

PRAGMATICS AND SEMIOTICS: MOVIES AS AESTHETIC AUDIO-VISUAL DEVICE EXPEDITE SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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ABSTRACT

The author as teacher educator and her students as teacher candidates conceptualized pragmatics, semiotics and aesthetics into literacy education by inviting students of diversity to watch movies, talk about movies, write movies, and act movies. Pragmatics is the study of how language is used for communication in various social and cultural contexts, semiotics is the study of signs, and aesthetics is the artistic stance that learners take for response to literary works. The purposes of this study are multi-functional: to develop the multisensory acquisition of five literacy skills in thinking, listening, speaking, writing and reading in a pleasant and natural authentic discourse setting. Both students from diversity and mainstream cultures acquire natural language for social functions. Based on research, most students of diversity need two years to develop the social language, while they need five years to obtain the academic language. But this audio-visual approach in terms of movies expedites the second language acquisition for social function towards academic success.

KEYWORDS

Pragmatics; Semiotics; Aesthetics; Social Language; Second Language Acquisition.

1. INTRODUCTION

The author explored the second language acquisition process of students from diversity, whose first language was not English at the urban school district in Georgia, US, for two semesters when she supervised teacher candidates' practicum from Pre-K to 4th grade. The author and the teacher candidates employed "movies" in the after school program and found that movies expedited the ELLs (English language Learners) social language and benefited them for academic language too.

1.1 The Limits in the Classroom

Bardovi-Harlig (2011) assured that most ELLs have little opportunity to engage in the appropriate linguistic activity outside classroom, which results in a growing awareness that simply exposing ELLs to grammatically appropriate rules is inadequate. The author observed that most K-4 students from diversity rarely asked questions or answered questions, but kept smiling. Those students were very active when they played with their Spanish-speaking peers in the playground during recess or lunch time, while they had little interaction with their English-speaking peers. One new classroom teacher complained, "They have been in the U.S. for more than two years, but they did not pass CRCT's!" (The Criterion-Referenced Competency Test designed to measure students' performance in reading, English/language arts, mathematics, science and social studies in Georgia).

1.2 The Limits of Teachers Being Cultural Bound

The US Immigration Reform Bill (2013) proposed to issue the W-Visa for nonimmigrant labors to solve the problem of labor shortage in the U.S, and the new bill will issue up to 185,000 new working visas in the next four years. More people will immigrate into the U.S. bearing W-visas, and their children whose native language is not English will populate this country and legally enroll in the public schools. With the immigrant population grows, schools adapt to help kids learn English (Kozma, 2014). Since most school

teachers are cultural-bound (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2012; Lu, 2014) and are not ready to work with the students from diversity.

1.3 Sociopragmatic Failure and Pragmalinguistic Failure

In using languages for effective communication, most learners have to figure out “when” it is appropriate to perform a particular language function and “how” to encode it. Thomas (1983) noticed that learners frequently experience difficulties with both: “sociopragmatic failure”, which occurs when learners produce socially inappropriate behavior, and “pragmalinguistic failure”, which occurs when learners do not express themselves in a linguistically appropriate manner. This is the reason that nonverbal communication skills (Cherry, 2014) obtained from watching movies were included in this pilot study, while there has been very little research on second language (L2) learning with movies (Gibson, 2014).

1.4 Objectives

The author was inspired by the *Movie Script* from Hoffner (2003) and Gormly’s research on movies that enhance language-learning program in 2013. She and the teacher candidates attempted to install movies in the After School Program daily by encouraging students to finish their daily assignments and to watch movies later. The movie activity engaged students and their parents from diversity, and developed the students’ functional literacy (Ariza, 2009; Dolly, 1998) for social interaction towards academic success.

2. PRAGMATIC, SEMIOTICS AND AESTHETICS

2.1 Pragmatics

To Grice (1989), pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that deals with norms of conversation. Generally pragmatics was defined as the study of how language is used in communication in various social and cultural contexts (Ariza, 2009; Ellis, 1995; Reutzel & Cooter, 2012). It covers a wide range of linguistic phenomena like deixis, conversational implicature and presupposition, illocutionary acts, conversational structures, and repair (Ellis, 1995). Pragmatics is particularly concerned with appropriateness, with regard to what is said in a particular context and how it is said.

2.2 Semiotics

Semiotics is the study of signs like languages, arts, music, dance, drama, films, cultures, etc. that humans created to mediate the world (Cunningham, 1992; Sebeok, 1978; Siegel, 2006). In this pilot study, the movie is the target sign, with its audio-visual artistic device to demonstrate various nonverbal communication signals (Cherry, 2014) such as kinesics, gestures, head movements, posture, eye contact, tone of voice, and facial expression that were infused in literacy education for appropriate and effective communication. For a good language art curriculum must be able to expand a learner’s potential for understanding and communicating through various signs, not only languages.

Movie is the all-inclusive artistic composition (Eisner, 2002; Goldberg, 2001; Uhrmacher, & Matthews, 2005) with language, arts, music, dance, drama, cultures, and nonverbal communication signals, etc. which attract learners’ attention more than the books, and motivate their interest in using multisensory literacy skills in thinking, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as nonverbal signals for more appropriate communication to achieve personal goals.

