

The Effect of BBC World Clips With and Without Subtitles on Intermediate EFL Learners' Vocabulary Development

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to investigate the effect of bimodal subtitled films on vocabulary learning among Iranian EFL learners. To achieve this purpose, 60 male and female intermediate learners who were studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Pardis Memar Institute in Bandar Abbas, Iran, participated in this study. A standard proficiency test was run to ensure learner homogeneity. Then participants were randomly assigned to three groups, namely: experimental group with English subtitle (N = 20), experimental group without English subtitle (N = 20) and control group (N = 20). The experimental groups watched 10 video clips (with and without subtitles) with the duration of 2-3 minutes. Then the pretest including 50 vocabularies was administered to the groups. During 10 sessions two experimental groups watched the clips with different modes: Bimodal subtitle, and no subtitle. All groups received the same pre-test containing new words drawn from the movie. After 10 treatment sessions, the post-test, which was the parallel form of the pretest was administered. One-way ANOVA was conducted to identify any difference between the three different groups. The findings of the study showed that the participants in the bimodal subtitling group performed significantly better and learned more new vocabulary items. The performance of participants in the no subtitle group was less effective than for the bimodal subtitling group, while performance of the control group was the worst.

Keywords: *Movie Subtitling, Bimodal Subtitles, Vocabulary Development, Efl Learners*

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary learning plays a vital role in learning any language. It also has an essential role in developing second language skills (i.e., speaking, reading, writing, and listening). This factor is important to both EFL learners and teachers. Learning vocabulary can facilitate communication through languages. McCarthy (1990) determined that without words communication in L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way.

Hence, vocabulary and the way of teaching it for different purposes (general language and ESP) have become the focus of many studies (e.g., Atay & Ozbulgan, 2007; Naghizadeh & Tahririan, 2014; Nation, 2001; Rodriguez & Sadoski, 2000).

Using multimedia materials (e.g., TV programs) is the common way that students and teachers rely on in order to improve their vocabulary knowledge. In recent years, many studies have been conducted to find the effect of multimedia materials on second language (L2) learning. Some of them have presented that visual materials specially subtitled ones can play a vital role in helping EFL learners increase their foreign language vocabulary.

In addition, it can help motivate students and decrease the anxiety and stress derived from unfamiliar words and not knowing the language. Moreover, movies allow teachers to introduce variety and to some extent reality into the classroom. Furthermore, after watching the films, the students can bring their own background knowledge and experiences into the classroom through discussions based on the movie content and share these experiences with others.

Furthermore, since in the films, especially subtitled films, the verbal and imagery system are activated simultaneously, this can increase the power of learning. Based on dual coding theory, the learners can have better performance and recall because of the additional effects of both image and words. Moreover, subtitled films can help learners to encode information and retrieve them easily for later use.

Films and visual materials are generally valuable and useful tools in different aspects of language learning. Many teachers and scholars agree with this view. But the point to take into consideration is that subtitled films are so valuable for enhancing the learners' vocabulary knowledge. Although subtitled films offer many benefits for EFL learners, some researchers encourage learners to watch unsubtitled films because they believe the latter as facilitating comprehension.

Reese (1984) believed that subtitles are a block to learning and claimed that since humans can pay attention to only one channel at the same time, subtitles offer little benefit and in fact also have injurious effect. Findings by Bird and Williams (2002), on the other hand, revealed that subtitles are useful tools for improving the learning of new words. They let the learners enjoy the films from other cultures and countries, and give a new path to language comprehension. Other benefits of subtitles have been mentioned by many other investigations.

Many vocabulary learning strategies exist (repeating new words over and over, reading their synonyms and antonyms, making sentence with new words, and so on) that students use these different strategies until they can memorize novel words. But it is observed that although students use these strategies for a long time, they still cannot use these words appropriately in different situations. Therefore, selecting a much more appropriate strategy to learn novel words is important.

