

# Student Generated Media: Theories, Practice and Attitudes

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## Abstract

Many language educators are embracing new technologies to enhance the second language classroom. Some examples are: internet sites, computer programs, listening to podcasts, Moodle, e-learning labs, just to name a few. What if we introduce the technology to the students and have them create these content? Would their learning be more accelerated? Would students take control of these learning opportunities? What about motivation? How would the student react to other people reading or listening to their pronunciation and writing? This paper will address the semester long undergraduate course titled “Advanced Oral Communication” for 4<sup>th</sup> year English majors in an all women’s university. In this class, students wrote, recorded, edited and produced an English podcast program magazine called Ayamechan Podcast. The student results were varied and some attitudes were positively changed as the semester progressed. As of the writing of this article, 9 podcast episodes have been produced with over 600 downloads.

## 1. Introduction

Educators are being challenged today with the decision of including technology in their array of pedagogic tools. Sometimes the current “trend” or uneasiness with technological knowledge provoke an educator to retreat and rely on tried and proven practices. Levy makes a very important point in saying that “the technology should not be in the driving seat, but instead act as a vehicle for what teachers and learners need to do.”

This paper will introduce theory, practices and student’s attitudes towards using podcasting in an advanced oral communication university course. It will explain pedagogic theory that supports using a technology that is utilized by a majority of Japanese university students today. In addition, the teacher, also not very “Tech” savvy, will introduce a lesson plan that applies tried and proven theories in a practical and easily adoptable syllabus. The course produced an English weekly podcast “magazine” geared towards the student body and prospective students. The goal was to make an English environment on campus that can be embraced across all faculties and disciplines. Students’ attitudes in using these technologies in the classroom are also very important to the

podcasts success. A survey was distributed during the half point in the semester and on the final day of the course. The results revealed a change in the students' attitudes and motivation in addition to an increase of fluency and expansion of vocabulary.

The teacher of the course was influenced by the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology' student magazine podcast "Campus Beat". The goal of "Campus Beat" was geared toward second language learners' skill of writing in different styles. In addition, the idea of a "borderless classroom" (McMinn 2007) whereby students spend time outside the classroom interviewing and exploring topics that interest them and their classmates.

## 2. Second Language Theory

Before the decision was made to use podcasting as a vehicle of learning, second language theories and criteria were investigated. Issues such as learner autonomy, motivation and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) were researched and evaluated.

### a. Learner Autonomy

The title of this course was Advanced Oral Communication. From this, the key word "advanced" was always kept in mind. One of the principles that was decided was to incorporate learner autonomy. Learner autonomy is defined as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (Holec 1981) Japanese students in this class have already had at least 9 years of English language classroom learning. As seniors, we need to direct them to take charge of expanding their English education by relying on themselves to explore new vocabulary and communication strategies since they were going to graduate at the end of this course. Students were given "responsibility for aspects of the language learning process (such as setting goals, selecting learning strategies, and evaluating progress)" (Cotterall 2000). With these principles chosen, the 5 learner autonomy principles needed to be addressed as defined by Holec (1981) Learner goals, language learning process, tasks, learner strategies, and reflections on learning. For this course, students are given the task to find topics of interest and report on them. Learner goals of vocabulary expansion and conversation strategies were integrated into the assignments. The students were in control of the interviews; this allowed them to set a goal for each segment and make sure all aspects of reporting were covered, and pro-

nunciation of new vocabulary was spoken correctly and used grammatically. Each student utilizes her unique individual learning styles to acquire these new sets of vocabulary and/or patterns of language usage. In addition, for every episode of the podcast, students were grouped and responsibilities were rotated. Tasks varied from interviews, information gathering and reporting, to song selection and translation. Learner strategies, again, were selected by the learner as to how to internalize and remember key verbal and non-verbal communication aspects. Finally, self evaluations were accomplished in 2 ways. The first was via editing of their own podcasts. Speed, intonation, pauses and pronunciation were evaluated by the students, in their group, and corrected. In addition, a survey was given by the teacher twice in the semester to evaluate student attitudes and awareness's.

