The effect of watching captioned TV series on speaking accuracy of Iranian advanced EFL learners

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Abstract

The present study aimed to find out the effect of watching captioned TV series on speaking accuracy of Iranian advanced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learner. To do so, 66 advanced learners were selected out of 104 ones, using Oxford Placement Test. The researchers assigned the participants randomly into three groups, one control and two experimental, each including 22 learners. One of the experimental groups watched the series with English subtitles and the other group with Persian subtitles while the control group (CG) watched the same series without any subtitles. The form of the pre-test and post-test was semi-structured interview. Before the treatment, the participants were asked questions about friendship, similar to the theme of the series and after the treatment they were asked the same questions as the post-test. The results indicated that both English and Persian subtitling had a positive impact on the accuracy of Iranian advanced English learners. Furthermore, it was found that oral accuracy did not considerably change in the CG, but there were significant improvements in English subtitle and Persian subtitle groups in oral accuracy. Moreover, the study has insights and implications for EFL/English as second language teachers and curriculum designers.

Keywords: Advanced English as a Foreign Language learners, English subtitles, Persian subtitles, speaking accuracy

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1. Introduction

Many scholars have claimed that movies used in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom can become an important part of the curriculum. This is based on the fact that movies provide exposure to 'real language,' the language used in authentic settings and in the cultural context where that language is spoken. Researchers have also found that movies catch the learners' interest which can positively affect their motivation to learn (Kusumarasdyati, 2004; Luo, 2004). Winke, Gass and Sydorenko (2010) noted that with a greater emphasis on technology in language classrooms, the use of subtitles would undoubtedly increase in both importance and frequency.

Watching movies are one of the many strategies which have been applied for promoting English language skills, especially speaking and listening. Using captions as pedagogical instruments play an effective and important role in the process of learning. Subtitling refers to placing text, original or translated, into the pictures and sound by regarding time and space (Ayand & Shafiee, 2016).

After conducting lots of studies, Danan (2004) provided a list of the advantages and disadvantages of using subtitles in movies and programs. Improvement in productive skills, development of word recognition and vocabulary building, comprehension of details and reducing learners' anxiety can be mentioned as four of the advantages.

In addition, he asserted that captions facilitate language learning by helping learners visualise what they hear, especially if the input is slightly beyond their linguistic ability. He also argued that the motivation toward understanding the content of movies and series increase when the captions are available (Danan, 2004).

With regard to advantages of captioning, Baltova (1994, p. 33) said that movies with captions 'provide simultaneous exposure to spoken language, printed text and visual information, all conveying the same message, and so promote content and vocabulary learning even in relatively inexperienced learners.' Furthermore, Garza (1991) regarded captioning as a bonus since it is helpful for language learners to link auditory to visual input, and as Doughty (2004) mentioned, it may aid form-meaning mapping which is a necessary process for foreign language acquisition.

Although lots of researchers found favourable and useful results with regard to captioning (Canning-Wilson, 2000; Hinkin, 2009; Hwang & Huang, 2011; Winke, Gass, & Sydorenko, 2010 to name some), both language learners and teachers appeared apprehensive. For example, Danan (2004) reported that when students were exposed to captioned movies and programs they were annoyed. Furthermore, in Taylor's study (2005) learners perceived captioning to be distracting.

Iranian students start learning English at their secondary schools; however, their oral communication skills are limited because most of the class time is devoted to teaching grammar, reading and vocabulary rather than oral skills.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of watching captioned TV series on speaking accuracy of Iranian advanced EFL learners. A number of studies have been conducted to investigate the effectiveness of captioning on intermediate students (Ayand & Shafiee, 2016), but they just investigated intermediate students while the need for investigating other students in other proficiency levels than intermediate is felt.

Hence, the present study aimed to shed more light on advanced level students with regard to the effect of watching captioned TV series on their speaking accuracy.

2. Literature Review

Using movies can be influential in a variety of areas in language teaching including teaching writing, oral skills, grammar, vocabulary and cultural features. Using captions in movies can be mentioned as an effective strategy in classrooms. Captions are usually displayed at the bottom of the screen and are either a transcript or screenplay of the conversation or narration in movies, television programs, series or video games (Ayand & Shafiee, 2016).

