Using podcasts and podcasting for language teaching and learning

You can use podcasts as a source of listening material for your classes, create a class podcast with your students, or podcast yourself!

What can I do in this DOTS activity?	Where can I find the information? *(click on the link to go to the section)*
Part 1	
Find out what podcasts are.	A. What is a podcast?
Think about some pedagogical reasons why I would want to use podcasts for my teaching.	B. Why would I want to use podcasts in my teaching?
Part 2	
Learn about how to find and download podcasts.	C. How to find/download podcasts?
Consider what I need to keep in mind when using podcasts in my teaching, explore podcasting yourself, and the different types of podcasts available.	D. Pedagogical considerations
Find out about some practical suggestion for the classroom, and a sample activity.	E. Practical suggestions and sample activity
Part 3	
Check my understanding using a quick and easy checklist.	F. Check your understanding
Think back over what worked and what didn't work (in the DOTS activity and/or in my use of this tool).	G. Reflect!
Check out what other teachers do with podcasts. Discuss and evaluate ideas and activities in a DOTS forum. Create additional tasks and share them with colleagues online.	H. Explore and share!
Explore privacy issues in podcasting.	I. Protecting students' privacy.
	J. References

Part 1

A. What is a podcast?

If you've never listened to a podcast before, try it out! Here's a link to a podcast for beginners' Spanish from a well-known provider. Just click on the link below, which will open a new window, and then click on the triangular play button:
http://radiolingua.com/2010/10/lesson-01-one-minute-lam-spanish/

A podcast is a series of regularly-updated audio or video files that can be played on a number of devices (either portable, such as mp3 players or mobile phones, but also static, such as desktop computers) and are distributed over the internet via a subscription service.

If you want to know more:
The key differences between podcasts and other audio or video file distribution formats is that podcasts form part of a series, which are automatically delivered to subscribers via RSS subscription and that once downloaded they can be accessed anytime and anyplace, as opposed to requiring the user to be in front of a computer with an internet connection. However, in practice, many individuals and institutions talk about podcasts when referring to any media file distributed online, regardless of whether it is part of a series or whether it can be subscribed to through an RSS feed. Without RSS syndication, however, podcasting is no different from streaming or downloadable audio, and its impact is not the same.

> RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication , and RSS feeds are often represented by this symbol:
>
>

B. Why would I want to use podcasts in my teaching?

You can use podcasting to find interesting and up to date resources for your classes, to encourage learners to listen to audio materials on topics they are interested in, and you can even make your own podcasts, or ask your class to make some.

For instance, to see what there is available in English, go to http://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts and find a podcast on a topic you are interested in. If you want, you can subscribe to it.
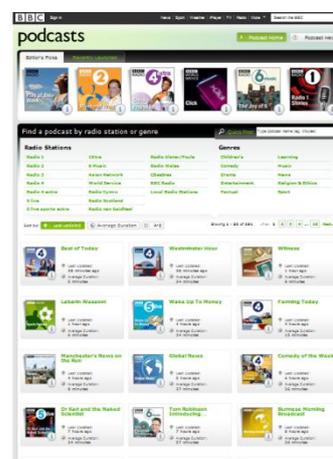
In the last few years portable media players and podcasting have become very popular. Some researchers were quick to identify the potential uses and benefits of podcasting for language learning:

Podcasting can support principles advocated by several theories of learning, such as the use of authentic materials, informal and lifelong learning, the use of learning objects for the provision of learning materials and just in time teaching (Rosell-Aguilar, 2007).

Podcasting also fits with mobile learning, which takes place "when the learner is not at a fixed, predetermined location, or when the learner 'takes advantage of the learning opportunities offered by mobile technologies'" (Kukulska-Hulme, 2005, p. 1).

Podcasting offers many potential benefits: for instance, the materials are delivered in a format that is portable, convenient and easy to use, and easy to access. The user can control the pace at which the information is delivered to them – using the pause button, for example. The format is also motivating and attractive: short, often professionally made resources on a whole range of topics. And they are free!

Some researchers also mention the potential to allow contact time with students in the classroom to focus on interaction, shifting preparatory work to outside times and locations (Blaisdell, 2006) as well as integrating in-class and out-of-class activities and materials (Thorne & Payne, 2005). For example, students can be asked to watch or listen to material as preparation work for discussion during a class, allowing the instructor to make the most of their contact time with students. The delivery medium, format, portability, and the fact that the materials can be subscribed to and do not have to be sourced from a library make this quite a different proposition to reading a chapter or article as homework.

