The Use of Subtitled Movies for Vocabulary Acquisition in ESP Settings: Insights from an Experimental Study in Algeria

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Abstract
Research in the field of second language acquisition indicates that exposure to subtitled movies as comprehensible input generally enhances the acquisition of vocabulary. This paper reports on an experimental study which seeks to explore the effects of using subtitled movies on the vocabulary acquisition of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) university students in Algeria. The aim is to possibly find empirical evidence using ESP programs in Algeria as a case study. In order to achieve this aim, a sample of participants were recruited for the research and were randomly divided into control group, those who were asked to watch a movie without subtitles, and treatment group, those who were exposed to the movie with subtitles. The two groups were later asked to complete a Vocabulary Test (VT), which involved thirty vocabulary items identified from the movie. The VT was quantitatively analyzed using the one-way ANOVA procedure to determine the statistical significance of vocabulary acquisition. The findings indicate that using subtitled movies clearly enhances the learning of new vocabulary, and that the vocabulary acquisition of the treatment group is much greater than the acquisition of the control group. As a conclusion, it is noted that these results are generally congruent with current theory in the field. It is recommended that ESP teachers in Algeria need to encourage the use of multimedia in their language classrooms towards enhancing their learners' vocabulary acquisition.
Keywords: Algeria, ESP, experimental research, second language acquisition, subtitled movies, vocabulary acquisition

Introduction

This paper reports on a study that explores whether exposure to subtitled movies as comprehensible input enhances the acquisition of vocabulary among English for Specific Purposes (ESP) university students in Algeria. It is generally expected that an application of such a method of language input would generate positive vocabulary learning results.

The study is motivated by ongoing reforms of the sector of education in Algeria (Ministry of Education, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2004). In fact, since early 2000, the Ministry of Education has initiated a project of technology-in-education, which involves a generalisation of the use of technology in all Algerian schools and universities by 2020 (Tawil, 2006; Roegiers, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2006; Toualbi-Thaalibi, 2006). In this respect, the Government has allocated extra funds to promote research on how best to use technology to enhance students' learning and achievement (Chevalier, 2006). Our study comes to provide a contribution towards this aim.

Seen from a macro-perspective, the study supports theory which indicates that multimedia and technology-in-education can represent good sources for learning foreign languages (see for instance discussions in Alessi & Trollip, 2001; Alias & Hussin, 2002; Baltova, 1999; Bernhardt & Kamil, 1997; Bianchi & Ciabattoni,2008; Canning-Wilson, 2000). In other words, the study aims at exploring the impact of the use of multimedia and technology instruction on the learners' educational achievement in the context of Algerian university ESP programmes. In particular, it explores how students' use of technology can help them look for authentic materials, the latter of which can eventually be used as comprehensible input to subsequently enhance their acquisition of the target language. Some research that was conducted in the area of foreign language learning and teaching indicates that employing audio-visual technology enhances students' learning (Arslanyilmaz & Pedersen, 2010).

From a micro-perspective, the study can be seen as premised in the general paradigm of second language acquisition theory (SLA) that acknowledges that vocabulary acquisition is at the heart of any development of the learners' communicative competence (Grabe & Stoller, 1997; Sökmen, 1997). In fact, while many studies conducted in the field have taken a holistic approach and dealt with the impact of multimedia on learning foreign languages in general (see for example Mekheimer, 2011), in recent years, however, we have witnessed a growing interest in exploring the effects of multimedia on specific language components (see for example Haghverdi & Vaezi, 2008). Hence, we have seen, for instance, an increasing focus on the effects of subtitled videos on vocabulary acquisition (Harji et al., 2010; Yuksel & Tanriverdi, 2009; Bianchi & Ciabattoni, 2008). However, while some studies have been conducted in different parts of the world, for instance, in Iran (Harji et al., 2010), in Turkey (Yuksel & Tanriverdi, 2009), and in Italy (Bianchi & Ciabattoni, 2008), no study has been carried out in Algeria. Our study, therefore, attempts to shed some light on the above issue with particular reference to the Algerian ESP context.

Objectives and research questions
The main objectives of the study are:
1. To add to theory in SLA and L2 methodology using university language programmes in Algeria as a case study.

