

Improving Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Vocabulary Knowledge through Watching Video Clips with English Subtitles

Effat Heidari Sirmandi *

Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, Bandarabbas Branch, Islamic Azad University, Bandarabbas, Iran

Sedigheh Abbasnasab Sardareh

Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, Bandarabbas Branch, Islamic Azad University, Bandarabbas, Iran

Abstract

The present study aimed at investigating the improvement of Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' vocabulary knowledge through watching video clips with English Subtitles. To achieve this goal, 40 male and female intermediate learners who were studying English as a foreign language (EFL) in Pardis Memar Institute in Bandar Abbas, Iran, were selected as the main participants of the study through administering an Oxford Placement Test to ensure the homogeneity of the learners. They were randomly assigned in to two groups, namely: the experimental group with English subtitle (N=20) and the control group with no subtitle (N=20). The experimental group watched 10 video clips with English subtitles and the control group watched 10 video clips with no subtitles during ten sessions. Both groups received the same pre-test containing 50 new words drawn from the clips. After 10 treatment sessions, the post-test, which was the parallel form of the pretest, was administered. The result showed that the participants in the bimodal subtitling group outperformed and learned more new vocabulary items. The performance of the participants in no subtitle group, revealed to be less effective than the group with subtitles. The findings showed that watching video clips with subtitles can improve the EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge.

Keywords: English subtitles, vocabulary knowledge, EFL learners

INTRODUCTION

Learning English nowadays is more challenging than ever. To increase the student's proficiency, teacher constantly try to provide many different method and strategies to teach their students foreign languages. It seems, among many strategies, visual aids can help a lot. Using video clips among these visual aids will engage, interest, up-to-date the learners in language learning process. Besides, video clips and movies are the most available entertainment and teaching materials all over the world. Almost, everyone finds watching the films pleasurable and enjoys talking about them. These films can present and provide many new words within the learners can watch them and learn the

language in real context. By using movies as a teaching and learning materials, variety and reality will be introduced to the class by the teachers and students can bring their own background knowledge and experiences into the class.

The dual-coding theory proposed by Paivio (1971) suggests that when pictures are added to the meaning, the number of signals connected with the message increases and more comprehensible input will be provided. In an enriched context, the meanings of unknown words can be inferred from the context, therefore, it can be claimed that getting the meaning from the context is a stepwise process through which learners make use of semantic and syntactic clues provided by the context to achieve the meaning of a word (Beck & McKeown, 1991). In addition to written texts, subtitled television programs seem to provide an enriched context for incidental vocabulary learning (Grignon et al., 2005; Zarei, 2009).

Using sound and images is beneficial and valuable to comprehend the films but the subtitles of different languages can assist to better understanding them and lead to learning language more easily. Grgurovic and Hegelheimer (2007) states that learners can learn how to pronounce many new words via watching subtitled films. It can reinforce the learners' understanding of English expressions and idioms. Furthermore, subtitles can motivate the students to study English outside the classroom and can increase listening skill by listening to original dialogues in subtitled films. As King (2002) determine when learners are exposed to films, many vocabulary and phrases can be learnt and they can improve their target language simultaneously.

This study makes an attempt to investigate the effect of contextualizing vocabulary items in the form of subtitled contexts and compares their effectiveness to teaching vocabulary without subtitles. It is believed that the enrichment of the context in which language learning takes place, whether first language acquisition or second language learning context, may have great impact on learners' vocabulary development (Anderson & Nagy, 1991). When the learner tries to understand the written and spoken discourse, the vocabulary items are used as the main element. At the end of this process, learning vocabulary as the most crucial part of language takes place.

Use of authentic videos and using the target words into 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 instances that learners are exposed to target language outside the classroom. Moreover, current understanding of the 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 they will be remembered more readily than when presented in isolation (Grgurovic & Hegelheimer, 2007). Learners' vocabulary

capacity is continuously enhancing. Thus, to acquire and retain new words learners have to take part in various meaningful learning practices such as guessing task 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 internalize and utilize 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).

