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DEVELOPING RECEPTIVE AND INTERACTIVE SKILLS IN B1 LEARNERS VIA EDUCATIONAL PODCASTS AND PEER-INTERACTIVITY

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Abstract: This article examines how educational podcasts and structured peer interaction can be combined to develop listening comprehension and interactive communication among B1-level learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). It is a literature-based study and reports no new experimental data. The article distinguishes receptive from interactive skills, reviews theories that link them, and proposes a three-stage framework (pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening) in which podcast input becomes the content of pair tasks. The analysis suggests that podcasts offer repeatable input, while peer work lets learners clarify meaning and reuse what they have heard. However, the evidence is limited, and peer work depends on task design. Practical recommendations for B1 classrooms are given.

Keywords: receptive skills, interactive skills, educational podcasts, peer interaction, listening comprehension, B1 level, EFL

Introduction

Listening and speaking are closely connected in language learning, but they are often taught as if they were separate. Many B1 learners understand a teacher who speaks slowly, yet struggle with natural speech or with replying to a classmate without preparation. Listening gives learners the language they will later use, and interaction gives them a reason to use it.

Educational podcasts are one practical way to widen this input. A podcast is an audio programme that can be downloaded or streamed, replayed as often as needed, and chosen from a wide range of topics. However, a podcast does not teach anything by itself. If learners only listen and answer comprehension questions, the lesson develops receptive skills but leaves little room for interactive ones.

This article therefore asks: how can educational podcasts combined with structured peer interaction support the development of receptive and interactive English skills among B1-level EFL learners? Its purpose is to bring together scholarly arguments about listening, interaction and podcast

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use, and to turn them into a practical framework for B1 classrooms. It considers what makes a podcast suitable for B1 learners, how peer interaction can build on podcast content, and what challenges teachers may face. The classroom activities described are the author's own proposals and have not been tested with learners.

Theoretical background

In this article, receptive skills means listening and, where a transcript is used, reading. Interactive skills means taking part in a conversation: asking and answering questions, clarifying meaning, giving opinions and responding to a partner. The Common European Framework of Reference treats reception, production and interaction as different modes of communication [1]. Listening is also not simply "getting" meaning from sound. Field [2] argues that classroom listening often tests understanding instead of helping learners become better listeners, and he recommends attention to the processes behind listening. Vandergrift and Goh [3] describe listening as an active process in which learners combine what they hear with their knowledge of the topic and monitor their own understanding.

At B1, learners are independent users on the CEFR scale [1]. In general terms, they can follow the main points of clear speech on familiar topics and manage many everyday exchanges, but they still need support with fast speech, unfamiliar vocabulary and extended, unplanned talk. B1 learners therefore benefit from input that is challenging but supported, and from structured rather than completely open interaction tasks.

Several theories explain why input and interaction should be combined. Krashen [4] claims that acquisition happens mainly when learners understand input that is slightly above their current level. This supports listening materials but gives interaction a limited role. Long [5] proposed a stronger role for interaction: when speakers have difficulty understanding each other, they negotiate meaning by checking, clarifying and rephrasing, which can make input more comprehensible. Pica, Young and Doughty [6] compared two conditions in which non-native speakers followed spoken directions for a task: premodified input without interaction, and unmodified input with the chance to interact. Comprehension was better in the interaction condition. This small experiment (16 learners) used a native-speaker partner, so it cannot be applied directly to peer work, but it shows how interaction can support understanding.

Swain [7] added that learners also need to produce language, because speaking or writing forces them to process grammar and word choice more carefully than listening does. From a sociocultural view, Vygotsky [8] argued that learning develops through social interaction, so learners can help one another complete tasks that would be difficult alone. Philp, Adams and Iwashita [9] review research on peer interaction and show that peers can offer each other input, feedback and support, although the quality of this help varies.

Taken together, these views suggest a simple relationship: listening supplies content and language, and peer interaction gives learners a reason to process, question and reuse that content. In

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my view, the two skill areas support each other only when the tasks connect them. A discussion unrelated to the audio wastes the input, and listening without follow-up does little for interaction.

Main analysis

Educational podcasts for B1 listening

Rosell-Aguilar [10] reviewed language-learning podcasts and proposed a taxonomy of them, ranging from authentic recordings made for native speakers to programmes designed for learners. He also argued that many learning podcasts needed better design. This distinction is useful for B1 teachers, because authentic material gives realistic input but may be too fast or dense, while learner-oriented material is easier to follow but can sound artificial. A reasonable compromise is natural speech on a clearly structured topic.

Based on this literature and on the needs of B1 learners, I propose these selection criteria: a familiar topic, a clear structure with a main idea and a few supporting points, a moderate speech rate with natural pauses, limited unknown vocabulary, a widely understood accent, and a short length, for example two to four minutes. These are practical guidelines, not research-based thresholds, and teachers should adjust them after trying the audio with their own class. BBC Learning English's 6 Minute English, which is aimed at intermediate learners and provides transcripts, is one example of public material, although each episode should still be checked for level and topic, and a shorter extract can be used.

O'Bryan and Hegelheimer [11] describe how podcasts were integrated into an academic ESL listening strategies course. Their preliminary evaluation suggested that the teacher and students saw the podcasts as a positive part of the course. This shows acceptance, not improvement: the project was ongoing, the context was ESL rather than EFL, and the learners were not specifically B1. Stronger evidence for scaffolding comes from Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari [12], who taught 106 university learners of French as a second language. The group that received metacognitive instruction in listening significantly outperformed the comparison group on a comprehension test. Their study used neither podcasts nor English, so transfer is plausible but not certain. It does support teaching learners how to listen, for example by predicting, checking and reflecting, and not only testing them.

