

The effects of the use of captions on low- and high-level EFL learners' speaking performance*

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Kim, Na-Young. 2020. The effects of the use of captions on low- and high-level EFL learners' speaking performance. *Linguistics Research* 37(Special Edition): 135-161. The current study explores the effects of the use of captions on low- and high-level EFL learners' English speaking performance. The entire experiment lasted for one semester of the 2019 academic year. This study was conducted at a university located in the southern part of Korea. A total of 67 students from two freshman English classes were recruited. They were divided into two groups: captioned group (N = 34) and non-captioned group (N = 33). During 10 weeks, all participants watched the audiovisual media every week in class, with captions or without captions. In order to confirm the effects of caption use, all participants were required to take speaking tests. Findings from the independent t-tests revealed the positive effects of caption use on EFL learners' overall speaking performance. Statistically significant group differences were found in both the low- and high-level learners' total speaking score. Furthermore, in the case of high-level learners, a statistically significant mean difference between the groups was observed regarding speaking fluency and accuracy. Based on these findings, several pedagogical implications and suggestions for future study are made. (Sehan University)

Keywords caption, speaking proficiency, fluency, accuracy, EFL contexts

1. Introduction

Korean society caught an English fever (Park 2009). In order to improve their English language proficiency, Korean learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) have invested an enormous amount of money, time, and effort studying English (Jeon and Paek 2008). According to Lee (2010), Korea is one of the largest consumers of English language learning products and service. They spend more than 10 billion dollars a year in the English education market. Throughout their official school career – from elementary school to high school – Korean

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students spend approximately 730 hours studying English.

Along with official English courses at school, many Korean EFL learners take extra lessons to learn English skills by receiving private tutoring (Kim and Lee 2010). They also attend academy classes and take on- and off-line English courses. Some of the learners even go to English-speaking countries to study the language. According to Jeon (2009), the national government has also created English villages and cities to support students' English education. Native speakers of English have been hired as teaching staff for these intensive language learning camps. Universities in Korea have also made fundamental changes in course delivery through English medium instruction (EMI) classes with the extensive support from the Korean government (Gu and Reynolds 2013).

Despite their eagerness and hard work, English learners in Korea have been less than successful in achieving their goal (Kim 2004). According to Han and Kim (2016), many Korean EFL learners are still not proficient in English. In spite of all the abovementioned efforts to improve English proficiency, there is no conspicuous improvement overall. Particularly, Korean learners' English speaking proficiency remains almost at the bottom when measured by well-recognized and standardized proficiency tests such as TOEFL (Kim 2018). For example, Kang (2009) reported that Korean learners of English received 18 points out of 30 on average for the TOEFL speaking test. This is lower than the world average of 19.3 points. Out of 161 nations, Korea ranked 136th on the English speaking test.

Many strategies and tools have been applied to improve English as a foreign language speaking skills (Kim 2019). Among them, English captions have been recommended for improving EFL speaking proficiency. As pedagogical instruments, captions have played an effective role in the process of foreign language learning. They have allowed foreign language learners not only to observe creditable input but also to produce perceptible output (Ayand and Shafiee 2016). In particular, previous scholars have demonstrated the positive effects of captions on EFL learners' speaking performance, suggesting that the EFL learners can benefit from English captioning (Borrás and Lafayette 1994; King 2002; Mei-ling 2007; Rokni and Ataee 2014; Talavan 2010; Vanderplank 1988).

According to Winke, Gass, and Sydorenko (2010), it is also important to

concern the learners' English proficiency level when using captions in EFL class. Although various studies have shown the positive effects of captioned media on English language learning, findings of the previous research regarding the level of proficiency have been mixed (Ghorbani 2011). Some have claimed that captions are more appropriate for high-level learners (Markham 1999), while others have reported that captions are more useful and beneficial for low-level learners (Guillory 1998). Interestingly, Winke et al. (2010) found that proficiency differences do not affect any benefits derived from the use of captions. They suggested that captioning plays a role as a language learning tool to assist processing, functioning similarly for all proficiency levels. Bird and Williams (2002) also state that for a range of proficiency levels, captions have proven to be favorable.

Although speaking has a crucial role in success of foreign language learning (Rokni and Ataee 2014), Korean learners still struggle with English speaking (Gu and Reynolds 2013). In this context, the aim of this study is to confirm whether captions have any effects on the speaking performance of Korean EFL learners. In particular, considering that previous studies have centered around the effects of caption use on intermediate-level EFL learners' speaking proficiency (Ayand and Shafiee 2016; Rokni and Ataee 2014) and no definite conclusions have been drawn as to whether captions are beneficial for low- and high-proficiency level EFL learners (Winke et al. 2010), it is also necessary to determine whether the use of captions benefits low- and high- level EFL learners' speaking performance. In light of this, the research questions for the present study were the following:

- (1) Does the use of captions have any impact on low-level EFL learners' English speaking performance?
- (2) Can high-level EFL learners benefit from the use of captions regarding English speaking performance?

