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Effects of Watching Flash Stories with or without Subtitle and Reading Subtitles on Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition

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Abstract

This study investigated the effect of flash stories with or without subtitle on incidental vocabulary acquisition of elementary learners. To this end, two experimental groups and one control group were selected. The data was gathered through a 5-point vocabulary knowledge scale. After random assignment of the participants into three groups, they were given the same pre- and post-test before and after the treatment. An ANCOVA was used to compare the effectiveness of each language material on incidental vocabulary acquisition (IVA) of the learners. The results revealed that flash stories resulted in more IVA of the respondents than reading subtitles as text.

Keywords: flash story; english-subtitle; reading a story; incidental vocabulary acquisition; vocabulary knowledge scale

1. Introduction

"Vocabulary is an essential means of interchanging ideas and of acquiring new experiences. Man’s growth in ideas has always been accompanied by a corresponding expansion of his vocabulary" (Gray 1939, p.1). However, there is often a misunderstanding in the field of vocabulary learning, in the sense that, it is considered as a collection of isolated vocabulary lists for intentional memorization. Furthermore, a learner reads difficult classical texts with the aim of increasing his/her knowledge of vocabulary and draws a conscious attention to the learning of new words in the text. He/she reads a text with the aim of being able to translate and to memorize words. Thus, this process is very tedious and meanwhile increasing the affective filters prevents intentional vocabulary learning. However, Hunt

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and Beglar (1998) suggested three approaches to enhance vocabulary learning—incidental acquisition, intentional learning, and independent strategy development, among which incidental vocabulary acquisition was regarded as an essential part of vocabulary acquisition. As Nation (2001) defined, incidental vocabulary acquisition facilitates the process of vocabulary acquisition by providing a meaningful context, while the learners' attention is in some other features of foreign language. Therefore, vocabulary growth often appears incidentally while learners are doing other cognitive exercises. Among these cognitive activities, reading can enlarge learners' vocabulary acquisition, and promote their language competence and academic performances. Nagy, Herman, & Anderson (1985) declared that when incidental vocabulary acquisition is encouraged by the help of contact with a sufficient amount of written language exposure, incidental vocabulary acquisition can be substantial. Many scholars have agreed that much second language vocabulary acquisition is learned incidentally while learners are agreed in extensive reading (ER) or reading for meaning and inferring the meanings of unknown words (Huckin & Coady, 1999; Krashen, 1993; Paribakht & Wesche, 1997). In this case, vocabulary acquisition which is called incidental acquisition is a byproduct rather than the explicit purpose of reading. In addition, with the development of computer and multimedia technologies such as animations, videos and flash stories, educators will lead to use these types of materials. Several research into vocabulary learning from meaningful context have focused on acquiring from extensive reading, acquiring from taking part in conversations, and acquiring from listening to radio, watching films, television, flash stories and so on (e.g., Brown, Waring and Donkaewbua, 2008; Pigada and Schmitt, 2006; Horst, 2005; Paribakht and Wesche, 1993; Elley, 1989; Hwang and Nation, 1989). In this regard, new methods of English language teaching should use new materials to draw learners' attention for acquisition of English language. To put it another way, nowadays there is a tendency toward using media to aid and supplement educational objectives.

According to Purushotma (2005), numerous attempts must be done to develop "edutainment" titles that seek to merge educational goals with entertainment content. So that educators can use methods and materials which lead to incidental language acquisition. Definitely, learners do not watch or use media only to have fun. They can be quite educational. Teachers and educators can help motivate learners and remove part of the anxiety of not knowing the language by using films and cartoons in foreign language classrooms. They can supply a large amount of SL/FL aural and visual input in a short time and learners are highly motivated to them for language learning (Chapple & Curtis, 2000). It means that learners could be more motivated to learn language through watching television than through reading. In this respect, several studies have testified the value of media technology as language learning materials in foreign language classrooms (e.g., Al-Seghayer, 2001; Bueno, 2009; Vanderplank, 1988, 1990).

