

English Dramas and English Listening & Speaking Ability

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With the development and popularization of the Internet, dramas from English-speaking countries, i.e., English dramas, are becoming more and more popular in China. It has become a fashion to contact and learn English and British & American culture through English dramas. This paper analyzes the possibility of learning English with English dramas as the medium and how to make use of English dramas to learn English scientifically and effectively; this paper also expounds the important role played by English dramas in helping students improve their English proficiency in an all-round way, especially in listening and speaking.

Keywords: English dramas, English learning, English listening & speaking ability

Introduction

In recent years, with the popularity of computers, tablets, smart phones, and the Internet, it has become a common practice for some netizens in China, especially students in colleges and universities, to watch English dramas. It is a dream of many students to improve their English proficiency by watching English dramas, which enables them not only to enjoy the plot, but also improve their English and understand the cultural life abroad. Why not kill two birds with one stone? However, some practical guidance and methods are required to improve English, especially listening and speaking ability, by watching a large number of English dramas.

The Possibility and Positive Role of Learning English Through English Dramas

The Possibility to Learn English Through English Dramas Provided by the Popularity of the Internet

With the development of science and technology, the Internet and smart phones have become indispensable tools in people's lives. People work, study, and entertain on smart phones through the Internet, and college students are the main force in network use. The spread of information, which is characterized by high efficiency, rapidity, convenience, and low cost, has won wide popularity, and provided the audience with the possibility to choose and get what is needed. Based on this advantage, English dramas are popular among college students. They download the dramas for free from the Internet, and watch them almost simultaneously with foreign local audiences. This strong timeliness of English dramas impresses college students very much. They discuss the characters in the play through the internet, predict the development of the plot, and download the relevant information and pictures. The rise of the Internet has provided the possibility for the spread of English dramas, and stimulated college students' interest in watching English dramas, and at the same time increased their exposure to authentic English.

English Dramas as Vivid Textbooks Thanks to Their Real Language Setting

The most direct role played by English dramas in improving English level lies in its reproduction of the real language environment. Students can hear what people say from the film and see what people say on some occasions, so as to better understand how to communicate in English in real context. Specifically, English dramas play an active role in the following aspects:

Firstly, English dramas provide students with natural language used in real communication, which makes students get used to language phenomena, such as linking, weak reading, pause, stress, rising and falling tones, which they once were not familiar, thus improving their listening ability.

Secondly, in the real context, listening to authentic English makes it easier for students to correct their pronunciation and intonation, including some pronunciation rules, such as the lost pronunciation, the voicedness of some consonants, shortened reading, and other forms of sound change, and improve their oral English by observing the ways of speaking and gestures used by the characters in the play.

Thirdly, in the process of appreciating the plot, there must be many new words, slang, and unfamiliar expressions, which are seldom available in textbooks. They are more vivid and practical. English dramas, like vivid textbooks, provide college students with materials to learn the basic English skills, and it will certainly become their favorite way of learning English.

English Dramas Helping English Learners Understand European and American Cultures From Multiple Perspectives

English dramas are not only the carrier of culture, but also the product of culture. The understanding of language is inseparable from the understanding of culture. English dramas are an encyclopedia of life, culture, customs, and history about the English-speaking countries. Taking American TV series as an example, from *Friends*, we can understand the thoughts of ordinary Americans: They are open and free, and actively pursue their happiness; they are independent and confident, and dare to make mistakes. This is the essence of American culture which emphasizes the development of personality and the right to pursue equality, freedom, and happiness. From *Ugly Betty*, we can see an ordinary American woman of Latin descent's mental journey of pursuing personal value through personal struggle, which is a true portrayal of the search for "American Dream". In *Prison Break*, we can learn about the dark side of American politics. Rather than risking their lives to escape from prison, the characters in the play escaped from the black money politics of the United States and the hatred between people alienated by capitalism and racial discrimination. As one of the means to spread American culture, English dramas also promote cross-cultural communication. In the process of appreciating English dramas, students can use the theoretical knowledge learned in the textbook to understand the cultural phenomena in the drama, and make a comparison between the two different cultures in China and the United States and their forms of expression. This can not only improve students' interest in learning English, but also deepen their understanding of British and American culture.

