In Hampel and Hauck (2004) the basic second language learning theory is summarized as follows: “For language acquisition to take place, students must be provided with comprehensible input (Krashen, 1981, 1985), they have to be able to interact to negotiate learning (Gass & Varonis, 1994; Varonis & Gass, 1985), and they must produce comprehensible output (Swain, 1985).” In accordance with this basic theory, most language instruction starts with a good amount of comprehensible input and with the advent of Communicative Language Teaching and other communicative types of teaching methodologies, students are forced to interact with either other learners or the teacher to negotiate meaning. However, while trying to find grounds for learners to communicate and produce comprehensible output, the lack of native speakers has always been seen as something which reduces the effectiveness of communication in that it was not authentic. For years, many institutions have hired native speakers—not necessarily ELT teachers—and made them responsible for speaking classes as the easiest way to solve this problem. The success of this approach can be discussed; however, the dependence upon such outer resources is losing its power in today’s world as new technologies enable us to communicate internationally without any charge and with good audio and even video quality. In this paper, one of these technologies, podcasting, is going to be touched upon and a web-site which enables even the most novice users to use this kind of high-tech technology is reviewed.

What is Podcasting?

As it is stated in Wikipedia, podcasting is:

“...the distribution of audio or video files, such as radio programs or music videos, over the Internet using either RSS (Real Simple Syndication) or Atom syndication for listening on mobile devices and personal computers. The term podcast, like "radio", can mean both the content and the method of delivery. Podcasters’ websites also may offer direct download of their files, but the subscription feed of automatically delivered new content is what distinguishes a podcast from a simple download or real-time streaming. Usually, the podcast features one type of “show” with new episodes either sporadically or at planned intervals such as daily, weekly, etc. In addition to this, there are podcast networks that feature multiple shows on the same feed. Podcasting’s es-
sence is about creating content (audio or video) for an audience that wants to listen when they want, where they want, and how they want." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podcast retrieved April 8, 2006)

When we examine this definition closely, it is easy to see that podcasting is a part of a new era where we can get asynchronous audio and video. In terms of language teaching, podcasting creates more opportunities for the learners to practice their listening skills outside the classroom, and in this way the boundaries of the classroom is extended. As is stated by Stanly (2005), podcasting not only gives students extra possibilities of listening both inside and outside the classroom but also expands the scope of the classroom by making the students involved in creating content for their own audience and building communities with other classes and students around the world.

Not so long ago, to be able to podcast, users were required to have some HTML knowledge, and the process was not simple. In order to publish a podcast, first of all an XML file needs to be created with a closure tag, an MP3 format sound file needs to be recorded and uploaded to a specific server, and lastly the XML feed needs to be fed into a Podcast “catcher” program such as iTunes or Podcatcher. This whole process sounds complicated for a novice web user, making Podcasting sound like an activity only for professionals. PodOmatic is a website which enables even the most novice users to be able to podcast with very simple steps and is the focus of this review.

How to use PodOmatic
As it is stated in About Us section of the web-site, “PodOmatic is the leading provider of free, web-based tools and services that enable anyone to easily find, create, distribute, promote and listen to podcasts and videocasts’ and state that they provide “Simple and Fun Podcasting for everyone!”: The procedure for setting up a podcast are outlined below:

a. Registering
Registering in PodOmatic includes very simple steps. By clicking the “register” link on the top-right section of the main page the users are provided with a registration form and then they are asked to fill in some basic information. After filling in the basic information and submitting it, a confirmation email is sent to the user’s account to complete the registration.

After these simple steps to complete registration, the user is ready to start podcasting, and is taken to the main page of PodOmatic and there a wide range of podcasts, including a “Recently updated podcasts” section, which allows users to subscribe or alternatively find links for creating their own podcast.

b. Recording and Publishing a Podcast
By clicking the “Podcasts” and then “Post Episode” links, the user is taken to the page where the recording and publishing of a podcast can be completed in seconds. In the “Post Episode” page the users are first asked to put in a title for the episode of that podcast, which can be anything the user wants. The “Tags” section of the form is required to
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integrate some keywords about that podcast into the search engine and make it easy for the other users to reach this specific episode. After providing the tag information, the user is asked to put his/her podcast into a category from the wide range of possible categories present. Then, the user is asked to put a picture for that specific podcast, although this is optional. Lastly, the user is asked to mark their podcasts as either “explicit” or “clean”. What is meant by this is that as podcasting has increased in number so have the number of “non-educational” podcasts, and some of the podcasts include some profanity and even violence. By marking “clean” or “explicit” the user gives a disclaimer to the listeners about the content of the episode.

