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Authentic Captioned Sitcom as Listening Comprehension Material in English Language Teaching[i]

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Abstract

This paper provides the results of a research study conducted during the 2007-2008 spring semester at Selçuk University, School of Foreign Languages (SOFL) in order to determine the effects of captioned authentic video films on the listening comprehension of intermediate English as Foreign Language (EFL) students. Two groups of students (pilot and control group) were chosen and provided with the same chosen episodes of "Everybody Hates Chris", an Emmy Award-nominated sitcom, and took the same pre- and post-tests, and questionnaires. While the experimental group of students watched the episodes with captions, the students in the control group watched them without captions. Subjects viewed the episodes once, for nearly 20 minutes. Before each presentation, both groups received work sheets of the target vocabulary and phrases. The results of the study showed that the group who watched the sitcom episodes with captioning scored significantly better in the listening comprehension test, than the ones in the controlled one. Pre/ post questionnaires were conducted to analyse the students' perceptions of the effects of captioning on EFL learning. The results of the study revealed significant outcomes stating that films with captions in ELT teaching helped students understand the plot better; supported vocabulary acquisition; improved students' listening skills. More, multi-sensory presentations encouraged students using captioning technology as a listening and a learning tool by themselves outside the classroom.

Key Words: Listening, Listening Comprehension, Captioned video, Captions and EFL teaching

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Introduction

Language teachers are exposed to the question of how to capture the interest of their students and to stimulate their imagination so that they will be more motivated to learn the foreign language. Today although there is a wide array of teaching materials available for teaching reading, speaking, vocabulary building, grammar, writing, culture as well as listening in the market, teaching materials utilised in the classrooms are by majority graded text or course books, and practiced on the basis of teacher-talk and student-listening routines which prevent students from developing an interest in learning English. However, according to Krashen (1995), "language learning is 'knowing the rules,' having a conscious knowledge about grammar", so learning is discrete from acquisition; for, language acquisition is the sole means to comprehend and speak second languages easily and well (p.18). He continues, "we acquire when language is used for communicating real ideas, and comprehension precedes production" (p.19). Therefore, in addition to the aforementioned materials, we sometimes need to adopt other means we think more avail to promote listening as well as comprehension. This is possible by means of using authentic teaching materials, which will aid students to 'notice that learning a language is not just learning its grammatical rules' (p.19).

With the advancement of technology in the twentieth century, teachers have been repeatedly trying to utilise materials such as videos to promote classroom teaching and language learning. To examplify, when captioned video technology was designed for people with hearing disabilities in the USA, some educators noticed its potential to aid their students in processing the second language differently with this additional method. They could make use of the words in the subtitles (Goldman & Goldman, 1988; Neuman & Koskinen, 1992). Since the starting point in language instruction is to help acquirers apprehend what is being uttered to them, captioned-video may be a promising method as captions may aid students to comprehend real-English conversation and enhance their listening comprehension capabilities (Krashen, 1995, p.20).

Among the main skills of interaction and language development, listening is the most basic one. It is obvious that youngsters start with listening to their environment prior to learning to talk and respond to language. As Rost (2002) specifies, "under normal circumstances, we all manage to acquire our first language, and we do it primarily through listening. There is a seamless connection between learning, listening and acquiring our first language" (p.81). Krashen identifies two independent systems of second language performance as 'the acquired system' and 'the learned system'. The acquired system -in other words 'acquisition'- is the

product of a subconscious process very similar to the process children experience when they acquire their first language. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language, natural communication, in which speakers concentrate in the communicative act and not in the form of their utterances. Krashen believes that, 'learning' is less substantial than 'acquisition' and signifies that learning does not become acquisition and our ability to use second languages comes considerably from what we have 'acquired', not from what we have 'learned'. Therefore, acquisition is the result of both listening and reading. So, we can enjoy real language use right away by listening to stories, reading authentic books, and engage in daily conversations (Krashen, 1995, pp. 16-17).

EFL students could be encouraged and motivated by interesting written or oral authentic language materials employed in daily and real life situations by native speakers. Ur (1999), for example, emphasizes this point:

> In order to provide students with training in listening comprehension that will prepare them for effective functioning outside the classroom, activities should give learners practice in coping with at least some of the features of real-life situations. For example: it would seem not very helpful to base listening exercises mainly on passages that are read aloud and followed by comprehension questions. It is worth nothing also that listening activities based on simulated real-life situations are likely to be more motivating and interesting to do than contrived textbook comprehension exercises. (p.107)

Rivers and Temperly (1978) believe that, "we as language teachers, have an open field. We are free to experiment and innovate (p.vii). Currently, there is a wide array of teaching materials available to EFL teachers to accommodate their various needs and their unique teaching situations. One approach may be the use of recorded films on DVDs to teach listening comprehension. A crucial advantage of these is that there are subtitles or captions of distinct languages on them. When watching TV programs or films, close- captions are the printed version of the spoken texts, and next to the original speech, they reflect the gestures and natural sounds. This method could be taken as an efficient teaching instrument with regard to communicative competence. Hence, the use of close-captioned videos in EFL classes could be considered as an alternative to other teaching materials.

Background of the Study

Listening plays a significant role in the lives of people. A very simple analysis of listening would designate four headings for this skill: understanding a speaker's accent or pronunciation, comprehending her/his grammar, recognizing her/his vocabulary and being able to grasp the meaning of what s/he says (Allen & Corder, 1974, p.93). Rivers and Temperly (1978) describe listening as, "essential to all interaction is the ability to understand what others are saying" by expressing, "it has been estimated that, of the time adults spend in communication activities 45 percent is devoted to listening, only 30 percent to speaking, 16 percent to reading, and a mere 9 percent to writing" (p.62-63). Listening is not only the first of the language skills developed, it is additionally the most-frequently used in daily life. On the other hand, due to the fact that listening was usually characterized as a passive activity in the past, Rost (2002) remarks, "ironically, instruction in listening has not received much attention until recently" and "listening plays an active part in language learning and listening is involved in many language-learning activities, both inside and outside the language classrooms" (p.103).

