CONTRIBUTIONS OF E-AUDIOBOOKS AND PODCAST TO EFL LISTENING CLASSES

Yrd. Doç. Dr. Nazlı GÜNDÜZ
Selçuk Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi
İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü
nazgunduz@yahoo.com

Abstract

Internet sources are obviously beneficial to EFL learners in many ways since they bring the target language, culture and literature either into the classroom or their homes. The aim of this paper is to shed light on novelties and alternatives to listening activities, accessible via the internet. When exposed to the target language and its culture in natural settings through the internet students can collect data, evaluate structures of language in use through authentic audio materials such as audio-books, e-audiobooks and podcasts from innumerable link pages, and download them as well. With these valuable downloaded materials they not only can improve their English skills but also better their pronunciation.

Key Words: Internet and ELT, internet for EFL, multi-media, audiobooks, e-audiobooks, podcasts, ELT links pages

ELEKTRONİK SESLİKİTAP VE PODCASTLARIN İNGİLİZCENİN YABANCI DİL OLARAK EĞİTİMİNE KATKILARI

Özet

Internet kaynakları İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrenciler için birçok yönden oldukça yararlıdır. Bu kaynaklar hedef dili, onun kültürünü ve edebiyatını öğrencinin sınıfına ya da evine ulaştırır. Bu çalışmanın amacı internet üzerinden eşdeğer etkinlik ve kaynaklara ulaşılarak dinleme becerilerine yenilik ve farklılık katmaktır. Öğrenciler internet üzerinden sayısız geçiş sayfası (link) aracılığı ile elektronik sesli kitap ve podcastlar'a ulaştıklarında hedef dile ve kültüre ait özgün bilgi toplayabilir ve hedef-dilin yapısını inceleyebilirler. Bu değerli bilgiler ile İngilizce becerilerini geliştirmenin yanı sıra telaffuzlarını da düzeltebilirler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İngilizce öğretimi ve internet, İngilizce öğrenenler için internet, çoklu iletişim araçları (multimedya), sesli kitaplar, sesli e-kitaplar, İngilizce linkler.

INTRODUCTION

A growing number of internet resources are offering multimedia communications as a way to bring language, literature, culture and other topics to the access of visitors. The boom in the internet technology and its vast use by teenagers and young adults can be a good means for challenging the traditional ideas of English language teaching (ELT). As Jones & Fortescue (1987:57) point, teachers, from time to time, should change their traditional teaching materials from course books, blackboards, chalk, pictures and tapes to innovative technologies provided by the computer. In other words, since the internet provides a great number of multimedia resources to second and foreign language teaching such as 'e-books' (electronic books), 'audio-books', e-audiobooks, and 'podcasts' which bring the authentic target culture into the classroom, we language teachers should follow and implement these latest novelties as much as possible into our teaching to keep up to date with our students. Undoubtedly, using materials generating the interest of students will increase their motivation and thus create a climate for successful learning.

Internet use particularly among teenagers and young adults has grown rapidly in the last two decades. Actually it goes hand in hand with the growth of the World Wide Web (Eastman, 2001). Consequently the usage of internet and multimedia in English instruction has now become an undeniable beneficial source and aid for language teachers and learners. Students learning English can now easily be exposed to target language and its culture in natural settings, collect data, and evaluate structures of language in use through authentic audio materials such as audio-books and podcasts developed and designed in native English speaking countries.

Today in ELT, the multi-media networked computer with a range of communicative and informational tools at the fingertips of nearly every student in developed countries provides both much more integrated use of technology and the imperative for such use as learning how to read, write, and communicate in English via the computer without leaving their homes. That is, language learners can read and listen to E-audiobooks or listen to Podcasts via the Internet to improve their English and better their pronunciation. They can communicate either directly online or from the screen face to face with native speakers of English all over the world via the internet without having to spend big amount of money to visit the target country personally and improve their listening comprehension and speaking skills, as well as their reading and writing skills. What is more, the internet offers them access to a huge amount of authentic target-language data, as well as possibilities to generate, create and publish and distribute their own multi-media information for an international audience, a challenging and enjoyable activity for the innovative student.