One of the ways you can use podcasts is by uploading them to environments such as VLEs or your school or college website. You can use podcasts together with other tools, such as forums (see the DOTS Forum activity or visit http://moodle.dots.ecml.at/), to enable students to listen to a piece of audio at their own pace, and then to respond to it and comment on it with other learners using a forum, for instance, or you can ask them to write a collaborative piece about it in a wiki (see the DOTS wiki activity or visit http://moodle.dots.ecml.at/).

Part 2:

C. How to find / download podcasts?

Podcasts can be accessed from aggregators (websites or software that allow the user to download or subscribe to the media files). The most common and popular of podcast aggregators is **iTunes**. As well as being an entertainment shop (where customers can purchase music, video, and apps), iTunes has a podcast section, where podcast providers distribute their audio and video files free of charge. Podcasts can be downloaded individually or the user can subscribe to them to automatically receive new installments of a series.
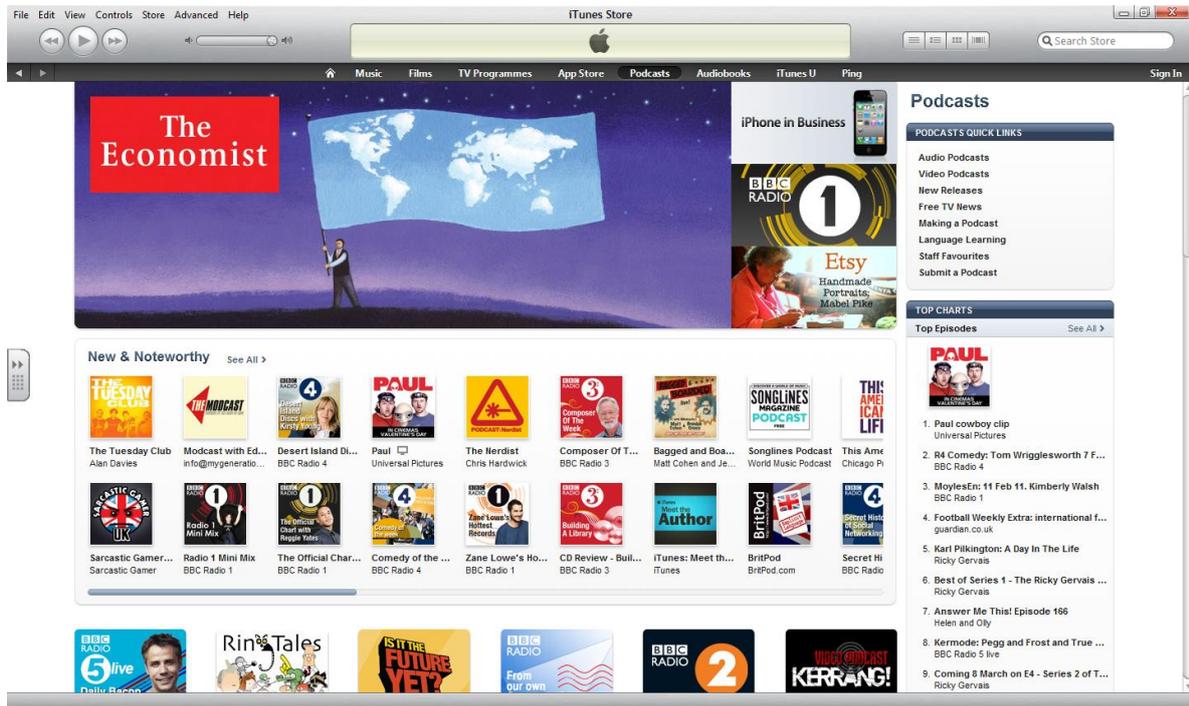
Other podcast directories include:

Podcast Alley:
http://www.podcastalley.com/top_podcasts.php?num=20&genre=7&year=2011&month=4

iPodder: http://www.ipodder.org/podcasts

If you use other podcasts directories, you might want to share that information with others in the Podcasting Explore and Share forum (available at: http://moodle.dots.ecml.at/mod/forum/view.php?id=39).

