

FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND VIETNAMESE

THE USE OF SUBTITLED ENGLISH MOVIES IN IMPROVING LISTENING COMPREHENSION: INSIGHTS FROM AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY AT THE TERTIARY LEVEL

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ABSTRACT: The use of media in English teaching and learning has received much attention from educators and second/foreign language educators. The present study attempted to investigate the possible effect of English movie subtitles on the improvement of listening comprehension for students of Faculty of English Language Teacher Education, Hanoi University of Languages and International studies, Vietnam National University. To achieve this goal, 60 freshmen from two classes were assigned into two groups of Bimodal-Subtitles and No-Subtitles. The material consisted of 12 authentic English movies; each movies last in about 15 minutes. A pre – test and a post – test were given to the learners at the beginning and at the end of the course to evaluate their improvement in listening comprehension. Findings revealed that the English subtitle group performed better than the no subtitle group on the listening test.

KEY WORDS: listening comprehension; movies; authentic learning; media in language learning; ESL teaching.

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1. Introduction

Over the past decades, English language has become the most significant and dominant language over the globe (Crystal, 2012). Hence, it is fundamental to learn English for the future; however, studying is a complicated process for non-native English speakers in general. In Viet Nam, English becomes a core subject for students; thus, it received great attention from people, especially adolescents. On the other hand, youngsters in Vietnam currently have a tendency to concentrate on reading and writing skills for the compulsory tests at schools. Traditional language teaching is based on a traditional approach to the target language, which regards the language as a body of grammatical rules and isolated items of vocabulary (Boumova, 2008). Besides, there is a normal circumstance that the majority of Vietnamese students have an ability to pass English exams with flying colors at schools, yet their speaking and listening skills are at a low level compared to the others. Moreover, The Former Minister of Education Nguyen Thien Nhan informed that most of the students only achieve level 2 out of 6 in Common European Framework of Reference Languages (CERF), which prevents them from using English correctly and flexibly in a real-life situation. According to the statistic in Hanoimoi newspaper (2015), only 49.3% of graduated students satisfy the English requirement. One of the biggest contributors to this result is the low scores in listening and speaking skills. This fact represents the deficiency of a suitable learning method to improve English skills among university students. One way that has been used effectively is encouraging language learners to develop their language competencies through English movies. In fact, much attention has been given regarding the effectiveness of using media, specifically English movies, in language teaching and learning. Proponents of using this type of media believe that movies allow for more interactive and appealing ways of teaching and learning English (Ruusunen, 2011). Other researchers (Kusumawardhani, 2016; Zanon, 2006) have argued that watching movies for learning English has some drawbacks because these movies lack instructional and pedagogical intentions. This is also the problem of those who majoring in English from FELTE, ULIS, VNU. Learning English through watching films with English subtitles can be a solution.

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This research paper namely, *“The Use of Subtitled English Movies in Improving Listening Comprehension: An Experimental Study at the Tertiary Level”* engrossed in one of learning methods to advance the speaking and listening proficiency for students, aims at determining how students at Faculty of English Language Teacher Education (FELTE), Hanoi University of Languages and International studies (ULIS), Vietnam National University (VNU), are getting benefit from watching English-spoken films in order to support their learning process, especially in listening skills. Moreover, this paper provides a general framework about educational impacts of English movies as a pedagogical tool to learn English Language.

The purpose of the research is to investigate the impact of watching movies as a pedagogical tool on learning English Language of FELTE students by the students of English department and its academic achievements on ESL students. This paper will attempt to highlight findings that address the following questions: 1/Do movies with English subtitles have effect on EFL learners' Listening comprehension?; 2/Is there any significant difference between the experimental group watching English movies with subtitles and the control group watching no subtitle movies in Listening comprehension?

2. Literature review

2.1. English movie in teaching listening comprehension

Technology has an effective relation with English language education (Singhal, 1997). Using technology, especially movies, as a teaching strategy for learning a second language in ESL classrooms has become popular today. It supports learning process among ESL learners and can be utilized in various forms to improve comprehension skill in their course contents (Hicks, Reid, & George, 2001) and ESL learners themselves see it as pivotal source for advancing their second language proficiency as well (Neuman & Koskinen, 1992).

