

The Effect of Videos with Subtitles on Vocabulary Learning of EFL Learners

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Abstract

The present study aimed to examine the potential effect of the use of L2 English subtitled videos on the development of the acquisition of the vocabulary on EFL intermediate students at Bülent Ecevit University, Turkey. 60 Turkish intermediate students were divided into two groups such as bimodal subtitle group, and no-subtitle group. The material included an English TV series with an episode including four parts, and each of them was 4-6 minutes. After four session of watching the movie, all participants were requested to answer the multiple-choice vocabulary test and a comprehension question post-test to assess their improvement in the acquisition of the vocabulary and to clarify that they paid attention to the videos. The results revealed that the most of the participants have high accuracy judgements from the comprehension test, however, bimodal subtitle group performed better in the acquisition of vocabulary.

Keywords: subtitle, caption, acquisition of vocabulary, EFL learners

1. Introduction

With the development of different teaching techniques, the audio-visual media, TV, videos and computers gain importance in order to use them in every level of second language teaching effectively and comprehensively (Canning-Wilson, 2000; Kikuchi, 1997; Kothari, Pandey & Chudgar, 2004; Lewis & Anping, 2002; Meskill, 1996; Ryan, 1998; Weyer, 1999). It has been significantly evident that the audio-visual teaching materials are more effective as having motivational influence on audiences (Al-Seghayer, 2005; Baltova, 1999; Brett, 1997; Egbert & Jessup, 1996). Since the current study examines the subtitled videos, it is necessary to state that in vocabulary learning, visual information can be crucial as it serves body language, gestures, facial expressions that companion with the meaning, intonation and stress of the vocabulary, as well as with the culture and authentic language of the speakers. The subtitles are described as written transcripts of the dialogues in videos at the bottom of the screen while watching films (Canning-Wilson & Wallace, 2000).

Providing the subtitled English videos is one of the comprehensible inputs in English as a second language (ESL) learning environment (Vanderplank, 1988). The subtitled films can ensure a rich comprehensible input as being aural, visual and textual (Zanon, 2006). Additionally, Krashen (1982) stated that the students need to be exposed to a good deal of comprehensible input in order to achieve the goal of learning a second language. Thus, English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers have used movies without subtitles, in their classes at different levels and with different students from different ages (Baltova, 1999; Borrás & Lafayette, 1994; Garza, 1991; Neuman & Koskinen, 1992; Vanderplank, 1988). The main question is that the movies or videos should be showed with or without subtitles, in which the language (native or foreign language), and in what relation they utilize the vocabulary learning.

There is a big gap in using videos with subtitles and vocabulary learning studies with Turkish participants and ESL. To bridge this gap, it is aimed to examine the role and the effectiveness of videos with or without subtitles in learning vocabulary. Thus, in order to reveal this question on comprehension, learning or predicting the new vocabularies: the two techniques were used; bimodal subtitling technique (English subtitles with English dialogues), and no-subtitling technique (English dialogues with no subtitle).

2. Literature Review

In the study of Hayati & Mohmedi (2011), 90 ESL students on the intermediate level were represented six episodes (approximately 5 minutes of each) of a film entitled “*Wild Weather*”. They applied three conditions of subtitles as English, Parsian, and no-subtitles; the results showed that English subtitled group achieved higher performance than the other groups, so English subtitled videos utilize in learning ESL in listening tasks (De Bot, Jagt, Janssen, Kessels & Schils, 1986; Garza, 1991; Holobow, Lambert & Sayegh, 1984; Markham, 1989).

Neuman and Koskinen (1992) researched whether the captioned TV programmes affects the acquisition of vocabulary with young learners. Four conditions were applied to participants as captioned TV programmes, TV programmes without captions, reading and listening to the soundtrack, and the reading only. The results showed that the captioned TV group were highly better at vocabulary acquisition than the other groups. Danan (1992) and Holobow et al., (1984), also, found out that the bimodal input positively increased vocabulary recall. They emphasized that listening to and reading the text at the same time in videos, can help students distinguish known vocabularies from unknown ones. Koostra, Jonannes and Beentjes (1999) investigated the effectiveness of subtitled condition with 246 Dutch young learners of ESL. After watching 15 min. documentary, the participants were carried out a vocabulary recognition test, and furthermore, the subtitled group performed better as a result. Markham (1999) provided evidence that the videos with subtitles considerably developed the aural word recognition skills of ESL students in listening tasks.