D. Pedagogical considerations

What about podcasting myself?

Many teachers like making their own podcasts for their learners. One of the great uses of podcasting by teachers is to offer generalised feedback on homework, for instance, or on assignments.

In terms of making podcasts for your students, there are several programmes you can use to make high-quality audio recordings, such as Audacity (multi-platform; see the DOTS Audacity activitiy or visit

http://moodle.dots.ecml.at/) or Garageband (for Mac OS).
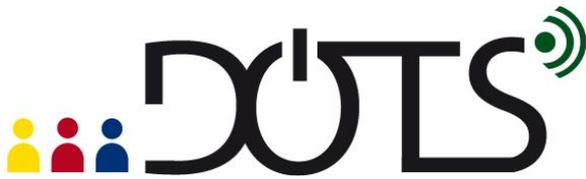
Students might also want to produce their own podcasts. This could be as an assignment on a particular topic, and can be done individually or collaboratively. You can ask students to share their podcasts through your VLE, and to respond to other students' podcasts. You could also organise a competition for the best podcast on a given theme, for instance.

Types of podcast resources:

There are many existing resources that can be used for language learning purposes.

Authentic materials: Many broadcasters from all over the world release their materials as podcasts. Although primarily intended for native speakers of the language, these are of enormous value to language teachers and learners as resources. Many national state radio and television stations make their programs available through iTunes, for example.

Language learning podcasts: There is a huge range of language learning podcasts. Some are produced professionally, and you might want to point them out to your learners for additional practice. Others are developed by language teachers for their own students, but also available for other teachers or individual learners to use. Some teachers also encourage their students to produce their own podcasts and broadcast them through iTunes.

Podcasts from "iTunes U": "iTunes U" is a vast repository of materials developed by universities from all over the world (U=university!). The resources from certain

subjects can be used as authentic materials, and some are developed specifically for language learning. The UK Open University reached 20 million downloads for their iTunes U resources within two years of its launch.
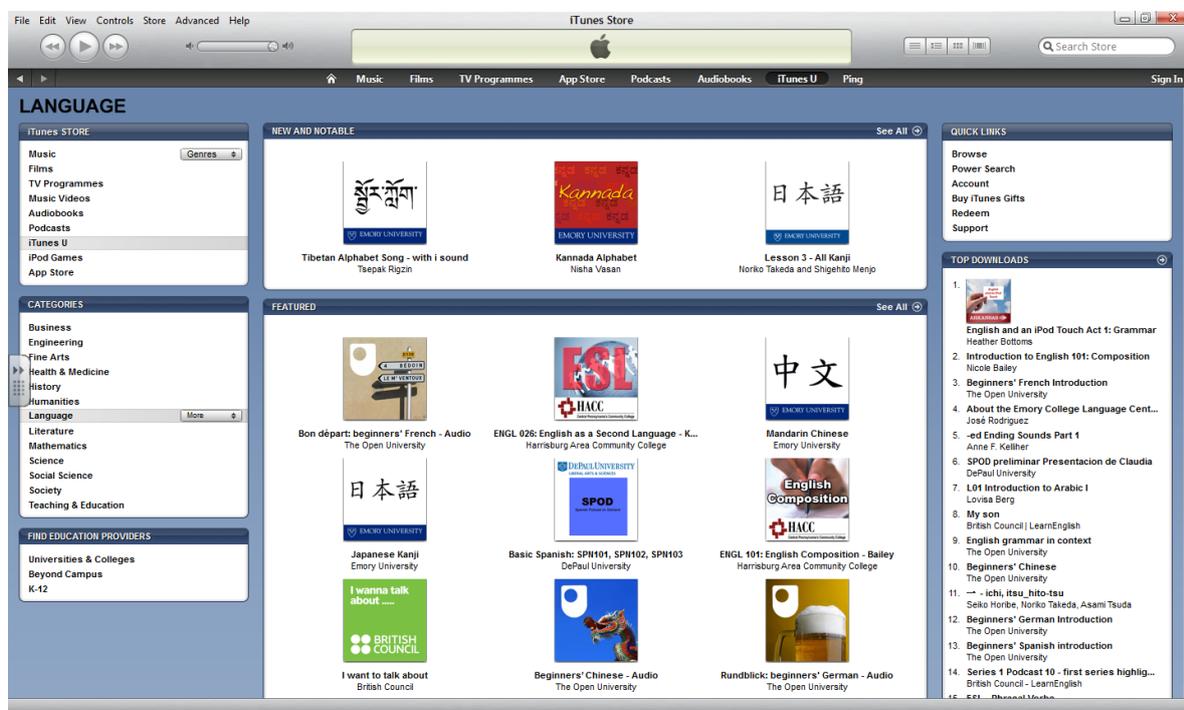
E. Practical suggestions and sample activity

