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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Grammar Podcasts for ESL College Students

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| ABSTRACT

Podcasts are audio files that are automatically delivered to the student's computer, smart phone, iPad or MP3/MP4 player. They can be automatically updated. Students typically subscribe to podcasts using "podcatcher" software such as iTunes. The present study proposes a model for integrating grammar podcasts in teaching English grammar to EFL/ESL college students. It gives examples of English grammar podcasts that can be integrated in in-class grammar instruction. It shows how grammar podcasts can be downloaded and used and some of the grammatical structures and topics are covered by those podcasts. Grammar podcasts contain 2-5-minute-long audio explanations of a particular grammatical point or structure. They include a lesson script, exercises, quizzes with an answer key, and/or an English grammar help where answers are given to students' questions about problematic grammatical points. Students can download podcasts, print the script, do the exercises and score their answers themselves. Elementary, intermediate, and advanced level grammar podcasts can be downloaded depending on the students' needs and proficiency level. Unlike face-to-face classroom lectures, students can listen to grammar podcasts anywhere, anytime and as many times as they need. Classroom discussions on a grammar podcast can be performed in pairs, small groups or even whole class. End-of-semester grammar tests can be given to find out improvements in the students' grammatical knowledge/achievement as a result of integrating grammar podcasts in EFL grammar courses. Recommendations for the effective use of grammar podcasts are given.

| KEYWORDS

Grammar practice, EFL/ESL students, college students, grammar podcasts, BBC podcasts, VOA podcasts.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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### 1. Introduction

Podcasts<sup>1</sup> are digital audio files that are typically available as a series. They are made available on the Internet, and new instalments can be downloaded to a computer or a mobile device, or automatically delivered to the student's computer, smart phone, iPad or MP3/MP4 player. They can be automatically updated. Students typically subscribe to podcasts using "podcatcher" software such as iTunes. Today there are podcasts on a variety of topics, and in subject areas from individuals, radio networks like BBC, VOA, NPR, TV networks a CNN, Fox, BBC, ESPN, etc., organizations such as the British council, new podcast-only networks (*Gimlet*), large and small companies, comedians, storytellers (*Lore*), and others.

The increasing use of podcasts in higher education necessitates research on the impact of the podcasting emerging technology. Specifically, podcast technology is very popular in language learning and teaching among students and teachers. They have

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.podcastinsights.com/what-is-a-podcast/>

been used in learning and practicing a variety of language skills such as listening and speaking skills (Shavkatovna & Ganiyevna, 2022; Saragih, Marpaung & Saragih, 2022; Naidionova & Ponomarenko, 2018; Kelly & Klein, 2016; Sandoval Zapata, 2020; Chaikovska, Zbaravska & Bilyk, 2019; Chaikovska, 2018. Hasan & Hoon, 2012; Checho, 2007; Lu, 2007; Bowie, 2012; Bustari, Samad & Achmad, 2017; Prasetya & Nuraeni, 2021; Alfa, 2020; Meier, 2015). In addition, they are used for practicing pronunciation (Mbah, Mbah, Iloene & Iloene 2013); listening comprehension (Abdulrahman, Basalama & Widodo (2018); vocabulary (Nurmukhamedov & Sadler, 2011); Chaikovska, Zbaravska & Bilyk, 2019); Checho, 2007); Lu, 2007; Liu, 2023; writing (Bamanger & Alhassan, 2015; Bowie, 2012; and in language assessment (Thompson, 2007).

Compared to the plethora of language skills such as listening and speaking podcasts, the literature showed few studies that focused on the use of grammar podcast by EFL/ESL students of different levels a Urbina (2022); Chaikovska (2020); Parra (2016); Qiang & Klein (2013); Checho (2007); Lu (2007) and Thompson (2007). In addition, the literature review showed lack of empirical research studies in Saudi Arabia that investigate the use of grammar podcast by ESL/EFL students at Saudi universities and colleges.

Moreover, English grammar poses numerous problems for EFL college students majoring in translation at the College of Languages and Translation (COLT), King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. For example, many freshman students at COLT confuse tenses, have difficulty with subject-verb agreement, with irregular singular and plural forms, with the use of definite articles, complex sentences, noun- and adjective-forming suffixes, Greek and Latin roots, plural formation (irregular and Latin plurals, word + preposition collocations, idioms, modals, phrasal verbs, clauses, as shown by results of several studies conducted with different groups of students at COLT by Al-Jarf (2022b); Al-Jarf (2022d); Al-Jarf (2020b); Al-Jarf (2019); Al-Jarf (2011); Al-Jarf (2009); Al-Jarf (2008); and Al-Jarf (2005).

