

In the Name of God

The Compassionate

The Merciful



Payam Noor University

Department of Foreign Languages

Title

**A Comparative Study of “Subtitled” vs.
“Auditory” Documentaries Comprehension among
Persian Speakers of English**

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
M.A**

In Teaching English as Foreign language

Advisor:

Dr.Masoud Rae Sharif

Reader:

Dr. Manoochehr Jafarigohar

By

Maryam Ebrahimian

January

2013

Abstract

This study set out to compare the effect of modality of presentation (Subtitled vs. auditory) in the comprehension of verbal content of documentary films among Iranian EFL students. To this end, (30 male 30 female) students were chosen from two schools. After their homogeneity was established, the students attended the listening sessions to watch five documentary films over two weeks. Each session lasted nearly one hour. The students of each school were voluntarily assigned to one of the two experimental conditions: English soundtrack with no subtitles (ESONSU), no soundtrack with English subtitles (NSOESU). They observed five five-minute documentary clips, where the presentation format was varied in terms of verbal information in the soundtrack and subtitles. A group was presented with a combination of two visual inputs (muted film while reading subtitles) while the other group observed the documentary clips and listened to the sound tracks. The comparison of the groups on Mann-Whitney U test illustrated that there is not any significant difference between the comprehension of subtitled and audible documentaries. However, a significant difference was observed between the comprehension of females (Median = 20) and males (Median = 13) on the comprehension of subtitled documentaries. Comprehension of females and males on audible documentaries showed that female EFL Iranian students performed better on audible movies.

Key Words: Subtitled Movies, Documentary Films, Advanced EFL Students, Learning English through Films

Acknowledgements

The accomplishment of this thesis would have been impossible without contribution of the people who sacrificed their time and advice which encouraged me to break through difficulties during the writing process. Initially, my sincere gratefulness is dedicated to Dr. Masoud Raei Sharif from the Department of Foreign Languages at Payam Noor University of Tehran. His gentle assistance and patient guidance led my research to be constructed more thoroughly and thoughtfully. With his constructive advice, I developed independent research abilities and fulfilled my thesis through various difficulties. In addition, I especially thank Dr. Jafari Gohar and Dr Hemati from the same department. Their valuable suggestions and comments provided me with directions to improve my thesis. I would also like to thank Mr. Ashrafi who helped with the statistical analysis. Moreover, I express my true gratitude to my professors for instruction and encouragement during the three-year study at Payam Noor University. With their inspirations, I broadened my perspective in research in EFL teaching. Furthermore, I really appreciate the effort of the participants in my study. This thesis would not have been completed without their cooperation and assistance. Additionally, I would like to thank my friends Ms Torkashvand, Ms Nabavy and Mr Firoozi, for their kind help of providing me with more resource of students. In addition, I deeply acknowledge my dear classmate; Shabnam's help for her warm company and passionate assistance to go through my disappointed moments. Finally, I present my honest gratefulness for the physical and psychological support of my dear family. I especially thank my mom with all my heart for her countless care and endless love. She was the best listener when I encountered difficulties during the composing process and the best supporter who has confidence in my ability. I would like to share the glory of my research achievement with my beloved mom.

Table of Contents

Title	Page
Abstract	III
Acknowledgments	IV
List of tables	X
List of graphs	X
Dedication Page	XI
Chapter one: Introduction	1
1.1 Background	2
1.2. Statement of the Problem	6
1.3. Significance of the Study	7
1.4. Purpose of the Study	7
1.5. Research Questions	8
1.6. Research hypotheses	8
1.9. Definitions of key Terms	9
Listening Comprehension	9
Reading Comprehension	9
Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature	11
2.1. Introduction	12
2.2. Definition of subtitling	13
2.3. Kinds of Subtitling	15
2.4. Combination of Subtitles	15
2.4.1. Standard subtitling (L2 audio with L1 subtitles)	15
2.4.2 Bimodal subtitling (L2 audio with L2 subtitles)	16
2.4.3. Reversed Subtitling (L1 audio with L2 subtitles)	16
2.4.4. Bilingual subtitling (L2 audio with L2&L1 subtitles Simultaneously)	16
2.4.5. Bilingual reversed subtitling (L1 audio with L1 and L2 subtitles)	17

simultaneously)	
2.4.6. No subtitling	17
2.5. Benefits and Pitfalls of subtitling	17
2.5.1. Benefits of Subtitling	18
2.5.2. Limitations and Pitfalls of subtitling	23
2.6. Previous Research	28
2.6.1. Multiple-Channel Message Research	29
2.6.2. Dual Coding and working memory	31
2.6.3. Audio/visual Redundancy	32
2.6.4. Subtitling Research	33
Chapter Three: Method	41
3.1. Introduction	42
3.2. Participants	42
3.3 Instrumentation	43
3.3.1. Customized PET	43
3.2.2. Researcher-made Test	43
3.4. Design	44
3.5. Procedure	45
3-5-1- Administration Procedure	45
3-5-2- Scoring Procedure	47
3.6. Data Analysis	47
Chapter Four: Results and Discussion	48
4.1. Introduction	49
4.2. Results and Discussion	49