1. E-AUDIOBOOKS/ AUDIOBOOKS

For a student of English it is nowadays easily to read a written English book without having to purchase it. There are vast numbers of internet books or reading sites on the net among which many provide free access to downloading the chosen books. One of the oldest and well known electronic websites "gutenberg.org" gives access to innumerable books online in the form of e-books. The site introduces itself in the following way: "Welcome To the World of Free Plain Vanilla Electronic Texts; e-texts Readable By Both Humans and By Computers, Since 1971;*These E-texts Prepared By Hundreds of Volunteers and Donations". It does not require any subscription to download the e-books, so visitors interested in books can freely read and download them onto their computer. E-books are generally downloaded by people and students who cannot get cheap access to specific books and classics, or could not find a printed version of the needed book.

Research has shown that e-books are not preferred by book readers and literature lovers because it is rather difficult and boring to read a book from the screen. Imagine you want to read a book in your spare time. What would you prefer? A hard cover book which you can read lying down by changing the pages from your bed, or sitting on a desk reading it from the screen of your PC or laptop? Of course you would prefer to read the hard cover one, but probably your students not. What if a speaker reads your favorite book aloud for you from an audiobook and you just scrolled down with your eyes through the e-book text you downloaded and printed out from the e-book site for free? Would not that be great? Waters (2007) rightly advises that with downloadable e-audiobooks and their transcripts, you do not have to worry about returns or overdue library books, cassettes or CD's. Besides, you do not have to hesitate or feel embarrassed about your incorrect pronunciation while reading a book because a native speaker is reading it aloud for you, so you can immediately correct your pronunciation and learn the correct pronunciation right away.

The audiobook, the improved form of a book or e-book which was actually created for visually impaired people in the 1950s to enable them 'to read with their ears', gained great popularity among ESL learners in the last decade. Today it is living its peak among ELT learners because you can listen to a person reading aloud for you anywhere; at night in bed; while driving your car, on the bus or train, while doing housework, and so on and learn the language at the same time. As Jacobs (2006:1) states "audio books are developing and improving the listening skills of their hearers". Moreover, he claims that Audio-book listeners have better reading comprehension skills than non-listeners since listening is fundamental to learning all the other language arts: reading, writing, and speaking. "Listening is not only the heart of human interaction, but also the heart of teaching and learning." (Lundsteen, 1990 qtd. In Vardell).

The first DVD encyclopedia, Encarta ("Audiobook", 2008) defines an audio book as "audio recording of a person reading a book, story, or other written text". Nowadays it is possible to listen to audio books through cassettes, compact disks, computers, mp3 players, i-Phones as well as cell-phones. With the spread of internet, people can download audio files from internet to these personal gadgets and listen to them whenever and wherever they want.

Audio books have been known for over fifty years, but first they were expensive to obtain. They were given with hard cover books, with textbooks as supplementary material or sold separately. Nowadays you can buy, rent and download them from the internet in the form of either audio or e-audiobooks. The variety in media formats made audiobooks cheaper as well as offering a great number for free.

In the last two decades the audiobook/e-audiobooks entered foreign language teaching with the purpose of being a model for a native-like speaker. In ESL/EFL learning, audiobooks enhance pronunciation and contribute to the student's education and advancement and thus increase her/his language comprehension. Pronunciation work in particular has benefitted and therefore most pronunciation programs now incorporate some sort of voice recording and playback to let students compare their recordings with a model (Demirezen, 2005). "When paired with matching text, audiobooks reinforce word, phonic, and syntactic knowledge; reading-while-listening is the most efficient way to assist readers' transition to fluency" (Dowhower, 1987; Rasinksi, 1990).

