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## **Interlingual Subtitling as a Mode of Facilitating Incidental Foreign Language Acquisition**

### **Abstract:**

Because there is no study in the existing literature addressing a combination of receptive and productive foreign language (FL) skills via quantitative and qualitative methods, the present article has tried to close this research gap. The study reveals the impact of unassisted video exposure with reversed subtitles-L2 on incidental FL lexis and grammar acquisition, reading-based general comprehension and writing skill. In terms of FL skills, quantitative results indicate that writing skill shows greater acquisition effects than reading-based general comprehension skill. FL grammar was the least impacted upon after video exposure, whereas vocabulary acquisition shows the most beneficial effects. The interviewees' reflections from in-depth interviews suggest that by exposing native Slovenian speakers to reversed subtitles-L2 optimal conditions for them to lower their cognitive overload were created and that the learners who learned the most in the study were the ones who were adequately predisposed towards FL stimuli to improve their FL performance. Furthermore, video viewing induced lower levels of anxiety compared with normal apprehension in FL class and the feeling of being able to claim responsibility for their own FL learning. These findings echo the outcomes of those studies that reinforced the positive effects of a low affective filter of FL learners, an anxiety-free learning environment and learners' high involvement in an FL stimulus that enables FL input to be internalized in the form of FL intake. Moreover, enhanced performance without any conscious knowledge of the underlying system may be seen as evidence of implicit FL learning.

### **1. Introduction**

Using digital media to improve FL learners' overall FL proficiency, especially via the internet, by playing video games, watching TV, DVD feature films and videos – dubbed or subtitled - may be regarded by now as a learning process, since they have proven to be a novel, genuinely authentic source of situations for FL learning and FL acquisition (e.g., Canning-Wilson, 2000; Stempleski, 2000; Van de Poel et al., 2001; Bayon, 2004; Talavan Zanon, 2006; Perego et al., 2007; Ranalli, 2008; Gentzkow et al., 2008; Cross, 2009; Kavaliauskiene et al., 2010; Kuppens, 2010). Quite a few authors have argued that there are several advantages to using digital media to teach/learn an FL (Brett, 2000; Holden, 2000; Donley, 2000; Yamanaka, 2003; Sokoli, 2006). Nevertheless, a question remains regarding how much modern FL teaching/learning has started awakening to the potential of teaching/learning/acquiring an FL via digital media (e.g., Vanderplank 1999) and, in particular, how much viewing subtitled programmes could promote intentional FL learning or incidental FL acquisition or which subtitling combination is the most beneficial.

As regards the pedagogical implications of using the digital media for English as a second language (ESL)/English as a foreign language (EFL), research evidence abundantly supports the usefulness of subtitles for ESL/EFL purposes. Typically, studies on interlingual subtitles so far have focused on examining the following parameters: adult vs. children FL acquisition, short-term vs. long-term effects, intentional vs. incidental FL acquisition, acquisition of L2 vs. L1, viewing TV vs. video subtitles or viewing with vs. without subtitles (e.g., Vanderplanck, 2010). Moreover, most of the previous research has dealt with only a few areas - namely, with the effects of processing subtitles on the acquisition of FL lexis (Al-Seghayer, 2001; Hulstijn, 2003; Pulido, 2003; Stewart et al; 2004; Yuksel et al., 2009) and on the FL listening/understanding and reading benefits (Yoshino et al., 2000; Markham et al., 2001; Kothari et al., 2002; 2004; Taylor, 2005; Caimi, 2006; Grgurovic et al., 2007). Essentially, FL vocabulary acquisition is assumed to be of paramount importance to FL learners' overall proficiency (e.g., Hulstijn, 2003); however, the outcomes of these studies still do not show conclusively that processing subtitles allows for long-term vocabulary gains.

Since the notions incidental/intentional refer to quite different learning processes (e.g., Kuppens, 2010), it is important that the outcomes of these studies also be evaluated in light of this. To turn to incidental FL acquisition only, quite a few studies may have proven the connection between processing interlingual subtitles and incidental FL acquisition (Borell, 2000; Danan, 2004; Bueno, 2009); however, with rare exceptions (e.g., Kuppens, 2010), they

seem to have mostly established short-term effects of subtitling on FL proficiency (Zahar et al., 2001; Uchikoshi, 2006). It seems that prior research has rarely addressed the issue of FL grammar acquisition via viewing subtitles (Koolstra and Beentjes, 1999; Lee, 2002; Van Lommel et al., 2006). In the available literature, only Markham et al., (2001) have explored the development of FL learners' productive writing skill through subtitles, but the summary writing activity was performed in L1 and the study is quantitative only. Previous studies have therefore addressed the interaction between interlingual subtitling and a few of the issues examined in this study; however, they have mostly dealt with receptive, not productive FL skills, treating them separately, not in combination, and using just quantitative methods. In view of this, and due to a lack of research into these issues, this study has tried to close this research gap by employing interlingual reversed subtitling-L2 as a treatment condition to look into the impact of unassisted video exposure on incidental FL lexis and grammar acquisition, reading-based general comprehension and FL writing skill. Moreover, our research tries to fill this gap by adopting an innovative approach; i.e., a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, as this is assumed to enable a researcher to obtain deeper insight into the influence of such video exposure on learners' overall FL ability.

In the theoretical background, relevant research on processing subtitles in ESL/EFL contexts will be described, as well as a short review of the notions incidental/intentional. After the methodology chapter, results of analyses will be presented, and later on interpreted in the broader context of enhancing incidental FL acquisition via interlingual subtitling.

## **2. Theoretical background**

### ***2.1 Processing subtitles as an authentic source of contexts for ESL/EFL purposes***

In many western European countries where subtitling is the preferred option, there is evidence that interlingual subtitling impacts positively the viewers' FL proficiency. In other words, to take English as an FL, learners' listening comprehension, English literacy and reading abilities are apparently statistically far higher in subtitling than in dubbing countries (Koolstra et al., 2002; Van Lommel et al., 2006). The effect of processing subtitles in English even appears to be equivalent to at least twenty years of traditional classroom-based instruction (Rupérez et al., 2009). Reading activity, both extensive and intensive, seems to be an automatically elicited response in viewers who start paying attention to the script in

subtitles subconsciously, even with FL subtitles and independently of FL knowledge (d'Ydewalle et al., 1991; d'Ydewalle and Van de Poel, 1999). Moreover, the processing of the subtitles - i.e., reading and listening to the sound track - seem to be almost simultaneous, automatic and effortless processes (d'Ydewalle et al., 1999; Borell, 2000) during which details of the pictorial information are not missed while switching attention from one mode to the other.

