

PODCASTING: A TOOL FOR IMPROVING LISTENING SKILLS

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Abstract

Skills of listening in learning a foreign language have been neglected in spite of being most needed ability in everyday communication. Ability to follow a speaker and respond appropriately needs to be taught like all other language skills.

An innovative approach to teaching listening skills has emerged due to audio publishing online. It is known as 'podcasting' and has become very popular because it offers language learners extra listening practice both inside and outside of the classroom. Moreover, podcasting as online communication technology is a new way to inspire learning: it provides an exciting way for students and educators to explore and discover educational content. Applicability of podcasting to teaching English needs researching.

This paper describes research into learners' perceptions of online listening to podcasts, self-evaluation of their own performance in individual listening practice and reflections on ways of improving listening skills. The findings give insights into a practice of developing listening competence. Some implications of research are described including a recommendation for blended learning, i.e. combination of multiple approaches to learning by harmonizing online listening with classroom audition activities in teaching / learning English.

Introduction

Listening skills in language teaching have been neglected and shifted to a secondary position after speaking and writing. This is a surprising fact given that it is the skill that is most often used in communication. It is thought that about forty percent of our daily communication is spent on listening, thirty-five percent on speaking, sixteen percent on reading, and only nine percent on writing. Yet, in spite of its critical role in communication and language acquisition, listening comprehension remains one of the least understood processes in language learning. By now language practitioners have accepted that listening skills have to be taught like any other language skills.

An innovative approach to teaching listening skills has emerged due to the hi-tech developments. One of them is a so called 'podcasting' (a portemanteau of the words iPod and broadcasting), which has recently become very popular. The term 'podcast' was first coined in 2004, and it means the publishing of audio via the Internet. Audio recording is designed to be downloaded and listened to on a portable MP3 player of any type, or on a personal computer. Listening to audio is nothing new to the Internet. Audio files available for

downloading and other means of online listening have been around for some time. Podcasting differs from other ways of delivering audio online by the idea of automatically downloaded content. Podcasting offers language teachers and students a wide range of possibilities for extra listening practice both inside and outside of the classroom. Moreover, podcasts enable students to practice listening in a self-directed manner and at their own pace. By 2005, the concept of 'podcasting' reached its top point: thousands of podcasts were created, and The New Oxford American Dictionary named a 'podcast' its official 'Word of the Year'.

The aims of research are 1) to examine the challenges that students face in listening to various authentic English podcasts, and 2) analyze learners' self-assessment data on various ways of improving listening skills. The research methods include 1) the survey of students' self-evaluation of their performance in listening to podcasts, and 2) students' reflections on their experience of online listening and listening activities in the class. The intended outcome of research is to formulate the tips for good practice in improving learners' listening skills. The participants in this study are students of different specializations who study English for Specific Purposes at the Faculty of Social Policy, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania.

Defining podcasting and its advantages

'Podcasting', created by former MTV VJ Adam Curry, is a term that was devised as a way to describe the technology used to push audio content from websites down to consumers of that content, who typically listen to it on their iPod (hence the 'pod') or other audio player that supports MP3 at their convenience. The term podcasting is meant to rhyme with broadcasting. According to P. Constantine (2007),

a podcast is the name of a digital recording of a radio broadcast or similar program. Podcasts published on the internet as MP3 files. Interested listeners are able to download these MP3 files onto their personal computer or personal MP3 player of any type. The files can be listened to at the convenience of the listener. Learners can listen over and over to any material that is of interest to them. Podcasts can be as short as two to three minutes and as long as an hour.

Learners can subscribe to a podcast through an RSS subscription (Really Simple Syndication).

D. Mendelson, (1994), cited by P. Constantine (2007), offers some techniques that enhance learning and help the listeners focus on any listening activity: 1) Listen for one crucial detail, 2) Listen for all the details, 3) Listen for the gist, 4) Listen for mood and atmosphere, 5) Listen to form hypotheses and make predictions, 6) Listen to make an inference. According to T. Robb (2007),

the rise in popularity of podcasting actually allows the reincarnation of activity types that have recently fallen into disuse. In the 70s and 80s, it was common for teachers to have their

students record their own voice for various types of practice activities, such as the practice of specific segmental phonemes, or 'pair taping' activities where the students had to record their own conversations. Now with digital recording, it is back, and in a form that is easier than ever to use and with greater functionality.