In today's world, with the development of technology, the instruction of English listening comprehension has been transformed into a technology-based system. This age brought to language teaching and learning a wide range of audio-visual technologies. Among these, employing videos to develop learner's listening comprehension has been widely investigated (Baltova, 1994; Chung, 1999). Rivers (1988) explains, "such technologies permit us to see and hear language in a cultural context as well as observe the impact on language meaning of things like real time, word stress, and gestures" (p.155) as seen below:

> The greeting, 'How are you today?' can be presented in a variety of mediums:
> Print: 'How are you today?'
> Audio: We hear the phonic chain, with stress and intonation for the particular meaning intended.
> Video: We observe one individual greeting another and saying, 'How are you today?' with gestures appropriate to the culture. (p.155)

Students in non-native environments are not accustomed to hear the language as produced by the native speakers and frequently have great difficulty in understanding the English spoken to them when they come into contact with native speakers of the language. Similarly, Brown and Yule (1983) explain:

> The student is taught to speak slowly and clearly and his teacher generally addresses the class in a public style (sometimes in a caricature 'speaking to foreigners, the stupid or the deaf style) which is also slow and clear. Native

> speakers, much of the time, don't speak slowly or particularly clearly. Moreover, the student is often only exposed to one accent of English, usually only that spoken by his teacher and as spoken by his teacher. The normal habits of simplification which characterize the accent may be lost when the teacher speaks slowly and 'artificially' clearly. Students consequently get used to a model of speech where every segment is clearly articulated (p.54).

Thus, instead of listening to artificial materials produced for language learning purposes, via social media students face challenges of authentic English such as chatting to native speakers or watching English TV shows and films. For this reason, Katchen (2001; 2003) conducted a study based on the idea of designing a listening course with materials, which would motivate students to learn listening, and constitute a learning environment with lower-affective filter. He states, "when watching TV programs or films, subtitles are the printed versions of the spoken texts. Through using DVDs, the user can choose different languages for both the audio track and text" (p.5).

Price and Dow (1983) implemented a study at Harvard University to determine whether nonnative English speakers could benefit from captioned materials originally targeted for the hearing impaired. Results indicated that viewers, regardless of educational level or language background, benefited significantly from captioning. In a study commissioned by the National Captioning Institute, Neuman and Koskinen (1992) discovered that using captioned science materials from the television program '3-2-1 Contact' with Asian and Hispanic seventh and eighth grade ESL students resulted in higher scores on tests of vocabulary knowledge and recall of science information. Hence, these results support the theory that multisensory processing of the audio, video, and print components of captioned video enhances language learning and content.

Statement of the Problem

Many traditional teachers believe that listening comprehension is a natural skill developed by students on their own and does not require teaching. Listening practice as a preparation for real-life listening comprehension is particularly difficult for learners to handle. Knowing what difficulties students might encounter during the process of learning real-life listening would provide teachers with great help. Ur (1999, p 107) summarizes learner adversities in listening as:

1. Trouble with sounds
2. Have to understand every word

3. Can't understand fast, natural native speech (p.112)

In order to assist students to overcome the listening difficulties, close-captioned video could a promising teaching material, since captioning technology displays the dialogue, narration, sound effects of a video program as words on a television screen. Neuman and Koskinen state (1993), "captioned videos allow viewers to focus attention on both definitional and contextual information; they enhance word meaning by providing a semantically rich visual setting that presents printed words in context with pictorial images" (p.6). Captioned television and video provide a presentation of information that includes opportunities to view the video action, hear the spoken word, and see the printed text. This multi-sensory presentation attracts the students. They further observe, "not only does it decrease the difficulty of learning new words, but it is a medium with which students feel confident" (p.6).

Purpose of the Study

As the British Council and TEPAV project 'Turkey National Needs Assessment of State School English Language Teaching' has also signified, English language classes in Turkey are still based on mastering skills through grammar and vocabulary; and listening comprehension is based on teacher-talk and student-listen routines. Students do not own sufficient motivation to learn a language need variety and excitement. Besides, EFL students in Turkey have very few opportunities to hear real language, so these students are not accustomed to hear the language, as produced by the native speakers (Özen, et al, 2013). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine whether authentic closed-captioned video helps or hinders the listening comprehension development of two groups of learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at School of Foreign Languages (SOFL) at Selçuk University. The designed research questions for the study are as follows:

1. Will the subjects who watched eight episodes of the award winning sitcom, *Everybody Hates Chris*, outperform those who watch traditional, without captions, on a listening comprehension test?
2. Will captioned videos improve EFL students' vocabulary and phrase acquisition?
3. Will closed-captioned presentation help students to overcome their listening difficulties?
4. Will this multi-sensory (to view the video action, hear the spoken word, and see the printed text) presentation charm students, and create a tendency for using captioning technology as a listening and learning tool by themselves outside the classroom?

Some limitations may influence the findings of this study, since this study was applied merely on intermediate level preparatory students at SOFL (School of Foreign Languages), including students ages ranging from 18 to 22. Therefore, it cannot be generalized for other groups. It also reflected a time limitation preventing the researcher to proceed the study and obtain a further result. If time had been extended to two semesters, the progress of each student could have been more clearly observed and reliable results could have been obtained. This study is only valid for Selçuk University School of Foreign Languages.

Importance of Listening

When listening is considered, what is meant could be defined as listening and understanding what we hear. Rost (1991) provides an expansive definition by listing its necessary components as:

- Discriminating between sounds;
- Recognizing words;
- Identifying grammatical groupings of words;
- Identifying 'pragmatic units'-expressions and sets of utterances which function as whole units to create meaning;
- Connecting linguistic cues to paralinguistic cues (intonation and stress) and to nonlinguistic cues (gestures and relevant objects in the situation) in order to construct meaning;
- Using background knowledge (what we already know about the content and the form) and context (what has already been said) to predict and then to confirm meaning;
- Recalling important words and ideas.

Porficient listening encompasses an integration of these skills. In this sense, listening is a coordination of the component skills, not the individual skills themselves (p.4). Similarly Murcia (2000) states, "listening is the most-frequently used language skill in everyday life and when people listen, they listen to a stretch of discourse (p.102).

As indicated above, listening embraces more than just the perception of sounds. Listening is not only hearing, but also an act of attending to the speech and trying to understand the message. In fact, listening is the most-frequently used language skill in everyday life. We seem to listen to twice as much language as we speak, four times as much as we read, and five

times as much as we write (Murcia, 2000, p.102). On the other hand, despite of its importance, listening has been the most-neglected language skill for generations. Overall, Rost (1991) argues that unless listening is given priority at the right level, learning cannot begin and he believes that only "progress in listening will provide a basis for development of other language skills" (p.3).

For Gebhard (2006), "listening is not a passive activity. Rather, listening places many demands on us. When we participate in face to face or telephone exchanges, we need to be receptive to others, which comprises paying attention to explanations, questions and opinions" (p.148). Listening implies more than just hearing or perceiving a stream of sounds; it also requires comprehension of the speaker's intended message.