We as teachers should recommend to learners different ways of picking up new words in order to help them, retain, remember, and recall appropriate use of vocabulary items in different situations. An admitted way by many researchers and teachers, is asking them to make themselves exposed to the new words with different modes. For example, films are great tools for achieving this purpose, especially subtitled films, which make the students see, read and hear the word in real related situation simultaneously.

Subtitled movies allow students to learn how to pronounce many new words. They offer reinforcement in understanding of English context-bound expressions and help learners acquire new vocabulary and idioms. Subtitles can also motivate learners to study English in other contexts, unrestricted to the classroom, by watching English movies, listening to the news and so on. Finally, learners' comprehension will be increase by watching this kind of film.

The educational system of Iran does not to take into account seriously the role of visual materials in developing vocabulary. The results of this study can be useful to all people involved in language programs including teachers and students, besides curriculum and course designers. It can be helpful for teachers in selecting the proper kind of subtitles for teaching new words to their students. And course designers can use the findings of this study to add subtitled film as an important part of educational materials for developing vocabulary.

Statement of the Problem

As mentioned earlier, vocabulary is integral to language and is of great significance to language learners and teachers. Words are the prime building blocks of a language since they label objects, actions, and ideas without which people cannot convey the intended meaning. The prominent role of vocabulary knowledge in second or foreign language learning has been recently recognized by theorists and researchers in the domain. Accordingly, numerous types of approaches, techniques, activities and practices have been introduced into vocabulary teaching (Hatch & Brown, 1995).

English is a foreign language for Iranian people so the only places where they can learn English language are educational environments such as schools, universities and institutes. These educational environments and systems do not provide native-like situations. For this reason, learners may face more problems in understanding and learning the target language. The educational system of Iran pays much

attention to teaching grammar and the focus is also on reading comprehension but sub-skills such as vocabulary learning are less emphasized. Therefore the learners have more difficulties in communicating in the target language even when they study and learn English for many years. And when some of them decide to continue education in another country language is the main problem. Travelling to an English speaking country in order to learn language may not be possible for all who want to learn English in a English speaking country. But it seems the video clips can work, especially subtitled ones, because they provide rich information about the target culture, display language use in real situations and provide useful background information for learners.

Use of authentic videos and using the target words in a context might be a way of facilitating vocabulary learning, and can be quite rewarding in a foreign language learning context, considering the low frequency of learner exposure to the target language outside the Iranian classroom. Moreover, current understanding of vocabulary development holds the belief that acquiring a word should be explained on a continuum of knowledge level (Nation, 1990; Schmidt, 2001; Wesche & Paribakht, 1996), where copious encounters to a target item are needed for acquisition. Decontextualized vocabulary learning is the main problem which makes the process of learning and using the vocabulary in different aspects of language boring and dull and substantially demanding. In other words, if language teachers utilize contextualized materials such as textbooks and multimedia for teaching vocabulary, the lexical items will last much longer in learners' minds and will be remembered more readily than if presented in isolation (Grgurovic & Hegelheimer, 2007). Learners' vocabulary capacity is continuously being enhanced. Thus, to acquire and retain new words learners have to take part in various meaningful learning practices such as guessing tasks and exercises, describing and explaining practice, and conversation making exercise. These activities construct a contextualized vocabulary learning (e.g., through showing movies and short episodes of films) which assist learners in internalizing and utilizing various words in different settings and contexts. Thus, it seems necessary to investigate the impact of these factors on improving learners' vocabulary knowledge and retaining the whole process of lexical learning and using them in different situations (Chapple & Curtis, 2002).

Review of Literature

The theoretical basis of this study is inspired by dual-coding theory. This theory of cognition was hypothesized by Paivio (1971). Two ways are introduced through this theory to develop learnt material: verbal association and visual imagery.

Paivio's dual coding theory states that functionally the verbal system and the imagery system are independent and separate subsystems encoded them. Furthermore, two separate verbal systems create bilingual situations by associative connections. These three independent systems in subtitled films simultaneously interconnect and present. This might cause better processing and recall due to image and translation effects.

