

ENHANCING STUDENTS' LISTENING SKILL THROUGH PODCASTS

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Abstract

Applying podcast as an appropriate multimedia can be very potential and practical as a tool to enhance listening skill. Students and teachers can download podcast easily and freely as source of their listening materials. Listening materials presented through Podcast is possible to increase students' listening skill as Podcast provides students with authentic and contextual material. Podcast offers an ideal tool for the creative expression of knowledge preferred by today's students, and provides an exciting way for students and teachers to explore and discover listening content or material.

Podcasts are particularly suited for extensive listening, for the purpose of motivating students' interest in listening to English and providing them with exposure to native speakers' speech (Rost, 1991). Stanley (2006) points out that podcasts offer students a wide range of possibilities for extra listening both inside and outside of the classrooms. The outside classroom listening activity effectively bridges the gap between the formal English which dominates most English language classrooms and the informal English used in real-life communication events. Podcast as a new technology has huge potential in enhancing students' listening skill. The ease of downloading podcasts to MP3 players and iPods means that students can now engage in plenty of listening practice in any condition.

Key words: *Listening skills, podcast, Information technology in ELT*

Listening in language learning has undergone several important stages, from being assumed "acquired through exposure but not really taught" (Richard, 2002) to be viewed as "a primary vehicle for language learning" (Rost, 2001). During the decades, developments in education, linguistics and sociology have led to the powerful theories of the nature of language comprehension and the active interest in the role of listening comprehension in second language acquisition.

In daily communication, listening plays an important role. Research has demonstrated that adults spend 40-50% of communication time listening, 25-30% speaking, 11-16% reading, and about 9% writing (Vandergrift, 1999). Listening, the most widely used language skill, is often used in conjunction with the other skills of speaking, reading and writing. It is not only a skill area in language performance, but also a critical means of acquiring a second and foreign language.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, applied linguistics recognized that listening was the primary channel by which the learner gained access to L2 data, and that it therefore served as the trigger for acquisition (Rost, 2001). Krashen (1982) claimed that "comprehensible input" was a necessary condition for language learning. In his input hypothesis, Krashen said further development from the learner's current stage of language knowledge could only be achieved by the learner's comprehending language that contained linguistic items (lexis, syntax, morphology) at a level slightly above the learner's current knowledge (Rost, 2001). According to this theory, the more language we expose students to, the more they will acquire, and the better they get in listening activities

In general, provided the listening material appropriate to their level is a very significant point. However, the reality of the teaching of listening in Indonesian's classrooms is that students have only one hour to learn listening in the language laboratory every week, which is far from satisfactory. Hence, extensive listening must go along with intensive listening. Extensive listening, where a teacher encourages students to choose for themselves what they listen to and to do so for pleasure or for general language improvement can also have a dramatic effect on a student's language proficiency (Harmer, 2001).

Applying appropriate multimedia in Extensive Listening activity can be one of the solutions to improve students' listening skill and their motivation (Juniardi, 2008). By using multimedia students not only hear the sound but also can capture the pictures, moreover by using multimedia students can download native voices as source of their listening materials. One of the programs that can be applied is podcast program. By using Podcast, the students can listen to music, news, TV program etc. Podcast has two files audio (MP3) and video (MP4).

These files can be down loaded free of charge from www.cnn.com. One of the Podcast examples which can be free down loaded is, CNN Larry King Live Podcast (Paul, 2007).

Another example, which is also interesting to be used as the listening material, is taken from www.invisiblechildren.com. There are many videos which can be downloaded by subscribing to the website using iTunes (Stanley, 2006).

These two examples are few of many others materials that can be freely downloaded from the internet by subscribing to the website using iTunes. The capacity of each file is varied (about 3 to 100 Mb) according to duration of the podcast. For instance, it takes at least one and a half hour to download a 15 minutes Larry King Live Podcast (McCarty, 2005).

Based on the explanation above, listening materials presented through Podcast is possible to increase student listening comprehension as Podcast provide students with authentic and contextual material and it can improve students' knowledge because students are able to share their Podcast. Podcasting offers an ideal tool for the creative expression of knowledge preferred by today's students, and provides an exciting way for students and educators to explore and discover listening content or material (McCarty, 2005). Podcasts are audio or video files that are automatically delivered over a network, and then played back on any Mac, PC, or iPod. When students create a Podcast for class, they not only learn the content in a creative way, they learn 21st-century communication skills at the same time.