To help EFL/ESL college students at COLT overcome their grammar difficulties, this study proposes a model for integrating grammar podcasts as a resource/material to be used as a supplement to in-class instruction that depends on the textbooks assigned by the department. Hence, this article intends to (i) show the advantages of using podcasts; (ii) how to search for grammar podcasts, how to download and use; (iii) give examples of English grammar podcasts that can be integrated in grammar instruction for EFL college students at COLT; (iv) give examples of grammatical structures and topics covered by grammar podcasts; (v) describe the stages of teaching and learning with grammar podcasts; and (iv) describe the teacher's role.

## **2- Advantages of using Podcasts in Language learning**

There is a great need to familiarize EFL college students in Saudi Arabia with grammar podcasts and train them in the use of podcasting technology in language learning including grammar learning in order to enrich their knowledge of English grammatical structures by using grammar podcasts that contain hundreds of episodes targeting all kinds of grammatical structures. A variety of grammar podcasts exist which students of different proficiency levels (beginners, intermediate and advanced) can use. Grammar podcasts help the students learn faster and remember more. They can use them for self-testing. Unlike face-to-face class lessons, students can listen to grammar podcasts anytime, anywhere, and as many times as they need. They can listen to podcasts on the move.

Teachers and students can use podcasts as a resource for learning academic English, as a supplementary and reliable learning material which they can use outside the classroom and as authentic material that is useful for developing students' skills (Liu, 2023; Urbina, 2022; Alfa, 2020; Seo & Chan, 2011).

In addition, podcasts help in L2 incidental vocabulary acquisition through extensive listening (Meier, 2015). They serve as a way to enrich the students' communication skills while equipping them with a proper resource for enjoying grammar learning in a second/foreign language (Urbina, 2022). Listening to grammar podcasts helps students improve their speaking skills, language proficiency and confidence (Qiang & Klein, 2013; Kelly & Klein, 2016). Podcast-based lessons are a useful tool for improving university students' oral skills (Sandoval, 2020). The integration of grammar and listening strategies promotes the teaching of grammar by English Language Learners (Urbina, 2022). Compared to mobile apps, podcasts were more effective in developing students' communicative competence, enriching their vocabulary, and improving their knowledge of orthoepic standards of a foreign language, while mobile applications were better in developing students' grammar, spelling, and punctuation skills (Oliinyk, Gaman, Chaikovska, Bezzubova & Paustovska, 2022). Podcasts can be also used in authentic assessment by teachers (Thompson, 2007).

The study of grammar based on created podcasts contributes to the development of grammatical skills and improves the quality of teaching and learning, as well as the active dissemination of experiences (Chaikovska, 2020). They promote creativity and supports learner autonomy (Thompson, 2007). They had a positive impact on students' engagement and performance in a beginning level Japanese language course (Takeda, 2013) and a positive effect on learning and motivation of at-risk high school students (Checho, 2007).

### **3- Searching For Grammar Podcasts**

The instructor and/or students may search Google, Google *Podcasts*, BBC, Voice of America (VOA) and/or the British Council websites, Google Play and/or Apple App Stores for grammar podcasts targeting specific grammatical structures. The instructor and/or can enclose the search terms in quotation marks, and use Boolean operators (&, or, not) to delimit the search. It is important to add "English" in order to get more accurate results and to avoid getting grammar podcasts in other foreign languages. Once a search term is entered in the search box, Google will suggest related search terms that can be tried. The students can also locate, select, and suggest grammar podcasts of interest to them. The following are examples of grammar podcasts that can be used by EFI/ESL students:

- [6 Minute Grammar](#) - This podcast from BBC Learning English has 155 episodes. It teaches students a new key area of grammar in six minutes. The students can learn about tenses, modals, clauses, prepositions and gives more with clear explanations and examples
- [Grammar Girl](#) - This podcast is about language and how we use it. It has 111 episodes.-It provides students with tips to improve their writing in a short and fun format. From punctuation to word choice, the students learn how to avoid common mistakes and write with clarity and confidence.
- [Everyday Grammar | VOA Learning English](#): There are more than 1990 episodes, 300 articles and more than 100 videos of Everyday Grammar. The students learn American English through English language lessons.
- [Happy English Podcast](#) - This podcast helps students learn American English idioms, phrasal verbs, pronunciation, confusing vocabulary, grammar and more. You'll also get useful tips on how to practice and remember what you learn.
- [Plain English Podcast](#) - This podcast helps students learn English vocabulary, idioms, phrasal verbs, grammar and other expressions. Each episode comes with a transcript and interactive exercises.
- [Espresso English Podcast](#) - It has 43 episodes. The students learn English grammar, vocabulary, phrases, idioms, and more. *Espresso English* lessons are clear and practical, making it easy to learn the language quickly and effectively.
- [Grammar Matters and Stuff That Isn't Funny](#): Here, two pals talk about grammar and life. They try to learn and provide information on both topics.
- [Doc Grammar Podcast](#) - This podcast is for learners of English who want to improve their grammar skills.
- [Grammar Underground with June Casagrande](#) – This is the best resource for grammar help. June Casagrande's goes through the myths and the misperceptions to let the students make the best choices in usage, sentence structure, punctuation, and more.
- [Look Better In Writing](#) – This is an audio outlet for all things writing and all things grammar.
- [How to Speak and Write Correctly by Joseph Devlin](#) - This podcast looks at the essentials of English grammar and focuses on improving eloquence, proficiency, and grammar in everyday communication.
- [Grammar-Land by M.L. Nesbitt](#) – The students are introduced to the nine parts of speech and learn about the rules that govern them.
- [Learn English Podcasts From The British Council](#) – It has podcasts [A1-A2 grammar](#), [B1-B2 grammar](#) and an [English grammar reference](#). The podcasts cover topics such as verb tenses, modal verbs, conditionals, relative clauses and more. The students can listen to the podcasts and do some interactive exercises to practise their grammar skills. They can download the episodes, listen to them offline, and do some simple exercises to check their comprehension:
- [Apple iTunes: http://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/english-grammar-help-podcasts/id210895970](http://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/english-grammar-help-podcasts/id210895970)
- [ESL Help Desk: http://www.eslhelpdesk.com/index.html](http://www.eslhelpdesk.com/index.html)
- [Podbean: http://www.podbean.com/site/search/index](http://www.podbean.com/site/search/index). It has 100 podcasts with 100 episodes.

### **4- Criteria for Selecting and Using Grammar Podcasts**

The grammatical structures covered by the chosen podcast should be related to what the students are studying in class and in the textbook. The instructor can assign several grammar podcasts that target a particular grammatical structure to accommodate the students' different proficiency levels, needs, learning styles and even the accent of the podcast speaker. The podcasts chosen should contain enough material for practice. The difficulty level of the podcasts should match the proficiency level of the students. The instructor should take into consideration the difficulty level of the grammatical point in the grammar podcasts, degree of familiarity and complexity and content details. The instructor can look at the grammar podcasts star ratings and read

the users' reviews and comments. She may try several grammar podcasts targeting a specific grammatical structure before deciding which ones are useful and appropriate for the students. She can select those that are free of charge and easy to use by the students.

In a study with Chinese and Korean students, Chan, Chi, Chin & Lin (2011) emphasized 4 factors that affect students' perceptions of quality and usefulness, and their attitudes towards podcast-based learning: (i) the podcasts' objectives and students' learning motivation; (ii) a match/mismatch between the podcast design and students' needs, preferences, and expectations; (iii) teacher encouragement and student preparation; and (iv) the students' experience with mobile learning.

In another study, García-Marín (2020) mapped the factors that determine students' engagement in podcasts. Those included asynchrony, knowledge of the podcast topic, volume of the podcast, the podcast sub-community, tension amplitude/depth, tone, the students' participatory culture, the number of podcasts followed, and the level of knowledge and integration in the sub-community that each podcast forms from its activity.