Nunan (1999) indicates, "we do not simply take language in like a tape-recorder, but interpret what we hear according to our purpose in listening and our background knowledge" (p.23). Further, for Rost (2002) "listening is primarily a cognitive activity, embracing the activation and modification of concepts in the listener's mind", and he assumes, "due to the evolutionary causes, the conceptual that the listener brings to the text comprehension is organized in ways that allow him to activate it efficiently (p.62).

Ur (1999) does not view the classroom listening as real-life listening, and states "it would not be very efficient to base listening exercises mainly on passages that are read aloud and followed by comprehension questions". She claims, "it is worth that listening activities based on real-life situations are likely to be more motivating and interesting to do than contrived textbook comprehension exercises" (p.107). Therefore, DVD films would provide a real-life listening environment with plenty of contextual information, which students could relate to their life experiences.

According to Allwright and Bailey's (2004) reflection, "observations of many different classes, both in content area subjects and in language instruction, consistently reflect that teachers typically do between one half and three quarters of the talking done in classrooms (p.139). They define 'teacher talk' as, 'one of the major ways that teachers convey information to learners, and it is also one of the primary means of controlling learner behavior' (p.139). As Rost (2002) denotes, "Teacher-talk - how the teacher talks to students- is one of the vital sources of listening input for learners" (p.134). On the other hand, classroom activities do not provide students with natural language or 'real' language. Rost (2002), for example, observes that, "teachers typically accommodate their speech to the comprehension abilities of their

students. (p.134). Similarly, Allwright and Bailey (2004) put, "a number of studies have revealed, and quite convincingly so, that the language to which second language learners are exposed in the classroom is often unlike the language they will encounter in talking to native speakers outside the classroom" (p.140). According to Krashen (1995), teacher-talk is characterized by slower production, reduced syntactic complexity and utterance length, limited lexicon, and more well-formed sentences (p.34). On the contrary, the characteristics of real-life listening situations are rather discrete from teacher talk, or from the nature of language classroom speech. Ur (1999) expresses that in real-life situations, most of the spoken language we listen to is informal and spontaneous. It is usually broken into short chunks, in a conversation people take turns to speak, usually in short turns of a few seconds each. The pronunciation of words is often slurred, and noticeably different from the phonological representation given in a dictionary. The vocabulary is often colloquial, and in such real-life situations, the grammar tends to be somewhat ungrammatical: utterances do not usually divide neatly into sentences (p.106).

It can be concluded that to prepare students more proficiently and enable them to react accurately to the spoken language outside the classroom, it is necessary that teachers provide their students with many opportunities to listen to authentic and real language samples in the classroom.

Comprehensible Input

'Comprehensible input' is a term popularized by Krashen (Allwright and Bailey (2004), p.120). Brown (1993) explains, "Krashen's hypotheses have had a number of different names. In earlier years 'Monitor Model' and the 'Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis' were more popular terms; in recent years the 'Input Hypothesis' has been a common term to refer to what are really a set of interrelated hypotheses" (p.279). Rost (2002) believes, " while it is clear that input plays an essential part in second-language acquisition, the amount and type of input that is required for a learner to acquire a second language has not been clearly described" (p.93). In his Input Hypothesis, Krashen (1995) explains, "this hypothesis states simply that we acquire (not learn) language by comprehending input that is a little beyond our current level of (acquired) competence. We move from *i*, our current level, to *i+1*, the next level along the natural order" (p.32). Besides, Krashen believes that:

> The most substantial and avail theoretical point is the acquisition-learning distinction; the hypothesis that adult language students have two distinct ways

> of developing skills and knowledge is second language. Simply, acquiring a language is 'picking it up', i.e., developing ability in a language by using it in natural, communicative situations. It appears that language acquisition is the central, most crucial means for gaining linguistic skills even for an adult. (p.18)

Krashen's (1995) input hypothesis claims that listening comprehension and reading are of primary importance in the language-learning program, and that the ability to speak or write fluently in a second language will come gradually with time. Speaking fluency is thus not 'taught' directly; rather, speaking ability 'emerges' after the acquirer has built up competence through comprehending input (p.32).

According to Rost (2002), "Krashen's Input Hypothesis has been widely criticized (p.93). Allwright and Bailey (2004) underline the fact that not all language learners live in the in the target culture, and may not be exposed to a great deal of language. (p.129). These problems might be overcome by the benefits of captioned video. Via multi-sensory (watch the video action, hear the spoken word, and see the printed text) presentation, the learner could easily digest the rapid speech by the help of the captions. Video action would provide enough contextual clues to help learner to interpret the spoken text, and authentic materials provide a real life listening context.

Nonetheless, students who encounter some adversities during the process of learning listening would provide excessive support for teachers and course designers and aid them to build a positive emotional learning environment. Ur (1999) actually classifies the listening difficulties encountered by EFL learners by summing their comments into several categories as follows:

1. I have trouble catching the actual sounds of the foreign language.
2. I have to understand every word; if I miss something, I feel I am failing and get worried and stressed.
3. I can understand people if they talk slowly and clearly; I can't understand fast, natural native- sounding speech.
4. I need to hear things more than once in order to understand.
5. I find it difficult to 'keep up' with all the information I am getting, and cannot think ahead or predict.

6. If the listening goes on a long time I get tired, and find it more difficult to concentrate. (p.111)

In order to help students to overcome the listening adversities, instructors could design listening activities with captioned video, which allows learners to focus attention on both definitional and contextual information; they enhance word meaning by providing a semantically rich visual setting that presents printed words in context with pictorial images.

Using Video as an Authentic Material

There is a huge gap between listening activities in the classroom and in actual situations. This is because most listening materials, comprising dialogues in textbooks are considerably grammar-oriented and controlled in many ways with a few professional speakers. The speakers read the script with a perfectly controlled speed, voice tone, accent, and correct grammar. However, this is far different from real life conversations. In real life situations, there may be improper grammar usage, incomplete sentences, redundancy, contractions, overlap and so forth. Thus, there is a huge gap between controlled listening materials and real life listening. In addition, it is a fact that, in real life listening, we depend largely on visual information, including speaker's facial expressions, posture, movements, and appearance. According to Katchen (2001), there are a number of reasons for using authentic video in classrooms:

> First of all, we get language input for listening practice; video is superior to tape recordings because students can more easily distinguish among more than two voices, the speakers are more "real" and not disembodied voices, and often seeing the mouth movements is an aid to comprehension. A second reason for using video is as a stimulus, a way to elicit language output for speaking or writing activities. The content can present ideas that motivate students to express their own ideas. The focus of these reactions could be from the various cultural elements embedded in films. Nonverbal behavior-gestures, eye contact, proxemics-all can be a source of cultural difference. Finally, films and videos are colorful and appealing. Watching a film does not feel like work; it feels like fun. We watch TV to relax, so using a film/video in class lets students put down the books and learn in a less typical way. (p.5)

Furthermore, as Grant and Starks (2001) specify, "the use of video samples of conversational data from television would help students make this transition from simplified language to real-life language and provide a welcome alternative to textbook data" (p.49). It

appears that visual information via television or video helps students to interpret the given material enhances their comprehension, and a source of teaching the real-language. In sum, videos derived from authentic materials such as soap operas on TV or films, would help students in their language input processes. Karakaş and Sarıçoban (2012, p. 12) in their study which investigated the relationship between watching subtitled and non-subtitled cartoons and its effect on the vocabulary development found that the improvement of participants were thought to be the result of contextual aids of cartoons.