In the study of Hsu & Chang (2010), it was found that English target-word group performed as well as full-caption group, and likewise, in some studies (for example; Bird & Williams, 2002; Borrás and Lafayette, 1994; Danan, 2004; Garza, 1991), it was resulted that the subtitled video materials may help develop language proficiency. On the other hand, there are some controversial studies supporting the idea that the subtitled videos can distract the learners’ attention (such as; Vanderplank, 1988) or may not be suitable for beginners (Holobow, Lambert & Sayegh, 1984; Taylor, 2005).

As mentioned before, the subtitled videos, clips or movies were researched from different aspects of language learning such as for the development of listening skill (such as; Garza, 1991; Huang & Eskey, 2000; Markham, 1999; Markham & Peter, 2003). In aforecited studies, the subtitles were found to have a significant effect on reading/listening comprehension, and furthermore, they were proved to improve the listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition skills.

From the perspective of word recognition, the benefits of captions for language learners attracted some of the researchers’ attention early (Price, 1983; Vanderplank, 1988), and lately, some researchers concluded that captioning not only offers the learner support but also provides him with a “target language learning environment” (Bird and Williams, 2002). In the study of Plass, Chun, Mayer & Leutner (1998), Danan (1992), Brett (1997), Duquette and Painchaud (1996), Markham (1999), Winke, Gass & Sydorenko (2010), the results were compatible with a generative theory of multimedia learning that assumes that learners actively select relevant verbal and visual information, organize the information into coherent mental representations, and integrate these newly constructed visual and verbal representations with one another. For instance, in the study of Koolstra, Joannes & Beentjes (1999), the children were randomly participated to one of three experimental conditions: (a) watching an English program with native language subtitles, (b) watching the same program without subtitles, and (c) watching the television program in native language, and it was found out that the vocabulary acquisition and recognition of English words were the highest in the subtitled condition. In the same line, in the study of Koskinen et al., (1985), the teachers using closed-captioned television materials, stated that they developed the skills in the areas of comprehension, vocabulary, and oral reading fluency.

Although some studies have found no significant effect of captioned videos (Taylor, 2005), a vast amount of studies showed a statistical difference between the videos with and without subtitles (Baltova, 1999; Garza, 1991; Guichon and McLornan, 2008; Huang and Eskey, 2000; Markham, 1989). Many teachers suggest their students to watch TV series or movies in L2 so as to experience the target foreign language. Nevertheless, the studies researched the function of the subtitled videos in L1 or L2 by ignoring its effect on language acquisition. In order to fill this gap in literature with the participants including Turkish L2 learners of English, the current study aims to examine the effects of subtitled videos on vocabulary acquisition. To my best knowledge, the only study which examined the effects of watching a closed-captioned movie clip on incidental vocabulary is the study of Yuksel & Tanrıverdi (2009) in Turkish research organization. They assigned the participants into two groups; with or

without subtitled groups and found out that the development between the groups were not significant. Apparently, the studies on this field are not enough to reach a judgement about Turkish L2 speakers of English since the relation between subtitled videos and the acquisition of vocabulary seems to be ignored in the learning environments. Grounded from the belief that visual clues support the students' understanding (Çakır, 2006), this relation has the priority to be researched. In this respect, the main aim of the current study is to examine whether videos with subtitles have any effect on the acquisition of the vocabulary or not.

For these purposes, the following research questions are tried to be answered;

1. Do videos with English subtitles help EFL students improve their vocabulary acquisition skills?
2. Do bi-modal group perform better in vocabulary tests than the Turkish subtitled group?

3. Methodology

3.1. The Participants

The study was conducted with 60 students from different departments, studying at Bülent Ecevit University in the academic term 2016-2017, consisting 28 male and 32 female students. The participants, firstly, took a background scale (adapted from Gurel, 2004) and the Oxford Proficiency Test in order to form a homogeneous participant group having similar properties. After these tests, the students were determined to be at least upper-intermediate English level. The participants were divided into two groups; the bi-modal group (English subtitled group), and no-subtitled group.

3.2. The Materials

3.2.1. Language Background Test

It was decided that, via the background information, the participants were confirmed to have almost similar properties. Before the participants took the experimental tests, they were requested to fill the background questionnaire which was adapted from Gurel (2004).

3.2.2. English Proficiency Test

It was determined that the Oxford English Proficiency Test was applied to the participants because the scores indicated whether their proficiency level was appropriate for the experiment or not. The test took 20-30 min. and includes 40-60 questions.