Although FL teaching/learning has traditionally been focused primarily on textbooks, several authors seem to have proven the benefits of using computer-based multimedia instruction and simulation games; suggesting an impressive impact of digital media on FL proficiency (Shea, 2000; Washburn, 2001; Koolstra et al., 2002; Ranalli, 2008; Kavaliauskiene et al., 2010). However, some authors have suggested the usefulness of a combination of structured pre- and post-viewing activities, discussions and reviews along with a video clip to maximize FL intake (e.g., Donley, 2000; Sherman, 2003). Learning an FL is no longer a static experience (King, 2002; Bueno, 2009) since viewers are actively watching, reading and listening, and thus acquiring information intentionally or unintentionally via in-class and out-of-class learning in passionate affinity spaces (e.g., Gee and Hayes, 2011).

The prevalence of research on the usefulness of processing subtitles for FL teaching/learning/acquisition so far has looked into two areas: firstly, the impact of processing subtitles on the acquisition of FL vocabulary (d'Ydewalle et al., 1999; Yu, 2001; Van de Poel et al., 2001; Hulstijn, 2001; Bird et al., 2002; Laufer, 2003; Markham and Peter, 2003; Pulido, 2004; Danan, 2004; Kuppens, 2010), and secondly, there has been research into the effects of processing subtitles on the improvement of FL skills (Markham and Peter, 2003; Huang and Eskey, 1999-2000; Holden, 2000; Lee, 2002; Kothari et al., 2002; Laufer, 2003; Pulido, 2003; 2004; Taylor, 2005).

The emphasis on FL lexis improvement via interlingual subtitling is actually not surprising as vocabulary acquisition is considered paramount to achieving good overall FL proficiency (e.g., Hulstijn, 2003). Most theorists of lexical development believe that a cocktail of multiple mechanisms is underlying the word-learning phenomenon (e.g., Diesendruck, 2009). Nevertheless, several studies have noted, besides other factors, the importance of

learners' attention in promoting learning of words (Robinson, 2003; Saffran and Thiessen, 2009; Dörnyei, 2009; Gerken, 2009).

Apparently, attention will also be raised due to learning an FL in a novel way via processing subtitles since they have been reported to reduce learner-viewer anxiety (e.g., Danan, 2004). Consequently, contemporary pedagogical theory has been emphasizing the substantial effects of affective factors on FL learning for quite some time (Ellis, 2006; Dörnyei, 2009; Schmid, 2011). Subtitling has been proven to have a beneficial effect on creating low-anxiety environment and involvement in the message - the two prerequisites to creating a low affective filter and consequently allowing FL input in instead of blocking it out (Krashen, 1985). FL learners processing subtitles seemed to be relieved of learner anxiety and quite confident, they projected more mental energy and assumed a much more positive attitude towards FL learning than those without them (e.g., Borrás and Lafayette, 1994).

The basic idea underlying the claim that FL vocabulary can be acquired via subtitled script is actually based on several other assumptions - the noticing assumption, the guessing ability assumption, the guessing-retention link assumption and the cumulative gain assumption - which actually have been criticized due to a lack of hard empirical evidence (e.g., Laufer, 2003). Numerous researchers argue that acquiring new FL lexis requires frequent exposure to FL words in different forms (Ellis et al., 1993; Schmidt, 2001; Bird et al., 2002), which is in line with the current pedagogical trends of trying to foster unintentional, incidental FL vocabulary acquisition instead of teaching it explicitly and intentionally (Lee, 2004; Yuksel et al., 2009). In turn, visual orthographic information in subtitles in combination with the auditory information in the bimodal condition appears to have a significant facilitatory effect on long-term implicit and explicit vocabulary learning (Bird et al., 2002). At the same time, certain findings show learners' subjective evaluations of their own understanding of new words in context to be hugely over-estimated. Therefore the assumption about FL vocabulary acquisition via reading a subtitled script cannot be taken for granted (e.g., Laufer and Yano, 2001). Nevertheless, one fact remains undisputed - learning materials featuring bimodal FL input - i.e., integration of visual and auditory learning context - provide inclusive instruction for right-brain-dominant language students who are dependent on images to remember and think (Brown, 2007).

A word of caveat: the outcomes of the research on intentional FL learning must not be confused with the findings on incidental FL acquisition as the notions of incidental/intentional refer to two completely different processes (Ellis, 2005; Dörnyei, 2009; Kuppens, 2010). Predictably, research has suggested the more intentional, deliberate attention a learner gives a FL word, the more likely it is to be learned (e.g., Nation, 2005). Fundamentally, incidental learning has been used to refer to unintentional acquisition of language while the focus is not on form, but on meaning, function and successful completion of a listening, reading, speaking or writing activity. It is learning as a by-product, and not to memorize the information or commit it to memory (Hulstijn, 2001). Nevertheless, it appears that processing meaning-focused receptive language such as by viewing TV, films and videos, may anyway result in explicit learning (Dörnyei, 2009). A critical operational distinction between incidental and intentional or goal-oriented learning is the fact that with incidental learning there is no pre-warning to the participants in L2 research that they will be tested afterwards or what test to expect (Hulstijn, 2003).

Although the discussion about incidental/intentional reaches beyond the scope of the present article, it must be mentioned that the two notions of incidental/intentional are not to be confused with explicit/implicit learning though they may appear indistinguishable (Hulstijn, 2001). Thus, explicit learning will normally be labelled as intentional learning, however, it may be also incidental (Schmidt, 2001). There have been attempts to define incidental learning as a subset of implicit learning since it seems to be less explicit than intentional learning; however, being less explicit is not an automatic sign of incidental learning being unintentional or implicit (*ibid*). Interestingly, incidental and intentional learning both require attention and noticing (Hulstijn, 2003)

In view of this, a number of experimental studies seem to have confirmed incidental FL benefits due to processing interlingual subtitles (Williams and Thorne, 2000; Al-Seghayer, 2001; Tschirner, 2001; Van de Poel and d'Ydewalle, 2001; Markham and Peter, 2003; Pulido, 2003, 2004; Ranalli, 2008). Nevertheless, they have mostly found mild impact on the learners' overall FL proficiency (Kuppens, 2010; Vanderplanck, 2010) as well as rather limited influence on FL grammar acquisition (e.g., Rodrigo, 2006)