Although the language teaching audiobooks on the internet are in the form of e-audiobooks with their texts and provide an innumerable number of sources for all types of learners, some sites with free subscription to e-audio books like 'LibriVox' do not have a quality sound system and the computer gives the sense of a bionic sound. So, it is better to search and find the best sound quality providing sites. However Schrock, an administrator for technology from Nauset Public Schools, puts:

> LibriVox offers free audiobooks for downloading. It is a bit disconcerting, at times, to listen to different readers for each chapter in a book, but the quality of the recordings is well done...these books, found in the public domain, are read aloud and recorded by volunteers. The books are read either in their entirety by one person or a volunteer can choose to read just a single chapter from a book. The books are accessible through either a catalog list or via a podcast feed. When you choose to browse a book from the catalog access area, there are various options. The site is well-constructed and easy to navigate. Some of the audio files are large, so assignment should be based on the student's home Internet connection. Listening to the audiobook, while reading along in the e-text, could help struggling readers. I can see this as a great community service project for high school students—they get to read classic literature aloud and contribute to the collection for use by everyone! (Schrock, 2006:91)

Listening is the most used skill among the language skills; 85% of what we learn, we learn by listening. As aforementioned, audiobook / e-audiobook listeners gain better reading comprehension skills as non-listeners. About 45% of each day is spent listening to others and audio books are often credited with developing and improving the listening skills.

Moreover, when presented with the printed word, ESL/EFL learners see the written forms of words; but audio books make it so that the rhythm patterns of speech become more distinct and thus allowing the material to become more easily understood by non-native speakers. That is, the students have the opportunity to hear the pronunciation of words they are unfamiliar with and frequently pick up the meaning of the word by the reader's tone. The connection between text and speech becomes clear with the use of audiobooks, helping the student improve her/his reading and vocabulary skills. However, it should be borne in mind that the audiobook cannot replace the teacher and merely serves as a supplement to the educational tools the student already uses to gain clarity in a topic.

Listening to audiobooks is very beneficial for language learners, and serves as one of the most popular rationales. E-audiobooks will give most readers an idea of how indispensable, and enjoyable they can be when utilized for the sake of learning English. A much sought for result of audiobooks in the classroom, though, and a very common one, is that students often go home and start reading with a willing attitude. Since love of reading and reading comprehension goes hand in hand, audio books have proven to promote increased reading activity and advance reading comprehension. At a National Council of Teachers of English conference Professor Lesesne at Sam Houston State University, presented "Opening the Mind of the YA Through Audiobooks" by demonstrating that audiobooks enrich students' overall use of language and love of literature. (see www.professornana.com/alanpresentation06.htm.)

1.1. Some Tips for Teaching & Learning with Audiobooks

The well known leader in providing tools and services to 'level the playing field' for struggling readers and students with print disabilities is 'Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic (RFB&D®). Educators in general classrooms, resource room inclusion and self-contained classrooms consult and ask them about effective strategies for integrating audiobooks successfully in their classrooms.

The following 'tips' are partly adapted and partly adopted from their web site www.rfbd.org designed developed to give teachers and colleagues some practical, proven approaches that will help their students bridge the achievement gap, access the total curriculum and succeed.

1.1.1. Tip 1. Use audiobooks/e-audiobooks to teach and reinforce phonemic awareness and phonics skills:

Audiobooks provide auditory reinforcement for newly introduced letters and sounds. It is suggested that you provide students with both the audio and print versions of textbooks and literature containing the letters and sounds. In introducing the lesson, connect the words with the letters and sounds you're teaching. The print/audiobook combination works effectively in listening centers, whole class listening sessions and for students' independent reading during free-choice reading times.

1.1.2. Tip 2. Integrate audiobooks/e-audiobooks at all grade levels across the curriculum:

Audiobooks give you great teaching flexibility. You can use them at the elementary, middle and high school levels as well as universities teaching ESL/EFL students with ease and simplicity. They also work well in any subject area in which students with print disabilities benefit from listening to learn. Listening while reading provides a multi-sensory reading experience and can eliminate some of the frustrations for students who have difficulties with text-only materials. This chart will give you some specific integration insights.

1.1.3. Tip 3. Use audiobooks/e-audiobooks to build students' critical thinking and listening skills:

Students at all ages and ability levels will benefit by practicing several different types of listening and learning skills.

