

Extensive Listening Using Student-Generated Podcasts

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This paper presents a study of the use of student-generated podcasts in an extensive listening program in oral communication courses at a university in western Japan. The participants were 189 elementary-level and intermediate-level university students. They were required to write, practice, and record a 5-minute conversation with a partner about a topic of their choice. Podcasts and transcripts were uploaded to a blog and made available to all students, thus creating a student-generated database of listening activities. At the end of the 15-week semester, two questionnaires were administered. The data collection method consisted of 5 open-ended questions (130 responses) and a 14-item Likert-scale questionnaire (answered by all participants). It was found that although some students did not enjoy creating the podcast episodes due to a variety of reasons, they did see the educational value of the project and considered podcasts to be a viable language-learning tool.

本論文では、ある西日本の大学でのオーラルコミュニケーションコースの多聴プログラム (extensive listening program) で学生が作成したポッドキャスト (podcast) に関する研究を解説する。本研究は初級レベルと中級レベルの学生189名を対象にした。トピックは学生が自由に選び、文章を書き、練習した後、5分間のパートナーとの会話を録音することを義務付けた。録音のデータと台本はブログにアップロードされ、すべての学生に見られるようにし、それが学生作成のリスニング活動データベースになった。15週間の学期末に、2種類のアンケートを行った。データ収集方法は、自由回答式の5つの質問 (回答130名) と、14問のリッカート尺度 (Likert scale) アンケート (参加者全員が回答) を用いた。学生によっては、podcastを作るのは難易であったようだが、学生たちはpodcastの教育価値を理解し、podcastが語学学習において有効な方法であると考えていた。

Students who study EFL often do not have enough exposure to listening input. It can be challenging to build up the necessary listening skills when the focus of instruction is often on reading, writing, and speaking. In recent years there has been a shift to

a more balanced approach to language teaching. Extensive reading (ER) has been shown to be an effective way of increasing many reading subskills. However, extensive listening (EL) remains underresearched. Both ER and EL rely on a similar premise: Exposure to comprehensible input is good for language acquisition. Unlike ER, EL does not have a tried-and-true set of principles to follow. This is an additional challenge to establishing a functional EL program. That being said, this paper has three functions: first, discuss the value of EL; second, establish podcasting as a valuable medium for language learning; and third, discuss students' perspectives on podcasts as a language tool.

Literature Review

Extensive Listening

EL in foreign language instruction can be traced back to Elley's (1989) study in which he found that vocabulary could be acquired incidentally by students who were listening to storybooks. The idea makes sense especially because research has shown that ER is effective in developing reading skills and vocabulary acquisition. One would expect EL to have similar effects on listening skills.

As has already been mentioned, the research concerning EL is still limited. In recent years, researchers have found that learners acquire vocabulary better when they are reading-while-listening. Brown, Waring, and Donkaewbua (2008) evaluated the vocabulary acquisition of students using graded readers under three learning conditions. The conditions were read text only, read-while-listening, and listen to text only. The researchers found that incidental learning of vocabulary can happen in all three learning conditions in the short term, but after 3 months, students who had only listened to the material did not recall any of the target vocabulary. The researchers concluded that simultaneous reading-while-listening before listening-only was the most effective method.

Chang (2009) conducted another study that investigated reading-while-listening. Participants were divided into two groups, reading-while-listening and listening only,

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and conducted sequencing and gap-fill listening assessments. Chang found that students in the reading-while-listening group scored 10% higher on the listening assessment than the listening-only group. Additionally, treatment group participants believed that the reading-while-listening tasks were shorter, easier, and more interesting and allowed them to have a higher level of concentration. Chang (2011) divided her participants into the same two groups. This time she evaluated dictation listening scores, vocabulary test scores, and the number of audiobooks students listened to each semester. The researcher concluded that students in the reading-while-listening group scored significantly higher in dictation posttests than did students in the control group, showing increased speed in listening processing. The treatment group gained a significant amount of vocabulary implicitly when compared to the listening-only control group. Chang also discovered that students' interest and motivation in the program increased and in the second semester, the number of audiobooks students listened to increased 81% over the first semester.

