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Film Adaptations as a Pedagogical Tool in the Teaching of Literature

Abstract

With the fulgurous development of technology and the need to keep pace with the globalisation era, it becomes a necessity for English language teachers to think about innovative ways deemed to meet the demands of nowadays English as foreign language classrooms. Admittedly, the use of multimedia as an instructional tool, per se, has become increasingly popular in the foreign language teaching field and, particularly, in the teaching of literature. In fact, one of the most promising multimedia technologies which has gained momentum in the literature teaching sphere is the film adaptations or also called the cinematographic literature. Accordingly, the aim of this paper, by reviewing the current literature related to this area of interest, is to shed light on the multitude of assets that such authentic audio-visual material can offer to the teaching of the literary masterpieces, not least enhancing students' motivation and interest, befitting their learning style, promoting their comprehension of the texts' content and providing them with a genuine cultural exposure.

Key words: Literature Teaching - Film Adaptations - Motivation - Learning Style -Comprehension.

1-Introduction

In today's increasingly technological era, English language courses have begun to integrate approaches that rely on visual and auditory learning, since it has become assumed that students are different in terms of learning capacities, styles and strategies to acquire

knowledge. Researchers have come to agree that language learning is not a passive process but depends on the learner's interest, motivation and attitude. However, it seems unmanageable for the traditional way of teaching to cover these issues without integrating multimedia. As far as the teaching of literature is concerned, film in general and film adaptation of literary works in particular, is one of the multimedia technologies that has been a subject of debate among a plethora of specialists. In fact, the projection of film adaptations as a means to teach literature seems to attract many teachers due to the variety of assets it can offer. Accordingly, this paper will shed light on the main benefits that can be generated through the use of such popular genre of movies as a pedagogical tool per se.

2-Film Adaptations and Literature

Nowadays, one of the most popular and widely used multimedia materials is Film. Known as, moving picture, motion picture, or movie, film is defined by the word web dictionary as **"a form of entertainment that enacts a story by a sequence of images giving the illusion of continuous movement"**. Movies are generally sorted by different genres: Action, comedy, crime, romance, historical, fantasy and educational short film movies, in addition to contemporary films, classical films, documentaries, and film adaptations (Champoux 1999).

Before reviewing the pedagogical role of films, herein, the light is spot on one of the most popular cinematic genre, namely, the film adaptation. This latter is said to have a close relationship with

literature that makes such a genre of films in the midst of debates among the public of critics and scholars

2-1-Film Adaptations Defined

Literature and cinema are arts that utilise different ways of transmission. The first is based on the written mode while the second relies on the visual mode. Yet, the meeting ground wherein both arts converge is the issue of adaptation.

Any complete account of film adaptations must start with the definition of the term adaptation. The Oxford English Dictionary states that to adapt is to **"make suitable for a new use or purpose, to alter or modify, adjust one thing to another or, to become adjusted to new conditions."** Besides. it is also to express **"a work in one medium that derives its impulse as well as varying number of its elements from a work in different medium"** (Konigsberg 1998:6). Put differently, adaptation is any endeavour originating in one medium having been translated into other medium using specific instruments that result in a new creation.

When referring to film adaptation, it can be defined as the translation of written texts from a literary source such as novels, short stories and plays into the cinematic sign system. Van Vugt (2011) considers film adaptation as types of derivative work that, whether, adheres to the source material or differently interprets concepts derived from the original work. In this vein Belton (2003) argues that film adaptation **"offers an opportunity for filmmakers to reread a**

narrative from another age through the lens of their own time and to project onto that narrative their own sense of the world" (2003:195). In short, film adaptation is a kind of movies that involves the translation of the literary work from the print to the screen with the necessary inherent changes that are implied by the process. It offers not merely a simple appropriation of writers' work, but different interpretations that offer another reading of the original literary text through another perspective.

2-2-Film Adaptations, a Controversial Matter

The discussion of the relationship between film and literature inevitably leads us to be involved in the consideration of the issue of adaptation. This latter has been a topic of controversy among the academic circle.