2. To draw conclusions and to make recommendations that would subsequently be raised to the Algerian Ministry of Education for evaluation and policy formulation purposes.
3. To publish the findings in order to share them with the academic community in the field towards generating further debate in the MENA region and internationally.

In this respect, the study revolves around the following main question:

- What are the effects of using subtitled movies on the vocabulary acquisition of ESP university students in Algeria?

The study attempts to answer the following research sub-questions:
1. Does using subtitled movies in ESP classrooms enhance the learners' acquisition of vocabulary?
2. To what degree does the vocabulary acquisition of the treatment group (learners who were exposed to subtitled movies) differ from the acquisition of the control group (those who were exposed to non-subtitled movies)?
3. What implications do the findings have on ESP teaching methodology and students' learning?

Hypotheses

In our attempt to answer the above questions, we have advanced the following hypotheses:
1. Subtitled movies enhance the learning of vocabulary.
2. There is a significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups on the post-test in favor of the treatment group.

Literature review

Research in SLA indicates that vocabulary is the bedrock of language, and, hence, it is emphasized that vocabulary instruction be given primacy in the second language classroom (Grabe & Stoller, 1997; Sökmen, 1997). It is argued that vocabulary is a crucial element in foreign language learning because words generally help learners express their meanings more appropriately and, therefore, communicate better (Oxford, 1990; Gass & Selinker, 1994). It is further argued that knowledge of vocabulary is important when reading and understanding written texts (Harmon, 1998), and that low levels of vocabulary usually engender poor reading comprehension (Lin, 2002). Thus, it is generally argued that acquiring vocabulary requires appropriate exposure to comprehensible input (Schmidt, 2001; Nation, 2001). By the same token, it is argued that it is rather insufficient to simply rely on incidental learning to acquire vocabulary (Haynes & Baker, 1993; Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 1998; Sökmen, 1997; Zimmerman, 1997). Hence, research in the field generally suggests that learners should be provided with opportunities for classroom instruction that would enhance their acquisition of vocabulary (Nation, 2001).

Multimedia resources offer many advantages to the second language classroom (Brinton, 2001). These resources can range from tape/CD players, to radio and television, to video players, to overhead and film projectors, to language labs, to smart-boards, and to the latest mobile phone technology. These, as it is argued, can be efficient tools in second language teaching and learning (Delaska, 2002). Multimedia resources have, in fact, created opportunities for integrating text, sound and image in the designing of authentic and interactive learning materials (Delaska, 2002).

In particular, video-based instruction is becoming widely used in the language classroom (Terrell, 1993; Yang et al., 2010). It is argued that videos can provide appropriate language exposure to native speakers' accents and cultures while living in a non-native context (Richardson & Scinicariello, 1989), and can consequently enhance the learners' motivation and interest (Altman, 1989). Furthermore, videos can help the learners develop their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in an integrative way and can subsequently improve their communicative competence (Cummins, 1989; Ciccone, 1995; Weyers, 1999). In fact, videos are found to have strong effects on the development of reading (Pezdek et al., 1984; Neuman, 1990), of writing (Hanley et al., 1995), and of vocabulary (Danan, 2004; Baltova, 1994; Duquette et al., 1998).

With particular relevance to our study, subtitled videos are found to have strong effects on second language acquisition in general, and on vocabulary acquisition in particular (Chang, 2004; Danan, 2004; Zanon, 2006; Weyers, 1999; Garza, 1991; Baltova, 1994; Duquette et al., 1998). By definition, subtitling is an audiovisual process whereby people can watch a movie while reading statements of dialogues on the screen (Reich, 2006). In recent years, the field of second language teaching and learning has turned to subtitled videos as a technique to help learners acquire language inside and outside their classrooms (Eken, 2003; Koolstra & Beentjes, 1999). In fact, there is a growing belief among researchers and practitioners that this process can be a good way to enhance the learners' acquisition of foreign languages (Wang & Shen, 2007; Chang, 2004). For instance, Garza (1991) argues that subtitles have a considerable impact on listening and reading of Russian ESL learners. Markham (1999) notes that the use of subtitles considerably leads to listening comprehension of ESL learners. Kothari et al. (2002) notes that subtitles have positive effects on reading comprehension. With regards to vocabulary acquisition, other studies by Huang & Eskey (2000), Koskinen et al., (1995), Bean & Wilson (1989), Baltova (1999), Koolstra & Beentjes (1999), Katchen (1997), Yuksel & Tanriverdi (2002), Jones (2004), and Bianchi & Ciabattoni (2008) all claim that exposure to subtitles results in a significant improvement of their learners' level of vocabulary, as well as of other language components.