In another study, Chang and Millett (2014) concluded that reading-while-listening in an EL program led to more consistent and significant improvement in students' listening fluency than happened in the reading-only or listening-only experimental groups. Webb, Newton, and Chang (2013) determined that reading-while-listening also had a positive effect on the incidental learning of collocations. Reading-while-listening was the most effective and most comfortable for students. The researchers came to the conclusion that any EL materials should probably be read first, then read again while listening to the audio, and finally listened to without written input. All the above researchers used professionally developed EL materials in their EL studies.

One of the most difficult aspects of EL is finding suitable material for students to use without limiting student autonomy. A good place to find EL material might be the audio recordings included with graded readers as Stephens (2011) suggested. Many graded reader publishers are including these recordings with their books on CDs or as content downloadable from the Internet. Additionally, there are many websites that offer listening material, but the methods used for leveling material on EL websites might not be reliable. If students download an "easy-level" listening file from one of these websites, they might be surprised at how difficult it is compared to an "easy-level" file from another site. The hope is that an EL program will recycle vocabulary, collocations, and idioms many times. That is difficult to ensure if students are getting their materials from various sources.

Lastly, an EL program would need a large collection of easily accessible, teacher-trusted, properly leveled audio files. The files should expose EFL students to a variety of interesting topics. The files should be easy to access and link to transcripts so students

can read-while-listening. It should also be updated frequently with new material. Finally, listening material should be easy to access on smartphones, tablets, and computers. This paper will show that student-generated podcasts are an ideal solution.

Podcasts in Language Education

Technology plays an important part in education. Recent developments in Internet accessibility make accessing materials easy. For EFL/ESL learners, it has never been easier to find authentic or simplified L2 material. Web 2.0 technologies like blogs, podcasts, social networking, online videos, and microblogs can be used by learners to practice both productive and receptive skills. With such resources at our fingertips, remaining up-to-date with the latest technology and fads is not only useful for understanding students who are using these technologies already but can also provide new ways for teachers to engage with their students. The term *podcast* is a neologism of the words *iPod* and *broadcast*. Podcasts are generally audio files that can be accessed in many ways. They can be downloaded individually to a PC or mobile device or subscribed to through an application so that new episodes are delivered automatically.

Rosell-Aguilar (2007) conducted an evaluation of podcasting for its use in language courses based on several SLA theories. From a constructivist perspective, podcasts that are used solely as listening material are not being utilized fully. Podcasts are hosted on blogs or websites that include comment sections in which language learners could further engage with the community and the material. Engaging with authentic materials and an online community of other users, both native and nonnative, exposes the language learner to a variety of input as well as gives them the opportunity for output and feedback. Additionally, the nature of podcasts encourages out-of-class, informal learning. Learners take control of the material, the learning location, and the listening speed. The autonomy granted by podcasts is precisely what makes it a perfect medium for EL. Rosell-Aguilar concluded that there was a place for podcasts as supplemental materials and their success is dependent on the reason they are being used. Podcasts are convenient and portable. Users can pause, skip, rewind, and even slow down the rate of speech. Many learners already have the hardware required to access podcasts. Lastly, podcasts are free resources that can be used as meaningful, authentic input. They can be used in distance learning, as remediation for slower learners, as additional content for high-level learners, or as material for EL programs.

O'Brien and Hegelheimer (2007) found that podcasts were a rich source of input that helped to reinforce strategies and previously learned vocabulary. Additionally, both students and teachers involved in the study believed that the podcasts were a positive aspect

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of the course. This study confirmed several of the assertions made by Rosell-Aguilar concerning the value of using podcasts as supplementary material. A few years later, Abdous, Camarena, and Facer (2009) compared the effectiveness of integrating podcasts into the curriculum with using them as supplemental material. They found that when podcasts were integrated into the curriculum, they were downloaded much more often. More than half of the students enrolled in the supplemental group did not even download one podcast. Students who used the podcasts reported a positive effect on study habits and improved speaking and listening skills. The researchers concluded that podcasting is a cost-effective instructional tool because it is portable and easily accessible.

