

A Relook at the Efficacy of Persian and English Subtitled Movies on the Improvement of EFL Incidental Vocabulary Retention

< Kazemi, Seyyed Ali>¹, <Zarei, Leila>²

¹Young Researchers and Elites Club, Yasuj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Yasuj, Iran
Kazemi.TEFL@Yahoo.com

²Leila Zarei, Young Researchers and Elites Club, Yasuj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Yasuj, Iran
Zarei.EFL@ Gmail.com

Abstract: The main aim of this study is to investigate the impacts that Persian and English subtitles have on incidental vocabulary retention. Fifty four participants were randomly assigned to one of the three following conditions: (a) watching an English movie with original language and without subtitles (non-subtitling), (b) watching the same movie with original language and native language in subtitles (standard subtitling), and (c) watching the movie with foreign language in subtitles and native language (reversed subtitling). The study was carried out using a 40- minute-long episode of a drama film about a person who is exorcist. This study has two variables. The variables of the study were a dependent variable (incidental vocabulary learning) and an independent variable (the impact of Persian and English subtitle). First of all, a modified version of [1] Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) and a kind of listening test were administered to ensure the homogeneity of the participants. After homogenized, pre-test was given to the participants. Finally post-test including a word-form recognition test, a multiple-choice test, and a meaning by translation test was given to the participants. To this end, three tests were adopted from [2]. The result of ANOVA revealed that there was statistical significant difference among three groups in vocabulary learning. The results of the study showed that the third method i.e. reversed subtitling was the most effective method. The results were evidently suggestive of the important role of subtitled movies in vocabulary learning. This study has implications for language teachers to take into consideration the significance of subtitled movies in classrooms.

Keywords: incidental vocabulary learning, watching movie, standard subtitling, reversed subtitling, language learning

1. Introduction

A student's vocabulary has frequently been reported to be the most critical factor for success within language learning. However, over the past two decades, there has been a great deal of attention devoted to the incidental vocabulary learning. Generally, it can be said that one of the most influential technological tools in English language learning-teaching and vocabulary learning is the implication of subtitled movies through using DVDs, because DVDs provide subtitling options and they are considered as one of the best existing input for EFL learners and teachers [3].

In consequence of the prompt progress in technology, science, and mass media, foreign or second language teaching field has received much improvement currently. Accordingly, the functions of language classes have changed [4]. Their possibility to offer comprehensible input according to [5],

causes 'subconscious language acquisition', has improved dramatically through the implication of technical devices, etc. TV, LCD projector, laptop, DVD player, and video materials in the classrooms.

Additionally, the use of video and TV has developed promptly as a result of the growing emphasis on communicative aspects of language use [6]. Furthermore, this fact has facilitated language teaching quality to increase in and outside the class as well. Even if language learners have trouble with following and understanding video materials and TV programs in the target language, such visual materials have been enriched with subtitles in the mother tongue or the target language to facilitate the comprehensibility of these materials [7].

In the same vein, the learners' expansion of vocabulary in native and foreign language as well, partially is subject to being involved in rich and natural language setting. The

different definitions of a word cannot be completely understood without encountering the word in different semantic and syntactic settings [8]. As regards, using vocabulary arises not only because the learner tends to learn words but because the learner tends to understand what is said, written or, sung. Regarding, the definition of words can be inferred from the context in which they are presented. Learning words from context can be considered as a stage in which the learner can construct the meaning of a word, use the semantic and syntactic cues that the context offers [9]. Additionally, most investigation of incidental vocabulary learning has concentrated on written texts. Along with written texts, subtitled movies look to offer a rich setting for incidental vocabulary acquisition [10], [11]; [12]; [13]. Besides, watching television has become an appropriate way of getting information from different sources. Likewise, many of movies from different countries are accessible in other countries. Hence, people have to watch movies in languages other than their own native language. On account of the high costs of dubbing, which contains changing the original soundtrack in foreign language by a version in the native language, subtitling has been a general way of coping with the language problem. Generally, in subtitling, the original soundtrack is remained intact whereas subtitles in the target language are used at the bottom of the screen [14]. Likewise, a possible learning effect of watching subtitled movies is the acquisition of foreign languages, which is discussed in the current study. The expectancy that subtitled movies might provide for foreign language acquisition is to a certain extent reasonable [15]. Subtitled movies can provide an appropriate setting for foreign language acquisition in different forms of information. Accordingly, these are three modes: First, spoken which is the original sound track of the film, second, written which is the mother tongue subtitle of the movies, and third, visual which is the images of the story of the movies [16]. Furthermore, subtitled movies may lead to obtaining different sorts of language properties. One can learn word meanings and the situations in which these words can be used. It is also possible to improve the ability to recognize distinct words in spoken language, their pronunciations, and their uses in grammatical sentences.

