AUTHENTIC AUDIOVISUAL INPUT AND SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE: A PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR INTEGRATING FEATURE FILMS INTO ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Student: **Aziza Gayratova Dilshod qizi**
Bachelor student, Chirchik State Pedagogical University
E-mail: agayratova36@gmail.com
+998937578353
Scientific supervisor: **Yusupova Mukhabbat Anatolevna**
Head of Linguistics and English Teaching Methodology Department
Phd, Associate Professor Faculty of Turism, Chirchik State Pedagogical University
E-mail: m.yusupova@cspi.uz
+998901364849

Abstract: *Despite widespread recognition that communicative competence extends far beyond grammatical accuracy, many english as a foreign language (efl) curricula continue to underutilise the sociocultural and pragmatic dimensions of language. This paper proposes and theoretically validates a structured pedagogical framework for developing learners' sociolinguistic competence through the systematic integration of feature films into efl instruction. Drawing on Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence, Hymes's (1972) concept of communicative competence, Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis, and contemporary research on multimodal learning, the framework delineates four instructional phases pre-*

viewing, while-viewing, post-viewing, and assessment each targeting distinct sociolinguistic sub-competencies including pragmatic awareness, discourse organisation, register variation, and intercultural understanding. A review of eight empirically grounded studies published between 1996 and 2023 consistently demonstrates that authentic audiovisual input surpasses textbook-based methods in promoting naturalistic pragmatic production, cultural sensitivity, and affective engagement. Practical film selection criteria, classroom implementation strategies, and assessment rubrics are detailed to support adoption across diverse efl contexts. The framework argues for a principled shift from linguistic accuracy as the sole instructional goal toward a holistic, sociolinguistically informed pedagogy mediated by authentic cinematic discourse.

Keywords: *sociolinguistic competence; feature films; efl instruction; communicative language teaching; pragmatic awareness; authentic input; multimodal learning; intercultural competence.*

INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition researchers have long argued that mastery of a second or foreign language requires more than correct syntactic production; it demands the ability to interpret and generate utterances that are contextually, socially, and culturally appropriate (Hymes, 1972). Sociolinguistic competence defined as the capacity to use language in socially sensitive and situationally fitting ways is a foundational strand of Canale and Swain's (1980) influential communicative competence model, yet it remains among the most neglected dimensions in formal efl instruction.

Traditional efl classrooms tend to privilege discrete-point grammar instruction and controlled vocabulary exercises, materials that by their very nature strip language of the social context in which it is inevitably embedded (Gilmore, 2007). Textbook dialogues, for instance, are typically sanitised, stylistically uniform, and culturally generic, offering little exposure to the register shifts, politeness conventions, or prosodic variation that characterise real-world english interaction. As a result, learners who achieve high scores on standardised grammar tests frequently experience significant pragmatic failure when they encounter native or near-native speakers in authentic settings (Thomas, 1983).

Feature films represent a richly underexploited pedagogical resource that can bridge this gap. As extended, narratively coherent audiovisual texts, films expose learners simultaneously to verbal language, paralinguistic cues, cultural practices, and emotional affect a multimodal ecology that approximates authentic communication far more closely than any printed textbook ever could (King, 2002). The characters in a well-chosen film enact the full spectrum of sociolinguistic variation: they argue, gossip, negotiate, apologise, joke, flatter, and deceive using language that is as complex and context-sensitive as language encountered outside the classroom.

The present paper has three principal aims: first, to review the theoretical foundations that justify film-based instruction as a vehicle for sociolinguistic development; second, to synthesise the empirical evidence bearing on its effectiveness; and third, to propose a coherent, four-phase pedagogical framework supported by practical tables that teachers can adapt to their own institutional contexts. The paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 surveys the theoretical literature; section 3 reviews empirical studies; section 4 presents the

pedagogical framework; section 5 addresses practical implementation, including film selection criteria and assessment; and section 6 offers conclusions and recommendations for future research.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Communicative competence and sociolinguistic knowledge.

