

Which Are More Effective in English Conversation Classrooms: Textbooks or Podcasts?

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In a comprehensive longitudinal study, the English communicative abilities of 102 Japanese university freshmen were analyzed in detail during one semester. Two teachers each taught two courses; in one course a textbook was used, and in the other course podcasts were used. There were several controlled variables, including starting language abilities and student majors. A series of communicative language tests were given at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. Importantly, the experimental method used here partially mirrored an influential study published by Gilmore (2011), which found that utilizing “authentic materials”—which were mostly Web-based—seemed to be more effective than utilizing textbooks. Thus, the goal of the present study was to confirm Gilmore’s findings by determining which pedagogical materials were more effective in improving students’ oral abilities: textbooks or podcasts.

It was found that students progressed in similar ways, regardless of the pedagogical materials used. For example, students in all four classes improved their scores on listening tests by an average of about 10%, this improvement being statistically significant ($p < .05$). And, on average, students in none of the classes noticeably improved their vocabulary-grammar scores much. On audio recordings of students having conversations in English, there were remarkable improvements during the semester in all classes with respect to both fluency (number of words uttered during 3 minutes) and the correct pronunciation of /l/. But none of the classes, when taken as a whole, seemed to improve other spoken grammatical trouble spots, such as use of grammatical articles or prepositions. The results seriously question Gilmore’s contention that Web-based materials are better than textbooks.

BACKGROUND

In the 21st century, it is clear that more and more English pedagogical materials have moved from being textbook-based to being based on the Internet. Such Web-based materials are often said to be “authentic,” this word referring to materials which have been created for native speakers and are taught to second language students unaltered (Rafalovich, 2014). But authentic materials also can be defined more broadly as “a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort” (Morrow, 1977, p. 13). This latter definition includes language between non-native speakers, and it excludes text created specifically to teach certain lexicogrammatical items. Thus, well-written dialogs, focusing on culture or news rather than language, can be called authentic. In any case, a great deal of research has found that authentic materials are motivating (e.g., Day, 2004; Peacock, 1997).

Whatever materials are used, the ultimate goal in most English classes is to improve students' "communicative competence." This is often delineated as including linguistic competence, pragmalinguistic competence, sociopragmatic competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence. Various tests can be used to measure the different types of competencies. (See Gilmore (2011) for a review of the literature.)

English language teaching (ELT) textbooks, it has been argued, often give learners an impoverished or distorted view of the native language (Gilmore, 2007). The dialogs in the books usually center around contrived utterances, with the goal often being to illustrate particular grammar points while utilizing only frequent, easily-understood vocabulary. Meanwhile, a lot of research shows that even native speakers (including most textbook writers) are unreliable when it comes to recognizing frequencies of natural linguistic patterns (e.g., Biber, Conrad, & Reppen, 1994; Labov, 1966).

In a prominent study concerning the value of ELT textbooks, Gilmore (2011) found that 31 second-year university students in Japan who used "authentic materials" significantly improved certain dimensions of their communicative competence over 10 months better than 31 students who used only textbooks. The authentic materials utilized in two classes mostly involved Web-based sources, films, songs, newspaper articles, and novels. In the two textbook classes, students worked methodically first through *Inside English* (Maggs, Kay, Jones, & Kerr, 2004), and then through *Face to Face* (Fuller & Fuller, 1999). These textbooks were chosen, wrote the researcher, because they seemed to contain a lot of "contrived" utterances, with the goal being to teach linguistic phenomena. Also, the textbook CDs often had "slowed speech," in contrast to the authentic materials. During the academic year, all of Gilmore's students received approximately nine hours of English classroom instruction per week at the college, with three of those hours involving either the experimental group or the control group. At the beginning of the year, all of the students had TOEFL scores between 493 and 567 ($M = 514$; this median is equivalent to a TOEIC score of about 605). Students were given three sets (pre-course, mid-course, post-course) of eight tests each.

Specifically, it was found that students using the authentic materials significantly outperformed the students using the textbooks on eight measures of communicative competence: 1) Listening, 2) Receptive pronunciation, 3) Receptive vocabulary, 4) Body language in an oral interview, 5) Fluency in an oral interview, 6) Interactional competence in an oral interview, 7) Conversational behavior in student role plays, and 8) Conversational management in student role plays. Students did not significantly improve on five other measures: a C-test (a type of cloze test in which the second half of every second word is deleted), a grammar test, a discourse completion task, and the pronunciation and vocabulary subcomponents of an oral interview.

