

Creating Podcasts for Academic Listening in French: Student Perceptions of Enjoyment and Usefulness

ALYSSE WEINBERG

HÉLÈNE KNOERR

LARRY VANDERGRIFT

*Official Language and Bilingualism Institute (OLBI)
University of Ottawa, Ottawa*

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the piloting of podcasts created to support Anglophone French Immersion (FI) students in academic listening. The authors developed a series of seven English language podcasts grounded in metacognitive and L2 listening theory to provide FI students with strategies to enhance L2 listening ability and note-taking skills for academic lectures in French. Student feedback was solicited through weekly questionnaires and a focus group discussion. Weekly questionnaires showed that most of the students enjoyed the podcasts and found them moderately useful, although some contradictions emerged. The focus group discussion showed a somewhat higher degree of satisfaction both in terms of enjoyment and usefulness. Suggestions for improving the podcasts are proposed.

KEYWORDS

Podcast, French Immersion at University Level, Listening Strategies, Note-taking Skills, Metacognitive Awareness, CALL Integration

INTRODUCTION

Students listening to academic lectures in their second language (L2) face the double challenge of understanding complex information and unfamiliar language. The needs of these students, particularly those studying in English, have been well documented (e.g., Flowerdew, 1994; Miller, 2009) and podcasts have been identified as one possible response to improving academic listening skills (O'Bryan & Hegelheimer, 2009). As suggested by Koohang and Durante (2003) "the promise of anywhere, anyplace, anytime education has intrigued both instructor and student alike" (p. 106). Students can use podcasts to listen to lectures before or after class; they can listen to related material such as authentic radio broadcasts, or they can gain knowledge on specific aspects such as grammar or vocabulary (Abdous, Camarena, & Facer, 2009; Thorne & Payne, 2005). Podcasts have tremendous potential as sources of authentic listening documents for second language (L2) learners. They can also be powerful tools for learning to listen, as evidenced in a recent study on the integration of podcasts into an ESL listening course where they were viewed very positively by the students (O'Bryan & Hegelheimer, 2007).

Building on work by O'Bryan and Hegelheimer, we report on a pilot study of podcasts to support the academic listening efforts of Anglophone French immersion (FI) students taking content courses in French with their Francophone peers. We developed a series of seven

English-language podcasts grounded in metacognitive (Wenden, 1998) and L2 listening theory (Goh, 2008), to provide students with strategies to enhance their L2 academic listening ability and note-taking skills. In order to determine the degree to which these podcasts were able to realize their intended purpose, student perceptions¹ towards the podcasts were solicited through questionnaires and a focus group discussion. With the goal of improving these teaching tools to support the academic efforts of future FI students, we were guided by the following questions:

- 1) Are these podcasts enjoyable? To what degree?
- 2) Are these podcasts useful for increasing comprehension of lectures in French? To what degree?
- 3) How can these podcasts be improved to enhance their enjoyment and usefulness for FI students who need to improve listening and note-taking skills for listening to lectures in French?

We begin by presenting the conceptual framework for the podcast scripts and a brief overview of the importance of metacognition for learning and for successful listening comprehension. We then describe the methodology, the participants, and the podcasts. In the results section, we summarize student perceptions of these podcasts in light of our research questions. Finally, we discuss the results, the limitations of the study, and the implications for revising the podcasts to better meet the needs of our target population.

ACADEMIC LISTENING AND METACOGNITION

The extant body of research on lecture comprehension has historically focused on the comprehension process and spoken discourse in general, and has largely been directed to non-native speakers of English (Flowerdew, 1994). Only in the last two decades has research activity directed more attention to the specific characteristics of lectures and how these lectures can be made more comprehensible to L2 students. Working within this paradigm, Flowerdew and colleagues conducted a series of studies investigating the perceptions, problems, and strategies for lecture comprehension from the perspective of students (Flowerdew & Miller, 1992), native-speaking lecturers (Flowerdew & Miller, 1996), and non-native speaking lecturers (Flowerdew, Miller, & Li, 2000). Common problems emerging in these studies were speed of delivery of the lecture, difficulty with course-specific terminology, cultural differences, and note-taking skills. More recently, Miller (2009) explored, with L2 engineering students, the features of lectures that facilitated comprehension. Students identified linguistic features such as uncomplicated language and accent, as well as pedagogical features such as examples, visuals, humor, advance preparation, and organization of the lecture. The results of these studies have enormous implications for lecturers, suggesting many important teaching strategies to help them facilitate lecture comprehension by the L2 students in their classes. This body of research is useful to lecturers who are sensitive enough to the needs of their non-native listeners to make the necessary changes and accommodations.

On the other hand, what can L2 students do when their lecturers are unaware of the listening difficulties faced by non-native speakers in their large classes, or if these lecturers are unwilling to accommodate their needs? What can L2 students themselves do to enhance lecture comprehension? The current research base on L2 academic listening rarely focuses on what students themselves can do to facilitate comprehension. Even the study focusing on students in particular (Flowerdew & Miller, 1992) gave very few suggestions: 1) read course materials before or after the lecture, 2) ask peers for help, 3) ask questions in class, 4) concentrate harder, and 5) add notes to handouts or readings during the lecture. Although well intentioned, some of these suggestions are not very helpful, given the context of large classes, increased alienation of students (particularly L2 students), and the wide range of

lecture styles. In order for L2 students to be more successful in academic listening, they need to take charge of their own learning. This requires students to be "more aware of their learning, to evaluate their learning needs, to generate strategies to meet their needs and to implement those strategies" (Hacker, Dunlosky, & Graesser, 2009, p. 1). In short, students need to develop their metacognition about academic listening so that they can take control of their learning by planning their actions, checking the results of their efforts, remediating difficulties, and evaluating their progress (Baker, 2002).