In a similar study, Abdous, Facer, and Yen (2012) tried to determine if integrated podcasts or supplemental podcasts could be seen as predictors of final grades in university language classes. Surprisingly, students involved in the supplemental group were more likely to have higher final grades, due partly to their high proficiency and partly to the nonstandard way in which podcasts were implemented into the course work by the instructors involved in the study. The researchers suggested that future studies on this topic should focus on student-generated podcasts that are integrated into the course work and that will maximize the potential of web 2.0 technologies and avoid the pitfall of podcasts acting solely as retransmission of teacher lectures. In their study, Ashraf, Noroozi, and Salami (2011) investigated if students had a preference for podcasts or live radio programs. The results demonstrated that students preferred podcasts and reported that listening to podcasts specifically designed for ESL students improved their listening skills. The researchers found that ease of access to the files, the convenience of downloading and playing the podcasts offline, the slow rate of speech, and the elaboration of complex words were all factors in why students preferred podcasts over radio programs. Additionally, allowing students to pause, rewind, and listen to parts of the podcast repeatedly gave them more autonomy and control over their learning.

Qasim and Fadda (2013) conducted a study in their university testing the effects of podcasts on listening comprehension. This study was unique in that it used student-generated podcasts as listening materials for other students in the class. They found that compared to the control group, who received no special treatment relating to making and listening to podcasts, the podcast group had higher motivation and higher listening comprehension on a posttest listening comprehension assessment. The researchers determined that students' choosing the pace of learning was valuable. They also concluded that the ideal podcast length for their students was between 2 and 3 minutes.

Hasan and Hoon (2013) conducted meta-analyses of all the studies involving podcasts and language learning available at the time. They found that although the data collected

in these studies relied mostly on self-reported measurements, podcast use in and out of the classroom was seen as having positive effects on students' affect, motivation, and attitudes towards the technology and language learning. Additionally, listening to podcasts had positive effects on students' pronunciation, grammatical knowledge, listening skills, and vocabulary.

This study bridges gaps in the literature by combining EL, podcasting, and student-generated material in a Japanese context. The present study addressed the following three research questions:

- RQ1. What are students' opinions of podcasting as an activity integrated into the curriculum?
- RQ2. What are students' opinions of listening to student-generated podcasts as listening material?
- RQ3. Does this project increase student awareness of podcasts as a viable language-learning aid?

Methods

Participants

The study was conducted during a 15-week semester at a private university in western Japan. The podcast project and questionnaires were administered to 189 students (130 male and 59 female) in 11 classes taught by the researcher. The students were separated into two courses based on their TOEIC IP test scores at the beginning of the academic year. The 2nd-year elementary classes consisted of students whose TOEIC scores ranged from 310 to 395. The 1st-year intermediate level students' TOEIC IP scores ranged from 395 to 520. In terms of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR), the elementary students would be placed between A2 and B1, and the intermediate students were firmly in the B1 range.

Procedure

At the beginning of the semester, students were given two assignments: the EL weekly report and the podcast project. In the first assignment, students listened to or watched a video in English then wrote a short summary of the content on Moodle. They were also required to share the URL of their resource to create a list of listening material that all students could access. The students were given autonomy to choose any media they wished. Additionally, they received a list of appropriate media from which they could choose if they could not find anything on their own.

In the second assignment, students wrote and recorded a 5-minute conversation with a partner about a topic of their choice. Students had complete autonomy over the project. After writing the script for their conversation, students submitted it for feedback and editing. The grammatical mistakes were corrected and the script was returned to the students. Later, students recorded their scripted conversation on their smartphones and submitted the script and the recording to the researcher. The new recordings and scripts were uploaded to a Google Blogger website that allowed for the student podcast episodes to be streamed or downloaded easily on PC, tablets, and smartphones.

The two assignments were designed to go hand-in-hand; students were encouraged to use the student podcast to satisfy their weekly EL requirement.

Questionnaires

At the end of the 15-week semester, students completed two questionnaires relating to the podcast assignment. The first was a 5-item, open-ended questionnaire submitted through Moodle and the second was a 14-item Likert-scale questionnaire gathered anonymously. The open-ended responses were coded and analyzed. Additionally, a factor analysis was conducted using SPSS on the Likert questionnaire responses to determine item behavior as well as the factors affecting the responses.

Results

The Open-Ended Questionnaire

The open-ended questionnaire collected data on the students' opinions of the podcast assignment. There were 130 responses. The first question, "What is your opinion of the podcast project?" had a variety of answers. The answers were classified into four types (codes): positive, negative, difficult, and no response. An overwhelming majority (83.8%) of the responses indicated that the podcast was looked on positively, whereas only 1.5% of responses showed a negative opinion.