In educational system of Iran, especially at high schools and institutes, language learners are aware of the significant role of vocabulary knowledge in language learning process (Paribakht & Wesche, 1993), they understand the necessity of lexical learning and believe that their EFL teaching practitioners' method of vocabulary teaching including defining, pronouncing, spelling and explaining new words' grammatical functions is not effective and problem solving and they mostly learn vocabulary in a passive manner and in a decontextualized process (Finkbeiner & Nicol, 2003).

A vast crucial majority of studies and researches carried out in language learning, have been devoted to vocabulary learning process and tried to evince the significant role of lexical in learning a language, however, a few of them investigated the effect of visual teaching techniques on vocabulary learning and most of them attempt to investigate the role of vocabulary in de-contextualized situations (Goldman & Goldman, 1988; Koolstra & Beentjes, 1999; Koskinen et al., 1985; Markham & Peter, 2003; Neuman & Koskinen, 1992; Grgurovic & Hegelheimer, 2007; Yuksel & Tanriverdi, 2009; Zoghi & Mirzaei, 2014).

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 the studies in the literature that specifically examined the functions of captioned movies in second/foreign language learning is scarce compared to the popularity of the assumption regarding the effectiveness of the captioned movies in language development (Danan, 2004).

To make up for this pitfall and see how these aspects of contextualization influence learners' vocabulary learning, the present study compares learners' lexical growth with regard to their exposure to captioned and uncaptioned BBC word clips and tries to show to what extent subtitles may be effective in lexical development.

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

There are numerous studies conducted regarding using subtitled films in EFL classes in order to learn and develop different language skills. Two studies were conducted by Birds and Williams in order to examine the effect of single modality (sound or text) and bimodal (sound and text) presentation on vocabulary learning. The results of both studies showed that subtitles can improve learners' vocabulary learning. In other study

conducted by Koolstra and Beentjes (1999), they investigated children's English vocabulary learning through a television program with Dutch subtitles. The findings revealed vocabulary acquisition was the highest in subtitled condition.

Stewart and Pertusa (2004) in a similar study investigate a group of students' vocabulary recognition by using English subtitled film and the same film is shown to other group with Spanish subtitles. The reported results presented that intralingual subtitles are more beneficial in enhancing vocabulary recognition.

Markham (1999) also examined the impact of subtitles on aural word recognition skills and concluded that the learners' ability to identify new words can increase with the presence of subtitles. Gignon, Lavour, and Blank (2005) conducted a study in order to investigate the impact of subtitles on film understanding. They found that availability of subtitles leads to better performance. Investigating the impact of listening to various TV programs on improving different components of oral skill, Bahrani and Soltani (2011), conducted a study on 20 females and males EFL learners. The results indicated that the experimental group outperformed the vocabulary and communication components compared to control group. Furthermore, their findings showed that the use of different TV programs could facilitate vocabulary acquisition significantly.

In 2011, Mekheimer did a research in which the participants were exposed to supplementary video materials. His findings showed that video materials can be effective to language skills. Based on the results, he concluded that the experimental group demonstrated statistically significant gains scores over their peers in the control group across all skills. In addition, the research showed valuable of authentic video in language teaching and curriculum.

The influence of subtitle on listening comprehension of EFL students in Iran was investigated by Hayati and Mohamadi (2011). The material consisted of 6 episodes of a DVD entitled "Wild Weather". The participants for this study were 90 students among 200 in intermediate level. They were divided into three groups. They viewed only one of the three treatments: English subtitles, Persian subtitles, and no subtitles. As result showed, the level of English subtitles group was higher than Persian subtitles group but on the listening test, Persian subtitles group performed at a higher level than the no subtitle group.

Sadeghi and Farzizadeh (2013) conducted a study on the vocabulary learning achievements of beginner EFL learners by visual aids. The findings present a wealth of opportunity for teachers to experience the visual-supported approach to teaching vocabulary. Investigating the Effectiveness of Using Movies in the EFL Classroom, Ismaili (2013), conducted a research at the South East European University. The results indicated that movies are more motivating and interesting than the text-books for Iranian EFL students and visual contexts provided by movies help students to notice and develop their learning skills.