Debates on cinematographic adaptations of literary works have been for many years prevailed by the issue of fidelity to the original source and by the assumptions that prioritise the literary texts over their screened versions. In fact, adaptation by its nature implies necessary modifications, additions or omissions that may result in something of utmost importance to be left out. Such alteration, scholars argue, makes film adaptations in an unfavourable position.

According to Whelehan (2006) adaptations were considered by majority of critics as inferior to the originals, as minor, subsidiary or secondary products. Besides, Hutchoen (2006) sees the filmed versions

of literature as materials that lack **"the symbolic richness of the books and missing their spirit"** (2006: XII).

Virginia Woolf (cited in Boyum 1985:6) staunchly reduced the process of adaptation to the "unnatural and disastrous" . Moreover, she likened books to a prey and unfortunate victims of parasite movies. Likewise, considering film adaptations as destructive to literature, Miller, focusing on adapting novels, stands against adaptations claiming that **"most novels are irreversibly damaged by being dramatized"** (cited in Baresay 2006:23)

Other opponents of such process go further by lamenting the adaptation for displaying what novels originally do not, according to them **"to visualize the character, destroys the very subtlety with which the novel creates this particular character in the first place"**(Giddings et al.1990:81) .

Accordingly, the main criticism is the perception problems caused by the visuality of film adaptations. An example of such a problem, is given by Chatman (1980) when he says that the process of adapting literary works **"narrows down the open-ended characters, objects or landscapes, created by the book and reconstructed in the reader´s imagination, to concrete and definite images"**(1980:118).

Arguably, while the textual description of the characteristics of the characters and places is open to varied interpretations possibilities in readers' imagination, the visuality of the film circumscribes these possibilities. Adaptations were, therefore, considered as destructing the subtlety of the printed word that makes the reader interact with the internal world of the literary work.

On the other side of the fence, the adaptation of literature classics benefits from a certain tolerance among critics. Boyum (1985) sees adaptations as a promising tool able to introduce the literary cannons to the masses. She supports her arguments by quoting Stephen Bush who said that **"It is the business of the moving picture to make [classic novels] known to all"** (Bush cited in Boyum1985: 4). Suchlike, Hutcheon (2006) argues that adaptation can give a second breathe to the book. Film adaptations, she maintains, do not **"leave it dying or dead, nor it is paler than the adapted work. It may, on the contrary, keep the prior work alive, giving it an afterlife it would never have had otherwise"** (2006:176).Accordingly, this claim is supported by Giddings et al. (1990) who say that surveys shows that many people purchase the printed literary work as a result of viewing its adaptation.

Such claims may be legitimate if we take into account the current modern culture when people are attracted by movies rather than by books. Besides, these arguments denote the educational potential of adaptations. Whelehan (2006) asserts that film adaptations are capable of enhancing the interest for reading literature. She adds that writers with a more or less accessibility such as Virginia Woolf, obtained a larger readership circle after the adaptation of her own *Mrs. Dalloway*(1997) and *The Hours*(2002).

The educational asset of literature to film materials is also praised by Spack (1985). He regards stories which have been made into films of considerable gains since **"the films provide students with a visual interpretation of the stories and present the costumes,**

scenery, and sounds of the works" (1985:710). Though considered as an entertainment or reward tool, adaptations can serve practical pedagogical purposes in the literary classroom. According to Bousted and Ozturk (2004) students could easily relate themselves to the narration in the text. Besides, since film adaptations and literary texts are both creations of the same work, adaptations can offer various examples of literary interpretations.

Arguably, adaptations by its visuality can offer vivid visual context for students who are unacquainted with literary terms and concepts. Thus, screened literature sounds to be a bridge between the ornate language of Dickens, Conrad and Austen's era and the modern world of nowadays students.

3-Film as an Instructional Tool

For the sake of a deeper is closure of the pedagogical aspect of the film adaptation in literature teaching, and since this latter is one of several genres of movies, it seems wiser to put forward the current literature concerned with the use of films in general as an instructional tool.

