

SUBTITLES CAN HELP YOU READ FASTER

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DO you know that every time you read subtitles in a movie, in the same language, you improve your reading speed? It may sound unconventional but the regional language national channels have been carrying out this experiment for quite some years now. The popular songs are run with subtitles in the same language to improve the reading speed of both adults and children. This experiment is the result of a research carried out by students and faculty members of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Ahmedabad. And the person spearheading this project is Brij Kothari, faculty at IIM-Ahmedabad. Kothari's mission is to help people in backward areas improve their reading speed. The mission is based on the concept of Same Language Subtitling (SLS).

While explaining the concept, Kothari said, "When subtitles are in the same language you end up reading them by default. Hence, this can reinforce reading in a weak reader. In the West, this model of improving reading with subtitling is a known phenomenon." But Kothari and his

team went ahead and adopted this model in popular media. They gave subtitles to the Hindi film songs. "Usually, people like to know the lyrics of a song and they find it easier to read it. Songs are the best way to hook a reader," informed Kothari.

With this information in hand, in 2002, Kothari and his team took a sample of 13,000 people from four different states — one year before the national channels started telecasting songs with subtitles. These people were found to be weak in reading and understanding newspaper headlines. "With us requesting, National channels started telecasting songs with subtitles. A year later, we noticed some improvement. But in 2007, when we took the same sample of people, there was a marked improvement. They were able to read and understand headlines," he said.

Kothari feels that in a nation where literacy is defined as the ability to sign and read your own name, reading a newspaper is a far better yardstick. "My mission is to change the policy of information and broadcasting ministry so that every song is aired along with subtitles," he said.