Significantly, in the opinion of the present researchers, Gilmore's study had a couple of crucial weak points. First, the textbooks used in his classes seemed to be too boring. What progress can be expected in a course when even the teacher recognizes that the textbooks are full of "contrived" utterances? Second, the students in Gilmore's study had no chance to practice before their first oral tests. Of course, progress can be expected when students are suddenly exposed to an oral testing format which they have probably never experienced before, and then they later get used to it.

The purpose of the present study is to determine if podcasts are more effective than textbooks in improving students' English communicative abilities. English language podcasts are audio (usually) or visual "programs" which are distributed over the Internet, usually for free. So, students can study them any time and place they wish, using computers or portable devices such as cell phones. Podcasts are partially

“authentic materials” in that some involve natural language. Also, they are motivating because they are interesting and educational—often based upon news or culture topics—and usually come out weekly or even more often, so students can look forward to the next program. But, importantly, there is also a lot of scripted language and “slowed speech” in podcasts, so they are not totally authentic.

Assuming that podcasts are relatively “authentic materials,” this study also set out to verify Gilmore’s finding that such materials are superior to textbooks.

METHOD

Two of the authors—Lauer and Selwood—each taught a podcast-centered English conversation course and a textbook-centered English conversation course during the first semester of 2015 (see Table 1). All of the freshmen were assigned to the classes based on their entrance exam scores. Pedagogical materials used were balanced with starting English abilities in the following way. Lauer’s textbook class was the group with the second highest entrance exam scores out of six groups in Hiroshima University’s Faculty of Education, and thus it was assumed to be relatively strong. His podcast class was ranked eleventh out of 14 groups in that faculty, and thus it was thought to be quite weak. Selwood’s textbook class was the group with the fourth highest entrance exam scores out of six groups in Hiroshima University’s Faculty of Science, and thus it was postulated to be relatively weak. His podcast class entrance exam scores were ranked the highest among seven groups in that faculty.

TABLE 1. The Classes

Teacher’s Name	Main Materials Used	Number of Students	Students’ Major	Starting English Ability
Lauer	Textbook	20	Education	Higher Level
	Podcasts	26	Education	Lower Level
Selwood	Textbook	22	Science	Lower Level
	Podcasts	34	Science	Higher Level

TOEIC tests taken university-wide in May, one month into the courses, confirmed the students’ abilities. Lauer’s textbook class had an average score of 540.6 ($SD = 87.5$), and his podcast class had an average score of 419 ($SD = 75.1$). Conversely, Selwood’s textbook class had an average score of 467.5 ($SD = 85.5$), and his podcast class had an average score of 629.7 ($SD = 80.9$).

As for specific materials used, Lauer’s textbook class was based upon *Slumdog Millionaire* (Close, 2010). Even though this is a “graded reader” (Scholastic Readers, Level 4: most-frequent 2,000 words), Lauer has used it in conversation classes for several years because he finds that the students like it—it is a simplified version of the “Best Picture” Academy Award-winning movie a few years ago—and because there are narrative CDs which accompany the text. Thus, the students for homework listened and read, and also often had to do speaking activities, such as speaking with a friend for 20 minutes and reporting the activity to the teacher; Lauer’s textbook class had no podcast homework. In class, there were mostly speaking activities based on the textbook, including a lot of pair-work activities, vocabulary games, and small-group discussions. During each of his textbook and podcast courses, students received a total of about two hours of grammar practice (articles *a/the* and prepositions) and a total of about 40 min of *l/r* pronunciation practice.

Selwood's textbook class used *English Speak*, his self-published book which is totally digital and can be downloaded free onto students' smartphones. Using the digital book, students did a lot of pair work, talking about activities important in their daily lives. As homework, since the book has no audio materials, Selwood encouraged some podcast listening, but class-time centered upon the textbook. During each of Selwood's textbook and podcast courses, students received a total of about two hours in grammar practice, and a total of about 1.5 hours in pronunciation practice.

In Lauer's podcast class, in addition to the grammar and pronunciation practice mentioned above, students mostly practiced speaking English, frequently utilizing words associated with various podcasts. The podcasts used in classes involved equal amounts of *Hiroshima University's English Podcast*, *English Weekly News*, *the Daily English Show*, *ECC Eikaiwa Podcasting*, and *VOA Learning English Podcast*. One particular episode was assigned each week, and students also had to listen to any other episodes of their choosing and report on those latter episodes in a small group.