You may wish to think of podcasts as "spoken websites". Just like you might ask your language students to go online to find language learning resources or information in the target language, you can do the same with the audio and video material available as podcasts.

Here are some suggestions to engage students with podcasts for language learning:

- Ask them to do a search for authentic podcasts in the target language on a topic that is relevant to your teaching or any topic that is of interest to them personally. When they have found something, ask them to read the description, ratings, and the comments from other listeners to ascertain how others have rated the material. Ask them to listen to the first two minutes to decide if it's worth listening any further. Can they grasp the content of the material? Remind them that when listening to authentic materials, language learners should not expect to understand every word they hear. Depending on their level, understanding 10% or just grasping what it's about is enough!

- Alternatively ask students to do a search for language learning podcasts in the language they are studying. There are many with many different

approaches including vocabulary lists, useful expressions, short conversations… some of these include support materials such as transcripts. Ask them to search for different types. Which do they like best? Why? You can then ask student to present their findings in class, or discuss them in a course forum.

- Ask your own students! Depending on their ages, they are likely to be more familiar with the technology and probably know more than you.

It's probably best to carry out these activities outside class time and then engage the students in presenting what they have found.

- Another option is to ask students to create their own audio or video podcast projects describing their house, town or school in the target language. This can be very motivating and technically easy to do – there are very good guides to do this available online. Then upload it to iTunes and get them to tell all their friends.

Sample podcast activity
Here is an example for a listening task that you can do with podcasts.

Steps	Learner objectives	Class activity	Format
INTRODUCTION a) Ask students if they ever listen to any podcasts, and if so, where from, and what sort. They discuss in pairs or small groups, then plenary feedback b) Explain to students that for the next class they will need to find and listen to an episode of a podcast on a topic they are interested in, or on a topic set by you, if appropriate, and be prepared to present it to their peers	Stimulate students' interest in the topic. Find out about each other's interests and hobbies	Discussion	Pairs, then plenary
PREPARATION AT HOME Independent work: students look for and listen to a podcast episode Note: you could use a forum for	Independent research and listening	NA	Independent work

students to share information about or links to the podcasts they are listening to before the next class.			
DISCUSSION a) In groups of 3, each student explains what podcasts they listened to, why they chose it, and say one thing that they liked, one thing that particularly interested them, and one thing that could improve the podcast. The other students might take notes. b) Plenary feedback: the teacher asks several students to report on something interesting they've heard from their peers	Speaking and listening	Discussio n	Small groups and plenary
For homework, you can ask students to listen to another podcast from the same series, or to a podcast selected by another student, or to write a review of the podcast they've listened to.			

Part 3

F. Check your understanding

	I know this / I can do this	I would like to look at that again
What are podcasts, and where can I find some?	☐	Click here.
What are three reasons for using podcasting in language teaching?	☐	Click here.
Why would I or my students make our own	☐	Click here.
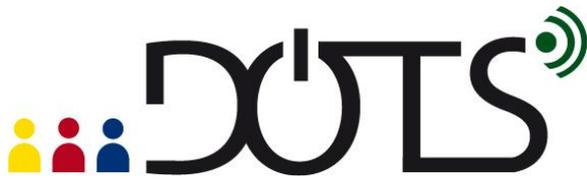
podcasts?		
Why types of podcasts are there, and where can I find them?	☐	Click here.
What can I do to engage my students with podcasting?	☐	Click here.

G. Reflect

Here are three possible ways of guiding your reflection. Select the questions that are the most relevant for you.

