

The Effects of Watching Authentic English Videos with and without Subtitles on Listening and Reading Skills of EFL Learners

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Received 14 February 2018 • Revised 11 April 2018 • Accepted 11 April 2018

ABSTRACT

Watching English videos can be considered as a powerful and popular tool with regard to learning English as a foreign language, and ought to be devoted serious attention by teachers and researchers. The present study attempts to explore the potential effects of watching authentic English videos (movies, TV shows, etc.) with subtitles (English and Slovak) and without subtitles on listening and reading skills. A total of thirty Slovak university EFL learners were divided into three groups according to their viewing preference: English subtitle group (ESG), Slovak subtitle group (SSG), and no subtitle group (NSG). Afterwards, the participants in each group underwent listening and reading tests, and their scores were subsequently examined. The test results were analyzed and compared using the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistical method and the Bonferroni post-hoc test. Overall, neither listening nor reading test scores exhibit statistically significant differences between the three groups, although the post-hoc test, which was used for comparing the groups with each other, revealed that a significant difference was detected between the ESG and SSG within the analysis of reading test scores.

Keywords: authentic English videos, subtitles, listening skills, reading skills, EFL learner

INTRODUCTION

The four language skills – listening, reading (receptive skills), speaking, and writing (productive skills) are deemed to be the focus of L2 (second language, foreign language) classes, and both teachers and learners ought to attach major importance to all of them. Traditional methods of foreign language teaching primarily concentrated on reading and writing, paying scant attention to the skills of listening and speaking (Raissi, Nor, Aziz, Zainal & Saleh, 2013). According to CLT (Communicative Language Teaching), however, the four skills are integrated, and a particular emphasis is placed on listening and speaking (Rees-Miller, 2017). Alternatively, Korkmaz and Güneyli (2017) recognize the considerable significance of reading and listening since the productive skills cannot be acquired without gaining the receptive ones. Thus, all four skills should be incorporated within the process of EFL (English as a foreign language) teaching.

Although listening and reading skills are often referred to as passive language skills, as opposed to the skills of speaking and writing (active skills), Bordonaro (2014) explains that both listening and reading can also be deemed active. Listening in L2 can be considered as an active skill since the listeners are required to cope with a number of complicated tasks such as differentiating between phonemes or interpreting stress and intonation (Ghoneim, 2013). Thus, it is something of a misnomer to label this skill passive (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). Similarly to listening, reading is also normally thought of as a passive skill, although according to (Fu, 2012, p. 54), “[r]eading is an active skill, which constantly involves guessing, predicting, checking and asking oneself questions”. Dangsaart, Naruedomkul, Cercone, and Sirinaovakul (2008) and Pčolinská (2008) also assert that reading is an active skill involving a reader, text, and the interaction between them, and that it is a dynamic and interactive process. Thus, listening and reading also seem to fall into the categories of active skills rather than the passive ones.

Contribution of this paper to the literature

- The study examines the impact of watching English videos with or without subtitles by exploring the difference in listening and reading test scores between ESG, SSG, and NSG.
- The analyses reveal that overall, no statistically significant difference was detected between the three groups within the listening and reading test scores.
- The Bonferroni post-hoc test, which was used for comparing the groups with each other, indicates that there is a significant difference between the ESG and SSG within reading test scores.

As far as teaching the receptive skills is concerned, it was the skill of listening which has long been neglected despite its obvious importance within L2 learning (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011; Kavaliauskienė, 2008; Kazemi & Kiamarsi, 2017; Yildiz, Parjanadze & Albay, 2015). Teachers and academics have to remember that devoting scant attention to any of the two receptive skills may have serious consequences for the overall proficiency of a learner, and that the development of productive skills (speaking and writing) may be seriously hampered. As has been previously mentioned, L2 learners are barely capable of gaining the skills of speaking and writing without acquiring the skills of reading and listening.