Podcasts are part of innovative online learning and can serve a number of purposes: to enhance the range and register of English language listening practice material available for the students to use in a variety of ways; to provide increased connectivity between different elements of the course; to increase the scope for discussion activity, etc.

The podcasts online have given the language teacher a wealth of materials for teaching listening skills. P. Constantine (2007) covers the subject of podcasts on several levels and deals with the questions of the advantages of podcasts, selection of the most beneficial ones, and discusses how to maximize learning from them. The advantages of podcasts are: 1) learners can benefit from global listening, even if they only listen for three to five minutes a day; 2) students will be exposed to the new language; 3) the intermediate learner has a need for authentic texts and to be exposed to a variety of voices. Podcasts are not just intended for listening. Often there is a transcript provided along with worksheets. A number of websites interact with the students and ask them to write in with questions or comments. According to P. Constantine (2007), one innovative usage of podcasts is to have a student listen to a podcast and read along its transcript. Then the student will make a recording of the material on a cassette tape and turn it into the teacher along with a written journal. The teacher then listens to the student's recording and gives appropriate feedback to the student. This type of activity helps the students to develop fluency in reading, to improve pronunciation, to acquire new vocabulary words, and to perfect listening skills.

It is assumed that podcasting is especially interesting for English learners as it provides a means for students to get access to 'authentic' listening sources about almost any subject that may interest them. Teachers can take advantage of podcasts as a basis for listening comprehension exercises, as a means of generating conversation based on students' reaction to podcasts, and as a way of providing each and every student diverse listening materials.

Review of literature

Although once labelled a passive skill, listening is an active and demanding process of selecting and interpreting information from auditory and visual clues. What is known about the listening process basically emerges from research on developments in native language. In listening, there are several major steps that may occur sequentially or simultaneously, in rapid

succession, or backward and forward. The major points include determining a reason for listening, predicting information, attempting to organize information, assigning a meaning to the message, and transferring information from short-term memory to long-term memory.

Earlier research into listening processes by V. M. Rivers (1992:18) suggests that “listening involves active cognitive processing – the construction of a message from phonic material”. Three stages in the aural reception of a message are distinguished: 1) “listeners must recognize in phonic substance sound patterns in bounded segments related to phrase structure. At this stage students are dependent on echoic memory, which is very fleeting. 2) Listeners must immediately begin processing, identifying the groupings detected according to the content of our central information system. 3) Listeners recycle the material they organized through immediate memory, thus building up an auditory memory which helps to retain the segments listeners are processing”. An important feature of the listening process is that much of processing of incoming information takes place during the pauses in speech. Pauses in natural speech allow students to gain processing time. Moreover, much of comprehension involves drawing inferences. A characteristic feature of listening is a creation of mental messages which are stored by learners. This phenomenon is known as a false recognition memory (Rivers, 1992).

According to V. Cook (1996:69), restrictions on learner’s ability to understand the L2 speech are caused just as much by difficulties of the language as by memory limits. All comprehension depends on the storing and processing of information by the mind. Interestingly, the human mind is less efficient in L2 whatever it is doing, in other words, “L2 learners have cognitive deficits with listening that are not caused by lack of language ability but by difficulties with processing information in the second language”.

The role of vocabulary knowledge and its recognition in listening affects comprehension of information. The term ‘listenability’ as an oral equivalent of ‘readability’ was coined by J. Read (2000:11). The simple readability idea focuses on two variables: the frequency of the complex vocabulary and the length of the sentences. The number of long words (three syllables or longer) and the number of words in a sentence define comprehensibility of a text. Lexical density is a variable showing the percentage of content words. A vocabulary measure may provide an indication of how easy it will be for learners to understand a spoken text. In listening, it is not just the relative frequency of the content words that affects comprehension but also how concentrated they are in the text.

The important issue in comprehension is authenticity of listening materials. The exact meaning of authenticity has often been unclear (Dudley-Evans and Jo St John, 1998:27):

“many have used it with reference to genuine (not simplified) texts that were originally written for purposes other than language teaching”. According to H. Douglas Brown (2004:28), “authenticity is a concept that is a little slippery to define, especially within the art and science of evaluating designing tests” Authenticity may be present in the following way: the language is as natural as possible, items are contextualized rather than isolated topics are meaningful (relevant and interesting for the learners), tasks represent real-world tasks. In other words, authenticity implies real language, which is the hardest to understand, because no concessions are made to non-native speakers - language is unlikely to be simplified or spoken slowly. For learners, authenticity often means negative expectations, i.e. listening is bound to be too difficult. When learners listen to unfamiliar speech they hear an almost continuous chain of sounds. Inexperienced learners do not actually hear the boundaries of words. For this reason, they describe the speech as too fast. Experienced learners are able to break down this chain into separate words in their heads because they are familiar with the sounds and can create meaningful words with them.