In 1922, the famous American inventor Thomas Edison said that **"the motion picture is destined to revolutionize our educational system and that in a few years it will supplant...the use of textbooks"** (cited in Cuban, 1986: 9). Since almost a century later, film is still at the centre of interest among people *in vivo* and *ex vivo*. In other words, beside being subject of discussion and debates among

cinematic specialists and critics, film has been the target of attention among scholars and researchers in other fields, not least the EFL teaching and learning sphere. Regarding its role in the educational context, the benefits gained from film use are based on well-grounded and intertwined educational principles.

3-1-Film and Learning Styles

In fact, language teaching is one area in which the application of visual media has been encouraged. A plethora of arguments that favour the use of films in EFL classrooms have been put forward. The first is on the premise that such a visual media is to a great extent significant to nowadays students since it suits their learning styles.

Students learn in different ways, by seeing and hearing; reflecting and acting; memorizing and visualizing (Felder1995). This variety in how learners acquire, retain and retrieve information is conjointly referred to learning styles. Brown (2000) classifies learners as visual learners who prefer learning through pictures, charts or any visual presentation, as auditory learners who prefer listening to lectures and audio materials and as kinesthetic learners, those who favour physical activity and body movement.

Arguably, the suitability of film as a teaching tool lies in the fact that it is ubiquitously present in nowadays generation's daily life making them, therefore, prone to be audio visual learners. Kuzma and Haney (2001) posit

We teach and live in a culture dominated by film, television, and other visual media. Our students, namely the MTV generation, spend a major portion of their time in front of the television, at the computer, or in a movie theater. Consequently, they are geared to audiovisual rather than written forms of expression and communication" (2001: 34).

This viewpoint is supported by Frey and Fisher (2008) putting a stress on film's use in literature teaching. They consider that the present generation of students or, using Prensky's words (2001), 'digital natives' are to a great extent exposed to a myriad of media that are developed as speedily as their interests shift to them. They suggest investing in students' fascination by all what is seen and heard by using film as a teaching tool, they assert

With students who no longer possess the inclination for traditional subjects and material, the literature teacher is faced with a challenge of keeping up with, and taking advantage of, students' fascination with more visually-stimulating media by expanding there choices for literary texts. After all, the primary literacy of the twenty-first century is visual. (2008: 5)

Accordingly, it seems that movies possess a solid argument that justifies its use in educational context, not least in the teaching of literature. The importance of keeping pace with the development of technology and necessity to match present time students' learning style might encourage teachers to assign a more than entertaining role to such visual media. Such suitability leads us to tackle the second

argument that pleads for film in class notably being a motivating material.

3-2-Film and Motivation

It is a common knowledge that motivation is of paramount importance in determining the failure or success of the language learning process. Prior to reviewing the relationship between film and students' motivation, an explanation of this latter imposes itself.

In fact motivation in foreign language learning is **"the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity"** Gardner (1985:10). It can be explained also as the internal drive that leads a person to do things in order to achieve his /her goals (Harmer, 2007).

In discussing motivation, a clear distinction is made between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. As for extrinsic motivation, it refers to a motivation caused by a number of outside elements such as the need to pass exam, the hope for reward or possibility for future travel (Harmer, 2001). Put simply, it is a motivation that is derived from external influence. Being pushed by such motivation, student looks for approval and external signs of worth (Sansone& Smith, 2000) .However, intrinsic motivation is derived from inside. **"A person might be motivated by the enjoyment of the learning process itself"** (Harmer 2001:51). Thus, being intrinsically motivated refers to a desire to engage in the learning activity for its own sake.

Traditionally, schools have relied heavily on extrinsically motivated behaviour, standardized tests and exams which have been given high authority and often used to drive student performance. In this respect, films are considered by specialists and researchers as a medium that can further boost students' motivation. Stephens (2001) asserts that as a multimedia material, films can create an engaging learning environment contributing to high level of motivation. Furthermore, according to Allan (1985), films actually are a genuine stimulus to get students involved in classroom discussion bringing out different opinions within the group. Besides, Champoux(2007) advocates the use of films since they permit to cut the routine of the traditional teaching especially when it concerns audio-visual learners. In this regard, Tileston (2005), a specialist in brain study, deriding the traditional way of teaching, she contends:

> It is unrealistic to believe that students who are constantly stimulated by the multimedia world will sit for hours each day passively listening to lectures, taking notes, and preparing for a pencil and-paper exam without dropping out mentally (2005:16).

