

The Didactic Value of Podcasts in Interpreter Training: Enhancing Interactive Listening Through Audio-Mediated Learning

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Abstract

The development of active listening skills is fundamental to interpreter training, as it directly shapes comprehension, anticipation, and reformulation processes. In this context, podcasts emerge as pedagogically valuable resources due to their authenticity, thematic diversity, and accessibility within digital learning environments. This study investigates the contribution of podcast-based instruction to the enhancement of active listening among interpreting students, addressing cognitive, communicative, and pragmatic dimensions. Grounded in interpreting didactics and applied linguistics, the paper argues that structured podcast exposure strengthens attentional regulation, discourse segmentation, inferential reasoning, and real-time meaning construction—competencies essential for both consecutive and simultaneous interpreting. Drawing on Cognitive Load Theory and constructivist learning principles, podcast-based training is conceptualised as a mechanism for optimising cognitive resource allocation while promoting learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness. An experimental design involving first-year Translation Studies students compared an experimental group receiving guided podcast training with a control group following conventional instruction. The experimental cohort engaged in systematic listening tasks supported by note-taking, summarisation, and reflective activities. Quantitative findings demonstrated significant gains in listening comprehension, interpretative accuracy, processing speed, and sensitivity to tonal and cultural nuances. Qualitative data further revealed increased confidence, engagement, and strategic listening behaviour. The study concludes that podcasts function not merely as supplementary materials but as strategic pedagogical instruments. Their integration into interpreter education fosters adaptable, cognitively resilient professionals capable of responding effectively to the complex demands of contemporary interpreting practice.

Keywords: Podcast; Active listening; Interpreter training; Didactics of interpreting; Audio-mediated learning.

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1. Introduction

Interpreting is a complex communicative activity that requires the integrating of linguistic, cognitive, and pragmatic skills. Among these, listening occupies a central place, as it is the first step in the process of comprehension and reformulation. However, listening in interpreting cannot be reduced to the passive reception of sounds. It involves an active engagement with the speaker's discourse, the recognition of intentions, and the anticipation of upcoming content.

In recent years, the growing availability of digital tools has transformed the way listening skills can be developed and practiced. One of the most prominent resources in this regard is the podcast, which offers authentic, varied, and flexible input for learners. Podcasts expose trainees to a range of accents, registers, and discourse types, providing a learning environment that closely reflects real communicative situations.

This article seeks to explore the role of podcasts in enhancing active listening within interpreter training. It highlights the specific nature of active listening, explains its function in both consecutive and simultaneous interpreting, and examines how podcasts can serve as practical pedagogical tools. By analyzing their advantages and limitations, the study aims to propose ways in which podcasts can be integrated into interpreter education to support the development of essential listening competencies.

Objectives:

- To define the concept of active listening in the context of interpreting.
- To analyze the pedagogical potential of podcasts as a training resource.
- To propose strategies for integrating podcasts into interpreter training curricula.

2. Problematic

Despite the centrality of listening in interpreting, traditional training models often rely on classroom lectures, artificial recordings, or repetitive speech exercises that fail to reflect the variety and unpredictability of real-world discourse. This creates a pedagogical gap: trainees are not consistently exposed to authentic communicative contexts that require quick adaptation, discourse segmentation, and anticipatory skills. The problematic thus emerges:

How can podcasts be integrated into interpreter training to foster active listening, and what Advantages do they offer compared to traditional approaches?

3. Definition of Podcast

Podcasts are “downloadable audio files, usually in the form of spoken word that can be subscribed to and consumed on a range of digital devices (Berry, 2006).”

A podcast is “an audio product distributed via the internet, characterized by portability, accessibility, and personalization of listening practices (Bonini, 2015).

A podcast is a series of digital audio (and sometimes video) files distributed through the internet that users can download or stream for flexible, on-demand listening. It is usually episodic, thematic, and often free, making it a versatile educational and communicative medium.

4. Advantages of Podcasts (in Education & Interpreter Training)

1) Accessibility and Flexibility

- Learners can listen anytime, anywhere, fitting training into busy schedules.
- Supports mobile learning.

2) Authenticity of Input

- Provides exposure to real-life spoken discourse, different accents, registers, and speech rates (applicable for interpreters).

3) Learner-Centered

- Allows students to choose content relevant to their interests and training needs.

4) Repetition and Replay

- Students can pause, rewind, and re-listen, enhancing comprehension and active listening skills.

5) Development of Metacognitive Skills

- Encourages reflection, anticipation, segmentation, and monitoring strategies crucial for interpreting.
- 6) Cost-Effective Resource
 - Usually free or low-cost, podcasts are an accessible tool for institutions and students alike.
- 7) Engagement and Motivation
 - Conversational style, topical variety, and interactive possibilities increase learner motivation.