Danan (2004) claimed that using audiovisual materials which have been enhanced with captions or subtitles are very powerful educational tools for various reasons. First, "because they improve listening comprehension skills of second/foreign language learners; second, they facilitate language learning by helping learners visualize what they hear; and third, they increase language comprehension and lead to additional cognitive benefits, such as greater depth of processing" (p. 67). Therefore, it is necessary to use materials that develop each of and sometimes more than what Danan claimed in foreign language classroom. Flash story which has been chosen for the current study has been equipped with video, audio and subtitle facilities. It is a short animated video story with subtitle which helps learners to understand the meaning of most words by providing a concrete picture of that word. This new technology, enhanced with subtitle, helps learner to see the label and its object at the same time. The flash story's subtitling case is actually foreign subtitling with foreign language in the soundtrack and subtitle. Thus, English series of flash stories with different number of episodes, which are suitable for low-level learners, provide a condition for exposing with different unknown words and help learners to acquire more vocabulary. Hence, the purpose of the current study is to investigate the relative impact that these flash stories may have on incidental vocabulary acquisition of elementary learners.

Moreover, several empirical studies focused on the effects of watching subtitled films/animations on comprehension in reading and listening, and vocabulary acquisition. Neuman and Koskinen's (1992) experiment showed that the group that watched a scientific television program with subtitle incidentally acquired more words than either of the two other treatment groups and the control group. Neuman and Koskinen (1992) claimed that "providing different modes of information appeared to enhance incidental acquisition from context rather than overwhelming the student's intentional capacity. Visual and printed context that provided explicit, and thus redundant, information supported incidental vocabulary acquisition" (p. 104). Similar empirical studies which
investigate the effects of captioned and non-captioned movies or programs on incidental acquisition (Garza, 1991; Danan, 1992, 2004; Neuman & Koskinen, 1992; Markham, 1993, 1999; Baltova, 1999) found that subtitles are powerful instructional tools in learning vocabulary and improving reading and listening comprehension skills of language learners.

2. Research questions

The current study sought answers for the following questions.

1. Does watching English series of flash stories with English-subtitles have any statistically significant impact on incidental vocabulary acquisition of elementary Iranian EFL learners?
2. Does watching English series of flash stories without subtitle have any statistically significant impact on incidental vocabulary acquisition of elementary Iranian EFL learners?
3. Is there any statistically significant difference between the relative impacts of watching English series of flash stories with or without English-subtitles on incidental vocabulary acquisition of elementary Iranian EFL learners?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study were 28 elementary level EFL learners from Sadra Institute of Maku (10 males and 18 females). They were enrolled in the English conversation class. The learners were selected based on their scores on English placement test. The participants of each experimental group consisted of 10 and 9 language learners and the participants of control group consisted of 9 language learners. Their ages ranged between 13 and 16 years. They shared the same linguistic and background knowledge. All participants were oriented to the task of watching or reading with a view of furthering task or activity for reinforcing learner's comprehension and storytelling task. They were unaware of the purpose of study as vocabulary acquisition.

3.2. Instruments and materials

3.2.1. Flash story and reading text

Language material which has been chosen for the current study was flash stories. Each flash story narrated a specific story about social and moral issues. These stories facilitate the process of vocabulary acquisition. These flash stories were used in two experimental groups but with a big difference: one of these experimental groups was exposed to watching flash stories with English subtitle and the other one was exposed to watching flash stories without subtitle. The control group was exposed to reading English-subtitles of flash stories as reading text.

3.2.2. Placement test

The test consists of 50 multiple choice questions which assess learners' knowledge of a key grammar and vocabulary from elementary to intermediate levels, a reading text with 10 graded comprehension question and an optional writing task that assesses learners' ability to produce the language.