“Life informatization” imposes new demands on using ICT (information and communication technologies) at each level of the educational system (Baş, Kubiato & Sünbül, 2016; Fedina, Burmykina, Zvezda, Pikalova, Skudnev & Voronin 2017). Technical and technological development has induced changes in every sphere of society, including education (Doulík, Škoda & Šimonová, 2017). In a similar way, Krause, Pietzner, Dori, and Eilks (2017, p. 4406) state that “[w]ith the development of technology changing both people’s lives and people’s relations within societies, education is also undergoing innovations and necessary reforms”. It is also the Internet which has a substantial influence on education (Qiao & Wang, 2017) since it provides ample opportunity for learning a language in a new and unconventional manner. One such example, which illustrates using the ICT technologies or the Internet in education, is watching movies, TV shows, and authentic videos by L2 learners in order to develop their proficiency in the target language either with or without subtitles.

The principal objective of the study is to explore the effects of watching English videos with and without English subtitles on the listening and reading skills of Slovak university EFL students by examining the differences in listening and reading test scores between the three groups (ESG, SSG, NSG). Another goal of this paper is to perform a comparison of groups with each other (ESG vs SSG, ESG vs NSG, SSG vs NSG) using the Bonferroni post-hoc test.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Listening

General findings of several studies indicate that using subtitles and captions when watching videos or TV programs is a powerful instructional tool in relation to learning vocabulary and enhancing reading and listening comprehension skills of L2 learners (Karakas & Sariçoban, 2012). Similarly, Yuksel and Tanriverdi (2009) maintain that most of the research conducted in the field suggests that using subtitles and captions is valuable in terms of improving the language skills of L2 learners.

Research in the Slovak field of using L1 and L2 subtitles while watching authentic English videos and their effect on language skills of Slovak EFL learners is scarce. Therefore, it is hoped that this paper will help fill in the gap in research concerning this important matter.

Yang and Chang (2013) conducted a study on the contribution of three modes of English captions (full, keyword-only, and annotated keyword captions) towards learning English reduced forms and the overall listening comprehension. The results showed that all three groups demonstrated improvement. The annotated keyword captioned group demonstrated the best performance with the highest mean score.

The study carried out by Ghasemband and Nafissi (2012) demonstrated that using captions had a significant effect on the listening comprehension of the subjects involved since the group in which English captions were present outperformed the other group (this group did not use the captions).

Another paper by Hayati and Mohmedi (2011) supports the value of using English subtitles for improving English listening skills of Iranian EFL learners. According to the study, the group which used English subtitles outperformed the group using Persian subtitles, which in turn outperformed the no subtitle group in the listening test.

Rokni and Ataee (2014) investigated the potential effect of using English movie subtitles on listening comprehension of EFL Iranian students. The results of this study demonstrated that the English subtitle group achieved higher scores on the listening test in comparison to the no subtitle group.

Similarly, Shamsaddini, Ghanbari, and Nematizadeh (2014) investigated the effect of watching movies with and without subtitles on the listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. The students who used English subtitles while watching English video outperformed the students who did not use subtitles.

Opposing the idea, the study of Başaran and Köse (2013) examined the influence of English captions, Turkish captions, or no captions on listening comprehension of intermediate and low-intermediate level EFL learners. Their findings revealed that the subjects in all three conditions scored similarly on the listening comprehension test.

Another paper by Latifi, Mobalegh, and Mohammadi (2011) also explored the influence of using subtitles on the development of listening comprehension. The results showed that despite the fact that the MC (multiple choice) tests data suggest a positive effect for both types of subtitles (Bimodal and Standard subtitling) on the immediate comprehension of the students, none of the two subtitling procedures lead to the improvement of listening comprehension in general.

Reading

“Improving the reading comprehension skills of students has become an important issue in educational and civilian institutes” (Lee & Chang, 2016, p. 1501). As far as using subtitles in relation to improving the skill of reading is concerned, some studies (Borras & Lafayette, 1994; Danan, 2004) supported the notion that audio-visual materials which are enhanced by subtitles seem to improve L2 reading and listening comprehension skills.