Furthermore, researchers in the field divide subtitles into two types: (1) "interlingual" subtitles, where the language of subtitles is different from the language of dialogues in the movie, and (2) "intralingual" subtitles, where the subtitles are in the same language that of the movie (Caimi, 2006). It is argued that both types enhance language acquisition although an ongoing debate is still taking place about which of the two types is more efficient for second language learners (Danan, 2004). It is argued , however, that interlingual subtitles can be used with low proficiency learners, whereas intralingual subtitles can be used with advanced learners (Bravo, 2005; Caimi, 2006; Danan, 2004). Nevertheless, regardless of this distinction between interlingual and intralingual subtitling, a considerable body of research generally supports the claims that subtitled videos in general can facilitate the acquisition of vocabulary. For the purposes of the present study, interlingual subtitles were used, where the movie is in English, the target language, while the subtitles are in Arabic, the participants' main language of instruction. Our decision to use interlingual subtitled movies is based on the fact that the participants are low proficiency students (see participants' sampling below for more details).

Research methodology
Research design
       The present study was generally conducted within an experimental research design (Nunan, 1992; McKay, 2006), which is defined as research where experiments are conducted to investigate the strength of relationships between variables (Cohen et al., 2007). In order to answer the above research questions, a quantitative method was used. Quantitative research generally focuses on providing an understanding of social phenomena using quantitative data and statistical analysis towards providing inferential results and conclusions (Nunan, 1992; McKay, 2006; Cohen et al., 2007).

Participants
       The participants in this study were a sample of 27 university students who followed a BA Degree in History at the University of Mostaganem. The main language of instruction in their program is Arabic. One module they attended was English for Specific Purposes, where they were introduced to the terminology in the field of History using English language as a medium of instruction. This would eventually enable them to use the target language in their library research. The proficiency level of the participants in the target was generally intermediate.

       The main strategy for sampling participants for the study was the "purposive convenience sampling" strategy (Kumar, 1996; Punch, 1998), defined as the one 'where advantage is taken of cases, events, situations or informants, which are close at hand' (Punch, 1998: 193). In this respect, all the participants recruited for the study studied at the University of Mostaganem in Algeria.

       After being briefed about the nature and objectives of the study, the students were randomly assigned to two groups: 13 students were in the Control Group (CG), those who were not exposed to subtitles, whereas 14 students were assigned to the Treatment Group (TG), those who were exposed to the subtitles. This procedure of randomization in research generally ensured the minimization of bias (Muijs, 2004; Punch, 1998).

Instruments
       First, we selected a short movie with Arabic subtitles, which we then duplicated into two pieces of material: one with subtitles to be presented to the Treatment Group (TG), and the other without subtitles to be shown to the Control Group (CG). We then viewed the movies and identified 31 vocabulary items, which were subsequently used to build a Vocabulary Test (VT) as data collection tool. The VT was intended to assess the impact of the intervention on the participants' vocabulary acquisition. The instructions in the VT asked the participants to match the words or expressions that they heard in English with their equivalents in Arabic subtitles. One thing to note is the fact that the VT was generally adapted from Laufer & Goldstein (2004), Coombe (2012), Qian & Schedl (2004), and Milton & Alexiou (2010).

Procedures
       After we briefed the participants to seek their consent for participation in the study, we handed out the VT pre-test and explained the instructions well. We also informed them that they were going to have the same test after watching the movie so they could prepare themselves and concentrate on the movie. After they had finished from the pre-test, the participants were invited

to watch their assigned movie separately, with subtitles for the TG and without for the CG. After that, we invited them to watch their movie for a second time to ensure a maximization of input, vocabulary processing and acquisition. Finally, we instructed them to do the post VT test.