Although some authors (e.g., Hulstijn, 2001) have criticized the lack of delayed post-tests to assess FL retention in case of incidental learning, some have argued in favour of the

opposite argument; i.e., one immediate post-test and no delayed post-tests (ibid). According to the same author, an immediate post-test is the only measure necessary, mainly for the following reasons: generally speaking, decreased performance on post-tests is expected since people tend to forget information without additional exposure or rehearsal; secondly, this fall in performance seems irrelevant from the educational point of view since it is common knowledge that rehearsal is vital for a long-term retention in learning; and thirdly, when research focuses on the type of learning novel language during initial exposure, and not after exposure under the influence of rehearsal and re-exposure, one immediate post-test seems appropriate. To continue in a similar vein, it was decided that incidental FL acquisition induced by reversed subtitles-L2 in a video exposure in this study was to be measured by administering an immediate post-test.

### **3. Methodology**

The goal of this article is to present a systematic and detailed analysis of immediate, incidental FL acquisition arising from unassisted processing of reversed subtitles-L2 in video exposure. The present study first employs quantitative pre- and post-test surveys, and then qualitative in-depth interviews. The combination of both methods was deemed legitimate to obtain generalized and in-depth results. At the same time, qualitative interviews enabled a profound insight into the potential of using interlingual subtitling as a mode of promoting incidental FL acquisition.

The study is looking for the answers to the following research questions: How well can viewing a native audio with English subtitles facilitate English language acquisition? How well can these processes be empirically proven? Which English language skill will show the greatest improvement while processing reversed subtitles-L2: writing or reading-based general comprehension? Finally, to what extent does processing reversed subtitles-L2 influence English vocabulary and grammar acquisition? The assumption underlying this approach is that drawing inferences from what we know in order to understand the unknown is fundamental to human thinking (e.g., Yu 2001: 18).

Pre- and post-test surveys, useful for obtaining impact data for progress reports (e.g., Dietz and Kalof, 2009), were employed as the first method. Seventy seven university-level

EFL students, all non-native speakers of English and second-year students at the Business School and School of Business and Economics at the Faculty of Economics in Ljubljana in the academic year 2011, were invited to partake in the research. The average age of the respondents was 19, and, generally, they had had 8 to 10 years of general English instruction at the start of business English lectures in the second year. The data collection took place during the regularly scheduled class periods. The decision was made to opt for reversed subtitling-L2 in a video exposure due to the alleged effectiveness of this subtitling format (Díaz-Cintas and Fernández Cruz, 2008). A video was chosen as a medium for subtitling since it is a form of digital media that embodies the properties of oral and written language and has the ability to convey the language interactively (e.g., Gee and Hayes 2011). Pre-tests were administered before viewing a video clip, and, to evaluate FL retention from processing subtitles, immediate, not delayed, FL acquisition assessment was made via an identical set of four post-tests.

The topic of the video *Wulfy* (Luzar, 2007) deals with human isolation and features an elderly pensioner who takes his neighbour's dog for a walk, but pretends the dog is his in order to try and meet people socially. While looking for a runaway dog, he makes friends with two young Jehovah's witnesses from the USA, gets them drunk, and the next day prepares lunch for them. By choosing the video *Wulfy* (Luzar, 2007) with reversed subtitles-L2, optimal conditions for native speakers of Slovenian to lower their cognitive overload were created. It is true they had to infer the meaning from both — linguistic clues from English subtitles and linguistic and non-linguistic clues from their mother-tongue audio - but the second activity took place effortlessly. The lexis and grammar from the video were evaluated as appropriate for the B2 level of FL competence as set in the English syllabus at the Faculty of Economics and according to the CEFRL classification (2001), and secondly, they were also adequate due to the fact that there are no more than one or two unknown words per 100 running words in easily understood context in order for incidental learning to occur (Nation, 2005). In view of this, the respondents' FL reading skill was assessed as good enough not to hinder the processing of the subtitles.

English vocabulary and grammar from the reversed subtitles L2 were used as a basis for devising two identical sets of four pre- and post-tests comprising a multiple-choice vocabulary test, a grammar test, a writing test and a general comprehension test (Appendices 1 and 2). The distractors were included on the basis of the visual or phonetic similarity with

the key word that was actually given in Slovenian, due to Slovenian audio, in an otherwise English test. For instance, in the vocabulary test: What is the correct spelling in English of slov. *blagajniški racun*? a) receipt b) recipe c) reciept; or, in the grammar test: What is the English expression for slov. *Kaj boste spili*? a) What will you drink? b) What are you having? c) What are you drinking?; and, in the spelling test: How do we spell correctly in English slov. *sestavine*? a) ingridients b) ingredients c) ingritiends.

Based on the existing research, the following hypotheses were formulated: the effects of processing reversed-L2 subtitles can be measured empirically by showing improvement on subsequent post-tests (Hypothesis 1), and additionally, any possible better achievement on the subsequent post-tests should be attributed to the effects of incidental FL learning since the participants were not primed for any lexis, grammar or comprehension regarding the topic of the video, neither by any discussion nor by pre-tests (Hypothesis 2). Equally, with a view to securing the optimal conditions for incidental FL learning and not invoking any intentional learning, the participants were not told in advance that they would be re-tested unexpectedly after viewing a video.

In-depth interviews were conducted (N=22) with a view to gaining deeper insights into the possibilities of using reversed subtitles L2 for incidental FL acquisition and to find out the participants' feelings, experiences and perceptions on the use of subtitles for FL acquisition. In methodological literature it is widely recognized that in-depth interviews are the most likely way to obtain indispensable information about the research subjects (Schutt, 2001). 12 interviewees were male and 10 female. They participated in the research voluntarily, but only spoke on condition that complete anonymity would be guaranteed, so we labelled them using letters, and words that could identify them were omitted and replaced by ellipses. Key questions were those enquiring about the interviewees' opinions on learning an FL via interlingual subtitle processing and video viewing, their personal experience, on reasons for positive or negative attitudes and views on future prospectives of interlingual subtitle-processing for such FL learning. Interviews were conducted individually, and lasted from one to two hours.

#### **4. Results**

First, quantitative and then qualitative results will be presented.