How to Make Use of English Dramas to Learn English Scientifically and Effectively

Careful Selection of English Dramas

First of all, we need to classify English dramas. To make it simple, English dramas can be divided into the following four categories: soap operas, sitcoms, dramas, and reality shows. The English dramas we usually talk

about may be mostly confined to melodrama, and there are various types of dramas, including science fiction dramas, crime dramas, medical dramas, war dramas, fantasy dramas, campus youth dramas, and so on. But not all types of English dramas are suitable for learning English. When choosing TV series to learn English, we should focus on the following three aspects: practicality, interest, and accuracy. Practicality mainly refers to the extent to which the lines appearing in the play can be replaced by us and then applied to life, or even can be used directly without replacement; interesting performance ensures that we can still watch it repeatedly on the premise of knowing the plot, and light comedy is the best choice; accuracy is the requirement for subtitles, that is, try to select some American dramas with high-quality bilingual subtitles. For example, action movies, such as *24 Hours* and *Nikita* have tense plots and grand scenes, but after enjoying the exciting plot, perhaps only gunshots and explosions will stay in your ear. However, American dramas, such as *The Practice*, *Boston Legal*, *House*, and *ER* are full of technical terms, and such dramas will not help you much in your daily oral English unless the students of related majors need to learn professional English. Therefore, the fundamental principle of choosing English dramas is: having many dialogues and being close to life.

The Viewing Mode of English Dramas

Since English dramas are regarded as the material for practicing oral English and improving listening, watching English dramas is definitely not just for entertainment and relaxation, and not to watch it once. Actually a play is strongly recommended to be viewed at least four times!

There are two practical options for reference:

Option 1: Chinese subtitles—English subtitles—No subtitles—English subtitles are suitable for students with weak English listening ability;

Option 2: No subtitles—Chinese subtitles—English subtitles—No subtitles are suitable for students with intermediate English listening ability.

Because the students in the present study are mostly freshmen with weak oral English and listening ability, let's take the first option mentioned in the previous paragraph as an example to specifically talk about the four-round method of watching English TV dramas.

In the first round, students are supposed to understand and enjoy the plot, so watching the drama with Chinese subtitles can help them clear the obstacles in understanding. The main purpose of this time is to find out the relationship between the characters in the play and summarize the story.

In the second round, students are supposed to watch the play with English subtitles. It is best to download the electronic version of the script. The students need to pause the play to write down what they cannot catch and look up new words in the dictionary. At the same time, the students can write down the good expressions at any time.

In the third round, students are supposed to turn off all the subtitles and check if they can catch some authentic expressions. For the special dialogue or narration and monologue encountered in the second round, they can choose a small segment for dictation training.

In the last round, students can turn on English subtitles again, listen and watch, and consolidate the authentic expression they have learned in the previous rounds. For the classic part, they can turn off the sound and try to dub the part, record their own voice, compare it with the original sound, and constantly adjust and polish their own pronunciation and intonation.

Open the Mouth and Practice It

Learning English by watching English dramas must not ignore the oral output. In English dramas, the most profound influence on us is spoken language, and more specifically, pronunciation and intonation. Imitation is an excellent way to improve oral pronunciation and intonation. The key to break through the pronunciation and intonation for learners is to practice it repeatedly and imitate the pronunciation of actors. So, whoever you like to listen to and which role you like, just imitate him or her as much as you like.

Suggestions on the Use of English Dramas in Classroom Teaching

English dramas provide authentic English learning resources, and many related studies (Yang & Zhang, 2010; Wang, 2011) found that all the respondents can benefit from watching English dramas, which not only improves their English listening and speaking ability, but also broadens their horizons. Therefore, it is of practical significance to integrate English dramas into multimedia classroom teaching. In the film and television drama appreciation class, teachers can perform the following specific operations:

Dubbing Activities

Teachers can organize students to watch the dialogue fragments of English dramas, play the videos with English subtitles for 2-3 times, ask students to speak after the characters and imitate them, then turn off the audio, ask students to practice in groups, and finally invite several groups of students to perform dubbing performances. Dubbing activities can improve pronunciation and intonation and enhance the learners' language sensitivity.

Audio-Visual Exercises

Teachers can adapt English drama fragments into audio-visual exercises, such as filling in the blanks, multiple choices, True or False questions, open-ended questions, and so on. Audio-visual practice can help students adapt to fast speed, vague pronunciation, noisy background, and various accents.

Role-Playing

Teachers can play videos several times, organize students to imitate in different roles with body language, and encourage students to exert their imagination, change plots or lines, and incorporate new elements. Role-playing can not only improve students' oral English, but also promote cooperation among students, and enhance students' self-confidence and sense of responsibility.

Retelling or Drama Review

Teachers can ask students to retell the stories in the fragments in detail in class to improve their memory and their abilities to think logically and organize language well. Teachers can also ask students to write English drama reviews after class, which can effectively improve their writing enthusiasm and writing ability.

Conclusion

In a word, college students should treat the role played by English dramas in English learning dialectically and scientifically, and learn English from English dramas in a reasonable way that suits them. Learners must make great efforts to follow what is recommended above, make a full use of English dramas, try to mobilize all positive factors, and make appropriate adjustments according to their own time.

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