

# The Effect of Movies with Different Types of Subtitles on Incidental English Vocabulary Learning of Iranian High School EFL Learners

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## Abstract

This study investigated the effect of different types of subtitles on incidental vocabulary learning among Iranian EFL learners. To this end, 60 high school students in Behbahan were selected after taking a proficiency test. The test was administered to ensure participants' homogeneity. Participants were randomly assigned to three experimental groups, namely, Bimodal group (A), Standard group (B) and Reversed group (C). They watched ten video clips selected from three animated movies with different types of subtitles: A) Bimodal subtitles (both English audio and subtitle), B) Standard subtitles (English audio and Persian subtitle) and C) Reversed subtitles (Persian audio and English subtitle). Research instrumentation included a pretest and posttest. Participants took a pretest containing new words selected from the clips. After ten treatment sessions, the posttest was administered. Data were analyzed descriptively and inferentially. To arrive at any difference between the three different types of subtitles, the researchers conducted one-way ANOVA. The results obtained from the test showed that participants in reversed subtitling group performed significantly different and learned more new vocabulary items. Standard subtitling was the second type of subtitling which was shown to be more effective than bimodal subtitling. Also, the effect of different types of subtitles on incidental English vocabulary learning between male and female was investigated in this study. To arrive at any difference between male and female in incidental English vocabulary learning an independent samples test was performed. The results obtained from the test showed that there was no significant difference between males and females in incidental English vocabulary learning.

**Keywords:** Different types of subtitles, Incidental vocabulary learning, High school EFL learners

## 1. Introduction

Students studying foreign languages often wish to enjoy authentic foreign-language content - for example, foreign-language videos and comics. Existing means of

presenting this content, however, are suboptimal from the perspective of language learning. Recently, new advances in technology in general, and multimedia in particular, have played a key role in facilitating foreign language teaching and

learning. Multimedia technology (like TV, computers, networks, emails, video cassette records (VCRS), compact disc read-only memories (CD-ROMs) and interactive multimedia) boosts teachers by providing authentic materials which further promotes learners' language acquisition. Many researchers have presented strong evidence that multimedia have useful effects on language learning because of rich and authentic comprehensible input (Brett, 1995; Egbert JESSUP, 1996; Khalid, 2001). Furthermore, the significance of providing learners with comprehensible input has been stressed in second language acquisition and foreign language learning theories. According to Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis, learners can learn a large amount of language unconsciously through ample comprehensible input.

From previous studies, a number of researchers have confirmed the effectiveness of combining audio and visual aid in language classrooms. They argued that visual input combining with other technology tools stimulated deeper comprehension of the texts and enhanced the interaction between the target language and learners' mind, which in turn, allows learners to predict the target language more easily and to recall to fully (Neuman, Burden & Holden, 1990; Stevens, 1989; Underwood, 1990). Oxford and Groomal (1990) found that the combination of pictorial and audio aids provided learners with multiple opportunities to access more parts of the brain and to process information more effectively.

In addition to its effects on increasing learners' overall language ability, the strength of multimedia tools in enhancing vocabulary learning has also been studied and reported. For example, Canning-Wilson (2000) found that images contextualized in video can help to reinforce lexical learning which provided the learners to see immediate meaning in terms of vocabulary

recognition. Hoogeveen (1995) proposed other values of using multimedia tools in language classrooms where learners might respond to the information with more personal feelings instead of just receiving it. Baltova (1999) claims that using video in the foreign language classroom help students to perceive the story more consistently in the sense that difficult and easy passages form a pattern. Besides, the multimedia tools turn learning into a more fun and happier process. Finally, one should never ignore the social and cultural messages embedded in videos that allow learners to experience the live use of the target language. Concerning vocabulary learning, video materials with subtitles, are considered to be more effective tools in teaching new L2 vocabulary by combining visual and audio aids and increasing capacity of learners' working memory (Wang, 2012).

