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## **SHADOWING THE MASTERS: LEVERAGING PODCASTS FOR SECOND-LANGUAGE ENGLISH DEVELOPMENT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*One of the basic methods in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), speech shadowing—the immediate, almost instantaneous vocal repetition of an auditory target—has grown in use. Traditionally confined to organized laboratory environments or short audio exercises, the democratization of high-fidelity, conversational podcast media offers a fresh paradigm for English language acquisition. To assess how well podcast-based speech shadowing helps EFL students, this study article draws on contemporary literature in psycholinguistic, neurocognitive, and instructional domains. The structural, phonological, and lexical advantages of this approach are investigated together with how real-time replication of unscripted native conversation speeds phonological encoding, automated grammatical processing, and prosodic integration. At last, we create an operational approach for pedagogical implementation and pinpoint key cognitive thresholds affecting foreign-language learner performance.*

**Key words:** *podcasts, English as a foreign language, L1, L2, shadowing technique.*

### **АННОТАЦИЯ**

*Одним из основных методов в обучении английскому языку как иностранному (EFL) является техника «shadowing» — немедленное, почти мгновенное голосовое повторение услышанной речи. Традиционно данный метод применялся только в организованных лабораторных условиях или в коротких аудио-упражнениях, однако демократизация высококачественных*

*разговорных подкастов открыла новую парадигму освоения английского языка. Данная научная статья, опираясь на современные исследования в области психолингвистики, нейрокогнитивных наук и методики преподавания, рассматривает эффективность подкаст-ориентированного shadowing для студентов EFL. Исследуются структурные, фонологические и лексические преимущества данного подхода, а также то, как воспроизведение неподготовленной речи носителей языка в реальном времени ускоряет фонологическое кодирование, автоматизацию грамматической обработки и просодическую интеграцию. В заключение предлагается практическая модель педагогического применения и определяются ключевые когнитивные факторы, влияющие на результаты изучающих иностранный язык.*

**Ключевые слова:** подкасты, английский язык как иностранный, L1, L2, техника shadowing.

#### ANNOTATSIYA

*Ingliz tilini chet tili sifatida (EFL) o'rganishda asosiy usullardan biri bo'lgan nutqni "shadowing" qilish — ya'ni eshitilgan nutqni darhol va deyarli bir vaqtning o'zida ovoz chiqarib takrorlash — keng qo'llanila boshladi. An'anaviy ravishda faqat tashkil etilgan laboratoriya muhitlari yoki qisqa audio mashqlar bilan cheklangan ushbu usul, yuqori sifatli va suhbat tarzidagi podkastlarning ommalashuvi tufayli ingliz tilini o'zlashtirishning yangi paradigmasiga aylandi. Ushbu ilmiy maqola podkast asosidagi shadowing usuli EFL talabalari uchun qanchalik samarali ekanligini psixolingvistika, neyrokognitiv va pedagogik sohalardagi zamonaviy adabiyotlarga tayangan holda tahlil qiladi. Mazkur yondashuvning strukturaviy, fonologik va leksik afzalliklari, shuningdek, skriptsiz tabiiy suhbatni real vaqt rejimida takrorlash fonologik kodlashni, grammatik jarayonlarning avtomatlashtirilishini va prosodik integratsiyani qanday tezlashtirishi o'rganiladi. Yakunda esa pedagogik qo'llash uchun amaliy model ishlab chiqilib, chet tilini o'rganuvchilar faoliyatiga ta'sir qiluvchi asosiy kognitiv omillar aniqlanadi.*

**Kalit so'zlar:** podkastlar, ingliz tili chet tili sifatida, L1, L2, shadowing texnikasi.

#### INTRODUCTION

Because of the worldwide need for high-tier English language ability, teaching approaches beyond passive textual understanding are needed to foster quick, natural output. Often focusing on explicit grammar teaching and separate vocabulary memorizing, traditional English language development (ELD) models often give top priority. Although these approaches foster explicit linguistic awareness, they usually

leave L2 learners with a **serious** operational barrier: a wide discrepancy between their passive knowledge of English and their live spoken fluency. Slow lexical recovery, an unnatural prosody (tone and rhythm), and a great cognitive load during unscripted communications cause difficulties for students.

Applied linguists have increasingly turned to speech shadowing to help to fill this gap. Originally developed by cognitive researchers exploring the mechanisms of speech perception, shadowing calls on a language learner to track a continual stream of target audio and repeat it loudly as closely to real-time as feasible, generally with a latency goal of 200 to 500 milliseconds.