In order to shed light on the importance of incidental vocabulary learning by using subtitled movies in English classrooms, the current study will examine how much incidental vocabulary learning can be affected by presenting subtitles [14]. The aim of the current study is considering the effect of two types of subtitling (1) standard subtitling mode and (2) reversed subtitling mode on incidental vocabulary learning of EFL learners. The purpose of this investigation is answering to the two following research questions:

- 1) Do subtitled movies influence on incidental vocabulary learning by EFL learners in Iran?
- 2) Which kind of subtitled movies result in more incidental vocabulary learning by EFL learners in Iran?

As a small number of studies have been carried out to show the impact of different types of subtitling modes (standard and reversed) on L2 vocabulary learning [13], this study aims to pay more attention to this topic to offer vivid explanations of the efficiency of the application of subtitling on English incidental vocabulary learning. In the same vein, there are three types of subtitling. (1) Bimodal subtitling

which contains English dialogues and English subtitles, (2) standard subtitling which contains English dialogues and subtitles in the learners' mother tongue, and (3) Reversed subtitling which contains dialogues in the learners' mother tongue and English subtitles [17].

2. Review of Literature

There are some studies brought up below in order to provide evidence to reveal the fact that audio and video modes together can be more useful to provide information than just one mode. Based on the following empirical studies, [18] pointed out that subtitles added to visual mode will not distract the oral and pictorial information. The existence of different resources to provide information can increase the capacity of memory and improve learning successfully. Accordingly, [10] investigated the amount of foreign language acquisition based on watching television through standard subtitles in no instructional settings by taking into account the effect of the similarities between the foreign and native languages.

In order that, some Dutch-Belgian high school students were provided with subtitled television programs with soundtracks in similar languages like South-African and German or dissimilar languages like Chinese and Russian. It was shown that vocabulary acquisition was more significant in programs with soundtracks in languages similar to Dutch. Vocabulary learning from dissimilar languages may have been lower since it was difficult to differentiate distinct words in the flow of quite unfamiliar sounds.

In the same vein, the impact of computer-based subtitling on language learning was studied and concluded the fact that subtitling helps learners comprehend the content of the film [17]. Similarly, [11] compared three versions of a film (subtitled, dubbed, and original versions) in order to investigate the efficacy of subtitles on film comprehension, and concluded that dubbed and subtitled versions bring about a superior performance in comparison with the original version.

Additionally, several studies focused on the effects of subtitles and captions on different language skills and components e.g. reading, listening and vocabulary learning. The mentioned studies designed to study captioned videos, TV programs, and non-captioned ones [19], [20]; [21]; [22]. The general findings maintained the assumption that subtitles and captions are influential instructional implements to learn vocabulary and improve reading and listening comprehension skills. Yet, along with [23], there are two reasons to show that it is not easy to generalize the findings of the above studies: "First, several studies did not group subjects by proficiency levels; second, the types of tests used to measure the effects of language learners' processing of captions varied widely" [23] (p.67). Therefore, different results of comprehension might have been because of the effects of captions, subtitles, or the level of proficiency and it is not still known whether other types of tests can provide equal findings or not.

Likewise, there is a study examining the impact of subtitled videos on foreign language learning, it was seen that reversed subtitling could be the most constructive approach to enhance foreign language learning comparing to no-subtitling and standard subtitling [24]. Accordingly, on the basis of empirical evidence, [19] maintained that bimodal

video is a useful way to enhance L2 learners' comprehension and vocabulary learning.

Recently, [25] studied the impact of multimodality on L2 learners through using an audiovisual recording. It was found that L2 subtitling was more helpful than L1 because it made less lexical interference implicitly. It indicated that the participants preferred subtitles in the transcript.

Furthermore, the impact of different kinds of subtitling, which are bimodal, standard, and reversed on L2 vocabulary recognition and recall by some university students in Iran was studied [13]. The results showed that participants in the bimodal and standard groups performed significantly differently from the reversed subtitling group.

