

# Animated Movies and Spoken English: A Blockbuster Experience

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## **Introduction and Background: The 'Plot and Setting'**

Teaching and learning a language is like Alice in Wonderland or Harry Potter! Languages have a constructive and creative setting for endless opportunities. There is no end to the possibilities of using different approaches, methods, practices and materials. Learning English language is broadly divided into two aspects; first is grammar and vocabulary and the second is speech and communication. The first aspect is mostly delivered through textbooks but the second aspect requires special attention. Objectives of learning English language range from common to particular across the world. One of the chief objectives for learning English language in the contemporary period is to learn to speak and communicate in English. Spoken English is quite different from the kind of English children learn at school from textbooks. The natural method of acquiring a language is to learn to speak it first. But, in the case of second language learning of English, learners generally learn to write first, rather than to speak the language fluently and thus they produce written English before they are comfortable with speaking it. This process obviously turns the natural method of language learning upside down.

Speaking in English should not feel like a journey to some unknown planet for non-native speakers. It is very important that learners feel comfortable while speaking in English. Communicating in English in a natural way can boost learners' confidence to a higher level.

Elements of Spoken English include pronunciation, tone, rhythm, pause, stress, phrases, phrasal verbs, idioms, contextual vocabularies, and sentence structure. Moreover, Spoken English also calls for learners to use various expressions for happiness, wonder, anger, agreements, disagreements, questioning and so on. While previous research (Gardner, 2000; Veenema & Gardner, 1996) has shown that there is a match between media and students' intelligences, the present article will focus on how Spoken English and its related elements can easily and effectively be taught and learnt with the help of animated movies at the school level.

## **Animated Movies and English Language Learning: The 'Theme and Cast'**

Technically, an animated movie is a film produced by photographing a series of gradually changing drawings, etc., which gives an illusion of movement when the series is projected rapidly. Animated movies are not a strictly-defined genre but rather a film technique and although they often appeal to children, they can easily be enjoyed by all.

Many theories of language learning support the use of animated movies as a learning tool or medium. According to the cognitive approach to language learning, a lot of importance is given to access to the target language input. Gass (1997) emphasizes that language acquisition is shaped by the input one receives, and animation movies allow for a strengthened input for language learning. Al-Seghayer (2001) and

Sherman (2003) suggest that a video helps learners build a mental image better; curiosity increases their concentration, and a video's combination of modalities facilitates recall. Moreover, English language words are learned better when directly associated with appropriate nonverbal referents (objects, events, emotions, context, etc.). This efficient association can only be found in real life or in an authentic video.

Many features of animated movies create connections and conditions for learning Spoken English. These features allow the movies to be used as wide-ranging applicable materials, tools or sources for teaching and learning Spoken English. To start with, the themes and characters of animated movies range from specific to universal and contain social and human concepts as well as events. Further, they are woven through manifold story-lines and plots, and this characteristic of animated movies allows representations of diverse events of human life and dialogues corresponding to them. In turn, the dialogues of animated movies are realistic and very close to real-world events and incidents which offers learners and teachers to have access to many different sets of dialogues for various situations and events. Characters in animated movies are closely designed to represent all sets of human personalities which also allows bringing out variety in dialogues.

Moreover, animated movies are generally made for children and for young audience, and this feature makes their dialogues easy yet authentic.

Given the above discussion on features of animated movies, we can see that all the important elements of Spoken English such as pronunciation, tone, rhythm, pause, stress, phrases, phrasal verbs, idioms, contextual vocabularies, body language, facial expressions and sentence structure are very well featured in animated movies. But above all, to reiterate the main point from the above discussion for our present purpose, animated movies give various verbal expressions for different human and social events and situations which allow learners to get exposure of manifold versions of Spoken English and language in use.

Over the past decade, a corpus of studies has accumulated that investigates the effects of multimedia strategies on learning. Multimedia typically refers to the presentation of material in two forms: auditory/verbal and visual/pictorial (Mayer, 2001). Animated movies, as a form of multimedia, proffer many reasons to be suitable source/material/tool to learn Spoken English. Various features of animated movies, approaches to language learning, and elements of Spoken English learnt through animated movies are highlighted in the following table:

**Table 1: Features and Benefits of Animated Movies, Learning Approaches Used, and Spoken Elements Covered through Animated Movies**

Features and Benefits of Animated Movies	Approaches to Language Learning Applied through Animated Movies	Spoken English Elements Learnt through Animated Movies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• interactive</li> <li>• live</li> <li>• interesting</li> <li>• authentic</li> <li>• natural</li> <li>• familiar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• natural approach</li> <li>• discovery-based learning</li> <li>• constructivist approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• phonemic awareness</li> <li>• stress</li> <li>• pause</li> <li>• tone</li> <li>• rhythm</li> <li>• sentence pattern</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• contextual</li> <li>• easy and simple</li> <li>• option for repetition and pause (manageable/navigable)</li> <li>• text-audio support</li> <li>• visual</li> <li>• real environment</li> <li>• accountability</li> <li>• diversity of language in use</li> <li>• variety of expressions</li> <li>• human and social themes</li> <li>• active engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inquiry-based learning</li> <li>• functional approach</li> <li>• communicative approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• contextual and general vocabulary development</li> <li>• phrases</li> <li>• phrasal verbs</li> <li>• idioms</li> <li>• expressions</li> </ul>
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### Animated Movies and English Language Learning: The 'Production and Reception'

This section of the paper comprises two parts: in the first part I will explore the approaches and methods of language learning which should be applied while using animated movies for learning Spoken English. In the second part, I will discuss the classroom application and practices of animated movies to teach Spoken English. Developing tasks for Spoken English based on animated movies can be an interesting activity for teachers and doing the tasks would certainly be an interactive experience for learners.

