

ELTPODCAST.COM - A PODCAST AND WEBSITE FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

ROBERT CHARTRAND
Kurume University, Japan
<robert_chartrand@kurume-u.ac.jp>

BILL PELLOWE
Kinki University, Japan
<bill@eltcalendar.com>

1. Introduction

Using podcasts for language learning has been popular for less than two years. In June 2005, Apple Computers included podcasts in its iTunes software with an update that made it easy for users to automatically download the latest podcasts. With this implementation, language teachers all over the world found a way to easily incorporate listening materials in their language lessons. This is one of the reasons why we started to think about doing a podcast of our own.

Prior to podcasting, it was not easy for learners of English to find listening materials that were free or suitable for their needs. Language learning materials such as CDs from major publishers are not inexpensive, and it is not always possible to ask students to buy these materials for their own use outside of class. Creating your own materials is an option that many teachers have done, but distribution of these materials to students often involved creating CDs with a full course worth of materials to hand out to your students in the first day of class (e.g., Ryan, 2001). Therefore, one alternative is creating your own podcasts. We realized that

materials we could create could address some specific needs of our students (and, by extension, these materials could fill a need with similar language learners anywhere in the world). Our students could download these listening materials from the Internet at no cost, allowing us to distribute the materials as needed, without the additional effort and costs that a more traditional CD would have required.

2. Creating the Podcast

Before we created our first podcast, we brainstormed by asking ourselves the following questions: What level(s) would be appropriate for our students? (How many levels would be needed?) What kind of conversations would be useful? What kind of practice exercises could we include with the conversations? Should we create a single podcast, or should we create different podcasts to address different levels? How many podcast episodes would we need to produce? What kind of equipment would we need (and what could we afford)?

We decided that we would create more than one podcast, so that students at a particular level could be sent to a compilation of episodes that were more closely aligned with their needs. In order to create conversations at different levels and topics, we decided to use scripted conversations for the Beginner and Intermediate levels. The conversations were recorded with an Apple Computer iMacG5, an Edirol UA-3FX USB audio capture unit and an Audio-Technica microphone. The following software was used to record, edit and mix the recordings: SoundStudio 3 (Freeverse Software), GarageBand 3 (part of the iLife '06 software package by Apple Computer) and iTunes 7 (Apple Computer). The eltpodcast.com website was programmed and designed by Bill Pellowe.

We decided to initially produce ten episodes each of 'ELT Podcast - Basic Conversations for EFL and ESL' and 'ELT Podcast - Intermediate Conversations for EFL and ESL' (see Fig. 1). Both podcasts include a transcript for each episode; these transcripts are available to students both on the website and on their iPod, if they have one.



Figure 1. The ELT Podcast Homepage

The basic conversations are aimed at the students who have a difficulty understanding spoken English that is disproportionate to their actual knowledge of English. Such students usually understand extremely clear speech or perhaps only written text, but rarely comprehend spoken

utterances. This is why these episodes contain a short dialogue that is repeated three times. The conversation is at normal speed the first and third time that the students hear it, but the second time, the conversation is at a slower pace. For the slower version, we speak at an unnaturally slow pace while trying to maintain the phonological features of quicker conversation (such as elision and relaxed pronunciation). The goal here is to allow students to ‘discover’ these features and (as they follow along with the script) to better understand the relationship between written English and spoken English. The slower version also gives the listeners an opportunity to concentrate on the listening aspect of the program.

ELT stands for English Language Teaching.

ELT Podcast - Basic Conversations for EFL and ESL

Subscribe free:
 iTunes

Basic Conversations - Weekend plans

Robert Chartrand and Bill Pellowe

Podcast Notes

You'll hear this basic conversation two times. First, at a normal speed, then at a slower speed. After that, practice asking questions. Then it will be your turn to answer some questions.

Conversation

Robert: Do you have any plans for this weekend?
 Bill: I don't know. I might watch a video at home. And you?
 Robert: I'm going to meet some friends.
 Bill: What are you going to do?
 Robert: We might go sailing if the weather is nice.
 Bill: Sailing, wow! Do you have a sailboat?
 Robert: No, my friend has one. She goes sailing every weekend.

Let's practice

A: We might go for a drive.
 B: A drive, wow! Do you have a car?

A: We might go hunting.
 B: Hunting, wow! Do you have a gun?

A: We might go surfing.
 B: Surfing, wow! Do you have a surfboard?

A: We might buy a house.
 B: A house, wow! Do you have enough money?

A: We might play some music.
 B: Play music, wow! Do you have a band?

Your turn. You answer the questions.