There is a general consensus among researchers in the fields of comprehension and L2 learning about the important role that metacognition plays in enhancing thinking and comprehension (Baker, 2002; Wenden, 1998). Metacognition gives students a sense of agency by enabling them to participate actively in regulating and managing their own learning. Learners with a high degree of metacognitive awareness are better at processing and storing new information, finding the best ways to practice, and reinforcing what they have learned. It is also positively linked to motivation and self-efficacy (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Graham & Macaro, 2008; Paris & Winograd, 1990). Metacognitive abilities are a mental characteristic shared by successful learners (Nisbet & Shucksmith, 1986); in fact, metacognition accounts for a relatively high percentage of variance in learning performance (Veenman, Van Hout-Walters, & Afflerbach, 2006). More precisely, Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal, and Tafaghodtari (2006) observed that 13% of listening variance could be accounted for by metacognition. Metacognitively aware individuals are more conscious of their own learning processes, perceptive of the demands of their learning tasks, and capable of applying and adapting a range of strategies to meet the requirements of different tasks and situations. Finally, and important for the purposes of this study, metacognition is amenable to classroom instruction.

There is some evidence that skilled L2 listeners do use metacognition about listening to regulate listening processes. Not only do they use more metacognitive strategies than their less skilled counterparts (Bacon, 1992; Goh, 2000; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990), skilled listeners appear to orchestrate these strategies in a continuous metacognitive cycle (Graham & Macaro, 2008; Vandergrift, 2003a). Furthermore, listening tasks which guide students through the process, engaging them in the use of prediction, monitoring, evaluating, and problem-solving, can help learners develop the metacognitive knowledge critical to the development of self-regulated listening (Goh & Taib, 2006; Vandergrift, 2002, 2003b). Finally, the positive effects of metacognitive instruction on listening achievement have been demonstrated (Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010). Although the number of studies that have focused on metacognition and L2 listening is still relatively small, the results reported thus far have been encouraging, and they are consistent with the findings in other disciplines concerning the importance of metacognition in comprehension in particular, and learning in general.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The University of Ottawa is the largest bilingual university in North America, offering programs to approximately 30,000 students in French and English. In September 2006, the French Immersion Studies program was introduced. This program follows the adjunct model of L2 immersion pioneered at the university in the 1980s (Burger, Wesche, & Migneron, 1997; Ready & Wesche, 1992). Anglophone students take courses in an academic discipline (e.g., Political Science) in French and, alongside, they can choose to take an adjunct French as a second language (FSL) course. The objectives of this FSL course are "to develop listening and reading comprehension skills, to help students assimilate the subject matter of the discipline course, to facilitate the understanding of oral and written documents related to

disciplinary course and to identify and understand the specialized content vocabulary” (Weinberg & Burger, 2007, p. 13).

An exploratory study by Knoerr and Weinberg (2009) investigated the difficulties reported by students registered in adjunct FSL classes with regard to comprehension of lectures in French. Students were asked to complete a questionnaire with a Likert-type scale to rate factors hindering comprehension. The most important factors that emerged were: speed at which the professor spoke (80% of respondents), comprehension of course-specific terminology (78%), cognitive overload due to listening to the lecture, and taking notes while copying slides (76%). Not surprisingly, most of these factors echo those expressed by L2 speakers listening to academic lectures in English, as revealed in the studies examined above.

After reviewing the results of the preliminary questionnaire we decided to produce a series of English-language podcasts grounded in metacognitive and L2 listening theory in order to address the most pressing needs identified by these FI students. We chose this theoretical framework, given the important role of metacognition in helping students take charge of their own learning and the growing evidence of a facilitating relationship between metacognition and L2 listening success.

Method

This section describes the content of the podcasts, the study participants, the procedure used to present the podcasts, the research instruments and the data collection procedure.

Content of podcasts

Since the goal of the podcasts was to enhance student listening strategies and note-taking skills, a series of seven podcasts were scripted, which discussed the following topics:

1. Listening to lectures: Applying the strategies of good listeners,
2. Preparing for the lecture before class and when arriving in class,
3. Monitoring and problem-solving during and after the lecture,
4. Best practices in note-taking,
5. The Cornell note-taking system,
6. Reviewing and evaluating the lecture, and
7. New technology and note-taking (wikis, semantic mapping, and Microsoft Office OneNote).

Each podcast followed the same format: a brief introduction, a brief theoretical background, practical issues and examples, and a summary section. For the recording, the script was read from a computer screen used as a prompter. Some visuals (e.g., PowerPoint slides, screenshots, short clips illustrating a point) were inserted during the editing phase. The duration of each podcast was between five and seven minutes.

The following excerpt from Podcast #1 (*Listening to lectures: Applying the strategies of good listeners*) gives some idea of how this podcast moved from introduction to theory and then, by means of a student question, into a practical issue:

Hello. So you would like to improve your listening skills? You want to understand lectures better and take better notes? This podcast will introduce you to the strategies used by good listeners and outline how you can apply these same strategies to better prepare for and understand academic lectures.

