

What Happens When Podcasting is integrated into Language Instruction? by esther hattingh – Graduate Student at Sac State

ABSTRACT

This research addressed the usefulness of Podcasting for language instruction. Eight students were asked to listen to Podcasts recorded in Japanese as part of a course at a four-year university and then to respond to a questionnaire on the ease of access, audio quality, understandability, and usefulness of the Podcasts provided. Although the limited feedback obtained was overwhelmingly positive, a surprising result was that only three of the students in fact used the Podcasts, prompting the question of why more students did not make use of a potentially beneficial technological device to aid learning.

INTRODUCTION

The focus of the study was to have audio pedagogical content available to students anytime, anywhere. The setting was a multi-language environment in which students could, as a community of practice, subscribe to the broadcast system called Podcasting in order to hear spoken Japanese. Podcasting is a web-based broadcast medium of content that is automatically delivered to subscribers. Podcasts are time-shifted, meaning that subscribers control when they listen to the recordings. Podcasts are not just for iPods. The audio content is accessible as MP3 files and students can listen to them on the run. Best of all, Podcasting can be made available without cost to the students. Thus, the purpose of this study was to assess the impact of Podcasting on the process of language learners.

My research questions addressed the following variables:

1. Use of Podcasts prior to the study
2. Technical ease of access to the experimental Podcasts
3. Speed of technical access to the experimental Podcasts
4. Audio quality of the experimental Podcasts.
5. Usefulness of the experimental Podcasts despite lack of visual aids.
6. Ability to select just parts of the experimental Podcasts.
7. Repeated use of the experimental Podcasts.
8. Delivery device used for the experimental Podcasts.
9. Preferred delivery device of the experimental Podcasts.
10. Why used the experimental Podcasts: convenience, catch-up, preparation for homework or exams, clarification, and repetition of content.
11. Potential of the experimental Podcasts for increasing involvement in the course of study.

Given the major finding that so few students, even after consenting to the study, actually used the Podcasts provided, an appropriate question for further research is how to increase the likelihood that students will use new technology in learning. The attention and motivation elements may be explored when emerging technology is introduced to students. For instance, if a student does engage in experimenting with emerging technology what will keep her or his attention? Also, when a student does explore an emerging technology what will motivate a student to use the new find technology for pedagogy rather than for entertainment? Also what can be researched is the appropriate type and length of education for the instructor offering an emerging technology to students.

SETTING

Eight students during the winter intersession and five students during the summer semester volunteered to participate in the Podcasting study. All the students had been taking Japanese for more than three years. The students took the class as a requirement for the Japanese program

<http://www.csus.edu/fl/japanese/jpminor.htm> at Sacramento State.

DESCRIPTION

The community for the focus study was comprised of students who had taken Japanese for three years at Sacramento State. The students who wished to participate downloaded a Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feed aggregator. The computer program known as an aggregator collect and automatically send MP3 files to any digital music-playing device that can play WMP formats.

The initial Podcasts consisted of the instructor's reading the headlines from a Japanese newspaper with comments about the articles. The content was uploaded to an audioblog. The audio was (and is) available to students to listen where and when they want.

The emphasis for this innovation was that it would be driven by participation from the students. Together with the instructor, the students were to decide whether the content was beneficial and kept their attention. The outcome of the results and suggestions from both the students and the instructor indicated that more research is needed in the factors that might increase the use of new technology for learning.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The smallness of the original sample precluded generalizability from the beginning; however, the finding that so few students in the sample actually used the Podcasts may indicate the need for a change in the direction of the research, as mentioned above. There are some factors that may have contributed to the low rate of usage. First, the instructor was sick during the spring semester and perhaps was not able to follow up on the use of the Podcasts. In addition, the instructor was sensitive to one student who apparently had technophobia; consequently she did not want to expose the student to my presence in the classroom. Lastly, the newness of this emerging technology limited the motivation factor for the students.

