

# The Impact of Playing English Movie Clips with Bilingual Subtitles on Chinese High School Students' Vocabulary Learning

Chang Xu

*School of Education, Leeds University, Leeds, LS2 9JT, United Kingdom*

*\*Corresponding author. Email: 29760474@qq.com*

## ABSTRACT

Vocabulary is important for Chinese students if they want to achieve good grades. Teachers should choose an appropriate way to teach vocabulary. Video-teaching is prevalent among teaching methods in recent years because students can not only learn lexical and syntax, but also understand western culture according to different English movies. It can help to stimulate students' interest to remember vocabulary based on subtitles. So, this paper uses questionnaire, experiment and interview to investigate the impact of playing English movie clips with bilingual subtitles on Chinese high school students' vocabulary learning. The results shows that students can acquire some vocabulary according to watch subtitled movies. Thus, the results help teachers can choose appropriate movie clips to improve students' vocabulary.

**Keywords:** *English movie clips, Vocabulary learning, English class, China*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is important for L2 learners to learn vocabulary in that if learners do not possess vocabulary accumulation, they cannot express their ideas meaningfully and communicate with others in L2 [1]. [2] support this view and further propose that learners may feel confused in expressing their thoughts if their vocabulary is limited. Thus, choosing an appropriate teaching method to teach vocabulary becomes more important for teachers in recent years. [3] points out that video is a prevalent method for language teaching and learning, which can help to increase understand of lexical and syntax learning. Besides, if learners watch subtitled movies can foster their skills of reading and learning, vocabulary accumulation, word comprehension and so on [4]. Subtitles perhaps can provide a new perspective for learning a new language [5]. It can be seen that if learners want to learning vocabulary through watching movies, subtitles is the vital part for them to pay attention. This paper chooses questionnaire, experiment and interview to investigate the impact of English movies clips with bilingual subtitles on vocabulary learning in Chinese English class, in order to help to select appropriate method to teach and learn vocabulary.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are many researchers [2, 4-7] done research about whether English movies can help to improve students' vocabulary skills. For example, [6] introduces the effects of bilingual subtitles on Iranian students' English film content understanding and vocabulary learning. And the results show that if English movies with subtitles, people can gain a better understanding of the content because they can know the written form of utterance. but as for vocabulary learning, subtitles may not play an important role due to the difficulties of some vocabularies, unless learners watch more than once to study vocabulary.

Similarly, [5] carry out research, which mainly discuss whether English movies with standard subtitles can help learners get a better understanding of movie content and vocabulary comprehension. Their findings also similar to [6], which show that when movies with subtitles, learners can understand movie content better than movies without subtitles. But they indicate that the relationship between vocabulary learning, and subtitles is weak. This means learners may not accumulate some vocabulary during the process of watching movies with subtitles. Besides, [4] also supports that it is useful to understand content by watching movies with subtitles, but vocabulary learning can not be achieved effectively.

However, research was carried out by [2], which affirms the importance of film subtitles to students' vocabulary learning and opposes [5] and [6] findings. [2] investigate learners' views of watching English movies to improve their vocabulary skill with the methods of questionnaire and interview. [2] demonstrate that most learners can learn vocabulary effectively by watching movies with subtitles and can master how to use new vocabularies, some of them can use them in daily conversation. Therefore, [2] prove it is useful for learners to learn new words from English movies, but [5] and [6] believe subtitles are not significant for learners to learn a new language if they just watch once.

In addition, a study that is carried out in China by [7] indicates the importance of movies' subtitles on vocabulary learning. According to experimental and interview, [7] concludes that when watching bilingual subtitles movies, participants not only hear the pronunciation of words, but also pay attention to the font of words in English subtitles and the meaning of words in Chinese subtitles. Compared with only English subtitle movies, watching bilingual subtitle movies is a deep language processing and is more conducive to enhancing memory. Besides, after interviewing several learners, [7] demonstrates that without subtitles, learners may not keep up with the progress of the film plot and lose interest in watching the film. When watching bilingual subtitles, the function of English subtitles is to help fill the gaps when encountering some words or phrases that they do not understand, which can help them know how to express or communicate in English. Similarly, [8] research that the impact of different subtitles on vocabulary learning, he observes three groups in different situations: interlingual, intralingual and no subtitles. The findings show that movies with interlingual captions can better help to improve viewers' vocabulary learning.

Therefore, for those researchers [4-6] who argue subtitles has no great impact on vocabulary learning is the conclusion on the premise that participants only watch the films or film clips once, and the conclusion may not be suitable in China. Besides, [7] also carries out research but he focus on college students' vocabulary acquisition ability rather than high school students and they all have passed CET-4 so their basic level is higher than that of high school students, which is also not suitable to support this essay's argument.