2. Speaking production in the literature

Hinkel (2005) defined speaking as a process of oral language production. Language production plays a crucial role in foreign language learning (Long

1983). According to Swain's (1985) output hypothesis, language production provides foreign language learners with opportunities for contextual use of linguistic resources, which result in automaticity in language use. It forces syntactic processing so that the learners can pay more attention to syntax and use it in their language production later on. By producing a language, they also notice what they know or do not know. They can test their own language production seeing if the linguistic features they produce work.

According to Ellis (2009), fluency, accuracy, and complexity are the key aspects of language production. A proficient speaker should have the ability to produce a language fluently and accurately, using complex language. Ellis (2005) defined fluency as the capacity to use a language in real time, emphasizing meanings and drawing on more lexicalized systems. Skehan (1996) also stated that fluency refers to the capacity of a learner to mobilize an interlanguage system in order to communicate meaning in real time. According to Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) a fluent speaker produces a language in realtime without pausing or hesitation.

In terms of accuracy, Ellis (2005) defined accuracy as the capacity to avoid errors in language performance, reflecting a higher level of control in the language. Accordingly, Skehan (1996) also noted that accuracy concerns the learner's capacity to deal with interlanguage complexity. As a language learner tries to produce a language more accurately, he or she works toward controlling the linguistic elements that they have already learned. Accuracy-oriented activities focus on linguistic form and the controlled production of grammatically appropriate linguistic structures (Hammerly 1991).

Regarding complexity, Ellis (2005) defined complexity as the capacity of a language learner to use more advanced language. According to Skehan (1996), complexity is related to the stage of elaboration of the underlying interlanguage system. Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) pointed out that this elaborated language can be considered as the cutting edge of the learner's language development. Therefore, the part is not yet fully automatic. In addition, it can be conceived of as language learner's readiness to use a variety of linguistic structures. According to Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005), complexity refers to a function of the learner's desire and eagerness to try out their new linguistic knowledge in speaking performance.

Skehan (1996) suggested that improving these three main areas – fluency, accuracy, and complexity – is a core goal of language instruction. According to Housen and Kuiken (2009), as major research variables in linguistic research, fluency, accuracy, and complexity have been used as performance descriptors for speaking assessment of a language learner as well as indicators of the learner's proficiency underlying their performance. These three aspects of language production have played an essential role for measuring progress in language learning. In other words, successful performance should contain fluent and interruption-free language at a normal speech rate, accurate and error-free language, and advanced and complex language. For language learners, therefore, increasing fluency, accuracy, and complexity of speaking performance is desirable (Ahmadian and Tavakoli 2011).

However, if one of the three aspects requires working memory involvement, committing attentional resources to one can have a negative impact on others. This Trade-off Hypothesis (Skehan 2009) suggests that learners divide their attentional resources among the three aspects of language performance – fluency, accuracy, and complexity – due to capacity limitations. If task demands exceed the available resources, they come into competition with each other (Sample and Michel 2014). The control function of attention prioritizes certain aspects over others (Skehan 2009). That is, only those aspects receiving enough attention reach optimal performance while others under limited attention become incorrect. Thus, increasing fluency, accuracy, and complexity of speaking performance all together is desirable but difficult to achieve (Ahmadian and Tavakoli 2011).

For EFL learners, it is much more difficult to pay attention to fluency, accuracy, and complexity at the same time, leading to the trade-off effect among the three aspects (Skehan 2009). In addition to limited working memory, attentional resources, and processing capacity, EFL learners have more limited and lower language proficiency than L1 or L2 learners (Mochizuki and Ortega 2008). This leads them to pay simultaneous less attention to all aspects of language production.

Much research has been carried out to understand the language production and speaking proficiency of EFL learners. Nonetheless, few studies have been conducted in the EFL area (Han and Kim 2016). Therefore, more research on how to develop the three components of speaking production – fluency,

accuracy, and complexity – in a balanced way in the EFL context is of pedagogical interest.

3. Use of captions for EFL speaking proficiency

In order to improve Korean EFL learners' English speaking proficiency, language professionals have employed various types of technology in class (Kim 2017). With the significant advancement in the Internet-enabled system, multimedia technology has taken hold in Korean EFL fields. In particular, the effective role of visual multimedia in improving EFL proficiency has continuously been highlighted.

Visual multimedia is believed to be a great enhancement for EFL learning and teaching. With abundant and authentic comprehensible input, the combination of image and sound can help EFL learners to achieve their pedagogical goals of listening, reading, writing, and speaking. In this vein, visual multimedia including television, video, and computers can be a powerful tool in facilitating language learning. Many researchers have demonstrated the helpful impacts of multimedia on foreign language learning (Koh 2012).