To investigate the impact of subtitling on aural word recognition skills, Markham conducted a study in this respect. The participants of this study were 118 advanced ESL learners. They watch two short videos of 12 and 13 minutes' duration in two different modes: with/without subtitles. The results of listening tests show that the learner's ability to identify the key words during screening significantly improved when they heard them again subsequently (Markham, 1999).

Bird and Williams (2002) and Schmidt (2007) maintain that watching subtitled programs is the best way of language learning. They maintained that comprehension and learning language occur to a greater extent because of clear word boundaries and no accent variation. Another study was done by Karakas and Saricoban (2012) investigating the impact of subtitled cartoons on incidental vocabulary learning. The findings of the study revealed significant improvement on pre and posttest of both participated groups but results of t-test showed no significant difference between the two groups.

A study conducted by Price (1983) examined the relationship between captioned TV program and the learning of a foreign language. Some 450 students participated in the study, and the result showed that captions significantly improved overall comprehension of the linguistic information presented in the video material.

In another study, Vanderplank (1988) investigated the use of English language subtitles in BBC television programs. Fifteen (15) high-intermediate and advanced ESL university students were selected as the participants of the study. They received subtitled BBC television programs in nine-hour-long sessions. The

results revealed that they could follow line, sound, and picture simultaneously. Students were better able to understand “fast, authentic speech and unfamiliar accents” (p. 275).

Koskinen, Kane, Jensema, Markham, and Knable (1995) analyzed the effects of captioned TV programs on the learners’ incidental vocabulary acquisition. Some 72 learners participated in the study voluntarily. They were randomly assigned into two groups: with and without subtitle. They watched 9 science information segments over 9 weeks. The results revealed no significant differences on the word recognition and sentence anomaly post-tests between the two groups, but the results of word meaning test showed significant differences on captioned TV program. Similarly, Markham (1989) did a study with 76 ESL university students to investigate the effects of captioned TV program on the comprehension of ESL university students. The results demonstrated fundamental comprehension advantages for beginning, intermediate, and advanced ESL university students who watched subtitled TV programs. Goldman (1993) concluded similarly that subtitled TV programs can be a good motivator for enhanced reading comprehension in intermediate and advanced ESL programs.

To sum up, it seems that these studies highlighted the significance of using subtitled films on language learning skills, particularly on vocabulary learning. The findings of the previous studies are inconclusive; therefore, there is a need to carry out a research to find the answer to this question.

Research Questions

The present study aimed at finding answers to the following research questions:

Q1: Does watching BBC World clips with English subtitles have any significant impact on Intermediate Iranian EFL learners’ vocabulary development?

Q2: Does watching BBC World clips without English subtitles have any significant impact on Intermediate Iranian EFL learners’ vocabulary development?

Q3: Is there any significant difference between the relative impacts of watching BBC World clips with or without English subtitles and traditional paper based instruction on Intermediate Iranian EFL learners’ vocabulary development?

METHOD

Design of the study

A quantitative design was used to carry out the study on three classrooms concluding both genders with equal vocabulary size knowledge of words. An Oxford Quick Placement test was conducted which showed the homogeneity of the students. Then three groups including both male and female learners were selected as the main groups of the study from Pardis Memar institute, Bandarabbas, Iran, including two experimental (subtitled and unsubtitled) and one control group. Therefore, the main goal of this study was to investigate the effect of BBC World clips on vocabulary development of Iranian intermediate students.

Participants

The participants were 60 intermediate-level English language learners studying conversational English. Forty one of the participants were male and nineteen were female. Their age ranged from 15 to 25 years. It should be noted here that three instructors handled the classes and reports on the activities were given to the researcher at the end of each session.

Instruments

Three types of instruments were administered for gathering data. The instruments consisted of Oxford quick placement test and vocabulary tests as pretest and posttest.

- A standard proficiency test namely Oxford quick placement test was utilized in order to select the homogeneous participants for this study.
- Vocabulary test as pre and posttest: a test of vocabulary based on teaching materials prepared by the researcher was run for the presented study. Pretest included 50 vocabulary items which only assessed the participants’ vocabulary knowledge. The posttest included 50 vocabulary items in the form of fill in the blank and multiple choice.

