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## THE ROLE OF SUBTITLES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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### Abstract

Today, engaging in real language environments and exposing to the target culture often are seen as more appropriate to learn a second language. In this sense, movies in foreign language teaching are important audio-visual tools in terms of reflecting the language, culture, customs and traditions, clothes and lifestyle of a community. In language teaching, it is very important to know how words and expressions are used in different contexts and to pronounce them correctly. Many language learners benefit from these audio-visual tools because of the contributions of movies to foreign language learning. Especially in the development of listening comprehension skills, learners prefer to watch movies in foreign language. There are three options: watching the movie in its original language without subtitles, watching the movie in its original language with subtitles in source language and watching the movie in its original language through subtitle translation in target language.

In this study, 68 English Language Teaching prospective teachers have been investigated for their attitudes towards developing their English language skills outside of the educational setting, whether they use English movies to improve their language skills, which genre they choose and their subtitle preferences. Therefore, the factors that should be considered in the selection of movies to be used in foreign language learning, the subtitle as a method of movie translation, the place and importance of subtitles in language learning, the positive and negative aspects of movie translation with the subtitle method have been studied and some suggestions have been made. As a research tool, appropriate sampling questionnaire has been distributed to the students and the collected data has been analyzed by SPSS program. As a result of the research, students believe that watching movies has improved their listening comprehension skills and has a positive contribution to the development of their speaking skills. Thus, they prefer English subtitles more.

*Keywords:* subtitle, subtitle translation, foreign language learning

### 1. Introduction

Learning a language means communicating by acquiring the communicative competency of that language. This requires learning the communicative skills of the language, as well as productive skills such as speaking and writing and perceptive skills such as listening and reading, and also learning to communicate verbally and in writing with the native speakers of target language along with the culture, lifestyle, and behaviour of the country where the language is spoken (Edmonson & House, 1993, p. 82, as cited in Aktaş, 2005, p. 93). The most effective way to achieve this is to learn the language in the target country. However,

since such an opportunity is not always possible, benefiting from the movies in this sense is an appropriate approach. Movies are the most effective audiovisual tools to learn the culture of the target language, because you can both see and hear, moreover, witness the patterns and contexts of expressions and words. Language becomes complete only when it is learned together with the culture in which it is born.

There are many studies regarding the significance of movies in foreign language learning. It has been proved that it has a booster feature in teaching level in a short time. (Demirezen, 1990, p. 294). Although they are fictional, movies reflect real life. Learning a foreign language in a system that is close to real environments attracts attention of the learners and they can see the shapes of the theoretical knowledge about the language in the movies. Movies are important tools especially in the acquisition of listening comprehension and speaking competences because through movies one can learn about how to form dialogues in different environments, gestures and mimics supporting verbal expressions, formal and informal expressions, stress and intonation. Since movies are both aural and visual tools, watching a movie in a foreign language to learn a language facilitates both channels. For this reason, learning with two channels increases learning speed and its permanence. Chan and Herrero (2010, p.11) explain the advantages of using movies in foreign language teaching as follows;

- 1 The movies make understanding activities easier because they are perceived as real.
- 2 Movies create an atmosphere of curiosity with the introduction of mutual ideas and interpretations.
- 3 Movies help to explore nonverbal linguistic elements.
- 4 They develop verbal and aural skills.
- 5 Movies help learners to speak more naturally and fluently, create more meaningful texts and improve their word power.
- 6 There are many ways to use movies in language classes depending on their genres.

It is apparent that they are very useful when considering all these advantages of movies in foreign language learning and in terms of developing listening-comprehension and speaking skills it is also obvious that movies should be watched in their original language. In such situations using subtitles will further motivate learners in the first stages of language learning. When the movie is watched in its original language, as the language in movies reflects their real use in the natural environment, learners can be aware of the use of linguistic features such as emphasis and intonation. It becomes easier and faster to learn the language as it integrates what is seen with what is heard. On the other hand, watching a movie in a foreign language is more difficult and tiresome because it can be difficult to understand. This may negatively motivate language learners. However, subtitles can be used to prevent such an inconvenience.

### **1.1. Place of Subtitled Movies in Foreign Language Learning**

In terms of observing vocabulary learning, listening comprehension, differences in expressions, and especially pronunciation, subtitled movies are suggested to language learners. Studies held in a research institution in England show that presenting audio with the written text at the same time has positive effects on recording spoken words and increasing language memory (Okyayuz, 2016, p. 43). In terms of foreign language learning, the most important advantage of subtitle is that the movie can be watched in its original language and with the original audio. Therefore, audience/language learner, who has partial knowledge of the language, can benefit from the subtitle when s/he cannot understand the audio.