Finally, James (2009) accurately defines the priority of learner autonomy as:

“When the learners are exposed to such personally appealing real-world communicative tasks, they will hopefully use the target language with interest, gradually taking charge of their own target language acquisition.” This description can be applied to second language podcasting creation.

## **b. Motivation**

Motivation must also be addressed as an integral part of the learner process when discussing learner autonomy. The format of the course is designed in such a way that the student must speak to an unknown/known audience. Even though recording is done in a small group with sometimes scripted discourse, the listening audience can be vast. Students are aware of the possible wide scope of their podcasts. This motivation to perform at a high level motivates the learners in four aspects. These aspects (Garner 1985) are: a goal (a podcast), effortful behavior (producing a thoughtful and interesting program), desire to attain the goal (for the University audience and to promote new students to the school) and favorable attitudes toward the activity (feedback from family, friends and teachers).

## **c. Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)**

CALL concepts have been utilized in the second language classroom for over 30 years. As technology changes, so should the uses of technology in the second language classroom. When walking or driving through university campus' today, one cannot

ignore the ear buds most students are wearing as they pass. This power of portable listening devices and the easy accessibility of these audio files must be taken advantage of by the educator.

In the early days of CALL usage, the computer was seen as a “tutor-tools” (Levy 1997). Teachers generated the software, the learner utilized the program, the program gave a result, evaluated the learner and then proceeded with the next task. The same use is true today. Many programs used by second language learners are “tutor-tools”.

Warchsuer and Healy (1998) and Bax (2003) state that CALL has been developing in 3 distinct phrases, the structural or restricted CALL (tutor-tool, closed drills), communicative or open CALL (emphasis on communicative tasks, simulations and games) and integrated CALL (emphasis on authentic discourse implemented through an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach, email, word processing, etc).

Integrated CALL is described as frequent interaction with other students, interpreting, evaluating, commenting and simulating thought. The teacher’s role is as a facilitator or manager. Technology usage is integrated into the syllabus and is a smaller part of the lesson. The technology is available in every classroom, on every desk or in every bag (Bax 2003). Podcasting in the second language classroom addresses all of these criteria. The learning experience is even more enhanced when the students generate this content in the integrated CALL classroom.

### **3. Podcasting and Education**

Portable digital music players were made popular with the introduction of the Apple Ipod. A complete history of this media device will not be addressed in this article, but can be found in many encyclopedia web sites. What will be addressed is the popularity of these devices in Japanese society. According to a JR Tokai Express Research report (May, 2008) of the 330 people surveyed, 55.8% had a digital audio player, the most popular being Apple with 44.6%. In addition, of the people polled, only 13% were in their twenties and 73% were in their thirties and forties. In another survey conducted by Cross Marketing and Internet-com, Inc, in February of 2008, of the 300 people surveyed, 51% owned a portable digital audio player; 20% were in their twenties and 20% were in their thirties. Excluded from this survey is the use of a cell phone as a music player. Again, Apple was the most popular player with nearly half owning one of their models. In addi-

tion, it was reported that 76% use their personal computers to upload music to their players. Recognizing the popularity of these devices and by doing a visual survey on any university campus today, we can see the power they have to access a wide audience.

In addition, the streaming and downloading of audio files is really not new for access to the internet. What is new is the ease of publication, subscription and use across multiple environments such as walking, commuting, stereo systems or moving about (Campbell 2005).

In education, podcasts are becoming increasingly common on college and university campuses in the United States (O'Bryan-Hegelheimer 2007). If you look at the Apple iTunes store, as of January 2010, there is a section labeled "iTunesU" In this section there are over 200,000 educational audio and video files from universities, museums, and public media organizations from around the world (iTunes).

The advantage for the second language learner is the "chunking " of information into short segments. Complex topics can be de-compartmentalized. Hargis-Wilson (2005) state that information processing and conceptual learning can be related to podcast learning. In addition, the podcast creation process facilitates self-correcting of ideas and concepts. As a producer of a podcast, the learner creates a podcast (a concrete experience) then edits and reflects on it (reflective observations), makes improvements (abstract conceptualization) and then takes steps for improvements in learning or the next podcast (abstract conceptualization) (Panday 2009). Panday also addresses the different types of learner styles, visual, auditory, reading/writing and kinesthetic. He states that listening to a podcast can serve auditory learners and creating podcasts can fit the kinesthetic learner. In addition, reading and writing style learners can benefit from creating scripts or translating songs.

