

Student-created Podcasts: An Effective Way to Practice L2 Speaking?

Tingting Kang

Northern Arizona University

Abstract

Student-created podcasts have been proposed as a great tool to improve language learners' speaking skills. The current study investigated the effectiveness of student-created podcasts on ESL learners' ($n = 17$) oral performance (i.e., fluency, grammatical accuracy, and comprehensibility) and self-awareness of their oral performance. This study was a mixed-subjects design. The two independent variables were the within-subject factor, time (i.e., pre- and post-test/questionnaire), and the between-subject factor, treatment (i.e., control group and experimental group). A series of Mann-Whitney U Tests revealed that participants in the experimental group had a significant improvement in their use of 3rd person singular after the treatment. Although, no statistical differences were found on other variables, participants in the experimental group revealed a tendency of producing more comprehensible speech and being more aware of their oral performance. Also, student-created podcasts had the potential effects on diminishing the number of inaccurate self-awareness of their oral performance.

Keywords: podcasts, acoustic analyses, grammatical accuracy, self-awareness

Student-created Podcasts: An Effective Way to Practice L2 Speaking?

Background

Mobile assisted language learning (MALL) is incorporated with any form of teaching and learning that involve a mobile device, which includes mobile phones, tablet computers, MP3 players, PDAs, electronic dictionaries, and game players (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). Due to a great growing number of mobile device owners and the convenience of such devices, m-learning was considered as the next generation of e-learning (Sharples, 2000). MALL has the advantages of extending students' learning from inside the classroom to outside the classroom and allowing students to study whenever and whatever they want. In addition to that, podcasts are considered to be a great tool for practicing listening skills for a large number of free downloadable authentic linguistic files.

Student-created podcasts, which is the primary focus in this study, have been proposed as a great MALL technology to improve language learners' speaking skills. As discussed in Sze's (2007) article, student-created podcasts had the advantages of (a) enhancing learners' motivations by knowing their podcasts would be listened to by other students or even people around the world, (b) improving learners' pronunciation through practice and rehearsal, (c) developing learners' collaboration skills when working in groups, (d) improving learners' accuracy, and (e) providing more language practice opportunities for the learners who had fewer chances to practice in a large classroom setting or who were less confident to speak in front of other students. However, most of these assumptions have not been tested empirically. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of using student-created podcasts to improve language learners' oral performance (i.e., fluency, grammatical accuracy, and compressibility) and self-awareness of their oral performance.

Research Questions

This study was conducted to explore the following questions: (a) To what extent do student-created podcasts affect their oral performance in terms of fluency, grammatical accuracy, and comprehensibility? (b) To what extent do students-created podcasts affect their self-awareness of oral performance?

Methods

The participants in this study were 17 PIE Level 3 students enrolled in the Fall 2013 semester. All the treatments were carried out by the researcher during students' CALL class. Before and after the treatment, both groups needed to complete the same pre- and post-test/questionnaire. During the treatment, all the participants would produce three 2-minute independent speaking tasks and send them to the researcher using an online voice recorder, *Vocaroo*. For the experimental group, 3B, the *Podcast Application* was introduced on the first day to make sure that students were able to download it to their personal mobile devices (e.g., mobile phones and lap-tops) and subscribe one program, *PIE Podcast* made by the researcher. The researcher then uploaded their speaking tasks through an online program, *PodOmatic*, to the *PIE Podcast* program. After each task was uploaded, students were asked to listen to their own speech in the *PIE Podcast* and complete a self-evaluation form.

This study was a mixed design. The two independent variables were the within-subject factor, time (i.e., pre- and post-test/questionnaire), and the between-subject factor, treatment (i.e., control group and experimental group). The dependent variables consisted of 12 measures of fluency, grammatical accuracy, comprehensibility, and self-awareness of oral performance. Specifically, the PRAAT computer program (Boersma & Weenink, 2007) assisted in the analysis of each fluency measure. According to the normality of the data distribution, a number of non-

parametric Mann-Whitney *U* Tests were conducted to analyze the differences between two groups' performance on the pre-test/questionnaire and the changes on the post-test (i.e., post-test/questionnaire - pre-test/questionnaire).

Results

To answer the first research question: To what extent do student-created podcasts affect their oral performance in terms of fluency, grammatical accuracy, and comprehensibility? As Sze (2007) proposed, knowing the podcasts would be listening to by others, participants in the experimental group made significant improvement on their use of 3rd person singular. Although, no statistical differences were found on other variables, participants in the experimental group revealed a tendency of producing more comprehensible speech. Regarding to oral fluency, after experiencing the treatment tasks students produced slower speech and longer filled/unfilled pauses on the post-test which made their speech more comprehensible.

To answer the second research question: To what extent do student-created podcasts affect their self-awareness of oral performance? Participants' gain scores of self-awareness on the post-questionnaires were quite similar but heading towards different directions. In other words, participants' self-awareness of their oral performance increased in the experimental group but decreased in the control group. Also, student-created podcasts had potential effects on diminishing the number of their inaccurate self-awareness on oral performance.

Relevance to PIE and Second Language Learning

The results of this study offered evidence for the influence of student-created podcasts on L2 learners' oral performance, including fluency, grammatical accuracy, comprehensibility, and self-awareness of their oral performance. Student-created podcast activity should be highly recommend to PIE Listening and Speaking teachers.

References

- Boersma, P., & Weenink, D. (2007). PRAAT for Windows. Available from
http://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/download_win.html
- Kukulska-Hulme, A., & Shield, L. (2008) An overview of mobile assisted language learning.
ReCALL, 20(3), 271-289.
- Sharples, M. (2000). The design of personal mobile technologies for lifelong learning.
Computers & Education, 34(3-4), 177-193.
- Sze, P. M. (2007). Developing students' listening and speaking skills through ELT podcasts.
Educational Journal, 34(2), 115-134.