3.2.3. Pilot test

Seventy words from the flash stories were chosen and were placed in vocabulary knowledge scale. This test was piloted with 10 learners at elementary level at Sadra Institute. Those words which learners knew their meaning were deleted because the aim of this study was to show that learners incidentally acquired the words which they have not already known them. Therefore, the purpose was to guarantee the lack of prior knowledge of the target words on the part of the participants and to identify the new or unfamiliar words for inclusion in pre-test and post-test. Finally, thirty target words were chosen for the current study based on the results of pilot group.
3.2.4. Pre-test and post-test

Wesche and Paribakht's (1996) five-point self-reported scale of vocabulary knowledge scale (VKS) was adopted to measure the vocabulary development of the learners before the treatment and after the fulfillment of treatment. A 5-level scale was used to rate vocabulary knowledge that ranges "from complete unfamiliarity, through recognition of the word and some idea of its meaning, to the ability to use the word with grammatical and semantic accuracy in a sentence" (Paribakht & Wesche, 1997, p. 22). The VKS thus allows learners to indicate partial knowledge of item, which allows a finer measurement of vocabulary gains. The VKS is composed of 5 levels as follows (adopted from Wesche and Paribakht 1996):

1. I don't remember having seen this word before
2. I have seen this word before but I don't know what it means
3. I have seen this word before and I think it means........ ______ (synonym or translation)
4. I know this word. It means........ (synonym or translation)
5. I can use this word in a sentence. e.g.:........ (if you do this section, please also do section 4).

Scores on the VKS test were calculated (scores apply to each individual target words):
0 Points: I don't remember having seen this word before.
1 Point: I have seen this word before but I don't know what it means.
2 Points: I have seen this word before and I think it means........ (synonym or translation).
3 Points: I know this word. It means........ (synonym or translation).
4 Points: I can use this word in a sentence. e.g.:........ (if you do this section, please also do section 4).

Consequently, the total scores could vary from zero to 120.

3.3. Procedure

Based on the placement test interpretation scores, participants whose scores fell at the elementary level borderlines were chosen into three different classes. 28 participants were randomly assigned to each of experimental groups and control group. In group A, the participants watched English series of flash stories with English subtitle, in group B, the participants watched English series of flash stories without subtitle and in group C (control group), participants read written subtitles of English series of flash stories as a reading text.

The participants from the three groups were tested on their knowledge of the target words before the treatment, and 13 sessions after the treatment. A sample of 30 words was systematically drawn from flash stories for elementary learners. A pilot test was conducted with similar elementary level of learners to determine the suitability of the selected target words. The participants were pretested on their knowledge of the target words some days before the experiments took place. Then, within 13 sessions, the participants were exposed to English flash stories with or without subtitle and written subtitles of English flash stories as reading text. Before watching the flash story or reading a text, all participants were oriented to the task of watching or reading for the purpose of subsequently answering comprehension questions and storytelling activities about the materials. Vocabulary acquisition was not mentioned to be the focus of the study. After exposing learners to language materials in groups A, B and C, teacher involved learners in 10 true-false items and cloze-test. The main aim of test is the involvement of experimental groups and control group in their own language materials while the aim of using these materials is as incidental acquisition of vocabulary rather than comprehension. Answering these tasks helped learners to have more comprehension of story.

After passing this step, in group A & B, teacher involved learners in storytelling activities while they were visually supported. In group c, learners told the story but they were not visually supported. Storytelling activities
were regarded as a class activity for more involvement of learners. After 4 weeks, participants were tested on the total number of the target words by vocabulary knowledge scale and were asked to answer the items on it.

3.4. Data collection and analysis

The participants' responses were simply coded according to the level they chose for each word on the VKS from Paribakht and Wesche (1996). However, level 3, 4 and 5 entails some kinds of production from learners. Thus, the researcher checked the accuracy of their answers and marked their choices as they were, if their choices were correct. However, if the responses were incorrect, the researcher downgraded the participants' choice one level. For instance, if a participant chose level 3 for a word, the answer was marked as level 3 if the response was accurate, if it was not, then the researcher marked the answer as level 2.