The second question "What were the good points of the podcast project?" had a much wider variety of responses, which can be found in Table 1. Nearly two thirds of the responses indicated the podcast project was valuable for their English skills. Twenty percent of the responses stated that the project was fun. Another 10% appreciated the novelty of the project.

Table 1. Q2: What Were the Good Points of the Podcast Project?

| Codes | Percent of responses |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Valuable for English skills | 66.9% |
| Fun | 20.0% |
| Novelty | 10.0% |
| Autonomy | 7.7% |
| Convenience | 7.7% |
| Teamwork | 5.4% |
| No response | 4.6% |

Note. $N = 130$; total 159 coded responses.

The third question asked what the students disliked about the project. The responses varied greatly and are displayed in Table 2. The most common response was that students found it difficult to meet their partner outside of class to work on the project. Additionally, some students reported that the assignment was too difficult or that they had experienced technological difficulties. Surprisingly, 7% of the students had nothing bad to say about the assignment.

Table 2. Q3: What Were the Bad Points of the Podcast Project?

| Codes | Percent of responses |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Schedule problems | 20.0% |
| Task difficulty | 18.5% |
| Time consuming | 16.9% |
| Technical problems | 10.0% |
| 5 minutes was too long | 6.9% |
| Not enough teacher feedback | 6.9% |
| Embarrassment | 5.4% |
| No bad points | 7.7% |
| No response | 12.3% |

Note. $N = 130$; total 136 coded responses.

The fourth and fifth questions addressed the students' motivation to continue using the podcast in the future. Question four asked the students if they would like to make a podcast again in the future. Of the 130 students who completed the questionnaire, 38% answered no, 35% answered yes, and 27% did not respond. The final question asked if students would continue listening to the podcasts after the class finished. Of the respondents, 55% stated they would continue listening after the class finished either for enjoyment or to study. Only 8.5% of the responses were explicitly negative.

The Likert-Scale Questionnaire

The Likert questionnaire addressed to what degree students agreed with statements concerning prior knowledge, podcast value, motivation, and enjoyment. All 189 students answered the 14 items on a 5-level scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* (Table 3). Items 1-4 pertained to the students' knowledge of podcasts before taking the course. A majority of students had never heard of or listened to a podcast in Japanese or in English before taking the course.

Items 5-7 measured the students' enjoyment. More students agreed than disagreed with the statement that they enjoyed making the podcast with their partner (Item 5), but fewer students agreed with the statements that they want to continue making the podcast episodes (Item 6) or are interested in making the episodes (Item 7). This is consistent with the responses to the open-ended question targeting the same construct. This shows that perhaps students enjoyed working with a partner more than they enjoyed the actual podcast assignment.

Items 8-11 measured how the students' perceived the value of the podcast project. It appears that students valued the project for its perceived effect on their English skills. The data show that making (Item 8) and listening to the podcasts (Item 9) were valuable to the students. They also believed that reading the script while listening was helpful as well (Item 10). Additionally, more students agreed than disagreed that listening to podcasts is a good way to study English (Item 11), which shows that even though most students had never heard of podcasts before the course, they had come to realize that podcasts are a valuable tool.

The final three items concerned the students' motivation to continue using podcasts, both KSU student podcasts and other podcasts, after the class finished. Although fewer students agreed with these three items, more than 20% of the students stated that they will continue to listen to or study with some English podcast in the future. If more students become aware of podcasting as a valuable source of English input, perhaps their popularity as a self-study tool will increase. This was one of the intended effects of the podcast project.

