

Learners Perceptions and Feelings Regarding Language Options of Audio-visual Materials

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Abstract

Research has shown that watching audio-visual materials can be beneficial for comprehension, motivation, and language acquisition in general. Subscription Video on Demand (SVOD) services, authentic, meaning focused foreign language audio-visual content has become more accessible in Japan. SVOD services offer various language options when accessing content. This study investigated the perceptions of usefulness of Japanese EFL learners considering three different language options, and enjoyment the students experienced watching a sitcom with the different language options. The participants completed questionnaires, watched three different episodes of a US sitcom, and randomly selected participants were asked to clarify their opinions in follow-up interviews. The results show that the participants consider captions to be the most useful language option, while the Japanese subtitles language option is the most enjoyable one, closely followed by the captions option. Finally, the study gives suggestions for language teachers what to do with these findings.

Keywords: Perceived usefulness, enjoy ability, audio-visual materials, Japan, EFL

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, due to technological advancements and the Covid-19 pandemic, television and video viewing habits have significantly changed. Subscription Video on Demand (SVOD) services such as Amazon Prime Video, Netflix, Hulu, etc. have grown considerably.

These services provide unlimited and convenient access, to authentic meaning focused on-demand foreign language content, which can be a valuable supplementary resource for English as a foreign language (EFL) learners to use out of class and for teachers to use in the classroom (Ashcroft, Garner, & Hadingham, 2018).

When accessing English language content through SVOD services there are four language options to choose from i.e. subtitles, English captions, the original version without any aid and lip-sync dubbing in Japanese. With such flexibility, the language option learners choose plays an important role in the potential to learn from the content, but also in language learning motivation in general.

The next section will look at research related to benefits of watching audio-visual materials in general as well as with subtitles, captions, and original language without aid. Followed by a short overview of research related to enjoyment, perceived usefulness and the research questions this study seeks to answer. Lip-sync dubbing will be kept out of the scope of this study as it is considered to have limited value for foreign language learning (source).

1.1 Research questions

The purpose of this study is to address three important questions that arise when considering the unprecedented flexibility EFL learners have when it comes to language options.

- 1) Which of the language options do Japanese EFL learners think is the most useful for language learning?
- 2) Which of the language options do Japanese EFL learners find the most enjoyable after exposure to individual episodes of an English language TV show?
- 3) Does the language option Japanese EFL learners think is the most useful match the language option Japanese EFL learners think is the most enjoyable?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Benefits of Watching

There is ample support for the notion that watching television and videos can be beneficial for foreign language learning (Koolstra et al, 1999). The authentic and contextualized language learners are exposed to while watching audio-visual materials can have motivational, attentional, and affective effects on learners, as well as facilitate auditory processing (Baltova, 1994). Exposure to audio-visual materials has also been found to improve language learners' pronunciation and intonation, knowledge of the target culture (Lin & Siyanova-Chanturia, 2014), and confidence (Chapple & Curtis, 2000). Research has also shown that watching audio-visual materials can provide the meaning focused input that is needed for foreign language learners to acquire incidental vocabulary (Montero Perez et al. 2015; Peters & Webb, 2018). Some studies would even suggest that watching audio-visual materials can lead to gains in learners' overall communicative performance (Peters & Webb, 2018).

2.2 Subtitles, Captions, Original Language without Aid

The first language option this study focuses on is subtitling. Subtitling is the translation into the L1, of the spoken text in audio-visual programs that you can read at the bottom of the screen when you are watching a program in a foreign language (Canning-Wilson & Wallace, 2000). The use of subtitles has been extensively studied and most of the research would suggest that watching authentic materials with subtitles facilitates foreign language learning (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Learners have a positive attitude towards subtitles, as de Bock (1977) showed that over a third of Dutch high school students are convinced that watching subtitled television is beneficial for their foreign language learning, and over a quarter of Dutch primary

school children feel that they are learning more English by watching television than at school (Vinje, 1994).

