

Preface

The use of Academic Podcasting Technology and Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is reshaping teaching and learning as it supports, expands, and enhances course content, learning activities, and teacher-learner interactions. The new wave of “enabled wifi” personal multimedia players is expanding learners’ access and mobility and is providing opportunities for them to time-shift their learning activities.

Indeed, Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) continues to gain popularity as it is becoming carefully and thoughtfully integrated into the foreign language curriculum, and as it provides learning tools to the “net generation” (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005). For this new generation, which comprises students who have been encouraged to “to take control of what they learn” (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2007), MALL (and particularly podcasting) is playing a key role in their learning as it provides them with instructional materials and low-cost tools which enable them to work toward developing and improving language proficiency. As an audio/video content delivery approach based on web syndication protocols, podcasting provides increased flexibility and portability of learning materials, while allowing students the ability to time-shift and multitask (Thorne & Payne, 2005). Syndication is the cornerstone of podcasting; by allowing subscription and notification, this XML-based protocol shifts audio/video file handling from a static and manual mode to a dynamic and automated mode.

“Academic Podcasting Technology” refers to the use of iPods and other MP3/MP4 players to disseminate audio and video programming over the Internet. “MALL” refers to any type of learning which is mediated by handheld devices, regardless of time or location. Their creative possibilities and their ease and popularity of use, as well as their overall cost effectiveness, make podcasting and MALL attractive, innovative, and pedagogically effective ways to improve and enhance foreign language education for both students and faculty. In fact, the integration of podcasting and MALL technologies (personal multimedia players, cell phones, and handheld devices) into the foreign language curriculum is commonplace in many secondary and higher education institutions, as these students are generally more accepting of these new technologies in other parts of their lives.

In this regard, current research has identified both pedagogically sound applications for these new technologies and important benefits to students from the use of these applications. For example, recent findings indicate that when instructors use podcasts for multiple instructional purposes (e.g., to critique student projects and exams, for student-centered video presentations, for student-paired interviews, to complete specific assignments or dictations, in roundtable discussions, or for guest lectures), students are more likely to use this technology in a new, academic setting, and to report academic benefits. Perhaps one of the most important benefits of podcasting, in addition to its ability to ease content distribution and to expand classroom time (Brien and Hegelheimer, 2007), is its potential “to foster a more seamless integration of in-class and out-of-class activity and materials” (p. 386).

PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

Mobile devices are ubiquitous in the educational landscape. These devices, particularly the new powerful and promising ones which offer rich multimedia experiences using a tactile interface, continue to penetrate into the field of education. To contribute to the effective integration of podcasting and MALL, the main purpose of this book is to provide an overview of ways to plan, design, produce, and integrate podcasting and MALL into language learning and acquisition. While this book attempts to provide effective ways of using podcasting, it also aims at helping the reader understand the pedagogical, technical, and logistical issues associated with podcasting in particular, and with MALL in general.

By offering a compilation of best practices and recommended processes for planning, designing, and producing effective podcasts for second language learning and acquisition, this book approaches an audience that is broad enough to include all practitioners interested in using podcasts for language education. Faculty reading it will find a solid pedagogical framework that will help them to anchor their integration of podcasting and MALL into their teaching and learning activities. Similarly, librarians will find relevant references and practical case studies to share with members of their faculty who are interested in using podcasting as part of their curricula. Instructional designers and technologists will find planning and production steps for developing podcasts. However, while this book provides enough basic technical information to enable the production of podcasts, it should not be considered to be merely a technical reference book, as it offers pedagogical and philosophical underpinnings for the use of podcasting in enhancing and extending language learning. Finally, this book is also intended to assist researchers interested in exploring and advancing the field of MALL and its integration into language learning and acquisition.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

This book is organized into four sections. The first section, which comprises five chapters, introduces MALL and language acquisition. In the first chapter, Lomicka and Lord offer a historical review of the uses of podcasting in K-12 and higher education language learning classrooms, while exploring current and potential pedagogical applications for academic podcasting. In the second chapter, Fernandez presents practical guidance for the design and production of pedagogically effective podcasts, with a focus on the importance of setting learning objectives. Following the same line of thinking, but writing from a more technical angle, Gonzalez, in the third chapter, describes several strategies to use in order to incorporate multimedia content into podcasts, and addresses the gray area of copyright. In the fourth chapter, Corbeil and Corbeil offer what they call a “simple guide for creating your first podcast.” In the final chapter of this section, Hsueh draws attention to the usefulness of social networks’ applications to language learning. The author discusses various Web 2.0 applications and their potential and challenges, while exploring the ways in which mobile technologies are assisting language learning.

In the second section, the focus of the book shifts to student-centered projects. In the first chapter, Beres refocuses the discussion to one from the student perspective and discusses the ways in which MALL is blurring the boundaries between students’ personal and educational lives. In this regard, the author reminds us of the pressing need to “better understand our learners, their needs, and the contexts in which they study language.” In the second chapter, Martin and Beckmann guide us through the implementation of a pedagogically-sound model for the effective use of academic podcasting in immersive-style language

teaching. The authors describe the genesis, implementation, and evaluation of an innovative approach to the intensive use of academic podcasting in the teaching of Spanish to undergraduate students.

The third section describes the potential of podcasting's use to engage students during their study abroad experiences. In the first chapter, Murphy-Judy discusses ways in which podcasting can help students create a transnational community of practice that shares the wealth of experiential learning through carefully structured and planned activities. In the second chapter, Summerfield describes how podcasting can "engage students extensively in language- and culture-based tasks" while cultivating collaboration and creativity among students.

The final section focuses on the use of podcasting in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). In the first chapter, Ting describes how podcasting can be used for instructional, informational, and developmental purposes for pre-service teachers. In addition to providing an insight into the attitudes of these prospective teachers toward podcasting in education and its future use in schools, the author reiterates previous research findings that have reported that podcasting not only is an "integrative and supplementary learning tool, but also as a powerful generator of knowledge, which encourages active learning." In the second chapter, Nurmukhamedov and Sadler attempt to assist language teachers in their search to find "useful and learner-friendly podcasts to supplement their language instruction." To this end, the authors categorize podcasting into four categories and offer practical suggestions that allow for the integration of podcasts into both in- and out-of-class activities.

As the convergence of hardware, telecommunication, and software infuse the educational landscape with more and more powerful mobile devices, we hope that this book will contribute to a better understanding and a stronger integration of these tools, particularly as they reconfigure traditional teaching and learning practices while extending both our and our students' cognitive abilities.

Betty Rose Facer
Old Dominion University, Virginia

Mohammed Abdous
Old Dominion University, Virginia