Captioned Video as an Authentic Material

Researchers have documented that closed-captioned video is an alternative approach to the teaching of listening comprehension, contribute to the overall effectiveness of the language learning process and provide a more creative approach to teaching.

Captioning is the process by which audio portions of television programs are transcribed into written words that appear on the television screen at the same time as the program. In other words, captions are a text version of the spoken part of a television, movie, or computer presentation. Subtitles are mistakenly assumed to be the same as captioning, but they are different media with deceptively similar appearance.

Main differences between captioning and subtitling are as follows:

1. Captions are intended for hearing impaired and hard-of-hearing audiences. The assumed audience for subtitling is hearing people who do not understand the language of dialogue.
2. Captions notate sound effects and other dramatically significant audio while subtitles assume you can hear the phone ringing, the footsteps outside the door, or a thunderclap and leave them out.
3. Captions are usually in the same language as the audio. Subtitles are usually a translation.
4. Captions ideally render all utterances. Subtitles do not bother to duplicate some verbal forms.
5. Captions render tone and manner of voice where necessary.

Captioning is categorized as open and closed captioning. Open captions always are in view and cannot be turned off, whereas closed captions can be turned on and off by the viewer. (Understanding Captions & Subtitles. Screenfont CA Web site: http://screenfont.ca/learn/)

Although closed-captioning technology was originally devised for the benefit of the hearing impaired, there has been recent interest on the part of reading and literacy specialists in the use of closed-captioned television (CCTV) with hearing audiences as well. National Captioning Institute in 1989 suggests that over half of the decoders sold to the hearing population, and among the purchasers, many are immigrant families.

Just through watching captioned TV, young children who are learning to read are able to improve their reading skills significantly, people learning English can improve their language and vocabulary skills. (National Captioning Institute. Retrieved May 19, 2008, Web site: http://www.ncicap.org)

Bird (2005) emphasizes the significance and advantages of captioning by remarking that the utilizer is given a transcription that can act as an orthographic, phonological and semantic foothold into entertaining movies without having to resort to translation. This in turn provides further opportunities to learn the language. For learners who are of an intermediate to advanced level, same language subtitles provide the sort of target language support that they need to begin the difficult task of comprehending and learning from fluent native speaker speech (p.313).

A study commissioned by the National Captioning Institute shows that by viewing close-captioned television students learning English can 'dramatically' improve their language skills" (Bird, 2005 p.572). Koolstra and Beentjes state that subtitled television programs seem to provide a rich context for foreign language acquisition and viewers are rather motivated to understand what is shown and said on television (1999, p.51).

As a result, video technology provides just such an innovation. People of all ages and educational backgrounds seem to be attracted to television, and numerous captioned television programs and video can be used in conjunction with specific curriculum topics and objectives. And what is more crucial is that, language learners may gain confidence in being able to understand by the opportunity to view the video action, hear the spoken word, and see the printed text. This multi-sensory presentation may also attract the students and accommodate motivation.

Captioned-Video as Comprehensible Input

Baltova (1999) specifies that language teachers and researchers have been searching for new strategies to make input 'comprehensible' (p.6). In addition, the researcher argues that when sufficient input of consistent high quality/ interest is delivered, "comprehensible input

automatically contains all the grammatical structures the acquirer is ready to acquire, in the right order and right quantity" (p.21). In other words, acquisition emerges on its own as a result of obtaining comprehensible input.

Some Studies on the use of Captioned-Video

Most research and studies have concluded that the use of captions helps students comprehend listening materials, and students display more interest and motivation for learning English (Lin, 2002). For his dissertation titled 'The Role of Closed- Captioning in Second Language Acquisition' Liversidge (1999) denotes that his study sought a comprehensive overview, rather than focusing on one single area, such as comprehension, or vocabulary gains and found that there are gains or benefits from the presence of captioning.

Goldman and Goldman (1988) generated a research employing closed-captioned television to help readers at the high school level. Utilizing popular situation comedies, they employed closed-captioned television once or twice a week to teach various reading skills before, during and after viewing a program. They concluded that (a) comprehension usually remained at 70% or higher, (b) students attended class more regularly, (c) greater time on task was evident during the viewing and discussions, and (d) students displayed more interest and motivation for learning in general. (p.458)

Thirdly, Huang (1998) conducted a study in which a group of thirty ESL students enrolled in The Language Academy at the University of Southern California for the summer session. They were placed in an intermediate level of speaking and listening, level 3, according to their performance in the International Student English (ISE) test. Huang's material was a television serial called, *Family Album U.S.A.* Participants were equally and randomly divided into two groups. The first group watched the series twice (without captions), and the second group watched twice but with close captions. After watching the same episode, students in both groups took the same listening test and the results indicated that students in group two performed better.

Research studies in this field designate that captioned videos/ films are more positive and effective than non-captioned videos/ films in terms of improving learning motivation and an attitude towards overall listening comprehension, vocabulary development, and in helping EFL students' comprehension ability.

Method

This study aimed to determine the effects of captioned video on the English listening comprehension intermediate EFL students at Selcuk University, School of Foreign Languages (SOFL) In addition, subjects' perceptions of the effects of captioned video on EFL learning were also covered in this study.

This study took place at SOFL Selçuk University. Students take a standardized placement test and are placed at proficiency levels based on their performance on this test. The number of students who participated in this study was 34, and they all continued to Level A at SOFL. Being at the same proficiency level, which is intermediate, the subjects of the study can be described as homogeneous. The students aged 18-21 years old and sixteen of them were female and 18 male. The study was performed with two groups: a control group and an experimental group. Each group encapsulated 17 students. In the study, Prep 13 students were considered as the experimental group, while Prep 14 students were considered the control group.