In a study conducted in Italy shows that watching movies in the target language with the subtitles is more beneficial for comprehension than watching the same materials with captions or the original without any aid, regardless of the learners' proficiency levels (Bianchi & Ciabattini, 2008). The Italian study confirmed the findings by Koolstra and Beentjes (1999) who found in an experiment with primary school students that comprehension as well as vocabulary learning was better in the group who watched videos in the target language with subtitles. In a series of studies in which Belgian university students watched animated films with subtitles d'Ydewalle and Pavaknun (1995, 1997) found that students were able to incidentally learn new vocabulary.

The second language option this study focuses on is the captioning option. Captioning is the textual version in the original language of the dialogue in audio-visual programs that you can read at the bottom of the screen. Various studies have reported positive effects of watching audio-visual materials with captions on retention and use of vocabulary in context, comprehension skills as well as communicative performance in specific oral and written communication tasks (Baltova, 1999; Garza, 1991; Montero Perez et al., 2015; Peters & Webb, 2018).

Some of the explanations of this success of incidental vocabulary learning are that captions help learners visualize the speech stream and distinguish word boundaries (Danan, 2004), they capture learners' attention, which is needed for learning to take place (Teng & Zhang, 2021), and they promote form-meaning connections in learners' mental lexicons (Montero et al., 2014). In an experiment investigating the aural and visual presentation of words in captioning, Bird and Williams (2002) found that vocabulary presented with text and sound resulted in better recognition memory. The researchers concluded that bimodal presentation aids word learning because it increases processing depth. When it comes to comprehension it is believed that captions make the aural input more comprehensible by bridging the gap between, the often better developed, reading comprehension skills, and listening comprehension (Garza, 1991).

The third language option in the scope of this research is the original language mode, without any aid from subtitles and captions. Most research into this topic does not explicitly focus on this mode but rather on the two modes described above. However, this mode is often used as the control group, therefore effects of this language option on foreign language learning are known. In an experiment with Dutch foreign language learners, Koolstra and Beentjes (1999) found that the groups who watched videos without any aid were able to acquire new vocabulary, albeit less than the subtitles and captions groups. The notion that learning can also take place with this language option, is also supported by Bianchi and Ciabattini (2008) who showed in an experiment that the group who watched without any aid, performed better on short term vocabulary and language-in use tests, than the subtitles and captions groups. The subtitles and captions groups did however outperform the group

in terms of long-term vocabulary improvements. Başaran and Köse (2013) found in an experiment with low-intermediate Turkish EFL learners that the subtitles, captions and no aid groups scored similarly on listening comprehension tests. The studies mentioned above justify the use of this mode as a pedagogical tool, and its inclusion in this study.

2.3 Enjoyment and Perceived usefulness

In recent years, positive feelings have started to play a more important role in research on learners' performance in a foreign language (MacIntyre & Vinceze, 2017). Negative feelings, which impede learning, have been researched extensively, but positive emotions much less. Among the many either negative or positive emotions, enjoyment is considered to be the easiest identifiable feeling for students (Piniel & Albert, 2018) and is contrasted with foreign language anxiety. Enjoyment is defined as the degree to which L2 learning is seen as providing joy and encourages challenge taking, bliss, interest, fun, feeling of pride, and feeling of importance (Dewaele and MacIntyre, 2014). According to MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) enjoyment allows learners to assimilate more language and helps them with building language assets. Enjoyment is also seen as a highly motivational emotion (Pekrun, 2006), with positive influence on L2 motivation, commitment, and learning accomplishments (Dewaele & Li, 2021; Li, 2020;) and it is capable of triggering foreign language learning (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016). Enjoyment is a powerful emotion which has the ability to make learners feel good and can motivate them to emotionally and physically attempt more foreign language tasks and continue studying in the future (Villavicencio and Bernardo, 2013). Research suggests that enjoyment is positively connected with high achievement and proficiency in a foreign language (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Dewaele et al., 2019).

Research comparing learners perceived usefulness on subtitling, captioning, and original language without aid, is nonexistent. The vast majority of studies have focused on effectiveness of the language options, and the limited research that is available does not compare the three with each other. De Bock (1977) and Vinje (1994) have shown that Dutch teenagers perceive the watching of audio-visual materials in general to be very useful. A study conducted with Malaysian university students revealed that the participants in their study perceived the use of audio-visual materials from YouTube, in and out of class, to be very useful (Zaidi et. al, 2018). Dizon (2018) showed in a study with Japanese learners that watching English audio-visual materials enhanced learners' motivation to study English, therefore it can be concluded that the activity of watching is useful. Anas and Zakaria (2019) looked at learner's perceptions on English audio-visual materials with subtitles, and found that the majority of the participants in the study perceived subtitles as useful for language learning.