Gorjian (2014), investigated the influence of movie subtitling on implicit vocabulary learning among EFL learners, by a research among 90 freshmen students studying English Translation. Three experimental groups of participants were formed randomly: (A) Bimodal group, (B) Standard group and (C) Reversed group. Three groups watched eight selected video clips from three animated movies which each one had different modes of subtitles: Bimodal subtitles for group (A), Standard subtitles for group (B) and Reversed subtitles for group (C). Instrumentation of Research following an experimental design was included a pre-test and a post-test. A pre-test presented to participants which was containing new words choosing from the clips. The post-test was implemented after eight treatment sessions. Analyzing the data implemented inferentially and descriptively. The researcher used one-way ANOVA for achieving any difference between the three different modes of subtitles. The tests' results revealed that learning new vocabulary items was higher in participants of reversed subtitling group and they performed significantly different. Effective of standard subtitling (the second type of subtitling) was more than bimodal subtitling.

Bava Harji & Vafaepour (2014), conducted a study to examine the effects of viewing captioned instructional videos on language proficiency, content comprehension and vocabulary acquisition of EFL learners. They also investigated the participants' understanding in viewing the subtitled instructional videos. They pursued the quantitative approach, a Michigan English Test, Content-Specific Tests and a questionnaire to evaluate the participants' content comprehension, vocabulary acquisition and improvement of language proficiency and the perception of experimental group towards watching subtitled instructional videos. The findings showed that on vocabulary acquisition and development of language proficiency, the effects of watching subtitled instructional videos are greater than content comprehension. The results indicated perceptions of the participants in using subtitled instructional video. Researchers found that their language learning will enhance, but has no effect on their comprehension of the movie and that subtitles do not cause confusion.

The review of previous researches has revealed, there was an emergent need for a research to investigate the effect of visual clips on Iranian EFL settings in general, and vocabulary learning in particular. Thus, the present research made an attempt to fill this gap and broaden the area of research to other EFL educational settings rather than academic ones.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions to be addressed are:

- Does watching BBC word clips with English-subtitles have any statistically significant impact on Iranian Intermediate EFL learners' vocabulary development?

- Does watching BBC word clips without English-subtitles have any statistically significant impact on Iranian Intermediate EFL learners' vocabulary development?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The main participants of the study were 40 male and female students were studying at Pardis Memar English Institute in Bandar Abbas City, Iran in fall 2015. They were selected randomly through administering OPT. Their age ranged from 15 to 25. Then, they were equally divided into two groups: experimental and control groups. There were 20 students in each group. They studied English three times a week and each session lasted for one and half hour. Prior to the instruction, all of the participants had passed six terms at Pardis Memar English Institute. In addition to the above mentioned participants, two language instructors holding M.A. in TEFL were selected for the groups.

Materials

Some English TV BBC word clips series were selected as the materials of the study. BBC clips were included 10 video clips by duration 2-3 minutes, namely, *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*, *Hong Kong's Hive of Business*. The treatment involved students in experimental and control groups watching these 2 or 3 minutes episodes three times. Five words for each episode were shown.



Figure 1. Screenshot of BBC word clip with full text subtitles

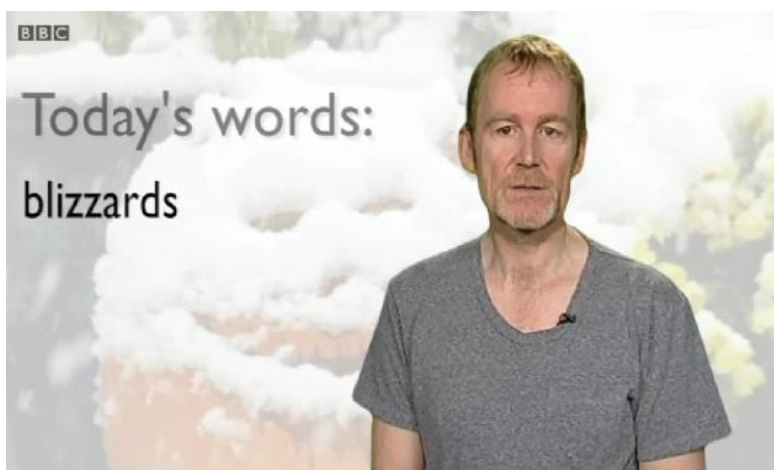


Figure 2. Screenshot of BBC word clip with keyword subtitle

All treatments were given in Multimedia Room that was available in the building where students had their regular classes. As the regular materials, an LCD projector and a desktop computer were available to use in the Multimedia Room.