Admittedly, the motivating effect of films is chiefly grounded on their accordance to students' learning style and their appeal to them. Tileston (2005) pinpoints "**because most students are familiar with and enjoy the motion picture, it is an excellent motivator**" (2005:333).

According to the aforementioned arguments, the monotony pervaded by the classical classroom can be lessened by the utilisation of films and, therefore, permitting such media-oriented students to benefits from a more enjoyable learning process appropriate to their preferences.

3-3-Film and Students' Attitudes

The other salient parameter related to the status of films in the EFL context is student's attitude. This latter, according to McGroarty(1996), has a cognitive and affective components; it regards beliefs, emotional reactions and behavioural tendencies related to the object of the attitudes. In the same line of thought, Baker (1992) argues that attitude is **"a disposition to respond favourably or unfavourably to an object, person, institution, or event"**(1992: 11).

In other words, attitudes refer to a disposition and inclination to react positively or negatively to a given subject. It is, in short, the construct that explains the way of thinking about and behaving with a given language.

In the context of language learning, students' attitude differs from one student to another. More precisely, regarding literature as one of the essential components of EFL program, the nature of students' attitude towards such a learning subject has been the core of various researches and studies.

When getting involved in discussing students' attitudes toward literature, it seems axiomatic to include the process of reading that has always held an integral role in the learning of literature. In this vein

Hall (2005) asserts that **"it will be difficult to think of literature without considering reading"** (2005:83). Davis et al (1992) carried out a survey of undergraduates' attitudes towards the study of literature. Their study brought out that the willingness to read in the target language and the preferred learning style are to a great extent entwined with students' attitudes towards EFL literature. Those students who are prone to read target language books inside and outside the classroom observed a positive attitude.

On the other hand, many language and literature teachers are more and disquieted that their students have limited reading skills(Smith 2010).In fact a great deal of scholars have left us to know that, for students, reading or keeping a **"challenging book by their bedsides"** (Brown 2009:9) is no more an actuality. Grabe and Stoller (2002) claim that **"most students read little in either the L1 or the L2, and they do not enjoy reading"** (2002: 89). To describe students reading reluctance, Gilbert and Gubar sorrowfully note that

> What was a powerful culture of print seems to be disintegrating as one-time readers…even this assessment seems too optimistic: most of my students have never been "one time readers" in any serious sense; they do read school assignment or informational texts related to their hobbies or interests. But by and large, they experience "stories " through film and television (Gilbert and Gubarquoted in Brown 2009:9)

Decidedly, such a refraining from reading and shift to the new media is, manifestly, one of the reasons that makes students run out

from literature and affects negatively their attitudes towards it. Moreover, **"young students are usually predisposed to dislike recommended literature, believing it to be boring and difficult"** (Ruubel 2012:218) and belongs to an environment spatially and temporally remote from them (Bellver 1989)

By the same token, Brown (2004) states that for many EFL students, the term English literature would mean difficult books which are seldom read remaining on library shelves. Arguably, present EFL students have a certain reluctance vis-à-vis literature due to the fact that it inexorably relies on the reading process; encompassing decoding its unfamiliar language and remote culture. Such a negative attitude is drawn from the incompatibility of the textual material to their learning style. In this, Malchow (2001) claims:

> As careful observers of our students, we must also acknowledge that our students are more likely to spend their narrative choices on film rather than literature: television and film are the preferred narrative media of the moment. (2001:1)

Avowedly, such students orientation and inclination towards visual media rather than prints constitute an affective barrier toward literature learning that invites the application of innovative tools and materials. (Baker1993) asserts that attitudes do not remain static; they can be changed by using appropriate materials and teaching techniques. In this vein Clary (1991) consider that since today's young people are media oriented and since film is of a great appeal to them, educators are asked to use it in order to motivate unenthusiastic readers and reduce their negative attitude.