3. METHODS

3.1. Participants and Research Design

A total of 72 EFL students participated in this study. All the participants were economics majors in the Department of Economics at a large university in western Japan. They were second-year students from four classes the author taught at the university in the autumn semester of 2021. Most participants self-rated their English proficiency as A2-B2 level based on the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001).

The research design consisted of three groups to which participants were assigned based on the time of their class, group A, B, and C. The study was conducted in three 25-minute sessions in which the participants answered questionnaires and watched the audio-visual materials selected for the study. All three groups watched three the same episodes of a popular US sitcom. Group A watched episode one with subtitles, episode two with captions, and finally the third episode without any aid. Group B watched first with captions, followed by no aid, and subtitles. Group C watched the first episode without aid, followed by subtitles, and captions. The participants were 19-21 years old; all but one, who reported to be a bilingual Mandarin and Japanese speaker, spoke Japanese as their first language, and have been studying English as a foreign language at school since junior high school. The order in which the participants experienced the different language options was not the same in order to minimize the influence of previously watched language options on their perception of the to be watched modes.

Table 1

Overview of the research design

Group	Number of participants	Session 1: Episode 1	Session 2: Episode 2	Session 3: Episode 3
A	30	Subtitles	Captions	No aid
B	22	Captions	No aid	Subtitles
C	20	No aid	Subtitles	Captions

3.2. Materials

The audio-visual materials chosen for this study are the first three episodes of the first season of the 1990s US sitcom 'Full House'. This sitcom was chosen for the following three reasons. Firstly, it is, despite the fact that it was first released about 30 years ago, a well-known sitcom in Japan, and most participants were familiar with it. According to Nation (2007) meaning-focused input should be familiar, enjoyable, and motivating to increase potential learning outcomes. Secondly, as this study was carried out during regular class hours, each episode could have not been too long. One episode of the selected sitcom is about 20 minutes. Finally, in an informal session with one of the groups the participants selected this sitcom as the one they would like to watch.

3.3. Data collection

In the first session of the study the participants were given the details of the study that they are partaking in and asked to complete a three-item questionnaire about how useful they thought each mode i.e. subtitling, captioning and no aid, is for language learning. The participants were asked to rate the usefulness for language learning of each language option on a 5-point Likert scale (1=not useful at all to 5=very useful). Immediately after this questionnaire the participants watched the first episode of the sitcom, followed by a single-item questionnaire, asking the participants to rate the enjoyment they experience watching this episode, on a on a 5-point Likert scale (1=not at all to 5=very enjoyable).

In the second session, the participants watched the second episode of the selected sitcom, followed by the same single-item questionnaire as in the end of session 1.

In the third session the participants watched the third episode, again followed by the single-item questionnaire asking them to rate their enjoyment on a 5-point Likert scale (1=not at all to 5=very enjoyable), and the same three-item questionnaire, as in session 1, about how useful they thought each mode i.e. subtitling, captioning and no aid, is for language learning.

Table 2

Order of activities in each session

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
3 item Questionnaire	Watching Episode 2	Watching Episode 3
Watching Episode 1	Enjoyment Question	Enjoyment Question
Enjoyment Question		3 item Questionnaire

In addition to the questionnaires, five randomly selected participants were asked if they would like to participate in a short follow-up interview after the final questionnaire in session 3. Since one participant declined, four interviews were conducted asking the participants to indicate if their perception of usefulness of the different modes had changed after having watched three episodes, and why they think it changed. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed.

4. RESULTS

Questionnaire 1: usefulness of the language options for language learning

The first questionnaire the participants were given prior to watching, consisted of three questions.