On the other hand, it was necessary to measure the reliability of the pre-test and the post-test. To this end, internal reliability of tests was measured according to Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Reliability analysis was undertaken to confirm the internal consistency of this research scale. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used to check internal consistency. In pre-test assessment, alpha coefficient was 0.82, and post-test was 0.94. Given Nunnally's (1978) landmark establishment of an alpha coefficient score of 0.70 or greater, which signifies a reliable scale, the current scale was considered very acceptable (Nunnally, 1978).

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive indices of research variables

In table 1, descriptive indices of research variables (pre-test and post-test) such as minimum, maximum, mean, standard deviation, Skewedness and Kurtosis for total sample has been reported.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of research variables

| Condition | Minimum | Maximum | Mean  | Standard deviation | Skewedness | Kurtosis |
|-----------|---------|---------|-------|-------------------|------------|----------|
| Pretest   | 1       | 17      | 7.43  | 4.25              | 0.34       | -0.45    |
| Post test | 11      | 76      | 46.89 | 19.47             | -0.15      | -0.99    |

According to table 1, skewedness and kurtosis indices are less than 1.96, so it can be conclude that the distribution of sample data is normal and it can be used parametric test such as t-test and analysis of covariance.

4.2. Analysis of research questions

One paired sample t-test was used for answering the first question of current study. Descriptive statistics for this question has been shown in table 2 and the finding of t-test has been reported in table 3.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of flash stories with subtitle in group A

| Condition | N  | Mean | S.D  | Std. Error of mean |
|-----------|----|------|------|--------------------|
| Pre test  | 10 | 7.80 | 5.65 | 1.79               |
| Post test | 10 | 55.70| 12.89| 4.08               |

Table 3. The results of t-test to investigate the differences of pre-test and post-test in group A

| Mean differences | T Statistic | Df  | P value |
|------------------|-------------|-----|---------|
| -47.90           | -10.87      | 9   | 0.001   |

According to table 2, the means of learners' scores in post-test is higher than pre-test. Also t-statistic in table 3 is shown that this differences is significant at 0.001 alpha level (t= -10.87, sig= 0.001). According to this result it can
be concluded that watching flash stories with subtitle, has significant effect on increase of incidental acquisition of vocabulary among learners.

Eta square was used to investigate the amount of intervention effect on learners' scores. Interpretation of eta square is similar to $R^2$ in regression analysis. And this statistic shows the percent of variance that predicted by intervention. In table 4 procedure to interpretation of eta square according to Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) has been shown.

| Eta square(percent of variance) | Effect size |
|---------------------------------|------------|
| 0.01 1 percent                  | Low        |
| 0.06 6 percent                  | Medium     |
| 0.14 14 percent or high         | High       |

For question one computed eta square was 0.93. This statistic shows that the intervention (watching flash stories with subtitle) predicts 93 percent of variance of learner scores. According to table 4 this effect size is high.

One paired sample t-test was also used to answer the second question. Descriptive statistics for this question has been shown in table 5 and the finding of t-test has been reported in table 6.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of flash stories without subtitle group B

| Condition | N | Mean  | S.D  | Std. Error of mean |
|-----------|---|-------|------|--------------------|
| Pre test  | 9 | 8.11  | 3.55 | 1.18               |
| Post test | 9 | 57.33 | 16.39| 5.46               |

According to Table 5 the means of learners' scores in post-test is higher than pre-test. Also t-statistic in table 6 is shown that this differences is significant at 0.001 alpha level ($t=-49.22$, sig= 0.001). According to this result it can be concluded that watching flash stories without subtitle, has significant effect on increase of incidental acquisition of vocabulary among learners.

| Mean differences | T statistic | Df | P value |
|------------------|-------------|----|---------|
| -49.22           | -8.92       | 8  | 0.001   |

Table 6: The results of t-test to investigate the differences of pre-test and post-test in group B.