• Provide a specific goal for listening: For example, ask your students to listen to pages 20-25 and write down the 3 places the main character visits.

• Use a graphic organizer for students to complete during or after listening. Graphic organizers help students clarify and record their thoughts.

• Pair students to take turns summarizing what they've listened to. Regroup the class and have students report on their partners' summary.

1.1.4. Tip 4 Use audiobooks/e-audiobooks to develop fluency and comprehension skills:

1.1.4.1.Fluency: Leading literacy experts report that listening to materials read aloud multiple times increases fluency. Listening and following along in the print version builds decoding skills and vocabulary that are essential for improving reading accuracy and

rates:

• Provide students with opportunities to access audio textbooks and literature multiple times throughout the learning day.

1.1.4.2. Comprehension: To help build comprehension:

• Give students specific questions to answer after listening, so they "listen with a purpose."

• Have students make predictions based on what they've listened to.
• Ask students to retell the story or concept to you after listening.

Some of the frequently visited and useful audiobook/e-audiobook sites for ESL/EFL learners are the following:

www.GetAudioBooksOnline.com

Download-Free-Audio-Books.com/Audio,

www.audiobooksforfree.com,

www.audible.com,

www.audiopub.org,

www.audiofilemagazine.com,

www.recordedbooks.com,

www.librivoks.com,

http://www.jiggerbug.com,

www.readingrockers.org,

www.learningthroughlistening.org/SiteData/docs/TeachingTipsWord/,

http://dmoz.org/Shopping/Publications/Books/Audio.

With the recent boom in technology new alternatives for audiobooks/e-audiobook emerged in the internet market. One of them is the podcast which is claimed to have a better sound quality.

2. PODCASTS

The term podcasting is a blend of the words 'iPod' and 'broadcasting' given to the publishing of audio (usually MP3 files) via the Internet, designed to be downloaded and listened to on a portable MP3 player of any type, iPod, or on a personal computer. It is a digital recording of a radio broadcast or similar program. In addition, there is also a web feed which allows users to subscribe to the audio program and automatically organizes to be downloaded files to their MP3 players or iPods (Encarta, 2008).

Podcasting has now become popular as an alternative way of providing high quality 'radio' type content that can be listened to whenever, wherever and as many times as the listener wants (Stanley, 2005). Podcasts have become a very popular way to share content on the Internet. The contents vary from news, government documents, interviews, reviews to language lessons. Many podcasts provide supplementary materials such as scripts, study guides and exercise downloads for language learners. Two most known and reliable web sites CNN and BBC provide up-to-date and very beneficial podcasts for the use of ESL/EFL learners. These sites' contribution to education serves as one of the greatest. They give most readers an idea of how indispensable, and enjoyable, podcasts can be when utilized for the sake of education.

The ability to consume and deliver high quality audio and video over the Internet has developed so quickly in such a short time that teachers need to learn this new medium for delivering content and start incorporating it into their lessons. Thus it means novel and extra but beneficial work for the teacher.

Bischke (2007) lists several benefits why he prefers podcasts to audiobooks in his web site. According to him they seem easier to listen to in bite-sized chunks. He states when you only have 10 or 15 minutes, it is often easier to throw on a podcast and listen to it in its entirety than it is to pick up an audio book mid-stream. You can download them automatically and they are timeless, as well. There is certain information that is much better consumed right away (e.g., news and current events, sports, etc.)

The idea that a podcast can be produced by just about anyone with access to the internet has generated a lot of interest in educational circles. In ELT, the appeal is not only in providing additional listening input for students, but that students themselves can become involved in recording and producing the podcast.

2.1. Some types of ELT podcasts to be used in the classroom

The following examples are some types of podcasts you can use with your students (adapted from Stanley (2005):

2.1.1. Authenticpodcasts :

Podcasts just like BBC news (www.bbc.co.uk) or CNN news (www.cnn.com) prepared for native inhabitants of a country provide a rich source of listening for all types of audience. ELT students can often make use of this authentic material to enhance their listening skills. Most of these will only be suitable for use with higher level students, but others, such as 'Sushi Radio' (www.sushiradio.com) are made by non native speakers of English and their length (5-10 minutes) make them ideal for use with lower level classes, as well.

