

State of the art on Authentic Materials and Listening Comprehension in Colombia

Romero Molina Paola Ximena¹

¹. *Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana –ÚNICA; Bogotá, Colombia*
correo electrónico: ximena.romero@unica.edu.co

Abstract

The present study shows the results of a literature review conducted to know about the state of the art of the use of authentic materials for listening comprehension in the Colombian context. The study set out to find the main trends concerning the use of such materials and opportunities to find areas for further research. The methodology used for the review was qualitative and the corpus gathered was analyzed by creating codes and categories about the emerging themes. The analysis revealed that teacher-researchers have found beneficial the use of authentic materials for listening comprehension. Also, this has been a recurrent topic studied by pre-service teachers for their undergraduate thesis projects with diverse audiences, especially during the last five years. In most of the studies considered the teacher-researchers have framed their work on listening comprehension within a pre-, while, and post-stage cycle. The methodology preferred in these studies has been action research. Given the benefits showed by the use of authentic materials for listening comprehension, it is worth finding ways to widespread this practice as pedagogical strategy among a wider audience of practitioners and not only for those in researching contexts.

Palabras clave:

Teacher pedagogy, action research, authentic materials, listening comprehension

1. Introduction

Este apartado debe contener problemática de investigación: incluida la pregunta de investigación; justificación; objetivo general de la investigación.

The increase of Internet use in recent times, especially, as a result of the pandemic, has caused people to spend more and more time in front of a screen. Watching movies or series on streaming platforms or on websites is one of the ways in which people spend their time. And this constitutes an excellent opportunity for those who are learning a new language, particularly, English. Materials that are not created for pedagogical use can be used for pedagogical purposes, yet they need to be used in a systematic way. Here it is precisely when teachers and teacher trainers become key actors to help learners obtain a greater benefit by bringing those resources to the language lessons. Thus, it was necessary to know whether teachers were using authentic materials in their classrooms and how they were using them. This study centered on listening comprehension as an initial step to this inquiry. The objective

was to discover the trends around the use of authentic materials and listening comprehension by collecting a corpus of research studies. The guiding question was: what trends are evidenced by analyzing a corpus of studies about the use of authentic materials for listening comprehension? The main theoretical constructs guiding that inquiry and the findings will be presented in the next section.

Theoretical references

1.1. Listening comprehension

To help learners develop their listening comprehension, two approaches have been traditionally used. The first one is the top-down or deductive approach in which learners are guided to work on their previous knowledge to activate background and understand the main ideas in aural input. Conversely, in bottom-up, the second approach, learners are guided to make sense of specific sounds, words, and smaller units to make sense and understand what they hear (Brown, 2006). Keeping a right balance between those approaches help learners become more successful listeners.

Similarly, to work on listening comprehension, following a cycle of activities have been recommended. Thus, experiencing with some activities before listening prepares learners to activate background and make connections that can facilitate understanding. The exercises proposed at this stage can be about the content of the text or some language preparation. The second stage, while listening, precisely refers to activities that will ask learners to pay attention to the input given (audio, or audio visual) to understand the message presented. The final stage, post-listening, is meant for learners to go beyond understanding the message by relating content to their own experiences, or continue analyzing and working on some linguistic aspect such as grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation. Learners need to develop good listening skills in their learning process, for which they should be exposed to audio or audio visual resources that offer a richer such as authentic materials. Here is where the second construct emerges.

1.2. Authentic Materials

These are resources created for non-pedagogical language teaching purposes, yet they can be used in a pedagogical way. Authentic materials offer a richer language and cultural input. They portray a real use of the language without the modifications or adaptations made for textbook materials. This benefits learners at the linguistic level by showing them how vocabulary and grammar are used in a natural way. For example, learners are exposed to slang, and idiomatic expressions. This also brings benefits at the pragmatic use of the language as learners can witness how people interact and relate to each other by using certain expressions according to the situation. Moreover, learners are exposed to aspects of pronunciation such as intonation rhythm and stress.

Bringing authentic materials into language classes has been encouraged by several authors. For example, Rogers and Medley (1988) suggested using this kind of resource and proposed to follow pre, while and post activities to frame its use. Gilmore (2011) wrote his doctorate dissertation on a study with Japanese learners. There he explored in depth the benefits of authentic materials for his students' communicative competence. Likewise, Zyzik and Polio (2017) discussed the advantages of using authentic materials while demystifying some beliefs about the topic. In consequence, knowing the benefits of this kind of resource for learning led to inquire what the state of the art regarding this subject was in Colombia, so it was decided to collect a corpus of studies to analyze.