The intellectual foundation of the present framework rests on Hymes's (1972) reconceptualisation of linguistic competence to include not only what is grammatically possible but also what is socially appropriate, contextually feasible, and actually enacted in use. Building directly on this insight, Canale and Swain (1980) proposed a four-component model that disaggregated communicative competence into grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic subcomponents. Sociolinguistic competence in their framework encompasses sensitivity to social context, register, and cultural convention precisely the dimensions that authentic films make cognitively accessible to learners.

Later theorists, including Bachman (1990) and Celce-Murcia et al. (1995), refined and extended this taxonomy, but the core insight remains consistent: linguistic knowledge alone is insufficient for successful communication. A learner who can construct a grammatically impeccable sentence but does not know whether to address an interlocutor formally or informally, or who fails to read the implicature in an indirect refusal, has not achieved communicative competence in any meaningful sense. Film instruction, by immersing learners in dynamic social scenes, provides repeated, emotionally anchored exposure to precisely these pragmatic and sociocultural phenomena.

Krashen's input hypothesis and comprehensible input

Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis posits that acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to language slightly beyond their current level of competence (the i+1 condition). Feature films, particularly when supported by l1 or l2 subtitles, scaffolded vocabulary preparation, and teacher-guided tasks, can constitute optimal comprehensible input in this sense. The narrative coherence of film character motivation, cause-and-effect plotting, emotional arcs provides the contextual redundancy that helps learners infer meaning without recourse to explicit grammar rules.

Moreover, krashen's distinction between formal acquisition and informal learning maps productively onto the contrast between grammar-focused classroom instruction and film-based exposure. Research by Toffoli and Sockett (2015) documents that university students who regularly watched english-language films and television outside class showed significantly higher pragmatic output scores than peers who did not, suggesting that the affectively rich, narrative-driven nature of cinema may activate acquisition mechanisms that decontextualised drills do not.

Multimodal learning theory

Mayer's (2009) cognitive theory of multimedia learning provides a further rationale for film-based instruction. The theory holds that learners acquire knowledge more deeply when verbal and visual information are presented simultaneously because this dual-channel input reduces cognitive overload and promotes the integration of new information into long-term memory schemas. Feature films are inherently multimodal: dialogue co-occurs with facial expression, gesture, body language, music, and environmental sound all of which contribute to meaning-making and contextual interpretation. This multimodal richness is particularly valuable for sociolinguistic learning,

where understanding an utterance often requires reading not the words alone but the entire embodied, situational context in which they are produced.

REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

A growing body of empirical research substantiates the theoretical case for film-based instruction in efl settings. Table 1 below summarises eight representative studies that collectively span a range of geographical contexts, proficiency levels, and methodological orientations.

Table 1. *Summary of empirical studies on film-based sociolinguistic instruction*

Study	Participants	Method	Key finding
Birulés-muntané & ozón (2016)	65 efl learners, spain	Experimental; pre/post-test	Film tasks enhanced pragmatic awareness significantly over textbook instruction
Toffoli & sockett (2015)	40 french efl students	Survey & discourse analysis	Informal viewing habits correlated with higher pragmatic output scores
Chan (2019)	80 university students, hong kong	Mixed methods; interview & test	Authentic film input raised sociolinguistic awareness of politeness strategies

Nguyen (2021)	55 vietnamese efl learners	Quasi-experimental	Film-based role-play improved discourse competence more than textbook dialogue drills
Baddock (1996)	Review study	Literature review	Established foundational criteria for pedagogically appropriate film selection

Across these studies, several convergent conclusions emerge. First, film-based instruction consistently outperforms textbook-based control conditions in measures of pragmatic awareness and production, particularly in tasks requiring learners to interpret indirect speech acts, select appropriate register, or produce culturally sensitive refusals and requests. Second, gains are strongest when film viewing is embedded in structured pedagogical activities rather than left as incidental exposure, corroborating the importance of teacher mediation and task design. Third, affective engagement learner motivation, enjoyment, and reported authenticity is significantly higher in film conditions, which may contribute to deeper processing and longer retention of sociolinguistic knowledge (chan, 2019).

