



Authentic Radio Clips and their Pedagogical Value to Teaching Listening Skills within Native Language Learning Contexts. A Critical Multimodal Research Venture.

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Abstract

*The purpose of this study focuses on one research question: Can radio clips serve as adequate pedagogical tools for the teaching of listening within the L1 language classroom? To answer this question, the paper adopts a socio-semiotic theoretical framework [1]. This framework is used for the analysis of a 100-week radio programme series *Nghidu Kelma* [2] transmitted on Maltese national radio. The paper identifies a set of authentic radio clips which can serve as pedagogical tools aimed at teaching listening in secondary 11-13-year-old L1 classrooms. After the identification of these clips, these clips were used during L1 listening lessons. Teachers wrote fieldnotes about their experiences and later participated in an interview where they could share their views. Based on the feedback of the six language teachers participating in the study, adopting thematic approach [3], as a conclusion the paper presents a ten-step checklist with practical tips for other educators willing to use authentic radio clips to teach listening skills within L1 learning contexts.*

Keywords: *Teaching and Learning, language learning context, Listening skills, radio, multimodality, teacher feedback*

1. Introduction: A literature review

Within the language learning classroom, teachers are encouraged to focus continuously on the four language skills. Reading and writing, together with speaking are frequently tackled and assessed. Moreover, of the four language skills, listening is the least understood [4] and least developed [5]. Research on listening in general language (L1) is very limited [5] and this is a reflection of the long years tradition of treating listening as the Cinderella skill in language learning contexts [6].

The seemingly few who have ventured to contribute to the field, have identified different techniques of teaching listening. Rost and Wison present five predominant active-listening techniques frequently adopted and adapted by language teachers within language learning contexts [7]:

Theoretical framework	Focus
Affective frame	Focus on enhancing the listener's personal motivation and involvement
Top-Down Frame	Focus on deepening the understanding of ideas and making stronger interpretations
Bottom-Up Frame	Focus on perceiving sounds, recognising words and syntactic structures more accurately.
Interactive Frame	Focus on building cooperation, collaboration and interdependence during the listening process
Autonomous Frame	Focus on developing effective listening and learning strategies.

Table 1: Theoretical Frameworks towards active-listening teaching and learning.

Furthermore, as Conti and Smith point out, 'teachers sometimes report how difficult it can be to find the audio sources they would like to use which, added to their overloaded timetables, often means they fall back on the course book' [8], and therefore justify the reason why listening activities are left to the side.



2. Research question

In January 2021 as part of my work as a Senior Lecturer within the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta, I was asked to organize a number of CPD sessions for a group of teachers of Maltese in a state middle school in Malta (i.e. a school with 11 to 13-year-old students). Back then, I had already started producing and presenting the educational programme *Nghidu Kelma* aired every Sunday on Calypso Radio 101.8 [3]. One of the sessions during the interactive CPD focused on the teaching of the four skills. Instantly, during this particular CPD session, the teachers sitting in the room vented their frustration about the lack of resources they find when intending to teaching listening. At this point, they asked whether I could somehow help them dare to challenge their limited experience in teaching listening skills, through radio clips aired during the programme I produce.

Reacting proactively to the situation mentioned in the previous section, seeing that this request was coming from the teachers themselves, I embarked on this research venture based on ethnographic principles which lasted one whole school term.

The teachers themselves choose the main research question, based on their needs and wishes:

Can authentic radio clips serve as adequate pedagogical tools for the teaching of listening within the L1 language classroom?

3. Methodology

To answer the research question, a two-step methodology data collection design was adopted.

The first part of the empirical research venture included a socio-semiotic interpretation of 150 6-minute radio clips broadcasted during the *Nghidu Kelma* radio programme. Each clip was interpreted through the original Multimodal Mirror Framework [2]. The clips were chosen adopting a stratified sampling technique [9] focusing particularly on genre, content and quality. After this interpretation, 50 audio clips were shortlisted and disseminated on a pen drive to all the teachers. A transcript of each clip was also included with each clip.

Once these clips were at the teachers' disposal, each teacher was asked to select and identify clips that they would use throughout the term, in order to design listening related activities with the different classes they were teaching. The six teachers later used the clips in the classroom and shared an evaluation about the pros and cons of the use of each radio clip as a pedagogic tool during the listening lesson.

4. Discussion of results and analysis of findings

The research venture suggests two main sets of results.