Research on listeners learning another language shows that they use three types of strategies to facilitate their listening and to make their learning more effective: metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective strategies.

Student: What are metacognitive strategies?

Prof: Metacognitive strategies are important because they oversee, regulate, or direct the listening and note-taking process. You use metacognitive strategies when you prepare for a lecture, when you anticipate or predict some of the main points the professor is going to discuss during the lecture, or when you clear your mind so that you can focus on the lecture.

The following excerpt from Podcast #3 (*Monitoring and problem-solving during and after the lecture*) conveys some important information on metacognition, contextualized for the listening demands of academic settings:

As you listen, always try to anticipate the next point, based on your knowledge of the topic and the content in the prepared readings. If you anticipate correctly, the points made by the professor will reinforce your predictions. If you are wrong, you will have to problem-solve to discover the reason for the difference. Either way, the likelihood of understanding and remembering far exceeds what you would have understood if you had been only a passive listener. This is why planning or predicting, monitoring or checking, and problem-solving are such powerful strategies for learning.

Participants

The participants were mainly first-year students registered in the FI program in four FSL classes linked to the introductory courses of four different academic disciplines (Political Science, Anthropology, History, and Philosophy). In total, 75 students participated; however, due to absences, the number of completed questionnaires varied from week to week. The focus group consisted of ten volunteers, representing all four FSL classes. They were recruited via a call for volunteers; a twenty-dollar honorarium was offered and pizza was provided during the focus group meeting.

The teaching styles of the professors in the content courses were quite different. Students registered in the Anthropology and Political Science classes (n= 40) had access to the professor's PowerPoint slides before, during, and after class, whereas students registered in the other two classes (n= 35) had no form of support during the lectures. Nevertheless, all professors made ample use of reformulation, repetition and redundancy; they also illustrated the new concepts with numerous examples.²

Instruments and data collection

Students in the four FSL classes viewed one podcast per week over a period of seven weeks. The podcasts were discussed and students completed a questionnaire evaluating the pertinence of each podcast. The process of viewing the podcasts, discussing them, and completing the questionnaire took about 20 minutes of a 90-minute class each week. Questionnaires, which included both quantitative and qualitative data, yielded between 50 and 70 responses per week in total from all four groups. The questionnaire consisted of ten questions; the first five were yes/no or Likert-scale questions, asking how enjoyable, useful, or understandable the podcast was. The second set of five questions elicited written comments from the students on the difficulties they encountered, what they liked least and most, how

well they understood the language used, and what suggestions they would make to improve the podcasts (see questionnaire in Appendix).

In addition to the weekly questionnaires, a focus group discussion took place at the end of the study. Ten participants from the four groups agreed to meet with a research assistant for two hours. Information was elicited on the podcasts and how the content might best be presented to FI students. The discussion was guided using the Social Analysis System 2 (SAS²) methodology for group dialogue, collaborative inquiry, and social engagement, first developed for use in social analysis (Chevalier & Buckles, 2008) and later adapted for education research (Bourassa, Phillion, & Chevalier, 2007; Peters, Chevrier, Leblanc, Fortin, & Kennedy, 2007). The first step in this methodology required students to complete a questionnaire individually, using a Likert scale of one through five, indicating whether they liked the podcasts and found them useful. The questionnaire also asked them to indicate if there had been a change in their use of listening strategies and note-taking after viewing the podcasts. The second step required students, as a group, to discuss their individual ratings and then arrive at a group consensus on the degree to which they found each podcast enjoyable and useful.

RESULTS

We will first report on the responses to the weekly questionnaires and then the results of the focus group discussion. In general, student responses were very similar regardless of class of origin.

Weekly questionnaires

Table 1 presents the responses of the students to the questions related to the goals of this study. Results for each category are represented as percentages of the total number of responses.

Table 1

Weekly questionnaire responses on student perceptions of the podcasts

Podcast #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
N =	71	60	53	53	48	51	51
<i>Q2 - How difficult was this podcast to understand?</i>							
Very difficult							2.0
Difficult				1.9	2.0	2.0	
Easy	46%	47.0	51.0	40.4	41.7	35.3	41.2
Very easy	53%	52.0	49.0	57.7	56.3	62.7	56.8
<i>Q5 - What was your degree of enjoyment of the podcast?</i>							
Very little	1.0 %	1.7	7.5	7.5	6.3	7.8	7.8
Little	23.0%	16.6	18.9	26.4	12.5	15.7	9.8
Medium	52.0%	45.0	50.9	37.7	39.6	49.0	43.1
Higher	24.0%	33.3	18.9	28.3	25.0	19.6	31.4
Very high		3.3	3.8		16.7	7.8	7.8

Q6 – Did you find this podcast useful for the content immersion course?

Not at all	8.0 %	9.4	7.5	6.3	11.8	13.7
A little	54 %	41.6	64.2	52.8	35.4	37.3
Yes	30 %	45.0	22.6	34.0	37.5	29.4
A lot	8.0 %	13.4	3.8	5.7	20.8	19.6

As evidenced in Table 1, results of the weekly questionnaire indicate that almost all students felt the podcasts were easy or very easy to watch. Responses indicate that most of the students enjoyed the podcasts; between 66% and 82.3% responded favourably, depending on the podcast. Podcasts # 2 (*Preparing for the lecture*) and # 7 (*New technology and note-taking*) were the most enjoyed — 81.6% and 82.3% indicated a medium, higher, or very high level of enjoyment. Podcasts # 3 (*Monitoring and problem-solving during and after the lecture*) and # 4 (*Best practices in note-taking*) were least enjoyed, at a level of 73.6% and 66%, respectively, which is still an overall favourable rating.