The authentic material used in this study is an award winning sitcom *Everybody Hates Chris* featuring fictional characters and situations based on real people and situations produced by the CBS Paramount Television.

The following criteria were used to evaluate the appropriateness of this sitcom;

1. Is the drama relevant and of interest to the average students in this age group?
2. Is the language (grammatical and lexical complexity) of the segment appropriate for the intermediate level of study?

The authentic and entertaining quality of the material was substantial in order to bring students into contact with language as it is used in the culture to meet actual communication needs. However, due to the fact that this sitcom was not designed for EFL or ESL classes, the language in the video was expected to be relatively challenging to students, as it embraces vocabulary that was likely to be unfamiliar, and some advanced syntactic structures. For each episode, students were expected to complete a worksheet which comprised a list of the target words, phrases and their explanations. As the episodes offer students an opportunity to witness cultural information, both behaviors that are not obvious in texts and cultural information was presented orally before or during the presentation.

This study was conducted during the subjects' regularly scheduled class hours in the Media Lab for about 45 minutes, about 8 weeks per week. Throughout the semester, the students in the control group watched the episodes without captions. During the treatment

experimental group watched the episodes with captions, and took the same pre and posttests, and questionnaires. Subjects viewed the episodes once, for nearly 20 minutes. Both groups received work-sheets of the target vocabulary and phrases.

The list and themes of the episodes shown throughout the study was as the following:

1. *Everybody Hates Halloween*
2. *Everybody Hates the Pilot*
3. *Everybody Hates Basketball*
4. *Everybody Hates Sausage*
5. *Everybody Hates The Babysitter*
6. *Everybody Hates Christmas*
7. *Everybody Hates Part Time Job*
8. *Everybody Hates Valentine's Day*
9. *Everybody Hates Thanksgiving Day*
10. *Everybody Hates Cutting School.*

After the students watched the first episode, *Everybody Hates Halloween,* they were given a Pre-questionnaire and pre-listening test. Then, after they watched the last episode *Everybody Hates Cutting School* they were given a post questionnaire and test. After the students watched an episode without captions, they took both tests.

In addition to the pretest and the posttest, two questionnaires were administered at the beginning and at the end of the study. It was aimed to investigate the participants' beliefs, and opinions towards their understanding of English. The questions also explore students' preferences for text, picture, and sound when studying English, or whether they preferred to study the language through reading, viewing (watching video or TV), or listening.

Data Analysis and Results

To collect the data two Likert-type questionnaires were designed. The first one encapsulated five items ranging from strongly-agree to strongly disagree. The second embraced none- to- a lot options. In the initial part of the pre-questionnaire, the first question asked: "How do the following statements apply to your understanding of English in the classroom?" Students were also expected to check the answers that best apply to their choices. Almost more than 80% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that understanding/ learning English was best under the following conditions:

1. When they were listening to the teacher;

2. When they were reading what the teacher was writing on the blackboard;
3. When they were reading books.

About half of the students were indecisive about considering how watching films and shows on DVD or TV affected their comprehension and learning of English. Finally, majority of the students either disagreed with, or were undecided about the benefits of listening to audiotapes when studying English.

As evidenced by percentages, students in general were not enthusiastic about listening to English audiotapes or watching of English films, video or DVD either when trying to understand English, or when learning English vocabulary. In contrast, most of the students were significantly in favor of listening to the teacher both with respect to comprehension and learning.

Question 6 inquired whether students watched English TV, listened to English radio, watched English movies, or read English magazines and books outside the classroom. They were also required to specify the time they spent on these activities, and to provide the number of movies they had seen, and of magazines and books they had read. The data concerning exposure to English via TV and radio after school revealed that nearly 25% of the students watched English TV after school (ranging from 1 to 7 hours per week), but hardly any ever listened to English radio.

Overall, very few students watched English movies, read English magazines and books of their own accord outside the classroom. Likewise, question 7 further asked students whether they had ever watched English movies subtitled in English, and question 8 asked whether they had seen any English movies subtitled in Turkish. As a result, close to 65% of all the students had never previously watched English movies with English subtitles. On the other hand, close to 100% of all students had already been exposed to English movies with Turkish subtitles. Responses to this question revealed that the vast majority of the students, about 70%, only read subtitles. As evidenced by percentages, students in general were not enthusiastic about watching and listening to films in English, and read only subtitles.

Responses to the question ‘whether they had seen the episode before’ reflected that none of the students had seen this episode before. The next question required students to check one of the 4 options in order to specify how much new information they had learned from watching the episode without captions.

To the question "Do you feel that you have learned any new information from watching this video today?" the majority of the students, in the control group, (roughly 60%) reported that they had learned 'some' information from the video. Furthermore, more students in the experimental group perceived that they learned 'very few', relative to the control group.

Another question asked whether there were new words they believed they had learned from watching the video. In both groups, only 2 students replied that they had learned 'some' new words, and over a third in both groups thought that they had learned 'very few' words. In addition, in both groups, roughly half of the students responded they had learned 'none'.

To the question how well students understood the content of the video, in both groups, nearly 60% of the students felt they had understood 'very little', and only one student in the Control Group claimed to have understood 'everything'. Over 20% of students in both groups claimed that they understood 'some' parts in the video.

The responses for factors preventing students to understand the video, the majority of the students commented that native people's fast speaking, the vocabulary, and their accent in the video prevented their understanding. Accordingly, captioning may be a possible solution as it allows students to read spoken language and increases their vocabulary knowledge by video content.

The aim of the pre-questionnaire was to gather information about students' background, their exposure to English outside of classroom hours, and their input preferences. For 8 weeks, students watched 8 different episodes of the sitcom *Everybody Hates Chris*. In order to collect data with respect to learners' input preferences after 8 weeks of study, students viewed a discrete episode, and then a post-questionnaire was applied on them. Again students were expected to indicate their preferences for different input sources since it also had the aim of discovering students' comprehension performance.

In this part, the first question asked all students whether they had watched the episode earlier on and their responses revealed that none of them had watched this episode before.

Question 2 required students to check one of the 4 options in order to specify how much new information they had learned from watching the episode without captions. The following chart displays the comments of the students' in the experimental group, both before and after the 8 weeks of study.