The growth of English-language podcasts has changed shadowing from a strict, lab-bound drill into a very dynamic, immersive language immersion tool. Using unscripted, very conversational podcast media as target audio, L2 English students get around the mechanical, artificial rhythms of standard textbook audio. Rather than that, they expose their neural networks to actual speech rates, common vernacular expressions, diverse dialects, and believable conversational mechanics. The mechanics, structural approaches, and cognitive consequences of podcast-based speech shadowing in contemporary English language development are investigated in this survey study.

## **METHODS**

### ***Arranging Podcast Shadowing for ELD***

Speech shadowing must not be done at will if one seeks to maximize English language growth. It calls for a structured framework suited to the student's current Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) level. The operational approach is based on two pillars: a progressive training taxonomy and judicious target media selection.

#### ***Criteria for Target Selection***

Unlike training for native speakers, target audio for L2 development must strike a balance between real delivery and the learner's ability for processing. Four different standards must be met by the chosen podcasts: The host's voice needs to be quite clear, cross-mixed in the audio stream, and free from strong background music, ambient sound effects, or intense cross-talk.

#### ***Spontaneous-Normal Speech Rate:***

Native conversational speeds (ranging from 120 to 160 words per minute) should correspond with the target audio. For intermediate and advanced students, artificial slowed audios—such as certain basic language learning tracks—should be steered clear as they alter natural English vowel reduction and word-linking patterns.

#### ***Idiomatic and Syntactic Realism:***

Real-time conceptualization—complete with genuine phrasal verbs, true clausal structures, and natural discourse indicators (well, you know, honestly)—must drive the content. Lexical Proximity: The podcast material should reside within the learner's "i + 1" zone (Krashen's Input Hypothesis), where most of the vocabulary is understood passively, therefore leaving a small, manageable margin of new lexical items.

### ***Progressive Training Taxonomies***

The operational framework divides the shadowing process into four different stages so that students may progressively increase their cognitive processing:

#### ***1. Focus: Sound and articulation during the Phonetic Alignment Phase.***

The student completely disregards semantic meaning. The only goal is to replicate native English phonemes, vowel lengths, and consonant clusters by matching the physical position of the tongue, lips, and teeth.

#### ***2. Focus: Cadence and Stress: The Prosodic and Rhythm Phase***

The student turns their attention to the English macro-structures. This entails coordinating with the speaker's sentence-level stress, rhythm (English as a stress-timed language), pitch contours, and natural linking of words (e.g., saying "an apple" as /ə'næp.əl/).

#### ***3. Lexical Tracking Stage: Concentrate: Word Recognition.***

Working at a somewhat longer latency (400-600ms) the learner proactively recognizes and clearly speaks individual word units and collocations, mapping the auditory stream onto their own English language database.

#### ***4. The Phase of Semantic-Syntactic Integration: Focus: Acting comprehension.***

The top tier of shadowing. Speaking in real time, the learner processes the conceptual meaning of the podcast so enabling them to grasp the story arc or argument of the episode without interfering with their vocal output.

### **Results**

#### ***Observed English Proficiency Development***

Tracking second-language speech metrics using empirical studies and proxy data shows that regular speech shadowing produces quick, measurable advances in several facets of English language mastery.

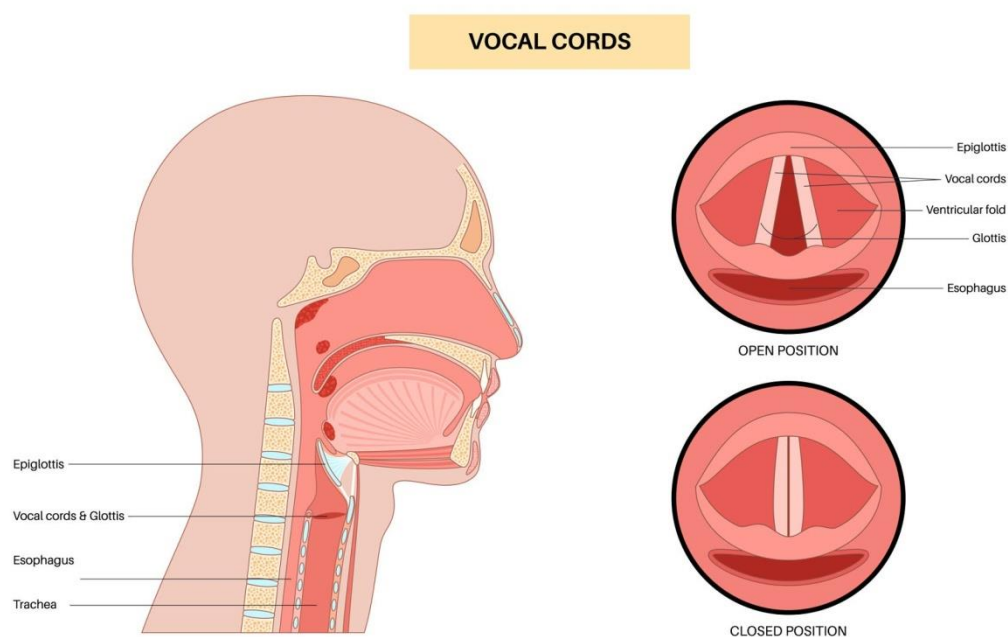
#### ***Phonological Precision and Accent Reduction***