Listening

Language learning depends on listening since it provides the aural input that serves as the basis for language acquisition and enables learners to interact in spoken communication. Listening is the

first language mode that children acquire. It provides the foundation for all aspects of language and cognitive development, and it plays a life-long role in the processes of communication. A study by Wilt (1950), found that people listen 45 % of the time they spend communicating.

Since listening is, according to Wang Shouyuan (2003), the most important component in the five aspects of overall English competence he suggests as listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation, it deserves particular attention. Teachers must actively explore the nature and process of listening comprehension and study the theory and methodology of listening comprehension in order to improve listening teaching outcomes and make students recognize that listening comprehension is the crucial aspect of English learning.

From the point of view of constructivist linguistics, foreign language teaching should focus on language form and structure, thus, listening teaching is undertaken in each of the four aspects of language form. When students are taught to understand a passage of text, teachers first let them discriminate between the pronunciation of vowels and consonants, then understand vocabulary, sentences and discourses. The goals of this listening teaching model from the "bottom-up" is to help students understand the meaning of vocabulary by discriminating sounds, to understand sentence meaning, and to monitor and control the meaning of discourses by understanding sentence meaning (Feyten, 1991).

Since the 1970s, with the development of functional language theory, there has been an emphasis on the research of language function in society. Functional linguistic experts recognize language as a communicative tool, but not an isolated structure system. Consequently the teaching of listening is not simply intended to make students hear a sound, a

word or a sentence, rather, the goal is to cultivate students' abilities to understand speakers' intentions accurately and communicate with each other effectively (Lihua, 2002).

Different from the traditional theory that listening is a passive activity, now we have realized that listening is a complicated process that involves many factors. Rost (2002) suggests that "listening is a process involving a continuum of active processes which are under the control of the listener." It is different from hearing which is "the primary physiological system that allows for reception and conversion of sound waves that surround the listener" (Rost, 2002).

A thorough definition of listening, thus, should include at least four factors: receptive, constructive, collaborative, or transformative (Rost, 2002). Receptive means receiving what the speaker actually says while constructive suggests constructing and representing meaning. Collaborative, on the other hand, shows negotiating meaning with the speaker and responding while transformative requires creating meaning through involvement, imagination and empathy.

In summary, effective listening involves the listener taking an active role in constructing meaning with the speaker. Speaker must be aware of the deixis, speaker intention, implicit meaning and strategy use. In addition, effective listening will involve attention to cooperative social interaction, as that is where conversational meaning is monitored and negotiated (Rost, 2002).

The notion of involvement, engagement, and negotiation is related to pragmatic approach to listening. The pragmatic point of view of listening is that it is an intention to complete a communication process. In order that this occurs, there must be engagement, in which a listener switches from becoming a mere 'presence' to an interpreter (Verschueren, 1999 in Rost, 2002).

Listening and Technologies

A prominent artefact of older beliefs concerning the role of listening in language learning is the language laboratory. The rationale for language laboratories is tied to the belief that individual listening practice with audiotape can help build a learner's overall ability in the target language through self instructed comprehension practice. Technology continues to be perceived as an enhancement to the process of language acquisition. The large-scale infusion of computers in language instruction programs in the past decade attests to this belief. The rationale behind what is now growing support for Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is not unlike earlier enthusiasm for audiotape-based technologies. That is, individualized access to target language material under learner control provides needed exposure to and practice in the target language (Meskill, 1993).

Enthusiasm for CALL in general and multimedia in particular, however, differs from that of the audiotape laboratory as regards the breadth of expectations concerning technology's role and potential. Fast and powerful computational capacity in conjunction with the orchestrated video, text and graphics of today's multimedia learning systems would predict more sophisticated paradigms for interaction with the target language and, consequently, more effective learning (Jung, 1990).

Arguments supporting multimedia for education of this kind have rung loud and clear over the past decade. Praises for the medium are, however, based largely on intuition: learning a language via individualized instruction with the computer especially when audio and video are involved is an extremely appealing proposition, one that has sold to many an administrator in search of instructional panaceas (Jonassen, 1993). Thus far,

however, the extent of multimedia's impact on the language acquisition process remains an open issue. Is there evidence to suggest that listening skills development can be enhanced through this medium? The following section treats this question by examining potential correspondence between multi modal processing opportunities for language learners and how these can interact to complement listening skills acquisition (Garza, 1991).