The major finding in this study is that five out of the eight students who consented to using Podcasts did not use them, even though doing so might have benefited their learning. This finding could be defined as a (literal) failure to connect using new technology and raises various questions. Initially the project was explained to the students in Professor Masuyama's class and the students' consents were obtained. Students were then emailed individualized emails. One example of such an email was: Attached is a questionnaire regarding lesson 10's Podcast. I would appreciate your feedback. Your feedback helps me tremendously in completing my research. I do appreciate your time because knowing how busy our lives are makes your effort so much more valuable. Thanks. However, when students were emailed the questionnaire (see Appendix), it was discovered that only three students actually listened to the Podcasts.

TIMELINE

March 2005 I attended a technology conference. One of the workshops concerned Podcasts and was offered by Steve Sloan. The PowerPoint slides of the speaker can be viewed at <http://www.edupodder.com/conferences/index.html>

Next I read Cochrane, T. (2005) Podcasting The Do-It-Yourself Guide, Indianapolis, IN: Wiley Publishing, Inc. Also, I found online tutorials and studies from Duke University <http://www.isis.duke.edu/events/podcasting/casts.html> and Stanford University <http://itunes.stanford.edu/>.

I purchased the software program Casteasy <http://www.casteasy.com> to do the encoding and downloaded Audacity <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/> to do the audio recording. I also bought a Logitech headset (<http://www.logitech.com/>) and a Griffin iMic <http://www.griffintechnology.com/products/imic/> for the professor's Mac laptop.

The instructor told the students, at the last class meeting in fall 2005, that she would be posting Podcasts during the Winter Intersession for my graduate project. She asked the students to complete a consent form. The following consent form was given to all the students in the class:

Hi

I am a graduate student in Educational Technology. For my final project, I am exploring in how to create a mobile language-learning environment. Professor Masuyama has offered her Japanese expertise to record newspaper readings for Podcasting distribution.

The primary objective is to observe what happens when a student listen to a Podcast for educational purposes. The student will have the liberty to listen to a Podcast on a computer or a MP3 player. The student has a choice to listen to the Podcasts from Professor Masuyama. The student's grade will not be affected whether he or she participate in the exploration or not.

That being said, would you please consider to listen to at least one Podcast from Professor Masuyama? Please sign your name below at the appropriate place regarding your decision in this matter. I need the form signed by all regardless if you are participating or not, because CSUS Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects requires that I do so.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.

Masters of Educational Technology, CSUS

I _____ choose to participate
in the volunteer Podcasting research for Spring 2006.

I _____ choose not to
participate in the volunteer Podcasting research for Spring 2006.

Student Signature

Eight students gave their consent. They were not enrolled in Japanese classes during the Winter Intersession, but submitted their email addresses with the consent form. I contacted them via email.

I met with Professor Masuyama in the beginning of December 2005 and gave her documentation that had step-by-step instructions in how to record an audio file and publish it on her Sac State Web site. The following PDF files were emailed to the instructor:

How to use Audacity at

<http://imet.csus.edu/imet8/hattingh/eportfolio/showcase/kazue/Audacity.pdf>

How to add a Podcast at

<http://imet.csus.edu/imet8/hattingh/eportfolio/showcase/kazue/addpodcast.pdf>

How to add an episode

<http://imet.csus.edu/imet8/hattingh/eportfolio/showcase/kazue/addepisode.pdf>

How to publish a Podcast

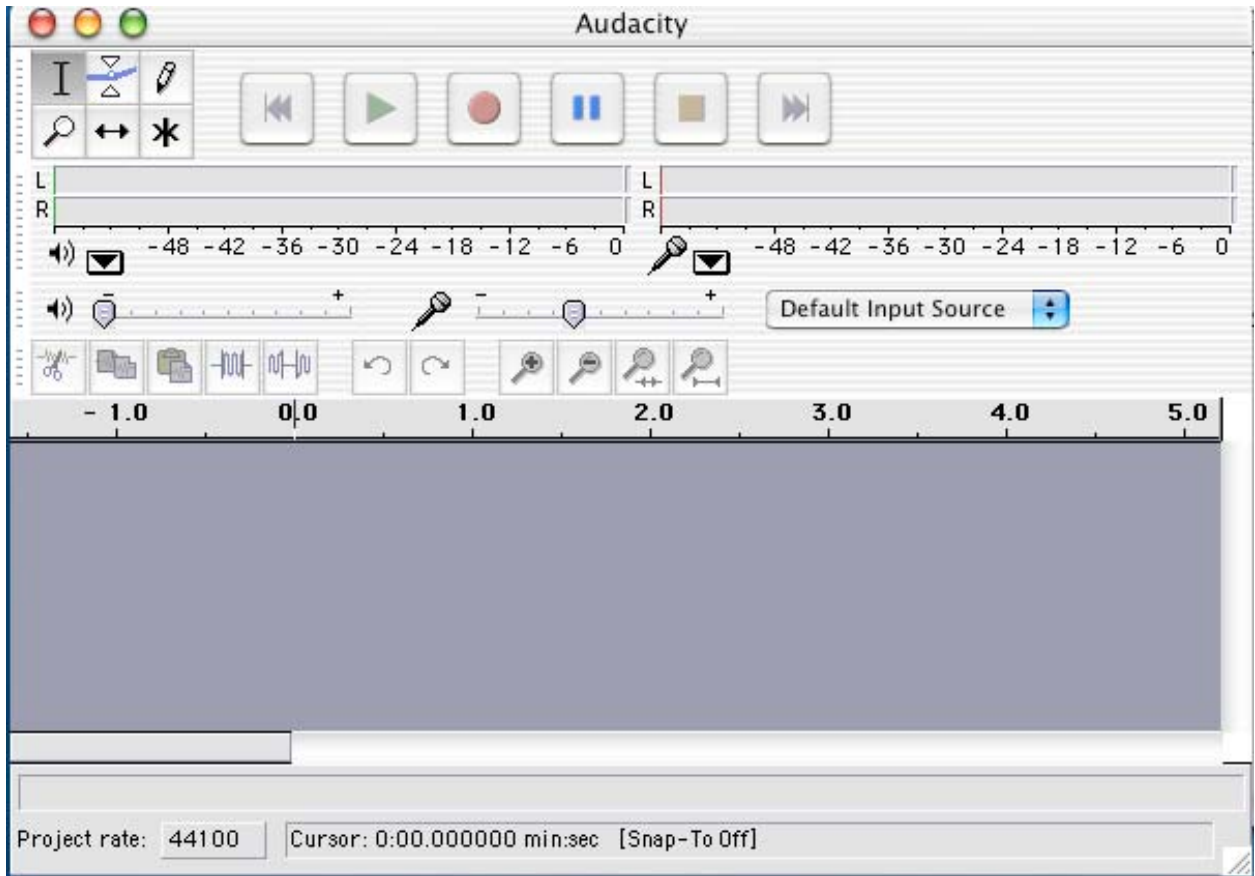
<http://imet.csus.edu/imet8/hattingh/eportfolio/showcase/kazue/Publish.pdf>

We did a trial recording and posted it. Dave Margolis, Sac State Webmaster, and Andrea Shea, a critical friend and a Japanese student, were present at the time. They both assisted in this venture.

Recording the Podcasts

Professor Masuyama recorded from a Japanese online news Web site at

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/> with Audacity.



Audacity is a free open source, cross-platform audio recording and editing tool. We familiarized ourselves with Audacity. To record the Podcasts we used the following settings: the number of channels was set to Mono, the Sampling Rate was 44100Hz, and the Sampling Size was 16 Bit. We then recorded the Professor's voice. We made sure the volume levels remained in the green and yellow areas. We saved the recording as an Audio Interchange Format (AIFF) file.



We purchased Casteasy and installed the software on the professor's Macintosh laptop. After we recorded and saved the professor's voice in Audacity, we opened Casteasy. We imported the voice recording by clicking the "Add Podcast" button. Casteasy prompted us to fill in the Podcast information such as the title and a link to a Web site, for which we used the professor's Web site at Sac State. We followed the promptings from Casteasy and, after filling in a description about the Podcast and the category in which we wanted the Podcast to reside; we selected the "Done" button. Casteasy then automatically published the Podcast on the professor's Web site.

Professor Masuyama published her first official Podcast 1/6/2005.

I sent the following email to the eight students who consented to listen to the Podcasts:

This email is regarding your consent to participate in the Podcasting pilot program for language acquisition. Thank you for your interest in exploring a creative way to

learn Japanese. You will find information and tips about this program when you visit Professor Masuyama's webpage at

<http://www.csus.edu/indiv/m/masuyama/podcasting.htm>.