In addition to the language benefits of creating and listening to a podcast, students can develop skills such as scripting and interviewing in addition to learning how to use different kinds of software and technologies.

## **4. Classroom Practice**

The Advanced Oral Communication course met once a week for 90 minutes for 14 sessions. There were 17 students in the class. 15 were Japanese nationals, one Korean exchange student and one Chinese exchange student. All were English majors with the

majority being 4<sup>th</sup> year students.

The class was separated into 4 groups, 4 to 5 members in each one. Each group was assigned a leader for communication purposes, organization of ideas, and decision making.

The teacher gave the students a format that they had to follow initially. This format included:

- a. Introduction to the podcast contents
- b. Campus news
- c. City news
- d. An interview with someone connected with the university
- e. Teaching an English idiom
- f. An English song with a translation to be put on the podcast blog.
- g. Conclusion

Each podcast took 4 classes to produce. The first class period was research and organization of the podcast. The second class was the writing and editing of scripts. The third class was the actual recording of the podcast and the forth class was the editing of the recordings. During the whole process, the teacher helped by giving advice, checking grammar and fixing any technical issues that arose. The students also used time outside the regular classroom schedule for research and interviews.

The teacher, in addition to the class responsibilities, maintained the Podcast blog, put together the podcast after the students edited their audio files (filing in music, volume adjustment and format) and arranged distribution and storage of the podcast (Details of the actual software and devices used can be found in Appendix 2).

In addition, the class was provided with 2 digital recorders and an Ipod with a microphone. These recorders were shared and kept at a central location for easy pickup with a university staff member. One of the students had her own Ipod and used it for recordings with her group. Podcast length was limited to 30 minutes, about the average time of a student commute.

As the semester progressed, groups started to acquire unique characteristics. One example is the theme oriented podcast. Interviews and new articles were about a certain topic decided by the group. The teacher did not know of this group decision. Another characteristic was the addition of new sections. Movie, store and restaurant reviews were added. In addition to audio content, pictures were added to the podcast blog as

additional information. Also, students had discussions and opinions recorded as a group. Still another group handed out a survey and reported the results in English. Another unique idea was the interviewing of a fellow student not in the class. Usually interviewees were teachers or staff of the university. One group decided to interview a very proficient English speaking student to get her insights to learning English and her experience abroad.

All in all, as the semester progressed, a thirty minute podcast was easier to make as the flow of ideas and opportunities flourished.

## **5. Student Attitudes, Comments and Analysis**

During the course of the semester, a survey was conducted during class number 7 and class number 14, the last class.

1. Question: Do you think making a podcast is a good way to improve your English abilities?

Both surveys contained this question. The results showed that there was a positive attitude change from the midterm to the end of the term by 4 students. For the first survey, comments were “Yes, I can think by myself when writing scripts and learning new vocabulary words.”, “Yes, my interview quality and grammar improved.” “Yes, it is a good way to have a chance using English.” “Yes, we can try to speak English smoothly when we record.” “Yes, I can listen to my pronunciation and improve it.” “Yes, we have to speak English with foreigners in the interview.” For the January 20<sup>th</sup> survey, comments from two students noted a big change of opinion and appreciated this experience. On the negative side, two students noted that she felt this was not an “oral” communication activity and felt they were just reading scripts. In addition, one student commented that she wanted more teacher input and structure. She wrote, “I want the teacher to teach me English.”

2. Question: Would you change the format of the podcast to make it more interesting? What would you add or delete?

Both surveys contained these questions. For the class number 7 survey, there was a clear dichotomy in answers; leave it as is and delete certain sections. In addition, some

complained that it was too much work and seniors have more important things to do; their graduation thesis and job hunting. Only 2 students gave positive suggestions of sections to add that were more of a reading of works already written (short stories, songs or old radio programs). For the survey in class 14, students made many suggestions of sections that could be added to the podcast. 8 students suggested sections to be added. For example, discussions, movies, music, karaoke, speaking about more than 1 topic, talking with the class teacher, making the podcasts theme oriented, sports programs, and introducing a restaurant.