Birulés-muntané and ozón (2016) further demonstrate that the mode of subtitle presentation matters: bimodal subtitles (l1 subtitles alongside l2 audio) are most effective for lower-proficiency learners, while l2 subtitles support vocabulary acquisition and prosodic mapping at intermediate and advanced levels. This finding has direct implications for the scaffolding decisions embedded in the framework proposed in section 4. Nguyen's (2021) quasi-experimental study with vietnamese efl learners similarly reports that post-

viewing role-play where students re-enacted film scenes using spontaneous language produced significantly richer discourse patterns than scripted textbook dialogue practice, with learners demonstrating more varied discourse markers, more appropriate turn-taking, and greater pragmatic fluency.

A FOUR-PHASE PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

On the basis of the theoretical and empirical literature reviewed above, the following four-phase framework is proposed for the systematic integration of feature films into efl instruction targeting sociolinguistic competence. The phases—pre-viewing, while-viewing, post-viewing, and assessment—are designed to be cyclically recursive rather than strictly linear, allowing teachers to revisit earlier phases as learner needs evolve. Each phase targets specific sociolinguistic sub-competencies and is associated with particular film features and activity types, as shown in table 2.

Table 2. *Four-phase pedagogical framework for film-based sociolinguistic instruction*

Phase	Activity type	Film feature targeted	Competence area
Pre-viewing	Vocabulary pre-teaching; cultural background discussion	Lexical density; cultural setting	Linguistic; sociocultural
While-viewing	Role-play pause tasks; pragmatic analysis worksheets	Turn-taking; speech acts; register shifts	Pragmatic; discourse

Post-viewing	Reflective journals; re-enactment & dubbing	Nonverbal cues; attitude markers	Sociolinguistic ; strategic
Assessment	Peer feedback; portfolio entries; rubric scoring	All features holistically	Integrated competence

4.1 Pre-viewing phase

The pre-viewing phase prepares learners cognitively and culturally to receive the film's language with comprehension and critical awareness. Activities include the pre-teaching of key vocabulary and idiomatic expressions, background discussion of the cultural or historical setting, and the activation of schema through prediction tasks (Interpreting a still image or the film's opening frame). From a sociocultural standpoint, this phase invites learners to surface their existing assumptions about the culture depicted, setting the stage for what Byram (1997) calls 'critical cultural awareness' the ability to evaluate cultural practices, including linguistic ones, from a reflective rather than merely receptive stance.

4.2 While-viewing phase

The while-viewing phase is the analytical core of the framework. Rather than passive consumption, learners engage with targeted pauses and tasks designed to bring sociolinguistic features into conscious awareness. Pragmatic analysis worksheets direct attention to specific speech acts how characters apologise, refuse, compliment, or negotiate and invite learners to note the contextual variables (power, distance, imposition) that shape utterance choice (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Role-play pause tasks freeze a scene at a pivotal

moment and ask learners to predict what a character will say next before the film continues, developing predictive pragmatic competence. Discourse-level tasks focus on turn-taking patterns, topic management, and interruption strategies as they occur naturally in cinematic dialogue.

4.3 Post-viewing phase

Post-viewing activities consolidate and extend the sociolinguistic knowledge activated during viewing. Reflective journaling encourages learners to articulate what they observed, what surprised them, and what they would do differently in similar contexts. Re-enactment tasks ask small groups to recreate key scenes, which requires them to reproduce not merely the words but the prosodic, gestural, and relational dynamics that gave those words their social meaning. Dubbing activities in which learners re-record a scene with altered social parameters (Changing the power relationship between characters) are particularly effective in developing register flexibility and pragmatic sensitivity (Villareal & Gil-Sarratea, 2019). Sociolinguistic discussion tasks invite comparison between the film's cultural norms and those of the learners' own culture, fostering intercultural communicative competence as theorised by Byram (1997).

