

**TILTM 2022**

**Topical Issues of Linguistics and Teaching Methods in Business and Professional Communication**

**TEACHING PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION THROUGH  
PODCASTS, TV SERIES AND LITERATURE: STRATEGIES AND  
PERSPECTIVES**

Noemi Albanese (a)\*

\*Corresponding author

(a) University of Rome "Tor Vergata", Via Columbia 1, Rome, Italy, noemi.albanese@uniroma2.it

**Abstract**

Learning foreign languages and professional communication at intermediate to advanced levels present some peculiar aspects and difficulties. They are mostly related to the fact that there is an initial stumbling block due to a certain prejudice on the part of the learners themselves, who perceive the professional communication language as something foreign, 'other' and extremely complex compared to the language they have learned up to that point. This leads them, as naturally as unconsciously, to raise an additional emotional filter that further complicates the learning process and the acquisition of new terms and phrases. For this reason, students often learn by heart, and with no connection (or with a very limited connection) with the real context of use and application the vocabulary and expressions related to professional communication field. This purely mnemonic approach in learning a foreign language has long been shown to be inadequate, and although it is generally considered outdated, it tends to persist when dealing with specialised languages. In order to overcome this, teachers today have three instruments at their disposal that seem particularly relevant to us: literary texts, TV series and podcasts. The aim of this article is to investigate how to deal with them so to reach the best educational outcome.

2672-815X © 2022 Published by European Publisher.

*Keywords:* Foreign language learning, literature, podcasts, professional communication, tv series

## **1. Introduction**

Among the greatest challenges scholars face when teaching specialised languages in foreign language classes (intermediate to advanced levels) is undoubtedly a first stumbling block due to a certain apprehension and prejudice on the part of the learners themselves, who perceive professional languages as something foreign, ‘other’ and extremely complex compared to the language they have learned up to that point. This leads them, as naturally as unconsciously, to raise an additional emotional filter that further complicates the learning process and the acquisition of new terms and expressions (Orlova & Konkova, 2021). For this reason, the material related to these new fields is learnt by students by heart and in the form of lists, with no connection (or with a very limited connection) with its real context of use and application.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The purely mnemonic approach to a foreign language has long been shown to be inadequate, and although it is generally considered outdated, it unfortunately tends to persist when dealing with specialised languages. In order to overcome this trend, to break down the emotional filter and to achieve better and lasting learning results, teachers today have at their disposal, thanks to new media, devices and platforms (Petrosyan & Grishechko, 2021). Three of them seem particularly relevant to us and fruitful to be applied to the learning process of foreign languages in an integrated way: podcasts, TV series, and the literary text (which use has to be reconsidered on the basis of the new pedagogical theories).

## **3. Research questions**

- i. What advantages can literary texts, TV series and podcasts bring in foreign language acquisition?
- ii. By what method can these tools be integrated in classroom activities?

## **4. Purpose of the study**

The aim of this article is to investigate how to deal with literary texts, TV series and podcasts so as to reach the best educational outcome.

## **5. Research methods**

The study used methods of analysis of theoretical sources, observation, empirical analysis in the course of practical exercises.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. The use of podcasts, TV series and literature in foreign language classes: peculiarities of the different tools. Podcasts

Starting from the early 2000s, podcasts gained an increasing success among the wider audience, used daily mainly outside the teaching context. For this reason, learners do not perceive them as extraneous tools, but as something familiar, even if their use in the teaching context is different from the everyday one.

There are nowadays thousands of podcasts in every language dedicated to a wide variety of topics and mostly accessible free of charge. Since the main objective of this tool is to offer insights on different subjects to native speakers, the vocabulary used is often specialised but accessible. The duration as well is suitable for didactic use, being not excessive, ranging on average from 5/7 minutes (indicated by different studies as the most adequate length in order to successfully use podcasts during classes; Borshcheva, 2019; Sysoev, 2014) to a maximum of 20. These materials are specifically created with the intention of keeping the listener's interest high, proposing content that is easy to manage, assimilate and follow even in the case of less attentive listening. This leads us to consider these tools didactically adequate already starting from level B1+; for lower levels, the teacher will have to provide more additional and introductory material, concerning lexical specificities as well as morphological, grammatical, and syntactic ones. The variegated offer of podcasts, also produced by authorities in their field from the international scene, also allows a further level of analysis, the culturological one, which is essential for intermediate to advanced learners (Chong, 2020). In this way, podcasts compensate for an important deficiency that trainees must face when confronted with learning specialised languages: the lack of oral materials, which often increase the perception of the extraneousness of these topics, confined by traditional handbooks and education to written communication (Hřebačková, 2019). Thus, “podcasts can greatly help develop learners’ language skills, especially in developing learners’ speaking and listening skills”, influencing their outcome as well for what is concerning listening comprehension, pronunciation, phonetics, and vocabulary (Masudul Hasan & Bee Hoon, 2013, pp. 128-129).

