Four L2 learning objectives to guide podcast design

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Introduction

- Podcasts had a very successful beginning in academic settings as tools for learning, including L2 learning.
- They continue to have great popularity: about 200 podcast series for L2 learning on the iTunes list.
- There has been also an increased interest in investigating their use and effectiveness as teaching and learning tools (Abdous, Camarena & Facer, 2009; Dukate & Lomicka, 2009; Facer & Abdous, 2011; Lord, 2008)
Introduction

- However, little is still known about podcasts as learning tools, particularly the effectiveness of their design and the learning outcomes.

- The scarcity of the information has contributed to the poor podcast design, blurred objectives, and outdated instructional practices commonly found in podcasts for L2 learning available on the internet (Rosell-Aguilar, 2007; McQuillan, 2006).
Introduction

Because of this great popularity along with the podcast potential to promote L2 learning, it would be very useful to identify the elements that make podcasts effective L2 learning and teaching tools.
Introduction

- The purpose of this presentation is to address the importance of podcast design by
  - Highlighting the role of podcast objectives
  - Considering the nature of podcasts
  - Proposing four L2 learning goals that can be achieved through podcast listening
Podcast design

- Podcast design for L2 learning is perhaps the feature that will have the most impact on desired learning outcomes (Rosell-Aguilar, 2007).

- A well-designed podcast is conceptualized based on:
  - The particular nature of these audio files
  - The aspects of L2 learning for which they are potentially useful
  - The particular L2 learning objectives sought to achieve
The nature of podcasts

- “Podcast are
  - a series of regularly updated media files
  - that can be played on a number of devices (portable or static) and
  - are distributed over the internet via a subscription service” (Rosell-Aguilar, 2009).

- Key features: part of a series and delivered to and RSS subscription
The nature of podcasts has a great impact on the learning aspects for which they can be potentially useful.

The nature of podcasts

- Podcasts can deliver **hundreds of hours of language exposure**.
- Because linguistic input plays an essential role for L2 acquisition, podcasts can be **powerful tools** for the promotion of L2 learning and teaching.
- Being audio files that belong to a series, and being automatically delivered, learners can have access to the essential elements for L2 acquisition frequently, regularly, and automatically.
Four L2 Learning Objectives

1. L2 acquisition
2. Development of listening skills
3. Provision of explicit information about the L2
4. Promotion of awareness of the target culture
Podcasts for L2 acquisition

- Specific objective: To develop an implicit linguistic system
- Podcasts must contain comprehensible, meaning-bearing input.
  - How to make a text comprehensible?
    - Slower the pace, elaboration rather than simplification, redundancy, transparency, use of schemata, images, familiar vocabulary, etc.
  - How to make a text meaning-bearing
    - Include a communicative intent: why I am listening to this?
Podcasts for L2 acquisition

- Podcasts must promote **form-meaning connections**
  - Make target forms noticeable
  - by enhancing the input
    - Input flood
    - Aural enhancement (change tone, pitch or volume)
    - Draw attention to form explicitly

Example: ESLpod
Podcasts for L2 acquisition
Podcasts for the development of listening skills

- Specific objective: To promote the use of skills so learners become expert listeners, able to understand the meaning of aural message effectively.
- Not to test listening, but to teach listening (training on how to go about getting the meaning of the aural message)
Podcasts for the development of listening skills

- Identify the skills (Richards, 1983)
  - Identify word boundaries, discriminate between distinct sounds, detect key words, recognize syntactic patterns, etc.

- Identify the strategies (Mendelsohn, 2006)
  - Forming hypothesis, predicting, making inferences, etc.

- Identify the processes (Field, 2008)
  - Decoding (recognize linguistic features)
  - Meaning building process (using contextual information)
Podcasts for the development of listening skills

- Podcasts that target the use of certain skills to introduce the range of possible skills but
- Eventually learners will apply the skills that they need to comprehend the text
- Listening instruction should be given in a piece-meal fashion
Podcasts for the development of listening skills

- Design a podcast project that contains a series of episodes with micro-listening sessions where learners can apply the learned skills.
- Add explicit information about the skills, include a reflection phase after listening where learners assess the ways in which applying certain skills help their comprehension.
- Make sure learners hear actual spoken language!
Podcasts for the provision of explicit information

- Specific Objective: to promote a working knowledge about the L2 and how it works.

- Not essential but beneficial
  - Affects the rate of acquisition
  - Promotes noticing while attending to input
  - Helps monitor language use (e.g., writing)
Podcasts for the provision of explicit information

- Podcasts can make up for textbooks’ limitations
  - Superficial, linguistically unsound, incomplete (Katz and Blyth (2009))
  - Do not reflect actual use of grammar rules in discourse (O’Connor di Vito, 1991)
  - Do not provide aural examples to illustrate how the language works (Fernández, 2011)
Podcasts for the provision of explicit information

- The series of podcasts can
  - Actually reflect language use
  - Provide real examples of the L2
  - Complement or even substitute textbook information about the L2

Example: Grammar Girl
Podcasts for the provision of explicit information
Podcasts for the awareness of the target culture

- Specific objective: to promote cultural awareness and intercultural competence.
  - By conveying cultural information about the perspectives, products, and practices of the target culture (NSFLEP, 1999)
  - By moving beyond the facts-oriented approach
Podcasts for the awareness of the target culture

- Podcasts whose information **illustrate** the perspectives, practices, and products of the L2, and that
- serve as a point of departure to
- carry out tasks or projects that promote reflection, comparisons, and analysis
- to **deeper understand** the relationships among these three aspects and among learners’ own cultures.
Conclusion

- Information on podcast design is paramount to create or select effective podcasts.
- The nature of podcasts as well as the L2 learning objectives will inform podcast design.
- Information on L2 learning and best teaching practices should always be considered when designing or selecting podcasts.
Thank you

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