In Selwood's podcast class, besides the grammar practice and the first two podcasts mentioned above, students also studied *BBC The English We Speak Podcast*, *BBC 6 Minute Podcast*, *English News Monthly*, and *English News Students*. The first half of the course was structured with assigned podcasts, but the second half had more freedom for students in that they could choose to listen to whichever podcasts they wanted. Each week in class, students did a lot of small group activities, studying the vocabulary and the topics in the podcasts. Students in all classes in this project were encouraged to do about one hour of homework per week, and of course, the teachers tried to teach all the courses with equal enthusiasm.

According to Canale and Swain (1980), grammar, listening, and speaking are all key parts of communicative competence. So, in the current study, it was decided to administer three sets of three tests each, at the beginning, middle and end of the semester, and those three tests were:

1) A Communicative Vocabulary-Grammar Test — To measure students' vocabulary and grammar skills, we used the same multiple-choice test as Gilmore (2011) used, but slightly shortened to 49 questions. For both this test and the Communicative Listening Test below, between the pre-, mid-, and post-course tests, we had exactly parallel forms so that the tests would have the exact same difficulty; the same questions were presented in a different, random order, to give the impression that they were totally different tests. At the end of each administration, for both this test and the listening test, all test sheets were collected and no feedback was given, except for the scores. We believe the students thought they were different tests, and there were about seven weeks between the administrations, so we believe there was very little recall by students.

2) A Communicative Listening Test — To measure general listening ability, students took a 21-question test from Part 3 of a practice TOEIC manual (Educational Testing Service, 2007: pp. 84-87, Questions 50-70.)

3) A 3-Minute Recorded Speaking Test — To measure productive speaking ability, students, in pairs, were given a list of 25 words, and for three minutes the students had to ask each other questions and to provide answers while using the words. They could choose whichever words they wanted from the list. Their conversations were recorded digitally and simultaneously in large classrooms. In contrast to Gilmore's (2011) study, where students took some pre-course speaking tests in the very first meeting, in the present study students were given "practice time" so that they could get a bit used to the recording facility, the test format, and the words. Specifically, we gave "a practice speaking test" in the first class period, and then the actual "pre-course speaking test" (with different words) took place at the beginning of the second class

period. In addition, in the present experiment when given each list of words, students had three minutes to practice asking-answering questions. The three lists of words (pre-, mid- and post-course tests) were compiled from the JACET 8000 list of most frequent and most important words (*JACET 8000*, 2007). The pre-course list had an average JACET ranking of 1,103.52 ($SD = 97.08$). The words in the mid-course test had an average JACET ranking of 1,104.32 ($SD = 106.35$). And the words in the post-course test had an average JACET ranking of 1104.72 ($SD = 77.46$). Thus, the speaking tests seemed to be very similar in difficulty. See the Appendix for the lists of words.

The audio recordings were analyzed by two native English speakers (Lauer and Selwood). When they heard things differently, the recordings were re-analyzed until agreements were reached. Contractions were counted as two words. Whenever a student began an utterance but then backtracked to correct him/herself, those first words were ignored. Sentences uttered in Japanese were also ignored, but well-known individual words in context, such as “Shinkansen” when talking about the Bullet Train, and Japanese place names were counted as English words. When tabulating /l/ pronunciation mistakes, if a student said one word (such as *like*) more than once, it was counted only once and acceptability was determined according to the majority of utterances; if there were an even number of acceptable and unacceptable utterances of a particular word containing /l/, it was judged to be unacceptable.

When analyzing the audio recordings, we classified errors into nine types: Articles, Prepositions, Unacceptable /l/ Pronunciation, Word Order, Wrong Vocabulary, Verb Tense, Plural, Unneeded Word, and Missing Vocabulary. If a particular utterance might have been an error, but also might have been acceptable English, we gave the student the benefit of the doubt and classified it as acceptable. This study especially will look at the first three linguistic phenomena, because they are infamous stumbling blocks for native Japanese speakers, and because some time was spent teaching them during the courses.

RESULTS

On the listening tests, students in the textbook courses significantly improved their listening scores from 43% correct in the beginning of the course to 54% correct at the end of the course. Meanwhile, students in the podcast courses also greatly increased their listening scores from 39% correct to 51% correct (See Table 2). ANCOVA analyses show that these are statistically significant ($p < .05$). But improvements on the Grammar-Vocabulary Test, regardless of pedagogical materials used, were almost nil. (See Table 3).