It is important to underline that podcasts can be included in the learning process not only as a supplementary material for training comprehension skills, but they can motivate learners also outside the classroom (Elekaei et al., 2020), giving them the opportunity to learn at their own time and on the basis of their real level. This characteristic of the tool itself also increase flexibility and allows for multitasking (Abdous et al., 2012). Moreover, students can be involved also in the production of their own podcasts, reducing in this way the emotional filter, creating “a sense of belonging to a learning community” (Masudul Hasan & Bee Hoon, 2013, p. 131) and promoting collaborative learning activities.

In order to achieve the best educational outcome, it is crucial to carefully choose<sup>2</sup> the podcasts the students will listen to autonomously or in classes, the additional material to be used, as well as exercises and tests (Pogulyaev, 2017) and, in case the learners themselves will be asked to produce them, to define very clearly the different steps, the minimum vocabulary and expressions to be used, so to avoid any further confusion that could impact negatively on the results of the activity.

## **6.2. TV series**

Involving in the learning process selected passages or episodes from TV series moves in direction similar to the podcast's one, being able to enthrall and motivate students, albeit it is characterised by some specificities. First of all, it is important to define if the selected parts will be seen together in classes or if they will be just introduced there, presented and, in a following lesson, discussed and elaborated, keeping the watching of the material as homework. Considering the average number of hours a course of foreign language at university consists of, this second option is often the most suitable one. Moreover, watching the content at home not only saves some precious time in classroom that can be used for discussion, but also allows learners to see the content at their own pace, re-watching it or parts of it as many times as they need. In this way, they will join the discussion on the seen content in a more confident way, having also trained their own comprehension skills, listening repeatedly to native speakers' speech at a natural pace and benefitting the most from the filmic and gestural element as a valid help to understand the plot. As a supporting tool, it is important to keep in mind the possibility to use subtitles, in the learners' native language at intermediate levels and in the foreign language learned at advanced ones.

Given that every TV series has often numerous subplots, where it is possible to meet specialised language as well as themes and contents from the everyday communication, a deeper selection work by the teacher has to be done, in order to highlight the new content to be elaborated and to rationalize it, insisting also on the social and culturological value and context (Fedorova, 2016; Lugovyh, 2015). Due to the high level of engagement usually produced by TV series, a lot of useful "post-watching" activities can be developed, starting from a more basic discussion about the plot itself, to a more advanced creation of alternative endings or subplots, to the expression of the learners' point of view, training in this way all the four basic skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking).

## **6.3. Literary text**

For what is concerning the use of literature in foreign language classes and, in particular, with reference to specialised language, it is important first of all to re-think the role of literature in this context. In fact, traditionally the literary text has been used only in the frame of the grammar-translation method, which is considered now outdated because it gives no space to any creative output and to develop all the basic skills needed for a successful learning of a foreign language (Di Martino & Di Sabato, 2014).

It is therefore crucial to set aside the focus on translation and grammar only, in order to integrate the text in a wider context of use and to engage the learner as much as possible in the learning process. In order to achieve this result, it can be made a fruitful use not only of the classics (often perceived as distant from the students' interests and where can be found samples of outdated language, even if this assumption is not always true and depends also on the learners' culture; see Can & Tezcan, 2015), but of the so-called middle literature, with specific reference, for instance, to the numerous publications where is present a legal, business or medical background. As per TV series, also written fictional texts may include different subplot, so, once again, the role of the teacher in selecting the inherent material and to provide additional activities is fundamental. Compared to the other two modalities here analysed, the literary text is typologically and structurally more traditional, but, exactly for this reason, it allows a less impactful work

on the text for the learner. Moreover, reading lends itself to different timing and modalities than listening, so it is also well suited to learners with medium-level knowledge and skills.

With reference to the literary texts, it is also important to try to overcome the usual search for language authenticity, considering that authenticity mostly depends on the combination of the readers' feedback and the discourse created, rather using 100% authentic texts (Di Sabato & Hughes, 2019, p. 292):

It has therefore finally been acknowledged that in the field of language pedagogy most materials, techniques and activities will work, provided they are consistent with the set goals of the learning experience. Within this general framework, which could be defined as a humanized learner centred inductive approach to language education, pragmatic effectiveness in communication plays a pivotal role (Di Martino & Di Sabato, 2014, p. 1).