Using videos or films as a learning resource has received a great deal of attention from researchers and has been successfully applied to various educational applications (Crystal, 2003). Researchers (e.g., Mackey & Ho, 2008; Mayer & Moreno, 2002; Rose, 2003) have indicated that multimedia learning materials are more useful than traditional paper-based instruction. Videos which provide visual, contextual, and non-verbal input provide foreign language learners with simultaneous visual and aural stimuli which can make up for any lack of comprehension resulting from listening alone (Brett, 1995). Several previous studies (e.g., Choi & Johnson, 2007; Mackey & Ho, 2008) have also shown that such videos are highly accepted by learners during the learning process. Moreover, captions have been perceived as the most useful and efficient auxiliary for watching videos (Hsu, 1994), while videos with authentic accents have been recognized as being a good learning resource for language learners (Dahbi, 2004).

Captions and subtitles were initially used in foreign language instruction in the 1980s, and many studies have confirmed that combining captions with audio-visual materials is an effective instructional method to enhance the listening and reading comprehension of a second language as learners can confirm the information they hear by way of the support provided by the captions. In other words, captions visualize the auditory information of the foreign language which the learners hear in the video (Danan, 2004). Because of such additional cognitive processing, captions and subtitles promote language comprehension (Bird & Williams, 2002).

Researchers have further indicated that videos with captions facilitate listening comprehension (Markham & McCarthy, 2001). According to Kieran Donaghy, the winner of the British Council's Teaching English blog award averred that English learners had a high chance to be exposed to natural and diverse language.

To sum up, previous studies indicate that using English movies during language classes is an effective exposure English learning strategy. “, films provide an invaluable extension of what we might call the technologies of language acquisition that have been used to teach students the basics of English learning in elementary and high schools or institutes” (Sabouri, Zohrabi & Osbouei, 2015, p. 110).

2.2. Previous studies

A great number of researches have been carried out to investigate the influence of English films over EL. Abdul H. and his colleagues conducted an informative study (2013) focused on the effects of subtitled movies on learner's listening comprehension. The data clearly show that subtitled films do a great help in improving learners' listening skills. Besides, from relevant studies included, they came to the conclusion that there seemed to be no accurate assessment of the value of captions for several reasons.

Another research on the impact of subtitled TV upon the listening comprehension English learners conveyed by Markham and his colleague (2001) shared the similar results. In their study, they had two groups of learners: Control group viewed the movies without subtitles and Experimental one viewed the movies with subtitles. After watching the film, both group completed a set of multiple-choice questions about the content and language of the video to measure their comprehension. From the data analysed, it was concluded that both the listening and reading comprehension of the experimental group was improved significantly.

Besides, Huang and Eskey (2000), Grgurovic and Hegelheimer (2007), Yuksel and Tanriverdi (2009), Hayati and Mohmedi (2011) also investigated the effects of subtitles on the listening comprehension. The findings of these studies all revealed that learners showed their interests and preference to subtitled movie and the result of the group who watched the movies with the subtitles outperformed the subtitle group. In conclusion, watching movies in listening class do merits to English learners, particularly in terms of listening competency, which is "the best way to improve the listening skills of students" Ruusunen, (2011).

Those are some studies associated with benefits and advantages English movies bring to ESL learners. All of them concluded that English movies are of help to language learners, specifically in listening comprehension. They also emphasized the importance of vital role of of subtitled English movies and consider it as a beneficial approach to fulfill language competency, not only English, but also other foreign languages in the world.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The participants of the research were 62 freshmen at Faculty of English Language Teacher Education (FELTE), Hanoi University of Languages and International studies (ULIS), Vietnam National University (VNU), academic year 2018-2019. Students were divided into two different groups (Subtitle group and No subtitle groups), where they had to watch the same film but each one with a different subtitling option. These intensive English programs serve the academic and cultural needs of international students who were learning English for academic purposes. The sample groups were male and female students with the same proficiency level determined by a proficiency test.