Student perceptions of the degree to which these podcasts could help them with their immersion content course were slightly positive. On average, about one half of the students reported that they believed the podcasts would be slightly useful and, on average, one-third to one-half of the students deemed the podcasts to be useful or very useful. The two podcasts which students rated as most useful were # 2 (*Preparing for the lecture*) and # 5 (*The Cornell note-taking system*) with 58.4% and 58.3%, respectively, of the students judging these podcasts to be useful or very useful. The podcast deemed to be the least useful was podcast # 3 (*Monitoring and problem solving during and after the lecture*) with only 26.4% of the respondents rating this podcast as useful or very useful.

With regard to the open-ended questions, what did the students like most about the podcasts? Responses demonstrated that, overall, they liked the content but disliked the presentation. They thought the podcasts were clear, simple, well organized, and easy to understand. In the Political Science class, ten out of 22 students commented that Podcast # 1 gave them practical advice and very concrete tips on how to prepare for their classes and tests.

L'organisation du podcast # 1 est facile à suivre, i.e., ce qu'on doit faire avant, pendant, et après la lecture [sic]. ["Podcast # 1 is easy to follow, i.e., what to do before, during, and after the lecture."](Podcast # 1, Listening to lectures: Applying the strategies of good listeners)

The tips were good, they helped to take better notes and get more out of the class. (Podcast # 6, Reviewing and evaluating the lecture)

Students felt that the podcasts showed them how to improve their note-taking and gave them new strategies for listening in class. A few students (n = 3) liked the examples and the visuals, especially the podcasts on using technology and the Cornell note-taking technique because they were not familiar with this information.

D'excellentes idées pour soutenir l'information et prendre de bonnes notes. ["These are excellent ideas for remembering information and taking good notes."] (Podcast # 5, The Cornell note-taking system)

I have a laptop and so this information is pertinent. (Podcast #7, New technology and note-taking)

Other students mentioned that the podcasts helped them not only with the content course they were taking but also, and more importantly, for listening and learning in general:

These will be helpful in French and other classes I take. (Podcast # 1, Listening to lectures: Applying the strategies of good listeners)

If I was to use all those strategies, I would probably excel. (Podcast # 1, Listening to lectures: Applying the strategies of good listeners)

Useful because all the steps were explained and showed us why that way is more effective. (Podcast # 1, Listening to lectures: Applying the strategies of good listeners)

Very useful because I took the strategies and used them easily in my daily listening habits. (Podcast #2, Preparing for the lecture)

It was useful because it really helps with getting the full content from the lecture. (Podcast # 5, The Cornell note-taking system)

Students also noted a number of shortcomings. They did not like the plain format of the podcasts and commented that the presenters read their script, were monotonous, boring, and unenthusiastic about the topic discussed. Comments like these were mentioned at least three times for all the podcasts for all the classes: "Repetitious," "Reading a script," "Not interesting."

Students felt that the speakers neither engaged nor communicated with their intended audience. Three students commented that visuals such as lists and tables were either too scarce or not displayed long enough on the screen. Even though most students thought the podcasts were clear, simple and well organized, many found that there was nothing new in the content and that the information presented was too easy, repetitious, and already familiar.

Je n'aime pas que les personnes lisent ce qu'ils [sic] disent; pas de contact personnel. ["I didn't like that the persons read what they said; no contact with viewer."]

Ils parlaient avec une voix monotone. ["Their voices were in a monotone."]

Information d  j   acquise, les   tudiants savent comment prendre leurs notes.

["Information already known, students know how to take notes."] (Podcast # 5, The Cornell note-taking system)

Finally, the students made a number of suggestions for improving the podcasts. They recommended that the speakers look at the camera, be more dynamic, and not just read their script. They also proposed the inclusion of more examples and visuals, and that both French and English versions of the podcasts be made available.

Avoir le podcast en fran  ais mais aussi disponible en anglais s'il y a des   tudiants qui ne comprennent pas. ["Provide a French version and also an English version in case students don't understand."] (Podcast # 1, Listening to lectures: Applying the strategies of good listeners)

In sum, the weekly questionnaires indicated that students found the podcasts easy to understand, moderately to very enjoyable, and, for the most part, useful in helping them in their discipline course in French. Their suggestions for improvement focused mostly on the presentation of the material in the podcasts, rather than content.

Focus group

At the end of the term, a group of ten students participated in a focus group discussion. These students began by completing individual questionnaires, reporting on their enjoyment of the podcasts and any changes to their listening strategies and note-taking techniques after viewing. This reinforced each student's individual position before he/she entered the group consensus activity. Then, as a group, the students discussed their individual responses, with the goal of arriving at a consensus response to each question. The group discussion was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for themes that represented overall student perceptions of the podcasts with regard to enjoyment and usefulness.

Perceptions of the podcasts

The students were indifferent about the podcasts in their individual evaluations, finding them neither enjoyable nor useful. However, they were more positive and enthusiastic in many of their comments during the discussion. The individual evaluation ratings do not reflect the positive nature of these comments.

