

# The LLL SIG Newsletter

## Introducing podcasts for language learning

This article has been jointly written by three graduate students enrolled in the MA program of the English Department at Aoyama Gakuin University:

Shunsuke Morikawa, Mai Tsukahara & Anna Inaba

*What are podcasts and how can they be used in language learning/ teaching?*

By Shunsuke Morikawa

Since the iPod was introduced by Apple, podcasts have become very popular all around the world. A podcast is a type of digital media used to express one's ideas through a series of episodes of audio or video files that can be subscribed to and downloaded to a computer or mobile device. There are countless podcasts representing various genres.

Podcasts, like blogs, can be very personal or they can offer more general content and be the official voice of an organization. Generally, the more official podcasts are of higher quality and have more targeted audiences. These podcasts provide listeners with varied content on particular themes. Those related to ESL (English as a Second Language) or EFL (English as a Foreign Language) can be a source of rich exposure to native English for ESL/EFL learners (Diem, 2005; Patten, 2007).

Since it is difficult in Japan for teachers to give students an opportunity to listen to 'real' English, many students believe that they do not need English as long as they live in Japan. Podcasts may be able to compensate for this lack of English exposure. Although a computer or some kind of mobile device is required, and students may not have easy access to them, teachers can use podcasts in class to introduce 'real' conversations engaged in by native English speakers.

For those studying languages other than English, instructional podcasts are also available for students at all levels, either providing extensive listening content—through stories or jokes, for example—or more intensive and explicit instruction on grammar, pronunciation, or the use of phrasal verbs. In this report, several podcasts will be introduced that may be of interest to students and teachers of English and other foreign languages. To find out how you can access the podcasts described in this report, you might refer to Apple's "Tips for Podcast Fans" at

<http://www.apple.com/itunes/podcasts/>. You may also download iTunes from a link on that page.

### ***Reviews of particular podcasts***

#### ***Seattle Learning Academy: American English Pronunciation Podcast***

Reviewed by Shunsuke Morikawa

Seattle Learning Academy's American English Pronunciation Podcast is a podcast which offers weekly lessons covering many difficult English pronunciation issues that non-native English speakers and ESL students have. This podcast is created by Seattle Learning Academy, which is an English language school in Seattle, Washington, USA. Mandy, a teacher at the language school, is the narrator of this podcast. She aims to help students to communicate better and more clearly by teaching pronunciation and accent reduction. She provides not only the clear recording of the podcasts but also the transcripts of them on her website [[www.pronunciation.com](http://www.pronunciation.com)] so that listeners can follow the script while listening to make sure they understand what she is talking about. The website also offers hundreds of pronunciation lessons and thousands of American English sounds.

The latest episode, as of this writing, "#167: When to use the informal contraction 'useta'," provides a very clear idea of different pronunciations of 'used to' in various contexts. Mandy describes the formal and informal pronunciation patterns, and offers example sentences for the listeners so that they can learn through context. Although Mandy talks at a very comfortable pitch and speed for EFL students, it may be difficult for them to understand them all fully. The transcripts available on the website play a crucial role for them, as they can check the words that are pronounced simultaneously.

The episode "Special episode: Japanese speakers of English as a Second Language" gives a general idea of what sorts of English sounds Japanese learners struggle with. It introduces lessons (episodes) which may help Japanese learners pronounce *r* and *l* sounds, fricatives, glides, stops, and vowels. Although this episode is just an introduction, it presents each sound briefly and leads to several episodes that explain them in more detail. Furthermore, there are special episodes for Chinese and Spanish speakers of English which discuss the English sounds that they struggle with. Each episode will help Chinese and Spanish learners practice their weak points.

Overall, the podcast provides plenty of advice that ESL/EFL learners can use to improve their pronunciation. The website can also be used to review the podcast in more detail and it allows the learners to gain a deeper understanding.

*Center for Educational Development: English as a Second Language Podcast*

Reviewed by Shunsuke Morikawa

English as a Second Language Podcast (ESL Podcast) provides various episodes related to second language acquisition. This podcast is run by a team of experienced English teachers with over 30 years of experience. Dr. Lucy Tse, from the University of Southern California, writes the scripts and story ideas for the podcasts, and Dr. Jeff McQuillan, also from the University of Southern California, reads the scripts and provides explanations for the listeners. By speaking slowly and using everyday phrases and expressions, they provide many sources of listening content that English learners can use to improve their English.

Although the learners need to register for Basic or Premium membership to download learning guides for each episode (which cost at least \$10 for 30 days), all the podcast episodes are free to download and listen to. The learning guides include full transcripts, vocabulary lists, sample sentences, and comprehension questions. It should help learners understand and learn about each episode in more detail, but just listening to the episodes would also benefit learners since they increase the learners' exposure to English and they, therefore, become used to listening to English.

The most recent episode, as of this writing, is "English Café 380." Posted on January 8<sup>th</sup>, it discusses American presidents. It is very impressive that this podcast updates and posts new episodes more than once a week. This would surely help language learners to improve their listening skills. All the episodes are tagged to one of the following genres: Announcements, English Café, Business, Daily Life, Dining, Entertainment, Health/Medicine, Relationships, Shopping, Transportation, or Travel. On the website ([www.eslpod.com](http://www.eslpod.com)), listeners are able to search for the genre of episodes that they want to listen to. The website also provides the Top 10 podcasts which are most listened to.