A good movie, like literature, that bears the moral themes like the love of peace, justice, courage, honesty, kindness, righteousness, collaboration, and friendship. Since Disney movies compose these themes and are employed in this study. The students’ favorite movies are *Finding Nemo*, *Wizard of Oz*, *Little Mermaid*, *Lion King*, *Pocahontas*, etc. In this pilot study, only *The Little Mermaid* is discussed.

2.3 Aesthetics

Aesthetics is the artistic stance that learners take to the response to literary works (Cornett, 1999; Eisner, 2002; Goldberg, 2001). It is beyond the aim and scope of pragmatics.

3. METHOD

Teacher candidates, and students from PreK – 4th grades in the after school program in the inner city participated in this research by watching the movies released by Walt-Disney.

The teacher candidates briefly introduced the movie, and the key vocabulary words for enhancing the “comprehensive input” (Krashen 1982).

Students were grouped by five or six from diversity and mainstream cultures. The whole class watched the movie for 5 five minutes, and the 1st group went outside of the classroom talking about the movie, picking up roles, writing the movie script (playwright) based on his/her role, sharing the draft of the movie script in the small group. Teacher candidates and the group members reviewed and modified the movie script for group rehearsal. The other groups kept watching the movie. Five minutes later, the 2nd group went out to do the same activity until the last group completed the rehearsal. The whole class acted the movie.

Each group submitted the draft of the movie script to the teacher candidates who tutored the students in the After School Program. Teacher candidates collected the drafts of the movie script, edited the draft, typed it, and highlighted the movie script with different colors, i.e. red, blue, green, purple, and yellow for students to memorize the script for the week playing later on Friday.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 English Language Proficiency

Movie invited multisensory development through the stimuli of aesthetic audio-visual device for listening comprehension, speaking fluency, writing skill, reading comprehension, for example, every student, either from diversity or the mainstream cultures, was able to use at least two complete sentences to express what he/she watched of the movie for five minutes. Many students used invented spelling (Laminack, & Wood, 1996) to compose their sentences when they drafted their movie scripts. For the PreK to 1st graders, they preferred to dictate their sentences to the teacher candidates.

4.2 Pragmatic Competency: Teaching Natural Conversation

In addition to the instruction of essential linguistics (Freeman & Freeman, 2014) including reading strategies, ESL, spelling, phonics, and grammar, the teacher educator implemented activities for Pragmatics: Teaching natural conversation (Houck, & Tatsuki, 2011) in this course, so that teacher candidates will learn how to teach their students of diversity the following interactional activities in authentic language patterns like expressing gratitude (Bardovi-Harlig & Nickels, 2011), saying apologies (Lieske, 2011), paying compliments (Carduner, 2011), taking turns & talking naturally (Carroll, 2011), and performing pragmatic competency in telephone conversation (Wong, 2011). Through this kind of authentic discourse, the ELLs developed functional literacy (Dolly, 1998) for social interaction with their teachers and their English-speaking peers..

4.2.1 Communicative Competence

The ability to use language in a contextually appropriate fashion, and pragmatic competence is a fundamental aspect of a more general communicative competence including the effectiveness of communication for the purposes of confirming, commending, convincing, and persuading. To achieve the communicative competence, what the learners need is beyond the correct instruction of phonics (sound system), Syntax (grammar), and semantics (meaning). The students were observed to communicate with the various types of nonverbal communication: kinestics, gestures (emblems, illustrations), head movement, posture, eye contact, facial expression, and intonation in an appropriate manner during their rehearsal of the moving acting.

4.2.2 Sociolinguistic and Discourse Competence

Learners are knowledgeable of sociocultural rules of use. It is concerned with the learners' ability to handle settings, topics and communicative functions in different sociocultural contexts. In addition, it deals with the use of appropriate grammatical forms for different communicative functions in different sociolinguistic contexts, and social skills for collaboration through speaking, talking, discussion, negotiation for the building of leadership.

The discourse competence is related to the learners' mastery of understanding and producing texts in the modes of listening, speaking, reading and writing. It deals with cohesion and coherence in different types of texts.

5. DISCUSSION

Gibson (2014) declared that there has been very little research on second language learning with movies, and there does not appear to be any data on the amount of time that L2 learners watch movies. The pilot study in this research reveals that movies provide valuable resources in second language classrooms and fit Krashen's second language acquisition hypotheses (1982): acquisition rather than learning, natural approach, comprehensive input, free filter environment, self-monitor opportunity, and motivate interest in learning. The benefits of using movies in second language classroom are more valuable than the books, especially the audio-visual artistic effects, and the nonverbal communication signals to the second language learners for acquisition of language proficiency and social/cultural competency.

6. SIGNIFICANCE

The author plans to adopt the pragmatic formulas for oral/aural assessment (Bardovi-Harlig, 2011) and WIDA Consortium (2009) – The World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment Can DO Descriptors across the contents in the future when she uses the movies as supplementary materials in the literacy program.

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