Measurements using speech-analysis software show that shadowing significantly enhances an L2 learner's ability over English phonology. Significant changes are frequently noted in:

Vowel voice onset time (VOT): Especially for aspirated English consonants like /p/, /t/, and /k/, the exact timing of vocal cord vibration.

Learners vowel productions begin to match the acoustic targets of native podcasters quite closely as they go along. This is referred to as formant frequency convergence I guess.

It seems the coordination in the vocal tract starts to work better too. This change cuts down on the physical strain or muscle fatigue that non native speakers often run into when they shift over to English patterns. The whole process feels a bit uneven at first but it does ease up with more practice.



**Image 1: The human speech articulation system. (Source: Pikovit44 / Getty Images)**

### *Syntactic Chunking and Automaticity*

Data from tracking L2 speaking skills over time shows a major change in how learners put sentences together. Before shadowing exercises, non-native speakers usually build English sentences word-by-word, translating them from their native language (L1 - L2). After the intervention, the data reveals a notable increase in mean length of utterance (MLU) and a clear drop in mid-sentence pauses.

By shadowing native podcasters, learners start to internalize entire multi-word units, collocations, and structural patterns (for example, "If I had known about..." or "What I find interesting is..."). These units are saved and accessed as single, automatic blocks, which speeds up real-time speech production significantly.

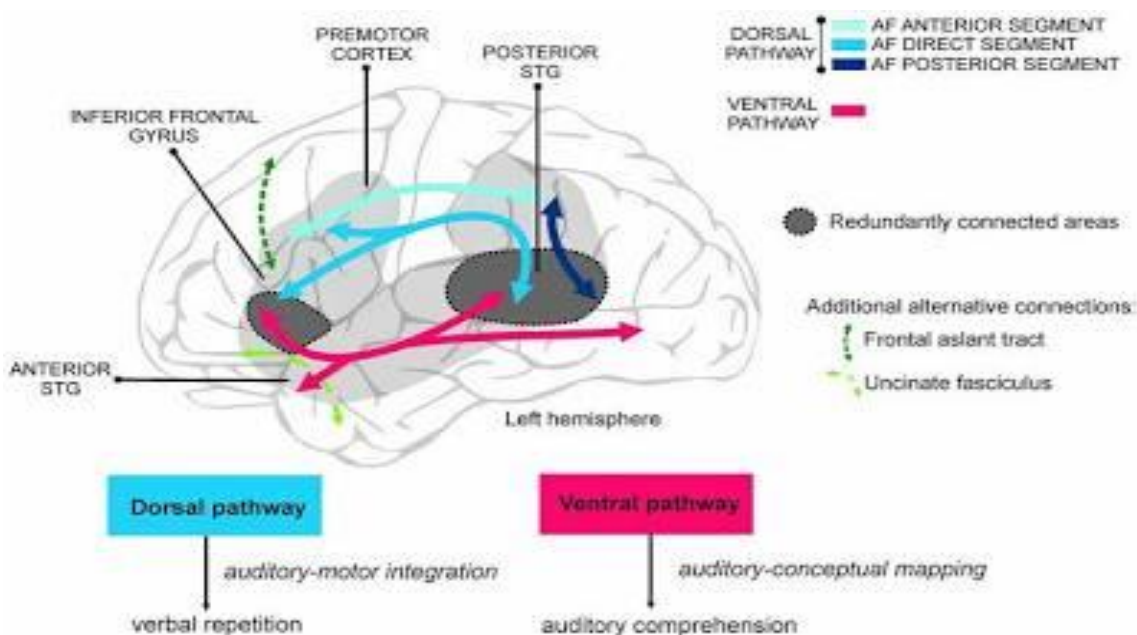
### **Analysis**

#### *Cognitive Architecture of L2 Shadowing.*

The remarkable speed at which speech shadowing enhances oral language skills can be understood by looking at the brain's dual-stream model of speech processing and the limitations of working memory.

