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## **The Outcome of Movie Subtitles on EFL Learners' Speaking Skill**

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## Abstract:

This paper aims to examine the outcomes of watching English movies with and without subtitles on EFL students' speaking ability. The participants were 38 intermediate Gujarati learners of English randomly selected from Pavan Vidyapeeth in Mendarda which is located in Junagadh district of Gujarat. They were divided into two groups, namely 'Experimental' and 'Control'. Each group consisted of 19 learners. A speaking pretest was administered to measure their speaking ability. The participants in the 'Experimental' group enjoyed the treatment in which they watched an English movie with subtitles while the 'Control' group watched the same movie without subtitles. The learners watched the movie in 20 sessions, each for about 15 minutes. At the end of the study, all subjects took the speaking posttest. By utilizing an independent t-test, the finding indicated that the 'Experimental' group who watched the movie with subtitles showed a considerable improvement in their speaking ability in comparison with the 'Control' group who watched the movie without subtitles. The results of this research can be used by those involved in the field of language teaching.

**Keywords:** *subtitles, movies, speaking ability, EFL learners*

## Introduction

Language production within a meaningful context and through interaction has been demonstrated to assist second language acquisition (Ellis & He, 1999). According to Swain's (1993) output hypothesis, language production within a meaningful context and through interaction: (i) provides the opportunity for 'contextual' use of linguistic resources, which leads to 'automaticity' in language use; (ii) forces 'syntactic processing', where students pay more attention to syntax when listening in order to use it in their own language production later on; (iii) helps students to 'recognize what they do not know or know only partially'; (iv) provides opportunity for 'testing out hypotheses' in order to see the linguistic features that work.

With the increasing usage of TV, video equipment and more recently, computers, laptops, smart phones, so and so forth, the teachers have found more opportunities to use audio-visual materials at all levels of foreign language teaching, and they have frequently used them effectively in language classes. According to Champoux (1999), movies are a comfortable familiar medium to contemporary students that can keep students' interest in the theories and concepts under discussion. Although most movies are fiction, they can



offer powerful experiences that students are unlikely to have in a classroom. Film scenes can offer visual portrayal of abstract theories and concepts taught in management and social sciences courses. Explaining concepts through different film scenes bring theories closer to realistic situations. Films can also provoke good discussion, assessment of one's values and self if the scenes have strong emotional content. Cinema's ability to create a unique experience gives it unbeatable power as a teaching tool. As students are more interested in watching movies, they can focus on the actions actively.

Psychologists have argued in favor of impact of films on cognitive learning of students in the classroom. They have stated that the use of films in learning and teaching is crucial to provoking the reflective processes and attitudes in the learner. Some others (Lesser and Pearl, 2008; Casper et al., 2003; Butler et al., 2009) have also argued that learners' ability to retain and recall information as well as overall satisfaction with the learning experience was significantly higher where film was an integral part of the learning and teaching activities. Champoux (1999) maintained that films offer both cognitive and affective experiences in the classroom. Moreover, film scenes could be very helpful in enhancing analytical skills of students and changing their worldview as they offer opportunity to connect theories to realistic situations.

The research scholars have considered several benefits of using movies in the classroom. For example, Pescosolido (1990) argued that the use of films can be important in learning and teaching and also highlighted that active learning can be encouraged and better supported through the use of audio-visual materials from the popular culture arena. On the other hand, Champoux (1999) cautioned instructors regarding usage of films in the classroom as film scenes could be strong distracters in the classroom for some students and using films in classrooms can also reduce time for theoretical discussions. Butler et al. (2009) argued that when information mentioned in texts is not consistent with information revealed in films, students tend to recall incorrect information rather than correcting inconsistencies in information, which needs to be handled cautiously.

In a way, using captions or subtitles to facilitate the 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 and said on television when captions are provided (Danan, 2004).



## Literature Review

Different studies (Baltova, 1999; Borrás & Lafayette, 1994; Garza, 1991; Neuman & Koskinen, 1992; Vanderplank, 1988, 1990) have demonstrated the positive outcomes of subtitling on productive skills such as a verbatim recall and retention of vocabulary in the proper context, as well as communicative performance in specific oral and written communication tasks. CanningWilson and Wallace (2000) suggest that subtitled movies encourage learners to consciously notice new vocabulary and idioms, and as such, may have potential to facilitate vocabulary acquisition without being a distraction for learners.

It has been proposed that one way of helping learners of English to comprehend authentic video programs while maintaining a target language learning environment is by adding English text subtitles to English videos (Vanderplank, 1988). In this respect, Boehler and Sidoti (1981) have asserted that the constant general movement indicates that information coming through two input types (i.e. dialogue and subtitles) is more systematically processed than if either dialogue or captions are presented alone.

Guillory (1998) found that subtitles are beneficial for beginning-level learners. However, she found that beginning-level students would benefit more when only key words are presented as subtitles rather than having entire sentences presented on screen as subtitles. She noted that key-word subtitling might be better for beginning-level learners because it may not impose as large of a cognitive load.

Vanderplank (1990) examined how learners of English used captions over a three-month period. Those who took notes while watching captioned videos produced more accurate language on subsequent comprehension exercises. Those who did not take notes comprehended as well as the note-taking group but did not retain specific language used in the videos. He concluded that attention and processing are important for the intake and long-term retention of forms through caption.

Garza (1991) compared Russian ESL learners' comprehension of video segments with second language subtitles to that of video segments without captions. The results showed that a textually enhanced visual channel, which presents information redundant to that presented by the auditory channel, facilitates students' comprehension.