The first question was: ‘Do you think watching an English language drama with Japanese language subtitles is useful for your English language learning?’. The overall trend that can be seen from the answers is that most participants do not really think that watching English language videos with Japanese subtitles is useful for language learning. A majority of the participants (56%) thought that watching

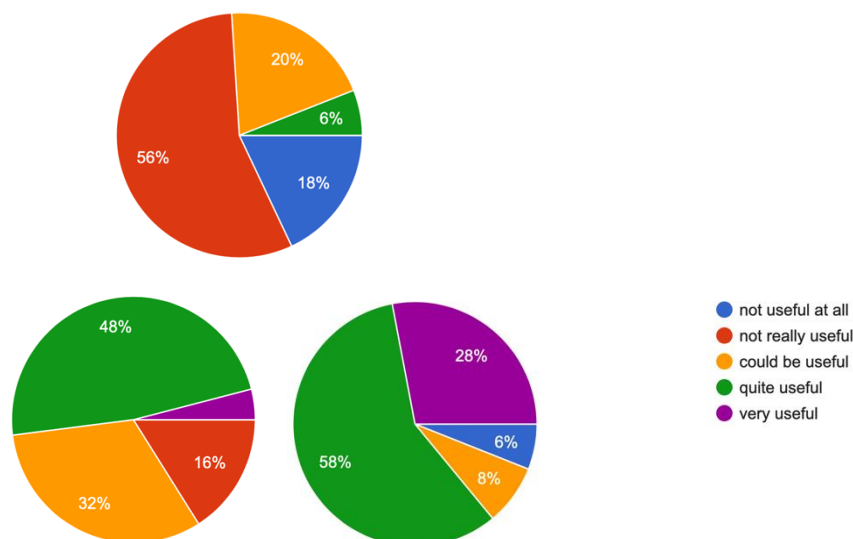
English language dramas with Japanese subtitles was not really useful, while another 18% of the participants thought that it was not useful at all. A smaller group was slightly more positive as 20% of the participants thought that watching English videos with subtitles could be useful, while 6% of the participants thought it could be quite useful. No participant thought that this mode was very useful.

The Second question was: ‘Do you think watching an English language drama with English language captions is useful for your English language learning?’. Almost half of the participants (48%) thought that watching English language videos with captions was quite useful for language learning, while 32% of the participants thought that it could be useful. A small group (4%) thought it was very useful. 16% of the participants thought it was not really useful, while no participant selected the ‘not useful at all’ option.

The Third question was: ‘Do you think watching an English language drama without any subtitles or captions is useful for your English language learning?’. The vast majority of the participants thought that watching without subtitles is useful for language learning. A bit more than a quarter of the participants (28%) thought that this was very useful, while 58% believed this mode of watching to be quite useful. A small group (8%) was a little bit less outspoken and thought that watching without any aid could be useful, while 6% of the participants believed that this mode is not useful at all.

Chart 1: Summary of the results of the pre-watching questionnaire.

From left to right: Chart A: Japanese language subtitles, Chart B: English language captions, Chart C: Without any subtitles or captions.

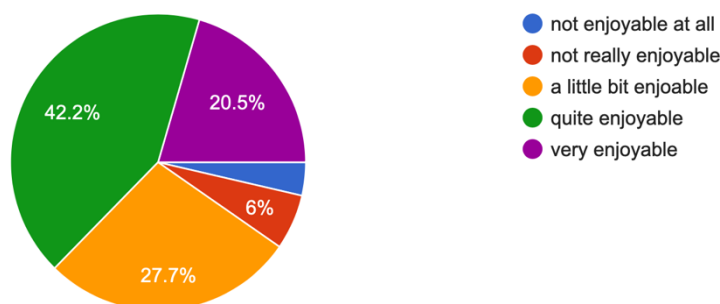


Questionnaire 2: Subtitles

This questionnaire was administered immediately after the participants finished watching the sitcom with English language audio and Japanese subtitles. The results of this one-question questionnaire show that overall, the participants enjoyed watching the sitcom with Japanese subtitles. More than a fifth (20.5%) believed it was very enjoyable, while another 42.2% of the participants felt it was quite enjoyable. A bit over a quarter of the participants (27.7%) felt that this mode was a little bit enjoyable. 6% of the participants did not really enjoy this mode, while 3.6% did not enjoy it at all.