Structured peer interaction after listening

Peer interaction includes pair discussion, information-gap tasks, small-group problem solving and peer questioning. After a podcast, these forms give learners a purpose for using what they heard. In an information-gap task, each learner holds different information from the audio, so they must ask questions and check answers to complete the task. This is close to the negotiation of meaning described by Long [5] and Pica et al. [6], although those studies did not involve podcast-based tasks.

However, peer work is not automatically beneficial. Storch [13] observed ten pairs of adult ESL learners over a semester and identified four patterns of interaction: collaborative, dominant/dominant, dominant/passive and expert/novice. Some patterns, especially collaborative and expert/novice pairs, were more conducive to learning than others. For teachers, pairing and task design matter. Role cards,

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changing partners and tasks that need both learners can reduce the risk of one student dominating. Other problems include anxiety, since Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope [14] describe foreign language anxiety as a specific type of anxiety connected with language classes; differences in proficiency; and off-task talk or use of the first language. Learners may also correct each other wrongly, so teachers need to monitor and give feedback.

An integrated pre-, while- and post-listening framework

The framework below combines the ideas discussed above. It is a proposal, not a tested method. The stages follow the familiar pre-, while- and post-listening sequence discussed by Field [2], and the listening phases draw on the prediction–verification–reflection cycle of Vandergrift and Goh [3].

In the pre-listening stage, learners look at the title and a picture, predict what the podcast will say, and discuss the topic in pairs. The teacher pre-teaches five or six key words. This stage builds receptive readiness and begins interaction in a low-risk way. For example, before a short podcast about study habits, pairs could discuss "How do you prepare for exams?" and predict two tips the speaker might give.

In the while-listening stage, learners listen first for the main idea (for example, "What is the speaker's main advice?") and compare answers with a partner. The second listening focuses on specific information, such as completing notes with three or four details. Comparing answers in pairs between listenings lets learners explain what they understood and notice what they missed, so even this receptive stage includes interaction.

In the post-listening stage the focus shifts to interactive skills. In one version, half of the class listens to one short extract and the other half to a different extract on the same topic, and partners then exchange what they heard to complete a shared table. In another, all learners hear the same podcast and pairs use prompts such as "Which tip is the most useful for you? Why?" Before the task, the teacher gives useful phrases, such as "Could you repeat that?", "What do you mean by…?" and "I agree because…". Finally, each pair prepares a two-sentence summary of one idea and gives peer feedback using a short checklist (Did my partner answer my question? Was the idea clear?). A 45-minute lesson could allow about 10 minutes for pre-listening, 15 for while-listening and 20 for post-listening.

Critical discussion

The theories reviewed here do not fully agree. Krashen [4] emphasises input and doubts the need for interaction, whereas Long [5] and Swain [7] argue that interaction and output do additional work. I consider the combined framework reasonable because B1 learners need both clear input and structured talk to practise using it. However, the empirical support is indirect. The studies discussed involved different learners, languages and tasks, and the only podcast study reviewed here reports preliminary perceptions. No claim can therefore be made that the framework improves B1 listening or speaking; that would need classroom research, such as action research comparing results before and after a series of lessons.

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Practical limits also matter. Podcasts depend on devices, internet access and sound quality, so teachers should prepare offline copies and a backup plan, such as reading the script aloud. Assessment is another challenge. If speaking is graded by how much each learner says, quiet learners are disadvantaged and meaningless talk is rewarded. A better approach assesses relevance, comprehensibility, response to a partner and task completion. Finally, anxiety and confidence differ between learners, so teachers can offer support such as sentence starters or a transcript after the final listening.

Pedagogical implications

Several recommendations follow from the analysis. First, teachers should choose short podcasts on familiar topics and check the language level beforehand. Second, listening should be taught as well as tested: prediction, two listenings with different purposes and a short reflection help learners develop strategies [3, 12]. Third, the speaking task should depend on the audio, ideally through an information gap. Fourth, learners should be given the language of interaction, such as clarification requests, agreement and disagreement, before they discuss. Fifth, teachers should organise pairs deliberately, change partners and use role cards so that both learners participate [13]. Sixth, teachers should create a supportive atmosphere in which mistakes are normal [14]. Finally, assessment should be mostly formative, using a simple checklist for main idea, details, relevance of questions and answers, and clarity of opinion.

Conclusion

This article examined how educational podcasts and structured peer interaction can support receptive and interactive skills among B1-level EFL learners. The literature suggests that podcasts can provide short, repeatable and varied listening input, while peer interaction offers opportunities to clarify meaning, respond spontaneously and reuse language from the audio. The proposed framework connects the two: receptive work prepares learners to understand the podcast, and interactive tasks require them to use what they understood.

However, the evidence is not strong enough to claim that this approach is always effective. Much of the research is indirect, the podcast studies are limited, and peer work depends on task design, pair dynamics and learner emotions. The main limitation of this article is that it has no classroom data. Future research could test the framework with B1 groups through small-scale action research, comparing comprehension, quality of interaction and learner attitudes. In my view, the most promising idea is the podcast-based information gap, because it gives learners a real reason to listen closely and then speak.

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