In their quasi-experiment, Lwo and Lin (2012) investigated the effects of captions on L2 learning of teenagers. The results demonstrated that the effects of different captions within multimedia L2 learning in regard to vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension is dependent upon the L2 proficiency of students.

The study of Kruger and Steyn (2013), which was performed in the context of English subtitles on English academic lectures, indicates that there exists a significant positive correlation between comprehension and subtitle reading, producing some evidence to suggest that using subtitles in reading instruction and L2 learning is favorable.

Another study conducted by Koolstra, Voort, and Kamp (1997) suggests that viewing subtitled TV programmes results over time to improved reading skills in children.

BavaHarji, Alavi, and Letchumanan (2014) explored the effects of viewing captioned videos on EFL learners’ content comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and language proficiency. The results revealed that the effects of watching captioned instructional videos are stronger on acquiring vocabulary and enhancing language proficiency than on content comprehension. However, the results within the reading comprehension section demonstrated favourable effects of captioned instructional video.

Hwang and Huang (2011) examined the effects of watching captioned video on reading comprehension of Taiwanese university freshmen. The findings showed that subjects watching captioned video did not achieve higher scores in the reading test when compared to the subjects who did not use subtitles.

There is no doubt that watching videos represent a powerful and attractive educational tool for EFL learners. This paper attempts to shed more light on the effect of watching captioned videos on both listening and reading skills of university EFL learners.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The objective of this study is to examine the effect of watching authentic videos, both with subtitles (English and Slovak) or without subtitles, on listening and reading skills. To achieve this, the participants were divided into three groups (watching authentic English videos with English subtitles, with Slovak subtitles, or without subtitles). Next, all the participants underwent a reading test and a listening test. Afterwards, the data were analyzed, results were interpreted, and conclusions drawn.

Subjects

The study employed a total of 30 university students (3rd year B.A. students and 1st year M.A. students) of the study programme Teaching of English Language and Literature at a university in Slovakia, who were formed by 24 females and 6 males. On average, they were 22.2 years of age, and all of them were of Slovak nationality, residing in Slovakia. Each participant had been studying English for more than 10 years.

The students were chosen on the basis of 53 questionnaire responses of Slovak university EFL students; only 30 eligible participants out of the 53 completed questionnaires were selected so as to create homogenous groups. All

30 participants were at an approximately similar English proficiency level – the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) level B2+ according to the university criteria.

Data Collection and Procedure

A short questionnaire ([Appendix 1](#)) was applied in order to obtain the data concerning the participants' preferences for watching authentic English videos. The students who claimed to watch authentic English videos either *every other day* or *two – three times per week* (so that the participants were more or less homogeneous in terms of their exposure to English videos) were subsequently divided into three groups (according to their preferences for subtitles use):

1. Students who watch authentic English videos with English subtitles – English subtitle group (ESG);
2. Students who watch authentic English videos with Slovak subtitles – Slovak subtitle group (SSG);
3. Students who watch authentic English videos using no subtitles – no subtitle group (NSG).

Subsequently, each group was given the same standardized reading and listening test in order to investigate the relationship between watching videos with or without subtitles and listening and reading comprehension test scores. The participants could achieve the maximum of 28 points for the listening section (18 items, fill-in-the-blank and multiple choice test) and 30 points for the reading section (15 items, multiple choice test). Afterwards, the data were compared and analysed using the analytics software *Statistica 10.0* in order to investigate whether the differences in test results between the three groups are statistically significant.

Results

Listening and reading scores are showed in [Table 1](#), [Figure 1](#), and [Figure 2](#). The highest mean score for listening test was detected in the SSG, followed by the NSG, and ESG. The highest average score for reading test was found in the ESG, followed by the NSG, and SSG.

