

Implications of News Segments and Movies for Enhancing Listening Comprehension of Language Learners

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Abstract

Armed with technological development, the present study aimed at gauging the effectiveness of exposure to news and movies as two types of audiovisual programs in improving language learners' listening comprehension at the intermediate level. To this end, a listening comprehension test was administered to 108 language learners and finally 60 language learners were selected as intermediate language learners and randomly divided into group one and group two. During the experiment, group one participants had exposure to audiovisual news stories to work on in and outside the classroom. On the contrary, the participants in group two had only exposure to a sample selected utterances extracted from different kinds of movies. At the end of the experiment, both groups took another sample listening test to find out to what extent the participants in each group could enhance their listening comprehension. The results obtained from the posttest were indicative of the fact that the participants who had exposure to news outperformed the participants who had exposure to movies. The findings of the present research seem to indicate that the language input embedded in the type of audiovisual programs which language learners are exposed to is more important than the amount of exposure.

Key words: Audiovisual news, Movies, listening comprehension, Intermediate level

Introduction

In today's audiovisually-driven world, technology has become the track upon which the train of education is heading toward its destination quickly. The growth of its application and its rapid development in transforming the process of learning is unbelievable (Mayya, 2007). Computer assisted language learning (CALL), computer and audiovisual equipped classes, the internet, e-mail, chat, and mobile assisted language learning (MALL) are just a few examples of the application of technology in language teaching/learning. As a result, language learners can have access to various types of authentic language input through various technologies such as the computers, TV, and CDs/DVDs for language learning.

In view of the above, various audiovisual programs such as news and movies have the potential to be utilized for language learning. The pedagogical values of news stories and movies as two sources of authentic language input to be used for language learning improvement have been emphasized by many studies. In this regard, there are a number of particular characteristics observed in developing any TV and radio news which make it different from other genres.

In this regard, one of the characteristics of TV news which makes it pedagogically worthy to be used in English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as second language (ESL) classrooms is vocabulary recycling (Blatchford, 1973; Brinton & Gaskill, 1978). The recycling feature of vocabulary in TV and radio news genre is also considered as redundancy of input which is generally understood by the students to help their second language comprehension (Chaudron, 1983; Chiang & Dunkel, 1992).

In the same line of argumentation, news writers and very experienced news reporters or newscasters are aware of the role of the news genre in the public attitude. As a result, they make their attempts to present the news stories, discussions, and commentaries as precisely

and directly as possible to draw individuals' attention. To reach the goal, news agendas also use specific vocabulary items and structure in order to make the news more understandable with a large group of the public. As the news consistently includes the same words and utterances, a good pedagogical benefit implicitly exists in TV and radio news programs (Blatchford, 1973).

Another essential characteristic of TV news genre is the fluency of speech which is the use of appropriate pausing, rhythm, intonation, stress, rate of speaking, and the use of interjections and interruptions (Bell, 2003). Chambers (1997) considered fluency as a component of oral proficiency which is acquired and emerges naturally. Consequently, fluency of speech is a dominant linguistic feature which can be observed in utterances designed and developed to be read by newscasters.

Moreover, one more important feature of TV and radio news is the special discourse which is used throughout the issue. In this regard, essential factors such as the nature of the news, the cognitive, affective and social status of both the news items and the audience, the structure of the news, etc. should be of focus. Therefore, while listening to a piece of news, comprehending is not merely associating meanings to words, sentences or discourses, but constructing mental models in episodic memory, including our own opinions and emotions associated with an event we hear or read about (Van Dijk, 1991).

Movies have also long been regarded as an important resource for foreign language instructors because it is an authentic source of material (Kaiser, 2011). The spoken language of movies often includes various types of speeches such as the speech of various educational levels, the speech of children and nonnative speakers, slang and jargon, rural and urban speech, and a range of regional dialects that language learners will encounter in the target language country (Kaiser, 2011).

Movies provide language learners with multi-sensory input that is close to what they will likely find and encounter in real world communication (Arcario, 1993). In the same line, Istanto (2009) highlighted the pedagogical value of movies as an effective platform for the language learners to immerse themselves in the target language culture. Generally, movies have the potential to provide the language learners exposures to the real language uttered in authentic settings.

In view of the above, one of the most important ways of improving language learners' listening comprehension in intermediate level may be through having greater exposure to news or movies as sources of authentic language input.