2. Methodology

To approach the inquiry about the use of authentic materials for listening comprehension a corpus of studies on the topic was gathered. It was decided to do this search moving from a global to a local level. Thus, a sample of studies published in various countries of the world was selected (5) to have an sense of the state of the art at a global level (only this representative sample was selected because, in a previous study (Alfonso-Vargas & Romero-Molina (2019), a more detailed sample of international studies had been reviewed). As the inquiry was also about listening comprehension, another sample of representative studies was chosen (5) to perceive the state of the situation at a global level. The search then was narrowed to find papers on listening comprehension at the local level. In this case, eight reports were included. Finally, the search was focused on finding Colombian research reports that combined both using authentic materials and listening comprehension. The result of this search was eight articles. The analysis presented in the next section will be focused on 16 papers in particular as these are the ones that study authentic materials and listening comprehension in the Colombian context. It is worth mentioning that the search was not limited to articles published in journals, instead the reports reviewed included articles as well as undergraduate and master's thesis. The analysis was guided by the following question: what trends are evidenced by analyzing a corpus of studies about the use of authentic materials for listening comprehension in Colombia?

The corpus was analyzed by searching for common patterns among the reports. These were classified in charts based on the topic with which they dealt (e.g. authentic materials or listening comprehension, or the combination of both) and whether the topic had been studied at a global level or in Colombia. The main points of each report were synthesized in the classification charts. After that, common patterns were found by reading the synthesis again and color coding the emerging codes. The codes were then grouped into categories.

3. Analysis and results

The main trends evidenced by the papers analyzed will be accounted as follows. The first category corresponds to the teaching approach followed by the teacher-researchers and the kind of material preferred. Thus, the studies framed the activities for listening comprehension within a pre-, while and post-cycle. Some of them emphasized this choice by following a task-based cycle. The material preferred was videos followed by songs. This shows a clear awareness of teachers to work with listening comprehension in a systematic way that helps students understand by using bottom-up and top-down processes.

A second category of findings connects with the methodology employed by the teacher-researchers. Precisely, this dual role is evident here as they preferred a qualitative type of research with an action-research design. Hence, it was common to find the action-research cycle (planning, acting, observing, and reflecting) and a pedagogical intervention. The instruments frequently used for data collection were observation by keeping journals, interviews and questionnaires. Data were analyzed by triangulating the information from the instruments. This seems to be completely coherent as teachers perform both as instructors and researchers when implementing and describing pedagogical interventions in their classes.

A third category is related to the kind of audience with which it was implemented and the purpose of the research. Thus, the main audience for these studies was elementary and high school students, followed by students in language undergraduate programs. Besides helping students develop or upgrade listening comprehension, most of the research reports correspond to projects of undergraduate thesis, followed by masters' and then independent reports. For the period between 2015 and 2020, most of the reports were released in 2019. This suggests that there has been an increasing interest in working with authentic materials, especially among novice researchers. Even though earlier articles on projects about this type of materials for listening purposes can be found as off 2006, a new trend seems to have started in 2015. This finding appears logical when reflecting on the rise of Internet use and videos recently.

4. Conclusions

Reviewing and analyzing a corpus of research reports on authentic materials and listening comprehension in Colombia evidences some trends related to the need to help learners improve their aural skills. Teacher-researchers have found systematic ways to bring current material into their classes, and they have prepared structured interventions to enrich their students learning process, and their teaching-researching experiences. For example, by framing their activities within a pre-, while-and post cycle, teachers have provided opportunities for their learners to apply bottom-up and top-down processes that facilitate understanding. Similarly, as busy as teachers are, they have found ways to combine their roles of teachers with that of researchers.

After this review, some opportunities for further research seem to remain such as analyzing the kind of activities and tasks that are proposed at each stage of the listening comprehension cycle to discover which ones are the ones that maximize learning. Also, granted the effectiveness of using authentic materials to help develop better listening skills, it is still needed to inquire if teachers who are not in researching contexts, are familiar with how to plan lessons using such resources

5. Acknowledgment

I would like to extend my gratitude to my colleague, Jasmin Alfonso, with whom we have worked together in this endeavor of knowing more and more about authentic materials and how to promote its use among a more general audience. My gratitude also goes to my dear university, ÚNICA.

6. Reference's

- Alfonso-Vargas, J. & Romero-Molina, P.X. (2019). Authentic video materials, a tool for vocabulary learning and global citizenship skills reflection. *Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26817/paper.06>
- Brown, S. (2006). *Teaching listening*. New York, US: Cambridge University Press.
- Gilmore, A. (2011). "I prefer not text": Developing Japanese learners' communicative competence with authentic materials. *Language learning*, 61(3), 786-819. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2011.00634.x>
- Rogers, C. V., & Medley Jr, F. W. (1988). Language with a purpose: Using authentic materials in the foreign language classroom. *Foreign Language Annals*, 21(5), 467-478.
- Zyzik, E. C., & Polio, C. (2017). *Authentic materials myths: Applying second language research to classroom teaching*. University of Michigan Press.