After reporting their individual responses, the participants worked together as a group to try to arrive at consensus evaluations on the value of the podcasts for academic listening (see Table 2). These scores were more positive than those reflected in the individual evaluations, with many fours (enjoyable and useful) and one five (very useful). Student comments during this discussion were also very positive.

Useful because all the steps were explained and showed us why that way is more effective.³

I applied these tips in class the most because they were very sensible and they did make a difference in note-taking. (Podcast #2, Preparing for the lecture)

I liked the information. I had not heard it before. (Podcast # 3, Monitoring and problem-solving during and after the lecture)

I did enjoy learning different ways to take notes and strategies. (Podcast #7, New technology and note-taking).

Table 2
Group consensus scores on the enjoyment and usefulness of the podcasts

	Enjoyment of podcast (see Scale 1 below)	Usefulness of podcast (see Scale 2 below)
General remarks for all podcasts	Presentation 2 Content 3	n/a
#1 – Listening to lectures	4 (great for first-year students)	4
#2 - Preparing for the lecture	3 – 4	n/a
#3 - Monitoring and problem- solving	1 – 4	3
#4 - Best practices in note-taking	4	4
#5 - Cornell note-taking system	4	2 – 4
#6 - Reviewing and evaluating the lecture	4	5
#7 - New technology and note- taking	3+	3

Notes:

Scale 1: 1 = Disliked it a lot; 2 = Disliked it; 3 = Indifferent; 4 = Enjoyed it; 5 = Enjoyed it very much.

Scale 2: 1 = Not useful at all; 2 = Not very useful; 3 = Indifferent; 4 = Useful; 5 = Very useful.

The participants left the cells blank (or "n/a") or gave ranges instead of discrete values when they were unable to reach consensus. For example, they were unable to decide whether or not they liked Podcast #5 (*The Cornell note-taking system*) and proposed a rating of 2 for a target audience of advanced students, who already had developed their note-taking skills, but 4 in the case of first-year students, who likely had less developed note-taking skills.

Not very useful for me, but could be useful for others. (Podcast # 5, The Cornell note-taking system)

The steps for taking notes using the Cornell method were very useful. (Podcast #5, The Cornell note-taking system)

The consensus group thought that Podcast # 1 would be "great for first-year students." Two podcasts received very high ratings, both in terms of enjoyment and usefulness. Podcasts # 4 (*Best practices in note-taking*) and # 6 (*Reviewing and evaluating the lecture*) received unanimous evaluations of 4, meaning the participants enjoyed them. Podcast # 4 was rated 4 (useful), and podcast # 6 was rated 5 (very useful). This echoes similar findings observed by O'Bryan and Hegelheimer (2007) on student perceptions of their podcast on note-taking.

Changes in use of listening and note-taking strategies

The second section of the individual questionnaire asked students to indicate the degree to which they used the listening strategies before and after viewing the podcasts. As a result of viewing Podcasts #1 through #6, the students reported increased use of listening strategies, as can be seen in Table 3. The most substantive change reported was for Podcast #1 and its section on the socio-affective strategies, which changed from "hardly ever or occasionally" to "regularly" after viewing the podcast. On the other hand, students reported that

the new technologies presented in Podcast # 7 were hardly used before or after viewing the podcast. Reported use of digital sound recording even seems to have gone slightly down after the students watched that segment of the video.

Table 3

Mean reported use of strategies before and after viewing the podcasts

	Before	After
#1 - Strategies of Good Listening – Metacognitive	2	2.8
#1 - Good listening -- cognitive	2.5	3.2
#1 - Good -- socio-affective	2.5	4.1
#2 - Preparing lecture – structure	2.4	3.4
#2 - Preparing -- read material	2.9	3.9
#3 – Monitoring and problem-solving	2.7	3.6
#4 - Best practices in note-taking	1.7	2.6
#5 - Cornell note-taking System	1.8	2.2
#6 - Reviewing and evaluating the lecture	2	2.8
#7 - New technology -- MS OneNote	1.8	1.9
#7 - New technology -- Mind Map	1.1	1.5
#7 - New technology -- Wikis	1.2	1.3
#7 - New technology -- digital sound recording	1.2	1.1

Note: 1 = never, no; 2 = hardly ever, for a while, I gave it up; 3 = occasionally, partially; 4 = regularly; 5 = very often

Throughout their discussion, the focus group raised the same issues as had been raised in the weekly questionnaires. Moreover, as reflected in the results shown in Table 3, students also reported increased use of the strategies presented in the podcasts. This was especially true for the reported use of metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective strategies.

DISCUSSION

Two different research methods were used to investigate our research questions — weekly classroom questionnaires and a focus group. The weekly questionnaires showed that most of the students enjoyed the podcasts and found them moderately useful. The focus group showed a higher degree of satisfaction in terms of both enjoyment and usefulness. Our discussion will consider three aspects of our study results: 1) limitations, 2) misinterpretations, and 3) contradictions.

Limitations

The focus group was composed of only ten members, which is a statistically small number. Furthermore, while the podcast series was developed to assist students with poor listening strategies and note-taking skills, the ten focus group students turned out to be strong, skilled, high-achieving students, as demonstrated by their final grades. These stronger students were not the target population for the podcasts. The small number of participants and the lack of diversity in our focus group participants are definite limitations to our study.