### 5- Features of Grammar Podcasts

Grammar podcasts should contain 2-5-minute-long audio explanations of a particular grammatical point or structure. They should include a lesson script, exercises, quizzes with an answer key and/or an English grammar help where answers are given to students' questions about problematic grammatical points. Students can download a podcast, print the script, do the exercises and score their answers themselves. Elementary, intermediate, and advanced level grammar podcasts can be downloaded depending on the students' proficiency level and needs. Classroom discussions on a grammar podcast can be performed in pairs, small groups or even whole class (Chaikovska, 2020).

Grammar podcasts present a list/an index of grammatical structures, each of which focusing on a single grammatical point (See Table 1). The students can either search for the grammatical point they wish to practice or browse through the list of podcasts to find a particular grammatical structure.

**Table 1 : A Sample of grammatical structures from the "6-Minute Grammar" on BBC Radio**

<u>Quantifiers</u>	<u>Defining relative clauses</u>
<u>Present tenses</u>	<u>The present perfect with 'just', 'yet' and 'already'</u>
<u>'Can', 'could', 'be able to', 'manage to'</u>	<u>Comparatives and superlatives</u>
<u>Will, going to, might</u>	<u>The present perfect with 'for' and 'since'</u>
<u>Question tags</u>	<u>The present perfect with 'ever' and 'never'</u>
<u>Present perfect and past simple</u>	<u>Verb patterns</u>
<u>State verbs</u>	<u>Present continuous and 'going to'</u>
<u>The second conditional</u>	<u>Articles</u>
<u>The first conditional</u>	<u>Past simple and past continuous</u>
<u>Present and past passives</u>	<u>The past simple tense</u>
<u>Indirect questions</u>	<u>'Have to' and 'must'</u>
<u>Verb tenses</u>	<u>Adverbs of frequency</u>
<u>Too, very, enough</u>	<u>Like for preference and description</u>
<u>Subject questions</u>	<u>Present simple and present continuous</u>
<u>Used to and would</u>	<u>Question forms</u>
<u>Will, going to, might</u>	<u>Future perfect continuous</u>
<u>Question Tags</u>	<u>Verb patterns</u>
<u>Present Perfect and Past Simple</u>	<u>So, such, enough, too</u>
<u>State verbs</u>	<u>-ing and -ed (Participle) Clauses</u>
<u>The second conditional</u>	<u>The future perfect</u>
<u>First Conditional</u>	<u>Linking devices of contrast</u>
<u>Present and past passives</u>	<u>Conditionals review</u>
<u>Indirect questions</u>	<u>Used to, be used to and get used to</u>
<u>Tenses</u>	<u>Future continuous</u>
<u>Too, very, enough</u>	<u>Verb patterns</u>
<u>Subject questions</u>	<u>So, such, enough, too</u>
<u>'Used to'</u>	<u>-ing and -ed (Participle) Clauses</u>
<u>'May', 'might' and 'could'</u>	<u>Defining relative clauses</u>

## **6- Instructional Stages Grammar Podcasts**

Instruction with grammar podcasts goes through 3 phases. In the *Pre-Task Phase*, the grammar instructor tells the students which grammar podcasts they need to locate, download, and use. She shows them how to search Google Podcasts, BBC, VOA, Google Play or the Apple App Stores for grammar podcasts targeting a specific grammatical structure. She posts a sample of grammar podcasts on a Learning Management System (LMS) such as Zoom, Google classroom, Microsoft Teams, Blackboard, a blog, an online discussion forum, on WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, or Telegram. She states the objective of using the grammar podcast, i.e., tells the students what they are going to do, study or practice and how they are going to use the podcast. She gives clear, specific, and detailed instructions on how a particular task should be performed. She tells the students what is expected of them, how many grammar podcasts they need to complete and sets a deadline for completing the assigned grammar podcasts.

In the *Task Phase*, the students listen to a specific grammar podcast on their smart phones, tablet, or laptop at home or in the classroom. They work on grammar podcasts individually, in pairs or small groups. They can post queries, comments, and evaluations of the grammar podcasts they have used on an LMS or a social media network. The instructor answers students' questions, provides guidance, and helps with difficulties.

In the *Post Task Phase*, the grammar instructor gives feedback and comments on the students' performance (strengths and weaknesses). She encourages the students to use grammar podcasts and gives credit for using them. The students correct their classmates' errors and make comments on each other's performance. They keep a log of the grammar podcasts they have used together with their evaluation of and comments on each.