Literature Review

Exposure to various programs, for example, news and movies and the pedagogical value of such materials in enhancing different language skills have been the focus of many studies. In this regard, some of the researches in relation to the integration of news and movies into language learning classes are considered.

In a research conducted by Brinton and Gaskill (1978), the effect of listening to TV and radio news on improving EFL students' listening comprehension was studied. Brinton and Gaskill (1978) argued that using TV and radio news utterances as teaching material has proved effective on improving listening comprehension of EFL learners having difficulty in dealing with comprehending news utterances. A similar study which focused on using TV news to improve listening proficiency was also conducted by Poon (1992). In addition to the above mentioned studies, Baker (1996) also focused on the pedagogical value of TV news in EFL classes and listening comprehension. According to Baker (1996), TV and radio news can help EFL students improve their listening comprehension.

The use of fast speech such as those of TV and radio news in EFL/ESL classrooms has also been studied by some other scholars. In this regard, Cauldwell (1996) conducted a

study aiming at discovering the relationship between direct encounters with fast speech such as TV and radio news and teaching listening to EFL students. Accordingly, students may have some problems coping with fast speech at first. However, EFL students can diminish these problems and improve their listening through a great amount of exposure to fast speech. Another short study conducted by Mackenzie (1997) also highlighted the possibility of using TV and radio news reports at all levels of EFL learning. The study rejected the assumption that because the reporters speak too fast, the content is too complex, and the vocabulary is too difficult, TV and radio news cannot be used at lower levels of EFL situations.

Regarding proficiency and comprehension of television and radio news in a foreign language, a research by Berber (1997) highlighted the point that through enough exposure to these materials, students can easily cope with the comprehension of such materials. Cabaj and Nicolic (2000) also noted that a great amount of exposure to TV and radio news could help students cope with TV and radio news broadcasts easier. Moreover, through exposure to TV news and radio programs students acquire the knowledge, structures, strategies, and vocabularies they can use in everyday situations.

In the same line, a study was conducted by Bell (2003) focusing on the pedagogical value and informative aspects of TV and radio news broadcasts in EFL settings. He considered background knowledge or content schemata, formal schemata, and linguistic difficulty as three broad categories for selecting any kinds of TV and radio news stories for the EFL classrooms. However, Wetzel et al. (1994), in their study, found that TV news is not always helpful in comprehension.

More recently, Bahrani and Tam (2012) considered the effectiveness of exposure to news, movies, and cartoons in enhancing the low level language learners' language proficiency. The study was conducted with 60 low level participants majoring in TESL who were divided into 3 separate classes (20 participants in each class). Each class was separately exposed news, movies, or cartoons. The results of the study showed that the low level language learners who were instructed using news materials could not gain significant language proficiency improvement. Bahrani and Tam (2012) argued that the language input of news materials might have been included a lot of incomprehensible language input which the low level participants could not comprehend and internalize to be contributed to their language proficiency development.

In short, the majority of the aforementioned descriptive and experimental works have been conducted on the pedagogical value and the effect of exposure to TV and radio news genre on promoting different language skills especially speaking proficiency (Poon, 1992; Baker, 1996; Berber, 1997; Beach & Somerholter, 1997, to name only a few), but none of them has specifically focused on the relationship between exposure to news genre and EFL learners' listening comprehension. This was one of the initial reasons to carry out the present study.

With regards to movies as another type of audiovisual program, Chapple and Curtis (2000) favored movies as a source of authentic language materials to be integrated in content-based instruction classes because they have many cross-cultural values, provide an excellent basis for the development of critical thinking skill, provide a rich source of content for language learners, and offer linguistic diversities. Moreover, the visual input of movies such as the interesting content, extended context, and rich visual imagery make movies motivating authentic material for language learning. The contextual clues also boost language learners' comprehension of the language used in the movies (Chapple & Curtis, 2000).