The reliability and validity of BBC word clips were reviewed by four faculty members at the English Language Department at Bandar Abbas Azad University, Iran and EFL teachers at language institutes, as well.

Instruments

Fifty vocabularies were selected to design the pre-test and post-test. Vocabulary is presented in pre-test in form of a table including three columns. In first column English vocabulary was given, the second column was related to the level of familiarity of the learners with the given words, it should be mentioned this part is according to 5 levels presented in VKS Test according to Wesche and Paribakht. And in the last column, it should be written the meaning of the word in Persian. The score was considered for each row was 1. This test was including 50 questions and the time considered for this test was 50 minutes.

Post-test was the parallel form of the pre-test, but different in design including 50 questions with 50 minutes time: part A consisting 25 fill in the blank questions and, 25 multiple choice questions in part B.

It should be noted here that pre-test and post-test were constructed on the basis of vocabularies introduced in video clips which were presented in the classes during the experiment period. The validity of both pre-test and post-test was measured in accordance with the content of related syllabus. Further, two validators of curriculum and materials development course reviewed the design of the tests. They are experts in Bandar Abbas Azad University in the area of English curriculum. To be statistically acceptable, the internal consistency and reliability co-efficient were measured using Cronbach Alpha was 0.75.

Data Collection Procedure

After selecting the homogeneous participants based on Oxford Quick Placement test, they were divided into two groups of 20. An experimental group and one control group. Later on, the vocabulary pretest including 50 vocabulary items in a table was given to them. The time duration of this test was 50 minute. After administering the pretest, the experimental group watched the film with subtitles, and control group without subtitle. Both groups watched the clips by duration 2-3 minutes 3 times for ten sessions. 50 vocabularies are presented to the learners through watching 10 clips in 10 sessions. At the end of the study the participants received the posttests. In order to check the validity of the vocabulary comprehension and production posttests, it was piloted with a similar group of 20 students studying conversational English at the English institute in Bandar Abbas. At the end of 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 format. The time duration of this test was also 50 minutes.

RESULTS

Pre and Posttests of Experimental Group

To investigate the effect of subtitling clips on developing new vocabulary, pre and posttest were administered at the beginning and at end of the study. The results obtained from the pre and posttest of experimental group are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the participants' pre & post-test scores for experimental group

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
with subtitle(Pre)	20	18.6500	2.71981	37	46
with subtitle(Post)	20	41.2000	2.66754	15	25

The results show the experimental group mean has improved after conducting posttest. This shows that there is a significant difference between pre and posttest. The mean score in pretest was 18.65 and the mean score in posttest was 41.20. It concludes that subtitling video clips were effective on improving new vocabulary among Iranian intermediate language learners.

Pre and Posttests of Control Group

To find the effect of unsubtitled clips on developing new vocabulary, pre and posttest were administered at the beginning and at end of the study for the control group. The descriptive statistics of the participants' performance in pre and posttest scores for the control group are shown in table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the participants' pre & post-test scores for experimental groups

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
without subtitle(Pre)	20	18.5000	2.46021	15	24
without subtitle(Post)	20	34.9000	2.80788	29	39

The mean scores in pre and posttests show that control group has improved on learning new vocabulary via watching the clips without subtitle. The mean score in pretest is 18.50 and in posttest is 34.90. This shows that watching video clips without subtitles also has had positive effect on learning new vocabulary among Iranian intermediate language learners.

According to pre and posttest scores of each group, it revealed that both groups have performed better on posttest and the mean score of both groups significantly increased. As it was shown in table1 and 2, the group with bimodal subtitles outperformed and the mean score is at highest level.

Answer to the research questions:

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

Regarding to the results of pre and posttests and presented information in table 1and 2, subtitled group improved in learning vocabulary items. Thus, teaching with subtitling films has positive effect on improving learners' vocabulary knowledge. Because the results show a significant impact on Intermediate Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary development.

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

Based on the findings of the study presented in table 1 and 2, it concluded that watching the subtitling video clips was effective on vocabulary development too.

Paired Sample T-Test

In order to find the differences between the groups in pre and post-tests a paired samples T-test was run. Table 3 determines some information in pre and post-tests of each group.