#### 4.1. Results of pre- and post-tests

The quantitative results were analyzed with a view to whether the students achieved any progress or not. Accordingly, the mistakes on the pre-test that the students corrected after viewing the video were categorized as “improvement/ have improved”. On the other hand, two types of mistakes were categorized as “no improvement/ have not improved”: firstly, the mistakes on the pre-test that were retained after viewing the video and the correct answers which should have been left intact, but were changed into the wrong ones. In light of this, the expressions denoting improvement - e.g. 100 % or 80 % improvement - refer to all the respondents with the same number of mistakes on the pre-test improving after viewing the video, but not necessarily to the fact that all of them have improved up to the same extent.

The results of the research showed that a Slovenian audio with English subtitles can facilitate English language acquisition for non-native speakers of English. The results confirm the first hypothesis, illustrating that the effects of processing reversed-L2 subtitles can be measured empirically by measuring improvement on the subsequent post-tests. The second hypothesis can also be accepted; reversed subtitling-L2 did improve certain aspects of the participants’ overall FL ability, so they performed better on the post-tests.

**Table 1:** Share of students with (non)improvement on general comprehension pre- and post-tests,  $\chi^2$  test, N=77, sig.  $p < 0.001$ .

General comprehension pre-test mistakes	General Comprehension post-test		Total
	improvement	non-improvement	
Zero	0	0	0 100%
One	0	1 100%	1 100%
Two	7 24.1 %	22 75.9%	29 100%
Three	31 66 %	16 34%	47 100%

The general comprehension pre-test consisted of three questions, whereas the post-test includes an additional, fourth, summary-writing question. The students’ replies were not categorized according to the number of grammatical mistakes but with reference to two other factors: firstly, whether the contents were satisfying or non-satisfying and secondly, whether

the five pre-selected key words were mentioned and spelt correctly in each of the five sentences. The 'non-improvement' category also comprises a 'no answer' category. With a view to achieving that, the replies were looked into in terms of improvement/non-improvement. Among the respondents with zero satisfying replies on the general comprehension pre-test (N=47 student), 66 % improved their answers after viewing the video while 34% did not. Among the respondents with one satisfying reply on the general comprehension pre-test (N=1 student), there is no improvement after viewing the video. Among the respondents with two satisfying replies on the general comprehension pre-test (N=29 student), 24.1 % improved after viewing the video while 75.9 % did not. There were no students with all three satisfying replies.

The summary question required the students to summarize the contents of the video in five sentences, regardless of their length. Grammar was not taken into account and all the summaries with more or fewer sentences than five were eliminated. The remaining students' summaries (49) were categorized according to whether the summary adequately described the video contents. Without the students being notified and with a view to assessing the summaries appropriately, two prerequisites were set in advance, namely, mentioning five key events with five key words from the subtitles. As five plot milestones the students should have mentioned: a lonely elderly pensioner, his borrowing a neighbour's dog and losing it, making friends with the two Jehovah's witnesses while trying to find the dog and intoxicating them, preparing a lunch for them and trying to intoxicate them again, and lastly, his daughter's refusal to stay for lunch and the fact that she only came to collect the tickets. As a second prerequisite, in each of these five plot milestones, five key words, not special or difficult in any way, from the subtitles were selected: *a loaf, take for a walk, an elder, Jehova's, a turkey*. Altogether, ten points were allocated to these ten factors, one point for the satisfying contents in each sentence and one point for a correctly spelt key word. When a student was given one point, it was for mentioning the plot milestone without a pre-selected word, not the other way round.

The outcomes show that eleven students were able to reach almost all the points allocated for the summary, that is nine points, and thirteen students (N=7; N=6) performed only slightly worse - i.e., they earned eight and seven points out of ten. Another thirteen students were still able to write adequate enough summaries to reach 60%. The remaining twelve students performed below 60%. To recap, after video exposure, and in terms of

comprehensibility of their summaries as well as meeting the pre-set criteria - i.e., summarizing the video in L2 by mentioning five key events along with five pre-selected key words from subtitles - 76% of students (N=37) were able to summarize the plot of the video in terms of reaching a passing 60% result on the essay-writing task on their final end-of-term FL tests.

**Table 2:** Share of students with (non)improvement on writing pre- and post-tests,  $\chi^2$  test, N=77, sig. p<0.001.

Writing pre-test mistakes	Writing post-test mistakes		Total
	improvement	non-improvement	
Zero	5 71.4%	2 28.6 %	7 100%
One	7 29.1%	17 70.9 %	24 100%
Two	34 79.1%	9 20.9 %	43 100%
Three	3 100%	0	3 100%

The writing pre- and post-tests consisted of three multiple choice questions, each with three given answers. The maximum number of mistakes that the respondents could have made was three. Among the respondents with zero mistakes on the writing pre-test (N=7 students), 71.4 % retained the correct answers after viewing the video versus 28.6 % who either retained the mistake or changed the correct reply into a wrong one. Among the respondents with one mistake on the writing pre-test (N=24 students), there was 29.2 % improvement after viewing the video versus 70.9 % who either retained the mistake or changed the correct reply into a wrong one. Among the respondents with two mistakes on the writing pre-test (N=43 students), there was 79.1 % improvement after viewing the video versus 20.9 % who either retained the mistake or changed the correct reply into a wrong one. Among the respondents with three mistakes on the writing pre-test (N=3 students), there was 100 % improvement after viewing the video.

The vocabulary pre- and post-tests consisted of fourteen multiple choice questions, each with three given answers to choose from. The maximum number of mistakes that the respondents could have made was fourteen.

**Table 3:** Share of students with (non)improvement on vocabulary pre- and post-tests,  $\chi^2$  test, N=77, sig. p<0.001.