Lots of studies have been conducted to investigate the effect of various kinds of subtitles on learning different skills. Ayand and Shafiee (2016) studied the effect of English and Persian subtitles on oral fluency and accuracy of intermediate Iranian EFL learners. The participants of this study were 60 learners selected from Donyaye Sokhan Language Institute in Isfahan, Iran. They were divided randomly into three groups. The control group (CG) received the movies without the subtitles while one of the experimental groups watched the movies with English subtitles and the other experimental group watched the movies with Persian subtitles. The results of the study indicated that there was no significant difference between the two experimental groups. Furthermore, it was found that the experimental groups showed a better performance regarding oral fluency and accuracy, but the CG did not improve significantly during the study.

Pasban, Forghani and Nouri (2015) investigated the effects of English captions on Iranian EFL students learning of phrasal verbs in terms of recognition and production. The participants of this study were 60 intermediate learners from Simin Institute of Zahedan. They were divided randomly into two groups: CG and experimental group. The learners in the experimental group watched video clips with a caption, but the learners in the CG watched video clips without captions. Results of the study indicated that the captions had a significant effect on learning phrasal verbs by Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

In another study, Shabani and Zanussi (2015) wanted to understand if watching captioned TV series have any effect on L2 learners' vocabulary development. The participants of this study were 40 intermediate English learners from Shokooh English Institute in Nowshahr, Mazandaran, Iran. They were divided into two groups: Experimental and CG. The experimental group received an American TV series and Friends, with a caption but the CG received it without caption. After analysing the data, they found that watching series with captions had a positive effect on vocabulary learning of the learners.

Mohajer and Pourgharib (2014) conducted a study in which they investigated the effects of captioned videos on advanced EFL learners' listening proficiency. Forty-four advanced learners were selected for this study from Iran Language Institute in Gorgan, Golestan and were divided into two groups of CG and experimental group. Three ABC Documentary movies were chosen for this study. The experimental group received the caption videos while the CG received videos without captions. The results indicated that the experimental group outperformed the CG and captioned videos had a significant effect on the listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners.

Bava Harji, Kamal Alavi and Letchumanan (2014) examined the effects of captioned instructional videos on content comprehension, vocabulary acquisition and language proficiency of learners. The participants of this study were 92 EFL learners who were divided into two groups of experimental and control. The experimental group received the 30 episodes of connect with English with caption while the CG received the same episodes without captions. The results of the study indicated that the experimental group with captioned episodes outperformed the CG regarding vocabulary acquisition and language proficiency development. Furthermore, the findings showed that the participants felt that captions had a positive effect on their language learning and enhanced it, but it did not have a positive effect on their comprehension of the movie. Nevertheless, they did not consider captions as distraction.

Abdolmanafi-Rokni and Jannati-Ataee (2014) studied the effects of watching English movies with or without subtitles on learners' speaking ability. The participants were 38 intermediate EFL learners selected from Novin Institute in Gorgan who were divided into two groups. Findings indicated that the experimental group who received the movie with subtitle outperformed the CG who received the

movie without subtitle in terms of their speaking ability.

Yuksel and Tanriverdi (2009) examined the effects of captioned movie clips on incidental vocabulary learning of EFL learners. The participants of this study were 120 intermediate university students at Kocaeli University, Turkey, who were divided into groups of control and experimental. The experimental group watched the movie clips with caption while the CG watched the same clips without caption. The study indicated that watching movie clips had positive effects on the vocabulary development of learners regardless of the caption. Furthermore, it showed that the captions group performed better than the group without caption.

The outcome of the previous studies showed that generally, captioned TV series or movies had positive effects on participants' vocabulary learning, listening comprehension and speaking ability. However, the number of studies that specifically investigated the effect of captioned movies and series on speaking accuracy is limited. To fill this gap, this study attempted to investigate the effects of watching captioned series on speaking accuracy of Iranian advanced EFL learners. To do so, the present study addressed the following research questions:

1. Does the application of English subtitles lead to the improvement of speaking accuracy of advanced Iranian EFL learners?

2. Does the application of Persian subtitles lead to the improvement of speaking accuracy of advanced Iranian EFL learners?

3. Does the application of subtitling (in its different forms) have any effects on speaking accuracy of advanced Iranian EFL learners?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants of the present study were 66 advanced learners that their proficiency level had been determined by the Institute, Ava Language Institute, in Darab, Iran. The sample was not ethnically diverse. All the participants were Iranian and their mother tongue was Persian with the age range of 18–25. Then, the researchers assigned them randomly into three groups, one control and two experimental, each including 22 learners. It is worth mentioning that all the participants were male to reduce the effect of gender as a kind of intervening variable.