Data analysis

To analyze our data, we used the one-way ANOVA procedure to determine the statistical significance of vocabulary acquisition between the two groups (Zar, 1999; Perry, 2005). The analysis was achieved with the help of the Microsoft Office Excel program. This initially involved allocating numerical scores to the participants' VKT performance, where each item on the test was given one mark for each correct answer making the maximum score for each participant no more than thirty-one. The test scores were then entered in the computer system for analysis of the means. The analysis was conducted from four perspectives: (1) statistical significance between TG and CG on the pre-test, (2) between TG and CG on the post-test, (3) in-between TG on pre and post-test, and (4) in-between CG on the pre and post-test.

Results

Research question 1: Does using subtitled movies in English for Specific Purposes Algerian classrooms enhance the learners' acquisition of vocabulary?

This first question seeks to investigate the effects of subtitled movies on the vocabulary acquisition of each group, i.e., it takes an intra-group perspective. The ANOVA statistical descriptions representing the pre and post-test performance of each group are presented in the tables below.

Table 1. *Control group pre and post-test performance results*

SUMMARY

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
CG pre-test	13	120	9.230769	13.85897
CG post-test	13	152	11.69231	19.23077

ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	39.38462	1	39.38462	2.380473	0.135944	4.259677
Within Groups	397.0769	24	16.54487			
Total	436.4615	25				

As it can be seen from Table 1 , the mean score of the Control Group on the post-test (11.69) is higher than it is on the pre-test (9.23). This indicates that there is an improvement in the knowledge of vocabulary after watching the movie without subtitles. However, as can be seen from the ANOVA statistics, this difference is not statistically significant as the *F* ratio 2. 38 is smaller than the *F crit* value 4.25. Therefore, there is no significant difference in vocabulary acquisition after watching the non-subtitled movie.

Furthermore, according to Table 2 the mean score of the Treatment Group on the post-test (21.71) is higher than it on the pre-test (9.92). This also indicates that there is an improvement in the knowledge of vocabulary after watching the subtitled movie. The ANOVA statistics indicate that this difference is statistically significant as the *F* ratio 91.00 is much higher than the *F crit* value 4.22. In other words, and at the difference of the Control Group, the Treatment Group shows a statistically significant difference in vocabulary acquisition after watching the subtitled movie. Hence, in response to the first question above, the results indicate that using subtitled movies has a significant effect on the learners' acquisition of vocabulary.

Table 2. *Treatment group pre and post-test performance results*

SUMMARY

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
TG pre-test	14	139	9.928571	9.60989
TG post-test	14	304	21.71429	11.75824

ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	972.3214	1	972.3214	91.00669	5.6E-10	4.225201
Within Groups	277.7857	26	10.68407			
Total	1250.107	27				

Research question 2: To what degree does the vocabulary acquisition of the Treatment Group differ from the acquisition of Control Group?

The purpose of this question is to show the extent to which the performance of both groups is different on the pre and post-tests, i.e., it provides an inter-group comparison. The ANOVA statistical descriptions representing the pre and post-test performance of both groups are presented in the tables below.

As Table 3 indicates, the mean score of the Control Group on the pre-test (9.23) is slightly smaller than the Treatment Group (9.92). From the ANOVA statistics, this difference is not statistically significant as the *F* ratio 0.28 is smaller than the *F crit* value 4.24. This indicates that the knowledge of vocabulary of both groups before the experiment was to a certain extent homogenous. Therefore, both groups had roughly the same knowledge of vocabulary prior to the experiment.

Table 3. *Control and treatment groups' pre-test performance results*

SUMMARY

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
CG pre-test	13	120	9.230769	13.85897

TG pre-test	14	139	9.928571	9.60989

ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	3.282255	1	3.282255	0.281752	0.600239	4.241699
Within Groups	291.2363	25	11.64945			
Total	294.5185	26				

Nevertheless, according to Table 4   the mean score of the Treatment Group on the post-test (21.71) is much higher than the control group's (11.69). Furthermore, the ANOVA statistics indicate that this difference is statistically significant as the *F* ratio 44.12 is higher than the *F crit* value 4.24. This indicates that the Treatment Group shows a much higher difference in vocabulary acquisition after watching a subtitled movie than the Control Group after watching the movie without subtitles. Hence, in response to the second question, the results show that the vocabulary acquisition of the Treatment Group differs from the acquisition of the control group to a larger degree. Hence, using subtitled movies clearly enhances the learning of new vocabulary.