However, numerous previous studies in China are about how to use film as a teaching method instead of investigating subtitles' function. Although there are some studies in this field abroad [4-6], few studies on Chinese English learners. The culture and background of foreign countries are quite different from that of China, so it can not be guaranteed that the foreign research conclusions are applicable to Chinese language learners. In addition, most studies only focus on whether subtitles can improve students' vocabulary, but a few scholars investigate what

types of films will interest students more. So my interview part focuses on asking students what kind of movies they like, so as to stimulate their interest in watching movies, help them focus more on watching movies and improve their attention to subtitles. Therefore, this research aims to investigate whether English movie clips with bilingual subtitles can influence Chinese high school students' vocabulary learning and how to choose appropriate movies to play. So the research questions are as follows:

- (1) What kinds of English movies should teacher choose?
- (2) Can watching bilingual movies improve learners' vocabulary?
- (3) If teachers play a short video before class, how should you improve your vocabulary skills according to watching video?

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Participants**

Questionnaire: 56 students from a high school in Shandong province.

Experiment: The 40 participants are selected from a particular high school in Shandong province. Their ages are around 17 years old and according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) standard English, their English level are at B1, which means they can understand some complicated sentences or texts, possess a clear view of grammar and basic English skills such as listening, speaking, writing and reading [9].

Interview: 4 students were selected from 40 participants of experiment.

#### **3.2 Materials**

##### **3.2.1 Experiment**

All 40 participants are asked to complete the same 8-item vocabulary knowledge test, which mainly related to the translation of phrases or words, and the number of questions in Chinese-English translation and English-Chinese translation is equal (The test is in appendix B). There is an example question of this test:

Which of the following phrases is the correct translation of "Take a girl's breath away

”? (“Take a girl's breath away” will be presented in Chinese in questionnaire)

Take a girl's breath away

Capture a girl's heart

Entrapment a girl's love

After experiment, six participants are randomly selected to be interviewed.

### 3.2.2 Video selection of experiment

Since this video needs to be played before class, in addition to playing a role in arousing students' interest in class, learners also expected to accumulate some new words during watching the video. I chose a film whose protagonists are children. This movie's atmosphere is relatively relaxed and active named the little rascals. It mainly tells the story that a little boy prepared a meal to express his feelings to the little girl. I enlarged the video, hoping that the students would notice the subtitles.

### 3.3 Procedure

#### 3.3.1 Data collection

Questionnaire: The result of questionnaire will be analyzed by a Chinese website called "questionnaire star", which can show the choice distribution of each question.

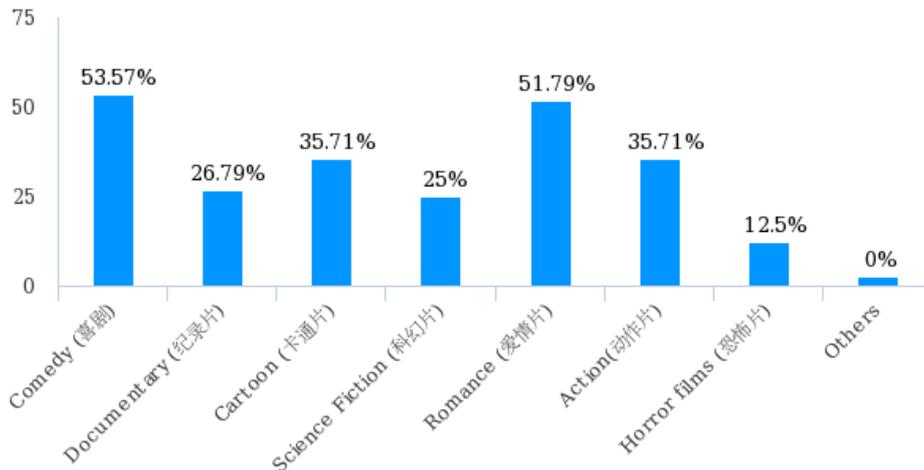


Figure 1 Types of movie that students prefer

According to Figure 1, students would like to watch comedy, romantic, cartoon and action movies, so teachers can focus more on these categories.