To recap, the above mentioned studies suggest that foreign language vocabulary learning might be learned in non-educational or educational settings by adult and children learners through watching subtitled television programs, in particular when these programs use a foreign language that sounds familiar to the viewer.

3. Statement of the problem

As mentioned before, learning vocabulary can be an important factor to increase literacy skills and successful communication. Particularly, the importance of multimedia and video materials in increasing students' vocabulary potential is more and more considered by researchers and teachers.

Most previous studies about the efficacy of subtitles on vocabulary learning seem to reveal the fact that subtitled movies can improve language learning and vocabulary learning as well. Yet, inadequacy of research about the modality of subtitling can be seen. There is a need to show which kinds of modality leads to more vocabulary learning.

4. Research questions

The purpose of the current study is to investigate the efficacy of Persian and English subtitled movies on the improvement of EFL incidental vocabulary learning. In order to help EFL learners to learn English effectively, so that they can improve their vocabulary and use it for real-life purposes. Vocabulary knowledge is one of the most important elements which can facilitate development of the four skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing). And, to what extent these variables are in tandem, positively and negatively, significantly or insignificantly, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Do subtitled movies significantly impact Iranian EFL learners' incidental vocabulary learning?
2. Which type of subtitle is more effective to improve the incidental vocabulary learning?

5. Methodology

5.1 Participants

The population selected for this study was 54 male students whose ages range from 18 to 24. They were randomly chosen from 110 Padida institute students upon their language proficiency. All of our participants are native speakers of Persian. The institute was chosen because it is equipped with many facilities, such as language labs and spacious classrooms. It was expected that such facilities would enable students to do communicative activities.

The participants were from two classes who randomly divided into three groups: the first group was the control group watched movie with no subtitle, the second group was the experimental group one (standard subtitling) watched movie with Persian subtitle and the third group the experimental group two (reversed subtitling) watched the movie with English in subtitles and Persian in sound track. Three groups consisted of a total number of 54 students: 36 participants in the experimental group and 18 participants in the control group.

5.2 Instruments

The instruments used in the research will be as follow:

5.2.1 Vocabulary Levels Test

A modified version of [1] Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) was administered to confirm the homogeneity of the participants. The VLT test was designed to establish the participants' basic knowledge of common meaning of words at 2000, 3000 word levels. The validity and reliability of VLT has been studied by [26]. Also, a listening test [27] was administered to ensure the homogeneity of the participants' listening abilities.

5.2.2 Pre-test

After confirming the homogeneity of the participants, pre-test was given to the participants. The pre-test consisted of total of 20 items selected randomly from the target word's film. Each correct target word received point 1 and each incorrect answer received point 0.

5.2.3 Post-test

Finally the post-test including (1) a word-form recognition test, (2) a multiple choice test, and (3) a meaning by translation test was given to the participants. To this end, three tests were adopted from [2]. The first test required the participants to circle any words they recognized from the soundtrack or the subtitles. The second test was a standard prompted recognition four-choice test with the correct meaning and three distractors. An "I do not know" option was added to allow participants to indicate when they did not know an item so as to reduce the effect of guessing. And, the third test presented the target words in a list. The participants were asked to write what the words mean in Persian and in English.

5.2.4 How to select the target words

Sixty words were selected from a movie "Constantine" to test the vocabulary knowledge of the participants. These sixty words in this study are known as the target words. In the process of word selection some factors such as, unfamiliarity of participants with the words, the selection of words with different parts of speech, avoiding the use of the words with different meanings, and avoiding the use of ambiguous and abstract words were considered.

5.2.5 Materials

The material used in the current study is one original American DVD movie which is dubbed in Persian. The film was entitled "Constantine" which was about a man (John) who is an exorcist.

5.3 Procedure

In order to ensure the homogeneity of the participants, a modified version of [1] Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) was administered. Moreover, a listening test was administered to confirm the participants' listening abilities were of the same level [27]. Additionally, a film entitled "Constantine" was selected for the experiment.

After homogenizing the participants, pre-test was given to the participants. The pre-test was administered to pinpoint target words that were unfamiliar to all the participants and to assess learners' entry vocabulary level before the post-test. All the participants were finally divided into three groups (n=18) for the purpose of making them watch the movie with different subtitling types.

The first group of the participants watched the film with original language and without the subtitle. The second group of the participants watched the movie in the standard subtitling, and the last group of the participants watched the movie in the reversed subtitling mode.