Subtitled video representing words and pictures in oral and visual form are more probable to activate both coding systems in the processing than words or pictures alone. According to dual-coding theory proposed by Paivio (1971), when pictures are associated with the meaning, the number of signals connected to the message increases. As a result, viewers will more probably keep the message in mind. Therefore, the results of the previous researchers appear to sustain the aspect that the use of subtitles causes multi-sensory processing, interacting with audio, video and print mechanisms. These information input foundations make the process of language learning enhanced, improve the comprehension of the content, and increase learners' knowledge of vocabulary by looking at the subtitled words in meaningful and stimulating circumstances. According to Zanon (2006), there are three types of subtitle (1) Standard subtitle is a combination of L2 audio with L1 caption. (2) Bimodal or Intralingua subtitle is the combination of L2 audio plus

L2 caption. (3) Reversed subtitle is a combination of L1 audio and L2 caption. Many linguistics have made the definition of incidental vocabulary learning. Meara (1994) claims that incidental learning is a by-product of learning something else and it is not like the intentional learning which is designed by teachers or students. That means learners acquire vocabulary when they are involved in some learning activities, such as reading, speaking, and interacting with others.

## 2. Literature Review

According to King (2002), closed captions are text written on the screen to transcribe the conversations of the speakers in the movie and indicate any other sounds as well, like music, lyrics, or phone ring. Whereas closed captions include any sounds, subtitles contain only the words articulated by the speakers. Cordell (2006) notes that subtitles are divided into intralingual and interlingual types. The National Captioning institute offers a glossary of caption terms which includes off-line captioning, real-time captioning, automatic live encoding (ALE), pop-on captions, roll-up captions, live-display captions, closed captions, open captions, sub-master, etc.

Concerning the history of the subtitles, Cintas (2005) notes that subtitled films were marketed in the second half of 1970s. Reich (2006) holds that although there were voiceless films in cinemas at the beginning of the film-making history, the producers tried to find a solution to convey the dialogues to viewers. They finally decided to write short statements on a paper and insert them between the sequences. The written statements were called intertitles. Subtitles are new forms of intertitles. A number of studies have more specifically focused on the effect of subtitles on vocabulary learning. The researcher will agree with Bird and Williams (2002) who

conducted two studies examining the effect of single modality (sound or text) and bimodal (sound and text) presentation on word learning. Both experiments led to the conclusion that subtitling can improve the learning of novel words.

Danan (1992) investigated the effects of subtitling conditions on vocabulary recall. She found that reversed subtitling not only produced the most favorable results, but that bimodal input also positively increased vocabulary recall. The results also showed benefits for beginners using such bimodal input. She explains the success of reversed subtitling for vocabulary recall through the way in which translation facilitate foreign language encoding and that it may help with the segmentation problems. She continues that students often have difficulty recognizing word boundaries in the spoken language, especially if they are not familiar with some of the words. Listening to and reading at the same time can at least help the students distinguish known from unknown words.

What interest the researcher is how much a learner can learn from the films and how much they can learn from subtitles and also to compare the effect of English and Farsi subtitles to know which is more effective in vocabulary learning. Reese and Davie (1987) report studies which suggest that visual illustrations are most effective when they are accompanied by the script. At a same time, a great number of studies favor the use of subtitles of one kind or another. Vanderplank (1988) gives two potential benefits of subtitles. One is that subtitles might have potential value in helping the language acquisition process by providing the learners with the key to massive quantities of authentic and comprehensible input. The second merit is that subtitles might help to develop language proficiency through enabling learners to be conscious of new and unfamiliar language that might otherwise be