The following are the approaches and methods of language learning applied through animated movies:

**1. Natural approach:** Use of animated movies replicates the natural language acquisition setting, and it emphasises communication. Moreover, it makes the learning environment as stress-free as possible. Such movies allow for comprehensible language input, and hence language output is not forced but allowed to emerge spontaneously. The meanings of words/phrases are recognized in their context.

### 2. Discovery-based and inquiry-based learning:

Learning elements of Spoken English through animated movies allows for discovery-based or inquiry-based learning as learners can discover dialogue patterns and spoken elements independently by watching/listening and thus enter a self-learning environment. While observing various events and situations in the movies, learners can infer what kind of vocabulary, phrases, tone, pause, stress, pronunciation and non-verbal features of Spoken English can be used in a particular set of events or situations.

### 3. Constructivist learning approach:

Animated movies allow interaction in real life scenarios by giving learners an opportunity to put their imagination into practice and to construct awareness for particular use of language. Learners find characters and their dialogues familiar and in this way, learners can comfortably relate with the elements of spoken language. Also, learners can explore and experiment with speech varieties which makes the learning more desirable and attainable. For example, while designing tasks, teachers can ask learners to explore a situation from a movie and ask them to identify appropriate dialogue patterns on their own.

#### 4. Functional and communicative

**approach:** Animated movies allow for a communicative view of language teaching which considers the learner not only as a receiver but also as a producer of the teaching content. It focuses on the essential needs of learners bearing in mind that they are naturally inclined to communicate and interact with others. This concept is facilitated by a previous 'individual needs' analysis in society, which leads to contemplate language acquisition both as a means for social integration and also as a tool for comprehending and expressing every single thing that surrounds and determines daily life. Learning spoken English through animated movies adheres to this functional view of language learning; it is more about social norm than linguistic norm.

Developing tasks for Spoken English based on animated movies can thus be an interesting activity for teachers and performing these tasks becomes an interactive experience for learners. The following are certain useful tips and some examples of tasks that may be followed by teachers while using animated movies in the classroom to teach Spoken English:

##### • Steps

1. Choose an animated movie with an interesting theme.
2. Watch it first before you show it in the class.
3. Use subtitles while you watch and also while screening it in the class.
4. Make a list of dialogues, and other Spoken English patterns that you wish to teach in the class.
5. Identify some interesting events and incidents and related dialogues from the movie for more focused teaching.
6. Break up the movie while you show it in

the class.

7. To begin with, show part of the movie (only if classroom setting permits, show the entire movie).
8. Maintain a movie journal for your own record.

##### • Examples of Some Tasks

We will take the example of the movie Ice Age. The story of Ice Age is set during the time when the Earth was overrun by glaciers, and animals were scurrying to save themselves from the upcoming ice age. Under the circumstances, a sloth named Sid, a woolly mammoth named Manny, and a sabre-toothed tiger named Diego are forced to become the unlikely heroes of the movie. The three reluctantly come together when they have to return a human child to its father while braving the deadly elements of the impending ice age. This movie has many situations and events to learn various sets of dialogues and elements of Spoken English. These include introduction, initiating friendship, forming a group, arguments, expressing opinions, expressing sympathy, courage, mischief, polite sarcasm, humour, being responsible, etc.

The following are some example of tasks based on which exploration and experience of dialogues and elements of spoken elements can be set as classroom practices by the teacher:

1. Finding appropriate dialogues for a particular event/situation from the movie. Such tasks may be done through quizzes, puzzles, match-a-situation game, etc.
2. Preparing a movie scrapbook where the learner makes a note of vocabulary, phrases, phrasal verbs, expressions, idioms, and proverbs for particular events and incidents from the movie.
3. Enacting the scenes by using dialogues with appropriate pronunciation, stress, rhythm, tone and expression.

4. Constructing a new situation in which learners can play various roles to use the learnt elements of Spoken English. Teachers can help the students by coming up with various situations similar to the movie they have watched.

There can be more such creative tasks to facilitate learning through animated movies. Moreover, teachers should provide enough explanation of contextual and cultural meanings of the dialogues and other elements of Spoken English to the learners.

The following are some dialogues from the movie Ice Age for teaching various elements of Spoken English.

1. **To express humour:**

Sid: For a second there, I actually thought you were gonna eat me.

Diego: I don't eat junk food.

2. **To learn a phrasal verb/ idiom:**

Manfred: Diego, spit that out. You don't know where it's been.

3. **For learning exclamation, questions and other expressions:**

Diego: The baby? Please. I was just returning it to its herd.

Sid: Oh, yeah. Nice try, Bucktooth.

Diego: You calling me a liar?

Sid: I didn't say that.

Diego: You were thinking it.

Sid: I don't like this cat. He reads minds.

4. **For learning new words:**

Sid: Sorry, fellas. He got a little frostbite.

Sid: Hey, widebody, curb it next time!

## Conclusion

Picking up elements of Spoken English through animated movies allows for learning and using English in context with an authentic flair. Animated movies can provide a live and

interactive environment where learning is done naturally in an interesting manner. Moreover, when teachers use animated movies as a teaching tool, they can have a diverse range of materials to be used in the classroom to enhance the learning experience. The experience of learning a language through animated movies may be new for young learners but it creates an enduring and interactive environment which is very comfortable for quick and natural learning. The teachers may go beyond what is given in the example tasks and steps in this article.

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