The review of the qualitative studies regarding the integration of movies as a source of authentic language input for language learning is limited. For example, a study was conducted by Yuksel (2009) considering the effects of viewing captioned movie clip on EFL learners' vocabulary development. The study was conducted with 120 students in a

preparatory class. The participants were randomly divided into two groups. Before the treatment, the participants in both groups took a sample 20-item vocabulary knowledge scale pretest. During the study, group one participants were exposed to some movie clips with captions while the second group participants were exposed to the same movie clips without captions. One month after the treatment, both group participants were given another vocabulary knowledge scale test with 20 words as a posttest. The results obtained from the pretests and posttests of both groups revealed that both groups demonstrated significant gains. In fact, watching the movie clips reinforced the expansion of the vocabulary knowledge of the language learners regardless of the presence or the absence of captions (Yuksel, 2009). According to Yuksel (2009), the development in the vocabulary knowledge stems from the importance of encountering the words in the real context. In fact, incidental vocabulary learning can be achieved by resorting to contextual cues. This calls for an essential pedagogical implication for teachers about using movies as authentic source of contextual communication materials to support learners' vocabulary learning instead of explaining the words in an isolated manner (Yuksel, 2009).

Huang and Eskey's (2000) considered the effectiveness of exposure to closed captioned TV (CCTV) on intermediate language learners' listening comprehension. The findings of the study showed that captions improved listening comprehension skill. Similarly, Markham (1999) carried out a research on the effects of captioned videotapes on second language listening word recognition skills. Markham reported that the presence of captions significantly helps language learners develop their listening word recognition skill.

However, a more recently comprehensive research has been conducted by Hayati and Mohmedi (2011) on the effect of exposure to movies with and without subtitles on listening comprehension improvement. The study was carried out with 90 intermediate language learners who were randomly divided into three groups of 30 participants at an Islamic Azad University in Iran. During the study which lasted for 6 weeks, group one was exposed to some segments of various movies with English subtitle, group two was exposed to the same segments of the same movies without subtitle, and group three was exposed to the same segments of the same movies with Persian subtitle. At the end of the study, a multiple-choice comprehension test was administered to all the three groups to evaluate their listening comprehension development and provide grounds for comparison. The results of the study were indicative of the fact that the English subtitles group performed significantly much better than the Persian subtitles group and the no subtitle group on the listening comprehension test. More particularly, the results proved that exposure to movies with English subtitles will help EFL intermediate students to develop their listening comprehension significantly.

In addition to the above-mentioned quantitative studies, a few researchers (Ryan, 1998; Heffernan, 2005) have also anecdotally considered movies to be utilized as authentic motivating materials which have the potential to enhance language learning by decreasing the low affective filter.

In a nutshell, the review of the related literature on the use of news and movies as sources of authentic language input is mostly limited to either some qualitative studies which have considered news or movies to be pedagogically valuable authentic motivating material for language learning or a few quantitative studies which have focused on the effects of exposure to news or movies on enhancing listening skill. As a result, the present research aimed at providing empirical evidence of the effectiveness of exposure to news and movies on enhancing the intermediate language learners' listening comprehension.

Research Questions

More particularly, this study was set out to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent does greater exposure to audiovisual news improve the intermediate level language learners' listening comprehension?
2. To what extent does greater exposure to various movies improve the intermediate level language learners' listening comprehension?

Methodology

Participants

Initially 108 language learners including both males and females majoring in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) from Iran volunteered for the research. Out of the initial population, 60 participants were selected based on a pretest to serve as the subjects of the research.

Instruments and Materials

The first instrument was a sample listening comprehension test from IELTS, which was used as a pretest. The second instrument, which was used as a posttest, was another sample listening comprehension test from IELTS. Efforts were made to ensure that the posttest was not focused on input from any one type of genre, for example, news or movies.

Regarding the materials that were used, it should be mentioned that 2 kinds of materials from the same audiovisual technology (TV) were used. The first one was a collection of 74 hours authentic news programs including both video and audio extracted and prepared from Press TV, BBC, and CBS, which was given to group one to work on in and outside the classroom. The second material was a collection of 74 hours movies such as Matrix and Final Destination for group two to work on in and outside the classroom.

Procedure

This research was conducted based on pretest and posttest design. The first step to take, before the participants were selected, was to verify the reliabilities of the sample IELTS listening comprehension pretest and posttest. To do so, parallel tests method was utilized to verify the reliability of the two sample parallel tests. According to Bachman (1990), in order to calculate the reliability of two tests by parallel tests method, the correlation between the two tests should be calculated. Then, the correlation is considered as the reliability coefficient. Accordingly, both tests were administered to two trial groups of language learners including 10 participants. From the results obtained from the two tests, the correlation between the two parallel tests was calculated as 0.862 using the Cronbach's Alpha formula. This was indicative of the fact that the two tests were also verified in terms of reliability.

