

RESEARCH ARTICLE

B1 Students' Receptive Vocabulary in Work with Podcasts

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Abstract

This paper examines how podcast-based instruction supports the development of receptive vocabulary among B1 students learning Russian. The study focuses on lexical recognition in context, comprehension of key words in authentic audio, and methodological conditions that make podcast work effective. It argues that repeated listening, pre-listening lexical support, guided noticing, and post-listening consolidation improve students' ability to identify, interpret, and retain lexical units. Podcasts are presented as a flexible digital resource that strengthens listening skills, learner autonomy, and communicative engagement.

KEY WORDS

Podcasts; receptive vocabulary; Russian as a foreign language; B1 level; listening comprehension; lexical recognition; authentic audio; language pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

The development of receptive vocabulary is one of the core tasks of language teaching at the B1 level because learners at this stage are expected not only to recognize isolated lexical items but also to understand them in connected speech, in familiar social, academic, and everyday situations.[1] In the CEFR Companion Volume, B1 learners are described as able to understand straightforward factual information on common topics and to grasp the information content of most recorded or broadcast material on topics of personal interest when the speech is clear and standard.[1] These descriptors make receptive lexical competence central to listening instruction: without sufficient lexical access, learners cannot identify key meanings, infer details, or maintain comprehension while processing authentic oral texts. In podcast-based instruction, this issue becomes especially relevant. Podcasts provide learners with regular exposure to authentic or semi-authentic speech, a wide range of topics, and a flexible digital format that supports repeated listening and autonomous work.[3] Research on podcasting for language learning has argued that

such materials can supply meaningful input, foster vocabulary noticing, and extend learning beyond classroom time.[3] In teaching Russian as a foreign language, digital technologies have also been shown to support the development of listening and reading skills at A1–B1 levels when materials are properly selected and methodically structured.[4] Therefore, the study of B1 students' receptive vocabulary in work with podcasts is methodologically significant for contemporary language education.

METHOD

Receptive vocabulary is usually understood as the stock of words that learners can recognize and understand in listening and reading, even if they do not yet use them actively in speaking or writing.[2] As Pignot-Shahov notes, knowing a word at the receptive level means more than matching form and meaning once; lexical knowledge is multifaceted and includes spoken form, written form, meaning, use, and the relationships among these aspects.[2] The same source also emphasizes that receptive knowledge is commonly associated

with listening and reading, whereas productive knowledge is linked to speaking and writing.[2] For B1 students working with spoken texts, receptive vocabulary therefore includes the ability to identify familiar words in natural pronunciation, connect them with contextually relevant meanings, and use surrounding linguistic cues to interpret partially unfamiliar lexical units.

A further methodological point is that receptive vocabulary generally develops earlier and is broader than productive vocabulary.[2] This has an important consequence for B1 teaching. If learners are exposed only to controlled textbook dialogues, their receptive lexicon may remain narrow and overdependent on simplified speech. Podcasts, by contrast, bring learners closer to natural pacing, contemporary topics, and recurrent lexical patterns that appear in real communication.[3] Rosell-Aguilar argues that podcasting provides access to authentic materials, gives learners freedom to listen anytime and anywhere, and offers opportunities to notice vocabulary and grammatical structures in meaningful input.[3] For receptive vocabulary instruction, this means that podcasts are not merely supplementary audio files; they are a practical source of repeated lexical encounters in discourse.

The methodological value of podcasts becomes even clearer when it is linked to B1 proficiency requirements. According to the CEFR, a B1 learner should be able to understand the information content of the majority of recorded or broadcast material on topics of personal interest when it is delivered in clear standard speech and should catch the main points of simpler recorded materials on familiar subjects.[1] This description aligns well with carefully selected podcasts on daily life, student experience, culture, hobbies, technology, or social interaction. If the teacher chooses materials that fit these parameters, the podcast becomes a bridge between level-appropriate listening goals and naturally occurring lexical input. However, the presence of audio material alone does not automatically lead to lexical growth. Effective podcast work requires a clear methodological model. Research in Russian as a foreign language confirms that listening is one of the most difficult speech activities for foreign students and that its successful development depends on a properly structured digital course that remains effective, intensive, and interesting at the same time.[4] Ivanova, Lontskaya, and Pakhomova also stress that reading and listening are receptive types of speech activity and that digital models are advantageous because they increase flexibility of time, allow work independent of

place, and correspond to learners' familiarity with digital resources.[4] These findings support the inclusion of podcasts in B1 Russian classes, but they also point to the need for staged pedagogical design.

