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The Potential of Asynchronous Podcasting in Developing EFL Learners Communicative Competence

Summary

The reality in which we live is marked by the ubiquitous process of digitisation. This leads to the development of new tools that replace existing tools, taking advantage of current technical and technological advances. Digital tools are present in almost all aspects of our lives, including communication between people, whether oral or written. Digital tools are also finding their place in language teaching. Numerous e-books, electronic dictionaries, platforms and apps designed to develop language skills are something common among foreign language learners.

Learning to speak in general, and teaching to speak a foreign language in particular, is a process that is crucial not only as a development of speaking skills, but as a process to make the phenomenon of communication occur. Therefore, when learning a language, an important issue is communicative competence, whose development and improvement is the goal of teaching and learning. When learning a language, you can easily use a variety of tools and digital resources, including pre-made, random or specially prepared for educational purposes podcasts. The question arises, however, whether the use of asynchronous tools designed for voice recording can be a tool in the hands of the teacher to develop students' oral communicative competence? Does the creation of students' own podcasts in English have an impact on the development of this competence and can it help prepare for the external exam in English? How would such a way of learning be perceived by the learners themselves? These questions are the research questions posed in this dissertation, and this dissertation focuses primarily on the correlation between the creation of podcasts and the development of oral communicative competence of students learning English as a foreign language.

The work consists of five parts. In the first chapter, the elements characteristic of the process of teaching speaking in a foreign language are presented, starting from the theoretical aspects, through their practical implementation, in order to show the desired results of this process in the following section. Teaching speaking in a foreign language

– analysed in the first chapter – is an important challenge for today's style of world functioning. For example, there is little need to know only grammar, but even the ability to communicate is proving necessary. It is not the theory of language itself and its ideals that are the goal of the teaching process, but precisely communicative competence, which is the main meta of the educational process, and because of it, some adjustment is made to the tasks or approaches in the teaching process. It is the application of theory to practice that shows that what comes into play here is not only the adopted model and its implementation, but also the personality factors of the individual in question and the circumstances in which language teaching is implemented. In this process, in order for it to be effective, everyone – teacher and student – must fulfil their role in the perspective of the intended effects in line with the assumptions of the communication approach. Despite the many aspects of teaching speaking in a foreign language, only a balanced consideration of them gives the opportunity to achieve communicative competence, that is, to realise the goal that the student and the teacher faced at the very beginning.

In order for the process of acquiring this competence by the student to be effective, it must be reviewed at virtually every stage. Chapter two of the work was devoted precisely to the aspects of assessment, divided into that taking place in the language classroom (classroom-based assessment) and that outside it, during external examinations (result-based assessment). In discussing classroom-based grading, attention was paid to three factors that, while not exhaustive of the factors affecting grading, are key factors, and these are: principles of assessment, attitude to errors and the role of feedback. Since verification is not only performed by the student or teacher, the following section addresses the issue of external assessment based on results, starting with a presentation of different types of spoken language tests and arriving at a presentation of the English 'Matura' exam and its assessment principles, since it is this exam that provides the context for the research conducted within the framework of this dissertation.

Teaching a foreign language, including teaching speaking, is a very complex process with many factors that determine the end result. One of them are the asynchronous tools for learning to speak. However, they would be useless without a group of other elements that affect teaching. Therefore, the third chapter addresses issues related to teaching speaking in a digital environment, with a particular focus on asynchronous tools. It also draws attention to the skills needed to guide the teaching process, using the aforementioned tools, following the motto "didactics first" (Turula, 2017), then technology. The chapter also discusses the need to develop learner autonomy, which

becomes a conducive environment for applying asynchronous tools in teaching or improving foreign language speaking.

The practical part of the dissertation was divided into two smaller units. Chapter four presents the theoretical assumptions, the research questions and hypotheses, the methodology chosen and the results of the research conducted. Chapter five, on the other hand, deals with the analysis of the results obtained in the qualitative and quantitative study and the presentation of the various conclusions.

The variables chosen for the analysis were podcasting as the independent variable and students' oral communicative competence and English-speaking achievement as the dependent variable that was observed and measured. There is reason to believe that the creation of their own podcasts influences the development of students' oral communicative competence. Indeed, there are studies that analyse the impact of using student-created podcasts in the teaching process. For example, a study conducted by Farangi et al. (2015), among 60 students in Iran, found a beneficial effect of using podcasts in the language classroom on the development of speaking skills. A study conducted by Diez and Richters (2020) among students learning French as a foreign language in Spain yielded similar results. They showed that by recording their own podcasts, the students had more opportunities to practice oral expression and this had a positive impact on their development of speaking skills and pronunciation. Several studies have shown positive attitudes among learners toward creating their own podcasts in a foreign language as part of learning that language (e.g. Facer, Abdous & Camarena, 2009; Hamzaoglu & Koçoğlu, 2016; Samad, Bustari & Ahman, 2017).