Puspitasari (2010) in Cahyono (2010) in her article "Using Podcast as a Source of Material for Teaching English" informed what a podcast is. By the guidance of the teacher, the students can experience learning authentically through podcasts. The strategy described in this article is how to use podcast as a source material. Having listened to podcast, students are assigned to do several tasks in worksheets. Then, they can finish their final project by submitting the worksheets and a written recount text.

Other sources of the use of technology in English language learning and teaching are Murtado (2010) in Cahyono (2010), he used mailing lists in the English classroom where students can read other people's questions and comments, and they can also give their comments. Samsuli (2010) in Cahyono (2010) proposed teaching English in a virtual classroom. As a teaching environment, virtual classroom provides a set of tools and features to facilitate teachers for delivering course materials and structuring learning experiences. The virtual learning gives teachers an experience in the new teaching atmosphere and environment and makes them change the way to teach. It will improve their face to face interaction with more effective questioning techniques.

Podcasts

Podcasts are audio (sometimes video) programs on the Web which are usually updated at regular intervals. New

episodes can be listened to on the computer, or downloaded to an MP3 player or iPod for later listening. Although audio programs have existed on the Web for a few years already, what makes podcasting unique is its capacity for subscription through an RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feed, listeners can subscribe to their favorite Podcasts. Their computer will then receive alerts when new episodes have been posted. Podcatcher software programs, such as iTunes, will even download the latest episodes automatically once the program is opened. In other words, instead of having to visit individual Websites regularly for updated episodes, listeners can now have the latest episodes of their favorite programs delivered to their computer (Stanley, 2006)

Types of Podcast

Podcasts available on the Web fall broadly into two types: "radio Podcasts" and "independent Podcasts." Radio Podcasts are existing radio programs turned into Podcasts, such as those produced by BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) and RTHK (Radio Television Hong Kong). "Independent Podcasts" are Web-based Podcasts produced by individuals and organizations (Lee, 2007).

It is the second type of Podcast which has huge potential for ELT because these can be perfect to suit the needs of different learners. They can be created by learners themselves with utmost ease.

ELT Podcasts

The first Podcasts appeared in early 2005. ELT educators soon joined the movement, and since the second half of 2005, there has been an upsurge in the number of ELT Podcasts on the Web. Teachers have three ways to look for suitable ELT Podcasts for their students. They can start with general Podcast directories. A Podcast directory is a searchable database which is linked to the

Podcast sites. Teachers can type in a search term like "English," "ELT," "ESL," and "TESOL," and they will be given a list of ELT Podcasts. An example of a general Podcast directory is <http://www.podcastalley.com/> (Lee, 2007).

To narrow down their search, teachers may go directly to directories of educational Podcasts. One well-known educational Podcast directory is the Education Podcast Network: <http://epnweb.org/>. A recent new directory is <http://recap.ltd.uk/podcasting/>, which claims to be the first U.K directory of educational Podcasts (Lee, 2007).

There is now such an abundance of ELT Podcasts on the Web that Podcast directories specializing in ELT are also available. These are directories which cover ELT podcasts only. One example is [http://iteslj.org/links/ESL/Listening/Podcast s/](http://iteslj.org/links/ESL/Listening/Podcast%2Fs/) maintained by the Internet TESL Journal (McCarty, 2005).

ELT podcasts cover a wide range of subject matter. A brief survey of ELT podcasts reveals the following content types:

- Comprehensive (e.g., <http://www.englishteacherjohn.com/podcast/>). These are Podcasts that cover a wide range of content types, such as traditional listening comprehension activities, interviews, and vocabulary. A well-known comprehensive Podcast is the one quoted above, created by "Teacher John," who teaches ESL in Japan.
- Whole lessons (e.g., <http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/>). These are whole lessons based on a Podcast. The Podcast quoted above, for example, makes use of a news story in each episode. The text of the news story is provided, and is accompanied by the audio file. There is then a lesson plan with

accompanying worksheet materials. In effect, these are ready-made lessons based on Podcasts which teachers can use in the classroom directly.