As Maley (1989), Duff and Maley (1991) correctly highlight, to define a successful approach and long-lasting outcomes, it is crucial to focus on literature not *per se*, but as a resource, an instrument in the process of learning and reflecting on the language itself, also developing the creative skills and encouraging both an autonomous use of the new material and a meta-textual reflection on society and culture (Belskaya, 2020; Makarenko, 2018).

## **7. The use of podcasts, TV series and literature in foreign language classes: an integrated approach**

In order to engage as much as possible the learner and to use also new media to gain their attention, the suggested tools, whose peculiarities have been analysed in paragraph 2, should be, in our opinion, used in a combined and integrated way. A relevant framework to develop this approach is offered by the theories by S.D. Krashen (including the one related to emotional filter we referred to at the very beginning of the article) and L. Vygotsky. Although they have been nowadays partially overcome, choosing the material to be shared in order to present professional communication to intermediate to advanced learners, the theories of the  $i + 1$  and of the "Zone of Proximal Development" must be taken into account, in order to define the mediated learning process, also in consideration of the fact that "the zone of proximal development is [...] a subject's organismic limit in terms of problem-solving, after the misleadingness of the problem situation has been minimized by the mentor's intervention" (Pascual-Leone & Irwin, 2011, p. 60). Keeping in mind these approaches may orient the teacher in creating the material supporting the original podcasts/TV series/literary texts and also in finding the most successful way to integrating them, which strongly depends on the exact audience and on its interest. In fact, although the used media are different, they can never be offered directly, without any introduction or intermediation. A preliminary phase (whose length depends on the level and skills of the learners) should focus on the precise context of what is to be listened, seen, or read to. Simultaneously, as mentioned above, should be avoided an exclusively lexical approach, working instead on the practical use of terms and expressions in context. After this, the listening, watching, or reading can happen either collectively,

during classes, or individually, at home. Crucial will be the subsequent discussion, that should hopefully develop using collaborative learning methods, rather than of the teacher-mediated one, proposing a first moment of peer discussion and hypotheses formulation, subsequently integrated by the teacher providing deeper insights and explanations.

Proceeding in an integrated way, aiming at developing as much as possible all the four basic skills, would mean, therefore, to organize a learning unit focusing, for instance, on a fragment including business communication from a TV series, presented by preparatory material and expanded, in a second phase, by a podcast and/or a short story on the same topic, intending to facilitate the memorization and the correct use, in different contexts, of the same vocabulary, expressions and idiom.

## 8. Conclusion

The suggested framework thus defines a process of knowledge acquisition that goes from the known (the structure of a literary text, of a TV series or of a podcast) to the unknown (the specialised languages addressed), facilitating learners' engagement already from an intermediate stage and making the acquisition process the most 'natural' and unnoticed as possible. Moreover, the possibility to get in touch or acquainted with the given material at home, repeating it as much as needed and as the students' own pace, helps greatly in reinforcing their self-confidence, reducing the emotional filter at minimum, and facilitating the interaction among peers. In this way, the crucial shift in modern foreign language learning from purely grammar-translation methods to more practical ones, where language is used in context and collaborative learning has a central role, allows the specialised languages to become once again a living matter, not just an accumulation of lists and word detached from any practical use.