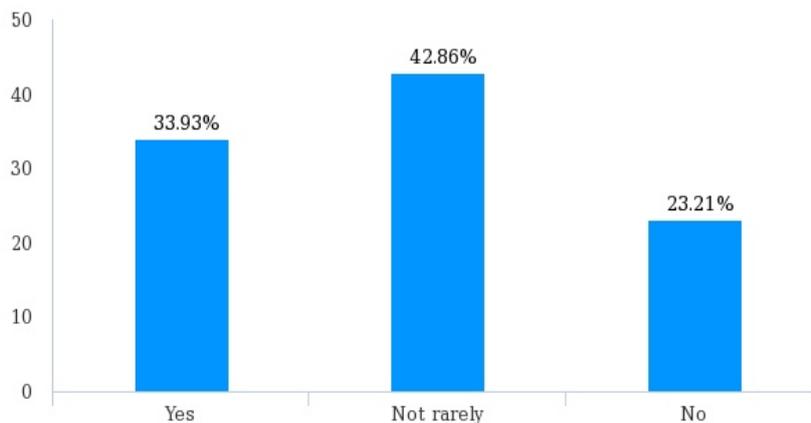


Figure 2 Students' view about video without subtitles

Experiment: These 40 participants were divided into 2 groups; one is control group (A) and the other is experimental group (B). Group A answer questions without watching the movie clips. Group B do the questions after watching the movie clips. Group A and B will do the same 8 questions. Whether to watch the video in advance is the only independent variable.

Interview: Six participants from group A and B are randomly selected to be interviewed and the transcript of the interview will be recorded.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Research question

1: What kinds of English movies should teacher choose?

In order to answer this question, some questions from questionnaire will be discussed.

(1) What kind of English movies do you usually watch (the result is attached in Figure 1)?

(2) If the video without subtitles, will you be interested in it (see Figure 2)?

Most participants show that they would not be interested in movies without subtitles.

(3) If an English film is shown before class, do you want it to be relevant to the class content or just for entertainment (see Figure 3)?

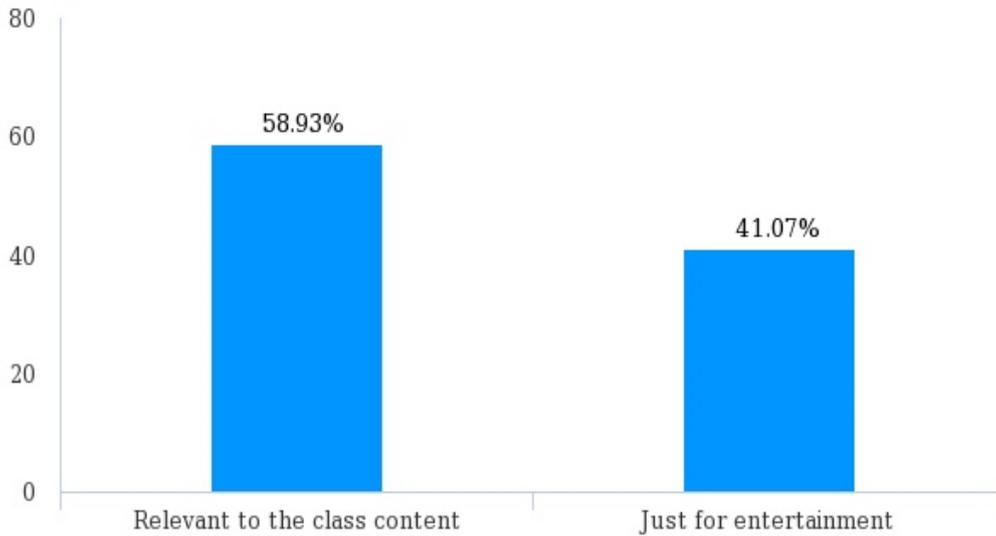


Figure 3 Question result about students' view of movie content

From Figure 3, more than half participants want to watch movie clips that are relevant to the class content.

(4) Does it distract you from watching the film when there is music in the background (the results are in Figure 4)?

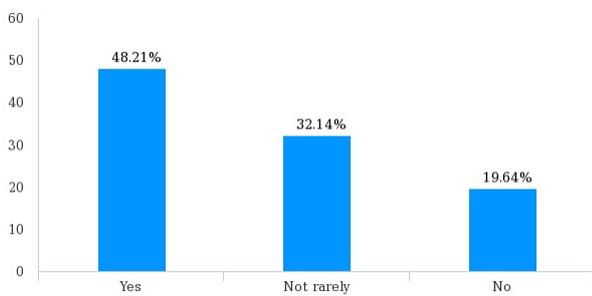


Figure 4 students' view about background music

According to Figure 4, nearly a half participant think background music will distract them, and only 19.64% of participants show that the background music will not affect them. So teachers can choose some movie clips without background music.

(5) Based on those videos, what types of videos do you think more difficult to understand? monologue or dialogue (see Figure 5)?