Subtitles used in movies can be classified under various types. For example, bimodal, standard and reversed subtitling (Zanon, 2006, p. 47). However, there are two different types of subtitles in general:

1. Interlingual subtitle: The original language of the movie is translated into another language. The audience/language learner watches and listens to the movie with the original/target language, but reads the subtitle translated into his/her own language.
2. Intralingual subtitle: Here, the original language and the subtitle of the movie are the same. Intralingual subtitle is more for people with impaired hearing. Therefore, with this kind of subtitle, all audio sounds like footsteps, which are a sign of someone is coming, knocking sound at the door, the sound of a car horn that is coming from outside are shown. There are also intralingual subtitles for foreign language learners apart from the aforementioned ones.

As a result of many research, it is seen that using subtitles in foreign language learning has positive results. These positive results also include subtitles' positive effects on productive skills like recalling the words entirely and keeping them in the correct context besides communicative performance in a specific oral and written communication (Rokni & Atae, 2014, p. 718).

In a research conducted, it has been decided that subtitles in the original language (English) have displayed positive effects on listening comprehension skills of students, who are learning English as a foreign language, with medium level English competency. The use of subtitled movie has been found helpful and entertaining by the participants (Felek Başaran, 2011). In another study, it has been identified that listening comprehension skills of the audience/language learners that watch a movie in English with intralingual subtitle have improved more than the others that watch it without any subtitle (Rokni & Atae, 2014).

In 2009, in an extensive research carried out on the use of subtitle in language education, it is revealed that intralingual and interlingual subtitles have positive contributions to the foreign language education. This paper has demonstrated that subtitles increase the motivation in language education and support a multilingual environment, and learners that want to improve their language skills prefer subtitle translations instead of dubbing translations (EACEA, 2009/01, as cited in Okyayuz, 2016, p. 43).

Many researchers agreed that intralingual subtitles have positive effects in foreign language learning. Studies held among English language learners have revealed that intralingual subtitles can be effective as a teaching tool (see Okyayuz, 2016, p. 43). In many research, it is stated that subtitles have positive influences on language education in general terms, however, inter-lingual subtitle, which is translated subtitle, has been recommended less than intra-lingual subtitle, which is the subtitle in the original language, by comparison. As an example, according to the study carried out by Holger Mitterer and James McQueen (2009), a learner who watches a movie in a foreign language to improve listening comprehension skills in that foreign language can ideally achieve this by watching the movie with an intra-lingual subtitle. Similarly, Caimi (2006) states that intra-lingual subtitles can be used for didactic purposes in language learning. In another paper, a movie in English with English subtitles was watched and it was seen that the subtitle helped students to learn new words and idioms, and to improve their listening skills (Özgen, 2008).

The main goal of interlingual subtitle is to use expressions, which make the movie understandable. The audience/learner comprehends the meaning of the scene by reading the subtitle. On the other hand, there are also features that subtitles should have technically (Günay-Köprülü, 2016). Because of these technical features like the number of lines and the

number of maximum characters, translation of the subtitles has to be restricted, therefore subtitles, in a way, have to give the summary or the gist of spoken expressions.

## 2. Methodology

In this study, the first and second year students of English Language Teaching department at Hacı Bektas Veli University in Nevşehir have been investigated for their attitudes towards developing their English language skills outside of the educational environment, whether they use English movies to improve their language skills, which genre they choose and their subtitle preferences. As a research tool, appropriate sampling questionnaire has been distributed to the students and the collected data has been analyzed by Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program version 18.0 to calculate means, frequencies and percentages.

The questionnaire has been constructed in order to have general information about participants, their opinions and attitudes towards watching movies, their preference of subtitles and the effects of movies and subtitles on language learning skills. The opinions of the participants on the effects of movies and subtitles on language learning skills have been graduated by Likert Scale: Strongly disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Neither agree nor disagree = 3, Agree = 4, Strongly agree = 5.

While identifying the study and the questionnaire, “A survey of students’ opinions on watching English soundtrack movies to enrich listening skill development” by Tanisara Pimsamarn has been used and adapted.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

The first and second year students of English Language Teaching department at Hacı Bektas Veli University in Nevşehir have been participated in the study. 34 first year students, 34 second year students and total 68 students have participated in the study. 86.8 % of the 68 students were (N=59) girls and 13.2% (N=9) of them were boys.

Only 2 of the 68 students participated in the questionnaire did not answer the question asking about the type of graduate high school. Over 66 students who have answered the question 78.8 % (N=52) of them were Anatolian High School graduates, and 21.2% (N=14) of them were Normal State High School graduates.

Only 2 of the 68 students participated in the questionnaire did not answer the question asking about their duration of language learning. Over 66 students who have answered the question 74.2 % (N=49) 11-15 years, 21.2% (N=14) 6-10 years, 3% (N=2) 1-5 years and only 1 student has more than 16 years of English language education period.