## References

- Abdous, M., Facer, B. R., & Yen, C. J. (2012). Academic effectiveness of podcasting: A comparative study of integrated versus supplemental use of podcasting in second language classes. *Computers & Education*, 58(1), 43–52. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2011.08.021>
- Belskaya, M. (2020). Ispol'zovanie tekstov hudozhestvennoj literatury na zanjatijah po russkomu jazyku kak inostrannomu [Using Fiction Texts in Lessons of Russian as a Foreign Language]. *Scientific notes of Orel State University*, 2(87), 142–143. <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/ispolzovanie-tekstov-hudozhestvennoj-literatury-na-zanyatijah-po-russkomu-yazyku-kak-inostrannomu>
- Borshcheva, O. (2019). Principy otbora podkastov dlja obuchenija inostrannomu jazyku [Principles of selection of podcasts in teaching a foreign language]. *Pedagogy and Psychology of Education*, 3, 2019, 62–70. <https://doi.org/10.31862/2500-297x-2019-3-62-70>
- Can, R. N., & Tezcan, E. (2015). Teaching English as a Foreign Language through Literature. *İstanbul Aydın Üniversitesi International Journal of Media Culture and Literature*, 7(2), 189–200. [https://doi.org/10.17932/iau.ijmcl.2015.014/ijmcl\\_v07i2006](https://doi.org/10.17932/iau.ijmcl.2015.014/ijmcl_v07i2006)
- Chong, C. S. (2020). Successful international communication. *Training, Language and Culture*, 4(1), 55–65. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2521-442X-2020-4-1-55-65>
- Di Martino, E., & Di Sabato, B. (2014). *Studying Language Through Literature: An Old Perspective Revisited and Something More*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Di Sabato, B., & Hughes, B. (2019). La lingua del diritto e il testo letterario: un esperimento glottodidattico [The language of law and the literary text: a language didactic experiment]. *Testi e Linguaggi*, 13, 288–304. <https://doi.org/10.14273/unisa-2349>
- Duff, A., & Maley, A. (1991). *Literature*. Oxford University Press.

- Elekaei, A., Tabrizi, H. H., & Chalak, A. (2020). Evaluating Learners' Vocabulary Gain and Retention in an e-learning Context using Vocabulary Podcasting Tasks: a Case Study. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education-TOJDE*, 2(21), 190–203. <https://doi.org/10.17718/tojde.728162>
- Fedorova, D. (2016). Autentichnyj serial kak sredstvo sovershenstvovaniya rechevyh umenij studentov na starshej stupeni ovladenija inostrannym jazykom [Authentic Series as a Tool of perfecting Language Skills of Advanced EFL Students]. *Innovacii v nauke*, 5(54), 59–65. <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/tehnologiya-formirovaniya-kommunikativnyh-gotovnostey-i-rechevyh-navykov-u-studentov-urovnya-b2-c-pomoschyu-serialov-na-angliyskom>
- Hřebačková, M. (2019). Teaching intercultural communicative competence through virtual exchange. *Training, Language and Culture*, 3(4), 8-17. <https://doi.org/10.29366/2019tlc.3.4.1>
- Lugovyh, A. (2015). Teleserial kak instrument obuchenija inostrannomu jazyku (iz opyta raboty) [TV series as a Tool for teaching a Foreign Language (from Teaching Practice Experience)]. *Magister Dixit*, 1(17), 57–63.
- Makarenko, A. V. (2018). Ispol'zovanie sovremennoj hudozhestvennoj literatury na urokah inostrannogo jazyka [Usage of contemporary literature in foreign languages in class]. *Interactive Science*, 11(33), 36–38. <https://doi.org/10.21661/r-473844>
- Maley, A. (1989). Down from the pedestal: Literature as resource. In R. Carter, R. Walker & C. Brumfit (eds.), *Literature and the learner: methodological approaches* (pp. 1–9). Modern English Publications and the British Counsel.
- Masudul Hasan, M., & Bee Hoon, T. (2013). Podcast Applications in Language Learning: A Review of Recent Studies. *English Language Teaching*, 6(2), 128–135. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v6n2p128>
- Orlova, S. N., & Konkova, A. A. (2021). Emotive means of language as a way of influence in Italian and English publicistic discourse. *Issues of Applied Linguistics*, 41, 122-147. <https://www.elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=45575334>
- Pascual-Leone, J., & Irwin, R.R. (2011). Abstraction, the Will, the Self, and Modes of Learning in Adulthood. In C.M. Smith & T. Pourchot (Eds.), *Adult Learning and Development. Perspectives from Educational Psychology* (pp. 45–66). Routledge.
- Petrosyan, G. O., & Grischechko, E. G. (2021). The possibility of using digital educational platforms in teaching English: theoretical aspect. *Issues of Applied Linguistics*, 43, 88-115. <https://doi.org/10.25076/vpl.43.04>
- Pogulyaev, F. (2017). Metodicheskie funkicii video-podkastov v obuchenii inostrannomu jazyku [Methodical functions of video-podcasts in Foreign Language Teaching]. *Tambov University Review. Series: Humanities*, 22(3(167)), 63–71. [https://doi.org/10.20310/1810-0201-2017-22-3\(167\)-63-71](https://doi.org/10.20310/1810-0201-2017-22-3(167)-63-71)
- Sysoev, P. (2014). Podkasty v obuchenii inostrannomu jazyku [Podcasts in teaching a Foreign Language]. *Jazyk i kul'tura*, 2(26), 189–201.