In this volume in the Routledge Focus series, Mark Feng Teng introduces researchers, graduate students, and classroom practitioners to research into language learning through captioned videos. In six chapters, the author addresses captioned videos from a theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical perspective.

The first chapter provides an “Introduction to vocabulary knowledge and incidental vocabulary acquisition” (Teng, 2021, p. 1). Teng uses Nation’s nine aspects of word knowledge (2013) to provide an answer to the question “what is a word.” Next, the reader is introduced to various topics in second language (L2) vocabulary research such as, for instance, incidental vocabulary acquisition, the incremental nature of vocabulary learning, and the role of attention and engagement. Finally, the chapter lists a number of aspects that
teachers could consider in order to promote learners’ lexical development. It also provides a first introduction to research on incidental vocabulary learning through audiovisual input.

The second chapter, “Captioned videos: Multimedia features, definitions and theoretical frameworks,” starts by discussing a selection of studies on captioned videos. Teng uses his own work and a selection of recently and less recently published articles, in order to provide an overview of the linguistic benefits and potential drawbacks that have been associated with the use of captioned videos for L2 learning. Next, the author describes theoretical frameworks, including the input hypothesis, the multimedia learning theory, Baddeley’s model of working memory, the dual-coding theory, and the cognitive load theory. The chapter also presents Vanderplank’s revised model of language learning through captioned videos (2016), which shows that captioned video input does not necessarily lead to acquisition, and that numerous input- as well as learner-related variables including motivation, proficiency, etc., play a role in this process. Finally, Teng proposes a model in which we recognize aspects of Baddeley’s model of working memory as well as the dual-channel assumption of the cognitive theory of multimedia learning.

The third chapter, “Language learning and incidental vocabulary acquisition from captioned videos: Advantages and disadvantages,” starts off with an overview of video tools. It also provides a selective review of previous research on the benefits and perceived usefulness of captioned videos. Next, the chapter discusses the results of a study with 223 university-level English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, which investigated the relationship between learners’ L2 reading and listening proficiency and their comprehension of captioned videos. In addition, the chapter presents the results of a survey completed by 150 respondents and interview data from 20 participants. We find graphs on learners’ perceived benefits of captioned videos, as well as numerous quotes from the interviews which are classified according to six main themes (e.g., enhanced language skills and enhanced confidence in language learning).

In the fourth chapter, the author summarizes three recently published articles on captioned videos. The studies are based on between-subject designs with “type of captioning” (video with full captioning, video with keyword captioning, and video without captioning) as one of its independent variables. In each of the studies, the author adds one or more independent variables to the design: word exposure frequency (one vs. three occurrences), English proficiency level (low vs. high proficiency), number of viewings (one vs. two), and an advance organizer (present vs. absent). The studies investigate different dependent variables: the learning of single words, comprehension, and the learning of collocations. Participants were primary school EFL learners. For each study, we find a short background section followed by the research
questions, the research design, and a presentation of instruments and materials. Next, Teng describes the results and key findings.

Chapter 5, which “is intended for researchers or research-oriented students seeking a starting point” to investigate captioned videos, describes five research projects. Each project includes a concise background description. The goals of the research projects are in line with the empirical work presented in Chapters 3 and 4. The projects focus on, for instance, how learners perceive the usefulness of captioned videos for vocabulary learning, the effectiveness of different types of captioning for vocabulary learning, repetition of vocabulary in videos, and the potential of multimedia glossing. For each research project, we find information about methodological and statistical aspects, as well as a list of research questions for future research. Finally, the chapter provides a general checklist for research design.

The final chapter, “Conclusion: Maximizing vocabulary learning performance from captioned videos,” presents a number of research-related as well as pedagogical aspects to consider. The author describes how teachers and learners perceive captioned videos. From a pedagogical point of view, the final chapter clarifies a number of practical questions regarding captioned video creation, such as tools to consider or details to pay attention to when creating captions. Teng concludes this book by discussing challenges in using captioned videos, such as the role of learners’ proficiency and the selection of appropriate video material. Finally, he reflects on the future use of captioned videos for language learning.

This book offers an introduction to research on captioned videos. Results of Teng’s empirical and previously published work are presented in a transparent way and provide insights into the effectiveness of different types of instructional interventions, including different types of captions (full captioning and keyword captioning), as well as other techniques such as advance organizers. It presents data on the effects of captions on L2 learners’ comprehension of video input, their perceptions, and vocabulary learning. For language practitioners, this book provides an accessible introduction to captioned video research. Throughout the book, we also find answers to practical questions related to caption creation or tools for video manipulation. For researchers, it provides a starting point for conducting research on captioned videos. Chapter 5 in particular will appeal to beginning researchers and graduate students who want to use a straightforward design to set up a study on captioned videos.

However, there are also a number of shortcomings that should be mentioned. First, the title of this book might be misleading for future readers, because this volume does not exclusively cover incidental vocabulary acquisition, but also focuses on learners’ listening comprehension and their perceived usefulness of captioned videos. While this broadens the scope of the book,
readers who buy this book expecting a thorough methodological and pedagogical discussion on incidental vocabulary learning through viewing captioned videos may find it unsatisfactory.

Second, the respective value of incidental and deliberate vocabulary learning in L2 learning as well as the role of the learner and the teacher in these processes could have been described in more detail. A discussion of studies on the effect of (out-of-class) input exposure on vocabulary learning and the role of extensive viewing (Webb, 2015) could have strengthened the reader’s understanding of the role of captioned videos for incidental vocabulary learning, or how teachers might prepare (young) learners for autonomous viewing outside the classroom.

Furthermore, the literature review sections included in this book often lack precision. For instance, in Chapter 2, we find a claim on previous eye-movement research (p. 16) that does not seem to correspond to the goals of the cited studies. The chapter mentions Diao and colleagues (2007), but this study is not based on video. Further, some parts would have benefited from additional references or details. In Chapter 3, for instance, the author mentions that “one caveat is that learners might not focus on audio when they have captions at their disposal,” but we are not informed about the findings of studies on the effectiveness of captioned videos for speech perception (e.g., Mitterer & McQueen, 2009), and the role of input and test modality in captioned video research (e.g., Sydorenko, 2010). More precise and thorough discussions of previous findings could have helped readers to better understand the potential benefits and drawbacks of captioned videos for language learning.

Finally, the author could have addressed the role of captioned videos for the target audience in Chapter 4, that is, primary EFL school learners, more explicitly because this is a less frequently studied participant group, which distinguishes the articles in this chapter from many other studies on captioned videos (conducted with older learners). An explicit discussion of how the empirical work of the author has to be considered in relation to previous research with other age groups might have been useful. Readers may also wonder what particular challenges (e.g., reading speed, material selection and preparation) are associated with caption use in this particular age group.

Yet, even with these limitations, this “research- and pedagogy-oriented” book is a useful addition to the growing body of literature on the use and effectiveness of captioned videos for L2 learning, and it will undoubtedly inspire researchers and teachers to further investigate the potential of captioned videos for L2 learning.
References


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