From these results, students were more creative and interested in producing good podcasts and realized the scope and interests of their audience as the semester progressed.

3. Question: Have your friends or family listened to the podcast? What are their opinions?

Both surveys contained these questions. For the November 11<sup>th</sup> survey, the majority answered no (13 students). Some added that they want them to listen to it (2 students). One student never thought about telling anyone. Only 4 students answered yes. The affirmative answers were accompanied by positive listener comments and even a technical question. The end of the semester had similar results. Though the scope of the listener comments included one from a Tokyo listener, positive comments from staff and teachers in the university were noted and one student even wrote that it was the first time her parents heard her speak in English.

Students still need to be more confident about their work. Though they were active in making posters to advertise the podcast and posted them around campus, most did not tell family or friends of the program. This can be attributed to the Japanese character of not boasting or lack of confidence in English speaking abilities.

4. Question : Should we continue making this podcast in class or as a new club?

Both surveys contained these questions. For the half semester survey, again the majority had concise views of podcast making venues. 15 said that the podcast should be continued. 9 students thought it should be done in class and 6 felt this is better as a club activity. One student thought it should be discontinued. However, for the final class survey, 10 students said that the podcast should be continued but did not write who



should be involved in the production. Only 7 students had strong convictions and were split between the podcast production being a class or club activity. Positive comments included interest in listening to it next year, and cooperation between students as an important aspect of making the podcast. Negative comments, again, mentioned the time constraints of seniors. Also, in this section, for the final class survey, an additional comment was made concerning the “freedom” in class.

The results were mixed. During the first half of the semester, students had concrete opinions of the podcast production staff, but as the semester came to a close these opinions were less definitive, resulting in the vague positive answers. Students started getting positive feedback which resulted in an increase of motivation. They started to feel proud of their accomplishments. Maybe students felt that to have an enjoyable situation in class constituted a non-learning environment? In addition, student awareness of increased vocabulary was never noted as a positive aspect of making the podcast. Also, the student that was uncomfortable with the unstructured atmosphere of the classroom maybe had never been given the responsibility to create her own learning style and was used to the Japanese style of structured teaching that required reports, or tests.

5. Question: Is it practical to make an all English podcast at this university?

This question was included only in the half semester survey. 9 students answered yes and 7 students answered no. An additional comment was made that the podcast is too difficult for all students on campus to enjoy.

Students need to be more aware of their level of English and design a podcast that all students can enjoy. This question was asked to get the students thinking about their content and designing this content to a target audience.

6. Question: Have you ever listened to your voice speaking English? Did this make you more aware of your pronunciation? Did your pronunciation improve?

This question was included only in the end of semester survey. Surprisingly, 4 students never heard a recording of themselves speaking English! 10 students answered yes to this question. Comments included, it made me try to speak better (9 students) and more advice by the teacher is needed to improve my pronunciation (2 students).

Student’s awareness of their pronunciation is an important part of accent reduction. Hopefully in the students first through third year of university, students should have a

chance to record their pronunciation and be made aware of individual pronunciation corrections.

7. Question: Have you ever had all English conversations with your teachers or friends before making this podcast?

This question was included only in the end of semester survey. Almost 50% of students admitted that they never had an all English conversation with their teachers or friends. 6 students said that they had this opportunity before, but some also noted that this all English conversations took place with native English speakers.

All students should have the opportunity to speak all English, especially with their teachers. This is difficult when there is a lack of understanding, but to the benefit of the student, it forces them to use strategies that will have long term positive results. Educators must help students build confidence and strategic communicative competence.

8. Question: Were you impressed with the English speaking abilities of some of our guest interviews? Why?

This question was included only in the end of semester survey. 11 students answered yes. Many noted that they were impressed by the interviewee's high level of English. Some stated that they were happy to get a chance to speak only English.