The role of intonation and pronunciation is crucial. Intonation is the ability to vary the pitch and tune of speech. Stressing words and phrases correctly is vital if emphasis is to be given to the important parts of messages. Different turns are signaled by the rise and fall in pitch. People hear certain accented words as prominent because of intonation. Knowing the language well, there is no need to hear every single sound in every single word to know what is said, because one’s mind is able to fill in the gaps and to determine where one word ends and the other begins. Intonation is interrelated with pronunciation. The aspect of pronunciation is crucial to listening. Major problems that occur in learning pronunciation are students’ great difficulty in hearing pronunciation features, in intonation – ‘tunes’ or identifying the different patterns of rising and falling tones.

One of the most difficult tasks for any teacher is to teach the skills of listening, because successful listening skills are acquired over time and with lots of practice (Rivers, 1992). Learning listening skills is frustrating for students because there are no rules as in grammar teaching. Listening skills are difficult to quantify. One of the largest inhibitors for students is often mental block. While listening students suddenly decide they do not understand. At this point, many students just tune out – some students convince themselves they are not able to understand spoken English well and create problems for themselves.

Top-down, bottom-up, and interactive models have been extensively used over the past decades to teach listening. In top-down processing the listener gets a general view of the listening passage. In bottom-up processing, the listener focuses on individual words and

phrases, and achieves understanding by combining the details together to build up the whole content (Harmer, 2001). It is also useful to see the activity of listening as interactions between top-down and bottom-up processing. However, J. Flowerdew & L. Miller (2005:24) believe that “these models do not cater to the complexities of the listening process and attempt to introduce a pedagogical model for second language listening that encompasses individual, cultural, social, contextualized, affective, strategic, intertextual, and critical dimensions.

In a guide to using computers in language teaching, J. Szendeffy (2005) argues that computers provide students and teachers with great access and integration of material than tape recorders or videocassettes. This guide monograph gives useful information how to digitalize materials and easily create recordings for class activities as well as good suggestions for finding online broadcasts, TV materials, and prepare students’ own recorded speeches.

The substantial contribution into the problem of listening comprehension in the CALL environment has been paid by the Special issue on Technology and Listening Comprehension of the *Language Learning and Technology Journal* (Volume 11, Number 1, February 2007). R. Robin (2007) argues that “off-the-shelf technology is not ready for interactive oral-aural instruction..., but it is ideal for use by the strategically independent learner to acquire and improve receptive skills in an authentic environment”. R. Robin suggests reexamining the value of pre-packaged listening comprehension materials in which L2 listeners are guided in listening strategies but are not encouraged to make use of technological innovations that native listeners are coming to use on a regular basis. On the other hand, M. Rost (2007) claims that teachers have to plan interventions that develop students’ skill at making the input comprehensible: “Helpful interventions in teaching listening promote the listener’s motivation by advancing the listener’s goals for listening”. In M. Rost’s opinion, the interruptions in the listening process can lead to a desire to listen more closely and with heightened curiosity. Therefore, providing targeted interventions that focus on the component processes of listening can allow learners to get more out of each listening encounter.

Having examined the available sources on developing learners’ listening skills in language classes, it is easier to understand why Internet audio has suddenly become popular now. Although Internet audio and video files have been around for many years, recent technical innovations allow subscribers with portable MP3 players to use technology for downloading podcasts and to listen to files at one’s own convenience. This opens up new educational potential of using unproductive time for learning (McCarty, 2005).