The step-by-step instructions in how to download iTunes and subscribe to Professor's Masuyama's Podcasts are at

<http://imet.csus.edu/imet8/hattingh/eportfolio/podcast/template3/students.html>

If you already know how to subscribe to a Podcast in iTunes, Professor Masuyama's podcast address is

<http://www.csus.edu/indiv/m/masuyama/podcast/japanesenews.xml>

Please contact me with any questions or feedback you have regarding this Podcasting program.

Thank you for listening and learning

Kind Regards,

I posted a Web page to assist the students in downloading iTunes and to subscribe to the professor's Podcasts. The Web page can be viewed at:

<http://imet.csus.edu/imet8/hattingh/eportfolio/podcast/template3/students.html>.

The professor also posted directions for the students about what kind of Podcasts she was posting, as well as my contact information in the event that they had any questions. Her Web site is at:

<http://www.csus.edu/indiv/m/masuyama/podcasting.htm>.

The professor posted the following Podcast during the Winter Intersession from

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/>:

Coffee and Tea, Firefighter, Snow, Yoga, Survey-Yoronchoosa, Hyakunin Isshu, Deer Meat Hamburger, University Entrance Exam, and Abduction.

I then met with Professor Masuyama in the beginning of the spring semester 2006. She suggested that I use her voice recordings of the lessons she had posted in WebCT, save the files in MP3 format, and publish them as Podcasts. We also discussed saving the files on a CD-ROM for the students so that they could listen to the content in their cars or on CD players.

Professor Masuyama allowed five minutes after a class period to introduce the concept of the Podcasts to the students. All eight of the students who consented to participate in the Winter Intersession were also in that class. Professor Masuyama asked the students who wished to participate in my Podcast research to meet with me outside the classroom for a few minutes.

Only five students came to meet with me. I asked them if they had listened to any Podcasts during the Winter Intersession. I also asked them to sign another consent form.

After the meeting with the students, I met with Professor Masuyama . She gave me her recordings for lesson 10. I published the Podcasts on her Sac State Web site at <http://www.csus.edu/indiv/m/masuyama/podcast/lesson10.xml>. In addition, I made a CD-ROM copy of lesson 10 and gave each student a copy.

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Type of Data Collected:

The type of data collected was self-report of the engagement, quality, and overall usefulness of Podcasts containing Japanese language instruction. As noted above, the finding that so few respondents in the sample actually used the Podcasts

precluded any significant analysis of questionnaire results and instead suggested new avenues of research.

Findings:

Comments volunteered by the three in response (see Appendix), to the questionnaire indicated the following:

- Lack of time. In fact, we do not know if the non-responsive students did anything to listen and practice, so lack of time might have pertained to all eight. One student emailed the following, "Yes, I did receive the email, but I haven't had a chance to look at it yet. Is there a deadline when you need the response?"
- Difficulty locating the files – this can fall into two categories: 1) technical difficulty / a faulty set-up, and 2) lack of familiarity on the respondent's part with locating audio files. A student response to the question about the download of the Podcasts from iTunes was, "I used the CD, and have just installed itunes, so I haven't yet downloaded them from the internet."
- Absence of an appropriate delivery device – did students have convenient access to an appropriate delivery device? One of the students who consented to the Podcasting study commented, "...as someone who does not own an ipod, or use itunes, it's important for the file to be available for download through different means. I have only a few devices that are capable of mp3 playback, and most of them I don't use very often (other than my phone, which turned out to be a disappointing audio device)."
- Failure to connect with the students. The finding could be an experimental design flaw (student were not required to use the Podcasts), fear or dislike of new technology, resistance to change in habitual behavior, disorganized study habits, preference for visual learning devices.

A secondary finding (see Appendix for questions) collected from the three students who used the Podcasts is as the follows:

- Enhanced the student's involvement with the subject matter, "I believe it would increase my involvement in the course. As it is, I attend class and listen to the lectures but aside from that there isn't much else for me to use outside the classroom. There are a few assignments that require students to listen to a file but because it is on WebCT I loathe hunting the files down; if those files were available as a Podcast it would be easy to access them and rewind and fast forward to understand the content. The currently available files are imbedded on the site in Real Player and it can be difficult to get to the spot you want. In addition, I would be more willing to download additional listening material or lectures if they were this easy to obtain."