Table 3. Paired Samples T-test Statistics between pre and post-test of each group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	with subtitle Pre	18.6500	20	2.71981	.60817
	with subtitle Post	41.2000	20	2.66754	.59648
Pair 2	without subtitle Pre	18.5000	20	2.46021	.55012
	without subtitle Post	34.9000	20	2.80788	.62786

The first row in table 3 shows the mean score (18.65) and standard deviation (2.71) of experimental group in pre-test, and for the post test of this group, mean (41.20) and standard deviation (2.66) are presented too.

The second row is related to the second pair that is control group which the pre-test mean and standard deviation of this group scores is given: as it clear in above table the mean is 18.50 and standard deviation is 2.46. Also the mean and standard deviation of post-test are given respectively, 34.90 and, 2.80.

With regards to this given information, it is observed that subtitled group is at the highest level in this study. This shows that mentioned group has learnt more vocabulary items than the other group. Control group has also improved their vocabulary knowledge and placed at the second level. However, the control group was in the lower level, the participants in this group could improve their vocabulary knowledge too.

Figure 3 illustrates the mean scores of both groups before and after the treatment. It is observed that the effect of subtitled video clips is more than the other groups.

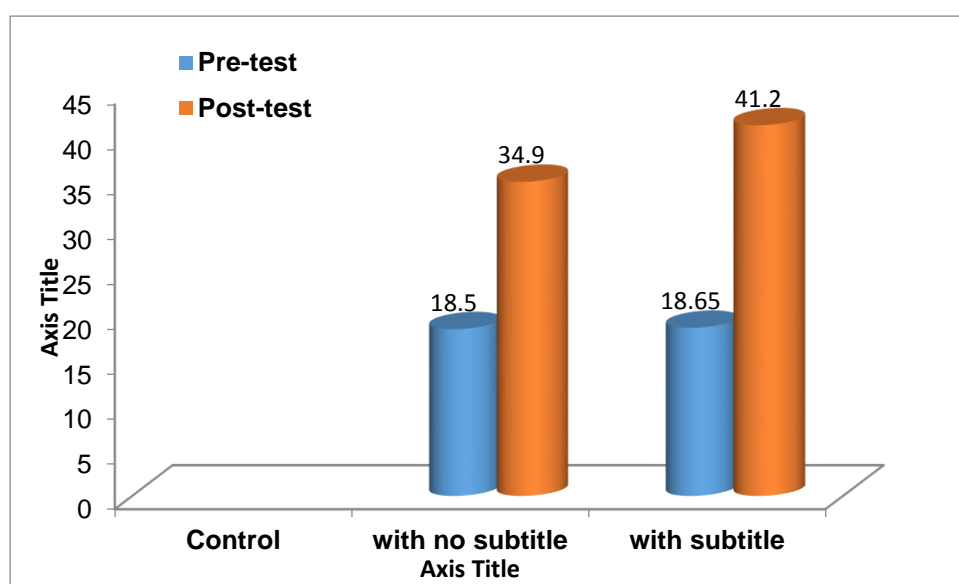


Figure 3. Comparisons of pre and post-test means in different groups

DISCUSSION

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

Koolstra and beentjes (1999) conducted a study in order to find the effect of English TV program with Dutch subtitles on children vocabulary learning. They concluded that vocabulary development was at the highest level with subtitled one. And in another

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

Although, most of researches were mentioned so far, seem to support and confirm that subtitles can improve language learning, vocabulary learning and content comprehension, there are some studies with opponent findings. Accordingly, the findings do not support the results of below 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) conducted their own studies in this ground, however, their findings were different from the results of 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 subtitle is 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 be beneficial to teachers in order to use subtitled clips as a part of teaching material in their classes. And this study can suggest the learners to watch subtitled movie so that they can improve different language skills i.e, speaking, listening, writing and reading as well as vocabulary knowledge simultaneously.

This study like any other study has its own limitations. The first limitation of the study is that the number of the participants is limited. The next is the level of participants which is restricted to intermediate level. An investigation on the effect of using subtitled movie on different language skills like listening, reading, writing and speaking can be the topic of another researches and other levels of proficiency can be investigated.

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