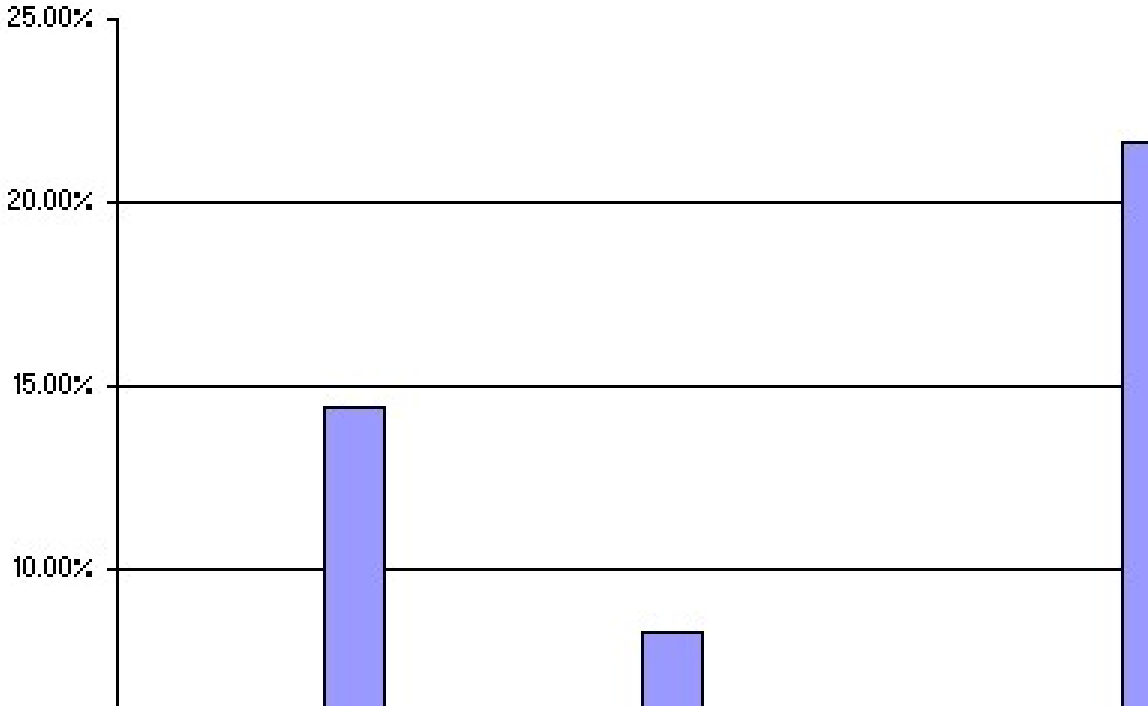
Research into the student reaction to podcasting is still in progress but early indications from student feedback collected so far and analysis of course tracking suggest that

the podcasts were highly appreciated and extensively used by students. The podcasts were frequently downloaded, and students reported listening to each several times over both for the listening practice they provided as well as for their entertainment or informational value (<http://www.elanguages.ac.uk/podcast/index.html>).

Various research projects are investigating the use of podcasting in education. Details of these can be found on the website of the IMPALA Project (<http://www.impala.ac.uk/index.html>), a Higher Education Academy research project into podcasting. Current plans on e-languages podcasting include introducing a podcast strand to all academic skill courses being delivered online.

The BBC world service website published the survey on the users of podcasts.

Figure 1. Who downloads podcasts?
(http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/radio/specials/1720_ten_years/page8.shtml)



It appeared that out of 285 responses there were 31% of females of various ages: 2% - under 20, about 15% aged 20 to 30, 6% aged 30 to 40, 8% - 40 to 50. There were 69 % of male users: 6% - under 20, 21% - aged 20 to 30, 17% - aged 30 to 40, 15% - aged 40 to 50, 10% - aged 50 plus. It shows that men are more active in downloading podcasts – 69% versus 31%. The age range of English learners is from 20 to 50 plus.

A brief overview of how podcasting can be used in English Language Teaching is provided by T. N. Robb (<http://www.cc.kyoto-su.ac.jp/~trobb/podcasting2.html>), who suggests that there are three basic modes of activities for podcasting: 1) students as consumers, and teachers create material for students or assign them to listen to one of the many available ESL podcast sites; 2) students as producers or publishers, and teachers have students create material for others to listen to; 3) students practice through various exercises.

Aims and intended outcome of research

The aims of this research are to examine the challenges that students face in listening to various authentic English podcasts and analyze learners' self-assessment data on improving listening skills. The intended outcome of research is to formulate the tips for good practice in perfecting listening skills.

Research techniques and respondents

The research methods included, first, the survey of students' self-evaluation of their performance in listening to various podcasts at upper-intermediate, advanced, native speaker, or intermediate level (for learners of lower proficiency), and, second, students' reflections on their experience of online listening.