lost in the stream of speech. According to Danan (2004), subtitling increases comprehension and leads to additional cognitive benefits such as greater depth of processing. Wilson (2002) suggests that subtitled movies can encourage the learners to notice new vocabulary items and may have the potential to facilitate vocabulary acquisition without being a distraction for the learners. When captioning was first introduced for use in foreign language classrooms in the 1980s, it was thought to be a way to increase learners' attention, reduce anxiety, give students instant confirmation of their understanding of what was heard, and increase motivation (Froehlich, 1988; Vanderplank, 1988; Burger, 1989; Grimmer, 1992). Stewart and Pertusa (2004) hypothesized that subtitled films in the target language are more appropriate foreign language tools for English learners although most English instructors use English subtitled films in foreign language classes. They avow that one of the biggest drawbacks for English subtitling is the neglect of the listening skill. On the other hand, Bird and Williams (2002) and Schmidt (2007) maintain that one of the best ways of language learning is watching intralingually subtitled programs. They state that because word boundaries are clear and there are no accent variations, language learners comprehend and learn language to a greater extent. Many studies have been designed and conducted to assess the impact of subtitled and captioned video on learning language skills. In these studies, the issue has been dealt with from different perspectives. In the following section, some of the most significant studies and their results will be presented and evaluated.

Bird and Williams (2002) claim that it remains unclear whether subtitles lead to better or worse listening comprehension. They argue that although some studies suggest that subtitle have some beneficial effects, it may be that text presents the

easiest path to comprehension. In other words, the improved comprehension of a video plot and a better retention of phrases and vocabulary could be due only to good reading, not improved listening comprehension. Koolstra and Beentjes (1999) investigated whether children can learn English vocabulary through watching a TV program with an English soundtrack and Dutch subtitles. They concluded that vocabulary was highest in the subtitled condition. They focused on 264 Dutch children in grade 4 (before any formal instruction in English) and grade 6 (following one year of English at school) after they watched a 15-minutes American documentary shown twice with or without subtitles. The study demonstrated that children acquired more English vocabulary from watching subtitle television, although even children in the condition without subtitle learned some new words. Children in the subtitled condition also performed significantly better on a word recognition test, consisting of words heard in soundtrack and words that could have been used in the context of the particular programs.

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1. Participants**

Participants of this study were 60 high school students from Behbahan, Iran. The students were both male and female, ranging in age from 16 to 17 and were selected based on non-random convenience sampling method. After administering a proficiency test students were assigned into three equal experimental groups (i.e. A, B and C). The groups were named as, bimodal group (A), standard group (B) and reversed group (C). Every group included 20 students, ten male and ten female.

#### **3.2. Instrumentation**

The instruments used in the research were as follows:

### 3.2.1. Proficiency Test

In order to assign students to homogeneous groups, a sample Interchange placement test was administered. The test included 40 multiple-choice items on both vocabulary and grammar. Students were allowed to answer these questions in 35 minutes. The reliability coefficient of the test was calculated through KR-21 formula as 0.76.

### 3.2. Pretest

It included 30 items of multiple-choice vocabulary items that was administered at the beginning of the treatment. Items of pretest were constructed on the basis of vocabularies introduced in DVDs which were presented in the classes. All the participants of the three groups were engaged in the same class activities except for the last 30 minutes of each session. During this period, participants of different groups were presented with episodes of the same film with different types of subtitle for 10 minutes. Students in group (A), were presented with both English audio and subtitle (Bimodal subtitles). In group (B), the students watched the movies with English audio and Persian subtitle (Standard subtitles) and students of group (C) were presented with Persian audio and English subtitle (Reversed subtitled).

### 3.3. Posttest

A vocabulary achievement posttest, including 30-item multiple-choice items was administered at the end of the treatment in order to measure the variation in the participants' vocabulary knowledge after the treatment. Each was containing one target word of the pretest with a different construction.

The reliability value of pretest and posttest was calculated through KR-21 formula as 0.89 and 0.93 respectively.

### 3.4. Material

The materials used in the research were three English animated movies with different types of subtitles. 1) *Tangled*

produced by Roy Conli and directed by Nathan Greno and Byron Howard (2010). 2) *Big hero 6 team* produced by Roy Conli and directed by Don Hall and Chris Williams (2014). 3) *Mr-peabodysherman* produced by Alex Schwartz, and Denise Nolan Cascino, and directed by Rob Minkoff (2014).