Table 3. Podcast Project Questionnaire Descriptives (N = 189)

| Item | | M | SD |
|------|--|------|-------|
| 1 | Listened to podcast before this class | 1.44 | .760 |
| 2 | Knew what podcast was before this class | 1.75 | 1.236 |
| 3 | Listened to podcast in Japanese before this class | 1.55 | 1.028 |
| 4 | Listened to podcasts in English before this class | 1.44 | .901 |
| 5 | Enjoyed making podcast with partner | 3.62 | 1.068 |
| 6 | Want to make KSU student podcast again | 2.76 | 1.053 |
| 7 | Interested in making KSU podcast episodes | 2.65 | 1.024 |
| 8 | Making the podcast helped English skills | 3.85 | .930 |
| 9 | Listening to KSU student podcast helped my English skills | 3.63 | 1.000 |
| 10 | Reading the script while listening was helpful | 3.76 | 1.002 |
| 11 | Listening to podcasts is a good way to study English | 3.38 | .996 |
| 12 | Will continue studying with KSU podcast | 2.87 | .961 |
| 13 | Will continue listening to KSU podcast after class is finished | 2.70 | 1.066 |
| 14 | Will continue listening to other podcasts to study English | 2.87 | 1.084 |

Note. Likert-scale values: *strongly disagree* = 1, *disagree* = 2, *neither* = 3, *agree* = 4, *strongly agree* = 5; KSU = name of the university.

After culling item 5 due to low communality with other items, a factor analysis using principle component analysis with Varimax (orthogonal) rotation procedure was performed on the other 13 items to determine the underlining factor structure. The KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity indicated the items were suitably related and that a factor analysis was appropriate. The analysis yielded a three-factor structure accounting for 66.23% of the total variance. *Perceived value* accounted for 40.07% of the total variance associated with items 8-11, which measured students' views of podcast project on their English skills. Items 6, 7, 12, 13, and 14, are associated with the second factor of *motivation*, which accounted for 18.42% of the total variance. The third factor, *prior knowledge*, accounted for 7.82% of the total variance and is associated with items 1, 2, 3, and 4.

These results are not surprising as the questionnaire was designed to target four main constructs: prior knowledge of podcasts, perceived value, motivation, and enjoyment.

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However, due to the results of the factor analysis, it seems that the intended variables of enjoyment and motivation were not distinct enough. This led to these items loading together into one larger factor.

Table 4. Summary of Items and Factor Loadings for Varimax Orthogonal Three-Factor Solution for the Podcast Questionnaire (N = 189)

| Items | Factor loadings | | | Communality |
|---|-----------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 10 Reading and listening helpful | .81 | .19 | -.11 | .71 |
| 8 Making helped English | .79 | .25 | -.08 | .69 |
| 9 Listening helped English | .78 | .32 | -.06 | .72 |
| 11 Listening to podcast is a good way to study | .72 | .27 | .05 | .59 |
| 6 Want to make again | .23 | .82 | -.02 | .74 |
| 7 Interested in making | .21 | .82 | .06 | .72 |
| 13 Will continue listening to KSU Pod | .45 | .68 | .15 | .69 |
| 12 Will continue studying with KSU Pod | .51 | .67 | .19 | .75 |
| 14 Will continue listening to other podcasts to study | .42 | .60 | .20 | .58 |
| 2 Knew before | .04 | -.10 | .90 | .82 |
| 3 Listened in Japanese | .05 | -.03 | .85 | .73 |
| 4 Listened in English | -.13 | .23 | .65 | .50 |
| 1 Listened before | -.05 | .18 | .54 | .32 |

Note. Boldface indicates highest factor loadings.

Limitations and Conclusion

The study is not without flaws. First, the open-ended questionnaire was not anonymous and student responses were visible to all other students in the class. This could have led to students telling the researcher what they thought he wanted to hear. However, responses were similar to the anonymous Likert responses. Second, there was no way to track how often and how many podcasts students listened to as a part of the EL program.

Future attempts to carry out this project should introduce a reliable way to track students' listening habits. Lastly, in reference to the Likert questionnaire, items that targeted the same construct were grouped together. This may have helped students deduce the goals of items and affected the way they answered the questions. Future versions of this questionnaire should vary the item order.

Judging from the results of the two questionnaires, it is clear that the podcast project accomplished its main goal: improved awareness of podcasts as a language tool. Awareness of podcasting as a productive and receptive language tool increased as a result of this project. When the semester started, hardly any students had ever heard of podcasting and even fewer of them had ever listened to one. Only one or two students had ever listened to a podcast in English. However, as a result of this project, more than 20% of the students stated that they would continue using podcasts in some way after the course finished. Additionally, the two questionnaires showed similar results regarding how the students perceived the value of podcasts. The data show that they valued them as learning tools for both productive and receptive English.

Bio Data

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