Nevertheless, understanding these ungraded materials can be cumbersome for foreign language learners because most of them lack enough linguistic knowledge (Flowerdew and Miller 2005). Therefore, many foreign language learners often do not fully understand the multimedia content, and their comprehension is frequently limited. According to Hsu, Hwang, Chang, and Chang (2013), if EFL learners cannot understand what they see and hear from the media, they cannot connect the English word and its meaning.

To fill this gap, the use of captions has been suggested to help foreign language learners through dual processing of input (Field 2008). As a key function on television, captions can be coordinated with the monologue or dialogue of the program's audio track and augment the understanding of the program. According to Koh (2012), the use of captions has been recommended by language professionals to facilitate the comprehension of audiovisual media. Hsu et al. (2013) also suggested the use of captions to increase the foreign language learners' comprehension of the media contents.

Captions can facilitate foreign language learning by helping learners visualize what they hear (Danan 2004). Especially for EFL learners, captioned media in English is believed to be one of the richest and the most useful ways of providing authentic input. Furthermore, it has been considered to be beneficial for improving EFL learners' language proficiency (Hsu et al. 2013). Scholars have determined that foreign language learning can be more effective by implementing multimedia with aural information and visual context like captions (Danan 2004; Markham and Peter 2003). They have indicated that captions can help develop EFL learners' English language performance in vocabulary, listening comprehension, and reading comprehension.

Previous research studies have also highlighted the effective role of captions in improving speaking skills. In particular, scholars have reported that captions can be beneficial for enhancing foreign language speaking proficiency (Ayand and Shafiee 2016; Borrás and Lafayette 1994; King 2002; Mei-ling 2007; Rokni and Atae 2014; Talavan 2010; Vanderplank 1988). According to King (2002), English-captioned media is a rich source of instructional materials providing EFL learners with authentic contents and real-life examples in spoken communication.

After examining teaching English speaking through audiovisual media, Mei-ling (2007) reported that English media is helpful for motivating learners to learn English. In particular, Vanderplank (1988) argued that captioned media plays a beneficial role in EFL speaking. Talavan (2010) studied the pedagogical usage of captions with the goal of improving EFL speaking proficiency, and found that captioning can provide visual, textual, and technological support and increase English speaking skill. According to Talavan (2007), when captions are incorporated into the media, it allows the learners to feel ready, confident, and motivated to watch them.

Rokni and Atae (2014) also found that using captioned media can result in a considerable improvement in EFL learners' speaking performance. Their research examined the effects of viewing English captioned movies on EFL learners' speaking ability. 38 intermediate Iranian learners of English were randomly divided into two groups, experimental and control, and watched a movie with and without captions. Speaking pre- and post-tests were administered to measure their speaking ability at the start and at the end of the study, respectively. Their findings indicated that participants in the experimental

group showed a considerable speaking improvement in comparison with those in the control group.

More specifically, Ayand and Shafiee (2016) reported that captions can be used as a method for improving EFL speaking fluency and accuracy. They explored the effects of employing captions on English learners' speaking fluency and accuracy. 60 participants were randomly divided into two experimental groups and one control group. One of the experimental groups was exposed to English captions while the other was presented with Persian captions. The analysis of the obtained data indicated the improvement of EFL learners' speaking fluency and accuracy. No significant differences were found between the two experimental groups, suggesting that both types of captions are beneficial for improving English speaking proficiency.

As mentioned above, previous studies have demonstrated the positive effects of captions on EFL learning. In particular, captioned videos for improving English speaking skills have been suggested by previous scholars (Ayand and Shafiee 2016; Borrás and Lafayette 1994; King 2002; Mei-ling 2007; Rokni and Ataee 2014; Talavan 2010; Vanderplank 1988). However, findings of the previous caption research have yielded conflicting results regarding the level of English language proficiency (Ghorbani 2011). While Markham (1999) claimed that captions are more appropriate for high-level learners, Guillory (1998) reported that captions are more useful and beneficial for low-level learners. Others also suggested that proficiency differences do not affect any benefits derived from the use of captions (Winke et al. 2010). Captions are favorable for a range of proficiency levels (Bird and Williams 2002).

In addition to the mixed findings on the effects of caption use for EFL learning, previous caption studies have focused on intermediate-level learners, particularly related to speaking performance (Ayand and Shafiee 2016; Rokni and Ataee 2014). More research is needed to determine whether captions are also beneficial for low- or high-level EFL learners' speaking performance.

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

The present study was comprised of 67 EFL learners who enrolled in freshman English courses at a university located in the southern part in Korea. There were 42 female students and 25 male students, and their age ranged from 19 to 22. The participants had at least 10 years of English learning experience in Korea.