Once the reliabilities of the above-mentioned tests were verified, one of the tests was given to 108 ESL students including both males and females. When the scores of the tests were obtained, 60 participants who scored one standard deviation above and below the mean (19 to 22) were selected as homogeneous intermediate language learners. Then, the 60 homogeneous participants were divided into two groups as group one ($N = 30$) and group two ($N = 30$) based on judgment sampling.

Throughout the experiment, which lasted for 12 weeks and 4 hours a week, group one and group two participants sat in two separate conversation classes. Both classes were run by one of the researcher. Group one participants were instructed with the news media exposure (from the above mentioned 74 hours news) as one kind of genre specific language listening material to work on in and outside the classroom with researcher monitoring. Group two was instructed with exposure to movies (from the above mentioned 74 hours movies) to work on in and outside the classroom with researcher monitoring.

During the experiment and for each interval between every two sessions, the participants in group one were asked to watch and listen to at least 4 hours of the already selected news from the collection from audiovisual technology outside the classroom and write down the summary of whatever was heard which was viewed and discussed later inside the classroom.

Moreover, group two participants were also asked to do the same with movies outside the classroom. In other words, they were also asked to watch and listen to at least 4 hours of the already selected movies from the collection outside the classroom and write down the summary of whatever was heard which was viewed and discussed later inside the classroom. This was only done to make sure that group one participants had at least the same minimum amount of exposure to news from the audiovisual technology and group two participants had at least the same minimum amount of exposure to movies from the audiovisual technology outside the classroom.

After 12 weeks of exposure of group one to news from audiovisual technology and group two to movies, all the participants took the same sample listening comprehension test from IELTS as a posttest to check if there was any change in their listening comprehension.

Results and Discussion

After the end of the experiment, the research questions were answered according to the data obtained from the administration of the pretests and posttests to both groups. In relation to the first question, the results obtained from the pretest and posttest related to the participants who had exposure to news during the period of the study showed a great difference in the means of the pretest and the posttest. However, in order to find out to what extent this change in the means was significant, a statistical analysis of a paired sample *t* test was employed.

According to the results of the paired sample *t* test, the difference was significant ($p < 0.05$) which was indicative of the fact that greater exposure to news had a significant effect on improving the listening comprehension of the intermediate level language learners.

Considering the second question which was about the effect of exposure to movies on intermediate level language learners' listening comprehension, the results of the pretest and posttest related to the participants who were exposed to movies during the period of the study showed a minor difference in the means of the pretest and the posttest. However, in order to find out to what extent this small change in the means was significant, a statistical analysis of a paired sample *t* test was also employed. According to the results of the paired sample *t* test, the difference was not significant ($p > 0.05$), which was indicative of the fact that greater exposure to movies did not have a significant effect on improving the listening comprehension of intermediate level language learners.

Following is the statistical analysis related to the data obtained from the administration of both tests to the both groups:

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics Related to Group One Pretest and Posttest Results

Tests	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> test
Group one pretest	30	16	0.54	-3.753
Group one posttest	30	23	0.46	0.022 < 0.05

T observed = -3.753 T critical = 1.671 T observed bigger than t critical

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics Related to Group Two Pretest and Posttest Results

Tests	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD	<i>t</i> test
Group two pretest	30	16	0.58	-0.295
Group two posttest	30	18	0.47	0.097 > 0.05

T observed = -0.295 T critical = 1.671 T observed smaller than t critical

The results of the present research are indicative of the fact that greater exposure to news genre boosts listening comprehension at the intermediate level more than that of the movies. Accordingly, the findings of the present study are in line with the studies conducted by Brinton and Gaskill (1978), Cauldwell (1996), and Mackenzie (1997) regarding the effectiveness of exposure to news on improving different language skills. Moreover, the findings of the present research shed more light to the claims put forth by Mackenzie (1997) regarding the pedagogical value of news stories and the possibility of using news stories at all levels of language learning.

One of the plausible reasons for the participants' language proficiency improvement might be related to the language input embedded in various types of news which they watched. It can be hypothesized that language input embedded in various news which the participants in the first group watched might have included those aspects of the language which they had not acquired yet. Another hypothesis is that the participants not only had exposure to a rich source of language input but also could comprehend and internalize the language input.