- Vocabulary, idioms, etc. (e.g., <http://englishteacherjohn.com/>). This is a popular type of Podcast, probably because it is easy to produce. In this kind of Podcast, the host chooses some vocabulary items and explains their usage. The example presents a few idioms in each episode.
- Conversations with script (e.g., <http://www.e-poche.net/conversations/>) These Podcasts contain conversations between native speakers to help less proficient learners, each episode is accompanied by the script, for learners to refer to while listening to the conversation.
- Jokes (e.g., <http://www.manythings.org/jokes/>) These are Podcasts containing jokes because they usually play on language, they encourage careful listening by the learner.
- Songs (e.g., <http://englishpodsong.blogspot.com/>) These Podcasts contain songs for ESL learners. The songs are either traditional children's songs, or authentic popular songs for teenagers. They are also often accompanied by the text of the lyrics.
- Phonetics, pronunciation (e.g., <http://phoneticpodcast.com/>) Podcasts are obviously highly suited for teaching phonetics and pronunciation. These Podcasts are lessons which focus on specific phonemes and pronunciation problems in English.

- Stories (e.g., <http://www.englishthroughstories.com/>)

These are usually reading aloud story. They may or may not be followed by listening comprehension questions.

- Listening comprehension (e.g., <http://mylcpodcasts.blogspot.com/>) These Podcasts provide conventional listening comprehension practice.

In conclusion, computerized media and a multimedia environment can be helpful for English language learning and teaching and it has been asserted that internet sources and internet-based teaching are an excellent medium and strategies for generating social construction of knowledge. Information and communication technology can be used by adopting variant methods that could encourage students in developing independent learning strategies. In this study, the use of weblog and internet mail (e-mail) as learning medium and the use of podcast as a listening source material hopefully can make the students improve their listening skill and motivation.

Podcast and Listening Activity

Teaching listening by using Podcast is possible to increase student listening comprehension as Podcast provide students with authentic and contextual material and it can improve students' knowledge because they share their Podcast (Earp, 1998). Podcasting offers an ideal tool for the creative expression of knowledge preferred by today's students, and provides an exciting way for students and teachers to explore and discover listening content or material. Podcasts are audio or video files that are automatically delivered over a network, and then played back on any Mac, PC, or iPod. When students create a Podcast for class, they not only learn the content in a creative way,

they learn 21st-century communications skills at the same time (McCarty, 2005).

Podcasting allows teachers to take their students beyond traditional assignments by allowing them to include voice recordings, photos, movies, and sound effects to share their knowledge. For example, students can draft and perform scripts as a writing assignment, create a visual progress report for an ongoing project, or submit a recorded version of a science presentation (Ge, 2005).

Podcasting is also a great way for teachers to deliver listening content to their students. They can distribute homework assignments, record book narration for beginning readers to read along with, or create foreign language lessons that students can review at their own pace (Lee, 2007).

ELT Podcasts can be used for intensive and extensive listening activities. However, ELT Podcasts are particularly suited for extensive listening, for the purpose of motivating student interest in listening to English, and providing them with exposure to native speakers' speech (Rost, 1991). Stanley (2006) points out that Podcasts offer students a wide range of possibilities for extra listening both inside and outside of the classroom:

"Supplementing the (often) scripted and stilted textbook listening with the real life authentic conversations we can find on many Podcasts is an attractive option for language teachers chosen carefully, extracts can bring a range of different voices and varieties of English into the classroom."

More advanced learners can be encouraged to listen to authentic podcast. This activity effectively bridges the gap between the formal English which dominates most second language classrooms and the informal English used in most real-life communication events.

The key to help students improve their listening skills is to convince them that

they can finish the job. This is more of an attitude adjustment than anything else, and it is easier for some students to accept than others. Another important point is that teachers should convince their students to listen to English as often as possible. As to the listening material, the more material they get touch with, the more progress they will make (Nunan and Miller, 1995).

In conclusion, as we all know, for the students of English as a foreign language, there are usually intervals between the perceptions of sounds by their ears and understanding the words, phrases and sentences. This kind of intervals often makes students have more troubles in listening comprehension. So it is essential for them to have more chances to contact with different kinds of listening materials and let their ears be familiar with different sounds of English words. In classroom activities, teachers can also give students some advice about improving listening competency, one of the useful suggestions, that is, extensive listening. The best source for extensive listening is podcast material from the internet.

Conclusion

Having observed all the results of the studies mentioned above, it can be concluded that internet podcast is a great multimedia to improve students' listening skill. Podcast allows students to download or subscribe to audio programs in the form of MP3 files which is very easy to apply and they can select appropriate podcast materials which they need and like. The material is then easily be transferred to a portable MP3 player. Moreover, Intensive and Extensive Listening Activity using podcast is able to overcome students' low ability in listening comprehension and is able to fulfil their need to have extra time to improve their listening skill with appropriate and interesting listening materials.

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