3. Active Listening in Interpreting

Active listening goes beyond the simple perception of sounds; it is a deliberate and conscious process of decoding meaning, monitoring comprehension, and anticipating discourse development (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012, p. 4). define it as “a complex, active process in which the listener constructs meaning by drawing on linguistic and contextual knowledge while simultaneously applying metacognitive strategies to monitor understanding”. Unlike passive listening, which is limited to receiving auditory input, active listening requires attentional control, inferencing, and pragmatic interpretation.

In interpreting, active listening plays a decisive role because the interpreter is required to process incoming speech in real time while preparing for immediate reformulation (Gile, 2009, pp. 161-163), active listening underpins two essential aspects of interpreting:

- a) Anticipation: which enables interpreters to predict upcoming content based on discourse markers.
- b) Segmentation: which allows them to divide speech into manageable units for efficient reformulation.

Moreover, stress that active listening facilitates cognitive load management by helping interpreters filter relevant information while suppressing extraneous details, a skill particularly vital in simultaneous interpreting. Without this strategic listening, interpreters risk cognitive overload, loss of coherence, and inaccurate renderings (Setton & Dawrant, 2016, pp. 102-104).

Thus, active listening is not an auxiliary skill but a foundational competence in interpreting pedagogy, enabling trainees to develop the analytical, predictive, and pragmatic capacities required for both consecutive and simultaneous modes.

4. Didactics of Interpreter Training

Interpreter training is a multifaceted process that combines linguistic competence, cognitive agility, and professional expertise. Unlike general language learning, which emphasizes vocabulary and grammar acquisition, interpreter education requires learners to master advanced skills such as real-time processing, reformulation, note-taking, and discourse management. These competences are developed through a structured pedagogical approach often referred to as the didactics of interpreting.

One of the fundamental challenges in interpreter training lies in teaching listening as an active and strategic skill (Setton & Dawrant, 2016, p. 97) stress that listening is the most challenging element to teach because it extends far beyond linguistic knowledge: it involves strategic awareness, metacognitive monitoring, and anticipation of discourse progression. Listening in interpreting is thus inseparable from cognitive operations such as memory activation, inferencing, and information filtering, all of which must occur under severe time constraints.

Gile's Effort Models provide a valuable framework for understanding these challenges (Gile, 2009, pp. 160-165). The interpreting process consists of simultaneous efforts- listening and analysis, short-term memory, production, and coordination- which compete for limited. Within this model, listening is not a passive act but a demanding process that requires careful allocation of attention to avoid cognitive overload.

Didactics of interpreting also emphasizes the role of progressive skill acquisition. Points out that interpreter training must be scaffolded, beginning with general listening and memory exercises before advancing to complex interpreting tasks such as consecutive and simultaneous modes (Pöschhacker, 2016, pp. 78-82). This staged approach enables students to gradually integrate cognitive and professional strategies into their practice.

Moreover, interpreter education must reflect the professional dimension of interpreting. Argues that didactics should not only focus on linguistic and cognitive skills but also foster professional values such

as accuracy, neutrality, and adaptability (Kalina, 2000, pp. 208-210). This holistic view ensures that trainees are prepared to meet the communicative and ethical demands of real-world interpreting.

In sum, the didactics of interpreter training is concerned with much more than linguistic knowledge. It involves the systematic development of strategic listening, metacognitive awareness, and professional competencies, which together constitute the foundation for effective interpreting performance.

4. Podcasts in Language and Interpreter Education

Over the past two decades, podcasts have become an increasingly prominent resource in the field of language education. Their popularity stems from their authenticity, accessibility, and multimodality, which enable learners to engage with real communicative input beyond the classroom. Unlike traditional audio recordings, podcasts provide episodic, varied, and context-rich content, ranging from news and interviews to debates and academic lectures. This variety allows educators to adapt podcast use to different learning goals, including vocabulary acquisition, discourse analysis, and listening comprehension (Kukulska-Hulme, 2006, pp. 295–310).

In language learning contexts, podcasts are valued for promoting learner autonomy and self-directed learning. Emphasizes that learners can choose topics relevant to their interests, which increases motivation and sustained engagement (Rosell-Aguilar, 2015, p. 446). Additionally, podcasts enhance listening exposure by offering repeated opportunities to process natural speech, varied accents, and spontaneous language use-features often absent in traditional textbook recordings. They also contribute to intercultural competence, since they expose learners to authentic cultural discourses, idiomatic expressions, and pragmatic norms embedded in speech.