Research employed learners' reflections on their difficulties to listening to authentic recordings, practice of listening to podcasts aimed to demonstrate to learners the opportunities of improving listening skills.

Listening to podcasts had to serve a number of purposes: 1) to enhance the range and register of English language listening practice material available for the students to use in a variety of ways; 2) to provide increased connectivity between different elements of the course; 3) to increase the scope for discussion activity in the classroom in pairs after students have shared their listening experiences.

The learners' task for podcasting was to evaluate their ability of understanding authentic language. The individual self-assessment involved checking one's comprehension (doing relevant exercises), reading transcript for clarification, looking up unknown vocabulary items in a dictionary, and summing up one's performance (very good, good, satisfactory).

The participants in this study were 27 1st year full-time students of two different specializations. These comprised students of psychology, law and penitentiary activities at the

Faculty of Social Policy, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania. The students were requested to answer relevant to podcasting questions of a specially designed questionnaire.

Podcasts were chosen by learners themselves from the website <http://a4esl.org/p/> which included the following sections:

[VOA Special English](#)

[Links to Podcasts for ESL](#)

[Links to Podcasts for Native English Speakers](#)

[Links to Downloadable MP3 Files](#)

The reason why learners were free to choose podcasts for themselves was to enable them to self-assess their listening abilities individually. The idea was to motivate learners in the future to develop listening comprehension skills without the threat of teacher's evaluation. Non-threatening practice may help learners who dread taking risks and who will enjoy some success in individual listening.

Collective listening to records in class differs from individual listening to podcasts in many aspects, such as in the former either top-down or bottom-up techniques are employed, students work in pairs or small groups, listening themes are brainstormed, essential vocabulary is generated, students do various exercises before the listening procedure, e.g. matching vocabulary items with their definitions, predicting the contents or the details of the recorded material, etc.

Listening autonomously in one's spare time ensures independence of learner's judgment of one's performance and helps develop critical approach to evaluation of success or failure in the activity. Also, there is an opportunity of improving listening skills from reading transcripts as a follow-up exercise. A fruitful idea of learning from transcripts was applied and discussed by T. Lynch (2007).

It should be noted that some learners chose easier recordings while others looked for more challenging and difficult podcasts available at the above websites. Having completed the assignment and done comprehension exercises, students were able to evaluate their performance impartially by checking results (if an answer key was available), or reading a transcript and looking up the meanings of unknown words. Such an approach to independent self-evaluation helps learners assess their abilities to follow authentic English speech.

The students were asked to listen to podcasts for homework. The deadline of two weeks was agreed with each group, by the end of which learners submitted feedback in writing. The collected data are analyzed in the following section. Moreover, students

described listening experiences in their weblogs, and some reflections are reproduced in Appendix.

Results of the self-evaluation survey

The results of the survey that examined the learners' self-evaluation of podcast listening skills are displayed in Table, which summarizes students' perceptions in percentage. As the number of students in groups differs, displayed percentage makes it easier to compare students' opinions in both groups.

Table 1. Self-evaluation of listening to podcasts skills. (Data provided by the 1st year students, 2008).

Survey questions	Specialization of Psychology (16 respondents)	Specialization of Law and Penitentiary (11 respondents)
1. Students' perception of the speaking rate in a podcast	Percentage of students	Percentage of students
Fast (Advanced Level)	20%	23%
Average (Upper-Intermediate Level)	56%	59%
Slow (Intermediate Level)	24%	18%
2. Number of the listening times to a single podcast	Percentage of listening times	Percentage of listening times
Once	47%	32%
Twice	47%	45%
Three times	6%	23%
Four times	-	-
3. Students' self-evaluation of their ability to understand a record	Percentage of students	Percentage of students
Very good	6%	-
Good	59%	45%
Satisfactory	35%	55%
4. Students' supported ways of improving listening skills	Percentage of students	Percentage of students
- listen to podcasts as often as possible	76%	64%

- listen to authentic cassette recordings in class	41%	55%
- listen to your friends in English classes	18%	9%
- watch English video films or movies on TV	88%	73%
- speak to the native English speakers	70%	91%