Table 1. Listening and reading test scores

| English subtitle group | | | Slovak subtitle group | | | No subtitle group | | |
|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Subject | Listening | Reading | Subject | Listening | Reading | Subject | Listening | Reading |
| 1 | 16 | 28 | 11 | 24 | 26 | 21 | 14 | 26 |
| 2 | 19 | 26 | 12 | 14 | 30 | 22 | 13 | 22 |
| 3 | 25 | 26 | 13 | 18 | 24 | 23 | 27 | 28 |
| 4 | 24 | 30 | 14 | 27 | 20 | 24 | 18 | 28 |
| 5 | 14 | 20 | 15 | 22 | 20 | 25 | 23 | 16 |
| 6 | 23 | 30 | 16 | 25 | 28 | 26 | 7 | 16 |
| 7 | 14 | 28 | 17 | 14 | 20 | 27 | 26 | 20 |
| 8 | 22 | 20 | 18 | 25 | 20 | 28 | 24 | 30 |
| 9 | 11 | 24 | 19 | 15 | 12 | 29 | 21 | 20 |
| 10 | 11 | 10 | 20 | 16 | 6 | 30 | 22 | 30 |
| Mean | 17.9 | 24.2 | Mean | 20 | 20.6 | Mean | 19.5 | 23.6 |

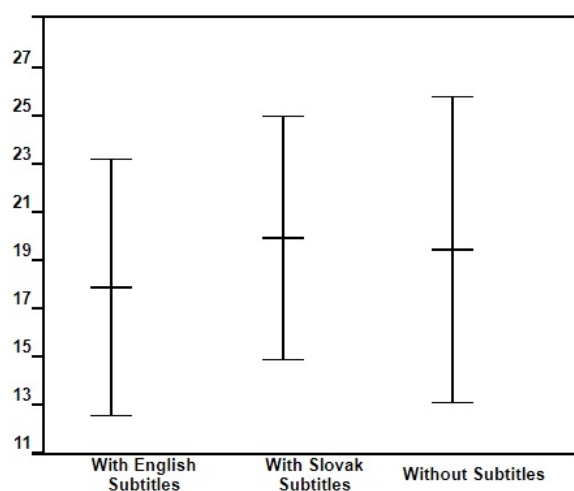


Figure 1. Listening test scores

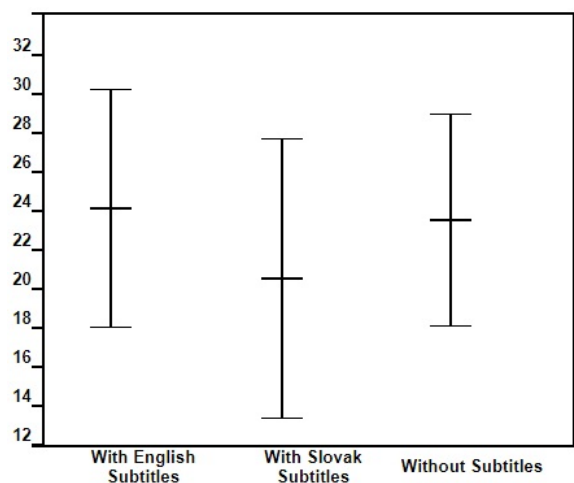


Figure 2. Reading test scores

It is, however, important to determine whether the differences in the obtained data are statistically significant. The ANOVA statistical model and the Bonferroni post-hoc test were applied to explore the difference between the test scores of all three groups.

The main findings are as follows. No statistically significant difference was observed between the three groups within the analysis of listening test scores ($F = 2.00$; $p = 0.37$; $W = 0.11$). Similarly, the analysis of reading test scores between the three groups did not reveal a statistically significant difference ($F = 4.67$; $p = 0.1$; $W = 0.23$). Thus, watching English authentic videos either with or without subtitles did not seem to produce significant effect on the test scores.

Afterwards, the test scores of particular groups were compared with each other. The Bonferroni post-hoc test was used to consider the difference in the test scores between the ESG, SSG, and NSG groups. The comparison of listening test scores (Table 2) did not show statistically significant differences between the three groups. However, the post-hoc test within the reading scores (Table 3) demonstrates that there is a statistically significant difference between the ESG and SSG ($p < 0.05$), which means that the test scores of ESG were significantly better when compared to the test scores of SSG. The comparison of ESG vs NSG and SSG vs NSG did not indicate a significant difference.