Eta square for this question computed was 0.99. This statistic shows that the intervention (watching flash stories without subtitle) predicts 99 percent of variance of learner scores on incidental vocabulary acquisition. This effect size is high according to table 4.

To answer the last question of study, One-way between-groups analysis of covariance was conducted to compare the effectiveness of two different interventions designed to increase learners' incidental vocabulary acquisition. The independent variable was the type of intervention (flash stories with subtitle, flash stories without subtitle) and control group (Reading of flash stories English subtitles as text), and the dependent variable consisted of learners' scores on test administered after the intervention was completed. Learners' scores on the pre-test were used as the covariate in this analysis. Before running ANCOVA, two assumptions of it have been checked to ensure that it could be used it. These investigated assumptions are linearity and homogeneity of regression slopes.

In checking linearity (existence of linear relationship between the dependent variable and the covariate for all groups), scatter plot of pre-test and post-test scores across groups showed that there is the linear relationship between pre-test and post-test scores across the groups, so linearity assumption was confirmed in this study. And also, in the process of checking homogeneity of regression slopes which concerns the relationship between the covariate and the dependent variable for each of groups, the test examines that there is no interaction between the
covariate and the treatment or experimental manipulation. The result of homogeneity of regression slopes has been shown in table 7.

| Table 7: Result of homogeneity of regression slopes |
|-----------------------------------------------|
| Sum of squares | Means squares | Df | F | p value |
|----------------|---------------|----|---|--------|
| 4.26           | 2.13          | 2  | 0.01 | 0.99   |

As shown in table 7, the F statistic wasn't significant (p<0.99). So it can be concluded that there is no interaction between the covariate and the experimental manipulation, so it can be used ANCOVA to answer this question. In the table 8 groups' descriptive statistics, and in table 9 homogeneity of variance test have been showed and the result of covariance analysis has been reported in table 10.

| Table 8: Descriptive statistics of groups in post-test |
|----------------|----------------|---------|
| Group            | n   | Mean | SD |
| flash stories with subtitle | 10  | 55.70 | 12.89 |
| flash stories without subtitle | 9   | 57.33 | 16.39 |
| Reading of flash stories' subtitles as text | 9   | 26.67 | 12.01 |
| Total            | 28  | 46.89 | 19.47 |

| Table 9: Levene's test of homogeneity of variance |
|----------------|-----|-----|-----|
| F              | Df1 | Df2 | p value |
| 0.86           | 2   | 25  | 0.44   |

According to above table, the levene's test was not significant (p<0.44). Therefore it can be concluded that the variance of post-test scores is equal across groups.

| Table 10: Result of covariance analysis to compare groups in post-test |
|----------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Source        | SS   | MS   | F    | P value | Df | Effect size |
| Pre test      | 8.68 | 8.68 | 0.04 | 0.83      | 1  | 0.002       |
| Group         | 5181.74 | 2590.86 | 12.98 | 0.001    | 2  | 0.52        |

As shown in above table, the F statistic of group membership, is significant at 0.001 alpha levels, after controlling the pre-test scores (F=12.98, p<0.001). This finding shows that there are significant differences among groups in post-test scores. Effect size statistic shows that group memberships predict 52 percent of variance in post-test scores. In table 11 pair wise comparison of groups in post-test scores has been reported to investigate which group has more effect on incidental vocabulary acquisition.

| Table 11: Result of pair wise comparison of groups |
|-------------------------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| Group                        | Group       | Mean difference | Std error   | p value |
| Without subtitle             | With subtitle | 1.59          | 6.49        | 0.81    |
| Without subtitle             | Reading group | 30.42         | 6.76        | 0.001   |
| With subtitle                | Reading group | 28.83         | 6.56        | 0.001   |