As the semester progressed, some students made comments that they never knew so many Japanese staff were so fluent in English. Many of the staff members were alumni of the university. In addition, the interviews showed the students the possibilities of using their English in future careers. Many students feel that there are no opportunities to use English daily in Japan. These outstanding educators and staff gave up their time and shared their thoughts, experiences and lessons on becoming good English speakers. Students were impressed after the interviews and talked about them often.

## 6. Conclusion

Second Language Learning can be integrated into a student's daily life via podcasting. Using the basic pedagogic theories of learner autonomy, motivation and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), students can create content, via a second language, that can be listened to by a very large audience. In addition, the benefits are not only to

the creators of the content, but also to the listeners of the podcast, a double benefit!

Podcasting in education is increasing and being recognized as a high quality source that can be accessed by a huge student body. An example of the “iTunes U” portion of the iTunes software is a perfect example of the multitude of different uses of podcasting. Universities can cheaply create content that all students can listen to in addition to the academic benefits.

Classroom set up is easy as long as there are guidelines and strategies predetermined and planned. A computer, digital recorder, easy to use software and an internet connection is all that is required to start a podcast.

Students not familiar with technology will soon appreciate the benefits of podcasting. They will think of it as part of their learning strategy not the basis of it. The additional benefit of a positive student attitude, motivation, creativity, new experiences, and learning in a non structured environment allowed the students to take control of their learning.

Campbell (2005) states that “podcasting can help education realize one of its noblest goals; to make better a conversation out of the thing we call civilization.”

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## Appendix 1

### Advanced Oral Communication Student Survey

Question	Student Responses	
	Survey taken on November 11	Survey taken on January 20th
Do you think making a podcast is a good way to improve your English abilities? Should we continue with the Podcast?	9 students Positive 3 students Positive, but no improvement 3 students Negative	10 students Positive 2 students Negative
Would you change the format of the podcast to make it more interesting? What would you add or delete?	8 students No change needed 4 students Wanted some sections deleted	4 students No change needed 3 students Delete sections 8 students Add sections
Have your friends or family listened to the podcast? What are their opinions?	13 students No 4 students Yes	13 students No 4 students Yes
Should we continue making this podcast in class or as a new club?	9 students Yes as a class activity 6 students Continue as a club activity 1 student No	4 students Yes as a class activity 3 students Continue as a club activity 10 students Yes, not specified
Is it practical to make an all English podcast at this university?	9 students Yes 7 students No	Not on Survey
Have you ever listened to your voice speaking English? Did this make you more aware of your pronunciation? Did your pronunciation improve?	Not on Survey	4 students No 10 students Yes 9 students Made me try to speak better
Have you ever had all English conversations with your teachers or friends before making this podcast?	Not on Survey	8 students No 6 students Yes
Were you impressed with the English speaking abilities of some of our guest interviews? Why?	Not on Survey	Yes 11 students

## **Appendix 2**

### Equipment, Software and Web sites

1. Equipment
  - a. Dell Inspiron 1501 with a Western Digital 150 GB hard drive
  - b. Ipod Classic (30 GB) with Griffen Italk
  - c. Sony IC recorder (different versions)
  - d. Buffalo Stand alone microphone
2. Software
  - a. Itunes By Apple ([www.apple.com/itunes/download](http://www.apple.com/itunes/download)) Free
  - b. Gold Wave-audio editor, recorder, converter software ([www.goldwave.com](http://www.goldwave.com)) Fee
  - c. Propaganda (podcasting software) ([www.makepropaganda.com](http://www.makepropaganda.com)) Fee
  - d. Digital Voice Editor By Sony (included with the IC recorder)
3. Web Sites
  - a. Songs were chosen and downloaded from [www.musicalley.com](http://www.musicalley.com)
  - b. Ayamechan Podcast Blog [www.ayamechanpodcast.blogspot.com](http://www.ayamechanpodcast.blogspot.com)

Note: Apple computer users have most podcast creating software already installed in their computer systems <http://www.apple.com/itunes/podcasts/specs.html>