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Whether, When, and How to Utilize the Printed Script of a Film: A Good Substitute for L2 Subtitles?

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listening L2 subtitles printed script soundtrack picture

Despite the growing popularity of L2 captioned films in listening classes, they seem to have certain limitations as a tool for listening proficiency development. This paper examines some alternatives in presenting the printed script of a film in search of a promising substitute for L2 subtitles.

Review

- 1) Adding picture to audio increases learners' comprehension.
- 2) It is doubtful whether films are superior to audio tapes.
- 3) Comprehending the situation through the visual channel does not guarantee paying attention to the words transmitted through the audio channel.
- 4) L2 subtitles increase learners' comprehension.
- 5) It is indecisive whether L2 subtitles contribute to listening proficiency development.
- 6) Subtitles seem to take away learners' attention to be paid to the soundtrack.
- 7) It is necessary to devise effective ways of presenting subtitles/script.

Research Questions

- (1) How does watching a subtitled scene compare with listening to the soundtrack while following the script of the same scene? Can the script be a substitute for L2 captions?
- (2) Is reading the script of each sentence prior to listening to the soundtrack more effective than simultaneously reading the caption and listening to the soundtrack?
- (3) When listening to the soundtrack after reading the script, should the script be followed with the eyes or be out of sight?

Subjects

Forty first year students (age 15-16) learning English at the Department of

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Communication Information Science, Fukushima National College of Technology, divided into two groups matched for sex and English proficiency served as the subjects.

Materials

Film: Three scenes from Punky Finds a Home (CC-Study, Gakken).

Pre/post/retention tests: Partial dictation items taken from the scenes above.

Questionnaire: Verbal responses to the contrasting methods of presentaion.

Comparisons

Comparison 1 Group A: Watch the scene with captions twice.

Group B: Listen to the soundtrack of the scene twice, following the printed script at the same time.

Comparison 2 Group A: Read one sentence on paper silently for 5 seconds, and then listen to the soundtrack for the sentence. Repeat the procedure for all the sentences in the scene.

Group B: Watch the scene with captions twice.

Comparison 3 Group A: Read one sentence on paper silently for 5 seconds, and then listen to the corresponding part of the soundtrack while still looking at the print. Repeat this twice for every sentence.

Group B: Read one sentence on paper silently for 5 seconds, and then listen to the corresponding part of the soundtrack with the eyes closed. Repeat this twice for every sentence.

Results

	Comparison 1	Comparison 2	Comparison 3
Posttest Scores	A = B	A > B	A = B
Verbal Responses	A < B	A > B	A < B

Implications

- (1) A film, its script, and the soundtrack could serve as more than an excellent substitute for a film with closed captions.
- (2) First presenting the script and then the sound is more effective than simultaneous presentation.
- (3) When listening to the sound track, the script should be followed for better assimilation, and should be out of sight for better concentration.

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Table 0. The Pairs of Treatment

	Group A		Group B	
Comparison 1	picture	picture	ϕ	ϕ
	audio	→ audio	audio	→ audio
	caption	caption	script	script
Comparison 2	ϕ	ϕ	picture	picture
	ϕ	→ audio	audio	→ audio
	script	ϕ	caption	caption
Comparison 3	ϕ	ϕ	ϕ	ϕ
	ϕ	→ audio	ϕ	→ audio
	script	script	script	ϕ

Note: Media clustered vertically indicate simultaneous presentation.

 ϕ indicates the lack of the medium.

Table 1a. Means, SDs, and Results of T-tests for Comparison 1

		Pre	Post	Gain	t-value	Ret	R-gain
Group A	Mean	13.2	33.7	20.6	6.09**	32.6	19.4
	SD	(6.9)	(14.7)	(14.7)		(12.8)	(10.8)
Group B	Mean	14.1	36.7	22.6	11.43**	30.6	16.5
	SD	(6.7)	(11.4)	(8.6)		(13.5)	(12.0)
t-value		0.42	0.71	0.53		0.49	0.82

**p<.01

Table 1b. Responses to Survey Question 1

	Reasoning	# of subjects
< For caption+audio+picture / Against script+audio >		
	The picture makes it easier to grasp the situation.	8
	The picture shows the movements of articulatory organs.	3
	Having fun facilitates progress.	1
< For script+audio / Against caption+audio+picture >		
	The picture makes it difficult to pay due attention to the audio.	16
	The picture makes it possible to guess without listening.	2
	The captions are harder to read than scripts.	2
	The captions are not exactly synchronized with the sound.	1
	The picture is superfluous for listening practice.	1

Table 2a. Means, SDs, and Results of T-tests for Comparison 2

		Pre	Post	Gain	t-value	Ret	R-gain
Group A	Mean	17.2	34.6	17.4	7.76**	27.9	10.7
	SD	(7.4)	(13.3)	(10.0)		(11.5)	(7.8)
Group B	Mean	17.8	27.9	10.1	4.33**	31.2	13.4
	SD	(5.3)	(9.5)	(9.9)		(7.8)	(8.0)
t-value		0.29	1.85	2.32*		1.06	1.07

**p<.01 *p<.05

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Table 2b. Responses to Survey Question 2

Reasoning	# of subjects
Looking at the script for some time enables/encourages me to memorize the line.	18
The captions appear and disappear too quickly for the eyes or brains to catch up.	10
Knowing in advance what will come helps me perceive words.	8
Listening to the audio with the image of the script enables me to clearly perceive how certain words/phrases are pronounced.	3
When watching a subtitled video, all I can do is barely follow the captions. I can hardly pay attention to the audio.	3
One thing at one time allows me to concentrate more.	3
Following the captions lets me feel as if I were catching the sounds when actually I am not.	1

Table 3a. Means, SDs, and Results of T-tests for Comparison 3

		Pre	Post	Gain	t-value	Ret	R-gain
Group A	Mean	34.4	60.2	25.7	8.75**	51.8	17.4
	SD	(7.3)	(13.3)	(13.1)		(12.5)	(13.7)
Group B	Mean	34.1	60.1	26.0	10.19**	53.7	19.7
	SD	(9.6)	(14.5)	(11.1)		(12.8)	(11.9)
t-value		0.14	0.02	0.07		0.48	0.57

**p<.01

Table 3b. Responses to Survey Question 3

Reasoning	# of subjects
< For script+sound / Against sound-only >	
The script allows me to better assimilate visual and acoustic images of the sentence.	8
The script is necessary when the sentence is too long to retain in the short-term memory.	4
The script helps with comprehension even when the sound is not clear.	2
The script enables me to follow the audio.	2
The script makes me feel secure.	2
< For sound-only / Against script+sound >	
The script prevents me from concentrating on the sound.	14
The script makes me feel that I am catching the sound when I am not.	3
Looking at the script makes me pay too much attention to individual words.	1