Firstly, the results show that the six teachers were all very willing to teach listening. Below is the number of clips each teacher used:

Teacher number	Audio clips used throughout the term
1	20 out of 50 audio clips
2	23 out of 50 audio clips
3	13 out of 50 audio clips
4	19 out of 50 audio clips
5	15 out of 50 audio clips
6	10 out of 50 audio clips

Table 2: Number of audio clips each teacher used to teach listening skills throughout the term.

Therefore, as seen through the numbers presented in Table 2 above, in Teacher 1's words:

This experience taught me that never considering radio material available was my weakness. I used to think about audio-visual clips particularly from YouTube or online. However, audio productions from Maltese local radio were rarely a resource I thought about. (Teacher 3 – field notes page 17)

With this, similar to the findings of Calvo et al [10], five out of six teachers also indicated that they also require technical support to edit these clips before they can use them during the lesson.

I never knew how to use free online-available software such as Audacity for editing, Once you start, it comes easy. (Teacher 6 – field notes page 2)

Based on their feedback, the teachers confirm Conti and Smith's findings [8] and argued that while they saw potential, time constraints did not allow them to do more. By time, they meant both time they



require to prepare alone before the lesson, as well as, the time they have with their class, in a context where they have to balance the four skills.

However, the findings indicate that four out of six needed more awareness about where adequate audio clips could originate. Another type of awareness each of the six teachers mentioned was also awareness about the skills and techniques they require to design active listening lessons [7]. In Teacher 4's words:

At University, we learnt about how to teach writing, reading and how to prepare students for the Oral Exam (i.e. speaking). However, as far as I remember, listening was given minimal time and I do not remember having lectures about the topic. (Teacher 4 – field notes page 8)

Teacher 5 elaborated further about this:

This being our native language (L1) makes it even more difficult to know how to teach it because as a teacher one asks: How did I learn how to listen? And how would I teach it to my students in class? Definitely not an easy task. (Teacher 5 – field notes page 11)

Conclusion

As the main conclusion, derived from the outcomes of this research venture based on ethnographic principles, the six teachers formulated a ten-step checklist with practical tips for other educators willing to use authentic radio clips to teach listening skills within L1 learning contexts.

- When evaluating a radio audio clip, before jumping to conclusions ask whether you should use the clip or not. Feel free to opt for better or more adequate clips. The choice is so vast, that rushing to conclusions might result in not using the most adequate audio radio clip.
- Distinguish between authentic radio clips and audio clips recorded and designed for the classroom. The former are authentic while the latter frequently lack the authentic quality (such as rhythm, intonation, speed etc) of texts we listen in real situations daily.
- What should determine whether to use a clip or not is its link to the lesson aim. Never use an audio radio clip simply because students will like it. Start by asking: Which lesson aim (and learning outcome) will this radio clip help me to teach? If there is a clear lesson aim which it covers, then use the clip.
- When choosing the radio clip always keep in mind the target audience (i.e. age, gender, tastes: likes and dislikes of students, linguistic competence, learning styles and mixed abilities) and adapt it accordingly. What works in one class, does not necessarily work in another class in the same school.
- Evaluate the technical quality of the radio clip.
- Evaluate at which point of the lesson you will use the particular radio clip. Ask whether the clip is adequate for the introduction, as a reinforcement tool or for a concluding activity.
- Always remember to use the radio clip as a tool to create a learning context based on communicative language learning i.e. putting language in a familiar authentic context.
- The radio clip should also be used to adopt task-based learning techniques, thus putting students at the centre of the lesson where the teacher is a facilitator of pre-, during and post-listening activities.
- Choose when to leave the audio clip as just an audio clip or when to use it together with other modes (such as images, clothes, body language, etc). All this depends on the lesson aim and the lesson objective and the learning outcome.
- Remember variety is the spice of life.
 - a) Keep in mind that repeating the audio clip does not always work. Students frequently switch off once audio clips are repeated.
 - b) Avoid using long audio clips. Short clips help students maintain their attention span.
 - c) Furthermore, there are so many genres of radio audio clips at hand (i.e. including songs, interviews, phone-ins, competitions, news etc) that repetition is easily avoided.

In an environment frequently lacking research related to the teaching and learning of L1 listening skills [5] these ten tips presented as the main conclusion of this paper should serve as music to the ear.

Hopefully, through this initiative, more educators listen to these suggestions and initiate other similar gradual processes which lead towards more resourceful LI teaching and learning contexts where listening skills find fertile soil.



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