What are going to wear tomorrow?
 What are you are going eat for dinner?
 Who are you going to meet later?
 When are you going to go home?
 Where are you going to go for your next vacation?
 How are you going to go home?

listen

mp3 file
 size: 2.43 MB
 time: 5:03
 Mar 3, 2006

[More from the ELT Podcast - Basic Conversations for EFL and ESL Archive](#)

Figure 2. ELTPodcast: Basic Conversations – Weekend Plans. Drills follow the conversation

For the intermediate level dialogs, we do not include a slower version, and the dialogs tend to be longer. In both podcasts, the dialogues are followed by some short drill-like practice opportunities in which the learner can participate by actively speaking out the parts that are required. All of the dialogues and drills are written on the website so that a student can read the text if needed (see Fig. 2). For the intermediate level conversations, we focused on specific themes like the weather, part-time job and so on, and we added some practice drills as well.

3. The Teachers' Lounge

Another podcast on our website is aimed not at students but at our fellow teachers of English as a foreign language. 'ELT Podcast - The Teachers' Lounge' (henceforth 'the Lounge') is essentially a small group of language teachers talking about some specific aspect of their jobs and careers in order to share their experiences. We wanted to have a regular panel with enough people so that each of us could excuse ourselves whenever the recording schedule interfered with our lives 'AFCC' (away from classrooms and computers), which also allows us to introduce new members and guest speakers whenever the opportunities arose. To date, the regular panel is Bill Pellowe, Robert Chartrand, Kevin Ryan and Dominic Marini.

A number of podcasters have noted that early ideas prior to the first episode often evolve into something very different, and the Lounge is no exception. The initial idea was to discuss a current news topic and relate it to our own teaching. Our first episode was recorded shortly after the comedian Michael Richards was caught on video hurling racial slurs at a member of his audience because Richards believed that the man was talking loudly during the stand-up routine. We related this story to how we as teachers should develop strategies for dealing with

disruptive students, so that when the time came, we could employ the strategies rather than becoming angry and unprofessional.

However, our focus gradually shifted to more essential aspects of teaching. After an episode on using textbook dialogs, we received very positive feedback on some of the practical advice we had given. This sparked an epiphany – each of the teachers on our panel has over 15 years’ experience in the classroom, and between us, we have a lot of experience to share. Currently, the Lounge is our attempt to capture snapshots of some of the myriad facets that comprise the body of practice of experienced EFL teachers. We have discussed topics such as attendance policies, the first lesson of the year, information gap activities and a guide for first-time conference goers.

The screenshot shows the ELTPodcast website interface. At the top left is the 'eltpodcast' logo. Below it is a breadcrumb trail: 'HOME > Archive > ELT Podcast - The Teachers' Lounge > Attending Conferences for Language Teachers'. The main heading is 'ELT Podcast - The Teachers' Lounge' with a 'Subscribe free: iTunes' button. The episode title is 'Attending Conferences for Language Teachers' by Bill Pellowe, Kevin Ryan, and Robert Chartrand. The 'Podcast Notes' section includes a list of panelists: Bill Pellowe (Kinki University Kyushu School of Engineering, and ELT Calendar), Robert Chartrand (Kurume University), and Kevin Ryan (Showa Women's University, the University of Tokyo, and kevinryan.com). It also lists the topic as 'language conferences' and provides a brief description of the episode's content. A 'listen' button with a play icon is visible, along with technical details: 'mp3 file size: 13.97 MB time: 28:59 May 16, 2007'. An RSS feed icon is also present.

Fig. 3. ELTPodcast – The Teachers’ Lounge: Attending Conferences for Language Teachers

Recording the Lounge is very different from recording our other conversation podcasts for students. The discussions are unscripted, but we do agree on a topic beforehand. The panelists are not in the same physical location when we record. We arrange a time, and Pellowe initiates a conference call through Skype. Pellowe records the discussion with Audio Hijack Pro (Rogue Amoeba Software) and saved as an MP3 file. Chartrand also records a second copy as a backup. Pellowe then edits the sound file using SoundStudio 3 (Freeverse Software). A summary is included on the episode's page on the ELT Podcast website and as the podcast has evolved, so too have these summaries, which are now actually quite lengthy (see Fig. 3).

4. Conclusion

In the last eighteen months, ELT Podcast has evolved into a collection of podcasts for students and teachers of English. Over the past few years, the world has seen a lowering of the technical barriers that might have prevented many of us from adding our voices to the worldwide collection of resources. We certainly encourage all teachers to consider turning their own ideas into resources for all of us to share.

References

Ryan, K. (2001). CD Duplication and Replication as an Alternative to Textbooks. JALTCALL 2001 Conference, Kanto Gakuen Univerisy, Ohta-shi, Gunma, May 26-27, 2001.