The first entry in Table 1 is students' perceptions of speaking speeds. Responses of evaluating recordings at advanced and upper-intermediate English are similar for both groups. The responses of assessing recordings at intermediate level of English differ probably due to generally higher proficiency of students of psychology. Interestingly, learners reported that it was easier for them to follow American speakers than British speakers (the data is not included in Table 1). This can be explained by the research into 'listenability' (Sharma and Barrett, 2007) that compared speaking rates by BBC, ABC, and CNN broadcasting companies. On average, BBC broadcasters do speak faster than CNN broadcasters (172 words per min. versus 153 words per min.), but BBC speakers use longer pauses, which help listeners to process information. However, linguistic complexity on BBC sites can complicate comprehension: on average, the sentence length in BBC broadcasts is 39 words versus 22 words in CNN broadcasts. Nevertheless, speaking rates and linguistic complexity are not the only factors that affect the ease of comprehension. It is thought that listener's background knowledge, speaking fluency and acoustic factors also affect comprehension significantly.

The second entry in Table 1 gives numbers of listening to a single podcast. The learners' responses also reflect the difference in proficiency: fewer learners of psychology specialization had to listen three times – 6% versus 23%.

The third entry in Table 1 shows learners' evaluation of the listening ability. As a matter of fact, the listening ability of an individual learner is comparable to his/her performance in listening tests in English classes: only 6% demonstrate very good ability, good ability – 59% versus 45%, and satisfactory ability – 35% versus 55%.

Finally, students' positive attitudes to the techniques of improving skills of listening include listening to podcasts (76% and 64%), watching English video films and movies on TV (88% and 73%), improving listening by talking to native speakers of English (70% and 91%) and listening to authentic recordings in the classroom (41% and 55%). However,

listening to peers in English classes is the least favorite activity – 18% versus 9% depending on students' specialization.

It has already been mentioned that learners were free to choose two podcasts online and listen to them outside English classes. The learners were expected to choose the podcasts of appropriate level of English: upper-intermediate, advanced or for native speakers. However, some of the students chose podcasts at the intermediate level. Their excuse was the inability to spot the podcasts of the right level. The learners of two specializations reported their perceptions of listening experiences by filling in the feedback questionnaire (Appendix).

As regards the issue of comprehensibility (not included in Table 1 above), students mentioned the following techniques they used in order to clarify the questionable parts of podcasts. Here are the most common answers: a) looked up the meaning of unknown words in a dictionary b) recognized the words by sight from having read the available transcript; c) used a dictionary while reading a recorded text; d) guessed the meaning from the context.

The sources of the difficulties that learners face in listening were examined by the researcher elsewhere (Kavaliauskienė, 2008). Several facts have emerged. Firstly, learners' perceptions of speaking speeds in the same recorded message differ. Secondly, pronunciation in the recorded messages affects comprehension of many learners. Thirdly, even pre-taught vocabulary might present difficulty in understanding, probably due to the failure to retrieve it during listening. Finally, in listening activities students found it hard to get some specific information and wanted to hear each word, while in post-listening activities the most common difficulties were gap-filling and summary writing. These results infer the potentially important role of vocabulary development in L2 listening proficiency.

Results of learners' feedback: reflections on listening activities

There are various ways of developing listening skills in a foreign language: listening activities in class, individual listening practice outside classes, using multi-media in one's spare time.

In the classroom, activities of listening to authentic records are the most common ways of practicing listening comprehension. As transpires from students' feedback (Appendix), not every learner is keen on such activities. The major cause is most probably the diversity in language proficiency – what is beneficial for some students might be problematic for others, and some learners are reluctant to admit their difficulties in front of the class.

Another way of practicing listening skills is podcasting which enables learners to conduct the activity at their own pace and at convenient time. Students' assignment of podcasting, which was used in this research, revealed a variety of attitudes. In the online

reflections, students admit to having listening problems and reason how to cope with difficulties. This is a positive point in itself as a student learns what she/he can do about it, e.g. keep practicing individually.

Real life listening, e.g. socializing with the native speakers of English, is not feasible on the daily basis in this country but highly appreciated by learners. Passive listening by watching TV films is also ranked high and can be easily exercised nowadays due to the availability of cable TV and a plethora of unabridged foreign films in local cinemas.

In this research, students evaluated their listening skills individually by writing self-assessment entries in their weblogs. Some excerpts from students' entries are being reproduced below in Appendix. The learners' weblogs can be found on the researcher's weblog <http://gkavaliauskiene.blogspot.com>. The students' language in the reproduced weblogs entries has not been corrected for the authenticity reasons. It should be noted that some students compare listening activities in English classes with the autonomous activities of listening to podcasts online or listening to authentic speech of English speakers outside classes while others describe generally their opinions on listening experiences.