The variable of teaching style of the content-course professor was not controlled for in any way and may have influenced the students' comments on the usefulness of certain podcasts. For example, students who could print out the PowerPoint notes before the lecture had a less pressing need for podcasts on note-taking techniques than those with no support

during the lecture. This being said, Podcasts #5 and #7 (*The Cornell note-taking system, Technology and note-taking*) were ranked third and first, respectively, in satisfaction level by all students across all four groups on the weekly questionnaires.

Also, the focus group responded in the presence of a research assistant and this might have biased their responses to be more positive. On the other hand, the SAS² methodology was chosen because it encourages authentic responses from its participants even with a research assistant being present.

Finally, this study involved students watching one podcast per week on a DVD for seven weeks in a row, whether or not they wanted to, and then completing a questionnaire. It may well be the case that our "required reading" protocol defeated the "wherever, whenever, whatever" philosophy of the podcasts.

Misinterpretations

Analyzing the results led us to the realization that our participants arranged their own interpretation of the key terms investigated on a bipolar axis: form versus content, enjoyment versus usefulness, and general use versus personal use.

It would appear that when the students said that they did not enjoy the podcasts, they did not mean that they disliked the content but rather that they disliked the way the content was presented. They did not feel engaged by the material because the speakers were reading the script, making the delivery of the message boring and not engaging. Some complained about the lack of fancy video effects and two witty students suggested bringing the podcasts into the age of "edu-tainment" by "[ajouter] des explosions, comme une course de voitures rapides" and "avoir des chicanes, des fusils"; that is, to "[add] explosions and car races" and "have fights and guns". Not surprisingly, it is difficult to make lecture note-taking as interesting as Stephen Colbert and viral YouTube videos.

It appears that when the students said that they enjoyed the podcasts, they meant that they found them useful. The two categories of enjoyment and usefulness were intermingled, as evidenced in the following comments:

I did not enjoy it as much because it was not as useful. (Podcast # 7, New technology and note-taking)

I liked the podcast because it gave a useful way to take notes. (Podcast # 5, The Cornell note-taking system)

I enjoyed it as it was informative and helpful. (Podcast # 2, Preparing for the lecture)

I enjoyed it more because it was more useful. (Podcast # 4, Best practices in note-taking)

Furthermore, when the students said that they found the podcasts enjoyable, they meant that the podcasts were relevant to them specifically or that this information could be applied to their other classes. There was a tendency for the more enjoyable podcasts to be those presenting useful tips, techniques, and strategies. The students also did not enjoy podcasts if they already knew or used the strategies or techniques presented. The relevance aspect was particularly evident when focus group students would want to give a higher evaluation for a podcast if its audience was first-year or a group of weaker students, but would give it

a lower evaluation if the audience comprised stronger second- and third-year students like themselves:

I knew most of the information already, but [this podcast] can help others who get lost in lectures and have trouble understanding. (Introduction podcast)

Contradictions

The most striking finding was the contradictions which emerged from all the areas investigated, again showing a dichotomy among: 1) expressed versus actual needs, 2) use of English versus French, 3) questionnaires and focus group responses, and 4) usefulness versus actual use.

We find it difficult to reconcile our results with the needs expressed by FI students in the exploratory study by Knoerr and Weinberg (2009). Students from that study indicated that their top priority was to get help to better understand lectures in French. However, students judged the listening and note-taking strategies presented in the podcasts in the present study as "not useful" or only "somewhat useful". One possible explanation is that our student population is extremely heterogeneous in terms of French language proficiency. It may be that the exploratory study group had overall weaker language proficiency than the podcast study group.

Contradictory results emerged on whether the podcasts should have been recorded in French or English. About one half of the students complained that the podcasts were in English and the other half commented on the use of English as a positive aspect of the podcasts. One can speculate that the stronger students would likely welcome the additional challenge of listening in French while the weaker students would prefer not to have that added challenge.

Also, it is interesting to note that responses to the weekly questionnaires indicated that the podcasts were thought not to be useful at the time they were shown, whereas the focus group students, who were given an opportunity to reflect on any reported use at the end of the semester, found the podcasts to have been useful. There appears to be little congruency in the findings of the weekly questionnaires and the focus group consensus outcomes with regard to the podcasts deemed most and least enjoyable and most and least useful. Sometimes the content was described as "useful" or "very useful" by the weekly questionnaire group, and yet the students from the focus group reported that they did not apply it to their learning. For instance, the podcasts on the use of technology were rated as the most enjoyable of the series, but these multitasking, hyperlinking, tweeting, texting, Facebooking students said that they did not use collaborative tools, mind-mapping programs, or note-taking software either before or after watching the podcasts. The focus group claimed that the new technology presented was not their style, too involved, and too demanding to implement.

I was indifferent [to the new technology podcast] because I don't use technology for my note-taking in French. I would rather write my notes. It is too difficult to enter accented characters on a keyboard. (Podcast # 7, New technology and note-taking)

Wikis take too much time. We do not have that much time. (Podcast # 7, New technology and note-taking)

One may speculate that if the higher-achieving focus group students were not willing to commit the time and energy to learning the technology, then the weaker students might not

either. This observation echoes the findings of Peters, Weinberg, & Sarma (2009), which suggest that teachers and students in a Canadian context may not have yet evolved to using the newest technologies.

CONCLUSIONS

Answers are now available to the three research questions. Were the podcasts enjoyable? Mildly. Were the podcasts useful? Somewhat. Can they be improved? Definitely.