TABLE 2. Listening Score Averages (out of 21 questions)

	Pre-course	Mid-course	Post-course
Textbooks (Classes Combined)	43% Correct Raw Scores: 8.96 ($SD = 2.17$) Selwood = 8.09 Lauer = 9.83	50% Correct Raw Scores: 10.50 ($SD = 3.19$) Selwood = 10.00 Lauer = 11.00	54% Correct Raw Scores: 11.42 ($SD = 2.71$) Selwood = 10.00 Lauer = 12.85
Podcasts (Classes Combined)	39% Correct Raw Scores: 8.29 ($SD = 2.86$) Selwood = 9.18 Lauer = 7.40	51% Correct Raw Scores: 10.62 ($SD = 3.73$) Selwood = 12.36 Lauer = 8.88	51% Correct Raw Scores: 10.70 ($SD = 3.38$) Selwood = 12.09 Lauer = 9.31

TABLE 3. Grammar-Vocabulary Score Averages (out of 49 questions)

	Pre-course	Mid-course	Post-course
Textbooks (Classes Combined)	69% Correct Raw Scores: 33.57 (SD = 3.83) Selwood = 32.81 Lauer = 34.33	73% Correct Raw Scores: 35.73 (SD = 3.57) Selwood = 34.86 Lauer = 36.60	72% Correct Raw Scores: 35.11 (SD = 3.34) Selwood = 34.77 Lauer = 35.45
Podcasts (Classes Combined)	69% Correct Raw Scores: 33.60 (SD = 3.51) Selwood = 37.21 Lauer = 30.00	74% Correct Raw Scores: 36.20 (SD = 2.89) Selwood = 39.35 Lauer = 33.04	70% Correct Raw Scores: 34.44 (SD = 3.01) Selwood = 36.97 Lauer = 31.92

Regarding fluency on the recordings (words spoken per three minutes), students in the textbook classes increased word totals by an average of about 15 words per three minutes, while students in the podcast classes increased their fluency by about seven words per three minutes (Table 4). These increases are remarkable, but not statistically significant. Meanwhile, the numbers of spoken errors per student basically stayed the same or increased slightly (Table 5).

TABLE 4. Fluency: Average Words Spoken per 3 Minutes / Student

	Pre-course	Mid-course	Post-course
Textbooks (Classes Combined)	50.66 (SD = 16.45) Selwood = 39.50 Lauer = 61.83	58.10 (SD = 17.64) Selwood = 55.20 Lauer = 61.00	65.88 (SD = 19.98) Selwood = 60.41 Lauer = 71.35
Podcasts (Classes Combined)	59.52 (SD = 27.80) Selwood = 64.04 Lauer = 55.00	66.88 (SD = 21.53) Selwood = 74.04 Lauer = 59.73	66.00 (SD = 22.02) Selwood = 66.09 Lauer = 65.91

TABLE 5. The Total Number of Spoken Errors: Average per 3 Minutes / Student

	Pre-course	Mid-course	Post-course
Textbooks (Classes Combined)	5.82 (SD = 3.20) Selwood = 5.00 Lauer = 6.64	5.02 (SD = 2.61) Selwood = 5.65 Lauer = 4.39	6.52 (SD = 3.31) Selwood = 6.64 Lauer = 6.40
Podcasts (Classes Combined)	7.50 (SD = 4.14) Selwood = 6.57 Lauer = 8.42	7.62 (SD = 4.23) Selwood = 6.68 Lauer = 8.74	8.74 (SD = 5.98) Selwood = 6.53 Lauer = 10.95

This study in particular looked at three types of linguistic errors: articles, prepositions, and /l/ pronunciation. Those findings are shown in Tables 6, 7, and 8.