Conclusions and implications of research

The extent to which learners consciously focus on aspects of language and the degree of noticing of its particular features have been currently debated by linguists and practitioners. This study documents the ways of raising language awareness by assigning a task of evaluating one's ability to understand authentic speech outside language class. Such an activity seems important for language processing and learner development.

In this paper, the researcher infers that there is an opportunity for raising language awareness by employing podcasting which allows learners to carry out homework assignments at their own pace and under non-threatening conditions. Online methodology involves downloading a variety of podcasts and listening to them at the convenient time. Follow-up classroom discussions on benefits or failures of listening to podcasts enable each learner to evaluate their ability to understand authentic records. Summarizing various types of listening experiences in individual weblogs allows learners to store written records of their progress for the future reference.

The implications of this research are numerous. First, individual online listening to podcasts at one's own pace and at convenient time prompts and motivates learners to improve skills of listening without being intimidated by possible failure. Second, raising learners' awareness of suitable individual ways of perfecting the listening skill promotes language

learning. Third, the novelty and diversity of out-of-class listening motivates learners to perfect their skills without being observed by peers or teachers. Fourth, harmonizing online listening with classroom audition activities in teaching/learning English should benefit all learners. Fifth, learners become aware that listening skills can be improved through a lot of practice of their own choice. Finally, self-assessing one's achievements and publishing a self-evaluation report in individual weblogs encourage learners to keep improving.

Catering for the learners of diverse personalities, the teacher must acknowledge the fact that not all learners enjoy using digital technology in learning. Therefore, blended learning, which is a combination of multiple approaches to learning, might be preferable (Sharma and Barrett, 2007). A typical example of blended learning is a combination of e-learning and face-to-face sessions in the classroom. Students' reflections prove the importance of such an approach.

This exploratory study provides some insights into students' abilities of listening to authentic speech. However it does not give any clues on students' L2 proficiency relevant to L2 listening. Moreover, the generalization is limited by the sample size of research respondents. It is thought (Vandergrift, 2006) that listening comprehension ability might depend on metacognitive knowledge such as types of records, listening strategies and goals, which are to be the subject of future research.

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Appendix. Learners' reflections on listening in class, podcasting, and listening outside class.

The excerpts from 1 to 13 refer to the reflections of students who study psychology, 14-16 – the ones of law and penitentiary activities.

1) <http://iavinaite.blogspot.com/>

Listening activities in class: Sometimes it was hard for me to follow the text. I performed quite good when doing these tasks, and my weakest point is filling the gaps while listening. And I perform worse if the question I have to answer has 2 or more answers and I have to choose one, the most suitable.

Listening to podcasts: It was not hard for me to listen to podcasts, for I have chosen the ones, which had interesting theme. My vocabulary is good enough to understand everything I hear. Also there was a text written which helped a lot.

Listening outside the class: it was quite difficult to hear and understand foreigners speaking English, for they have different dialects and pronounce some words differently. However, I lived with them and listened to them speaking for quite long period of time and managed to understand everything.

2) <http://dbesagirskaitė.blogspot.com/>

To watch films or to listen to the radio outside class gave me a lot of profit, so listening activities in class became easier and I think, I did it quite well. Of course, then listening task is more difficult, to listen is more complicated, so I think I need more difficult listening tasks. Also, it is quite complicated to understand when people speak with accent or not so clearly.

3) <http://adambrauskaite.blogspot.com/>

Listening activity is the most difficult for me. I think that my listening skills are not good and I should improve it. I think that my performance in listening activities in the class is quite bad, because I can not hear the main facts. However, I have really enjoyed listening to podcasts.

4) <http://kgasinska.blogspot.com/>

Listening activities in class. My performance on this task hasn't changed a lot this term. It was quite good before too.

Listening to podcasts. It was quite a difficult task. I had to listen to podcast for several times in order to understand it all. I think that my skills on this task became better.

Listening outside the class. In order to improve my listening skills I've tried to listen to BBC radio programs and also to watch English movies without reading subtitles. It's not easy.

5) <http://jzenkova.blogspot.com/>

Listening activities in class were not very difficult, almost every time we were listening twice, so it helped to understand as better as possible. I found it not very difficult.