4.2.1. Normality Test for Types of Movies	49
4.2.2. Normality Test for Types of Gender	50
4.3. Research Question 1	52
4.4. Research Question 2	53
4.5. Research Question 3	54
4.6. Discussion	55
Chapter Five: Conclusions, Implications and Implications	71
5.1. Overview	71
5.2. Summary and Conclusion	71
5.3. Pedagogical Implications	71
5.4. Limitations of the study	73
5.5. Delimitations of the study	74
5.6. Suggestions for further study	74
References	77
Appendix A	85
The Pet	85
Table 1. Reliability	86
Table 2. Pearson Correlation Proficiency Test with Listening Comprehension	86
Appendix B	86
Table 1. Reliability	86
Table 2. Pearson Correlation Proficiency Test with Listening Comprehension	87
Graph 1. Proficiency Test by Gender	89
Appendix C	90
The researcher made questions	90

Appendix D

C-PET Test

LIST OF TABLES	page
Table 4.1: Normality Test for Types of Movies	49
Table4.2: Normality Test for Gender	50
Table 4.3: Mann-Whitney U Test Comprehension (Audible vs. Subtitled)	53
Table4.4: Mann-Whitney U Test Comprehension (Male vs. Female Subtitled Movies)	54
Table4.5: Mann-Whitney U Test Comprehension (Male vs. Female Audible Movies)	55

LIST OF GRAPHS

Graph 4.1: Comprehension (by Types of Movies)

Graph 4.2: Comprehension (for Gender)

Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my dear parents for their perfect love and wholehearted support

Chapter one

Introduction

1.1. Background

“Today’s world is undoubtedly a visually oriented one. Films and videos capture audiences not only in the field of entertainment but in the business of corporate world as well as in the world of education”. (Stoller 1990:10, cited by Canning-Wilson 2000).” The incorporation of video in foreign language instruction has recently benefitted from the proliferation of subtitled material that provide learners with more opportunity for auditory discrimination through comparison of subtitles and audios for establishing a connection between words and images; for checking and reinforcing listening comprehension for improving vocabulary acquisition and reading ability with the help of verbatim subtitles” (Spanos & Smith 1990, as cited in Chang, 2003, p.162). Media use in today’s society is unavoidable and we believe that future teachers should use television as an educational tool and incorporate multimedia in lesson plans in an effective way. “It is our belief that the visual and oral input of television with subtitles can aid students in their ability to memorize and comprehend the content” (Zarah & kuses, 2011). Kusumarasyaty (2005) noted that

Subtitled movie DVDs turn out to be an effective teaching device to develop the EFL learners’ listening skills and equip them with the relevant knowledge of the target culture simultaneously. Their capacity to arouse the learners’ motivation and their potential to engage the learners in a variety of fruitful activities related to aural perception in the target language can scarcely be denied. (p.10)

“Using captions or subtitles to facilitate comprehension of video materials is taken for granted by many teachers and researchers. Moreover, many educators believe that television programs with captions seem to provide a rich context for foreign language acquisition. It is also argued that viewers are generally, quite motivated to understand what is shown on

television when the captions are provided” (Yuksel & Tanriverdi, 2009, p.48). Many educators recommend their students to watch TV and movies with captions in the belief that being exposed to the target language in this way will increase the language proficiency level of their students.

However, the number of studies that specifically examined the functions of captioned movies in second / foreign language learning is few compared to the popularity of assumption regarding the effectiveness of the captioned movies in language development (Yuksel & Tanriverdi, 2009, p.48).