Finally post-test was given to the participants: a word-form recognition test, a multiple choice test and a meaning by translation test.

The experiment was conducted in the same condition and were tested immediately afterwards. To this end, three tests were adopted from [2].

5.3.1 Scoring procedure

The scoring procedure was in line with [28] in such a way that every single item received a point from zero to one. Wrong translation or no translation, also wrong recognition or no recognition of words received no point or 0, correct translation and correct recognition of words received the maximum point or 1, and finally partial translation and recognition of words but not accurate item was assigned half a point or 0.5.

6. Data analysis

6.1 Analysis of scores on proficiency test

The descriptive statistics of proficiency test is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Scores Obtained From the Proficiency Test

Descriptive Statistics							
	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	
	<i>Statistic</i>	<i>Statistic</i>	<i>Statistic</i>	<i>Statistic</i>	<i>Statistic</i>	<i>Statistic</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>
Proficiency test	54	10.33	19.33	13.61981	2.265058	-.004	0.308235
	<i>Valid N (listwise)</i>	54					

Regarding this table the minimum and maximum of the scores were 10.33 and 19.33 respectively. The mean of the scores was 13.61981 and standard deviation was 2.265058.

6.2 Analysis of scores on pre-test

The descriptive statistics of the pre-test is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of the Scores Obtained From the Pre-test

Descriptive Statistics							
	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	
	<i>Statistic</i>	<i>Statistic</i>	<i>Statistic</i>	<i>Statistic</i>	<i>Statistic</i>	<i>Statistic</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>
Proficiency test	54	5	19	12	2.254789	-.004	0.308235
	<i>Valid N (listwise)</i>	54					

Regarding this table the minimum and maximum of the scores were 5 and 19 respectively. The mean of the scores was 12 and standard deviation was 2.254789.

7. Results

7.1 Results of word-form recognition test

The descriptive statistics of the scores obtained from form-recognition is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics of the Scores Obtained from Form-recognition

Score word form					
	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>
Control G	18	8.8889	3.08486	5.00	16.00
ExperiG 1	18	9.5000	2.59524	6.00	16.00
ExperiG 2	18	14.5000	2.72785	10.00	20.00
Total	54	10.9630	3.74651	5.00	20.00

The mean score in the third group is 14.5000. The result shows the highest mean score belongs to the second experimental group.

7.2 Results of multiple-choice recognition test

The multiple-choice test was employed in this study to measure the receptive lexical gains of the participants. The descriptive statistics of the scores obtained from multiple-choice recognition is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of the Scores Obtained From Multiple-choice Recognition

Score multiple-choice					
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
ControlG	18	4.4444	1.61690	2.00	8.00
ExperiG1	18	5.0000	1.32842	3.00	9.00
ExperiG2	18	7.3889	1.33456	5.00	10.00
Total	54	5.6111	1.90745	2.00	10.00

The mean score in the third group is 7.3889. The result shows the highest mean score belongs to the second experimental group.

7.3 Results of the meaning translation test

The descriptive statistics of the scores obtained from the meaning test is shown in Table 5.

Table 5 Descriptive Statistics of the Scores Obtained From Meaning

Scores meaning					
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Control G	18	8.6667	3.19926	2.00	15.00
ExperiG1	18	9.9444	2.60028	7.00	16.00
ExperiG2	18	15.0556	2.36325	12.00	20.00
Total	54	11.2222	3.87380	2.00	20.00

Table 7 ANOVA on the Students' Scores of Multiple-choice ANOVA Table

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	88.111	2	44.056	21.455	.000
Within Groups	104.722	51	2.053		
Total	192.833	53			

Table 8 reveals the result of ANOVA on the students' scores of meaning.

Table 8 ANOVA on the Students' Scores of Meaning ANOVA Table

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	88.111	2	44.056	21.455	.000
Within Groups	104.722	51	2.053		
Total	192.833	53			

The mean score in the third group is 15.0556. The result shows the highest mean score belongs to the second experimental group.

In order to answer both research questions, ANOVA with the number of groups as an independent variable and types of tests as a dependent variable was performed to confirm whether there was statistically significant effect of tests. Table 6 reveals the result of ANOVA on the students' scores of form-recognition.

Table 6 ANOVA on the Students' Scores of Form-recognition ANOVA Table

Score word-form	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	341.148	2	170.574	21.598	.000
Within Groups	402.778	51	7.898		
Total	743.926	53			

Table 7 reveals the result of ANOVA on the students' scores of multiple-choice test.