Chart 2: Summary of the subtitles questionnaire

How enjoyable was it to watch an episode of the drama with Japanese subtitles?



Questionnaire 3: Captions

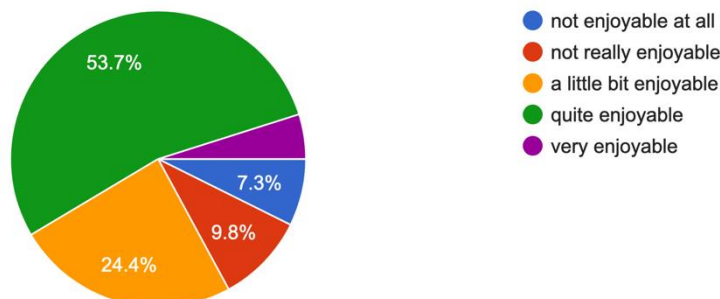
This questionnaire was administered immediately after the participants finished watching the sitcom with English language audio, and English language captions. Most of the participants (53.7%) believed this mode was quite enjoyable, while only 4.9% believed it was very enjoyable. About a quarter (24.4%) of the participants thought that this mode was a little bit enjoyable. A smaller group did not enjoy this mode, with 9.8% indicating that they did not really enjoy it while for 7.3% of the participants it was not enjoyable at all.

Chart 3: Summary of the captions questionnaire

How enjoyable was it to watch an episode of the drama with English captions?

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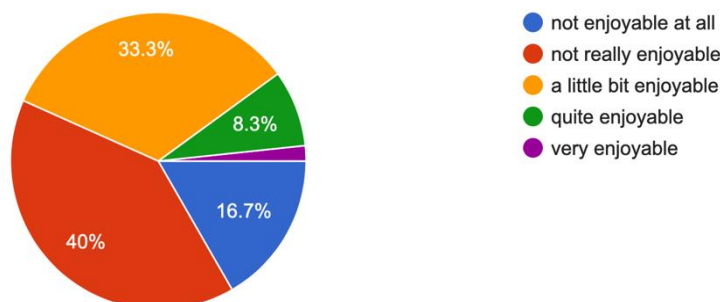


Questionnaire 4: No aid

This questionnaire was administered immediately after the participants finished watching the sitcom without any translation aid. The overall trend that can be deduced from these results is that the participants were not really positive about this mode. 16.7% did not enjoy the mode at all, while another 40% indicated that it was not really enjoyable. A third of the participants believed it was a little bit enjoyable. A small group (8.3%) believed it was enjoyable, and an even smaller group (1.7%) believed it was very enjoyable.

Chart 4: Summary of the ‘no aid’ questionnaire

How enjoyable was it to watch an episode of the drama without any subtitles or captions?



Questionnaire 5: Second usefulness questionnaire

This was the last questionnaire the participants were asked to complete and was the same as the first questionnaire the participants completed in this study. The only difference was that the first questionnaire was completed before the participants watched any of the episodes of the sitcom, while this questionnaire was completed after the participants had watched and completed all the other questionnaires.

When analyzing the responses to the first question it became obvious that more than half of the participants believed watching with Japanese subtitles was useful. 17.1% of the participants believed it was very useful while 42.9% thought it

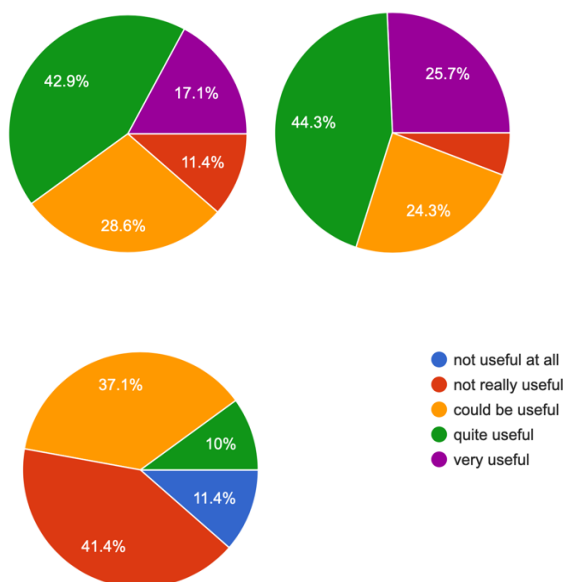
was quite useful. Another 28.6% of the participants believed that this way of watching could be useful for their English language learning. There was finally also a group of participants who believed that this mode was not really useful for language learning. No participant believed it was not useful at all.

