

Non-homogenizable Vocal Habitus: Podcast as Narrative Practice for Learning Subjectivity and Community Building

Chun-I, Chang^{1*}, Regina, Juchun, Chu²

^{1,2} Institute of Learning Sciences and Technologies, Tsing Hua University, Taiwan

*gingerchung0304@gmail.com

Abstract: *As generative artificial intelligence increasingly reshapes knowledge production, concerns over the homogenization of learning outcomes in higher education continue to grow. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice, this qualitative case study analyzes 15 podcast projects produced by graduate learners. The findings show that through vocal narratives, learners mobilize diverse narrative forms through vocal habitus to transform lived experience into symbolic capital and emotional resonance, and thereby constructing multiple forms of community. This study argues that the significance of podcasting lies in sustaining human-centered meaning-making through embodied vocal expression and social interaction, beyond mere resistance to technological replication. In this context, vocal habitus may be understood as an emerging form of educational capital in AI-mediated learning environments.*

Keywords: generative artificial intelligence, podcast, digital narrative, learning subjectivity, community building

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Questions

While the rapid advancement of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) enhances learning efficiency, it obscures the identification of learners' authentic academic abilities and poses challenges to academic integrity (Bittle & El-Gayar, 2025). Consequently, higher education must re-evaluate learning assessment designs, shifting the focus toward the learning process, personalized performance, and social learning outcomes that foster interpersonal interaction (Kofinas et al., 2025). As a digital medium centered on vocal narratives, podcasts enable learners to manifest embodied expressions, exhibiting distinct human traces resistant to GAI replication.

This study examines a graduate seminar using podcasts as learning outcomes, observing that personal experiences shared through vocal narratives exhibit non-homogenizable qualities. Guided by Bourdieu's (1990) theory of practice, this study conceptualizes these embodied expressions as vocal habitus, exploring how vocal habitus shapes learning subjectivity within podcasts, triggers emotional resonance, and drives community building. This study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: In higher education contexts, how do learners utilize podcast narratives to exhibit distinct human traces resistant to GAI replication, and to transform life experiences into symbolic capital?

RQ2: How do authentic-voice podcasts trigger emotional resonance and drive community building?

1.2. Research Scope and Limitations

This study was conducted in a graduate seminar where the curriculum encouraged learners to engage in reflective activities based on "what voice can I offer the world?" The objective was to produce authentic-voice podcasts as learning outcomes, cultivating professional self-identity through the sharing of personal experiences. Accordingly, narrative themes were open-ended, allowing learners to record individually or collaboratively in pairs.

Given that most learners have a background in digital education, their narrative styles may be influenced by existing disciplinary cultures. Furthermore, their creative processes might involve strategic adaptations to assessment rubrics and peer-voting mechanisms. Therefore, caution is required when generalizing these findings to other academic disciplines.

Finally, with the rapid advancement of GAI voice synthesis technologies, the irreplaceability of authentic human voices in learning outcomes remains a critical subject for continued verification in future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Development and Limitations of Generative Voice Technologies

Recently, by integrating large language models with voice synthesis, GAI can simulate podcast production, automatically generating scripts and spoken content (Ju et al., 2025). However, GAI's generative logic still relies on pre-existing texts and statistical models (Xiao et al., 2025). In contrast, the contextualized decisions inherent in learners' vocal narratives involve experience selection, real-time interaction, and narrative responsibility, all of which exhibit distinct human traces resistant to GAI replication. Thus, despite advances in GAI, authentic vocal narratives remain critical for observing and cultivating learning subjectivity in higher education.

2.2. Vocal Habitus and Podcast Narratives: Perspectives from Bourdieu's Theory of Practice

As GAI exacerbates the homogenization of textual learning outcomes, re-identifying learners' non-homogenizable performances becomes critical. Bourdieu's (1990) theory of practice conceptualizes performance as the interplay of field, capital, and habitus, which is recognizable through embodied forms like linguistic expression (Reay, 2004). Building on this perspective, this study conceptualizes "vocal habitus" as an embodied and socially conditioned disposition toward vocal expression, rooted in lived experience and manifested through features such as intonation, rhythm, and affective tone. These are understood not as deliberate strategies but as embodied dispositions constituting a form of capital. As a vocal narrative medium, podcasts enable learners to transform personal viewpoints into cultural capital. Through vocal features such as intonation, rhythm, and emotional pacing, they convey a strong sense of authenticity, fostering listeners' emotional engagement (Spinelli & Dann, 2019), while simultaneously reflecting accumulated media habitus and becoming recognized as symbolic capital that differentiates learning outcomes. Thus, this study conceptualizes podcasting as a narrative practice of learning subjectivity that answers "who speaks, how they speak, and why they speak," forming the theoretical foundation for subsequent analysis.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Subjects

Using a qualitative case study approach based on Bourdieu's (1990) theory of practice, this research analyzes 15 authentic-voice podcasts created by 23 learners. Assessed as learning outcomes that emphasize authentic first-person narration and impose no thematic or post-production restrictions, these projects organically revealed learners' narrative choices and human traces. As a result, no use of GAI-generated scripts or speech synthesis technologies was identified in the final productions. Procedures included data collection, repeated listening, annotation, and theoretical interpretation. Furthermore, classroom observations and questionnaires enabled triangulation across data sources to comprehensively construct the podcasts' narrative context.