The first stage is podcast selection. A B1-level podcast should meet several criteria. It should contain a clear communicative theme, use mostly standard pronunciation, remain limited in length, and include lexical repetition strong enough to support recognition.[1][3][7] Evidence from research on podcast listening shows that podcast length has a significant influence on listening comprehension and that repetition improves comprehension and attention, even when learners find repeated listening somewhat monotonous.[7] For this reason, brief episodes or fragments are especially suitable for B1 vocabulary work. They reduce cognitive overload, make repeated listening realistic, and allow the teacher to focus students on a manageable set of lexical units.

The second stage is pre-listening lexical preparation. At B1 level, students benefit from limited support before listening, but not from complete lexical pre-teaching. If every new word is explained in advance, learners do not develop the ability to infer meaning from spoken context.[2][3] A more effective approach is to activate thematic knowledge, present a small set of lexical signals, and ask students to predict the possible content of the episode. Such work creates semantic expectations and reduces anxiety while preserving the need for active listening.[3][8] In practical terms, the teacher may introduce several essential words, show a title or image, and ask learners to identify likely situations, speakers, and topics. This prepares the mental framework within which receptive vocabulary recognition will occur. The third stage is guided listening. During the first listening, students should focus on global meaning rather than on every unknown item. This follows the logic of B1 comprehension, where learners are expected to extract main points and major information rather than complete detail.[1] During the second listening, attention can be directed toward lexical noticing: students mark familiar words, identify repeated expressions, and distinguish between words they fully understand and words they only partly recognize.[2][7] At this point, the teacher can use tasks such as matching words with meanings, identifying key collocations, choosing the best paraphrase, or locating lexical clues that reveal the speaker's topic or attitude. Such tasks make listening more purposeful and help learners connect sound patterns with meaning.

A particularly useful technique in podcast-based vocabulary instruction is repeated listening with changing goals. Research by Şendağ, Gedik, and Toker demonstrates that repetitive listening improves comprehension and attention, while listening aids can reduce the number of repetitions required for successful understanding.[7] In a B1 Russian class, this principle may be operationalized as a sequence: first listening for topic, second listening for key words, third listening for important details, and final listening for confirmation or self-correction. The receptive lexicon grows here not because learners memorize a separate list, but because they hear the same lexical items several times in a stable semantic environment.[7] Repetition in context makes recognition faster and more reliable.

Another effective strategy is collaborative podcast work. A study published in *System* found that learners who worked with podcasts outperformed the control group on both listening comprehension and vocabulary measures, and peer-peer collaboration led to particularly strong vocabulary outcomes.[6] For B1 students, pair or small-group tasks after listening can therefore support receptive vocabulary consolidation. Students can compare the words they recognized, discuss probable meanings, reconstruct the episode's content, and justify their lexical interpretations with evidence from the audio.[6] This interaction turns listening from an individual decoding activity into a cooperative meaning-making process, which is especially useful when students are still building confidence in Russian. In addition, podcasts should be integrated with post-listening lexical consolidation. Receptive vocabulary is fragile if students recognize a word once but do not return to it. Empirical work on vocabulary podcasting has shown that podcast-based materials can contribute not only to vocabulary gain but also to retention, especially when the audio is supported by visually or pedagogically structured aids.[5] In one study, learners receiving audio plus animated pictures showed higher vocabulary gain and retention than those receiving audio plus still pictures.[5] While a teacher does not always need animation, the broader implication is methodologically important: receptive lexical learning improves when oral input is followed by structured reinforcement. For B1 podcast work, this may include lexical notebooks, thematic word maps, sentence completion, transcript-based highlighting, or short comprehension summaries built around target items.