In a nutshell, learning styles, motivation and attitudes are considerably connected. Inasmuch as movies are concordant with students' learning style, students' motivation can be boosted and therefore, negative attitude can be driven positive and favourable.

3-4-Film and Culture

It is a common knowledge that language and culture are inextricably intertwined. The public of scholars and specialists have long recognized that the process of learning a foreign language necessitates a keen knowledge of its culture. In fact, language learners need to possess a certain awareness of the cultural aspects embedded in the target language that, in its turn, is deemed to help them in understanding the language itself ,and then, using it appropriately.

Bates and Plog (1988) define culture as a **"system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours and artifacts that the members of a society use to cope with this world and with one another"** (1988 citd in Fassbender 2008:7). According to Kramsh (1993) the cultural awareness of a target language is of a considerable assistance to the achievement of EFL student's language proficiency. In Kramsch's view, a language cannot be learnt isolated from an understanding of the cultural context in which it is used. In other words, students' cultural awareness is decisive for their success as FL learners and speakers.

As for the way teachers can import the target culture into the literature classroom providing students with an enriching and enjoyable experience, a great deal of researchers like Voller and Widdows (1999) have come to agree on the use of audio-visual materials, not least the motion picture, as a tool for cultural exploration in literature classroom.

In this regard, Belver (1989) argues that students' unfamiliarity with a foreign culture makes movies incorporation particularly significant in literature classrooms. Herron et.al (1995) likewise, advocate the implementation of films on the grounds that they are powerful means which can aid in **"depicting the foreign language culture more effectively than other instructional materials"** (Herron et.al 1995:18). Arguably, such an effective cultural representation chiefly lies in the concrete visual link offered by the screen between the language used and the portrayed society.

Motion pictures offer students a chance to witness behaviours that are not obvious in texts. Additionally, they are comprehensive ways to capsulise a rich array of information about daily life, dress patterns, transportation in addition to more complex cultural elements such as values, attitudes, social roles and institutions. Accordingly, Chan and Herrero (2010) say

> Learning languages through film can increase language learners' intercultural understanding, as well as helping them to become aware of the similarities and differences between cultures, such as everyday life, education, traditions, social customs, religious beliefs, and events of national importance (2010:11)

In fact, most movies can allow for rewarding learning experiences on the language and cultures of the native speakers which students might probably miss in a traditional classroom. In addition, according to (Champoux, 2007) movies can be taken as a kind of alternative for field trips and other real visits to a country in which the

target language is used. Numberless studies showed and still show that students can achieve plain gains in overall cultural knowledge after watching videos from the target culture in the classroom. Kramsch, (1993) pinpoints the merits of films as follows:

- Movies offer a cultural knowledge that has to be learned across different contexts.

- Movies invite learners to reinterpret, reorganize, and reconstruct prior knowledge in light of the new, to recognize the traces of prior texts and events as they appear in new contexts.

- Films are an accessible authentic material that portrays social reality through a society in dialogue with itself.

Relating what have been said to literature teaching, films can work as springboard for culture discussions, as a mirror of the target culture or as a means of cultural understanding. As such, what has seemed quaint, queer and unfamiliar becomes thoroughgoing and acceptable. Using them in classroom setting, films are not merely to get students closer to the versatility of target language culture, but to comprehend the language and the message conveyed as well.

3-5-Film and Comprehension

The other premise that links films and language learning encompassing literature study is being a facilitator in comprehending texts' content. In fact, being audio-visual students and reluctant readers lacking cultural knowledge would undoubtedly affect the understanding of the course material and specifically literary texts. Thus, scholars and

teachers have suggested films to get the better of such learning inconvenient.