The responses to the second question revealed that many participants were positive about this mode. More than a quarter of the participants (25.7%) believed that this mode was very useful, while another 44.3% of the participants felt that this mode was quite useful. A bit less than a quarter (24.3%) believed that watching with captions could be useful, while 5.7% believed it was not really useful. No participant selected the 'not useful at all' option.

The responses to the third question were very different. The majority of the participants felt negatively about this mode. 11.4% believed that this mode was not useful at all, while another 41.4% believed it was not really useful for their English language learning to watch videos without any aid. 37.1% believed that this mode could be useful while 10% believed it was quite useful. No participant selected the 'very useful' option.

Chart 5: Summary of the results of the post- watching questionnaire.

From left to right: Chart A: Japanese language subtitles, Chart B: English language captions, Chart C: Without any subtitles or captions.



Short interviews

The four participants were asked if their perception of usefulness had changed between the pre-watching and the post-watching questionnaires. And if it had changed why they think that was the case. All the participants indicated that their

perception of usefulness had changed.

The first participant commented that she believed that watching the video without any aid would be the best way to practice English, but that it was too difficult for her. After having watched the three episodes she realized that she was able to follow the captions mode.

The second participant indicated that she never really considered watching subtitled videos to be very useful for language learning because she would only read the Japanese text, however after having watched the sitcoms she realized that because of the subtitles she had more time to focus on the pronunciation of the actors.

The third participant stated that he initially believed that watching videos without any aid would be the best, because that's how the movies are shown on TV and movie theatres abroad. However, after having watched the three episodes he realized that it was too difficult for him. And that both subtitles and captions are very useful, while the no aid mode was not useful for him.

The fourth participant believed that watching foreign dramas with subtitles was fun, but that it could not help her to learn a language as it would be too easy. She also admitted that she had never watched any foreign videos with captions, and for that reason believed that watching without any aid was the most useful mode. After having watched the three episodes her opinion changed and she stated that watching with captions was the most useful, as it allowed her to hear and read the words at the same time. She believed that subtitles could also be useful but she felt that watching the episode without any aid was not really useful for her language learning.

5. DISCUSSION

The first question that motivated this study was: 'Which of the three language options that viewers have when accessing English language content through SVOD services do Japanese EFL learners think is the most useful for language learning.?'. The participants in this study were asked to rate the usefulness of the three modes that were in the scope of this study on two different occasions, once before and once after having watched three episodes of the sitcom. The fact that the results between the two occasions were not the same gives a lot of room for interpretation.

Before the participants had watched the sitcom the vast majority of the participants believed that watching without any subtitles or captions was useful for their English language learning, while watching with Japanese subtitles was considered to be not useful. Watching with captions was moderately useful. The findings regarding subtitling do not match the findings of de Block (1977) and Anas and Zakaria (2019), who reported that the participants in their respective studies considered subtitles to be very useful. However, after having watched the three episodes the results of the post-usefulness questionnaire are very different. This time the participants believe that watching with captions is the most useful, very closely followed by the subtitles mode. Which is in line with the available literature. Watching without any aid is considered to be not useful by the majority of the participants.

The short interviews conducted after the final questionnaire in session three explain this shift in opinion. As the interviewed participants explained, their perception was that watching without any aid is ‘real’ or authentic, and thus must be the most useful and motivating (Peacock 1997). The participants initially also felt that too much use of the first language would not be useful for language learning, but as they watched the episodes with the different language options they had realized that it is potentially useful. Also, as the fourth participant indicated, some participants might have not really understood what the difference between the language options was during the explanation before the pre-watching questionnaire. Therefore, based on the explanations provided during the interviews it can be assumed that the post-watching questionnaire is the more reliable one, and thus the answer to the first research question is that Japanese EFL learners think that watching videos with captions is the most useful for language learning, closely followed by watching videos with Japanese subtitles. This answer does suggest however that it is very important for learners to be made aware about, understand the difference and experience the various language options back-to-back at least once.