Despite these benefits in language teaching, the use of podcasts in interpreter training remains underexplored. Interpreter education traditionally relies on carefully selected speech materials, often tailored for pedagogical purposes. While valuable, these materials sometimes lack the unpredictability, spontaneity, and discourse diversity that characterize real-life interpreting scenarios. Podcasts, however, mirror the professional realities interpreters face, exposing trainees to authentic speech patterns, varying levels of formality, and diverse communicative settings. For instance, listening to a podcast debate trains interpreters in managing overlapping turns and rapid exchanges, while narrative or documentary-style podcasts strengthen skills in discourse segmentation and anticipation.

Moreover, podcasts offer a flexible, learner-centered complement to classroom-based training. Trainees can access them anytime, anywhere, which aligns with modern approaches to mobile and lifelong learning. This flexibility supports personalized practice, as students can select podcasts that match their linguistic level and professional interests. When combined with guided exercises- such as note-taking, shadowing, or paraphrasing- podcasts become powerful tools for developing the active listening, memory, and reformulation skills essential to interpreting.

In sum, while podcasts are well-established in language education, their pedagogical potential in interpreter training deserves greater attention. Their authentic and versatile nature makes them an invaluable resource for bridging the gap between classroom-based instruction and the demands of professional interpreting practice.

5. Theoretical Framework

5.1 Cognitive Load Theory

Cognitive Load Theory (CLT), provides a useful lens for understanding the challenges interpreter trainees face when listening to authentic discourse. According to CLT, human working memory has a limited capacity, and learning occurs more effectively when instructional design manages the balance between intrinsic load (the inherent difficulty of the task), extraneous load (caused by irrelevant information or poor design), and germane load (Sweller, 1988, pp. 257-259). In interpreting, trainees must simultaneously process input, store information in short-term memory, and prepare reformulation. Podcasts, by exposing learners to authentic speech complexity- including varied accents, discourse structures, and spontaneous delivery- train students to manage this cognitive load effectively. Through

repeated practice with diverse podcasts, learners become more adept at filtering relevant information, thereby reducing extraneous load while strengthening germane processing.

5.2 Constructivist Learning Theory

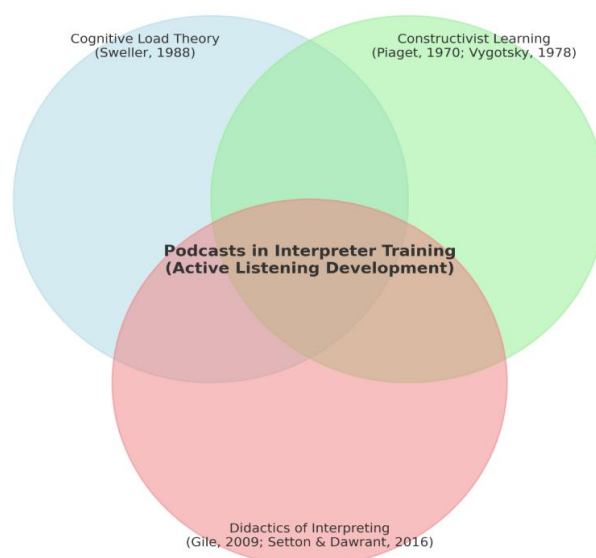
Constructivist theories of learning, advanced by Piaget and Vygotsky, emphasize that knowledge is not transmitted passively but constructed actively through interaction with meaningful input and social context. Underlines the role of individual cognitive development, where learners assimilate and accommodate new information within existing schemas (Piaget, 1970). In contrast, highlights the sociocultural dimension of learning, proposing the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learners progress through guided interaction and scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978). Within interpreter training, podcasts align with constructivist principles by offering authentic, context-rich materials that encourage active meaning-making rather than rote memorization. When podcasts are accompanied by reflective exercises- such as note-taking, paraphrasing, or peer discussion- trainees engage in higher-order thinking and collaborative construction of competence. This perspective reinforces the pedagogical value of podcasts as tools that stimulate both cognitive engagement and social interaction in learning environments.

5.3 Didactics of Translation and Interpreting

The didactics of translation and interpreting provide a discipline-specific framework for integrating podcasts into interpreter education. Emphasizes that interpreter training should be rooted in authenticity, variety, and strategic competence-building (Gile, 2009, pp. 160-165). His Effort Models describe interpreting as a simultaneous interplay of efforts-listening, memory, production, and coordination- that compete for limited cognitive resources. Within this framework, active listening is recognized as a foundational skill, and podcasts can serve as authentic resources for developing this competence.