### 3.5. Procedures

At first, in order to ensure homogeneity of participants, a proficiency test including 40 multiple-choice items was administered. Items of proficiency test were selected from Interchange books. The participants were assigned to three homogeneous experimental groups on the basis of the test results. They took a 30-item multiple-choice pretest to make sure the target words were new to them. The items of the pretest were constructed on the basis of the animated movies recorded on DVDs. In this study three English teacher were selected as instructor. All the participants of the three groups were engaged in the same class activities except for the last 30 minutes of each session. During this period, participants of different groups were presented with episodes of the same film with different types of subtitle for 10 minutes. Students in group (A), were presented with both English audio and subtitle (Bimodal subtitles). In group (B), the students watched the movies with English audio and Persian subtitle (Standard subtitles) and students of group (C) were presented with Persian audio and English subtitle (Reversed subtitled). The second 10 minutes of this period was devoted to asking questions about the episodes which were displayed in the three groups. The aim was to check understanding of the students and trying to elicit new vocabulary without emphasizing directly their novelty. During the last 10 minutes, students in different groups were asked to discuss the film content. This procedure lasted for ten sessions and the students were presented with 100 minutes

of movies tracks selected from the above mentioned DVDs. At the end of treatment period, the posttest was administered. The posttest included 30 multiple-choice items each were containing one target word of the pretest with a different construction.

Sample of pre and posttest

1. They found themselves in a vast underground chamber.

- a. room
- b. tunnel
- c. cave
- d. enclosed space

1. The picture shows a small burial chamber under a grassy mound.

- a. cavity
- b. coffin
- c. tunnel
- d. room

**Results**

As the first in analyzing data, the results obtained from pretest were analyzed using SPSS 14 software. Table 4.1 shows the descriptive statistic of the participants' performance in different groups on pretest.

**Table4-1: Descriptive Statistics of the Pretest**

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
A	20	20.7000	1.89459	.42364	19.8133	21.5867	18.00	25.00
B	20	19.2000	1.96281	.43890	18.2814	20.1186	16.00	23.00
C	20	20.5000	2.48151	.55488	19.3386	21.6614	17.00	25.00
Total	60	20.1333	2.19758	.28371	19.5656	20.7010	16.00	25.00

**Table 4.2: One-way ANOVA for pretest**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	26.533	2	13.267	2.926	.062
Within Groups	258.400	57	4.533		
Total	284.933	59			

As it can be seen in the table, the three groups were approximately similar concerning their performance on pretest and the mean and standard deviations of the groups are approximately similar. To determine the difference among the groups concerning their performance on pretest, One-way ANOVA was performed on the test scores of the three groups.

As table 4.2 shows, the observed F value is 2.926. Since the critical F value corresponding to degree of freedom of 2 at the probability

level of 0.05 is calculated to be 3.03, which is greater than observed value of f; and the calculated significance equals to .062, it can be seen that there is no significant difference among the three groups concerning their performance on the pretest (F observed < F critical).

The next step was to analyze the results obtained from the posttest at the end of the treatment period. The descriptive statistics of the participants' performance in different groups on posttest are presented in table 4.3:

**Table 4.3:** Descriptive statistic of the posttest

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
A	20	27.4000	1.87504	.41927	26.5225	28.2775	24.00	30.00
B	20	26.9500	1.90498	.42597	26.0584	27.8416	24.00	30.00
C	20	28.7500	1.29269	.28905	28.1450	29.3550	25.00	30.00
Total	60	27.7000	1.85308	.23923	27.2213	28.1787	24.00	30.00

**Table 4.4:** One-way ANOVA for posttest

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	35.100	2	17.550	5.972	.004
Within Groups	167.500	57	2.939		
Total	202.600	59			

**Table 4.5:** Multiple Comparisons of Mean

Multiple Comparisons Scores posttest Scheffe						
(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
A	B	.45000	.54209	.410	-.6355	1.5355
	C	-1.35000*	.54209	.016	-2.4355	-.2645
B	A	-.45000	.54209	.410	-1.5355	.6355
	C	-1.80000*	.54209	.002	-2.8855	-.7145
C	A	1.35000*	.54209	.016	.2645	2.4355
	B	1.80000*	.54209	.002	.7145	2.8855