The computed significance for all three tests equals .000 which is less than significance level set for the study (0.05). This substantiates the fact that there is a statistically significant difference among the three groups concerning their performance on the post-test.

The results of post hoc test showed that the performance of learners was progressed significantly from three different aspects in post-test; in addition to each of which was significantly different from each other at the level of $p < .05$.

8. Discussion

The results of the current study show that the participants can learn more vocabulary through watching subtitled movies. The findings indicate the higher test scores achieved in the reversed subtitled group (C) over other groups. For that reason, it can be concluded that subtitled movies with Persian sound track and English subtitles are more suitable for EFL learners in Iran because the participants can be exposed to more channels of information.

In addition, the findings indicate the higher test scores obtained in the standard subtitled group (B) over group (A). Accordingly, it is clear that the participants can learn some English words from watching the English-spoken film even without their Persian translations.

With regard to vocabulary recognition and recall, [13] investigated that the reversed subtitled movies was the least effective. Conversely, in this study, it has been concluded that the reversed subtitled movies could be the most effective way to learn vocabulary. The existing difference in the two studies could be because in [13], the participants were homogenized only based on the multiple-choice vocabulary tests. i.e. a listening test to ensure the participants' homogeneity with regard to listening comprehension was not carried out. But, in this study a listening test and a multiple-choice test were used together to ensure the homogeneity of the participants. Moreover, in this study a word-recognition, meaning translation test, the multiple-choice test were used to obtain more reliable data.

In contrast, [29] concluded that the reversed subtitled movies are more effective for the students in French immersion programs than the bi-modal subtitling. Furthermore, [24] showed that reversed subtitling was the most constructive type of subtitling. The findings of this study support the highest effect of reversed subtitling among other types of subtitling. There is a point that students cannot concentrate to hear English words while watching movies and reading the subtitles simultaneously. Consequently, learners' recognition of English words was compared among the three groups of this study. The findings show that word-form recognition in the second group was higher than that in the first group. Thus, it can be concluded that subtitle reading was not a distraction for the learners while hearing the English words. To this end, eye-movement research shows that viewers can switch easily between the visual image and

the subtitle [30]. Additionally, the findings of this research are in line with the results of [31] in which the effect of different modes of subtitles on vocabulary learning was investigated. They investigated the effect of watching TV programs on incidental vocabulary learning in three different conditions: standard subtitles, reversed subtitles and without subtitles. 90 university participants randomly assigned to three experimental groups participated in their pretest-posttest design study. The results of their study demonstrated the relative superiority of reversed subtitled TV programs over standard subtitled and non-subtitled TV programs in terms of enhancing reader's learning of unknown words through eight treatment sessions.

The present article is highly related to the works of researchers like [32] who concluded that the groups using subtitles performed significantly better on listening comprehension than the groups without subtitles. The current study created a condition to show that English words are recognized more when their translations can be read in the subtitles through standard or reversed modes.

9. Implications of the study

Theoretically, the current study signified the subtitled movies as reliable ways to keep vocabulary in memory. They are powerful tools to contribute vocabulary learning. They can also be used to introduce new words and expressions in EFL classroom. As an authentic source they cause incidental learning among elementary, intermediate, and advanced learners.

Based on the results of the current study, EFL teachers can provide their students with subtitled movies to enhance incidental vocabulary learning. Additionally, language learners through studying the results of this study get familiarized with an appropriate strategy to learn more vocabulary.

10. Suggestions for further research

Study of the benefits of using foreign movies in language instruction settings seems an applicable field for further research. It is possible to carry out the same research in order to investigate the impact of the treatment on different genders with different language proficiency levels. For more practical results, longitudinal exposures are needed to gauge cumulative effects. Furthermore, it is imperative to administer delayed post-test. Besides, instead of watching movies only for one time, the participants should watch the movies more than one time during one session. Finally, it is suggested that students be provided with attitudinal questionnaires to investigate their positive or negative attitudes towards watching movies in their syllabus.

11. Conclusion

The current study represents EFL language learning acquisition through watching a movie, (40 min). So far,

mostly non-subtitled foreign movies have been shown in English classrooms in Iran. Based on the results of the current study, language learners can learn more from subtitled movies. Consequently, the subtitled movies should be considered as important instructional tools. Accordingly, teachers should select appropriate movies based on learners' needs, interest, and language proficiency levels.

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