3.2.3. The “Seinfeld” TV Series

One of the American famous series, Seinfeld was decided to be watched by the participants to test the vocabulary acquisition as being with or without subtitled. The episode 23 of the third season, “The Keys” was chosen which evolved around the main characters' giving their home keys to each other. The reason why this episode was chosen is that the pronunciation of the words are clear, and there are not much idioms or slang in it. The episode was divided into four parts and the each parts took 4-6 min. Furthermore, twenty target words from the episode were chosen based on the proficiency level of the participants, and from different word category (such as; noun, verb, adjective etc.).

3.2.4. Procedure and Design

The research design contained a pre-test, post-test and group framework in the current study. The groups were formed randomly by assigning the participants. The bi-modal group watched the movie in English language and with English subtitles on the bottom of the screen, and the no-subtitle group watched the movie with English language and without subtitles. After taking the background and proficiency test, all participants were applied the same pre-test including 50 vocabulary questions, 20 of them were experimental and the rest of them were fillers. The treatments were done in the computer lab, where an LCD projector, a computer for the teacher, and 30 computers for students were available. The four parts of the episode were watched in four weeks, and each part took 4-6 min. The each parts of the movie were displayed on the projector screen by using the media player. After the treatments, the participants took the post-test which had the same questions as the pre-test in order to indicate whether the treatments were fruitful to develop the vocabulary acquisition or not.

4. Results

The collected data of the study were analysed in SPSS statistic program and will be introduced in this section. In order to form homogenous groups, the mean performance of the pre-test was important, thus, the pre-test was applied to the participants before the separation of the groups. After the pre-test, the participants took a kind of a questionnaire which is necessary to give us information about the frequency of watching series of the participants. The questionnaire includes only one question (“*how often do you watch TV series*”) and three answers (“*never, sometimes, and always*”). The reason of applying the questionnaire to the participants is to include all kinds of watchers to the study, and thus, both of the groups were included the participants, who never, sometimes and always watch series. Table (1) shows the descriptive results and Table (2) shows the ANOVA results of the frequency of the watching series of the participants.

Table 1. The descriptive results of the frequency of watching series

	Frequency	Percent	ValidPercent	CumulativePercent
Valid never	20	33,3	33,3	33,3
sometimes	19	31,7	31,7	65,0
always	21	35,0	35,0	100,0
Total	60	100,0	100,0	

Table 2. ANOVA results of the frequency of watching series

	Sum of Squares	df	MeanSquare	F	Sig.	Difference
BetweenGroups	235,169	2	117,585	9,080	,000	1-2,1-3
WithinGroups	738,164	57	12,950			
Total	973,333	59				

As can be seen above, there is a significant difference between “*never*” and “*sometimes*”, and between “*never*” and “*always*” [$F_{(2-57)} = 9,08, p < 0,05$].

After the division of the groups as the no-subtitle group, and the bi-modal group, the post-test was presented. Table (3) shows a significant difference according to the T-test results of the vocabulary test between the two groups [$t(58) = 8,29, p < 0,05$], as the score of the bi-modal group (English subtitle group) is significantly higher than the no-subtitle group.

Table 3. T-Test results of vocabulary test

Groups	N	Mean	S	sd	t	P
Bi-modal Group	30	17.30	2.33	58	8.29	.000
No-subtitle Group	30	11.36	3.14			

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In the current study the aim was to examine whether English movies have any effect on Turkish L2 learners of English vocabulary acquisition. Furthermore, the main problem is to identify which type of movies (with or without English subtitles) has probably the most positive effect on vocabulary acquisition.

The results of the study revealed that the bi-modal group performed better than the no-subtitle group in the post-test. Furthermore, the difference between the two groups is significant statistically. Therefore it can be argued that watching videos or movies with the target language subtitles can be useful in the development of the vocabulary acquisition. The present study, strongly supports the related studies (such as; Brett, 1997; Danan, 1992; Duquette and Painchaud, 1996; Plass, Chun, Mayer & Leutner, 1998; Markham, 1999; Winke, Gass & Sydorenko, 2010) as they confirmed the necessity of the captions in vocabulary acquisition in second language learning. In some previous studies, it was stated that the contextualization in vocabulary teaching is the main source of improvement (Duquette & Painchaud, 1996; Sternberg, 1987).

However, the present study does not support this argue, as both of the groups were exposed the same context, but bi-modal group performed highly better than the no-subtitle group. On contrary to the results of the current study and in the same line with the contextualization view, it is crucial to note that the studies (Karakas & Sariçoban, 2012; Yüksel & Tanrıverdi, 2009), including the Turkish L2 learners of English as the participant group, did not reveal any significant difference between the groups, so they concluded that watching the movie clips facilitated the development of the vocabulary knowledge of the students regardless of the captions.

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