Vocabulary pre-test mistakes	Vocabulary post-test mistakes		Total
	improvement	non-improvement	
Zero	1 50%	1 50%	2 100%
One	5 71.4%	2 28.6%	7 100%
Two	7 63.7 %	4 36.4 %	11 100%
Three	13 72.3%	5 27.8%	18 100%
Four	17 100%	0	20 100%
Five	13 100 %	0	13 100%
Six	6 100%	0	6 100%
seven	3 100%	0	3 100%

Among the respondents with zero mistakes on the vocabulary pre-test (N=2 students), there was 50 % improvement on the post-test after viewing the video (versus 50 % who did not improve, i.e., 1 student retained the correct answer, and the other one changed it into a wrong one). Among the respondents with one mistake on the vocabulary pre-test (N=7 students), there was 71.4 % improvement on the post-test after viewing the video versus 28.6 % who did not improve. Among the respondents with two mistakes on the vocabulary pre-test (N=11 students), there was 63.7 % improvement on the post-test after viewing the video versus 36.4 % who did not improve. Among the respondents with three mistakes on the vocabulary pre-test (N=18 students), there was 72.3 % improvement on the post-test after viewing the video versus 28.8 % who did not improve. Among the respondents with four mistakes on the vocabulary pre-test (N=17 students), there was 82.3 % improvement on the post-test after viewing the video versus 17.6 % who did not improve. Among the respondents with five (N=13 students), six (N=6 students) and seven mistakes (N=3 students) on the vocabulary pre-test, there was 100 % improvement on the post-test after viewing the video.

The grammar pre- and post-tests consisted of eleven multiple choice questions, each with two or three given answers to choose from. The maximum number of mistakes that the respondents could have made was eleven.

**Table 4:** Share of students with (non)improvement on grammar pre- and post-tests,  $\chi^2$  test, N=77, sig. p<0.001.

Grammar pre-test mistakes	Grammar post-test mistakes		Total
	improvement	non-improvement	
Zero	0	0	0 100%
One	0	1 100%	1 100%
Two	10 66.7%	5 33.3%	15 100%
Three	14 77.7%	4 22.3%	18 100%
Four	16 80%	4 20%	20 100%
Five	18 100%	0	18 100%
Six	4 100%	0	4 100%
seven	1 100%	0	1 100%

There were no students with zero mistakes. Among the respondents with one mistake on the grammar pre-test (N=1 student), there was no improvement after viewing the video as the student retains the mistake. Among the respondents with two mistakes on the grammar pre-test (N=15 students), there was 66.7 % improvement after viewing the video versus 33.3 % in the other category. Among the respondents with three mistakes on the grammar pre-test (N=18 students), there was 77.7 % improvement after viewing the video versus 22.3 % in the other category. Among the respondents with four mistakes on the grammar pre-test (N=20 students), there was 80 % improvement after viewing the video versus 20 % in the other category. Among the respondents with five (N=18 students), six (N=4 students) and seven mistakes on the grammar pre-test, there was 100 % improvement after viewing the video.

#### **4.2. Results of in-depth interviews**

The in-depth interviews were conducted in L1 with a view to enabling the interviewees more opportunities to voice their opinions. The relevant parts of the interviews that exemplify the interviewees' reflections are presented in English; however the students' language has been corrected only slightly to preserve authenticity. In in-depth interviews we first tried to gain insights into their prevailing outlook on the issue in general. Secondly, we were able to elicit views on their personal experience with FL subtitle processing, as well as to obtain their viewpoints of the reasons for positive or negative attitudes. Additionally, also their unimpaired views on future prospectives of employing interlingual subtitle-processing for FL learning purposes were looked into.

By and large, all interviewees (22) expressed positive opinions regarding the possibility of learning an FL via interlingual subtitle processing, whether it be via standard subtitling condition (i.e., L2 audio and L1 subtitles), bimodal input L2 condition (i.e., L2 audio and L2 subtitles) or reversed subtitling-L2 condition (Díaz Cintas and Fernández Cruz, 2008). A typical example of these sentiments is voiced by student E: 'It never occurred to me that I could learn an FL simply by watching a film or a video with subtitles, which I in fact do quite often in reality; now, that probably seems quite possible. Super!' Student B claims that 'reading subtitles in English was quite interesting because I was curious how our words were translated so I was constantly comparing Slovenian and English; and that was certainly more fun than I expected'.

Although a quarter of students would prefer a standard subtitling condition, more than half approve of reversed subtitling-L2 as a particularly promising, novel FL learning activity. In case of reversed subtitling-L2, the auditory processing in L1 took place effortlessly. Moreover, they did not mind the effort that they had to put into reading FL subtitles. The students voice the opinion that reversed subtitling-L2 seems quite an efficient learning condition for non-native speakers of English to improve writing and reading skills, much better in fact than L2 dialogue-only condition; i.e., only processing an FL audio without subtitles. According to slightly fewer than a half of students the reason may lie in the fact that a combination of a Slovenian audio with an English script seems to promote the atmosphere of learning an FL, whereas viewing a Slovenian or English video without subtitles is more strictly reminiscent of and conducive to leisure time, enjoyment and fun. Before watching the video in question the interviewees had not been of the same opinion and none of them had tried learning an FL via interlingual subtitles with an FL teacher: 'This is my first. I've never

watched a Slovenian video with English subtitles so far. It would have probably seemed interesting at home as well, but I don't think I would try and learn anything'.

. When choosing between different mother-tongue-cum-L2 combinations of audio and subtitles, the majority of students claim that, to their mind, bimodal input L2 condition may be the most beneficial for them. Student H, for instance, claims that 'English subtitles in a Slovenian video change the whole feel of watching a film into studying because you can't help but learn — you hear the word, you see it, so you must remember, but unfortunately, not too many words, what a pity!'

To the question what English language skill, in their opinion, might show the greatest improvement while processing reversed subtitles-L2, half of the students expect the improvement of FL reading and a quarter writing. The others were indecisive but stated that their overall FL proficiency in English could possibly be raised through frequent interlingual subtitle processing. In view of this, they agree that the more studious attitude one maintains towards FL learning, the bigger the FL benefits. Admittedly, according to slightly more than a half of the students, English grammar seems too difficult to learn via reversed subtitling-L2; however, almost half express the opinion that grammar enhancement and revision appear much more attainable. Or, in the words of student C: 'I haven't learned much grammar from books and I really don't see how I might learn from films'.

Regarding actual instances of grammar that they memorized, only a quarter of students remembered the exact examples: *Which is better?*; *I'll toast to that.*; *Slovenija, where does your beauties stem from?*. Interestingly, the quite proficient student C noticed the use of 'would' after 'if', mentioned this in an interview and asked for clarification: 'I saw 'would' after 'if' in 'if you would listen to me', and immediately thought that was wrong, but it probably can't be, can it?'