The educational benefits of podcasting in the language classroom, especially its positive impact on the development of oral communicative competence, the fit of podcasting into the assumptions of the core curriculum for general education at all stages of education (MEN, 2008, 2018), and the research gap in this area in the Polish context are the reason for the author to consider this topic. Analysing the issue raised on the Polish ground, it can be noted that podcasting and its potential are discussed from a theoretical point of view (e.g. Górecka, 2009; Zajdel, 2020; Niewczas, 2021).

The main purpose of this dissertation, therefore, is to test the appropriateness of the assumption that the creation of their own podcasts by learners of English as a foreign language affects the development of oral communicative competence in the language. In order to answer the research question posed above, the author of this paper attempts to find an answer to how podcasting affects oral communicative competence and what is the

relationship between students' creation of podcasts and their preparation for the oral matriculation exam in a foreign language. In addition, students' reference to the use of podcasts in the language classroom is examined. Three research hypotheses were presented:

1. There is a link between the use of podcasts in the language classroom and the development of oral communicative competence.
2. Podcasting can help students prepare for the oral 'Matura' exam.
3. Overall, students have a positive attitude toward creating their own podcasts.

The study covered high school students located in the Subcarpathian province in their final year, preparing for the matriculation exam in English as a foreign language. The study was conducted between September 2018 and April 2019 with two groups of students, i.e., a research group and a control group. The groups totalled 29 people, 14 in the research group and 15 in the control group.

The research was conducted using a mixed methods approach, which allowed the author to evaluate the proposed model for teaching podcast-assisted speaking and its tools in a natural classroom environment, extended to an online environment. A quasi-experiment was used, often used in educational research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Due to the fact that the research was conducted in an educational setting, it was not possible to randomly select students from the entire population for the research groups. The researcher only had the option of randomly choosing which of the two groups would be the research group and which would be the control group. Additionally, the researcher did not make any modifications for the experiment in the selected groups, with the aim of verifying the hypotheses under the real conditions of a Polish school. This also made it possible to monitor the long-term podcast-assisted teaching process and control the final results on external exams. In order to reduce the one-sidedness of the data, a triangulation strategy was used. A pre-test (a mock oral 'Matura' exam) and a post-test (the actual oral 'Matura' exam), questionnaires, and focused observation on the entire group were used. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected at the beginning and end of the ongoing study, further supported by observation throughout the research process. It was assumed that if the analysis of all data sources suggested similar results, it would be possible to conclude that the conclusions were reliable and not subjective (Wilczyńska & Michońska-Stadnik, 2010).

As part of the introduced procedure, students created their own podcasts once a week as part of their homework, using the tools suggested by the teacher. The entire procedure consists of 4 steps:

1. The teacher introduced the topic in class (working on vocabulary and/or grammar);
2. The teacher prepared a speaking homework assignment and students recorded their own speeches at home and shared them with the teacher;
3. The teacher listened to the students' recordings and provided feedback via email.
4. The teacher summarised the task in class, focusing (if necessary) on common language problems among students' expressions, including mispronunciations.

In addition, all tasks prepared by the teacher were in the form of exam tasks. The study used 3 asynchronous tools: Vocaroo, Fotobabble, VoiceThread. All tools used in the experiment were free of charge and the order in which they were used was deliberate, taking into account some specific features of the tools and training needs.

All of the collected data has been thoroughly analysed. To verify the hypotheses, the quantitative data obtained from the oral 'Matura' exams (the mock exam and the actual exam) were subjected to statistical analyses. Frequency analyses, basic descriptive statistics analyses, the Shapiro-Wilk test, and two-factor analyses of variance in a mixed design were performed. The basic statistics of the variables studied are presented in Table 1.

	<i>M</i>	<i>Me</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Sk.</i>	<i>Kurt.</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>p</i>
Measurement I									
Conversational skills	5.52	6	0.69	-1.13	0.10	4	6	0.69	<0.001
Ability to create a description, short speech and a story	5.10	5	1.01	-0.89	-0.27	3	6	0.80	<0.001
Ability to analyse and produce speech	3.62	3	1.32	0.07	-1.54	2	6	0.85	<0.001
Communication skills	14.24	14	2.49	-0.07	-1.59	11	18	0.87	0.001
Scope	1.59	2	0.57	0.27	-0.81	1	3	0.72	<0.001

Correctness	1.76	2	0.74	0.43	-1	1	3	0.79	<0.00 1
Pronunciation	1.79	2	0.41	-1.53	0.35	1	2	0.50	<0.00 1
Fluency	1.90	2	0.31	-2.75	5.96	1	2	0.35	<0.00 1
Language skills demonstrated in the examination	7.03	8	1.68	-0.50	-1.06	4	9	0.87	0.002
Overall result	21.24	22	3.98	-0.11	-1.56	15	27	0.90	0.008
Measurement II									
Conversational skills	5.69	6	0.66	-1.97	2.55	4	6	0.52	<0.00 1
Ability to create a description, short speech and a story	5.62	6	0.82	-2.09	3.37	3	6	0.53	<0.00 1
Ability to analyse and produce speech	5.55	6	0.87	-1.75	1.81	3	6	0.57	<0.00 1
Communication skills	16.86	18	2.22	-1.59	0.74	12	18	0.55	<0.00 1
Scope	3.41	4	0.73	-0.85	-0.57	2	4	0.74	<0.00 1
Correctness	3.34	4	0.77	-0.70	-0.91	2	4	0.75	<0.00 1
Pronunciation	1.90	2	0.31	-2.75	5.96	1	2	0.35	<0.00 1
Fluency	1.90	2	0.31	-2.75	5.96	1	2	0.35	<0.00 1
Language skills demonstrated in the examination	10.55	12	1.94	-1.36	1.05	6	12	0.74	<0.00 1
Overall result	27.41	30	3.87	-1.52	1.16	18	30	0.71	<0.00 1