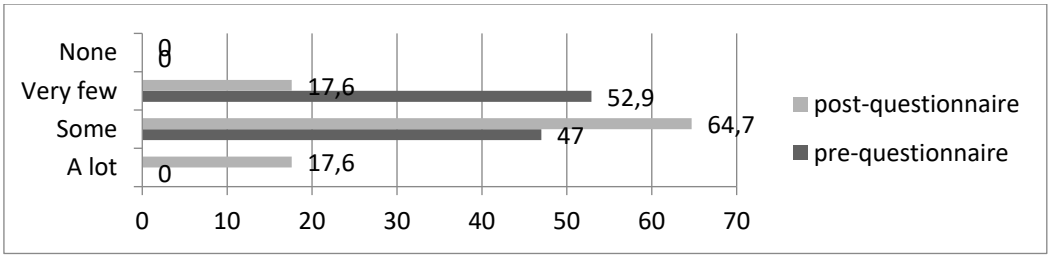


Chart 1. The comments of the students' in the experimental group.

The second chart below shows the comments of the students' in the control group before and after the eighth week of the study:

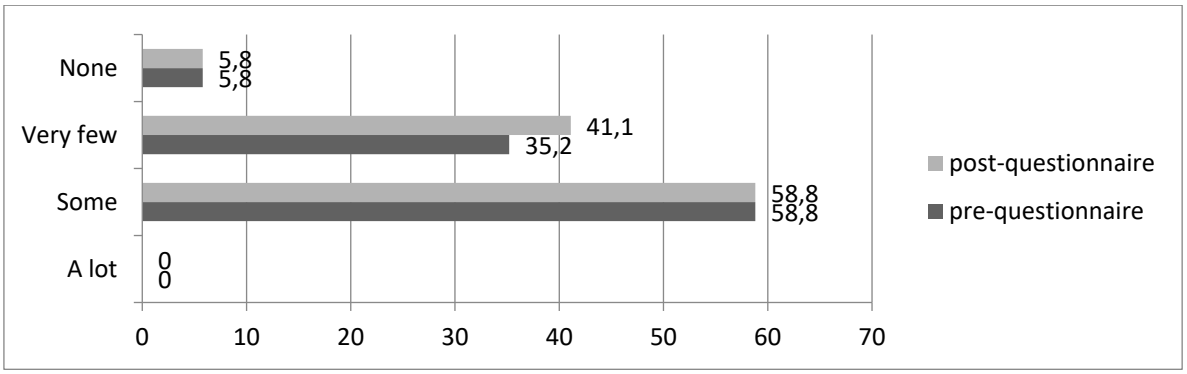


Chart 2. The comments of the students' in the control group.

The majority of the students in the experimental group reported that they had learned 'some' information from the video, with more people in the subtitled conditions than in the control group. Furthermore, three students in the experimental group thought they learned 'a lot'. In particular, students in the experimental group reported higher learning of new information relative to the comparison group.

Students' comments in both groups with respect to their perceived learning of words were significantly higher after 8 weeks of treatment. Merely two students responded with 'none' in the experimental group, on the other hand 6 students responded with 'none' in the control group as seen in the charts 3 and 4.

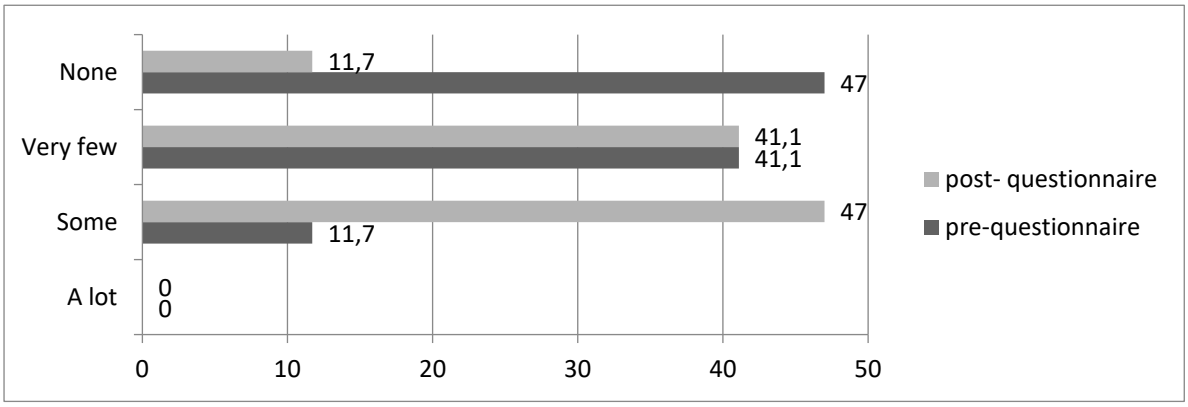


Chart 3. Experimental group students' comments before and after the 8 weeks of study.

The question, "Do you feel that you have learned cultural information all through the episodes you have watched?" inquired if the episodes the students watched afforded them the opportunity of meeting the target language's culture, or if the cultural information was presented via this treatment. As Peterson and Coltrane (2003) also highlight, the role of culture is significant and, "culture must be fully incorporated as a vital component of language learning" (pp. 3-6) In both groups, nearly 90% of the students believed that they learned 'a lot' or 'some' cultural information. Only five students responded 'very few'. No student responded with 'None'.

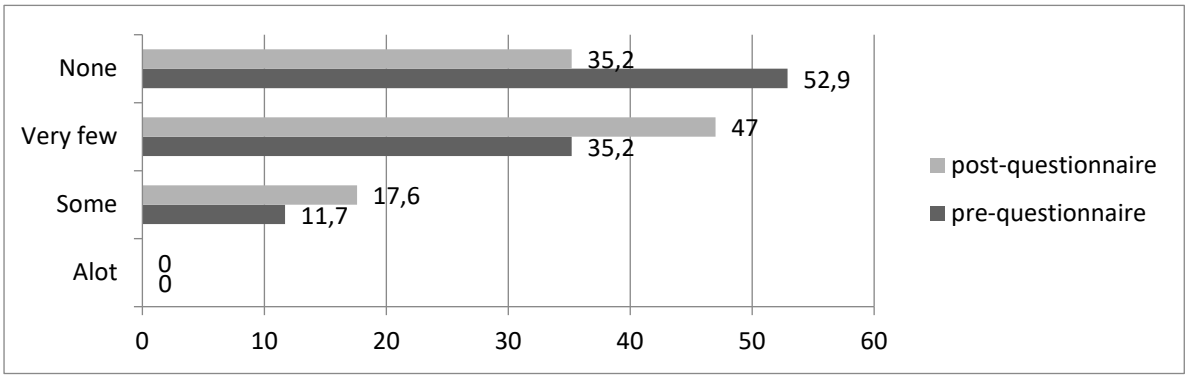


Chart 4. Control group students' comments before and after the 8 weeks of study.