3.2. Instrumentation

The instruments used in the research were as follows:

A set of 30 listening comprehension questions in three parts which was adopted from the listening comprehension section of Cambridge English First Certificate in English 01. The FCE listening test has a reliability of 0.847, which could be considered to be quite high (Lado, *ibid*).

The material used in the research was one original American English film. It was a kind of movie holding the capacity of showing English subtitles or none.

3.3. Treatment

During ten sessions, the students tried to improve their Listening skills by watching English movies with different subtitles (subtitle and no subtitle). The experimental group was exposed to English movies with subtitles, while the control group watched English movies with no subtitles. The movie came in 10 units, each unit was shown in about 15 minutes. The film was shown twice in one session, in order to draw students' attention to subtitles.

3.4. Procedure

In order to conduct this research, two classes of first year students in the subject of Social English at FELTE, ULIS - VNU were chosen. To begin with, the two groups were given a proficiency test. Then, in order to measure the level of listening comprehension of the subjects, they were

administered the pretest. Next, as treatment an original authentic movie was shown to both groups. After the treatment, the posttest was given to two groups (Subtitle and No subtitle) to judge whether or their listening comprehension improved.

To analyze our data, we used the one-way ANOVA procedure to determine the statistical significance of vocabulary acquisition between the two groups (Zar, 1999; Perry, 2005). The analysis was achieved with the help of the Microsoft Office Excel program. The test scores were then entered in the computer system for analysis of the means.

4. Results

The data which were collected from the two classes were analyzed by SPSS Version 18.0 for Windows. In this research, the *t-test* is a type of inferential statistic used to determine if there is a significant difference between the means of two groups, which may be related in certain features. Total 62 students participated in the study were divided in 2 groups: Control group (N=32) watches the movies with no subtitles and Experimental group (N=30) watch subtitle movies; and *SD* is a measure of how dispersed the data is in relation to the mean.

The participants' overall listening comprehension knowledge as shown by their scores from the pre and posttests is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of Both Groups' Performances on the Pre-test*

Groups	N	Mean	SD	t
Control	32	13.13	3.57	0.077
Experimental	30	14.70	3.97	

The Table 1 reveals the result of a *t-test*. As can be seen from table 1, the Mean score of the Control group is 13.13 and that of the Experimental one is 14.70 so the Mean score of the experimental group is slightly higher than the Mean score of the control group, $t = 0.077$.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics of Both Groups' Performances on the Post-test*

Groups	N	Mean	SD	t
Control	32	17.76	4.05	4.506
Experimental	30	22.3	3.18	

According to Table 2 the mean score of the Treatment Group on the post- test (22.3) is higher than it on the pre-test (14.70) and the improvement score is 7.6. This result indicates that there is an improvement in the listening comprehension after watching the subtitled movie. Moreover, the mean score of the Post – test for the Control Group (17.76) is still higher than that before watching video without subtitles (13.13); the score after treatment is 4.63 higher than that before the treatment. According to the result of *t - test* of the post-test ($t=4.506$) compared to that of the pre - test ($t=0.077$) it can be concluded that the treatment had an effect on boosting the listening comprehension of the students and students who had watched subtitled movies had improved their listening comprehension more effectively than the students who had watched movies without subtitles.

5. Discussion

The study was aimed to examine whether English subtitles or English movies without subtitles (no subtitles) have effects on the listening comprehension of freshmen in ULIS - VNU's. The findings of the present study revealed that movies with English subtitles had a significantly positive influence on the learners' listening comprehension compared to the movies with no subtitles. The final result from the Experimental group is higher than that of the Control group.

The present article is highly related to the works of researchers like (Borras & Lafayette, 1994; Dahbi, 2004; Zanon, 2006; Huang and Eskey, 2000) who have confirmed that combining subtitles with audio-visual materials is an effective instructional method to enhance the listening comprehension of second language learners, which was approved by this article, too.

Further, this study is in congruent with the work done by Ruusunen, (2011) who concluded that the groups using subtitles performed significantly better on listening comprehension compared to the groups without subtitles. The findings of the present research is also in line with the work conducted by Hayati and Mohmedi (2011) who concluded that, English subtitles group showed higher level than

Persian subtitles group which in turn performed at a higher level than the no subtitle group on the listening test.