3.2. Instruments

A popular American TV series and 'Friends' created by Crane and Kauffman (1994) was used in the study. The theme of 'Friends' is about friendship and the relationship between friends, intended for advanced learners. It contains ten seasons each of which includes 24 episodes with the length of 20–25 min for each episode. The form of the pre-test and post-test was semi-structured interviews. Before the treatment, in the pre-test, the participants were asked questions about friendship, similar to the theme of the series. The main question was: 'What characteristics do you think a good friend should have?' and two or three follow-up questions with regard to friends and friendship. After the treatment, they were asked the same questions as the post-test. The interviews lasted for 2–3 min for each individual based on their answers to the questions. All performances were audio recorder for further analysis.

3.3. Data collection and analysis procedures

To achieve the aims of the study, 66 advanced EFL learners were selected from Ava Institute in

Darab, Iran. Their proficiency level had been determined by the Institute. Then, they were randomly divided into one CG (no scripts group [NSG]) that watched the series without any subtitles, and two experimental groups one of which watched the series with English subtitle (English subtitle group [ESG]) and the other with Persian subtitle (Persian subtitle group [PSG]). Before the treatment, as the pre-test, they were all asked questions about friends and friendship and their interviews were audio recorder. They attended the class 3 times a week, and in each session, they watched one episode of the series about 20–25 min for 2 months. Overall, they watched 24 episodes of 'Friends.' After the treatment sessions, in the post-test, the researchers asked the learners the same questions as in the pre-test and again the students' interviews were audio recorder to be compared with the pre-test. For measuring their ability in accuracy, the method suggested and employed by Foster and Skehan (1996) was used. They suggest using error-free clauses as a percentage of the total number of clauses. More specifically, the number of clauses was counted. Then, the number of error-free clauses was counted and accuracy was measured by dividing the number of error-free clauses to the total number of clauses. Finally, the data were analysed using SPSS.

4. Results

The present study made use of an experimental design to examine the possible effects of different types of subtitling on advanced Iranian EFL learners' speaking accuracy. The data obtained were analysed using the SPSS: Paired-samples t-test was used to examine the possible improvements from pre-test to post-test for research questions 1 and 2. One-way between groups ANOVA was conducted to find an answer to the third research questions of the study.

The first research question of the study was an investigation of whether English subtitles led to the improvement of speaking accuracy of advanced Iranian EFL learners or not. To find the answer to this research question, the accuracy pre-test scores of the participants in the ESG were compared with their accuracy post-test scores. This made the researchers capable of finding out whether the possible differences between the accuracy pre-test and post-test scores were due to the treatment they received. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the accuracy pre-test and accuracy post-test scores of the ESG.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the accuracy pre-test and accuracy post-test scores of the ESG

		Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Pair 1	PRE	13.2727	22	1.69542	0.36147
	POST	15.4545	22	1.43849	0.30669

ESG: English subtitle group

Comparing the mean scores of the accuracy pre-test and the post-test, it could be seen that for accuracy, the post-test mean scores exceeded their pre-test counterparts. That is, ESG learners achieved a mean score of 15.45 on the post-test while their pre-test mean score was 13.27. To see whether this difference was statistically significant, a paired sample t-test was run whose results are reported in the next table.

Table 2. Paired-samples t-test results comparing accuracy pre-test and post-test scores of the ESG

Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	t	Sig. (2-tailed)

Pre-test-post-test	−2.1818	1.62235	0.34589	−6.31	0.000

ESG: English subtitle group

The Sig. (two-tailed) value represents a p value lower than the significance level (0.000 < 0.05) for accuracy, indicating that the difference between the pre-test and post-test accuracy scores of the ESG learners had been statistically significant. Without a doubt the ESG group showed better performances on their post-tests, in comparison to their pre-test performances.

The second research question of the study investigated whether Persian subtitles led to the improvement of speaking accuracy of advanced Iranian EFL learners or not. To find an answer to this research question, the accuracy pre-test scores of the participants in the PSG were compared with their accuracy post-test scores to see whether the possible differences between the accuracy pre-test and accuracy post-test scores were statistically significant or not. This enabled the researchers to understand whether the improvements were achieved. Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics results for the accuracy pre-test and post-test scores of the PSG.

Table 3. The descriptive statistics results for the accuracy pre-test and post-test scores of the PSG

		Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Pair 1	Pre	13.3182	22	1.72892	0.36861
	Post	14.9091	22	1.30600	0.27844

PSG: Persian subtitle group

The number of participants, mean scores, standard deviations, etc. is demonstrated in Table 3. Comparing the mean scores of the accuracy pre-test and the post-test revealed that post-test mean scores for accuracy were greater than their pre-test scores. This means that PSG learners managed to obtain a mean score of 14.90 on the accuracy post-test while their accuracy pre-test mean score was 13.31. To see whether this difference was statistically significant, a paired sample t-test was run whose results are reported in the next table.