3.2. Research Instruments

Acting as the primary instrument, the researcher triangulated classroom observations and questionnaires. These tools captured class interactions, learners' self-interpretations, and the instructor's assessment criteria, providing essential context for learners' perspectives and the field's logic.

3.3. Data Analysis

At the analytical level, all recordings were systematically annotated, focusing on intonation, narrative structure, and interactional features. Guided by Bourdieu's (1990) theoretical framework, data analysis involved iterative listening, annotation, and interpretation. The first stage of descriptive classification involved repeated listening to identify narrative patterns and annotate acoustic features (e.g., intonation, pauses). For example, prolonged pauses in recounting personal internship experiences were annotated as reflective positioning, indicating self-reflection. Post-production elements (e.g., transition design) were also examined to understand how learners presented their experiences and professional

backgrounds. These audio elements highlight irreplaceable human traces. The second stage of theoretical interpretation applied the concepts of habitus and capital to four representative podcasts selected for narrative diversity and thematic representativeness. As an interpretive qualitative study, coding was conducted by the researcher, with reflexive analysis, triangulation, and member checking involving seven participants to ensure trustworthiness. Only minor clarifications were required, and no substantial disagreements were identified. The third stage of cross-data triangulation integrated questionnaires and observational records to connect learners' interpretations with their lived experiences. The researcher synthesized the data and finalized the findings through reflective writing. All participants provided informed consent, data were anonymized, and analysis was conducted after the course to minimize potential bias.

4. Findings

Among the 15 analyzed podcasts, topics primarily centered on personal interests like learning, daily life, and reviews. Narrative forms ranged from solo reflections designed to “*completely convey what I want*” (S9-5) to dialogic interviews aimed at “*stimulating more perspectives*” (S10-5). Strategies included varying self-disclosure, pauses for critical reflection, and unscripted dialogues described as “*recording a daily conversation with a friend*” (S3-5). Overall, podcast narratives transform personal experiences into symbolic capital and foster three community types:

First, the narratives fostered shared-experience communities. Life narratives about relocating or renting “*easily resonate after publication*” (S6-4), allowing listeners to project their experiences and fostering emotional exchange. Aligning with Reay (2004), educational community value stems from authentic resonance. Second, these practices facilitated identity-positioning communities. Through reflective narratives on procrastination, learners positioned themselves as analysts adopting a “*brutally honest style*” (S19-4). Echoing Bourdieu (1984), expressing personal habitus converts into symbolic capital via identity recognition, establishing peer-negotiated academic positions. Third, the podcasts gave rise to parenting-education communities. Incorporating parent-child dialogues transforms family life into a public narrative, perceived as “*very novel*” (S20-4). This successfully converts parenting's emotional legitimacy and educational mission into symbolic capital.

Across these forms, interactional dynamics such as conversational turn-taking, shared laughter, and co-constructed storytelling function as markers of relational intimacy. Co-recording actively reshapes relationships, demonstrating that podcasting is a generative practice that produces, rather than merely expresses, social ties.

5. Research Conclusions

5.1. Responding to RQ1: Exhibiting Human Traces and Accumulating Symbolic Capital via Vocal Habitus

Through topic selections grounded in personal experience, learners demonstrate learning subjectivity resistant to GAI replication. By employing diverse narrative forms, they transform social relationships into actions bearing distinct human traces. In practice, learners draw on a personalized vocal habitus, using embodied expression to interpret issues and assume responsibility for voicing, thereby enacting learning subjectivity by answering “who speaks, how they speak, and why they speak.” Accumulated cultural and technical habitus further translates into symbolic capital. However, if learners merely read aloud GAI-generated texts, even authentic-voice podcasts become conduits for transmission, failing to demonstrate learning subjectivity. Likewise, reliance on AI-generated voice, even with self-authored content, may attenuate embodied expression. Only when learners take ownership of narrative choices and active interpretation do podcasts function as a narrative practice of learning subjectivity.

5.2. Responding to RQ2: Driving Community Building via Emotional Resonance

Findings reveal that the interplay of topic selections, narrative forms, and narrative strategies triggers distinct forms of community resonance. Shared-experience narratives promote emotional recognition and companionable responses; identity-positioning narratives solidify academic viewpoints and role recognition; while parenting-education narratives spark discussions on parental values. These interactions demonstrate that podcast creation is not merely knowledge transmission, but a catalyst for affective learning that continuously generates diverse learning communities. Countering

the progressive homogenization of textual outcomes, the vocal narratives of podcasts preserve embodied cues, enabling learners to proactively respond to learning contexts and drive community building.

5.3. Conclusion: Redefining Subjectivity in the GAI Era

Against the backdrop of rapid advancements in GAI, the core challenge facing higher education lies not only in how to integrate technology, but in how to preserve human agency, judgment, and responsibility in learning. This study argues that learning subjectivity should be understood as a contextualized process of meaning-making, enacted through embodied expression and social interaction. In this regard, the significance of podcasting lies in its capacity to connect lived experience, expressive practice, and social recognition through vocal habitus. It foregrounds the conditions under which learners construct meaning, take ownership of their narratives, and engage with others. Therefore, this study proposes that vocal habitus may be understood as an emerging form of educational capital in AI-mediated learning environments, highlighting the value of learning as an embodied, relational, and meaning-making practice.

6. References

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