Materials

Ten video clips titled: 80 Years at the Top, African Ivory up in Smoke, Back to Nature, First Child of an Infant Nation, Indonesian Track Treatment, Laughter Yoga, Mecca or Manhattan?, New York Snow Chaos, Palestinians in UN Bid, and Hong Kong's Hive of Business were used as treatments in this study. Each clips lasted for 2 or 3 minutes. The participants watched these clips three times in each session. And at the end of any session they had to write down a summary of what they learnt from the videos.

Procedure

After the homogeneous participants were selected based on the Oxford Quick Placement test, they were divided into three groups of 20 (two experimental groups and one control group). Later on, the vocabulary pretest including 50 vocabulary items in a table was given to them. This test lasted 50 minutes. After the pretest, one experimental group watched the film with subtitles, the other experimental group without subtitle and control group did not receive any special treatment. The experimental groups watched the clips by duration 2-3 minutes 3 times for ten sessions. Some 50 vocabulary items are presented to the learners through watching 10 clips in 10 sessions. To ensure that they watched the clips carefully, the participants were asked to write a summary about what they saw and heard. And finally, they had to deliver their summaries to the instructor at the end of each session.

After ending the experiments the participants were subjected to a posttest. In order to check the validity of the vocabulary comprehension and production posttests, they were piloted with a similar group of 30 students studying conversational English at the English institute in Bandar Abbas. At the end of the treatment period, the vocabulary posttest was administered. The vocabulary posttest was the parallel form of the pretest including 50 vocabulary items in fill in the blank and multiple choice formats. The time given for this test was also 50 minutes.

RESULTS

Pretest

To investigate the effect of subtitled and unsubtitled clips on new vocabulary development, a one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run. The results obtained from the pretest of all three groups are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Results of the Participants' Pre-Test Scores in Different Groups

	Control	Without subtitle	With subtitle
N	Valid	20	20
Mean	18.7000	18.5000	18.6500
Std. Error of Mean	.60741	.55012	.60817
Median	18.0000	18.0000	17.5000
Std. Deviation	2.71642	2.46021	2.71981
Variance	7.379	6.053	7.397
Range	9.00	9.00	10.00
Minimum	15.00	15.00	15.00
Maximum	24.00	24.00	25.00

The results show that all groups are almost the same in terms of their vocabulary knowledge, and there is no significant difference between them. To analyze this result, SPSS 19 was used.

Posttest

After analyzing the pretest results, at the end of the treatment, the results obtained from the posttest were analyzed. The descriptive statistics of the participants' performance in different groups are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The Results of the Participants' Post-Test Scores in different groups

	Control	Without subtitle	With subtitle
N	Valid	20	20
Mean	30.0000	34.9000	41.2000
Std. Error of Mean	.61130	.62786	.59648
Median	30.0000	35.0000	41.0000
Std. Deviation	2.73380	2.80788	2.66754
Variance	7.474	7.884	7.116
Range	9.00	10.00	9.00
Minimum	25.00	29.00	37.00
Maximum	34.00	39.00	46.00

The mean score of each group and comparison with the mean obtained from pretest reveal that all groups have performed better on posttest and the mean of all groups significantly increased. As shown in Table 2, the group with bimodal subtitles significantly outperformed the other groups and had the highest mean score. The experimental without subtitle group performed better in the posttest than the control group. And the control group achieved the lowest level posttest score than all. To see whether the differences among the groups are statistically significant in their posttest performances, a One-Way ANOVA was run. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. One-Way ANOVA for Posttest

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1260.933	2	630.467	84.161	.000
Within Groups	427.000	57	7.491		
Total	1687.933	59			

The analysis in Table 3 shows that the computed significance equals 0.00 which is less than the significance level set for the study (.05); in other words there is a statistically significant difference among all three groups. To find out exactly where the difference lies, multiple comparisons were performed using the post-hoc test. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Post Hoc Tests (Tukey HSD)