I. Think about the following issues concerning this section:

(To do when you have finished this activity sequence)

- Has this worksheet given you enough information/confidence to use podcasts in your teaching?	**-** Go to the forum on the DOTS workspace (http://moodle.dots.ecml.at/), find out what other people use podcasts and podcasting for.
- Are the different possible uses of podcasts and podcasting explained in a helpful way?	- Discuss your planned use of podcasts or podcasting in the DOTS Explore and Share forum to get advice and feedback from other users (http://moodle.dots.ecml.at/).
- Do you know any podcasts that you might like to use with your learners in your setting?	Search for podcasts online (you can start by searching itunes, for instance), and then share any useful resources in the DOTS Explore and share forum (http://moodle.dots.ecml.at/.

II. Now that you've used existing podcasts in your teaching…

Reflect on the following questions concerning your use of podcasts in your teaching:

(To do after your first attempt at using podcasts in your teaching)

- Are podcasts relevant for your teaching?
 	
    • Does using podcasts fit with your teaching approach and aims?
 	
- Are podcasts relevant for your learners
 	
    • (age, level, interest, …)
    • Do they help bring more linguistically and culturally challenging material to your learners?
    • Is the level of the material appropriate for the intended users?
 	
- For which skills and activities do you think podcasts can be best used?
 	
    • Do they allow for interactive activities?
    • Do they allow for individualised learning?
 	
- Technical considerations
	- After you've used podcasts in your class, share your experience in the forum.
	
	- Share suggestions for ways to use podcasts in the DOTS forum.
	
	- When you've developed a task using a podcast, share it with colleagues by uploading it to the DOTS wiki!
	
	Our forums and wikis are multilingual, so whatever the language you teach, please upload your material and you can be sure that you will be helping less experienced colleagues.
	
	- Don't forget to also share what you have done with your colleagues in your institution!

• What equipment and technical support is required to use podcasts in your setting? • Is this available in your institution? • Do your learners have access to the necessary equipment to access podcasts outside class time?	

III. Now that you or your learners have created your own podcasts!…

Reflect on the following questions concerning your use of podcasting in your teaching:

(To do after your first attempt at using podcasting in your teaching)

So, now that you or your learners have created a podcast and used it with your class… - How is podcasting relevant for your teaching? • Does it fit with your teaching approach and aims? • What have you used it for? - Is podcasting relevant for your learners • (age, level, interest, …) - For which skills and activities do you	**-** After you've used podcasting in your class, share your experience in the forum. - Share suggestions for ways to use podcasting in the forum. - When you've developed a podcast, or a task for your students to develop one themselves, share it with colleagues by uploading it to the forum! Our forums and wikis are multilingual, so whatever the language you teach, please upload your material and you can be sure that you will be helping

think podcasting is best used?	less experienced colleagues.
- Does it allow for interactive activities? - Does it allow for individualised learning? - Does it allow for feedback? - Technical considerations - What equipment and technical support is required to do a podcast? - Is this available in your institution? - Do your learners have access to the necessary equipment outside class time?	**-** Don't forget to also share what you have done with your colleagues in your institution!

* Credit for illustrations: fotographic1980/FreeDigitalPhotos.net

H. Explore and share!

Now go to the Explore and share forum (available at: http://moodle.dots.ecml.at/mod/forum/view.php?id=39) for this activity, and see what your peers have to say. If you have any question or issue you want to discuss, this is the place to go. And if you know of any useful podcasts, or resources on podcasting in language teaching, this is the place to share them!

I. Protecting students' privacy

If you are going to set up your own podcast, either for yourself or for your students, or if you want your students to leave comments in external podcasts, it is important that you think about privacy issues.

In general, it is wise to be cautious when using social website, so if you or your students are making podcasts that will be available for anyone, or if they are leaving comments in existing podcasts, remind your students not to give out too much personal information, and never reveal information about their address, telephone number, email or their date of birth.

For general considerations about protecting your students' privacy, you can also check the privacy forum (available at: http://moodle.dots.ecml.at/mod/forum/view.php?id=29).
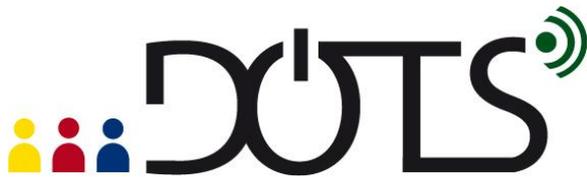
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Photo of podcasting equipment from:
http://www.flickr.com/photos/raincitystudios/71231114/