As shown in above table, the differences between flash stories with subtitle group and without subtitle one is not significant (p<0.81). Thus there is not a significant difference in incidental vocabulary acquisition between with and without subtitle groups. Also according to table 11 the differences between without subtitle group and control group (reading group) is significant at 0.001 alpha level, furthermore the differences between with subtitle group and control group is also significant at 0.001 alpha level. Thus it can be concluded that the effects of watching flash stories with or without subtitle have better effects on learners incidental vocabulary acquisition compared with reading group. But watching flash stories with or without subtitle have equal effects on vocabulary acquisition.
5. Discussion

Findings of the study suggest that the mean scores of pre-test of both groups were very close to each other. It is assumed from this finding that both groups had similar knowledge about the target words before they were exposed to the treatment. The development in each group was measured through t-test. One paired of sample t-test result demonstrated that there was an improvement in each group. It is clear that high differences in mean differences of each experimental groups show that a group's development is higher than the other one. Regarding the comparison of mean differences in groups A and B, it might be concluded that there were no significant differences between two groups while progress in group B is slightly more than group A. Thus, it might be concluded that what facilitated the improvement in vocabulary knowledge was not the incorporation of subtitles into the flash story. At this point, it might be concluded that flash story increased the vocabulary development of participants.

The findings of the current study are in accordance with a number of previous studies (Baltova, 1999; Yuksel & Tanriverdi, 2002; Mitter & Macqueen 2009; and Karakash & Saricoban 2011), which support the effects of English subtitles on vocabulary acquisition. Mitter and Mcqueen studies in (2009) revealed that native-language subtitles appear to create lexical interference, but foreign-language subtitles assist speech learning by indicating which words (and hence sounds) are being spoken. However, the result of this study is in line with Neuman and Koskinen (1992), Yuksel and Taniverdi (2002) and Karakas and Saricoban (2011) findings of study explained that watching flash stories with or without subtitle has a significant impact on incidental vocabulary acquisition of Elementary Iranian EFL learners. The results seem consistent with our third hypothesis that there is not significant differences between flash stories with subtitle and without subtitle which in line with previous studies. But the difference is in this point that the improvement of group B is slightly more than group A. One of the possible reasons for such different results may be the different proficiency level of the participants in this study in comparison to the other studies. Another possible reason may be the fact that flash stories have significant differences with films and cartoons or it might be related to learners' motivation and attitudes to English language or language learning. Winke, Gass, and Sydrenko (2010) claimed that generalizing the findings of studies is not appropriate, because "(1) several studies did not group subjects by proficiency levels; (2) the types of tests used to measure the effects of language learners' processing of captions varied widely" (p. 67). And also there are some other more reasons which make the generalization of research findings more difficult such as group's age, type of films or cartoons which have been chosen by researcher, the kind of subtitles and learners' motivation and attitudes toward English.

Furthermore, regarding the comparison of watching media and reading a text in English language classroom, the outcome of the present study is compatible with Neuman and Koskinen (1992), who indicated that group D that watched a scientific television program with subtitle incidentally acquire more words than either of the two other treatment groups (read along and listened to the textbook being read aloud and group which watched a scientific television program without subtitle) and the control group which read a scientific textbook. Thus, watching flash stories with or without subtitle is more effective than reading a text.

6. Conclusion

The results of current study show that watching flash story with or without subtitles seems to have a significant impact on incidental vocabulary acquisition of learners. The gains of learners were thought to be the result of contextual aids of flash stories. Flash stories with special characteristics such as providing a concrete picture of words and articulating of words clearly provides a very rich context of acquisition and facilitate the understanding of the target words whether it is accompanied with subtitle or without subtitle.

The findings of this study also indicated that vocabulary development is a long lasting process that needs to be supported by contextual clues. The possibility of guessing the meaning from context is higher in flash stories. Words in isolation give no clues to the learner and thus they are hard to guess from context. On the other hand learners' comprehension and storytelling skills significantly developed through the pass of time.
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