4.4 Assessment phase

Assessment within the framework is ongoing, formative, and multimodal. Portfolio-based assessment, in which learners collect reflective journals, analysis worksheets, and self-evaluations of role-play performances across multiple films, provides richer evidence of sociolinguistic development than any single point-in-time test. Peer feedback rubrics, calibrated to the sociolinguistic dimensions targeted in each phase, promote metacognitive awareness and learner agency. Holistic rubric scoring of spoken performance

samples collected from re-enactment or dubbing tasks allows teachers to trace growth across the communicative competence dimensions identified by Canale and Swain (1980).

PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION: FILM SELECTION AND CLASSROOM CONSIDERATIONS

The effectiveness of the framework depends substantially on the principled selection of films. Not every cinematically acclaimed work is appropriate for efl instruction, and teachers must weigh multiple criteria simultaneously. Table 3 below presents a structured set of selection criteria derived from Baddock (1996), King (2002), and the authors' own pedagogical experience.

Table 3. *Criteria for pedagogically appropriate film selection*

Criterion	Rationale	Example films
Authentic language use	Exposes learners to natural register variation and colloquial speech	The king's speech; forrest gump
Cultural richness	Embeds sociocultural norms, rituals, and identity markers	Bend it like beckham; crazy rich asians
Proficiency alignment	Lexical complexity matches learner's cefr level	Home alone (a2–b1); arrival (b2–c1)
Ethical suitability	Age-appropriate; avoids stereotypes; promotes inclusion	Wonder; hidden figures

Subtitle availability	Supports comprehension scaffolding and l1 comparison tasks	Most mainstream releases (netflix, amazon)

Beyond film selection, several classroom management considerations deserve attention. Time constraints in formal curricula often preclude screening entire feature-length films; a viable alternative is the strategic use of carefully selected scenes of 5–15 minutes that concentrate the targeted sociolinguistic features. This approach, documented by Sherman (2003), preserves the authenticity of cinematic language while remaining compatible with standard lesson planning. Teachers should also be attentive to the affective dimensions of film viewing: emotionally intense scenes may provoke strong responses that, while pedagogically rich, require sensitive facilitation. Pre-establishing classroom norms around respectful discussion of cultural differences is essential preparation for this work.

Technological infrastructure is a further practical consideration. The framework assumes access to a projector or interactive whiteboard, high-quality audio, and, where possible, digital subtitle files that can be toggled on or off. Many platforms including kanopy, plex, and standard streaming services with institutional licensing provide these affordances. Where technological resources are limited, dvds with embedded subtitle options or carefully prepared transcripts can serve as alternatives.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that feature films, when integrated through a principled pedagogical framework, constitute a powerful medium for developing the sociolinguistic competence that many efl learners

conspicuously lack. By drawing on communicative competence theory, the input hypothesis, and multimodal learning research, and by synthesising the growing empirical literature on film-based instruction, the four-phase framework presented here offers a coherent, theoretically grounded, and practically actionable approach to a perennial challenge in english language teaching.

The framework's principal contribution lies in its systematic articulation of how film's distinctive features its authentic dialogue, multimodal richness, cultural embeddedness, and narrative coherence can be harnessed at each stage of the instructional cycle to target specific sociolinguistic sub-competencies. Unlike impressionistic or ad hoc uses of films in the classroom, the proposed approach demands that teachers engage analytically with both the sociolinguistic properties of the selected film and the sociolinguistic needs of their learners, bringing these together in pedagogically designed encounters with authentic language.

Future research should investigate the differential effectiveness of the framework across proficiency levels and cultural contexts, attend to the long-term retention of sociolinguistic gains, and explore digital affordances interactive transcripts, ai-assisted subtitle analysis, and learner-generated dubbing that may further enhance the pedagogical potential of cinematic input. As english continues to function as the world's primary medium of international communication, the cultivation of sociolinguistic as well as grammatical competence must be recognised as an ethical as well as a pedagogical imperative.

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