Listening to podcasts was more difficult than listening in class. I found much more easier to listen about interesting topic than about politics or something like this.

Listening outside class: I had a lot of opportunities to listen and use English language outside the class, and again I persuade myself that I can understand quite well, but need to improve my vocabulary and practice more.

6) <http://grudzinskaiteb.blogspot.com/>

Listening activities in class were the most difficult tasks for me. In my view, I could perform better. I need more practice because sometimes I miss some words. Listening to podcasts was a new task. It was difficult for me to do this. I need to listen to podcasts as much as I can if I want to get more practice and perform better.

7) <http://vgruzdyte.blogspot.com/>

Listening activities in class: I think I performed satisfactorily in listening. It is difficult for me to understand some certain word when they are taped and said by foreigners , but usually I can understand the main idea of the speech, so I think I just need to have wider vocabulary and to listen to foreign speakers more often.

Listening to podcasts: my performance was satisfactory. It was difficult to understand certain ideas, but the main idea of the speech was clear to me.

8) <http://ijankauskaite.blogspot.com/>

Listening activities in class: my skill is sometimes better and sometimes worse. This is unaccountable thing. Of course sometimes the task is harder and sometimes easier but maybe it depends on introversion and the quality of record.

Listening to podcasts. Interesting task but the stories are sometimes very boring and when you are listening to them you feel asleep, but my performance wasn't bad and I'm happy.

Listening outside class. Sometimes I watch English channels and try to understand what they are talking about. If the words aren't specific I can understand the point. Although this term I had a lot of practice in speaking and listening because I went to the USA embassy and I needed to have a conversation with the USA embassy employee. Everything was good and I understood everything what they have said to me.

9) <http://ikazlauskaite.blogspot.com/>

Listening activities in class: my listening improved because the texts which we listened were quite easy so it was not so hard to plug in the text.

Listening to podcasts. This task was good because I could read the text of podcasts and translate the words I did not know. Listening outside class: I watch movies in English. It helps me to improve the understanding of this language and also it helps me to cream off what is the most important.

10) <http://atiskute.blogspot.com/>

I am quite good at listening during listening activities in our classes; however I still make comprehension mistakes, even though the number of them has decreased clearly in comparison to the previous term. I was pleasantly astonished when I have found that I can easily understand a native English podcasts and listen to the BBC or CNN news.

11) <http://gturskyte.blogspot.com/>

The most intensive are listening activities in class. It was always one of the most difficult tasks to me, but I'm happy now. It's a rare success to make an exercise without mistakes, but I feel like I'm a step forward. I've listened to podcasts just once, so it's difficult to evaluate my skills objectively. And I should admit I have never practiced listening outside the class.

12) <http://tvasilevskyte.blogspot.com/>

Listening activities in class: Help to practice and improve my comprehension, however I need more practice. Listening to podcasts: It is very useful and interesting , helped me to improve not just listening but also other skills.

Listening outside class: it is easier to understand and usually the comprehension is better because the speech is not so formal.

13) <http://izamaraitte.blogspot.com/>

My skills of listening in classes are satisfactory. Performance in listening tasks vary and sometimes the results are good, although sometimes the results are quite poor. I think I need more practice in listening, especially at advanced level listening and doing some comprehension tasks. As for homework task, which was listening to podcasts, I think I performed well, it was not a difficult task for me. Still I have some problems in understanding and trying to interpret new words, phrases.

14) <http://gsakalauskiteg.blogspot.com/> Listening activities in class usually are not very easy for me, because we listen to authentic English and it is hard to understand everything clearly. Listening to podcasts was much harder, but more interesting. I have learned a lot of new words and improved my listening skills. I listen to English outside class too, but it is usually English music and films, but I think it helps to find out new things, especially new words.

15) <http://imsarkauskaite-inga.blogspot.com/> In my point of you, usually I haven't no problems with listening activities in class. It is not difficult to understand the text if it isn't in authentic English. Mostly, I can understand listening text and do exercises, especially when I hear the text twice. However, when I have to listen to podcasts it is more difficult, because speakers talk very fast, there are many unknown words and I can't understand mane ideas. I think, that I should practice more and everything will be good.

16) <http://rzekaitte.blogspot.com/> Listening activities in class are very difficult for me because I cannot understand what is said in recordings. I need simple records. In addition to this, listening to podcasts is difficult for me, too, perhaps I need to listen more in order to improve listening skills.