The university required their first-year students to take a simulated TOEIC test as a placement test. The test was administered before registering for the students' first-semester course at the university. Based on the results of the TOEIC-based placement test, all the freshman students of the university were allocated into the three-level – low, intermediate, and high-level – English classes. In the current study, the average TOEIC test score of low-level learners was 246.53 (SD = 81.59) with a range of 110 to 400. High-level learners scored 806.77 on average (SD = 19.35) with scores ranging from 785 to 855. The low- and high-level classes consisted of 36 and 31 students, respectively. Wall, Clapham, and Alderson (1994) suggested that the TOEIC test can be used to create homogeneous groups of language abilities. Therefore, each proficiency level class in the current study was considered homogeneous in terms of English language proficiency.

In order to explore whether the low- and high-level EFL learners are affected by the use of captions, participants were selected from the two intact classes, taught by the researcher of this study. One of the two classes was comprised of low-level participants while the other was high-level. Each proficiency level class was then divided into two groups at random: a captioned group and a non-captioned group. The two captioned groups (one from the low-level class and the other from the high-level class) watched the audiovisual media with captions, and the other two non-captioned groups (one from the low-level class and the other from the high-level class) watched the same media with no captions provided. The captioned group consisted of 34 students (19 from the low-level class and 15 from the high-level class) while the non-captioned group consisted of 33 students (17 from the low-level class and 16 from the high-level class). See detailed information in Table 1 below.

Table 1. The number of participants

	Captioned Group (n)	Non-captioned Group (n)	Total (N)
Low-Proficiency Level (n)	19	17	36
High-Proficiency Level (n)	15	16	31
Total (N)	34	33	67

4.2 Data collection

4.2.1 Captioned TV show

The purpose of this study was to confirm whether the use of captions improves low- and high-level EFL learners' speaking proficiency. According to Wang (2012), EFL learners in Asia have developed their self-directed learning by watching the popular English TV sitcom "*Friends*." The EFL learners have used the show as an authentic input providing communicative contexts for independent language learning (Wang 2012). Previous studies have also recommended this television program for English learning because it fairly represents spoken English conversation (Frumuselu, De Maeyer, Donche, and Plana 2015). Based on this, "*Friends*" was selected as audiovisual media for this study. There were 10 viewing sessions and all participants viewed 10 episodes of the show with or without captions.

Captioned media provides a rich context for foreign language learning. As captioned media has become increasingly popular, many EFL learners have been exposed to authentic TV show with captions (Danan 2004; Markham and Peter 2003; Taylor 2005). With the development of DVD technology allowing for a multitude of choices, audiovisual media such as movies and TV shows can be watched with captions. According to Bianchi and Ciabattoni (2008), foreign language learners, in particular, can take advantage of the text aids provided (e.g., captions) while watching audiovisual materials on DVD.

In the EFL context, viewing English-spoken products with the use of English

1 The sitcom television series "*Friends*," created by David Crane and Marta Kauffman, aired on NBC from 1994 to 2004, lasting ten seasons with 236 episodes. The main characters are twenty to thirty-something-year-old friends who are living in Manhattan. As one of the most popular TV shows of all time, this sitcom received acclaim throughout its run. It was nominated for 62 Primetime Emmy Awards and won the Outstanding Comedy Series award in 2002.

captions projected on the screen is common. According to Katchen, Lin, Fox, and Chun (2001), DVD technology provides the powerful function of selecting different captions that can facilitate the listening comprehension of foreign language students at different proficiency levels and enhance their motivation towards learning the target language. Since it is possible to choose foreign captions on DVDs, for example, EFL learners who want to improve their understanding of English language can watch some DVDs with English captions (Mitterer and McQueen 2009). Participants in the captioned group of the current study, therefore, engaged in 10 media viewing sessions over the 10 weeks using DVD technology with English captions.

4.2.2 TOEIC-based placement test

In the current study, all participants took a simulated TOEIC test as a placement test. The main purpose of this placement test was to create groups of homogeneous language abilities (Brown 1996). According to Wall et al. (1994), standardized tests such as TOEIC, TOEFL, and IELTS can be used to fulfill that purpose. Although the tests are not directly related to the content of the course in which test-takers are placed, they still have a general proficiency orientation. As a rapid, cost effective, and convenient means of placing students on the same score scale, such standardized proficiency tests allow relatively easy comparisons and placement of EFL students (Weaver 2016). In this light, the test was administered before the freshman students registered for their first-semester course at the university. All the freshman students of the university were grouped into the three levels of English proficiency – low, intermediate, and high – and then were allocated into the three-level English classes based on the results of the TOEIC-based placement test.