TABLE 6. Article Errors: Average Number per 3 Minutes / Student

	Pre-course	Mid-course	Post-course
Textbooks (Classes Combined)	1.11 (<i>SD</i> = 1.16) Selwood = 1.50 Lauer = 0.72	0.96 (<i>SD</i> = 0.96) Selwood = 1.20 Lauer = 0.72	1.26 (<i>SD</i> = 1.15) Selwood = 1.27 Lauer = 1.25
Podcasts (Classes Combined)	1.38 (<i>SD</i> = 1.40) Selwood = 1.54 Lauer = 1.23	1.74 (<i>SD</i> = 1.66) Selwood = 2.14 Lauer = 1.35	1.25 (<i>SD</i> = 1.24) Selwood = 1.09 Lauer = 1.41

TABLE 7. Preposition Errors: Average Number per 3 Minutes / Student

	Pre-course	Mid-course	Post-course
Textbooks (Classes Combined)	0.74 (<i>SD</i> = 0.79) Selwood = 0.55 Lauer = 0.94	0.56 (<i>SD</i> = 0.82) Selwood = 0.55 Lauer = 0.56	0.78 (<i>SD</i> = 0.92) Selwood = 0.77 Lauer = 0.78
Podcasts (Classes Combined)	0.78 (<i>SD</i> = 0.78) Selwood = 0.68 Lauer = 0.88	0.96 (<i>SD</i> = 0.95) Selwood = 0.61 Lauer = 1.30	1.20 (<i>SD</i> = 1.33) Selwood = 0.68 Lauer = 1.73

TABLE 8. Unacceptable /l/ Pronunciation among All /l/s: Total Percentage per 3 Minutes

	Pre-course	Mid-course	Post-course
Textbooks (Classes Combined)	19.69% Selwood = 14.70% (10 out of 68) Lauer = 24.68% (19 out of 77)	3.48% Selwood = 5.81% (5 out of 86) Lauer = 1.14% (1 out of 88)	4.56% Selwood = 5.81% (5 out of 86) Lauer = 3.30% (3 out of 91)
Podcasts (Classes Combined)	28.57% Selwood = 8.70% (12 out of 138) Lauer = 48.42% (46 out of 95)	5.61% Selwood = 7.19% (11 out of 153) Lauer = 4.04% (4 out of 99)	7.14% Selwood = 9.82% (16 out of 163) Lauer = 4.46% (5 out of 112)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study found no significant differences for the effects of pedagogical materials. Textbooks worked equally as well as podcasts in improving students' communicative abilities over one semester. Also, as the number of words spoken increased, the number of errors spoken also increased.

The encouraging news was that students, using either textbooks or podcasts, significantly improved listening scores ($p < .05$), and remarkably improved their fluency in oral recordings and their use of /l/ during one semester. The fluency improvements (words uttered during three-minute tests) were to be expected, because students had numerous speaking opportunities in all classes, and speaking, like many skills, improves with practice. Concerning listening scores, our results contradict Gilmore's (2011) finding that students who

used natural-speed audio materials scored significantly better than students who used slow-speed CDs; in the present study, students who used podcasts, which sometimes involve slowed-speed, improved their listening scores just as well as students who used a textbook with CDs read at natural speed.

Concerning /l/ pronunciation improvements, our results confirm other findings that native Japanese students can indeed be successfully taught how to pronounce the phoneme (Bradlow et al., 1999). The amazing finding in the current study was that improvements were remarkable even though only a relatively brief amount of class time was focused on it. Another interesting fact was that, on the mid- and post-course speaking tests, only one student in the entire population had as many as 3 unacceptable /l/s on a particular recording. In other words, no student had terrible /l/ production; the occasional /l/ errors were scattered among about one-third of all the students.

The bad news was that no significant improvement, using either method, was noted with respect to other aspects of language, such as oral accuracy with grammatical articles and prepositions, or scores on the vocabulary-grammar test. This came despite the fact that some class time was devoted to these troublesome grammatical phenomena in all courses. But actually this echoes Gilmore's finding that authentic materials did not significantly help students' grammar abilities. One reason why student grammar-vocabulary scores did not significantly improve in any class might have been that the students' grammar abilities were already quite developed after six years of junior high and senior high English classes.

With respect to the three linguistic phenomena analyzed (Tables 6, 7, and 8), a couple of interesting facts can be noted. First, the number of grammatical article and preposition errors uttered by students is relatively small; during three minutes, each student had, on average, a little over one article error, and about one preposition error.

Second, one of the most interesting findings of the whole study was that students greatly improved their /l/ pronunciation. At the beginning of the course, over 20% of /l/s were deemed unacceptable, but by mid-course students were uttering about 95% of their /l/s correctly. Most of the unacceptable /l/s involved katakana words (foreign words which have become "Japanized" with Japanese pronunciations), such as *military* and *policy*.