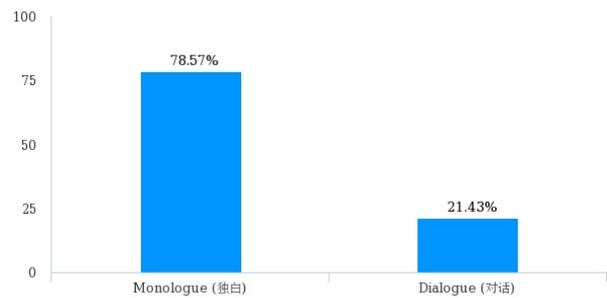


Figure 5 students' view about monologue and dialogue

Most of the participants think monologue is more difficult to understand because of the complex syntax. So if teachers want to train students' English ability such as speaking and listening, they can play monologue movie clips, while if teachers want to relax students, they can choose dialogue.

#### 4.2 Research question

2: Can watching bilingual movies improve learners' vocabulary (see Figure 6)?

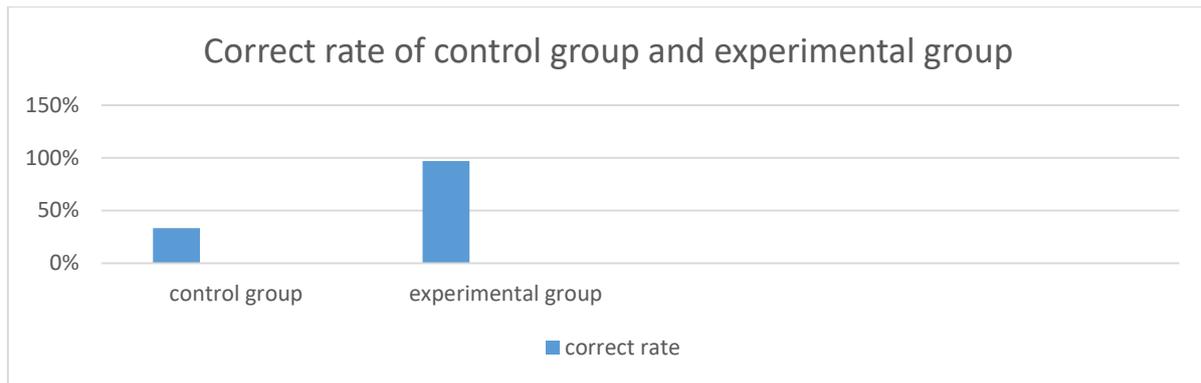


Figure 6 The result of the experimental

The correct rate experimental group (97%) is much higher than control group (33%). Thus, students can acquire some vocabulary according to watch subtitled movies, which can support [2, 7-8] arguments: subtitles can help students improve vocabulary skill.

### 4.3 Research question

3: If teachers play a short video before class, how should you improve your vocabulary skills according to watching video?

4 students were invited to answer this question:

Student A: "Try to look at captions and subtitles at the same time. For some words I don't understand, I will find the corresponding translation from subtitles."

Student B: "When watching the video, prepare paper and pen and write down unknown words or phrases with cultural characteristics."

Student C: "Prepare a notebook and write down the words I don't know."

Student D: "When encounter a new word, I will read it silently several times in my heart."

From their answers, they would like to write the new words or read new words followed by the actor.

## 5. CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Summary of results and discussion

The strategies of questionnaire, experiment and interview are selected to help to carry out this research. According to the results of questionnaire, most students would like to watch comedy, romantic and cartoon. Besides, after experiment, the result shows that watching bilingual English movie clips can effectively help students remember vocabulary. In addition, most students will use notebook and write new words down for remembering in the future. Besides, [10] support this finding and indicate that students would like to use notebook to learn vocabulary especially freshmen.

### 5.2 Limitation and implication

However, according to my research, there are some aspects need to be improved.

1. The video is too short. Students can have instantaneous memory, but it is not sure that whether they will remember so clearly for watching an hour-long movie.

2. Set more questions and ask more questions in test or questionnaire. This result is too accidental and limited.

3. The focus of this study is on senior three, and it is hoped that future research can expand the grade distribution

4. Chinese and English subtitles can be further subdivided, such as only L1 subtitles, or only L2 subtitles, or the voice of actor is L1, but the subtitle is L2.

Despite of these limitations, this study also indicates the impact of bilingual subtitles on vocabulary learning, and the findings can provide a direction for English teachers about how to choose movie clips for students as a teaching tool. So in the future studies, hoping other studies can enlarge the sample and try to divide Chinese and English subtitles. Also, it is better for studies to mark key words selected from movie clips and observe the results after watching.

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