Table 2. Bonferroni post-hoc test for listening test scores

| Treatments pair | p-value | Difference |
|-----------------|---------|-----------------|
| ESG vs SSG | 0.21 | not significant |
| ESG vs NSG | 0.59 | not significant |
| SSG vs NSG | 0.38 | not significant |

Table 3. Bonferroni post-hoc test for reading test scores

| Treatments pair | p-value | Difference |
|-----------------|---------|-----------------|
| ESG vs SSG | 0.04 | significant |
| ESG vs NSG | 0.85 | not significant |
| SSG vs NSG | 0.38 | not significant |

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

In spite of the fact that some differences between the mean scores of listening (ESG = 17.9, SSG = 20.0, NSG = 19.5) and reading (ESG = 24.2, SSG = 20.6, NSG = 23.6) were observed, the ANOVA test reveals that overall, there is no statistically significant difference between the three groups within the analysis of listening and reading test scores. Further comparison of groups with each other (ESG vs SSG, ESG vs NSG, SSG vs NSG), performed on the basis of the Bonferroni post-hoc test, does not show significant differences in terms of the listening test scores. However, comparing the three groups with each other in terms of the reading test scores revealed that while no significant differences were observed within the comparison of ESG vs NSG and SSG vs NSG, a statistically significant difference was detected within the comparison of ESG vs SSG ($p < 0.05$). This finding seems to indicate that watching English videos with L2 subtitles (rather than L1 subtitles) could lead to improved reading comprehension.

Based on this small-scale study, it can be concluded that the findings do not support the assumption that the ESG would outperform the NSG or the SSG subtitle group when it comes to examining the effect of subtitles on listening skills. The situation is similar when it comes to reading; although the Bonferroni post-hoc test, which was used for comparing the groups with each other, indicates that the difference between the ESG (24.2) and SSG (20.6) within reading comprehension is statistically significant, no significant difference was found overall according the ANOVA statistical method.

The results of this study indicate that the use of L1 or L2 subtitles does not bring about an important effect when it comes to the relationship between watching authentic English videos with or without subtitles and listening comprehension; using the subtitles neither improves nor impedes listening comprehension. Overall, the same can be concluded about the relationship between watching English videos with or without subtitles and reading comprehension, although some effect was detected in this instance (ESG reading test scores were significantly better in comparison to SSG reading test scores according to the post hoc-test). Thus, it appears that watching English videos with English subtitles could be more beneficial to EFL learners' reading comprehension skills than using Slovak (Czech) subtitles. However, this finding needs to be verified by conducting further research into the field of subtitles and L2 acquisition.

On the whole, it can be concluded that the findings do not appear to be in line with those of Ghasemband and Nafissi (2012), Hayati and Mohmedi (2011), Rokni and Ataei (2014), or Shamsaddini, Ghanbari, and Nematizadeh (2014). On the contrary, the results seem to be in agreement with the findings of Başaran and Köse (2013), Hwang and Huang (2011), or Latifi, Mobalegh, and Mohammadi (2011).

One of the limitations of this study lies in employing a relatively small sample size, which can somewhat lower the generalizability of the findings. Thus, performing the study on a larger sample size and employing subjects consisting of EFL learners at other CEFR levels than B2+ would definitely prove useful and helpful.

Watching authentic English videos represents a powerful and popular tool when it comes to learning languages, and ought to be devoted considerable attention by teachers and researchers. There is no doubt that further research and investigation into the effect of subtitles (both L1 and L2) on listening and reading skills is necessary as it would shed more light on the use of videos with and without subtitles in L2 acquisition.

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APPENDIX 1

Questionnaire

Name and surname:

Age:

Gender:

I watch authentic English videos (movies, TV shows, etc.) in English

Every day

Every other day

Two to three times a week

Once a week

Once in two weeks

Once a month

I usually watch authentic English videos (movies, TV shows, etc.) in English

With English subtitles

With Slovak (Czech) subtitles

Without subtitles

<http://www.ejmste.com>