Table 4. *Control and treatment groups' post-test performance results*

SUMMARY

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
CG post-test	13	152	11.69231	19.23077
TG post-test	14	304	21.71429	11.75824

ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	677.0403	1	677.0403	44.12107	5.84E-07	4.241699
Within Groups	383.6264	25	15.34505			
Total	1060.667	26				

Discussion

The findings above indicate that using subtitled movies clearly enhances the learning of new vocabulary among the sampled group, i.e., using subtitled movies with the participants has a generally significant effect on their acquisition of vocabulary. In particular, it shows that the vocabulary acquisition of the Treatment Group differs greatly from the acquisition of the Control Group. A considerable body of research is generally congruent with these findings and supports

the claims that subtitled movies can help improve vocabulary acquisition. For instance, Baltova (1999) explores the effects of subtitles on the acquisition of vocabulary of Canadian students studying French as a foreign language. He divides the students into those who watched the movie with and those who watched it without subtitles. His findings indicate that that those who were exposed to subtitles learned more vocabulary. Baltova concludes that subtitles have strong effects on the learning of vocabulary. In another study, Koolstra & Beentjes (1999) also make similar claims in their study on the effectiveness of interlingual subtitles among Dutch students. They argue that their experimental group performed better in terms of vocabulary acquisition. Katchen (1997) explores the effects of interlingual subtitles on Chinese EFL students and concludes that the process benefited the learners in terms of vocabulary. Yuksel & Tanriverdi (2002), on the other hand, investigates the effects of an American subtitled and non-subtitled movie on the vocabulary acquisition of Turkish EFL university students. They argue that the Treatment Group performed better than the Control Group. They conclude that watching subtitled movies has a strong impact on the students' knowledge of vocabulary. Another research by Bianchi and Ciabattoni (2008) explores the effects of subtitled movies on the comprehension and acquisition of vocabulary of Italian EFL students. They conclude that subtitles lead to the best result in content comprehension and vocabulary learning. Koskinen et al. (1995) examine the effects of subtitled videos on incidental reading vocabulary knowledge of adult non-native English speakers. Their findings indicate that subtitled videos substantially improve the incidental reading vocabulary knowledge of the participants. Similar findings are also reported by Huang & Eskey's (2000) who investigate the effects of subtitled movies on the listening comprehension of intermediate EFL students. They argue that subtitled movies not only improve the listening comprehension of students but also develop their general vocabulary. In another study, Neuman (1990) looks at the effectiveness of subtitles in foreign language education. Their results demonstrate that the participants who are exposed to subtitled videos learn more new words than those who are not. Similar findings are also noted by Wang et al. (2008) who explore the effects of a subtitled animation movie on Chinese students learning English. The results of their study show that the Experimental Group performs much better than the Control Group in vocabulary learning.

Conclusions and recommendations

This study investigates the extent to which exposure to subtitled movies as comprehensible input enhances the acquisition of vocabulary among a sample of ESP students in Algeria. The findings indicate that using subtitled movies clearly enhances the learning of new vocabulary, and that the vocabulary acquisition of the Treatment Group is much greater than the acquisition of the Control Group. The conclusions we can draw for the study can be summarized as follows:

- The use of multimedia in the ESP classroom can enhance students' learning and acquisition of foreign languages because this technique can provide appropriate language exposure to authentic materials and can therefore maximize language input and output.
- Subtitled videos in particular can have strong effects on L2 vocabulary acquisition in the sense that they can help learners acquire new vocabulary.

Some recommendations can be made in accordance with our findings. In general, ESP teachers in Algeria should be encouraged to use multimedia-based activities in their teaching. In particular, teachers should promote the use of subtitled movies to help enhance their students' learning of

vocabulary. For this to be possible, we suggest that continuous professional development training directed at developing appropriate media-based teaching methodology be organized. The results of our study and the above recommendations will be taken up to the Ministry for consideration.

Furthermore, we can also suggest that further research in the field be conducted in other Algerian universities to measure up the validity of our findings. It is worth noting that we intend to communicate the findings of our study to other universities across Algeria as a first step towards creating a network of researchers in this area. We hope that further liaising with other research groups would not only help build a more consistent theoretical framework, but would also encourage us to do more research in the field.

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