M - mean; *Me* - median; *SD* - standard deviation; *Sk.* - skewness; *Kurt.* - kurtosis; *Min.* and *Max.* - lowest and highest values of the distribution; *W* - Shapiro-Wilk test result; *p* – significance

Table 1

Basic descriptive statistics of the quantitative variables under study

Students were tested in oral exams – before the experiment began (mock exam – Measurement I) and after the experiment ended – in actual high school exams (Measurement II). The evaluation was based on the communicative proficiency and

language skills presented during the exam in accordance with the evaluation criteria of the said exam, according to the scheme presented below (Table 2).

Communication skills			Language skills demonstrated in the examination			
Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Scope	Correctness	Pronunciation	Fluency
0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2 3 4	0 1 2	0 1 2

Table 2

'Matura' Exam Assessment Criteria

The collected data was considered based on the 3-element model¹ of communicative competence evaluation, which consists of complexity (complexity) of the language used, linguistic correctness and fluency of speech, closely related to communicative proficiency (Bygate, 1998).

The students' communication skills were analysed first. It was evaluated through the performance of 3 exam tasks, hence the results obtained by students in each task (1, 2, 3) were analysed at the beginning. The overall results obtained in the three tasks combined were then analysed. The data obtained formed the basis for determining the students' communication skills. In the next step, each of the elements constituting language skills, i.e., the range of language structures used by the students, the correctness of the language forms used, pronunciation and fluency of speech, were analysed separately. The final step in this series of analyses analysed the results for the overall language skills index at the time of the exam. The results obtained by the students in the research group were compared with those of the students in the control group.

In the next step, qualitative data collected through voluntary, anonymous surveys were analysed. The first survey, conducted at the beginning of the experiment, was designed to collect data to determine the language level of the research and control groups, as well as their attitudes toward speaking English and their podcasting experiences. The second survey was conducted after the students produced their first podcast of their own. Its goal was to collect data on the first impression of students working with podcasts and the resulting difficulties. The final survey conducted at the end of the experiment consisted of eight open questions. This form of survey allowed

¹ CAF – complexity, accuracy, fluency.

students to freely express their opinions and the researcher to collect the most complete data possible. Its goal was to obtain information on the students' creation of podcasts, their attitudes towards them, and how this form of work affected the learners' English speaking skills and their preparation for the oral 'Matura' exam.

In addition, observations were made throughout the research project, which were also analysed. The type adopted in this study is partial observations focused on the whole group. Elements of the observation included students' attitudes toward podcast creation and the tools used, as well as their level of participation in classroom activities and their attitudes toward speaking in English. All observations were recorded in the researcher's logbook, kept by the teacher.

The statistical and qualitative data analyses performed are consistent and confirm the veracity of all hypotheses. Therefore, it can be concluded that: there is a relationship between the use of podcasts in the language classroom and the development of oral communicative competence, podcasting can help students prepare for the oral 'Matura' exam. In addition, students' attitudes toward creating their own podcasts are positive.

Analysis of all data sources suggests the same results. Therefore, it can be assumed that the conclusions are reliable and objectified (see Wilczyńska & Michońska-Stadnik, 2010). Referring to the oral communicative competence of students, it should be said that the skilful integration of podcasts into the process of teaching speaking contributes to the development of students' communicative competence. It also significantly develops their communicative proficiency, linguistic correctness, pronunciation, and the range of linguistic means used, while building a friendly teaching and learning environment, promotes their autonomy. In addition, creating their own podcasts helps students prepare for the oral English 'Matura' exam and has an impact on students' performance on the exam. From the very first recording of their own speech, students are positive about creating podcasts in English, describing podcasting as an interesting and useful method of learning English, including learning to speak the language.

The results obtained in this study allow us to answer in the affirmative the main research question whether the creation of their own podcasts by learners of English as a foreign language affects the development of oral communicative competence in the language.

Taking into account the educational benefits of podcasting in the language classroom, the positive impact on the development of students' communicative

competence in a foreign language, as well as on preparing for and obtaining higher results during the oral high school exit exam, it should be considered that podcasting can be an innovative teaching method compared to traditional teaching. At the same time, this form of work with students is in line with the assumptions of the core curriculum for general education in Poland (MEN, 2008, 2018) and can be promoted in Polish schools. The results obtained in the context of students' preparation for the oral 'Matura' exam open up a field of research in the context of other language exams that test speaking ability.

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