When asked whether they were able to learn any new English vocabulary via viewing reversed subtitles-L2, all students agree in principle, but admit it is much easier to memorize meaningful phrases and not isolated words. Inferring the meaning of unknown words from the Slovenian audio did not appear to disrupt the flow of reading subtitles in English, and was in fact enjoyable. Interestingly, quite a few were able to recollect the exact moments when they started paying attention to reading English subtitles — namely, when they were especially interested in how certain Slovenian words were translated, either new words or the ones they

were just not familiar with, their translation or spelling. In the words of student D, subtitles proved to be ‘a super aid to check words immediately’. Student M is quite surprised at the fact that she was able to ‘concentrate on English subtitles more because her subconscious, quite by itself, followed the plot in Slovenian’, as she puts it.

The students’ replies to the question exactly which words they actually learned from the video *Wulfy* (Luzar, 2007) were, however, a bit more realistic — just some students remembered the exact words. They were not many, but exclusively new words featured in the subtitles that they did not know before: *wormwood, a medicinal herb, an oak, Jehova’s, the Lord, an animal shelter, to stem from, to drop by, to go wild, I’ll toast to that*. In contrast, when their FL writing skill was tested in the summary writing, they used just one of these words in an immediate post-test summary, namely *Jehova’s*, but without an apostrophe, *Jehova*. Surprisingly, student C even remembered the Latin word, *Quersus Crisolepis*, for wormwood, for a few reasons: firstly, the revelation that the lonely man must have been an expert in a certain area when he was working; secondly, because Student C felt sorry for him since nobody seemed to care about a lonely man or his knowledge; and thirdly, due to the fact that student C did not know the word in English and was interested in English translation. Apparently, the Latin translation sounded melodic enough to be memorized. Student A’s reply, for instance, illustrates typical answers: ‘I thought the pre-test was really easy, and thought I knew most of the words while watching a video, and grammar, too, but I still made such stupid mistakes in both tests’. Typically, a majority of interviewees stipulate various pre-requisites to learning FL vocabulary, such as: on condition they could watch such a video several times over longer periods of time or they would write down the new FL words from subtitles while watching a video or shortly after; if they also heard the words in English along with reading them in English; if they received targeted instruction or if there were structured preparatory language activities prior to viewing, and if the topic was familiar or seemed useful for their studies. Student C claims she was ‘rather disappointed at the contents of the video when I saw it wasn’t business English that we were going to learn’. Finally, some students were distracted from English subtitles simply because they wish to improve their FL speaking and not their reading skill.

Their replies to the question about the reasons for approving of interlingual subtitle-processing as a method to learn an FL were varied; nevertheless, a few stood out: viewing an FL video as pure entertainment, lower levels of anxiety, satisfaction arising from monitoring

FL subtitles effortlessly, claiming responsibility for their own FL learning, a hope for using interlingual subtitling as a new FL learning tool for non-native speakers, and finally, saving time and money.

To start with the first one, practically all interviewees perceive watching films and videos as pure entertainment, completely separate from FL study. As a consequence, they approached viewing *Wulfy* (Luzar, 2007) with reversed subtitles-L2 with similar anticipation, and managed to translate the same feelings of enjoyment into this FL learning experience. According to quite a few students, this is exactly why they liked *Wulfy* (Luzar, 2007) and would continue learning an FL via video viewing. They managed not to lose interest and concentration while viewing it in class, so it appears as if they intend ‘to try the same at home, just maybe watch more films with English subtitles because the feel is like you are not even trying to learn at all’, as student D claims.

According to more than half of the students, one of commonly stated reasons were lower levels of anxiety induced by video viewing compared with normal stress, apprehension and FL learner anxiety usually present in FL class, either from the very beginning or in the midst of video viewing. For instance, student J loved ‘the atmosphere during video viewing because I was in class and it felt like a movie, and for a change, that was super’.

Another quite frequent argument put forward by one third of students were subjective feelings of satisfaction arising from being able to quite effortlessly monitor English translations appearing along with their mother tongue audio — apparently a huge aid in keeping the concentration and interest till the end. The whole experience reminded a few of the interviewees of a similar satisfaction they had experienced when learning English as kids while watching English cartoons.

Some interviewees state that the novelty value is the very fact that attracted them to reversed-L2 subtitle processing. More precisely, they were in a position to break with traditional teacher-led instruction with an FL teacher as the sole authority; secondly, they were able to claim responsibility for their own FL learning, or, as student A puts it: ‘I could decide on my own whether to invest more or less effort into the activity and learn accordingly’. Finally, video viewing seems to them a good means of self study. Student A realised that ‘simply by taking the video activity more seriously and reading the subtitles more carefully, it may be possible to learn more in quite a doable way’.

The reason that just a few students pointed to was interlingual subtitle processing ‘as a convenient way to learn an FL at home and save some time and money’, as student E puts it. According to them, if approached seriously enough with some discipline and thorough, methodical note-taking, it appears to be affordable, less time-consuming and less costly in comparison with FL learning courses. Student I expresses his opinion that ‘the ongoing rates of language courses are really high, so I might start jotting things down while watching films with subtitles. It’s easier to do that when you already see the word in subtitles, so, I guess, I’ll have to just pay more attention’.

Furthermore, a reason stated by half of the students is their hope and expectations of interlingual subtitle-processing, not necessarily reversed subtitling-L2, gaining its place as a new FL learning tool for non-native speakers to improve their L2 with more ease. In Slovenia there still are not very many opportunities to converse with native-speakers of English on a daily basis. Interestingly, interlingual subtitle processing seems to create a promise of retaining a bit more knowledge in comparison with studying an FL in a traditional way via single modality - i.e. sound or text - in formal settings. As expected, the interviewees have sensed that a bimodal presentation in a video, an audio with the sound and the text in subtitles, appears to create more context that consequently enhances FL learning. Student M states that ‘after watching subtitled films I sometimes remember new words, or a few words together, or I sometimes hear the word that I couldn’t pronounce, and then if you see it written down, it’s good; I mean, I’d rather learn English from films or intranet than from books, if that was possible’.

## **5. Discussion and conclusion**

From reviewing the available literature, it appears that this is the first study to deal with reversed subtitling-L2 via combining productive and receptive FL skills, FL vocabulary and grammar, and finally qualitative pre-and post-tests and quantitative in-depth interviews. We tried to expand the current research into incidental FL acquisition via video exposure by applying interlingual subtitling type reversed subtitles-L2, a possible treatment condition that could facilitate immediate, incidental FL acquisition arising from unassisted processing of reversed subtitles-L2 in video exposure.