A: Bimodal Group

B: Standard Group

C: Reversed Group

A glance at the table 4.3 and comparing the mean of each group with corresponding mean obtained from pretest, reveals that the participants in all groups performed better on posttest and the mean of three groups significantly increased. As it is shown in the table, group C (Reversed group) achieved the highest mean, followed by group A (Bimodal group) and group B (Standard group) respectively. To see whether or not the differences among the groups concerning their performance on the posttest were statistically significant, another

One-way ANOVA was run. The results are presented in Table 4.4:

The analysis in Table 4.4 shows that observed F value (5.972) is greater than critical F value which is 3.03 in this case. The computed significance equals .004 which is less than significance level set for the study (0.05). This substantiates the fact that there was a statistically significant difference among the three groups concerning their performance on the posttest. Therefore, the first null hypothesis is rejected.

To find out exactly where the difference lies, a multiple comparisons were performed using the Scheffe's method. The results are shown in Table 4.5:

The multiple comparison of the results show no significant difference between group A (bimodal) and group B (standard). (Sig= .410). But, a difference is observed when comparing performance of the participants in group C (Reversed) and the other 2 groups, i.e. group A (Sig=.016) and group B (Sig=.02).

Since the significance level set for the study is 0.05, it can be concluded that

participants in group C (Reversed group) performed significantly better on the posttest comparing the participants in groups A (Bimodal) and B (Standard group).

As table 4-6 shows, male and female in every group were approximately similar concerning their performance on posttest and the mean of them are much similar. To see whether or not differences among male and female in every group concerning their performance on posttest were statistically significant, the independent samples test was performed. The results are presented in table 4-7:

**Table 4-6: Group Statistics (A,B,C)**

Group	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
A(post)	male	10	27.7000	2.00278	.63333
	female	10	27.1000	1.79196	.56667
B(post)	male	10	27.2000	1.87380	.59255
	female	10	26.7000	2.00278	.63333
C (post)	male	10	29.0000	.81650	.25820
	female	10	28.5000	1.64992	.52175

**Table 4.7: Independent Samples t Test (A,B,C)**

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
A (post)	.008	.929	.706	18	.489	.60000	.84984	-1.18544	2.38544
B (post)	0.068	.797	.576	18	.571	.50000	.86731	-1.32215	2.32215
C (post)	4.410	.050	.859	18	.402	.50000	.58214	-.72303	1.72303

According to the independent samples test and as table4-7 shows, there was no statistically significant difference between male and female students in incidental English vocabulary learning with watching different types of movies subtitling.

#### 4. Discussion

This study was aimed to investigate the effect of different types of subtitle on incidental vocabulary learning among Iranian EFL learners. The purpose of the research was also, to identify the most



effective type of subtitle. The results of one-way ANOVA of posttest, which are presented in Table 4.4, show that there was a significance difference between groups watching movies with different modes of subtitles ( $Sig = 0.01$ ). Since it was hypothesized that "There is not a significant difference among EFL students watching bimodal, standard and reversed subtitled movies concerning vocabulary learning. "As it can be understood from Table 4.5, the results of multiple comparison of means show that there was a significant difference between group B (Standard) and group C (Reversed) concerning their performances on the posttest ( $Sig = 0.002$ ). This means that participants in the Reversed group performed significantly better than those in the Standard group. In other words, according to the results, Reversed subtitling was the most effective mode of subtitling in learning vocabulary incidentally through watching movies.

By comparing the mean differences of the groups and levels of significance in Table 4.5, it is concluded that participants in group A have performed better in posttest than those in group B. This means that bimodal subtitling was in the second place concerning the effectiveness in learning vocabulary incidentally and was more effective than standard subtitling.