English language proficiency can be described on a six-level scale based on the TOEIC test scores (Krashen and Mason 2015). The English proficiency levels of the participants in the current study were also confirmed based on their TOEIC-based placement test scores. In this study, the six levels were divided in three bands: Basic Proficiency – Elementary Proficiency (Low), Elementary Proficiency Plus – Limited Working Proficiency (Intermediate), and Working

Proficiency Plus – International Professional Proficiency (High). The TOEIC test scores ranging from 10 to 400 were classified into low proficiency level while a score range of 405 to 780 was categorized in intermediate proficiency level. High proficiency level was linked to the TOEIC scores ranging from 785 to 990.

Considering that previous caption studies have been conducted focusing on intermediate-level EFL learners (Ayand and Shafiee 2016; Rokni and Ataei 2014), and conflicting results have been reported related to low- and high-level EFL learners (Winke et al. 2010), the present study aimed to determine whether the low- and high-level EFL learners benefit from the use of captions. Thus, the learners assigned to the low- and high-level classes participated in the current study. The average TOEIC test score of the low-level learners was 246.53 while that of the high-level learners was 806.77.

4.2.3 Speaking test

To conduct a close examination of the use of captions and their effects on the participants' speaking proficiency, the material chosen for this study was based on the TOEIC speaking test. The TOEIC speaking test was originally designed to associate with the theory of communicative competence. Powers, Kim, Yu, Weng, and van Winkle (2009) confirmed the validity of the test, suggesting that its measure makes a unique contribution to the English speaking proficiency assessment. That is, its test scores can indicate the test takers' general English speaking proficiency. Furthermore, in the EFL setting, the use of this test continues to increase in educational institutions such as junior colleges and universities. In this vein, the TOEIC speaking test was chosen to confirm the effects of caption use on EFL learners' speaking proficiency improvement.

The TOEIC speaking test includes six different monologic tasks: i) read a text aloud, ii) describe a picture, iii) respond to questions, iv) respond to questions using information provided, v) propose a solution, and vi) express an opinion. Monologic tasks have been largely used to evaluate speaking proficiency (Kang and Wang 2014). According to Yuan and Ellis (2003), they do not have any interaction effects, but they can trigger a great length of the test-taker's utterance (Brown and Yule 1983).

Among the six monologic tasks in the TOEIC speaking test, 'proposing a solution' task was chosen for the current study, following the previous research (Han and Kim 2016). For this task, participants were asked to recognize what problem occurs by listening to a short spoken text and to propose ways of dealing with the problem by suggesting a solution. To complete the task, they had 30 seconds to prepare their response and then 60 seconds to speak, based on the TOEIC speaking test format. Since this 'proposing a solution' task contains given information describing the problematic situation, Han and Kim (2016) suggested that test-takers can produce better performance in general compared to other speaking tasks.

All participants in the current study were asked to carry out the speaking test after the actual experiment ended. To evaluate the participants' responses, the measures using analytical rating scales for fluency, accuracy, and complexity (Iwashita, McNamara, and Elder 2001) were adopted. After investigating the previous discourse measures of fluency, accuracy, and complexity (Foster and Skehan 1999; Skehan and Foster 1999), Iwashita et al. (2001) pointed out that the previous measures are not feasible and not practical in an actual testing situation because they require time-consuming discourse analysis. They developed analytical rating scales for each rating category (fluency, accuracy, complexity) which can be scored by trained raters. Scores ranged from 1 to 5 for each category (see Appendix).

4.3 Procedures

The present study aimed to examine the effects of caption use on low- and high-level EFL learners' speaking proficiency improvement. The whole experiment lasted for one semester of the 2019 academic year at a university located in the southern part of Korea. In this university, it was mandatory for all first-year students to take a freshman English class for two hours a week. To take the class, all freshman students of the university were required to sit for an English placement test as soon as entering the school. The placement test was developed based on the TOEIC test to evaluate the first-year students' English communication competence. According to Kim and Kim (2019), language is for

communication. Based on the results of the placement test, all the freshman students were grouped into low and high levels of English and then allocated into low and high classes.

A total of 67 students from two English classes were recruited for this study. The course title was Practical English. The primary class objectives were to improve freshman students' overall English skills including listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills. There were 36 low proficiency level students in the low-level class and 31 high proficiency level students in the high-level class. Participants in each proficiency level were randomly divided into two conditions and engaged in the experiment. The intervention lasted for 10 weeks, excluding the time for data collection and mid-term and final exam. During the 10 weeks, all participants watched the audiovisual media every week in class, with captions or without captions. According to their experimental condition, the participants were separated into different classrooms and engaged in viewing sessions. Each running time was about 22-24 minutes.

In order to confirm the effects of caption use on low- and high-level EFL learners' speaking proficiency improvement, the TOEIC speaking test was employed. For the 'proposing a solution' task in the speaking test, all participants were given 30 seconds to prepare their response and then 60 seconds to speak. Their responses were recorded and submitted to the researcher of the study. Two trained raters scored the participants' responses based on the analytical rating scales (Iwashita et al. 2001). Each rating category – fluency, accuracy, and complexity – was scored from 1 to 5. The two raters participated in a 2-hour training session to achieve a best possible consensus about scoring. They were instructed to score the participants' speaking performance according to the rating scales. After the training session, they carried out an individual rating. Rater agreement was reasonably high. An inter-rater coefficient was .99.