The key message from the students was to make the podcasts more interesting. Using the feedback from the students, we produced a revised series of podcasts. New scripts were written to reflect a more authentic and engaging style of presentation. The new format now has a student asking questions and an expert answering them. Professional readers were hired to record the new podcast series. The scripts were translated into French and recorded. An English audio-only version has also been made available. These different formats should provide students with a choice to better suit individual learning styles. All podcasts are available at: <http://www.ilob.uottawa.ca/fr/podcasts.php>.

We plan to conduct a new study in "real-life conditions," with the revised podcasts. Since all versions of the revised podcasts are now accessible on the university FI web site and on YouTube, FSL teachers will briefly introduce these new tools to students at the beginning of the term, encouraging them to use these podcasts to help them learn how to listen and take better notes in their content courses in French. At the end of the term, students will be asked to complete a questionnaire on the usefulness, enjoyment, and reported use of these study tools. The questionnaire will define the key concepts of usefulness and enjoyment and also ask about the teaching styles of the content course professors, particularly with respect to access to course notes before class and the use of PowerPoint slides. It is our hope that the results of our study have helped to produce a better resource that will more adequately address the challenges faced by FI students in academic listening.

NOTES

¹ Perceptions, for purposes of this paper, refer to one's liking of computers and assessment of the usefulness of these tools (Koohang, 1989).

² This information was obtained via a questionnaire completed by the teachers of supporting FSL classes.

³ Recurring comment for all the podcasts.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abdous, M. H., Camarena, M. M., & Facer, B. R. (2009). MALL Technology: Use of academic podcasting in the foreign language classroom. *ReCALL*, 21(1), 76-95.
- Bacon, S. (1992). The relationship between gender, comprehension, processing strategies, and cognitive and affective response in second-language listening. *Modern Language Journal*, 76, 160-178.
- Baker, L. (2002). Metacognition in comprehension instruction. In C. Block & M. Pressley (Eds.), *Comprehension instruction: Research-based best practices* (pp. 77-95). New York: Guilford Press.
- Bourassa, M., Phillion, R., & Chevalier, J. (2007). L'analyse de construits, une co-construction de groupe. *Association canadienne d' ducation de langue fran aise.  ducation et francophonie*, 35(2), 78-116.

- Burger, S., Wesche, M., & Migneron, M. (1997). Late, late immersion. Discipline-based language teaching at the University of Ottawa. In R. K. Johnson & M. Swain (Eds.), *Immersion education: International perspectives* (pp. 65-84). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chevalier, J., & Buckles, D. (2008). *SAS². A guide to collaborative inquiry and social engagement*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Skehan, P. (2003). Individual differences in second language learning. In C. Doughty & M. Long (Eds.), *Handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 589-630). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Flowerdew, J. (Ed.) (1994). *Academic listening: Research perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Flowerdew, J., & Miller, L. (1992). Student perceptions, problems and strategies in L2 lectures. *RELC Journal*, 23, 60-80.
- Flowerdew, J., & Miller, L. (1996). Lecturer perceptions, problems and strategies in second language lectures. *RELC Journal*, 27, 23-46.
- Flowerdew, J., Miller, L., & Li, D. (2000). Chinese lecturers' perceptions, problems and strategies in lecturing in English to Chinese-speaking students. *RELC Journal*, 31, 116-138.
- Goh, C. (2000). A cognitive perspective on language learners' listening comprehension problems. *System*, 28, 55-75.
- Goh, C. (2008). Metacognitive instruction for second language listening development: Theory, practice and research implications. *RELC Journal*, 39, 188-213.
- Goh, C., & Taib, Y. (2006). Metacognitive instruction in listening for young learners. *ELT Journal*, 60(3), 222-232.
- Graham, S., & Macaro, E. (2008). Strategy instruction in listening for lower-intermediate learners of French. *Language Learning*, 58, 747-783.
- Hacker, D. J., Dunlosky, J., & Graesser, A. C. (2009). *Handbook of metacognition in education*. New York: Routledge.
- Kiewra, K. A. (1987). Notetaking and review: The research and its implications. *Journal of Instructional Science*, 16, 233-249.
- Knoerr, H., & Weinberg A. (2009). Overall listening strategies. Internal document. University of Ottawa. ILOB.
- Koohang, A. (1989). A study of attitudes toward computers: Anxiety, confidence, liking and perception of usefulness. *Journal Research on Computing in Education*, 22(2), 137-150.
- Koohang, A., & Durante, A. (2003). Learners' perceptions toward the web-based distance learning activities/assignments portion of an undergraduate hybrid instructional model. *Journal of Information Technology Education*, 2, 105-113.
- Miller, L. (2009). Engineering lectures in a second language: What factors facilitate students' listening comprehension? *Asian EFL Journal*, 11, 8-30.
- Nisbet, J., & Shucksmith, J. (1986). *Learning strategies*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- O'Bryan, A., & Hegelheimer, V. (2007). Integrating CALL into the classroom: The role of podcasting in an ESL listening strategies course. *ReCALL*, 19(2), 162-180.
- O'Bryan, A., & Hegelheimer, V. (2009). Using a mixed methods approach to explore strategies, metacognitive awareness and the effects of task design on listening development. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 12, 9-38.
- O'Malley, J. M., & Chamot, A. U. (1990). *Learning strategies in second language acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Paris, S. G., & Winograd, P. (1990). How metacognition can promote academic learning and instruction. In B. F. Jones & L. Idol (Eds.), *Dimensions of thinking and cognitive instruction* (pp. 15-51). Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ.
- Peters, M., Chevrier, J., Leblanc, R., Fortin, G., & Kennedy, S. (2007). L'utilisation de l'analyse de construits dans un groupe de recherche pour d  finir le concept d'accompagnement m  tacognitif. *Association canadienne d'  ducation de langue fran  aise.   ducation et francophonie*, 35(2), 172-191.
- Peters, M., Weinberg, A., & Sarma, N. (2009). To like or not to like! Canadian university students' perceptions towards multimedia activities used for learning a second language. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 65(5), 869-896.
- Ready, D., & Wesche, M. (1992). An evaluation of the University of Ottawa sheltered program: Language teaching strategies that work. In R. Courch  ne, J. Glidden, J. St. John, & C. Th  rien (Eds.), *Comprehension-based second language teaching/L'enseignement des langues secondes ax   sur la compr  hension* (pp. 389-405). Ottawa: Ottawa University Press.
- Thorne, S. L., & Payne, J. S. (2005). Evolutionary trajectories, Internet-mediated expression, and language education. *CALICO Journal*, 22(3), 371-397. Available at <https://calico.org/journalTOC.php>
- Vandergrift, L. (2002). It was nice to see that our predictions were right: Developing metacognition in L2 listening comprehension. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 58, 555-575.
- Vandergrift, L. (2003a). From prediction through reflection: Guiding students through the process of L2 listening. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 59(3), 425-440.
- Vandergrift, L. (2003b). Orchestrating strategy use: Toward a model of the skilled second language listener. *Language Learning*, 53, 463-496.
- Vandergrift, L., Goh, C., Mareschal, C., & Tafaghodtari, M. H. (2006). The metacognitive awareness listening questionnaire (MALQ): Development and validation. *Language Learning*, 56, 431-462.
- Vandergrift, L., & Tafaghodtari, M. H. (2010). Teaching students how to listen does make a difference: An empirical study. *Language Learning*, 65, 470-497.
- Veenman, M., Van Hout-Walters, B., & Afflerbach, P. (2006). Metacognition and learning: Conceptual and methodological considerations. *Metacognition and Learning*, 1, 3-14.
- Weinberg, A., & Burger, S. (2007). *Guide    l'intention des professeurs de langue: cours d'encadrement linguistique*. Document interne. University of Ottawa: OLBI.
- Wenden, A. (1998). Metacognitive knowledge and language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 19, 515-537.

