



Self-media Literacy in Language Education and Cross Cultural Competence Development

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Abstract. As a kind of self-media technology, podcasting can be applied to English education in this era of self-media for promoting personalized and independent learning. Based on two theoretical methods on teaching listening, the author described and reported the design and the teaching experience of an elective English course at a tertiary institution in China, and shared the perspectives of a culture content-based and podcasting task-driven curriculum.

Keywords: Self-media · Podcasting · Language education · Awareness

1 Introduction

The challenge for the future language education is to combine language learning theory with mobile technology and to know appropriate methods to ensure a high degree of contextualization, personalization, autonomy, and maximization of language application to achieve independent and lifelong learning [1]. Self-media is characterized by self-production and self-propagation, and various self-media tools are widely influential among college students because of their rich forms, high interactivity, wide coverage, and high efficiency. As a kind of self-media technology, podcasting technology can be applied to English listening and speaking courses in such an environment, and it can be used to reform teaching methods and promote personalized and independent learning.

In the literature, empirical studies have explored the effect of podcasting technology on English language proficiency (e.g. [2–7]), but there are few studies on how podcasting technology can be integrated and designed into listening and speaking teaching activities and what teaching strategies are available, especially how to use the language output function of podcasting technology in the era of self-media awareness. From the perspective of research methods, most of the studies are based on theories such as mobile learning rather than language acquisition and language teaching theories. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct more detailed educational action research on how to use podcasts and strategies to improve language skills from the perspective of language acquisition and language teaching theories, based on the existing theoretical studies and practical exploration of podcasting technology.

This article will share pedagogical experience in the integration of podcasts and podcasting in language and culture development by presenting a course taught in 2021

at a tertiary institution in China. The course was entitled “Podcasting: English listening & speaking through culture”. Experience and tips will be shared about what podcasts and how podcasting could be integrated in language and culture teaching and learning.

2 The Course and Theoretical Base

The course *Podcasting: English listening & speaking through culture* is one of the elective courses provided by the Center for Language Education (CLE) at Southern University of Science and Technology (SUSTech) in 2021. This course took place every week with 2 credits, making a total of 32 h of teaching and learning in class. This course was designed to sharpen students’ English listening and speaking skills by reviewing, analyzing and finally creating their own podcasts. Studying through the whole semester, students turned podcasts into authentic learning materials for both language improvement and culture enhancement. Through creating their own podcasts, students were not only language learners, but more importantly also language users. The ultimate goal of this course was to help students master a lifelong skill for conducting independent learning of the English language and culture.

The activities applied in the course were designed based on Jack C. Richards’ thoughts on teaching listening [8] and Michael Rost’s list of components to master for a successful listening [9]. Believing in the existence of input (what the learner hears) and intake (that part of the input that the learner notices), and the consciousness in language learning [10], and based on his examination on views of teaching listening, Richard (2005) proposed a two-part cycle of teaching activities as the basis for a listening lesson. First part is noticing activities that are used as the basis for language awareness. Second part is reconstructing activities. They are either oral or written tasks that involve productive use of the listening. In the course, this two-part cycle is called awareness raising activities and illustrated in Fig. 1.

As can be seen in Fig. 1, different from the two-part cycle, a pre-listening performance was added.

Under the theoretical bases, the course was designed with an emphasis on the role of listening in promoting language acquisition with cultural content-based podcasts

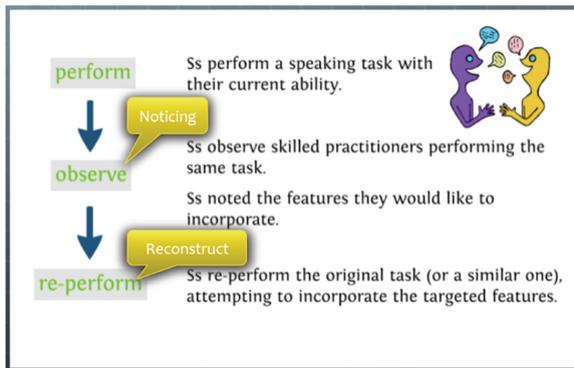


Fig. 1. Awareness raising activities

as major language and culture input, and the role of noticing in facilitating language development with podcasting as the outputting method and motivation.

3 Integration and Experience

In order to integrate podcasts and podcasting into the listening & speaking course, 3 steps were taken. The first step was to trigger students' interest in listening to podcasts and becoming podcasters. For example, the teacher introduced what podcasts are, gave them a list of podcasts, and let students explore their preferred podcast programs. Shown in Table 1 are some podcasts selected by the students and basic information about these podcasts.