29.4% (N=20) of the students have mentioned that they watch a movie once a week and again 29.4 % (N=20) them said they watch a movie once a month. While 29.4% (N=20) of the students have been watching an original English movie, 27.9% (N=19) pointed that they watch original English movies less than a month. For more detailed information see Table 1.

Table 1. *Movie watching frequency (MWF) and English movie watching frequency (EMWF)*

	Opportunity to use Movies/ English Movies	Frequency		Percent		Valid Percent		Cumulative Percent	
		FİS	İFİS	FİS	İFİS	FİS	İFİS	FİS	İFİS
Valid	Everyday	3	2	4.4	2.9	4.4	2.9	4.4	2.9
	Three to five times a week	15	10	22.1	14.7	22.1	14.7	26.5	17.6
	Once a week	20	17	<b>29.4</b>	25.0	29.4	25.0	55.9	42.6
	Once a month	20	20	<b>29.4</b>	<b>29.4</b>	29.4	29.4	85.3	72.1

Less than once a month	10	19	14.7	<b>27.9</b>	14.7	27.9	100.0	100.0
Total	68	68	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0		

48 students answered the question about what kind of movies they watch. The percentage of their answers: 27.1 % (N=13) Comedy, 22.9 % (N=11) Action, 18.8% (N=9) Romantic, 10.4% (N=5) Thriller and the rest have preferred Other.

56 students answered the question about why they watch movies. 83.9 % (N=47) of them mentioned that they watch movies in order to improve language skills and 8.9 % (N=5) for fun.

A great number of students (%94.0) who have participated in the questionnaire prefer subtitles while watching movies (see Table 2). About the languages used in subtitles although there is not a big difference between languages the number of the students who prefer English subtitles (% 53.2) are more than the others (see Table 3).

Table 2. *Subtitle preference*

	Subtitle	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	63	92.6	<b>94.0</b>	94.0
	No	4	5.9	6.0	100.0
	Total	67	98.5	100.0	
Missing	99.00	1	1.5		
Total		68	100.0		

Table 3. *Language of the subtitle*

	Subtitle language	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Turkish	29	42.6	46.8	46.8
	English	33	48.5	<b>53.2</b>	100.0
	Total	62	91.2	100.0	
Missing	99.00	6	8.8		
Total		68	100.0		

50 of the 68 students have answered the question about why they prefer English subtitles while watching movies. 46% (N=23) of 50 students prefer English subtitles in order to understand the dialogues while watching movies. Again 46% (N=23) of the students prefer English subtitles to see the English equivalents of the words they hear (see Table 4).

Table 4. *Reason for English subtitle preference*

	English subtitle	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Infer the meaning from the written form	23	33.8	<b>46.0</b>	46.0
	To see the written forms of the words	23	33.8	<b>46.0</b>	92.0
	Others	4	5.9	8.0	100.0
	Total	50	73.5	100.0	
Missing	99.00	18	26.5		
Total		68	100.0		

53 students have answered the question about why they prefer Turkish subtitle while watching a movie. 50.9 % (N=27) of the 53 students mentioned that they prefer Turkish subtitle to see the Turkish equivalent of the words in the movie, 24.5% (N=13) of them to understand the movie, and 22.6% (N=12) of them to understand the dialogues in the movie (see Table 5).

Table 5. Reason for Turkish subtitle preference

Turkish subtitle		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Understand the movie	13	19.1	<b>24.5</b>	24.5
	Understand the dialogues	12	17.6	<b>22.6</b>	47.2
	To see the Turkish equivalence of the word	27	39.7	<b>50.9</b>	98.1
	Other	1	1.5	1.9	100.0
	Total	53	77.9	100.0	
Missing	99.00	15	22.1		
Total		68	100.0		

According to the results of the questionnaire, most of the students agree with 10 of the 11 questions. The only question that they do not agree and confused is the one about the Turkish subtitles of the foreign movies. The students are indecisive about the adequacy of the Turkish subtitles. They totally agree with the following opinions; Learn correct pronunciation through movies, By watching movies in original English language I learn new words, I can improve my listening skill by watching English language movies (see Table 6).

Table 6. Opinions on the effects of movies and subtitles on language learning skills.