There are undoubtedly added FL acquisition benefits for non-native speakers to be gained from the exposure to reversed subtitles-L2 — the outcomes prove the respondents were

able to learn via video exposure. The noticeable trend, though quite unexpected, is consistently evident in all four pre- and post-tests according to the results — the impact of the video exposure with reversed subtitles-L2 on the students with fewer mistakes on the pre-test is smaller in comparison with those with more mistakes. Generally speaking, the study found that the fewer the mistakes on pre-tests, the lesser the progress after video exposure on post-tests, and vice versa, the more the mistakes, the greater the progress after viewing. Evidently, the students with fewer mistakes on the pre-test were confident enough not to be tempted to change the correct answers into the wrong ones after video exposure.

In terms of FL abilities, writing skill shows greater effects of viewing reversed-L2 subtitles than reading-based general comprehension skill. The respondents were better able to retain the FL phonological information they had been presented with in subtitles, and consequently improve their FL writing skill. FL grammar was the least impacted upon by the video exposure; however, the results show reversed subtitling-L2 may potentially enhance already existing FL grammar knowledge and exert mild effects on grammar acquisition/revision. The area of FL vocabulary acquisition shows the most beneficial effects. Essentially, the outcomes indicate reversed subtitling-L2 may have significant facilitatory impact on the short-term implicit vocabulary/phrase acquisition.

To illustrate this, let us take the two extremes - the students with zero mistakes and the students with the most mistakes on all pre-tests: 71.4 % respondents without mistakes on pre-tests retain the correct answers on the writing post-test and 66 % and 50% improve on the general comprehension and vocabulary post-tests. Nevertheless, the numbers are considerably higher for the students with the most mistakes on all pre-tests. Among them, 100% improve on the writing, vocabulary and grammar post-tests.

How to account for these mildly perplexing results? In retrospect, it can be concluded that the effects of the unassisted video exposure with reversed-L2 subtitles are lasting enough to provide two types of benefits to non-native speakers: firstly, mild, but immediate and explicit FL acquisition (Dörnyei, 2009), and secondly, some enhancement of already existing FL skill. The fact that the respondents with the most mistakes improved the most is not as surprising as it may seem since this category of students does not comprise the most or least proficient students, but the ones who were able to notice, view and process the subtitles with the most attention and motivation. Numerous studies in the processes of learning have shown

that success in any kind of human learning is due to the fact that an individual is motivated to achieve a goal. Consequently, and despite not being easily observable, the role of an individual's noticing processes, attention (e.g., Robinson, 2003), motivation, affective states and attitudes toward FL learning has been a central issue in FL research for quite some time (Schmid, 2011; Ellis, 2006; Saffran and Thiessen, 2009; Gerken, 2009). Motivation influences the degree of learners' effort to learn an FL, their actions, behaviours and orientations, so more motivated students seem to look for more opportunities to learn an FL — a video clip is certainly one of them (e.g., Dörnyei, 2009).

The interviewees' reflections from the in-depth interviews confirm the outcomes of certain studies that looked into the positive effects of a low affective filter of FL learners, an anxiety-free learning environment and learners' high involvement in an FL stimulus that allows FL input to be internalized in the form of FL intake (Krashen, 1985; Borrás and Lafayette, 1994; Danan, 2004). On the other hand, the interviews proved that two factors from the study may appear to have a reassuring, calming and tranquillity-inducing impact on the respondents (e.g., Taylor, 2005), and therefore they be utilized more often as possible novel FL learning tools — a video exposure itself as a carrier vessel for an FL input and an exposure to interlingual subtitles, whether it be via bimodal input L2 or reversed subtitling-L2 condition. In the case of our study, a combination of FL subtitles and a mother-tongue video seems to induce the atmosphere the students normally experience by leisure activities (e.g., Kuppens, 2010), thus lessening the levels of learner anxiety and raising the feelings of positive excitement, pleasure, motivation and enjoyment for learning a FL. Many respondents from the study seem to look forward to studying a FL in formal settings via interlingual processing, mainly for two reasons: first, video exposure has apparently stirred in them a genuine sense of progress that is considered a crucial motivational factor in classroom-based FL learning (e.g., Klapper, 2006); secondly, they seem to anticipate easier FL acquisition benefits in comparison with studying from traditional single modality methods or textbooks.

The researchers seem to have proved that the key difference in the impact of incidental and intentional learning lies in different learners' orientations towards FL input and their choice of subsequent processing and encoding strategies (e.g., Dörnyei, 2009). Moreover, exactly enhanced performance without any conscious knowledge of the underlying system may be seen as evidence of implicit learning (*ibid*).

It can safely be concluded that FL learners who learned the most in our study were the ones who were adequately oriented towards FL stimuli in a video exposure to improve their FL performance. A Slovenian audio with reversed subtitling-L2 instigated optimal FL learning conditions for native speakers of Slovenian to lower their cognitive overload, and, at the same time, integration of visual and auditory learning context also provided for right-brain-dominant image-dependent FL students (Brown, 2007).

Our research provided the students with an excellent practical confirmation that viewing a video with reversed subtitling-L2 may promote FL learning without them exerting any conscious effort, especially not by memorizing any explicit, conscious rules about the underlying FL system. In other words, implicit FL learning took place, and they were aware of it. Video viewing induced safe levels of learner anxiety in our study compared with normal apprehension in FL class and the opportunity for the students to claim responsibility for their own FL learning. These results ascertain the positive impact of a low affective filter of FL learners, low-stress learning environment and learners' high involvement in a FL stimulus that allows FL input to be internalized in form of FL intake.

Finally, the limitations of this study are the facts that it was restricted by place, time and a target group of learners - i.e., it was carried out during a certain period of time only in Slovenia and with a selected group of FL learners. Further empirical studies will need to examine the effects of longitudinal processing of reversed subtitles-L2 for FL acquisition of non-native speakers, though not necessarily lengthen the video viewing exposure time. Additionally, to measure FL retention, some studies may opt for the assessment of immediate and delayed FL acquisition after exposure to intralingual subtitling as this may be the best indicator of the long-term acquisition benefits. Alternatively, a comparison of unassisted versus assisted learning conditions for which the learners would need to be proactively instructed prior to exposure to intralingual subtitling, and subsequent incidental or intentional learning could offer useful outcomes may also be made. Moreover, various target groups of non-native speakers of English from different countries could be included in a similar study. Eventually, FL teachers might decide to explore possibilities to equip FL learners with skills and strategies to optimize their incidental FL acquisition from the modern digital media outside the classroom as well.