4.4 Data analysis

Data obtained from the present study were analyzed with SPSS version 21. To evaluate the participants' speaking performance, the measures used in Iwashita et al. (2001) were adopted. There were three rating categories: fluency,

accuracy, complexity. Participants' responses were scored from 1 to 5, following their analytical rating scales (see Appendix).

For all analyses, descriptive statistics were first computed. Independent samples t-tests were then used to compare the mean differences between the groups. P value was set at .05.

5. Results

5.1 Effects of caption use on low-level EFL learners' speaking performance

To examine the effects of caption use on EFL learners' speaking performance, the participants' responses were evaluated using the analytical rating scales based on Iwashita et al. (2001). For all analyses, descriptive statistics were first computed and then independent samples t-tests were administered. Based on the results of the TOEIC-based placement test performed before the experiment, participants were grouped into low- and high-level learners of English. Given that the TOEIC test can be used to confirm the homogeneous group of language abilities (Wall et al. 1994), each proficiency level was considered homogeneous in terms of English language proficiency. Table 2 below shows the results for the effects of caption use on low-level EFL learners' speaking performance.

Table 2. The effects of caption use on low-level EFL learners' speaking performance

	Captioned Group (n = 19)		Non-Captioned Group (n = 17)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Fluency	3.68	0.48	3.53	0.80	.695	.493
Accuracy	3.37	0.50	3.29	1.10	.255	.801
Complexity	2.74	0.45	2.71	0.85	.139	.891
Total	11.79	0.42	9.53	2.40	3.829	.001

In the case of low-level participants, the findings in Table 2 above reveal that there is a significant difference in the mean scores of the total speaking score between the two groups: the captioned group and the non-captioned group ($t = 3.829$, $p = .001$). Specifically, the total score of the captioned group was 11.79

while the score of the non-captioned group was 9.53. In other words, low-level participants who watched the American media presented with captions performed significantly better on overall speaking performance compared to those who watched the same media without captions.

For the three rating categories, fluency, accuracy, and complexity, the descriptive statistics results show that the low-level captioned group outperformed the low-level non-captioned group. Regarding fluency, the mean score of the captioned group was 3.68 while that of the non-captioned group was 3.53. As for accuracy, the captioned group also did better on the speaking test than the non-captioned group with the mean scores of 3.37 and 3.29. Accordingly, in terms of complexity, low-level participants with captions provided showed better speaking performance ($M = 2.74$) than those without captions ($M = 2.71$). Although these findings reveal that the captioned group performed better than their counterpart did, the mean differences between the two groups were not statistically significant ($p > .05$).

5.2 Effects of caption use on high-level EFL learners' speaking performance

To examine the effects of caption use on high-level EFL learners' speaking performance, the participants in the high-level class took the speaking test and their responses were again analyzed with both descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests. The results are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. The effects of caption use on high-level EFL learners' speaking performance

	Captioned Group (n = 15)		Non-Captioned Group (n = 16)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Fluency	4.67	0.62	4.13	0.62	2.438	.021
Accuracy	4.47	0.52	3.94	0.77	2.227	.034
Complexity	3.53	0.52	3.25	0.77	1.190	.244
Total	12.67	0.62	11.31	1.49	3.259	.003

As can be seen from Table 3 above, in the case of high-level participants, a statistically significant mean difference between the two groups was also found in the total speaking score ($t = 3.259$, $p = .003$). The captioned group in the

high-level class received 12.67 while the non-captioned group in the same level class did 11.31. That is, high-proficiency level participants who watched English-captioned media significantly outperformed their counterpart in general.

For the three rating categories, the descriptive statistics results yielded similar results. The findings show that the high-level captioned group performed better than the same-level non-captioned group in all aspects of speaking production: fluency, accuracy, and complexity. Specifically, for fluency, the mean score of the high-level captioned group was 4.67 while that of the non-captioned group was 4.13. Likewise, about accuracy, the high-level captioned group produced more accurate spoken language than the high-level non-captioned group did, with the mean scores of 4.47 and 3.94. With regards to complexity, the captioned group ($M = 3.53$) also outperformed the non-captioned group ($M = 3.25$).

Although the mean difference turned out to be not statistically significant in terms of complexity, indicating that there was no significant effect of caption use on speaking complexity, significant mean differences were found in both fluency ($t = 2.438$, $p = .021$) and accuracy ($t = 2.227$, $p = 0.034$). That is, high-level EFL learners performed better orally regarding fluency and accuracy. This suggests that the use of captions in high-level EFL class is beneficial for producing spoken language more fluently and more accurately.