	N	Level of Agreement				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. English subtitles help me understand conversation in the movies better	68	-	1 (% 1.5)	5 (% 7.4)	<b>43</b> (% <b>63.2</b> )	19 (% 27.9)
2. Learn correct pronunciation through movies	68	-	-	5 (% 7.4)	31 (% 45.6)	<b>32</b> (% <b>47.1</b> )
3. Movies help me understand unfamiliar accents and dialects better	68	-	-	7 (% 10.3)	<b>36</b> (% <b>52.9</b> )	25 (% 36.8)
4. By watching movies in the original English language I learn new words	68	-	1 (% 1.5)	3 (% 4.4)	30 (% 44.1)	<b>34</b> (% <b>50</b> )
5. By watching English movies with Turkish subtitles I learn new words	68	-	6 (% 8.8)	7 (% 10.3)	<b>29</b> (% <b>42.6</b> )	26 (% 38.2)
6. I find Turkish subtitle translations sufficient	66	3 (% 4.5)	15 (% 22.7)	<b>34</b> (% <b>51.5</b> )	9 (% 13.6)	5 (% 7.6)
7. Movies help me understand unfamiliar idioms and slangs better	68	-	3 (% 4.4)	10 (% 14.7)	<b>34</b> (% <b>50</b> )	21 (% 30.9)
8. Original English movies can improve me listening skill better than other English media normally used in class	67	-	-	10 (% 14.9)	<b>35</b> (% <b>52.2</b> )	22 (% 32.8)
9. Original English movies is good for teaching listening for students	67	-	-	4 (% 6)	<b>32</b> (% <b>47.8</b> )	31 (% 46.3)
10. Watching English movies can be beneficial for English use in everyday life	68	-	-	2 (% 2.9)	<b>37</b> (% <b>54.4</b> )	29 (% 42.6)
11. I can improve my listening skill by watching English language movies	68	-	1 (% 1.5)	-	30 (% 44.1)	<b>37</b> (% <b>54.4</b> )

The idea which the students mostly agree with is that they can improve their English listening skills by watching original English movies. Secondly, they think that they can learn new words while watching original English movies. Thirdly, they agree that original English movies are so helpful in teaching listening skills to the students. The idea that they least agree with is that they can learn new words while watching Turkish subtitled original English movies. In addition, they find Turkish subtitles insufficient (see Table 7).

Table 7. *The average of the opinions on the effects of movies and subtitles on language learning skills.*

	N	Mean	Min	Max	Std	Variance
1. English subtitles help me understand conversation in the movies better	68	4.17	2.00	5.00	.621	.386
2. Learn correct pronunciation through movies	68	4.39	3.00	5.00	.626	.392
3. Movies help me understand unfamiliar accents and dialects better	68	4.26	3.00	5.00	.637	.406
4. By watching movies in the original English language I learn new words	68	<b>4.42</b>	2.00	5.00	.653	.427
5. By watching English movies with Turkish subtitles I learn new words	68	4.10	2.00	5.00	.916	.840
6. I find Turkish subtitle translations sufficient	66	2.96	1.00	5.00	.927	.861
7. Movies help me understand unfamiliar idioms and slangs better	68	<b>4.07</b>	2.00	5.00	.797	.636
8. Original English movies can improve my listening skill better than other English media normally used in class	67	4.17	3.00	5.00	.672	.452
9. Original English movies is good for teaching listening for students	67	<b>4.40</b>	3.00	5.00	.604	.365
10. Watching English movies can be beneficial for English use in everyday life	68	4.39	3.00	5.00	.550	.303
11. I can improve my listening skill by watching English language movies	68	<b>4.51</b>	2.00	5.00	.585	.343

#### 4. Conclusion

Researchers agree that using movies has positive effects on foreign language teaching and learning. It is also emphasized that watching movies in the target language with subtitles motivates learners. Following these ideas, the students' attitudes and views on watching subtitle movies and whether they use movies for foreign language learning outside the classroom environment have been assessed. The evaluation was done according to the data obtained through the questionnaire which is one of quantitative research designs. The majority of the 68 students who participated in the survey graduated from Anatolian high schools. They have English education for 11-15 years. These students usually watch various movies once a week or once a month. The frequency of watching an original English movie is once a month. The vast majority of participants prefer to watch comedy and action movies. The majority watch movies for language development and they prefer subtitles. Although there is no big difference between the English-Turkish subtitles preference, English subtitles are preferred because they want to understand the dialogues and see spellings. Turkish subtitles are preferred in order to understand the Turkish meanings of the words they hear.

Students agree that movies help them learn accents and dialects, idioms, proverbs, and slang words in the target language and they also learn correct pronunciation. Opinions that students most agree with are that they can learn new words by movies and they can improve their listening skills. They think English movies are very helpful both in everyday English



use and in teaching English to students, especially to teach listening comprehension skills. The rate is a bit lower, considering that English movies are more helpful in improving listening and comprehension skills than other classroom tools. Regarding the use of subtitles in movies, compared to the view that they learn new words with Turkish subtitles, they agree more on the item that English subtitles are better for understanding dialogues in movies. According to results of the questionnaire, students are not sure about sufficiency of Turkish subtitles. This explains why the rate is lower for the item that Turkish subtitles are useful in new vocabulary learning.

As a result, students have the opinion that it is useful to watch English movies to improve their English language skills and it is useful to watch English movies with English subtitles.

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