***Dorsal Stream Activation and Auditory-Motor Integration.***

Neurofunctional models of language break down speech processing into two main pathways: the ventral stream, which focuses on semantic meaning, and the dorsal stream, which directly converts auditory sound maps into motor actions for speech.



**Image 2: The dual-stream model of language processing. (Source: Frontiers)**

Traditional classroom learning tends to focus almost exclusively on the ventral pathway, which is all about grasping the rules, translations, and meanings of English words. Unfortunately, it often overlooks the dorsal stream, the part that links the auditory cortex (where we hear English sounds) to Broca's area and the premotor cortex (which helps us move our mouths to speak).

This is where speech shadowing comes in—it's like a workout for the dorsal stream. By creating a nearly instant connection between what we hear and how we speak, it skips over those slow, conscious translation processes in our brains. As learners, we're constantly making real-time comparisons: we listen to the native audio, put together our speech plan, and check our own vocal output against the target sound, making corrections to our pronunciation as we go.

***Working Memory Optimization***

According to Baddeley's working memory model, the phonological loop serves as a temporary storage space for verbal information. In typical second language communication, this phonological loop can quickly get overwhelmed as learners

juggle grammar rules, hunt for vocabulary, and try to plan their pronunciation all at once.

Shadowing is a technique that helps automate these basic speaking processes. By training the brain to produce English sounds, stress patterns, and phrases automatically, it opens up valuable cognitive space in working memory. This extra capacity can then be used for more complex tasks, like analyzing intricate ideas, keeping a narrative flowing, and navigating real-time social interactions.

**Discussion**

***Pedagogical Realities and Challenges***

While the cognitive and physical advantages of podcast-based speech shadowing are evident, weaving this practice into either an independent or structured English Language Development routine brings its own set of practical and behavioral hurdles.

***The Challenge of Passive Drift:*** One of the biggest hurdles for language learners using this technique is falling into a passive mode, often referred to as imitation or echoing. To truly master shadowing, it's crucial to keep a minimal delay (less than 500 milliseconds). When learners encounter tricky English vocabulary or rapid conversations, their instinct is to hold back, waiting for the speaker to finish a full thought before they attempt to repeat it. This tendency to hold back turns the exercise into a typical listen-and-repeat routine. While this approach can still aid in memory retention, it completely disconnects the real-time auditory-to-motor connections that the dorsal stream facilitates, which in turn diminishes the exercise's effectiveness in developing conversational fluency.

***Managing Mental Fatigue:*** Effective speech shadowing requires an extraordinary level of concentration. Since learners are engaged in listening, speaking, and self-correcting all at once, it can lead to cognitive exhaustion much faster than more traditional language learning methods.

Metric	Beginner (L2 Baseline)	Advanced (L2 High-Fluency)
Optimal Session Length	5 to 10 minutes	15 to 20 minutes
Max Tolerance Limit	15 minutes	30 minutes
Primary Failure Mode	Phoneme fragmentation / Stopping	Semantic dropout / Passive mirroring
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To avoid frustration and dropouts, educators need to highlight that shorter, highly focused sessions—think 5 to 10 minutes each day—are far more effective than those occasional marathon sessions that can leave students feeling mentally drained.

### CONCLUSION

Podcast-based speech shadowing marks a significant advancement for both independent learners and institutions in the realm of English as a Foreign Language. By tapping into the rich and varied landscape of modern digital audio, EFL speakers can train their brains and vocal systems to adapt to the natural speeds and structures of native speech, creating an immersive learning environment no matter where they are. This method not only strengthens the brain's dorsal pathway but also helps automate the process of chunking language, transforming passive knowledge into active, real-time conversational skills.

Looking ahead, research in applied linguistics should aim to create specialized AI tools that can track an EFL learner's shadowing latency and pronunciation accuracy in real time, automatically adjusting podcast playback speeds to keep learners right in their sweet spot for linguistic growth.

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