The observations of the researcher from the participants in both groups during the research period was also indicative of the fact that one of the reasons behind the better performance of the first group in the posttest may be because of their high interest in the content of the materials which they had exposure to.

During the study, the first group participants selected the topics which they had schemata to help them comprehend the information better. Moreover, it was observed that the first group participants comprehended the news items quickly and attended the discussions with great interest. According to the observation of the researcher, the participants in the first group were more interested and more actively involved in the discussions over the news items during the class activities. This led to low affective filter which is understood to enhance language learning.

The first group's significant improvement in listening comprehension may also be associated to the fact that audiovisual news genre provides the listeners/viewers with a specific language input made around one of the most authentic types of language discourse by focusing on currently broadcast local and global events with which most individuals make real sense of connection. Although the vocabulary items used in developing audiovisual news items are almost highly specialized and the assumption is that this highly specialized vocabulary items may hinder comprehension, the recycling feature of vocabulary items in news stories can help comprehension over time. The research participants in group one showed their willingness in creative use of different vocabulary, sentences, utterances, and structures extracted from news in talking about the topics during the posttest. Through this, they could present the amount of their ability in the kind of words they needed to express their ideas with high fluency of speech. Their automatic production of speech and appropriate use and rate of pauses at specific junctures with correct use of super segmental features (rhythm, intonation, and stress) similar to that of the news was also significant. This reflected how exposure to news items was impressive on the participants speaking fluency because

fluency of speech is a dominant linguistic feature of news stories presented by the news casters.

In relation to the second group participants, who had exposure to various movies as a type audiovisual program, however, it can be noted that the participants in this group did not gain a significant improvement in their listening comprehension possibly due to insufficient amount of language input. Although Chapple and Curtis (2000) highlighted the point that movies provide excellent basis for the development of critical thinking skill, provide a rich source of content for language learners, and offer linguistic diversities which along with the motivating feature facilitate language learners' confidence build up in dealing with oral communication, the present research showed that exposure to news can facilitate listening comprehension development more than exposure to movies.

One of the plausible reasons might be related to the language input embedded in the type of movies which the participants in the second group watched. The language input of the selected movies might not have included those aspects of the language which the participants had not acquired yet because they had problems comprehending the language input. However, according to the observations of the researcher, the participants in the second group showed less effort comprehending the language input. They mostly gained help from extralinguistic input for grasping the main idea. Unlike the first group participants who actively participated in the class discussions, the participants in the second group showed less interest and effort in participating in the discussions.

Lesser interest in participating in the discussions which could lead to less comprehension and internalization of the language input might also be related to the story lines of the movies. Based on the findings of the present research, and while highlighting the importance of investment in the utilization of various audiovisual programs particularly news and movies in language teaching, teachers are encouraged to consider the language learners' interest in selecting the types of audiovisual programs.

Based on the findings of the present research, although audiovisual programs generally are a great source of authentic language input for teaching/learning purposes, more caution should be given to the selection of the type of audiovisual program.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to fill the gap in the experimental work on the effectiveness of exposure to news and movies on listening comprehension at the intermediate level in formal language learning settings. Accordingly, the results of the study revealed that the integration of news stories in intermediate language level classes brought about a significant development in listening comprehension. Language teachers can thus incorporate various news stories into their conversational classes to boost listening abilities of their learners.

The findings of the present research indicate that the language input embedded in the type of audiovisual programs which language learners watch is very important. According to the findings of the present research, audiovisual programs can aid *listening* comprehension development because of the language input available.

In a nutshell, the findings of the present research indicated that various audiovisual technologies can be incorporated in language learning particularly in formal settings in countries where the chances of having exposure to social interaction in real contexts are limited or do not exist at all. Various types of audiovisual programs such as news is a rich authentic source of language input which has the potential to provide the language learners with opportunities to have exposure to those aspects of the language which they have not acquired yet.

With regards to the limitations of the present research, it should be mentioned that some important issues should be considered. First, the participants of the present research

were intermediate language learners. Different results might be obtained if the study is conducted with low or advanced level participants. Second, during the study both groups participants had the chance to have exposure to other types of audiovisual programs outside the classroom settings. The effect of this variable which might have affected the results should not be ruled out. Finally, the contents of the news or the movies were not controlled in terms of difficulty level of language input to be the same. Indeed, if the content of the material particularly the movies was carefully selected to include those aspects of the language which the intermediate participants had not acquired yet, different results might have been obtained.

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