APPENDIX: WEEKLY QUESTIONNAIRE***Évaluation critique des podcasts***

Vous venez de visionner un podcast, prenez quelques minutes pour l'évaluer en encerclant votre réponse

1. Avez-vous facilement compris ce podcast ?

Oui Non

2. D'après-vous ce podcast était

Très difficile
Difficile
Facile
Très facile

3. Quelles difficultés avez-vous rencontrées ?

4. Avez-vous apprécié ce podcast ?

Oui Non

5. Quel est votre degré de satisfaction par rapport à ce podcast ?

Très faible
Faible
Moyen
Élevé
Très élevé

6. Est-ce que vous pensez que ce podcast vous aidera pour le cours d'immersion ?

Pas du tout
Un peu
Oui
Beaucoup

7. Indiquez ce que vous avez le moins aimé dans ce podcast.

8. Indiquez ce que vous avez le plus aimé dans ce podcast.

9. Est-ce que le langage des spécialistes était compréhensible ?

10. Avez-vous d'autres commentaires (suggestions, modifications) pour améliorer ce podcast ?

AUTHORS' BIODATA

Alysse Weinberg is an Associate Professor at the Official Language and Bilingualism Institute (OLBI) at the University of Ottawa. She is currently involved in teaching in its immersion program. She has developed teaching material for French, books as well as web-based sites. Her current interest is university level French immersion studies.

H  l  ne Knoerr is an Associate Professor at the Official Language and Bilingualism Institute (OLBI) at the University of Ottawa. She has developed teaching material for French. Her current interests include French pronunciation for second language students and university level French immersion studies.

Larry Vandergrift is Professor at the Institute of Official Languages and Bilingualism at the University of Ottawa. He has published widely on the teaching of second language listening and his book, *Teaching and Learning Second Language Listening: Metacognition in Action*, co-authored with Christine Goh and published by Routledge, will appear in 2011.

AUTHORS' ADDRESSES

Alysse Weinberg
600 King Edward
University of Ottawa
Official languages and Bilingualism Institute
Ottawa, On
K1N 6N5
Canada
Tel: 613-562-5800, poste 3465
Fax: 613-562-5126
Email: weinberg@uottawa.ca

H  l  ne Knoerr
600 King Edward
University of Ottawa
Official languages and Bilingualism Institute
Ottawa, On
K1N 6N5
Canada
Tel: 613-562-5800, poste 3413
Fax: 613-562-5126
Email: hknoerr@uottawa.ca

Larry Vandergrift
600 King Edward
University of Ottawa
Official languages and Bilingualism Institute
Ottawa, On
K1N 6N5
Canada
Tel: 613-562-5800, poste 3464
Fax: 613-562-5126
Email: lvdgrift@uottawa.ca