To the question, "Which of the following statements express how well you understood the video you just watched?" as can be seen in the chart below, the students in the control

group, responded nearly the same in both questionnaires. More than 40% of students in the experimental group claimed to have understood 'some of it'.

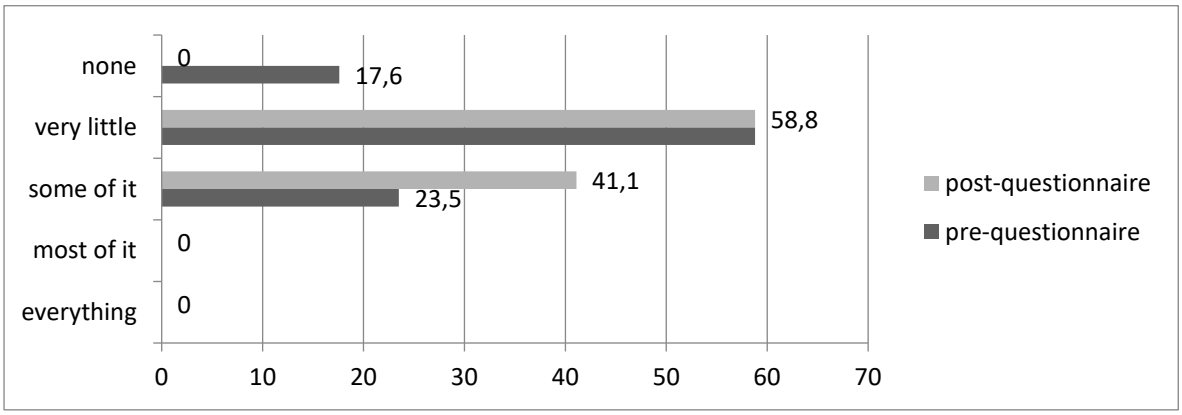


Chart 5. Experimental group students' comments before and after the 8 weeks of study.

In the experimental group, where students watched the videos with captions, item 6 sought the answer to whether captions aided them to comprehend the story better. Nearly 90% of students claimed that captions helped them 'a lot' to understand the story better.

In the captioned condition, question 7 asked students whether they felt that captions helped them to learn new vocabulary and all the students remarked that captions did indeed assist their performance on vocabulary learning.

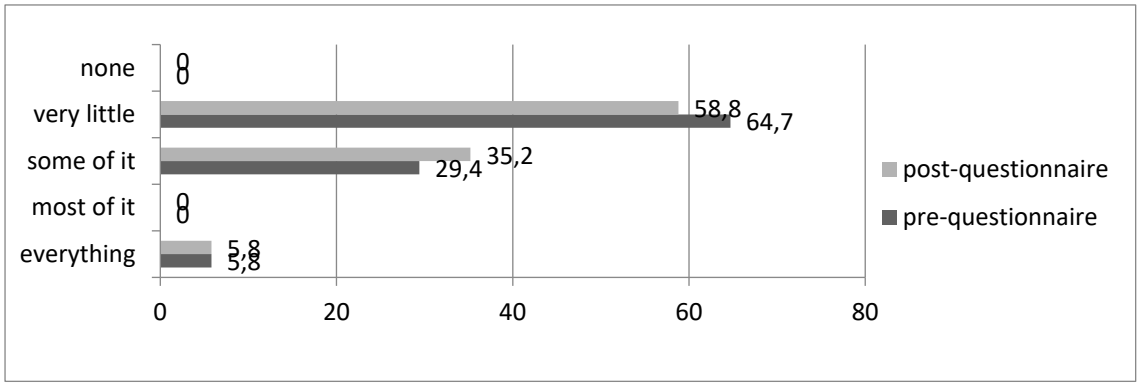


Chart 6. Control group students' comments before and after the 8 weeks of study.

The responses to whether captions assisted students to increase their listening skill confirmed that captioned video increased all learners' level of listening proficiency. Furthermore, majority of students claimed that captions increased their listening skill 'a lot'. To the question whether they thought learning English through watching video is fun, nearly 90% of the students believed that learning English through watching video is fun. It was

interesting to find out how positively students in the experimental group reacted to the treatment.

The last question, (10) elicited students' comments on, whether they perceived that captioned video could be used as a listening and learning tool outside the classroom.

In the light of the responses given to the last question, it was not surprising to discover that nearly all the students agreed that captioned video could be exerted as a listening and learning tool outside the classroom.

In the next section of the study, the questions 11 to 14 were only administered to students in the control group. At the end of the 8-weeks treatment, students in this group were displayed an episode with captions and they had to comment on whether captions would have helped them to understand the story better if they had watched the episodes with captions; whether they felt that captions would help them to learn further vocabulary; whether captions could progress their listening ability; whether they considered learning English through video is fun. None of the respondents were against the use of captioned presentation; moreover, they reported more positive attitude towards captioned video as learning and listening tool.

For examining the effects of captioning, before and after 8-weeks treatment, pre and post listening comprehension tests were conducted to assess their understanding. Apart from these two tests, an overall vocabulary test was also applied to assess their vocabulary acquisition all through the 8-weeks treatment. Then, in order to find out whether there was significant difference between two groups, a T-test was applied to the respondents.

The results of the Research Questions

The primary research question was reflected to obtain an answer to whether the students, who watch all eight episodes of the sitcom, would outperform those who watched it without captions, on a listening comprehension test. The results were displayed in tables and the experimental group made an average score of v56%, while the control group made 47 %. The result reveals that the experimental group learned nearly 20% better than the control group. In particular, students in the captioned condition scored 20% higher in learning of comprehension relative to the comparison group. The average difference of the two group students indicates a meaningful difference. The results of the T-test displayed that the group watching the sitcom with captioning scored excessively better on the listening comprehension test than the group without captioning. Accordingly, the first research question demonstrated a positive result for the researcher.

Research question 2 was reflected to discover an answer to whether captioned video would improve EFL students' vocabulary and phrase acquisition. As a result, the experimental group made an average score of 50%, while the control group scored 34.3%. In particular, students in the experimental group scored significantly higher, nearly 45% in learning of new vocabulary, relative to the control group. The average difference ($p<0.05$) of the two group of students designated a meaningful difference. In the experimental group, there has been a desired for improvement. Captioned presentation enhanced students' vocabulary/ phrase acquisition. Accordingly, research question 2 was also responded positively.

Research question 3 was seeking answer for whether captioned presentation helped students to overcome their listening difficulties. According to the responses in the experimental group roughly 90% of the students claimed that captions helped them 'a lot' to understand the story better. Only two students responded with 'some'. Accordingly, research question 3 was answered positively, too.