The findings of this research are in line with the results of some previous researches in which the effect of mode of subtitles on vocabulary learning was investigated. Fazilatfar, Ghorbani and Samavarchi (2011) investigated the effect of watching TV programs on incidental vocabulary learning in three different conditions: standard subtitles, reversed subtitles and without subtitles. 45 participants randomly assigned to three experimental groups participated in their pretest-posttest design study. The results of their study demonstrated the superiority of reversed subtitled TV programs over standard subtitled and non-subtitled TV programs in terms of enhancing reader's learning of unknown words.

Besides, according to the results, the mean scores of participants in all groups have considerably increased from pretest to posttest. This means that participants in all groups had a better performance in posttest regardless of the type of movie subtitles they were exposed to during the treatment period. In other words, watching movies with subtitles has a positive effect on incidental learning of new vocabulary. This is in accordance with the findings of many previous studies in which the effect of watching movies with subtitles on improving vocabulary knowledge of learners was investigated (e.g. Boras & Lafayette 1994; Jones 2002; Neuman & Koskinen 1992; Reese & Davie 1987).

The results obtained from table 4.6 and table 4.7 show that the mean scores of male and female in every group are much similar. Also, the results of independent samples test which are presented in Table 4.7, show that there was no significant difference between male and female students watching different types of movies subtitling. By comparing the mean difference of the male and female in table 4.7, it is concluded that male and female were approximately similar concerning their performance on posttest in every group.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the present study, it can be concluded that the type of subtitling is an effective factor influencing vocabulary learning. The overall results of study in three different conditions suggest the relative superiority of reversed subtitling group (C) over those of standard subtitled (B) and Bimodal group (A). In other words, the participants in the reversed subtitled condition had higher English vocabulary scores than those of standard subtitled and bimodal groups. According to the obtained results, it can be concluded that the most effective type of subtitling for learning vocabulary incidentally, is reversed subtitling; this kind of subtitling generates

better results than bimodal subtitling and significantly better results than standard subtitling. At the same time, bimodal subtitling produces better results than standard subtitling. It can be argued that reversed subtitles can visually support students who have difficulty in distinguishing orally presented unknown English words, ultimately allowing them to match the aural input with visually presented word by making the appropriate adjustment between their native language sound track and L2 subtitles. This finding is crucial because a weakness in the ability to distinguish L2 words in aural input can hinder vocabulary learning for L2 students. The findings of the present study also support the general idea that students can acquire elements of a foreign language, including vocabulary, through watching subtitled TV programs or movies.

The next aim of this study was to investigate the effect of different types of subtitles on incidental English vocabulary learning among male and female. This study had some limitations, presence of male and female high school students was encountered many defiance. Also, lack of adequate materials and enough time can be considered as other limitations of this study. According to the results obtained, it can be concluded that male and female are approximately same in learning English vocabulary watching different types of subtitles. In other hand, every type of subtitle has similar effect on male and female that is presented with that one. Therefore, according to the findings of this study there is no significant difference between male and female students in incidental English vocabulary learning with watching different types of movies subtitling.

## **6. Implication of study**

As mentioned earlier, the outcome of the current research shows that employing subtitled videos as a teaching material in

language teaching environments can assist learners to receive the language through multisensory channels. Using subtitled videos would also help language learners develop their knowledge of vocabulary. As it was stated earlier, the role of captioned movies in developing vocabulary has not been considered seriously in Iran. The finding of this study can be beneficial to all people, engaged in language program including curriculum and course designers, teachers and students. These findings might encourage learners to devote more time to watching subtitled TV programs including movies, cartoons and new in order to improve their overall language skills as well as their vocabulary knowledge. Course designers can benefit from the findings through incorporating subtitled movies of various types as a part of vocabulary development materials. Teachers can benefit from the findings of this study by using multimedia including subtitled movies as a part of their teaching material. It can also help teachers in choosing the right type of movie subtitles which has been proved to be the most effective one according to the results of this study and the similar studies. In sum, the findings of this study and other related researches should incite professional developers to update methods of language teaching in a way that multimedia in general and subtitled videos in particular be included in teaching and learning programs.

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