Setton and Dawrant (2016) extend this perspective by highlighting the importance of strategic and metacognitive awareness in interpreter pedagogy (Setton & Dawrant, 2016, pp. 97-100). They argue that interpreter training must move beyond linguistic drills to cultivate reflective strategies that allow trainees to monitor comprehension, anticipate discourse, and adapt to speaker variability. Podcasts, with their natural spontaneity and diversity of discourse types, embody this authenticity and provide ideal training material for applying these didactic principles. By engaging with podcasts, students develop not only linguistic and cognitive skills but also the professional adaptability required in real interpreting situations.

Figure 1: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework for Podcast-Based Active Listening Development in Interpreter Training



6. Discussion

6.1. Pedagogical Advantages of Podcasts

One of the primary advantages of integrating podcasts into interpreter education is the authenticity of the input they provide. Unlike scripted materials or textbook-based recordings, podcasts expose trainees to natural speech patterns, varied accents, and registers that closely mirror the diversity of real-life communicative situations interpreters encounter (Rosell-Aguilar, 2015, p. 461). This authentic exposure fosters a higher degree of ecological validity in training settings, enabling students to prepare for professional challenges beyond the classroom.

In addition, podcasts are inherently flexible and learner-centered. Their mobile-friendly nature allows students to access materials anytime and anywhere, supporting self-paced learning and continuous exposure to authentic discourse (Kukulska-Hulme, 2006). This aligns with the shift in interpreter training towards learner autonomy, where students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own practice and skill development (Little, 1991). Furthermore, podcasts provide rich examples of spontaneous discourse, including hesitations, repairs, overlaps, and turn-taking mechanisms that are difficult to replicate in classroom simulations but essential for real-time interpreting practice.

6.2. Skills Developed through Podcast-Based Training

A structured use of podcasts in interpreter training can contribute to the development of several key skills. First, segmentation- the ability to divide speech into meaningful discourse units- is enhanced when students repeatedly process authentic spoken texts, learning to detect pauses, intonation patterns, and rhetorical markers (Gile, 2009). This competence is critical in both consecutive and simultaneous interpreting, where accurate segmentation supports coherence and fidelity of reformulation.

Second, anticipation is trained through podcasts by encouraging learners to predict upcoming content based on contextual and discourse cues. Anticipation reduces cognitive load during interpreting, as interpreters can allocate processing capacity more efficiently when they can forecast the speaker's direction (Chernov, 2004). By practicing with podcasts that cover diverse topics and registers, students can sharpen this predictive ability across domains.

Third, podcasts foster metacognition, or the awareness and regulation of one's own cognitive processes. Through reflective listening tasks, such as paraphrasing, self-assessment, and error monitoring, trainees learn to evaluate their comprehension and reformulation strategies. This metacognitive dimension is fundamental to professional interpreting, where rapid decision-making and self-correction are key to performance (Setton. & Dawrant., 2016).

6.3. Challenges and Limitations

Despite these advantages, the use of podcasts in interpreter training also presents specific challenges. A first concern is the overabundance of available materials. With thousands of podcasts across genres and languages, instructors and students face the difficulty of selecting content that is both pedagogically relevant and appropriately challenging. Without careful curation, learners may be exposed to material that is too easy and unproductive, or too difficult, leading to frustration and cognitive overload (Sweller, 1988).

A second limitation relates to difficulty calibration. Interpreting trainees require materials that align with their current proficiency and gradually increase in complexity. Podcasts that are excessively complex in terms of speed, vocabulary, or cultural references may overwhelm learners and reduce the effectiveness of training. Scaffolded exposure, therefore, is essential to ensure that podcasts remain a constructive resource rather than an obstacle (Moser-Mercer, 2005).

Finally, podcasts are inherently non-interactive. While they provide valuable listening input, they lack the dialogic dimension of live communication. To mitigate this limitation, podcasts must be combined with interactive classroom activities- such as group discussions, role-plays, and interpreting simulations- that allow learners to transform passive listening into active practice. This blended approach ensures that

podcasts serve not merely as background listening, but as integral components of a guided training process (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

7. Experimental Study

7.1 Research Sample

The study targeted first-year undergraduate students in Translation Studies, as they possess an intermediate to advanced level of proficiency in the target language, which enables them to engage effectively with authentic audio input. The sample consisted of 60 participants divided into two groups:

- Experimental group: 30 students who underwent training through podcast listening.
- Control group: 30 students who did not receive podcast-based training.