Listening to one's own voice is in fact enjoyable. It's like after sending out a voice message on one's phone, one intends to listen to his or her own voice and the delivery of voice. Recording students' voice and playing the audio in class was another example on how to engage them.

The second step was to apply in-class awareness raising activities to activate language acquisition. The topic of an activity was essential to engage students. In 2021 Spring, one of the hot topics around the globe is COVID 19 vaccination. It was the time people were pondering on the effect of COVID 19 vaccination and whether we should be vaccinated or not. A spoken task was conducted with two key questions for students. They are "What do you know about COVID 19 vaccination? Do you want to be vaccinated?". To scaffold the task and students' performance, some background information and language support was provided beforehand. After a brief sharing, two podcasts talking about COVID 19 vaccination were sent to students to observe. Noticing happened when students noted some features, either language or ideas. Key cultural notes and language points in the podcasts were explained afterwards. A cloze test designed based on Rost's list of components [9] were conducted to practice and reinforce what they should have noticed. At last, students re-construct their answers to the two questions attempting to incorporate the target features observed or noticed when listening to and studying the podcasts.

The third step was to grow a self-media participatory culture. The structure of a good podcast was introduced part by part. Given a topic, students were assigned to listen to different podcasts for the topic. With the topic on COVID 19 vaccination, students were asked to search for answers why some people, especially those in America, refused to be vaccinated. Podcasting task driven approach could boost the participatory culture, motivate and involve students especially outside the classroom, where students have more time to invest in the self-media, and finally use English and acquire English.

Final advice is to embed listening strategies into the course syllabus to avoid vague sense of accomplishment from students. Clear learning objectives with listening strategies should be explained to students at the beginning of each class. At the end of the semester, students knew they could not only make podcasts themselves, but also they had learnt useful listening strategies. Some listening strategies included are how to do active listening, building up vocabulary in listening, listening difficulties and solutions, listening and note taking, and using listening strategies.

Table 1. Podcasts selected by the students

Name	Length	Subject	Transcripts availability
<i>6 min English</i>	<i>6 min</i>	<i>Interviews/Lessons on slang or proverbs</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>TED Ratio Hour</i>	<i>45 min</i>	<i>Funny stories/Lessons with TED talks (Critical thinking)</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Earthwhile</i>	<i>5 min</i>	<i>Short serious reports on climate</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Only A Game</i>	<i>50 min</i>	<i>How white students use college sports to get ahead</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Encore: The Emperor's Challenge</i>	<i>25 min</i>	<i>Parents telling cute and easy to understand stories.</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Food, we need to talk (not from the list)</i>	<i>20 min</i>	<i>Food and health</i>	<i>No</i>
<i>Scientific American</i>	<i>4 min</i>	<i>Wild life and domestic animals</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Morning Edition</i>	<i>5 min</i>	<i>News around the globe</i>	<i>No</i>
<i>Modern Love</i>	<i>20 min</i>	<i>Sexual oppression and resist (How 'Lolita' Freed me from my own humbert)</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Dear Sugars</i>	<i>40 min</i>	<i>Funny talk shows about some psychological topics</i>	<i>Partially yes</i>
<i>Planet Money</i>	<i>23 min</i>	<i>Economy</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Gourmet on Streets</i>	<i>30 min</i>	<i>Food culture in different countries</i>	<i>No</i>
<i>Seasonal Anime Podcast</i>	<i>12 min</i>	<i>Anime and movie review</i>	<i>No</i>
<i>Here & Now</i>	<i>10 min</i>	<i>Timely, in-depth news that is happening around the world</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>The Daily</i>	<i>30 min</i>	<i>Social focus: pandemic & vaccination, starvation, international conflicts, crimes, politics.....</i>	<i>Yes Published hours after the podcast's publishing</i>

4 Conclusion

This study has described and reported the design and the teaching experience of an elective English course at a tertiary institution in China, and shares the perspectives of a culture content-based and podcasting task-driven curriculum in the Chinese context.

Three steps of in-class management was introduced and illustrated with examples. With the experience in teaching both traditional courses and this content-based and self-media driven course, and based on the observation of the course instructor, it can be concluded that podcasting and self media can help spark the curiosity and wonder needed to use the target language English, therefore, students can be engaged in learning and using the language.

5 Suggestions for Future Studies

More detailed empirical studies are still needed to confirm the effect of podcasting on language education. For example, what is a scientific way of assessment on evaluating the effectiveness of podcasting in language education of both language skills and cross-cultural competence?

As examined in Richards (2005), the two views of listening as comprehension and acquisition pose some dilemmas for classroom instruction and materials development. Based on the teaching experience of the elective course reported in this study, there should be a way integrating listening as comprehension and listening as acquisition into one course to cater to individual differences in a class, and for better guidance on personalizing listening strategies and better materials development.

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