6. Discussion

English-captioned media has provided EFL learners with authentic contents and real-life examples in spoken communication. It has played a role as a rich source of instructional materials in EFL settings (King 2002). Previous research studies have demonstrated the effective role of captions in improving speaking proficiency (Ayand and Shafiee 2016; Borrás and Lafayette 1994; Mei-ling 2007; Rokni and Ataee 2014; Talavan 2010; Vanderplank 1988). However, language scholars have not reached consensus on the effectiveness of captions in EFL classes. Considering that there has been a never-ending debate about whether audiovisual materials should be captioned, the findings of this study are in accordance with the proponents of captions suggesting their positive effects on EFL learning (Ayand and Shafiee 2016; Borrás and Lafayette 1994; Hsu et al.

2013; King 2002; Mei-ling 2007; Rokni and Atae 2014; Talavan 2010; Vanderplank 1988).

Particularly, in the current study, significant group differences in the total speaking score for both low- and high-level learners were found. This proves that the use of captions is beneficial for both low- and high-level EFL learners' speaking performance. The previous findings on caption use regarding proficiency level, however, have been mixed (Ghorbani 2011). While some scholars have reported that high-level learners can benefit more from captioning (Markham 1993), others have indicated that captions benefit low-level learners more (Guillory 1998).

In this regard, findings of the present study demonstrate that both low- and high-level EFL learners can benefit from the use of captions regarding overall speaking performance. This is in line with the previous study (Winke et al. 2010), suggesting that the use of captions can play a role as a foreign language learning tool, functioning similarly for all proficiency levels. Considering that speaking proficiency improvement through captioning has focused on intermediate-level EFL learners (Ayand and Shafiee 2016; Rokni and Atae 2014), the present study provides evidence about whether captions are beneficial for low- and high- proficiency EFL learners.

Meanwhile, when it comes to the three aspects of speaking performance, fluency, accuracy, and complexity, findings of the current study reveal that the use of captions can be beneficial for high-level EFL learners' speaking fluency and accuracy. This is in line with the previous research, Ayand and Shafiee (2016), reporting that captions can be used for increasing EFL speaking fluency. The ultimate goal of foreign language learning is to achieve native-like speaking ability, and fluent speaking proficiency is becoming more and more crucial in the age of globalization. In this respect, one of the most important goals of EFL teaching in Korea lies in developing learners with fluent speaking proficiency (Han and Kim 2016). English-captioned media, therefore, can be recommended for EFL learners who want to improve their speaking fluency. Particularly, considering that findings of this study proved the positive effects of caption use on high-level EFL learners, captioned media can be employed in advanced EFL classes.

In addition, high-level EFL learners in the current study also revealed that

they can benefit from using captioned media in class in regard to accuracy. In EFL settings, teachers consider language accuracy very important, but their teaching materials are mostly textbook-oriented and lack an authentic and meaningful context. According to the previous research (Hammerly 1991), this consequently inhibits English language learning beyond classrooms. However, the current study confirms the American media "*Friends*" to constitute a fairly accurate representation of spoken communication, as Wang (2012) suggested.

According to Quaglio (2009), this TV show has provided students with accurate examples of the relation between the structural forms and their functional correlates. From this point of view, the current study proves that the use of captions can play a positive role in increasing accuracy of EFL speaking. With the increasing availability of captions, the learners can form an accurate memory trace of the words, making them identify equivalent sounds more easily (Caimi 2006). In particular, given that high-level EFL learners in the present study significantly benefited from watching captioned media, captions can also be used to improve speaking accuracy in advanced EFL classes.

When using captions in EFL class, learners' proficiency level should be carefully considered (Winke et al. 2010). Taylor (2005) suggested that learners in different proficiency levels have different gains from captioned media. According to Rokni and Ataee (2014), in low-level classes, captions can be used to provide cultural information about the foreign country. In high-level classes, they can provide an insight into the language. This study also proves that caption use can be particularly beneficial for high-level EFL learners' speaking fluency and accuracy, showing the significant mean differences between the captioned and non-captioned groups.

However, in terms of the overall speaking performance, the findings also reveal that use of captions turned out to be beneficial for both low- and high-level EFL learners. Considering this, further research on the effects of caption use by proficiency level should be undertaken.

7. Conclusion

Among the four main language skills, listening, reading, speaking, and

writing, speaking plays the crucial role in success of language learning (Rokni and Ataee 2014). In this context, Korean learners of English invest an enormous amount of money, time, and effort studying English (Jeon and Paek 2008). However, they still struggle in English speaking (Gu and Reynolds 2013). From this point of view, the current study aimed to determine whether captions benefit Korean EFL learners' speaking performance. In particular, given that inconclusive findings have been drawn as to whether the use of captions are more beneficial for low- or high-level EFL learners and previous caption studies have focused on intermediate-level EFL learners regarding speaking proficiency (Ayand and Shafiee 2016; Rokni and Ataee 2014), this study examined the effects of the use of captions on low- and high-level EFL learners' speaking performance.