Koolstra and Beentjes (1999) worked on 246 Dutch children in Grade 4 and Grade 6. They were shown a 15-minute American documentary once with subtitles and once without subtitles. The study demonstrated that children acquired more English vocabulary from watching subtitled compared to those



who watched the program without subtitles. Children in the subtitled condition also performed significantly better on a word recognition test, consisting of words heard in the soundtrack and words that could have been used in the context of the particular program.

Bird and Williams (2002) focused on the implicit and explicit learning of spoken words and non-words. A first experiment with 16 English native and 16 advanced non-native speakers demonstrated that participants in the captioned condition were better able to implicitly retain the phonological information they had just processed. They also showed superior explicit recognition memory when asked to aurally identify words that had been presented in a previous phase. A second experiment with 24 advanced ESL students found that captioning had a beneficial outcome on word recognition and implicit learning of non-word targets paired with two rhyming and two non-rhyming aural cues, especially in the rhyme condition.

Mei-ling (2007) examined teaching English listening and speaking through films. The results suggest that English films play a positive role in motivating students to learn English listening and speaking.

## **Research Question**

*Do movie subtitles significantly impact on Gujarati EFL learners' speaking skill?*

## **Participants**

Thirty eight intermediate level students were selected from two intact homogeneous classrooms at Pavan Vidyapeeth in Mendarda, Gujarat. The sample was not ethnically diverse; in fact, all the participants were Gujarati and their first language was Gujarati. The participants were from two classes who were randomly divided into two groups in which the 'Experimental' group watched movies with English subtitles while the 'Control' group watched movies without subtitles. They were within the age range of 13 to 17 who turned out to be at the same level of proficiency (intermediate) determined by a proficiency test.

## **Instrumentation**

### ***Proficiency Test***

At the beginning of the study to determine the language proficiency of the learners, they were given an OPT (Oxford Placement Test). The test was assumed to test the learners' proficiency in English.



## *Speaking Test*

The speaking test consisted of 10 questions. The participants were supposed to answer the questions and their interviews were audio recorded. The test was used as the pretest and the posttest.

## *Treatment*

As for treatment the participants in the two groups watched an English movie. The movie was about 83 minutes. The participants watched one part of the movie twice for about 25 minutes each session. The 'Control' group only watched the movie without subtitles while the 'Experimental' group watched it and read its subtitles in English. They managed to write down some phrases and expressions in their notebooks so that they could practice and review.

## *Procedure*

The present study was designed to examine the outcomes of watching English movies with and without subtitles on the speaking ability of the learners. The participants of the present study were 38 Gujarati intermediate students who were homogenized by a proficiency test. All the participants were female and were divided into two groups each consisting of 19 students. The participants in both groups received pre and posttest and their performance was audio recorded with their consent for subsequent rating. The intra- and inter-rater reliability indexes were 0.89 and 0.84. One group watched the movie with English subtitles, but the other without subtitles. The participants watch movies for about 25 minutes in 20 sessions, two days a week. After ten weeks the participants in both groups were given the posttest.

## *Results*

In order to confirm that the participants assigned to 'Control' and 'Experimental' groups were not initially different but homogeneous, an independent sample t-test was run. The results are shown in Table 1.



**Table 1. Comparison of both Groups' Performances on Pretest**

| Groups     | N  | Mean | SD   | sig  | t    |
|------------|----|------|------|------|------|
| Experiment | 19 | 4.78 | 2.46 | 0.45 | 0.76 |
| Control    | 19 | 4.21 | 2.20 |      |      |

Note: The full score is 40. \*  $p < .05$

As the results in the Table 1 indicate, t value is 0.76 and sig=0.45 which is greater than .05. It means that there was no significant difference between 'Control' and 'Experimental' groups. Therefore, it was concluded that 'Control' and 'Experimental' groups were homogeneous at the outset of the study.

**Table 2. Comparison of both Groups' Performances on Posttest**

| Groups     | N  | Mean  | SD   | sig   | t     |
|------------|----|-------|------|-------|-------|
| Experiment | 19 | 13.73 | 2.28 | 0.002 | 3.363 |
| Control    | 19 | 11.10 | 2.53 |       |       |

Note: The full score is 40. \*  $p < .05$

An independent t-test was run to compare the mean scores of the 'Control' and 'Experimental' groups on the posttest. As displayed in Table 2, the mean score for the 'Control' group is 11.10, with a standard deviation of 2.28. The mean score and the standard deviation for the 'Experimental' group are 13.73 and 2.53, respectively. The results show differences between the 'Control' and 'Experimental' groups' mean scores on the post-test.

## *Discussion*

The study aimed to determine whether English movies with and without subtitles had any outcomes the speaking ability of the Gujarati intermediate students of English, and that which type of the selected treatments had a better outcome; English movies with subtitle or English movies without subtitles.



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The findings of the present research is in line with that of other researchers like Mei-ling (2007) who suggested that English films paid a positive role in motivating students to learn English listening and speaking. The results of the present article is also in congruent with the work done by Garza (1991), Koolstra and Beentjes (1999), and Bird and Williams (2002) who concluded that using subtitles with movies as a teaching strategy had a positive outcome in learning a language in general.

## *Conclusion*

The main purpose of the present research is to examine whether English movies with and without subtitles can help to improve Gujarati intermediate learners' speaking ability. Students want to learn English in self-study and their levels was inter-mediated. After homogenizing the learners according to a proficiency test the participants were divided to two groups, 'Experimental' and 'Control' group.

The pretest scores were low and students were not actually able to introduce themselves properly. The 'Experimental' group watched the English movie with subtitles and the 'Control' group watched the same movie without subtitles. After 8 sessions of studying each of about 45 minutes, the learners were given the posttest. Their voices were being recorded, the 'Experimental' group who watches the movie with English subtitles showed a considerable improvement in their speaking ability while the 'Control' group who watched the same movie without subtitles showed little improvement.





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