The second question that this study attempted to answer was: ‘Which of the language options do Japanese EFL learners find the most enjoyable after exposure to individual episodes of an English language TV show?’. The results of the respective questionnaires the participants completed after having watched each mode clearly show that the Japanese subtitles option was considered to be the most enjoyable mode. This result was in line with Anas and Zakaria’s (2019) study, who found in the Malaysian EFL context, that watching with subtitles is the most enjoyable mode. It is also in line with older studies who have highlighted the positive emotional impact of watching videos with L1 subtitles (De Bock, 1977; Vinje, 1994). As EFL learners watch videos in English with L1 subtitles, the three independent systems providing the input i.e. visuals, L2 audio and L1 subtitles, work together to aid language processing and thus comprehension. As the students are able to comprehend more of the audio-visual input, they are able to relax, and process more of the content of the input, which leads to greater enjoyment (Bianchi & Ciabattini, 2008). The linkage of the two verbal systems, is also potentially beneficial for retrieval as the visual traces, in combination with two different verbal traces have established more paths for recovery of the processed language (Danan, 1992).

The third question that this study attempted to answer was: ‘Does the language mode Japanese EFL learners think is the most useful match the language option Japanese EFL learners think is the most enjoyable?’. This question could be answered with a simple no. As the participants thought that watching with captions was the most useful and watching with subtitles the most enjoyable mode. One possible reason for this difference could have been that the language level of the materials was too difficult for some of the participants in this study. As watching with subtitles was easier to comprehend it became more enjoyable.

As students approach a certain activity with the expectation that that particular activity is useful, they would be more likely to engage in that activity (Barkhuizen,

1998) but they also employ more cognitive power, and this increase in attention and awareness could potentially result in more learning (Robinson et al, 2012). The perception of usefulness in combination with enjoyment is a very strong motivational tool that influences engagement and learning, and thus the ultimate proficiency level attained (Dewaele and Alfawzan, 2018; Dewaele et al., 2019; Villavicencio and Bernardo, 2013). Learners should be made aware that especially for lower level students Japanese subtitles can be very useful, and that when the materials are at an appropriate level captions could be enjoyable as well. Teachers could recommend students level appropriate shows that are available through SVOD services.

6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Watching audio-visual materials offers great opportunities for language learning. And the positive emotions of usefulness and enjoy ability greatly influence motivation and overall learning accomplishments. Based on the results from the questionnaires and the interviews with the participants in this study it can be concluded that captions are considered to be the most useful language option. The comments made by the participants during the interviews reveal that it is important that learners are made aware of the various options and that they are ideally given opportunities to experience these language options. The study also found that the Japanese subtitles language option is the most enjoyable one, closely followed by the captions option. Research has shown that the L1 subtitle option benefits comprehension of language learners the most, which suggests that some of the participants relayed on the L1 subtitles for comprehension. Finally, the language options the participants in this study deem the most useful, do not match the option that they believe is the most enjoyable. The two would ideally match as positive emotions greatly impact motivation.

Based on this conclusion Language teachers could make more use of audio-visual materials in the classroom, as well as encourage students to watch English language videos, dramas, and movies out of the classroom. Students should be made aware of the various potential benefits watching audio-visual materials for pleasure, for foreign language learning. Teachers should also explain to their students about the various language options available on the most popular SVOD services, as well as Youtube, the world's most popular video streaming platform. Students should be explained that watching with subtitles, captions, and without any aid are all potentially useful for language learning. Preferably teachers would allow students to experience the three language options that were in the scope of this study, so that students could determine for themselves which option they find the most useful. Students need to be told that watching with L1 subtitles is not a bad thing, and that it can be a very useful language learning tool, especially for students who have comprehension issues while using the other two language options. Teachers could also guide the students to interesting materials and the appropriate language options for the language level of their students, keeping in mind the students' perceptions of usefulness and enjoyability.

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