Another student's answered, "I think it will increase my involvement because the podcasts provide a layer of support that will help me and decrease some of my frustration with course material. (The frustration comes from me, not the material.)"
- The Podcasts were found to be easy to use, fast to download, of good audio quality, easy to follow, useful without visual aids, and used for catch-up work and to clarify concepts. One of the students did commented that it would be helpful to listen to more than one voice and have different genders voices; in the students words "I'm not sure if it effected (sic) my involvement per se, but I found it helpful to listen to the reading practice, especially to get used to the pronunciation. I think it would also be useful to have a male do some of the readings as well. Listening to females speak too much has made my Japanese a bit feminine, and I think the podcast can help correct that."

RECOMMENDATIONS OR REFLECTIONS:

Andrea Shea, a critical friend and a student of Japanese students, reflected on the research I did, and asked, "Since you did not get many responses, is it too late to change your tactic as far as what you ask the students? Maybe find out why they did not use the podcasting? This is a new technology and it may take a while for students to incorporate it into their daily learning. Because it is a new technology, does the instructor need to encourage use of it more? I can almost liken it to the early days of WebCT. I'm sure it took students a while to "get used to" to logging in every day to WebCT, and probably needed instructors encouraging and reminding them. But now, WebCT is an integral part of a lot of students' learning environment."

The Podcasting paradigm is similar to that of the radio; it is seen as the broadband echo of what we hear on the radio. Hopefully Podcasting will hold it's own in due course. Liken to the Web, when the WWW came into existence it was used as an electronic display of what is in print. Not until the Blog was introduced did the Web truly began to blossom.

Although my initial thought was that there is a vast scope for Podcasting in teaching, my research has shown that some students do not embrace this emerging skill as such. In promoting digital inclusion for Podcasting in education, more trial and error studies have to be done. Increasing knowledge of implementation should reduce the awkwardness of subscribing to a RSS feed to receive audio files on a student's computer. Podcasting is a concept that hopefully will be captured by more instructors. "For change to work you need the energy, ideas, commitment, and ownership of all those implicated in the implementing improvements. This is

perplexing because the urgency of problems does not allow for long term ownership development." - Quote from the movie, The Greatest Game Ever Played.

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APPENDEX

The questionnaire to the students who partook in the spring semester study:

1. Have you listened to a Podcast before you listened to Professor Masuyama's Podcasts?
2. Could you access Professor Masuyama's Podcasts easy?
3. When you downloaded the Podcasts did it download quickly?
4. Were the Podcasts easy to understand?
5. Were the audio quality of all parts of the Podcasts clear?
6. Could you follow all parts of the Podcasts?
7. Did the Podcasts made sense without visual aids?
8. When you did listen to a Podcast, did you listen to a Podcast in its entirety or just a portion of the Podcast?
9. What best describe your method of listening to the Podcasts. Please circle the one most appropriate to your experience.
 - a) I listened to the Podcasts only once
 - b) I listened to the Podcasts numerous times
 - c) I listened to a certain portions of the Podcasts many times

- d) I fast-forwarded to a certain portions of the Podcast and listen to that only once
- e) I fast-forwarded to a certain portions of the Podcast and listen to that multiple times

10. Please circle all the options, which apply to you.

When you listened to the Podcasts did you listen to the content on your

- a) Computer
- b) MP3 player
- c) CD player
- d) Other – please specify

11. If you did listen to the Podcasts on different devices which device do you prefer?

12. Do you think that listening to the Podcasts from Professor Masuyama did support your learning? If so which answer will describe your response best:

- a) A convenient way to access Japanese course material
- b) It helped me to catch up on my reading
- c) Listening to the Podcasts helped to prepare for homework or the exams
- d) The Podcasts clarified concepts that I might have missed otherwise
- e) Other – please identify

13. Do you think the availability of Podcasts may increase or decrease your involvement in this course? Please say why you think so.