In the podcast, you can find an episode for teachers. This episode is called "Using iPods and iTunes for Language Education." It is particularly made for teachers. Dr. Jeff McQuillan gives a presentation about what Language Education is about, and how Web 2.0 technology, such as iPods and iTunes can be used efficiently for Language Learning. Teachers can adapt this idea to their classroom and improve their way of teaching. In conclusion, ESL Podcast provides various tips for both learners and teachers in terms of the learning and teaching of English.

*Classic French Tales (French Today)*

Reviewed by Mai Tsukahara

This podcast offers listeners the world's most well-known stories—such as Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood and Snow White—in French. The creators believe that, since we already know the stories, it will be easier for us to understand them in French. Two versions of the same tale are provided. One is narrated in modern French by Camille Chevalier-Karfis, an instructor who was born and raised in Paris and has been teaching French to adults for 19 years in the US and France, and to people around the world over the phone and by Skype for many years as well. The other version is based on the original tale, often from the 18th century, hence, considerably more challenging.

However, I was puzzled to find that only two versions of Cinderella have been provided so far. The organizers should have recorded, at least, those tales that they included in the description of this podcast, namely, Little Red Riding Hood and Snow White, before releasing the podcast. Despite that, this podcast gives language teachers whose native language is other than French, a brilliant opportunity to hear stories as language learners.

I must state that the pedagogical underpinnings of the podcast are quite the same as those of the Story-Based Curriculum (Allen-Tamai, 2011), which I have been using to teach English to four and five year-old children under the guidance of Dr. Allen-Tamai, a professor in the English Department at Aoyama Gakuin University. This is a method for children learning English as a foreign language (EFL), placing world-famous, traditionally told, stories at the center of the curriculum, which provides a rich and meaningful context for language learning. Children learn to tell whole stories through Joint-Storytelling, with scripts adapted by Dr. Allen-Tamai, so that they are easier to recite and more helpful for children to remember (See Allen-Tamai 2010; 2011).

The second episode presents the story “Cendrillon (Cinderella)”, told by Camille Chevalier-Karfis. The story is narrated very slowly, as if it were caretaker talk, so that the listener would not be overwhelmed. Since the characters in this story are almost all female (Cinderella, the stepsisters, the stepmother, and the fairy godmother), she didn't change the pitch of her voice so much. However, she did change her manner of talking to convey arrogance (sisters) and kindness (Cinderella), so that the listener can understand which character she is playing at the moment. Hence, the voice of the storyteller plays a key role in helping language learners understand the story. Speaking from the perspective of a learner, although it was hard to understand all the words, and there were many parts where I lost track of which scene the narrator was talking about,

I felt that I wanted to hear the story repeatedly, which I think derives from the strength of the story itself and the narrator's impressive storytelling ability.

I believe many other listeners will benefit from these podcast episodes. They could have been enhanced if pictures or animations accompanied the stories so that all listeners could follow them. Additionally, had there been some parts that the listener could say along (e.g. through chants or after a pause following each phrase), it would have been much more interesting and more supportive to learning. Nevertheless, I strongly recommend this podcast to all language teachers and learners of French.

*All things ESL TOEFL Preparation Podcast*

Reviewed by Anna Inaba

In the Podcast "All things ESL TOEFL Preparation Podcast", Rebekah Lawrence offers advice for TOEFL iBT test preparation. Rebekah is an English tutor who specializes in teaching TOEFL iBT test preparation, U.S citizenship classes, and English teaching for moms and kids.

Rebekah explains test techniques that can help learners prepare for the TOEFL iBT, including ways to increase their reading speed and help them write better thesis statements and essays. She also offers advice for developing better pronunciation and getting higher scores on the reading, writing, and speaking tests.

Learners will not only be able to obtain higher scores in the TOEFL test, but they also will be able to learn methods for how to perform better in the three English competence skills (reading, writing and speaking). These learning methods are useful not only for EFL learners who will take the TOEFL tests, but also for teachers who teach EFL students preparing for university entrance exams. This Podcast provided me with hints on ways to teach English reading to high school students because there was an episode which introduced how to use "decoding" and "sight words" to increase one's reading speed.

Listening to this episode gave me an opportunity to think back about my reading skills and how I built my English vocabulary in the past. The advantage of this Podcast was that Rebekah provided listeners with informative links and references for further study. For example, to improve vocabulary skills, she introduced "The 2000 most frequently used English words" and "The Academic Word List" as a reference and a good start to memorize vocabulary for academic reading. Each episode was related to the previous and to the next episodes, which helps listeners to remember what they heard in the previous episode and anticipate what they will hear in the following one.

The episodes are released on an irregular basis, once or twice every two months.

Although she introduced learning methods for reading, writing and speaking, she did not create podcasts for listening, which should be included in episodes in the future. In addition, the Podcast should release episodes more regularly, at least twice a month, so listeners can maintain their motivation to study. Despite those minor criticisms, the podcast will surely provide some assistance to those wishing to get higher scores on the TOEFL iBT.

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