To improve /l/ pronunciation, Lauer gave the students about 20 minutes of practice one week before both the mid-course and post-course tests. That practice consisted of /l/ modeling, pair work, and a game. Selwood gave some in-class practice utilizing online activities. Those exercises consisted of /l/ modeling, pair work, games and quizzes which students could access easily on their smartphones.

This research, involving non-English majors, had several key limitations, the most important being that it was carried out only four months, and classes met only once per week for 90 minutes. In contrast, in Gilmore's research, his English-major classes met twice per week for 10 months. Also, our students had only 90 minutes per week of formal instruction outside of the experiment at the college, while Gilmore's students had six hours of formal English instruction per week outside of the experiment. A longer period of study in our experiment might have detected greater progress.

Another key limitation is that podcasts are only partially "authentic materials." Sometimes podcasts do try to teach linguistic points, and sometimes podcasts have voice speeds slowed down so that students can better understand. Gilmore claims that his experimental group did not use scripted, contrived materials, so this difference between the studies may be a reason why Gilmore found students, using Web-based materials,

songs, novels and movies, improved significantly in certain ways.

In the future, researchers should investigate in greater detail about whether authentic materials or textbooks are more effective in English language education. Also, linguistic phenomena in data such as this should be analyzed with greater precision. For example, in what environments were the preposition and article errors occurring? Finally, it is not certain how much our three tests are related to communicative competency. Undoubtedly, more insights can be made in the near future.

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APPENDIX

The Speaking Test Vocabulary Items

(The actual tests had clear instructions and easy-to-read formatting, with lots of white space and larger fonts.)

Pre-course test — military, observe, element, function, structure, aim, hang, blow, feature, expert, complex, policy, prevent, admit, bill, journey, burn, edge, gain, audience, argue, branch, behavior, cell, represent.

Mid-course test — union, flow, pack, association, atmosphere, breath, detail, focus, region, tiny, nod, ignore, article, soldier, evidence, unless, recognize, invite, experiment, destroy, empty, physical, judge, publish, operation.

Post-course test — apply, neighbor, root, contract, replace, solution, fair, seek, relative, chemical, path, tax, benefit, collect, generation, fit, examine, hide, ordinary, spot, ancient, struggle, survive, escape, worth.

ABSTRACT

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It was found that students progressed in similar ways, regardless of the pedagogical materials used. For example, students in all four classes improved their scores on listening tests by an average of about 10%, this improvement being statistically significant ($p < .05$). And, on average, students in none of the classes noticeably improved their vocabulary-grammar scores much. On audio recordings of students having conversations in English, there were remarkable improvements during the semester in all classes with respect to both fluency (number of words uttered during 3 minutes) and the correct pronunciation of /l/. But none of the classes, when taken as a whole, seemed to improve other spoken grammatical trouble spots, such as use of grammatical articles or prepositions. The results seriously question Gilmore’s contention that Web-based materials are better than textbooks.

要 約

教科書とポッドキャスト： コミュニケーション教材としての効果の比較

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本稿では、日本の大学1年生102名の英語コミュニケーション能力を、1 Semesterにわたり詳細に分析する、総合的な縦断研究を行った。2名の教員が、それぞれ2クラスの授業において、一方は教科書、他方はポッドキャストを教材として用いた。各クラスにおいては英語力や専攻などの変数を統制した。Semesterの最初、中間、および最後に、コミュニケーション能力テストを実施した。特筆すべき点として、本稿で用いられている実験手法は、Gilmore (2011)の重要な研究を一部踏襲している。同研究では、ウェブを中心とする「オーセンティックな教材」を用いる方が教科書に比べて効果が高いとされた。それゆえ、本稿の目的は、Gilmoreの研究結果を確認し、教科書とポッドキャストを用いた教材のどちらが、学生の口頭能力の向上に効果が高いかを探ることにある。

本研究の結果、どちらの教材を用いても、学生は同様の向上を示した。例えば、リスニングテストでは全4クラスにおいて、平均約10%の、統計的に有意なスコアの上昇が見られた ($p < .05$)。また、語彙・文法のスコアは、概ねどのクラスも特に向上は見られなかった。録音によるスピーキングテストでは、全クラスで、流暢さ(3分間に発話された語数)、/l/の発音の正確さの点で有意な上昇が見られた。しかし、冠詞や前置詞といったその他の難易度の高い文法項目においては、どのクラスにおいても、概して向上は見られなかった。本研究の結果は、ウェブを教材に用いる方が教科書よりも良いとするGilmoreの主張に重大な疑問を呈するものである。