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Advancing Listening Comprehension Through Movies

Jelisaveta Safranĵ^{a*}

^aUniversity of Novi Sad, Faculty of Technical Sciences, Trg Dositeja Obradovica 6, Novi Sad 21000, Serbia

Abstract

Teaching listening comprehension is one of the most vital and difficult tasks for any foreign language teacher because there are no rules as in grammar teaching. This study explored to what extent students enhance listening comprehension through movies with and without subtitles and what their attitudes are towards this teaching tool. A total of 38 students taught in English language private school in Novi Sad in 2013 were tested in their listening abilities through pretest and posttest. The five-point Likert scale was employed in rating. Best students' attitudes and the worst students' attitudes toward this technique have been selected for interview after they completed the questionnaire. Finally interviews were used to elicit student's positive and negative opinions towards the technique. All these were conducted over one academic year, and the study showed that the students needed more time to learn and more advice. Clearly, using movies proved to be an effective way for students to improve their listening ability. A majority of them enhanced listening skills and gained more than vocabulary, understood more foreign culture, felt relaxed and had fun while learning in class.

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1. Introduction

Numerous research have proved that listening comprehension can be enhanced with the addition of images (Bowen, 1982; Guichon & McLornan, 2008; Hanley, Herron & Cole, 1995; Lonergan, 1984; Markham, Peter & McCarthy, 2001; Stempleski, 2003; Tomalin, 1986). Thus, besides that movies are motivating media due to encompassing various topics and that they are presented with both audio and visual stimuli (Lonergan, 1984; Stempleski, 2003), the benefits of using them for language learning are their images and sound that help set the scene of events and its additional information, such as the paralinguistic features, provided as support to listening comprehension (Guichon & McLornan, 2008; Katchen, 1996a). With the advance of technology, options of how one

* Jelisaveta Safranĵ. Tel.: +381 21 485 2308; fax: +381 21 6350 770.

E-mail address: savetas@uns.ac.rs

can watch movies become numerous. In addition, movies can also fill in a cultural gap which is sometimes a prerequisite for learning vocabulary, i.e. novel blends in English particularly focusing on the interpretation of their meaning. Silaški and Đurović (2013) note that “the correct ‘unpacking’ of novel blends by nonnative speakers of English requires the right cultural background, and if the knowledge of that background is missing, that is if extralinguistic opacity occurs, novel blends remain either incomprehensible or misdecoded.” (p.102). The use of movies seems to be limited to an extent or underused since numerous studies have been centered on exploring whether the use of the L1 or the L2 subtitles assist the learners’ general listening comprehension (Baltova, 1999; Guichon & McLornan, 2008; Markham et al., 2001) rather than their actual gains of language. These studies concerning the use of subtitles applied rather quantitative method in carrying out the research. They examined the end product rather than the process. However, there have also been several studies using a more qualitative method to investigate the learners’ interaction with the L1 and/or L2 subtitled movies and whether the L1 or L2 subtitles can enhance the learners’ language ability (Katchen, 1996b). This research is focused on the bottom-up language acquisition and intended to examine the learners’ gains of language through watching movies with either the L1 or the L2 subtitles. In addition, since Ratkovic-Njegovan, Vukadinović and Nešić-Grubić (2011) note that “according to some recent research (UNICEF u Srbiji, 2005 – 2009), young people in Serbia lack interest in any social issue outside their peer circles, tend to reject any authority, show no awareness or enthusiasm towards social goals of general significance” (p.658) this study also aimed at investigating students interest into some cultural issues and their reflection on language learning.

2. Research methodology

The study made use of a quantitative data survey consisting of a 25-item questionnaire and a qualitative data survey via oral interviews. The research sample comprised 38 students learning English as a foreign language. Twenty two participants were females and sixteen were males. The average age of the participants was eighteen years. Nine students were studying at secondary schools, and twenty nine of them were university students. Firstly, they were interviewed in order to build up an image of their background towards watching film in advance. Secondly, a questionnaire was applied to explore students' opinions after completed learning listening skills through films. The questionnaire consisted of twenty-five questions and was separated into two main sections. These sections were as follows: 1) Students' opinions toward learning listening skills by using films; 2) Other suggestions and opinions. Section two was also divided into three parts to identify students' view. It consisted of benefits, limitations and suggestions on learning listening skills through movies. The five-point Likert scale was employed in rating weight as: Strongly agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, and Strongly disagree. Best students' attitudes and the worst students' attitudes toward this technique have been selected for another interview after they completed the questionnaire.

3. Results

A group of 38 students was interviewed in order to build up an image of their background towards watching film in advance. The results were the following:

- 31 students claim that they liked watching films whereas 7 of them do not like watching films so much.
- 29 of them prefer watching films in English every time and 9 answered like not always
- 22 students would like to watch films with subtitles whereas 16 of them prefer watching without subtitles
- All of the students admit that watching films improve listening skills
- 18 students said that they are able to understand the language at once, 20 students said that they can comprehend by the context of the situation or event being shown.
- 21 students said they sometimes get bored when do not understand the language, 17 students consider that even if they do not understand it is a process of improving listening ability.

Since movies show real life situations, watching them may be interesting for teaching listening comprehension and help motivate students to study in English language. The questionnaire was applied to explore students' opinions on developing listening skills through movies. Students’ opinions are shown in Table 1.

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