Borras & Lafayette (1994) maintain that most foreign/ second language studies on the issue of subtitling have concentrated on the effects of subtitles on comprehension in reading or listening. As Bird and Williams (2002, p.1-2) maintain “a number of studies have demonstrated some beneficial effects of same-language subtitles (Chung, 1996; Danan, 1992; Garza, 1991; Holobow, Lambert & Sayegh, 1984; Lambert, Boehler, & Sidoti; Price, 1983; Vanderplank, 1988, 1990, 1993; and see Borras & Lafayette, 1994; Jung, 1990 for reviews”). In these studies the effects of subtitling were primarily measured by first showing video segments with or without subtitles to students and then testing their ‘global’ comprehension (i.e., written and/or oral questions about the video’s plot), the meanings of individual words, and sometimes memory for exact phrasing. However, the results of these studies may not be particularly surprising because text may present the easiest path to comprehension, and the auditory input might be ignored without loss of the information required for successfully completing a written test. Subjects could certainly perform both written and oral tests of story line content even if they only read the subtitles. Thus ‘improved comprehension’ of a video plot and better retention of phrasing and vocabulary could be due only to good reading

comprehension, not improved listening comprehension. This issue is important for teachers and learners since it remain unclear whether subtitles are leading to better or worse listening comprehension”.

It is to be mentioned that as Hinkin (2009, p.i) claims

While working memory studies have profoundly influenced the development of new cognitive theories, including the Dual-Processing Theory (Mayer & Moreno, 1998), limited research has investigated the effects of subtitled messages on multimedia comprehension. Besides, subtitling has received little attention from experimental psychology and communication studies. For this reason, practical applications of subtitling rely more on conventional rules of thumb than on validated empirical guidelines.

“Research in this area can, therefore have significant applied value” (Prego et al., 2010, p.245). Hinkin (2009), and also Mayer & Moreno (1998 as cited in Hinkin 2009) have addressed the subtitling issue from a psychological perspective. However, his research has focused on the use of native language soundtracks and subtitles and their influence on comprehension of movies. As Hinkin (2009) affirms “subtitled media are primarily used when viewing a movie with verbal information from a foreign language” (p. 243) and in this area there are just a few studies including Hinkin’s (ibid) secondary experimental study. To extend previous research on modes of presentation and its effect on comprehension, the current study attempts to address this issue to examine whether foreign language subtitles affect comprehension performance of documentary movie clips better compared to the same documentary films presented with foreign language soundtracks?

1.1.1. A Short review of previous findings.

As Perego et.al (2010,p245) maintain “Although earlier studies have provided valuable information on the cognitive processing of subtitled material, the picture is still partial (de Linde & Kay, 1999a, 1999b; d’Ydewalle & Gielen, 1992; d’Ydewalle & Pavakanun, 1995, 1997; d’Ydewalle, Muylle, & Van Rensbergen, 1985; d’Ydewalle & Van Rensbergen, 1989; Koolstra & Beentjes, 1999; Koolstra, Van der Voort, & d’Ydewalle, 1999; Praet, Verfaille, De Graef, Van Rensbergen, & d’Ydewalle, 1990)”.

Individuals show a rather strong tendency to initiate reading subtitles at their onset even when they have little experience with this source of information (d’Ydewalle & Gielen, 1992; d’Ydewalle & Pavakanun, 1997; d’Ydewalle, Praet, Verfaille, & Van Rensbergen, 1991; d’Ydewalle, Van Resenbergen, & Pollet, 1987; Gielen,1988), and this tendency is stronger when subtitles are informative (i.e., the language of the soundtrack is unknown or known little, there is limited redundancy between written text and images, and subtitles convey valuable information) (cited by Perego et al., 2010).

Moreover, people who have a degree of experience with subtitles seem to read them in a rather effortless way (e.g., d’Ydewalle & Gielen, 1992; see also d’Ydewalle & De Bruycker, 2007). The observation that reading text on screen seems to require relatively low effort is consistent with the generally agreed idea that reading can become partially automatic and relatively effortless for most normal adult readers due to the learning processes (e.g., LaBerge & Samuels, 1974; Logan, 1997; Perfetti, 1985; Perfetti & Marron, 1998). Indeed, although reading requires several complex perceptual and cognitive skills (e.g., knowledge of a given writing system, phonological awareness, decoding skills, grammatical expertise), once learned, readers appear to perform this activity without great effort, thanks to the partial

automatization of various components of the task (e.g., LaBerge & Samuels, 1974; Logan, 1997; Rayner & Sereno, 1994; Stanovich, 1990) (Cited by Perego et al. 2010).

The main purpose of this study thus, is to investigate which presentation method is more effective; watching documentary films silently and reading the subtitles or watching the same documentary films and listening to English soundtracks?

