FROM THE SPECIAL ISSUE EDITOR

Thanks to recent technology developments the future of listening in language learning is bright. In addition to dedicated CD-ROM and networked-based multimedia, online audio and video offer the potential to change the face of language teaching and learning significantly. The addition of web-based repositories such as YouTube and Google Video, as well as the increasing popularity of audio and video podcasts and video blogs, has provided a critical mass of resources that will almost certainly impact language teaching and learning practices in a major way. Online audio and video communication through Skype and similar VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) applications provide yet another motivation for building listening proficiency in conjunction with enhanced opportunities for oral interaction. Listening skills taught and acquired today will not only be valuable during the learning process, but will accompany students throughout their lives.

The future of listening and language learning may be bright, but despite the acknowledged importance of listening, the research base in this area is still relatively thin. What that means to language teachers and researchers is a lot of new spaces to explore, innovate in, and understand. So with the thought of that journey in mind, I am delighted to introduce you to this special issue of *Language Learning & Technology* on technology and listening comprehension. The issue includes three studies that add to the research base, along with two commentaries.

In the first article, "Post-comprehension breakdown use of help options in an ESL multimedia listening unit" Maja Grgurović & Volker Hegelheimer investigate differences in student use of subtitles or transcripts as text support for an academic lecture in an ESL course. The researchers provided students with the ability to use either help option and found that students overall interacted with the subtitles more frequently and for longer periods than with the transcripts. In terms of individual preferences, there was clearly a mix: of the eighteen students in the study, seven chose to use subtitles, three used transcripts, four used both, and four made limited use of either. Interestingly, all the students in the last category came from the group with lower proficiency. Their results support using subtitles for text support if only one option is provided, although they recommend providing both so that students have a choice. They further note that actively encouraging and training students in using help options is warranted.

The second article "Are They Watching? Test-Taker Viewing Behavior During an L2 Video Listening Test" by Elvis Wagner addresses a fundamental question in video-based listening assessment: do the test takers, in fact, actually look at the video so that they can take advantage of whatever additional information it affords over audio only? By taping individual students taking a six-part listening test consisting of three dialogues and three short lectures, Wagner determined that students oriented toward the video monitor an average of 69% of the time, although viewing patterns at the individual level ranged widely. Wagner also found that video orientation time for the dialogues was greater than to the lectures and that while the percentage of orientation varied among the six videos (from 62% to 77%), there was no obvious explanation for that variation based on either the general category (dialogue or lecture) or order of presentation.

While the first two articles focus on listening in adults, in the third, "Using digital stories to improve listening comprehension with Spanish young learners of English" Dolores Ramirez Verdugo and Isabel Alonso Belmonte look at young language learners to explore the impact interacting with digital stories may have on English learning. They conducted a 22-week study with 220 six-year-old EFL students in Spain from 12 intact classes divided into six experimental and six control groups. Experimental and control groups spent equal amounts of time (two 45-50 minute sessions per week) studying English, and each experimental-control pair had the same teacher. However, while the control group based both sessions on the textbook and teacher-led activities centered on it, the experimental group spent one session the same way but the second session using computer-based materials offering listening and graphic support for the text along with an interactive element. Their results showed a modest but statistically significant pre- to post-test gain for the experimental group.

The first commentary "I'm only trying to help: a role for interventions in teaching listening" comes from Michael Rost, who begins with expanded reviews of the three preceding articles, noting how they represent three distinct perspectives on the ways that teachers can use technology to help learners listen better. In the second part of the commentary, he proposes a set of helpful interventions aimed at promoting repeated and deeper listening based on a model encompassing processes of decoding, comprehension, and interpretation. For each of those components, he presents example linkages to learner goals, targeted interventions, and related research and instructional design.

Richard Robin follows with a commentary "Learner-based listening and technological authenticity" that looks at current and emerging technologies and focuses on their impact on the near future of language learning. He predicts that the next five to ten years will see increased development of strategic uses of available technology by language students to facilitate their learning, and that the programmed scaffolding found in dedicated software will be eclipsed by supports freely available to anyone using online materials. These support elements include repeated audio delivery, slowed audio delivery, accompanying texts, captioned video, translation bots, and voice chat with interactive native speaker practice. The shift for language learners will be paralleled by one for teachers, who will need to control these technologies well enough themselves to enable their students to use them effectively.

I am deeply indebted to LLT Editor Irene Thompson for her work on this issue—it was truly a collaborative effort. Special thanks also to Editorial Assistant Hunter Hatfield and other members of the LLT editorial staff. Most of all, I would like to thank the many reviewers who gave their time freely in providing valuable feedback for the submissions to this issue.

Phil Hubbard

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