Major findings are as follows: First, for both proficiency levels, there was a significant difference in the total mean score of speaking performance between the two groups, captioned group and non-captioned group, showing the superior effect of caption use on EFL speaking performance. That is, both low- and high-level EFL learners who were exposed to captions benefited more than those who were not. Particularly, in the case of high-level EFL learners, captions also played a beneficial role in increasing the high-level learners' speaking fluency and accuracy.

Previous studies on caption use have yielded inconclusive results. Proponents of captions have argued that captions help develop foreign language proficiency by enabling learners to be conscious of their target language that they may not otherwise understand (Borrás and Lafayette 1994; Hsu et al. 2013). Opponents of the use of captions in foreign language learning have argued that their presence is distracting, slowing down foreign language development (Rokni and Ataee 2014). Furthermore, concerning proficiency levels, the previous caption research has also yielded conflicting results (Ghorbani 2011). Some scholars have suggested that learners at different proficiency levels have different gains from captions (Guillory 1998; Markham 1993; Taylor 2005), whereas others have reported that captions are equally beneficial for all proficiency levels (Bird and Williams 2002; Katchen et al. 2001; Winke et al. 2010).

From this point of view, findings of the current study prove the positive effects of captions on overall EFL speaking performance, supporting the

proponents of caption use (Borrás and Lafayette 1994; Hsu et al. 2013). In particular, this study suggests that both low- and high-level Korean EFL learners can improve their speaking performance by watching captioned media, in accordance with the previous findings (Bird and Williams 2002; Katchen et al. 2001; Winke et al. 2010). Furthermore, high-level learners can also benefit from using captions for their speaking fluency and accuracy, supporting that captions provide an insight into the language in high-level classes (Rokni and Atae 2014).

Results of the current study yield several practical and pedagogical implications. First, language instructors in EFL settings can make use of captions in their class to improve their students' speaking performance. In particular, captions can be adopted for both low- and high-level EFL students if the class objective is to improve overall speaking proficiency. However, in order to increase the students' specific aspects of speaking such as fluency and accuracy, captions can be employed in high-level class. The instructors, therefore, should carefully consider their students' English proficiency level when using captions in their class. They should be aware of different characteristics of captioned media to make the best and most appropriate use of captions.

Limitations and suggestions for this study are as follows: First, findings cannot be generalized due to the small sample size (N = 67). Moreover, all participants were Korean EFL learners. Different findings can be obtained in different settings. Even though there was a placement test to create groups of homogeneous language abilities, this study did not include a pretest which could assess the equivalence of groups at baseline.

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Appendix

Rating Scales adopted from Iwashita, McNamara, and Elder (2001)

Fluency	5	Speaks without hesitation; speech is generally of a speed similar to a native speaker.
	4	Speaks fairly fluently with only occasional hesitation, false starts and modification of attempted utterance. Speech is only slightly slower than that of a native speaker.
	3	Speaks more slowly than a native speaker due to hesitations and word-finding delays.
	2	A marked degree of hesitation due to word-finding delays or inability to phrase utterances easily.
	1	Speech is quite disfluent due to frequent and lengthy hesitations or false starts.
Accuracy	5	Errors are barely noticeable.
	4	Errors are not unusual, but rarely major.
	3	Manages most common forms, with occasional errors; major errors present.
	2	Limited linguistic control; major errors frequent.
	1	Clear lack of linguistic control even of basic forms.
Complexity	5	Confidently attempts a variety of verb forms (e.g., passives, modals, tense, and aspect), even if the use is not always correct. Regularly takes risks grammatically in the service of expressing complex meaning. Routinely attempts the use of coordination and subordination to convey ideas that cannot be expressed in a single clause, even if the result is occasionally awkward or incorrect.
	4	Attempts a variety of verb forms (e.g., passives, modals, tense, and aspect), even if the use is not always correct. Takes risks grammatically in the service of expressing complex meaning. Regularly attempts the use of coordination and subordination to convey ideas that cannot be expressed in a single clause, even if the result is awkward or incorrect.
	3	Mostly relies on simple verb forms, with some attempts to use a greater variety of forms (e.g., passives, modals, more varied tense and aspect). Some attempt to use coordination and subordination to convey ideas that cannot be expressed in a single clause.
	2	Produces numerous sentence fragments in a predictable set of simple clause structures. If coordination and/or subordination are attempted to express more complex clause relations, this is hesitant and done with difficulty.
	1	Produces mostly sentence fragments and simple phrases. Little attempt to use any grammatical means to connect ideas across clause.

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