Table 4. Paired-samples t-test results comparing accuracy pre-test and post-test scores of the PSG

	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre–Post	−1.5909	1.46902	0.3132	−5.1	0.000

PSG: Persian subtitle group

The Sig. (two-tailed) value represents a p value lower than the significance level (0.000 < 0.05) for accuracy, demonstrating that the difference between the pre-test and post-test accuracy scores of the PSG learners had been significantly different. This means that Persian subtitling significantly improved accuracy of advanced Iranian EFL learners.

To answer the third research question posed at the outset, one-way between groups ANOVA was conducted 4 times: Once for the comparison of the accuracy pre-test scores of the three groups at the beginning of the study, and once again for the comparison of the accuracy pre-test scores of those groups at the outset of the study. Moreover, one-way ANOVA was used for comparing these groups' accuracy post-test scores. What follow is the results of the related analyses. The results of the comparison of the three groups on the accuracy pre-test are displayed in Table 5.

Tables 5. Results of the comparison of the three groups on the accuracy pre-test

	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error	Lower bound	Upper bound	Minimum	Maximum
CG	22	12.7727	1.47783	0.31507	12.1175	13.4280	10.00	15.00
ESG	22	13.2727	1.69542	0.36147	12.5210	14.0244	10.00	16.00
PSG	22	13.3182	1.72892	0.36861	12.5516	14.0847	10.00	17.00
PSG: Persian subtitle group, ESG: English subtitle group, CG: Control group								

The accuracy pre-test mean scores of the CG (M = 12.77), ESG (M = 13.27) and PSG (M = 13.31) were different from one another. To figure out, whether the differences among these mean scores were significant or not, one needs to check the p value under the Sig. column in the ANOVA table below.

Table 6. Results of one-way ANOVA for comparing CG, ESG and PSG mean scores on the accuracy pre-test

	Sum of squares	DF	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	4.030	2	2.015	0.751	0.476
Within groups	169.000	63	2.683		
Total	173.030	65			

As it is displayed in Table 6, there was not a statistically significant difference in the accuracy pre-test scores for CG, ESG and ESP because of the p value under the Sig. column was greater than the specified level of significance (i.e., 0.476 > 0.05). It is indicating that the three groups did not significantly differ before the commencement of the experiment. This made the three groups comparable in terms of accuracy.

The results obtained on the administration of the post-test are presented in this section. Table 7 shows the descriptive statistics for the comparison of the three groups on the accuracy post-test.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics results comparing CG, ESG and PSG mean scores on the accuracy post-test 95% confidence interval for mean

	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error	Lower bound	Upper bound	Minimum	Maximum
CG	22	13.6818	1.17053	0.24956	13.1628	14.2008	11.00	16.0
ESG	22	15.4545	1.43849	0.30669	14.8168	16.0923	13.00	18.00
PSG	22	14.9091	1.30600	0.27844	14.3300	15.4881	12.00	17.00
PSG: Persian subtitle group, ESG: English subtitle group, CG: Control group								

Based on Table 7, the mean scores of the NSG (M = 13.68), ESG (M = 15.45) and PSG (M = 14.90) were different from each other. Table 8 shows whether the differences among these mean scores were of statistical significance or not.

Table 8. Results of one-way ANOVA for comparing CG, ESG and PSG mean scores on the accuracy post-test

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	36.273	2	18.136	10.575	0.000
Within groups	108.045	63	1.715		
Total	144.318	65			

In Table 8, there was a statistically significant difference in post-test accuracy scores for CG, ESG and PSG since the p value under the Sig. column was less than the specified level of significance (i.e., 0.000 < 0.05). To find out where exactly the differences among the three groups lay, the Scheffe *post hoc* test was conducted.

Table 9. Results of the Scheffe *post hoc* test for comparing CG, ESG and PSG mean scores on the accuracy post-test

(I) participants	(J) participants	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. error	Sig.	95% Confidence interval	
					Lower bound	Upper bound
1.00 control group	2.00 English subtitle group	−1.77273[*]	0.39485	0.000	−2.7627	−0.7828
	3.00 Persian subtitle group	−1.22727[*]	0.39485	0.011	−2.2172	−0.2373
2.00 English subtitle group	1.00 control group	1.77273[*]	0.39485	0.000	0.7828	2.7627
	3.00 Persian subtitle group	0.54545	0.39485	0.391	−0.4445	1.5354
3.00 Persian subtitle group	1.00 control group	1.22727[*]	0.39485	0.011	0.2373	2.2172
	2.00 English subtitle group	−0.54545	0.39485	0.391	−1.5354	0.4445

In the top row, it could be seen that the CG was significantly different from the ESG and PSG. This means that the two experimental groups outperformed the CG on the accuracy post-test. However, there was not a significant difference between ESG and PSG in terms of their accuracy.