The issue of authenticity is also central. Rosell-Aguilar

distinguishes between podcasts created specifically for language learning and authentic content produced primarily for native speakers.[3] Both types can be useful, but for B1 learners the balance is crucial. Fully authentic podcasts may contain excessive speed, dense cultural references, or lexical overload, which can overwhelm processing. On the other hand, overly pedagogic recordings may lack the lexical richness and pragmatic naturalness necessary for real-world receptive development.[3] A productive compromise is the use of semi-authentic podcasts or carefully excerpted authentic segments that preserve natural language but remain accessible within CEFR B1 expectations.

This balance matters especially in Russian as a foreign language. Research on A1–B1 Russian listening with digital technology notes that the complexity of listening is intensified by the specificity of Russian phonetics, including consonant contrasts, vowel reduction, and intonation patterns unfamiliar to many learners.[4] As a result, receptive lexical difficulty is not only semantic but also phonological. A student may know a word in written form yet fail to recognize it in fast or reduced speech. Podcast work, when systematic, helps address this gap because it repeatedly exposes students to the spoken form of lexical items in meaningful contexts.[2][4] Thus, podcasts do not simply expand vocabulary size; they strengthen the mapping between sound and meaning, which is indispensable for listening in Russian. Motivation and autonomy are additional advantages. Farshi and Mohammadi found that learners showed positive attitudes toward podcasts and high motivation to continue learning vocabulary through them, while also noting practical limitations such as internet access and technical barriers.[8] The pedagogical conclusion remains relevant: learners are more willing to engage with vocabulary work when materials are short, portable, and perceived as useful.[8] This is particularly important for B1 students, whose progress depends heavily on regular contact with language outside the classroom. Podcasts can make vocabulary exposure part of independent study rather than a classroom-only activity.

At the same time, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, podcast listening can easily become passive if learners are asked only to listen "for practice." [3][7] Without explicit tasks, receptive vocabulary development remains incidental and uneven. Second, if the lexical density of the podcast is too high, students may rely on guessing or disengage from the task altogether.[1][3] Third, teachers need to avoid

overloading learners with transcripts too early, because immediate reliance on written text may reduce attention to auditory recognition.[2][4] Therefore, the methodological success of podcast work depends on sequencing, scaffolding, and a clear distinction between support and simplification.

For assessment, receptive vocabulary in podcast work should be measured through listening-sensitive tasks rather than isolated translation alone. Based on CEFR descriptors and vocabulary measurement literature, appropriate tools include identifying key words from audio, choosing contextually accurate meanings, matching spoken expressions to paraphrases, noting words that signal the speaker's intention, and completing short summaries after listening.[1][2] At B1 level, assessment should also capture partial knowledge: students may not provide a dictionary definition, but they may correctly infer function, topic, or evaluative meaning from context.[2] Such assessment is more consistent with real listening comprehension and more informative for teaching decisions.

CONCLUSION

In sum, podcasts represent a methodologically promising resource for the development of receptive vocabulary among B1 students learning Russian. Their value lies in the combination of authentic or semi-authentic input, flexible access, repeated listening, and opportunities for lexical noticing in context.[3][7] When podcast work is aligned with CEFR B1 descriptors, adapted to the phonetic and lexical realities of Russian, and organized through pre-listening, guided listening, collaborative processing, and post-listening consolidation, it can significantly strengthen lexical recognition and comprehension.[1][4][6] The main pedagogical conclusion is that receptive vocabulary does not grow effectively through exposure alone. It develops when learners repeatedly encounter words in meaningful spoken discourse, attend to them with specific tasks, and revisit them through structured reinforcement.[2][5] Podcasts are therefore most effective not as background audio but as a carefully designed instructional medium. In the context of "Theory and Methods of Education and Upbringing," they can be regarded as a contemporary didactic tool that links listening, vocabulary growth, learner autonomy, and communicative relevance in one coherent teaching model.

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