The finding of this article also revealed the results of the research done by Yuksel & Tanriverdi (2009) who studied listening learning through watching a video clip with and without captions demonstrated that the group who watched the video clip with the captions outperformed in listening comprehension compared to the no-caption group. It reconfirmed the essential role of subtitled English movies in enhancing L2 learners' understanding of listening. It is also suggested that English videos with caption should be used as an effective teaching method to boost students' interest and efficiency in learning English as second language in general and listening comprehension in particular.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

The prior purpose of learning L2 is to help learners immerse to actual speech in the real-life context thus allows them to communicate effectively. This study, therefore, investigates the extent to which exposure to subtitled movies as comprehensible input enhances listening skill among a sample of L2 learners at tertiary level in Vietnam. Based on the results of the previous studies and the present study we could come to the conclusion that watching English-spoken videos offers students with a variety of merits concerning listening comprehension. Specifically, the results of the post – test of the Treatment Group is greater than the that of the Control Group. Besides, the research findings also revealed that most of the participants had positive attitudes toward watching films with English subtitles (ES) and watching videos with subtitles is beneficial in increasing the study interest toward learning English. Besides, using subtitled movies in teaching English can help L2 learners get to know many idioms and colloquial expressions and improve other skills.

Using subtitled movies could not only enhance the improvement of the listening skill, but also helps to minimize the problems and difficulties that could happen to L2 learners in their learning process; for example, processing the speed of auditory input, retention of the input in short-term memory, distraction in processing, interpretation in context, matching between mental representations and input. Some recommendations can be made in accordance with our findings. In order to diagnose the difficulties, instructors can use various segments of listening material to test learners' processing problems. Since the procedures require comments and feedback from learners while listening, instructors are advised to work with individual learners or learners in small groups.

Furthermore, L2 teachers are also encouraged to use multimedia-based activities in their teaching or use various segments of listening material in order to draw attention and interest of the L2 learners that would do most in enhancing their students' learning of listening comprehension. For this to be possible, we suggest that continuous professional development training directed at developing appropriate media-based teaching methodology be organized. In conclusion, universities should include English videos as a teaching material to facilitate the learning process of students and deal with the problems related to listening that students are encountering.

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**Ứng dụng phim tiếng Anh có phụ đề nhằm nâng cao kĩ năng nghe hiểu:
một nghiên cứu thực nghiệm ở bậc Đại học**

Tóm tắt: Việc sử dụng các phương tiện truyền thông trong dạy và học tiếng Anh đã nhận được nhiều sự quan tâm của các nhà nghiên cứu, đặc biệt thầy cô giáo giảng dạy ngoại ngữ. Nghiên cứu này đã được thực hiện nhằm tìm hiểu tác động phim tiếng Anh có phụ đề đối với việc cải thiện khả năng nghe hiểu của sinh viên Khoa Sư phạm tiếng Anh, Trường Đại học Ngoại ngữ - ĐHQGHN. Trong nghiên cứu này, 62 sinh viên năm thứ nhất được chia thành hai nhóm: nhóm kiểm soát gồm 30 sinh viên, nhóm thí nghiệm gồm 32 sinh viên. Cả 2 nhóm được xem 15 đoạn phim tiếng Anh; mỗi đoạn có độ dài khoảng 15 phút. Trong đó nhóm kiểm soát được xem các bộ phim không có phụ đề; nhóm thí nghiệm được xem các bộ phim có phụ đề. Sinh viên được tham gia vào 2 bài kiểm tra trước và sau thực nhằm đánh giá mức độ cải thiện khả năng nghe hiểu. Kết quả cho thấy nhóm sinh viên xem phim có phụ đề tiếng Anh đạt kết quả cao hơn nhóm xem phim không có phụ đề trong bài kiểm tra nghe.

Từ khóa: kĩ năng nghe hiểu; phim; phương tiện truyền thông trong giáo dục; học tập xác thực; dạy và học ngoại ngữ.