It is evident that the performance of experimental groups was significantly better than that of the CG on the accuracy post-test, and scores of English subtitling was (although not significantly) better than Persian subtitling.

5. Discussion

Limited number of studies has so far been conducted on the impacts of using English and Persian subtitles on oral accuracy of advanced Iranian EFL learners. To fill this gap, this study was an attempt to shed lights on this impact. What can be obtained from the findings of this study is that using different kinds of captions seemed to carry positive effects on developing oral accuracy. Although there were no significant differences between groups at the beginning of the research, the scores of experimental groups were higher than those of the CG in the post-test. The effectiveness of using subtitles may be supported based on these results.

As the results of the study indicate, both English and Persian subtitling had a positive impact on the accuracy of Iranian advanced English learners. This is a positive answer to the first and second research questions. The reason why ESG learners improved their accuracy might be that they were exposed to grammatical structures of English through the auditory channel and through the visual channel as well. In other words, they could both see and hear the correct grammatical structures of English. The results of this study are in line with what Ayand and Shafei (2016) did on both fluency and accuracy of Iranian intermediate learners. Other studies also indicated the positive effect of captions on other skills. Pasban, Forghani and Nouri study (2015) on the effect of the presence of caption on learning phrasal verbs was reported positive. There were studies on the effect of caption on vocabulary learning done by Shabani and Zanussi (2015), and Beauprez (2014), Ina (2014) and Raine (2012) and all have reported the positive effects of subtitling on L2 vocabulary acquisition of EFL/English as a Second Language (ESL) learner. The research was conducted on the effect of subtitling on listening comprehension by Mohajer and Pourgharib (2014) and Janfaza, Javidi and Soori (2014). Both of these studies demonstrated positive effect of caption on listening.

Furthermore, it was shown by Bava Harji, Kamal Alavi and Letchumanan (2014) that captioned

instructional videos play a positive role in content comprehension, vocabulary acquisition and language proficiency.

To answer the second research question, results of data analysis revealed that PSG learners' post-test scores were better than their pre-test scores and the differences were significant. Consequently, Persian subtitles could improve accuracy in speaking. What can be inferred is that Persian subtitles may provide an opportunity for students to comprehend better and know the exact meaning of vocabulary and phrases. The students compared Persian equivalences with English voices and could apply them accurately in conversation. Previous studies revealed the positive effects of subtitling on vocabulary learning (Rostam-Shirazi, Hesabi, & Simin, 2015), listening comprehension (Ghasembolandi & Naffisi, 2012; Latif, Mohammadi, & Youhanaee, 2012) and speaking (Rokni & Ataeei, 2014). Likewise, the results of the current study revealed positive impacts of subtitling on speaking accuracy.

To answer the third question, accuracy pre-test scores of ESG, PSG and CG were compared which showed that and it was achieved that there were no significant differences among the three groups at the beginning of the study. It was found that oral accuracy did not considerably change in the CG, but there were significant improvements in ESG and PSG on oral accuracy. The improvements of ESG on accuracy were a bit better, and it seems because both the main language of movie and subtitles were English and acquainted students with more vocabulary, supported them in the understanding of speech and encouraged them to speak.

Based on the findings of the current study, it can be concluded that regardless of its language, the use of captions can result in more accurate oral production on the part of advanced EFL learners.

6. Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the impacts of using both English and Persian subtitles on the accuracy of the Iranian EFL advanced learners. In general, in the light of this study, we can say that using different kinds of subtitles may have positive impacts on the oral accuracy of the learners at advanced levels and particularly as the findings indicated in this study both English and Persian subtitles had positive effects in this perspective.

According to the findings regarding the efficacy of subtitles, this study suggests using instructional movie programs with subtitles. Furthermore, the results can be useful for EFL/ESL teachers and curriculum designers.

While this study was conducted among advanced learners, as further research this study can be replicated among intermediate or beginning levels. Furthermore, while this study investigated the effects of subtitles in general and Persian and English, in particular, their effects can be investigated regarding others skills and sub-skills as further study.

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