## **7- The Grammar Instructor's Role**

The grammar instructor serves as a facilitator. She helps the student enrolled in general English or grammar courses to locate and download relevant grammar podcasts that meet their needs and purposes. She matches the students' English proficiency level with the grammar podcasts' difficulty level. To ensure meaningful participation, she encourages the students to fully engage in the podcast activities. She follows the students up to ensure that they are making the best use of the grammar podcasts under study. She gives extra credit for using grammar podcasts depending on how many podcasts they have completed. Grammatical structures learnt from the podcasts may be included on general English or grammar tests to motivate the students to take the podcasts activities seriously.

## **8- Recommendations**

New technologies such as podcasts have opened up new options for language teaching and learning. They provide teachers in every type of institution with invaluable learning resources and assessment opportunities. EFL instructors teaching English grammar, in particular, should exploit latest advancements to help EFL/ESL students develop their English proficiency level and master English grammar. Grammar podcasts allow students to use their auditory senses to learn grammatical structures. EFL/ESL instructors should always remember that educational technologies such as podcasts are not, by default, spaces that ensure significant participation or a high level of engagement by students enrolled in a course. Grammar podcasts do not teach by themselves, and their use does not guarantee the automatic learning and recall of the English grammatical structures studied. They neither guarantee active participation nor engagement. For meaningful interaction among the students, the instructors should encourage their students to engage in, respond to, and be actively involved in activities with the assigned grammar podcasts. They should supervise the students, guide them, give them feedback, and encourage them to use grammar podcasts in and outside the classroom. The students can browse and locate grammatical structures of interest to them on their own.

Since ESL/EFL students' satisfaction, perceived difficulty of grammar podcasts and level of control over grammar podcasts affect their performance, selected grammar podcasts should have a variety of formats and designs. ESL/EFL instructors can prepare a list of grammatical structures available in a particular podcast. They can enhance students' knowledge and mastery of English grammar by modifying the type of grammar podcasts they use, understanding students' choice of grammar podcasts, and their habits in using them.

To make learning of the assigned grammatical structures more effective, the ES/EFL instructor can encourage the students to create their own grammar and English language podcasts using a cross-platform audio that provides open access such as Audacity (Chaikovska, 2020; Al-Jarf, Al-Jarf, 2021b).

In addition to podcasts, a variety of technologies can be employed for practicing English grammar such as using grammar mobile apps (Al-Jarf, 2020c, Al-Jarf, 2012); integrating online grammar tasks in grammar instruction (Al-Jarf, 2017); using mind-

mapping software to help students connect singular and plural forms, suffixes, prefixes, verb conjugation, tenses, question types, sentence types, conjunctions, prepositions and their usage and so on (Al-Jarf, 2015a; Al-Jarf, 2011c); practicing podcasts in a digital multimedia language lab (Al-Jarf, 2021c); conducting webconferences using platforms such as Elluminate, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, WebEx for engaging students in EFL grammar practice and review sessions in (Al-Jarf, 2013), and online grammar courses (Al-Jarf, 2005). In addition, grammar instructors can use iRubrics (digital rubrics) for grammar assessment (Al-Jarf, 2020a; Al-Jarf, 2011b).

Furthermore, the current study recommends applying strategies for teaching and learning English grammar that the author found effective with her students at COLT such as practicing grammar while and after listening to online audiobooks and TED Talks (Al-Jarf, 2021d; Al-Jarf, 2021e); combining grammar and speaking activities (Al-Jarf, 2021b; Al-Jarf, 2012); combining grammar and writing activities (Al-Jarf, 2022c); combining grammar and vocabulary activities and making multiple associations such as connecting singular and plural forms, verb tenses, verb forms, derived nouns, adjectives and verbs, and so on (Al-Jarf, 2022a; Al-Jarf, 2006); practicing grammar through reading multicultural children's short stories by identifying some grammatical structures in the text (Al-Jarf, 2015b); and providing communicative feedback on the location and type of grammatical errors and asking the students to correct their own and each other's errors (Al-Jarf, 2021a; Al-Jarf, 2011a).

Finally, the effect of utilizing podcasts for listening, speaking, pronunciation, listening comprehension and interpreting practice on Saudi students' oral and interpreting skill development together with their preference and views on their usefulness in specific contexts, are still open for further investigation by researchers in the future.

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