Learning FL in general and literature in particular entails the understanding of the course material or the literary texts to be read. Reading comprehension is a complex process that has been understood and explained in various ways. Robinson (1966) explains the process of reading comprehension in terms of components it implies. According to him, reading comprehension includes:

- Understanding the literal meaning of a writer;

- Understanding the implied meaning of a writer;

- Integration of information and ideas of a writer with the reader's information and related experiences. (Robinson1966 cited in Pettit and Cockrie 1974:64)

To turn to movies, foreign language teaching/learning sphere has stressed the significance of providing input which is interesting, relevant and comprehensible. The latter has been acknowledged to be the main feature of films.

Several authors suggest such visual technology for the sake of enhancing students' comprehension opportunities. In this respect, Chan and Herrero (2010) assert that **"learning through film is one of the best ways to improve comprehension skills"** (2010:11). They advocate the use of film on the grounds that it helps in exploring the non-verbal elements of a textual material. Champoux (1999) puts a stress on the combination of both audibility and visuality that make film a comprehensive tool for language learning. Such combination, he maintains, supports learners' grasp of the verbal message and makes

misunderstood information as well as abstract concepts easier to be made out while viewing the video material. In this sense, film is

> an excellent medium for giving meaning to theories and concepts. The visual and auditory effects of great films can convey a message better than printed or spoken words (Champoux, 1999: 211).

In other terms, motion picture is capable of contextualising the verbal text in a visible and audible representation that leads to discover other perspectives for comprehension. Put simply, a combination of images and sounds can provide large perception of the deep-seated meaning that, otherwise, does not lend itself easily from a textual exploration.

Researchers like Coniam (2001) has come to agree that audio visual materials are to a great extent more authentic and suitable for supporting students than the other materials, be it audio or textual. He posits **"video is more authentic than audio in terms of displaying the context, discourse, paralinguistic features, and culture that should be relevant to comprehension** (Coniam 2001 cited in Suvorov 2011 : 2)

As far as the merits of movies in teaching literature are concerned, **"English instructors have often used film to support student comprehension of literary texts"** (Maichow2001:1). Likewise, Bellver (1989) sides with the proponents of the incorporation of visual aids into the teaching of literature. She bases her viewpoint on the fact that the silver screen can add a dimension to learning by

elucidating meaning and contexts and by deepening students' understanding of literature as an independent art form. Moreover she classifies movies according to their relation to the literary text studied into three categories: textual, contextual, and intertextual.

-Textual aids are those supplementary materials which exemplify the fictional aspect of the text.

-Contextual materials include those items adverting the concrete milieu wherein the fictional reality only figuratively takes place.

-Intertextual materials refer to the materials resulting from a transposition of one system of signs into another, i.e film adaptations

In recapitulating what different scholars said regarding the advantages of movies that can be associated to students' comprehension, Suvrov (2011: 2) mentions what follows

- Seeing the situation and the participants increases situational and interactional authenticity which may aid comprehension

- Body language, facial expressions, and gestures of the speaker can provide additional information

- Visual elements can activate the viewer background knowledge

In toto, film, by its virtues, can be considered as a real catalyst for building a well round understanding of the literary texts. It offers a great deal of assets such as providing the students with a visual contextualization, body gestures and an authentic language exposure. Such features of films, if used judiciously, may likely lead students to reach a comprehension which they usually encounter difficulties in

achieving it via the written texts or , with special regard, the yellowish pages of the literary works.

4-Conclusion

By way of conclusion, one should reiterate the main motive of this paper i.e., to unearth the pedagogical role of film adaptations in literature teaching. Actually, though the academic and even the artistic value of film adaptations did not get the unanimity, it has been shown that they can provide considerable educational benefits to literature learners such as; making literary canon known to nowadays students, opening other perspectives for interpretation and enhancing their interest for reading literature.All in all, one may say that movies in general and film adaptations in particular have, *de facto,* more than one attribute that allow them to share an educational function with the other kinds of teaching materials. As it is shown above, film draws their utility from varied reasons, notably, being a motivational material that suits learners preferences which , *ergo,* positively changes their attitudes, being a source of cultural enrichment and at last but of course not least, a material that due to its audio and visual aspects can be a facilitator for comprehension.

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