1.2. Statement of the Problem

From the constructivist 'point of view, for a better comprehension of oral or written text, the learner should be exposed to linguistic and paralinguistic information simultaneously (Kess, 1992 cited in Imanian, 2004, p.2). Paralinguistic information can be provided for the learner through visual and nonverbal cues. The most important point is that the learner should be able to integrate verbal and nonverbal information. Success in comprehension hence may depend on success in integration of various sources of information. "In the case of subtitled films, the individual receives visual input from the images and the text of the subtitles and verbal and nonverbal auditory information from the soundtrack. Understanding how individuals are able to process, integrate, and understand information coming from these different sources will indeed provide significant contribution to the theoretical understanding of complex communication processes. Based on Mayer and Moreno's (1998) third assumption (cited in Hinkin, 2009, p.6), "meaningful learning occurs when a learner retains relevant information in each store, organizes the information in each store into a coherent representation, and makes connections between corresponding representations in each store". This assumption comes from the generative theory of multimedia learning introduced by Mayer (1997). "The fourth and final assumption is that connections are formed simultaneously between the visual inputs and the auditory inputs stored in working memory" (Hinkin, p.5-6).

Research on subtitles can thus be helpful to understand other forms of multiple-source communication in which the individual has to pay attention to information delivered through various sensorial channels and information sources (e.g., watching and hearing the news on television while processing the headlines and/or other written information on the screen) (Perego et al., 2010,p.245).

1.3. Significance of the Study

Although the literature on multimedia listening has looked at help options, in our case subtitling, there are few studies which have addressed subtitling from a psychological perspective.

Hinkin (2009) performed two experiments to investigate the effects of subtitled movies on the comprehension of movie content. The Results of their Experiments indicated that participants perform significantly better on verbal-only and combined-information questions when their native language was present in the subtitles as opposed to the soundtrack. However, it should be noted that as Hinkin (2009) argues “although Experiment 1 provides basic understanding of how native language soundtracks and subtitles influence comprehension of movies, subtitled media are primarily used when viewing a movie with verbal information from a foreign language”. The present experiments differ from the previous research on subtitling in that it is concerned with foreign language presentation both in subtitles and sound tracks.

1.4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is first to determine which combination of foreign language soundtrack and foreign language subtitles is more effective for recognition of movie content. In other words, the present study aims to examine the advantages of watching silent subtitled

film segments over watching films with simultaneous sound tracks. Furthermore, to gain a better understanding of the issue, the researcher will analyze the results for a probable difference between (male and female) participants.

1.5. Research Questions

This study was designed to provide answers to the following questions:

1. Is there any difference in the comprehension of subtitled documentaries vs. audible documentaries?
2. Is there any difference in the comprehension of subtitled documentaries by male and female language learners?
3. Is there any difference in the comprehension of audible movies by male vs. female language learners?

1.6. Research Hypotheses

In order to find answers to the above mentioned research questions, the following null hypothesis promulgated:

1. There is no difference between the comprehension of Subtitled vs. audible documentaries.
2. There is no difference between the comprehension of subtitled movies by male vs. female language learners.
3. There is no difference between the comprehension of audible movies by male vs. female language learners.

The present study focused on documentary movies only, to the exclusion of all others. Moreover the results of this study can only be generalized to high school population. Caution must be exercised when attempting to generalize to other situations.

1.9. Definitions of Key terms Listening Comprehension

Listening comprehension in an L2 is the process of receiving, attending to, and assigning meaning to aural stimuli (Goh, 2002; Jones & Plass, 2002; Rost, 2002). Nancy and Rubin (1985) have expanded the LC definition to critical listening skills (higher order skills such as analysis and synthesis) and nonverbal listening skills (comprehending the meaning of tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, and nonverbal cues). Operationalizing this expanded definition in LC tests might be partly possible through the use of subtitles which supplement the aural verbal input (Cited in Imanian, 2004, p.4).

Reading comprehension

Reading comprehension is the interaction between the reader and the text. From the psycholinguistic perspective, reading is the interaction between “thought and the written language”(Grabe, 1991; Harley, 1995; Whitney, 1998 cited in Imanian, 2004, p.4). “However, the reading of subtitles must be separated from the “normal” reading of words and sentences printed on page. Seeing subtitles is perhaps closer to the act of listening than that of reading. The words are shown once and then disappear. The viewer has no chance to go back and refer to an earlier part in the text. Not only do students need to rely on their ability to take in printed material, but also they need to do it very quickly. The addition of subtitled movies to classroom instruction has a further benefit of shifting watching typical classroom movies from a picture-viewing activity to a reading activity, supplying struggling readers with additional reading practice. (National Center for Technology Innovation & Center for Implementing Technology in Education, 2010, cited in Etemadi, (2011, p.240).