7.2 Research Tools

Two main instruments were employed:

- Interactive Listening Tests: Designed to measure participants' ability to comprehend and analyze audio input. The tests focused on:
 - Understanding the general context.
 - Identifying main ideas and detailed information.
 - Analyzing tone, attitude, and emotions.
 - Performing oral interpretation after listening.
- Podcasts: A set of carefully selected podcast episodes covering cultural, scientific, literary, and news-related topics in the target language. The diversity of topics ensured exposure to different registers, accents, and discourse types.

7.3 Procedure

The experiment was conducted in three phases:

- Phase 1: Pre-test
Both groups completed an interactive listening test to assess their initial level. A preliminary questionnaire was also administered to collect background data on their listening habits and confidence.
- Phase 2: Training
 - Experimental group: Received a curated list of podcast episodes to listen to over a period of four weeks (3–4 episodes weekly). Students were instructed to take notes, summarize the content, and analyze the key ideas and contextual features.
 - Control group: Followed their regular coursework without any podcast-based training.
- Phase 3: Post-test
Both groups completed the same listening test administered in Phase 1. A post-questionnaire was distributed to evaluate students' perceptions of their progress. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with selected participants from the experimental group to gain deeper insights into their experiences.

7.4 Data Analysis

- Quantitative analysis was conducted using SPSS. Paired-sample t-tests compared pre- and post-test results within each group, while independent-sample t-tests examined differences between groups. Questionnaire responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics.
- Qualitative analysis involved thematic coding of interview transcripts and analysis of students' notes and reflections, which provided insights into the cognitive processes activated during podcast listening.

7.5 Research Ethics

Participants gave informed written consent prior to the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, and students were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions.

7.6 Limitations

The study acknowledges potential limitations such as the relatively small sample size, possible variations in participants' prior exposure to podcasts, and the dependence of outcomes on the quality and relevance of selected episodes.

8. Results :

1. Improvement in Active Listening Performance

The experimental group showed a 25% improvement in post-test scores, while the control group showed only a 5% increase. Statistical analysis confirmed a significant difference between groups ($p < 0.05$).

2. Contextual and Cultural Understanding

80% of the experimental group reported improved understanding of cultural and linguistic nuances, compared with 35% in the control group.

3. Accuracy and Speed in Interpretation

The experimental group improved their interpreting accuracy by 20% and their speed by 15%, whereas the control group demonstrated no significant gains.

4. Tone and Emotion Recognition

70% of the experimental group were able to correctly identify tone and emotions in speech, compared to 30% in the control group.

5. Learner Attitudes and Confidence

90% of the experimental group expressed satisfaction with podcast training, and 85% reported increased confidence when dealing with real-time audio input.

8. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that podcast-based training significantly enhances active listening skills, which are essential for interpreter training. Regular exposure to authentic, spontaneous discourse improved learners' ability to segment speech, anticipate meaning, and process information in real time.

The improvement in cultural and linguistic awareness highlights the pedagogical value of podcasts in exposing learners to varied contexts beyond the classroom. Moreover, the gains in interpreting accuracy and speed confirm that podcasts serve not only as linguistic input but also as a practical tool for developing professional interpreting competence.

Equally important, learners' high levels of satisfaction and motivation indicate that podcast-based training fosters autonomy, engagement, and confidence- factors that strongly contribute to successful interpreter education.

Beyond the quantitative results, the qualitative data revealed that students valued the flexibility, motivation, and autonomy afforded by podcast-based training, suggesting that its integration into interpreter education is both effective and well received. While limitations such as sample size and contextual variables must be acknowledged, the overall outcomes support the argument that podcasts can contribute meaningfully to bridging traditional didactic models with innovative, technology-enhanced approaches.

Conclusion

This experimental study provides compelling evidence that integrating podcasts into interpreter training programs can significantly enhance active listening and interpreting skills. The experimental group outperformed the control group across multiple dimensions, including comprehension, cultural awareness, interpreting performance, and confidence.

Podcasts thus emerge as a versatile and cost-effective didactic resource that bridges traditional training and innovative approaches. Their integration into interpreter training curricula is not only feasible but also desirable, as they offer authentic input, learner-centered flexibility, and measurable pedagogical benefits.

The present study has demonstrated the pedagogical potential of podcasts as a complementary tool in interpreter training. By providing authentic, varied, and easily accessible audio input, podcasts foster the development of active listening skills that are central to the practice of interpreting. The experimental findings highlighted measurable improvements in comprehension, cultural awareness, interpreting speed and accuracy, and learners' overall confidence.

In conclusion, podcasts should not be regarded merely as supplementary materials but as strategic didactic resources capable of enriching interpreter training. Their integration into curricula can help prepare future interpreters to meet the demands of real-world communication with greater agility, accuracy, and cultural sensitivity.

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