The last research question intended to explore an answer on whether this multi-sensory video (to view the video action, hear the spoken word, and see the printed text) presentation charmed students, and created a tendency for using captioning technology as a listening and learning tool outside the classroom for them? In order to collect data for the answer to this question, students were expected to indicate their preferences via two related questions. Roughly 90% of the students believed that learning English through video is fun, as can be seen in the chart 7:

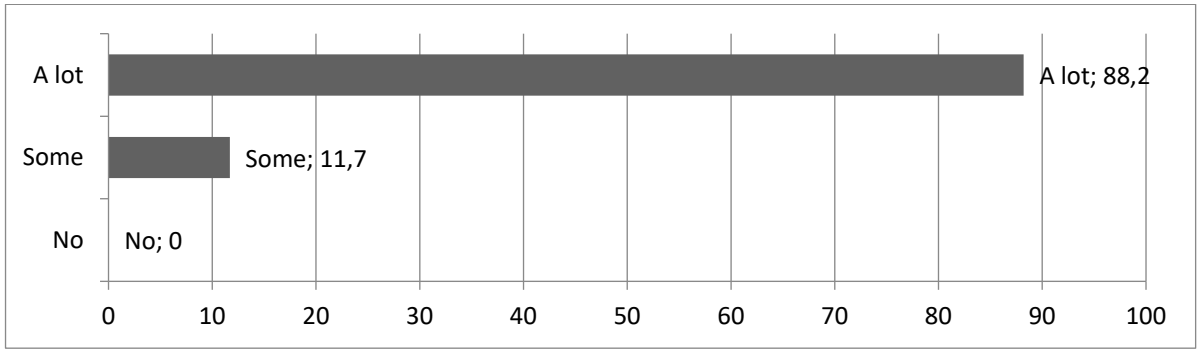
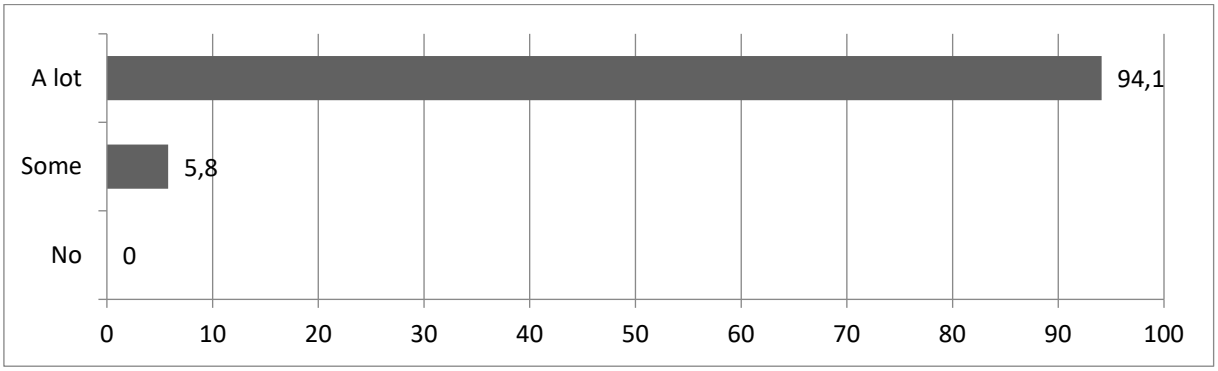


Chart 7. Question: Do you think learning English through watching video is fun?

Only two students were responded with 'some'. In the light of the percentages in the chart below, nearly all the students considered captioned video as a listening and learning tool which they could employ outside the school, by themselves.

Chart 8. Question: Do you think you can use captioned video as a listening and learning tool by yourself outside the classroom?



According to the students' answers to the questionnaire, this multi-sensory (to view the video action, hear the spoken word, and see the printed text) presentation charmed students, and created a tendency for using captioning technology as a listening and learning tool by themselves outside the classroom. Accordingly, the last research question also signified a positive result to the researcher.

Conclusion and Discussion

Technical advancements in digital multimedia present innovative techniques for foreign language learners. Such innovative techniques and methods are also crucial for all educators as they encourage students to apply and extend their foreign language learning.

This study aims to highlight the need for language teachers to be aware that mixing entertainment and education via authentic captioned-video will enhance learning. In order to create such an environment for learners, apart from their traditional classes, an experimental group was formed and trained with captions for eight weeks, while a control group was formed and trained without captions for eight weeks.

Throughout the research, the overall aim was to discover whether captioned-videos/films are more positive and effective than non- closed videos/films in terms of improving learning motivation and attitude, overall listening comprehension, vocabulary development and in terms of progressing EFL students' comprehension ability.

The results of listening comprehension test indicated that the experimental group, the group with captioning, scored considerably better in the listening comprehension test than the group without the use of captioning.

Since vocabulary or phrase acquisition is one of the essential factors influencing the success/failure in listening comprehension, the research additionally scrutinized the effects of captioning on this subscale, and it designated that the experimental group scored significantly better on the vocabulary test.

The results of the present study, concerning the significant outcome of the effects of captioned video on the students, - vocabulary, phrase acquisition and general comprehension- are clearly consistent with the results of previous studies, such as the works of Neuman and Koskinen (1993); Liversidge (1999), Goldman and Goldman (1988).

This research provides strong evidence that captioned video has beneficial influence on the listening comprehension and vocabulary/phrase acquisition on intermediate level EFL students at Selçuk University, School of Foreign Languages.

The results of the interviews reflected positive effects of captioning on students' attitudes. Captioning acted as motivational elements, and gained the attention of the students. As King (2002, p.516) also supports, the value and benefits of employing captioned films for language learners can be summarized as below to aid students in their further studies:

- learn to pronounce proper nouns in different disciplines through authentic video;
- acquire colloquial, context-bound expressions and slang via authentic text/speech;
- process a text rapidly and improve rapid reading by exercise;
- keep up with captioning that accompanies the native-speed spoken English;
- provide students with relaxing, stress-free learning environments where they can comprehend jokes and have a few hearty laughs;
- learn different strategies and skills for processing information.

In sum, as seen in the results of this research and the suggestions above, students' language improvement supported by captioned video provided students more meaningful language experience in the target language, as well as motivation to utilize captioned video for further success in the learning of EFL in their future lives. For further further research researchers can add other types of captioned video to their study, as well as conduct the study on a longer period of time than the present study to check its validity.

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[i] The data used in this article comes from the first author's MA thesis "The Use of Authentic Captioned Video as Listening Comprehension Material in English Language Teaching"[i]written under the supervision of the second author.