**PORTABLE LANGUAGE LEARNING
CREATING MATERIALS FOR THE IPOD**

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A recent survey at the University of Auckland showed that a majority of students had one or more mp3 players. Not many made use of them to listen to podcasts (audio broadcasts that can be downloaded from the internet on to a PC or a portable audio device), however, and even fewer did so on a regular basis. There are, of course, many highly entertaining and useful podcasts for English learners (http://iteslj.org/links/ESL/Listening/Podcasts/ is a good starting point) and we were keen to make them available to the students in our self-access centre in order to encourage them to take their learning out of the classroom and into their daily lives. In order to make things as easy as possible for the learners we set up a Language Station (a public PC on a lectern-type table) that lets students simply drop by and download the audio materials without having to pay for internet charges and without needing to know how to use the technology (permission was obtained from the makers of the podcasts). The Language Station was set up right at the entrance of the centre so as to appeal to students who are not members and who may otherwise be reluctant to take up English support. Students come in and use a very simple menu structure (in essence just a website) to choose the podcasts they want (which are stored locally rather than on the internet).

We noticed that many students had Ipods and decided to take the above one step further. In addition to playing music (and for the more recent models, video) the larger Ipod models have an under-used feature called 'Notes'; essentially a small application capable of displaying text files. When Apple decided to include the application on their players they also added an extremely useful feature: they made Notes capable of displaying hyperlinks. This means that any part of the text can be changed into a hyperlink which can link to either another note or to an audio (or video,- or photo,-) file. This opens up a number of opportunities for language learning as by using the hyperlink structure notes can for example be used to provide different feedback depending on the student's response.

In our case we often felt that the podcasts we made available were pedagogically limited in that the most interesting ones only provided input (good for exposure to authentic materials) but no comprehension checks or any type of exercises. Our students are not enrolled in English classes so a follow-up is not always possible. For this reason we decided to combine the audio with additional questions that we wrote ourselves to create portable language learning materials. A typical way to structure such materials is like this:

1) Students open the Notes function on their Ipod.
2) They select a podcast exercise.
3) They read some basic instructions and click on a hyperlink in the text to start the first audiofile, usually the first segment of the podcast.
4) After a few minutes the podcast stops and students read a short question with several multiple-choice answers. These questions can be about the content or about the pronunciation, about specific language features, or they can be more general reflective questions.
5) They click to select the answer which then hyperlinks to a new note with feedback relating to their answer.
6) The new note hyperlinks to the next question or to the next audio segment.

Photos can be displayed when playing audiofiles so students can derive further information from that. Of course, the above can also be done with short video segments from for example news-related podcasts. A small accessory makes the Ipod capable of recording audio and students

could for example be given a pre-loaded player with instructions and language input (such as models and examples) that require them to interview native speakers or record themselves outside the classroom. Many other applications can undoubtedly be found.

As for the above we have found that students find the technology exciting and they enjoy the fact that they can get easy access to the podcasts without having to search for them. Students report listening to the podcasts and doing the exercises on the bus or while waiting for lectures to start. Informal feedback tells us that student prefer having the questions over just listening as it forces them to focus while still having the benefit of not being 'serious' English study. An interesting phenomenon is that we have noticed that a number of students have started to come in to download our exercises who previously had never made use of our centre. This is very promising to us.

Creating the Notes is a very simple procedure. It is clearly outlined in this online document: http://developer.apple.com/hardwaredrivers/ipod/iPodNoteReaderGuide.pdf Start by drawing up a structure of your podcast exercise; when should the podcast stop and a question be asked? Does the feedback link to another question or to the rest of the podcast? The most difficult part of all this is probably finding podcasts relevant to your students level and interest.
Please share your ideas or experiences: *www.hayo.nl*