(I) Factor	(J) Factor	Mean Difference(IJ)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Control	without subtitle	-4.90000*	.86552	.000	-6.9828	-2.8172
	with subtitle	-11.20000*	.86552	.000	-13.2828	-9.1172
with no subtitle	Control	4.90000*	.86552	.000	2.8172	6.9828
	with subtitle	-6.30000*	.86552	.000	-8.3828	-4.2172
with subtitle	Control	11.20000*	.86552	.000	9.1172	13.2828
	without subtitle	6.30000*	.86552	.000	4.2172	8.3828

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

DISCUSSION

Answer to the first research question:

Q1: Does watching BBC World clips with English subtitles have any significant impact on Intermediate Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary development?

Regarding the results of pre and posttest and presented information in Table 1 and 2, the subtitled group improved in learning vocabulary items. Based on these results the first hypothesis "Watching BBC World clips with English-subtitles have no significant impact on Intermediate Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary development." is rejected. In other words, teaching with subtitled films has positive effect on improving learners' vocabulary knowledge, because the results show a significant impact on Intermediate Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary development.

Answer to the second research question:

Q2: Does watching BBC World clips without English subtitles have any significant impact on Intermediate Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary development?

Regarding the presented information on pre and posttest of the unsubtitled group in Table 1 and 2, it revealed that the second research hypothesis "Watching BBC World clips without English subtitles have no significant impact on Intermediate Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary development." Is rejected. Because the findings show that watching the clips with no subtitles was effective on vocabulary development.

Answer to the third research question:

Q3: Is there any significant difference between the relative impacts of watching BBC World clips with or without English-subtitles and control group on Intermediate Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary development?

Since it was hypothesized that "There is no significant difference between the relative impacts of watching BBC World clips with or without English-subtitles and traditional paper based instruction on Intermediate Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary development." it can be concluded that the null hypothesis of the study is rejected strongly. The Post-hoc test revealed that there was a significant difference between these three groups concerning their performances on the posttest.

The results of this study are in line with Syndorenko (2010) who concluded in his study that the VAC (Video, audio and captions) group learned more word meanings than the VA (video and audio) group. According to his findings, the VAC and VA groups (who received subtitles) performed better than the VA group in recognition of lexicon forms, while the VA group outperformed the other mentioned groups on aural recognition of word.

Koolstra and Beentjes (1999) conducted a study on the effect of English TV programs with subtitles on children's vocabulary learning. They concluded that vocabulary development was at the highest level with subtitled programs.

And in another study by Neuman and Koskinen (1992), they concluded that subtitling was more effective for vocabulary recognition than un-subtitling and listening to and reading along with a text. Markham (1999) also did a study in this respect that the results confirmed the findings of the abovementioned studies.

Although most of studies mentioned so far seem to support and confirm that subtitles can improve language learning, vocabulary learning and content comprehension, some studies have unearthed contrary findings. Accordingly, the findings of this study do not support the results of the following studies. For example, the results of a study conducted by Zanon (2006) showed that, because subtitles cover visual information so they seem to be nuisance, and also, they decrease the credibility of the film. King (2002), Dann (2004), Reese and Davie (1987) also obtained findings contradictory to the results of the current study.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to investigate the influence of subtitled video clips on learners' vocabulary learning. The preliminary use of subtitling was to explore their possible effects on the development of intermediate Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge.

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that subtitles are an effective factor influencing vocabulary development. Therefore, it can be claimed that this strategy had an impact on vocabulary learning.

The findings of this study can benefit teachers who use subtitled clips as a part of teaching materials in their classes. And this study can suggest the learners to watch subtitled movies so that they can improve different language skills such as speaking, listening, writing and reading as well as vocabulary knowledge simultaneously.

This study, like any other study, has its own limitations. The first limitation is the limited number of the participants. The next is the level of participants which is restricted to intermediate level only. Other researchers might want to investigate the effect of using subtitled movies on different language skills such as listening, reading, writing and speaking; besides that, they can carry out the same research on other proficiency level samples.

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