2.1.2. Teacherpodcasts:

There are several sites like 'BritFM.com' aiding teachers to make use of podcasts prepared for educational purposes. Some teacher also produce their own podcasts, often for their own classes, these podcasts are usually aimed at helping students learn by producing listening content that is not available elsewhere, or that gives cultural and local taste.

2.1.3. Studentpodcasts:

Students can produce their own podcasts generally with teacher assistance ·.g., under the guidance of their CALL teacher: first they can record heur about the lives and interests of other students from around the world and listen to the experience and culture of native speakers. and then record topics covering their own experience and culture and broadcast these via online sites like the 'hotmail messenger'. A podcast made by students for students is 'English Conversations' (http://e-poche.net/conversations).

Next to podcasts prepared by student, there are also others that can be useful in the professional development of educators.

2.1.4.Educatorpodcasts:

Comprehensible Input (http://ci.iplusone.org/podcast) and Bit by Bit (http://bobsprankle.com/bitbybit_wordpress/) are reflective podcasts that cover methodological matters as well as podcasting for ESL/ELT teachers. Ed Tech Talk (http://edtechtalk.com) is a more general show about educational technology, which is recorded live (this is called webcasting) using free Internet telephony and then provided as a podcast.

Some other useful links for podcast are the following:

www.englishcaster.com,

www.podcastalley.com,

www.mediasite.com,

http://www.manythings.org/repeat/ learn a song

http://www.manythings.org/repeat/listen to and repeat podcasts

http://www.manythings.org/repeat/ Jokes in English.

http://www.voanews.com/english/podcasts.cfm

http://www.npr.org/

http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/

Lately, next to audio podcasts there are also podcasts offering visual data such as videos named 'Vodcasts' that share content on the internet. However, you need video displaying devices such computers, iPhones or Mp3 players to utilize the vodcasts in the classroom or for individual use. Again authentic news sites such as the BBC and CNN provide vodcasts containing audio-visual material about the news item. To give an example for a vodcast, the historical documentary vodcast by David Starkey on the net on King Henry VIII provides vivid information about 16th Century Britain, lifestyle, wealth among aristocratic people, and its rural areas.

Both teachers and students can make use of vodcasts to utilize all the four language skills in their classes as well as free time. Students can study the target language autonomously on their personal computers by turning it into fun by viewing, listening to or preparing their own podcasts or vodcasts and broadcasting them on the most popular site of today the 'YouTube'.

CONCLUSION

My interest in e-audiobooks and podcasts developed because of the desire to find new materials for teaching listening skills. In teaching listening, a teacher can fall into the bad habit of using the same listening materials over and over again. The advent of internet, E-audiobooks and Podcasts can supply fresh ideas and motivation. The use of e-audiobooks in the classroom increases the success of beginning English learners in general, and also serves as an excellent aid to those who struggle with pronunciation. There are many reasons why audiobooks are used by teachers and ought certainly to be used by ESL and EFL learners. Listening is the first language mode learned and as Plato said 'the most natural way to take in words is not through the eye, but through the ear'. A thick-paged book might be intimidating to students both who are familiar with computers and even for lovers of literature. So, it would be better to give them an option that merges traditional reading, enjoyment and comprehension with the high-tech universe in which they are immersed and turn the boring reading activity into an eclectic activity by blending the reading activity with the listening activity and making use of the e-audiobook. Furthermore, e-audiobooks also offer the individualized attention that will ultimately increase a student's understanding of a subject. Students often go home and start reading with a willing attitude. However, that is not to say that audiobooks should replace traditional reading activities altogether. They can be used alternatively either in class or at home. E-audiobooks, podcasts, and vodcasts can quickly become a source of pleasure for ELT students and can lead to viewing learning as a fun activity.

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