## **Appendix A**

## Video WULFY

### Vocabulary pre-test

1) How do we say in English *slov. iskati srečo*? Choose one answer:

- look at happiness
- search happiness
- seek happiness

2) How do we say in English *slov. zdravilna rastlina*? Choose one answer:

- medicinal herb
- medicine plant
- medical flower

3) How do we say in English *slov. Na zdravje* (when drinking)? Choose one answer:

- Salute!
- God bless you!
- Cheers!

4) What is the English expression for *slov. zavetišče za živali*? Choose one answer:

- animals' pool
- animal shelter
- animal shack

5) What is the English expression for *slov. pelin*? Choose one answer:

- wormwood
- woodworm
- wormhole

6) How do we say in English *slov. štruca kruha*? Choose one answer:

- a piece of bread
- a loaf of bread
- a whole bread

7) How would you say in English *slov. polbeli kruh*? Choose one answer:

- half-white bread
- semi-white bread

- medium-white bread

8) How do we say in English *slov. (blagajniški) račun*? Choose one answer:

- a receipt
- a recipe
- a prescription

9) How would you say in English *slov. lajati*? Choose one answer:

- to brake
- to bark
- to break

10) What is the English word for *slov. hrast*? Choose one answer:

- an oak
- a birch
- a lime

11) How would you say in English *slov. pasma (psa)*? Choose one answer:

- a bread
- a breed
- a beard

12) What is the English expression for *slov. starešina*? Choose one answer:

- an older
- a boss
- an elder

13) What is one of the English words for *slov. gospod Jesus*? Choose one answer:

- the Master
- the King
- The Lord

14) What is the English expression for *slov. Čakaj malo*? Choose one answer:

- Wait for a second.
- Hold for a second.

- Hold on a second.

### Video WULFY

#### Writing pre-test

1) How do we spell correctly in English *slov. sestavine*? Choose one answer:

- ingredients
- ingridients
- ingretiends

2) What is the correct spelling in English of *slov. (blagajniški) račun*? Choose one answer:

- a receipt
- a recipe
- a reciept

3) How would you spell correctly in English *slov. lajati*? Choose one answer:

- to brake
- to bark
- to break

### Video WULFY

#### Grammar pre-test

1) How do we say in English *slov. Kateri od teh dveh je boljši*? Choose one answer:

- Which is better?
- What is better?

2) What is the English expression for *slov. Kaj boste spili*? Choose one answer:

- What will you drink?
- What are you having?
- What are you drinking?

3) What is the English expression for *slov. (Ostani) na kosilu*? Choose one answer:

- Stay on lunch.
- Have a lunch.
- Stay for lunch.

4) How would you say in English *slov. Na to bom nazdravil/pil?* Choose one answer:

- I'll have a drink for that.
- I'll drink for that.
- I'll toast to that.

5) How would you say in English *slov. (Ostal sem) sam?* Choose one answer:

- I've been left for myself.
- I've been alone.
- I've been left by myself.

6) Which answer is correct for the meaning *slov. živalsko zavetišče?* Choose one answer:

- animal shelter
- animal's shelter

7) Choose one correct answer below:

- to search happiness
- to seek happiness

8) How do we say in English *slov. oglasiti se pri kom/obiskati koga?* Choose one answer:

- Come in.
- Drop out.
- Drop by.

9) How do we say in English *slov. (iti) na sprehod?* Choose one answer:

- to go on a walk
- to go for a walk
- to go to walk

10) What is the English expression for *slov. Slovenija, od kod lepote tvoje?* Choose one answer:

- Slovenija, where do your beauties come from?.
- Slovenija, where does your beauty come from?
- Slovenija, where does your beauty stem from?

11) What answer is correct in English for the *slov. Če bi me hotela (= želela) poslušati, bi poslušal tudi jaz vaju?* Choose one answer:

- If you would listen to me, I would listen to you
- If you listened to me, I would listen to you
- If you listen to me, I will listen to you

## Video WULFY

### General comprehension pre-test

1. What do the members of the Christian religious community called Jehova's witnesses do and how do they operate?
2. Why do people visit animal shelters? Why are animals there?
3. In your opinion, how do elderly, retired people who live on their own feel? Think of 3 adjectives to describe their feelings?

## Appendix B

### Video WULFY

#### Vocabulary post-test

1) How do we say in English *slov. iskati srečo?* Choose one answer:

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- seek happiness

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- medicine plant
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- animal shack

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- a loaf of bread
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- a birch
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- an elder

13) What is one of the English words for *slov. gospod Jesus*? Choose one answer:

- the Master
- the King
- The Lord

14) What is the English expression for *slov. Čakaj malo*? Choose one answer:

- Wait for a second.
- Hold for a second.
- Hold on a second.

### Video WULFY

### Writing post-test

1) How do we spell correctly in English *slov. sestavine*? Choose one answer:

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2) What is the correct spelling in English of *slov. (blagajniški) račun*? Choose one answer:

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1) How do we say in English *slov. Kateri od teh dveh je boljši?* Choose one answer:

- Which is better?
- What is better?

2) What is the English expression for *slov. Kaj boste spili?* Choose one answer:

- What will you drink?
- What are you having?
- What are you drinking?

3) What is the English expression for *slov. (Ostani) na kosilu?* Choose one answer:

- Stay on lunch.
- Have a lunch.
- Stay for lunch.

4) How would you say in English *slov. Na to bom nazdravil/pil?* Choose one answer:

- I'll have a drink for that.
- I'll drink for that.
- I'll toast to that.

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- I've been left for myself.
- I've been alone.
- I've been left by myself.

6) Which answer is correct for the meaning *slov. živalsko zavetišče?* Choose one answer:

- animal shelter
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- to go on a walk
- to go for a walk
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- Slovenija, where do your beauties come from?.
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- If you listened to me, I would listen to you
- If you listen to me, I will listen to you

## Video WULFY

### General comprehension post-test

1. What do the members of the Christian religious community called Jehova's witnesses do and how do they operate?
2. Why do people visit animal shelters? Why are animals there?
3. In your opinion, how do elderly, retired people who live on their own feel? Think of 3 adjectives to describe their feelings?
4. Write a short summary of the video in English in only 5 sentences and include the words from the subtitles.

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