Figure 1. Registering PodOmatic and main user page

Figure 2. Posting a podcast
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After filling in the basic information for a specific episode, the next step is recording the episode online, or importing an MP3 format audio to the server. By simply plugging the microphone to the appropriate jack of the computer and clicking record button the user can start recording the episode online. The length and quality of the podcast is user determined. That is to say, the equipment used, such as the recording software and microphone, has a great impact on the quality of the podcast, and the length of the episode has something to do with the size of the file to be uploaded and downloaded. Keeping these at an optimal level, manageable sizes of episodes can be reached.

If the episode is already recorded on a computer, it can be uploaded to the podOmatic server by pressing the import button.

![Figure 3. Uploading an episode mp3](image)

If the recording is to be done online with podOmatic tools then the “Record” button is clicked. Clicking this button brings us a “Settings” dialogue and asks if we want to allow podOmatic page to access our microphone or camera. By pressing “Allow” the recording session is started and after recording desired episode, the “Stop Rec” button is clicked and the user is taken to the “Review podcast” step. In this step, the recorded audio can be previewed and if the result is not satisfactory, another recording can be done by pressing “Re-record” button.

On completion of recording the desired episode, the next step is publishing the podcast episode and getting the RSS feed to distributing episode and make the podcast known to everyone and attract subscribers. After clicking the “Publish” button, the user is taken to the screen where s/he is given the opportunity to send the RSS feed link to his/her contacts. By simply entering the account information of one of the widely used mail providers, the user can send the feed for his/her podcast to everyone in his/her contact list of that specific account. This way, the number of subscribers increases and the target audience for the podcast expands.

After completing this step, the podcast is ready to be listened to by the audience. The website promotes software named PodAmigo, which easily gets the RSS feeds and updates the podcasts as they are updated by the podcaster. Another way of following the podcasts is through using iTunes by Apple. In iTunes, by clicking on the advanced tab and “Subscribe to podcast” the user can easily paste the RSS feed given by podOmatic and be a subscriber of the podcast created.
Figure 4. Recording settings and recording preview

Figure 5. Sending the feed information to the email contacts.
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The RSS feeds and the Podcast webpage are named in a very simple manner:
- http://username.podOmatic.com/rss2.xml is the RSS feed
- http://username.podOmatic.com is the podcast’s main page.

Publishing the podcasts is made quite easy in PodOmatic as it is explained here. Each episode of the podcast follows the same routine. By pasting the given RSS feed into your podcatcher software, the user does not have to worry about updating the podcasts, since the software will automatically check for an update and download the newest one available. Another way of doing this is visiting the podcast webpage which is in a http://username.podOmatic.com format.

In this main page of the podcast, visitors can find every podcast published, with the newest one being on the top. This page also provides a link for the episodes from which the
users can alternatively download each mp3 file and listen to them by using any mp3 player software (including Windows Media Player). Moreover, by clicking on the “Comments” link, visitors can leave a comment on the episode, which can be anything related to the podcast.

In addition to these, the main podcast page also gives users the opportunity to listen to the podcast online. By clicking the green “Play” button under the episode picture, visitors can listen to the podcast in a new browser window as shown below.

c. Customization of the Podcast and Creating a Profile

Another user-friendly aspect of this website is that it allows users to modify their published podcasts easily, as well as the fact that users can create their own profile which can be reached through the main podcast page. The creation of such a profile helps users to provide listeners with background information about themselves.

After creating a podcast, users might want to change the content or delete a podcast permanently for some reason. In such cases, the previous podcasts can be reached by clicking “Podcast” and then “Edit Podcast”.

In the “Edit Podcast” page, users are provided with the option of editing a podcast as well as an option to delete a podcast. If a user wants to delete a podcast, by clicking on the delete link, s/he is asked for confirmation and by clicking the “Delete associated media” button the file is deleted.
Moreover, if a user only wants to change the name, the tags, the pictures or the content of the podcast, clicking the “Edit” link takes him/her to the “Edit podcast” page where s/he can change all of the information about that specific published podcast.

Basic modifications on published podcasts are done through the steps mentioned above. In addition to this, the webpage also offers a statistics page where the number of subscribers, downloads and visitors can be seen in a detailed way. This tool can be reached via “Podcast” and then “Stats” links successively. On this page, every statistical detail and a description of the terms is presented in a meaningful manner to the users.
Users can also decide whether to include a personal profile with the podcasts published. If the users decide to do so, the profile page can be reached though “Podcast > Personalize > Profile” links. In the profiles page, the user first decides what to include in terms of personal information. These can be “About me”, “My Friends”, “Fans of this Podcast”, or “My Podroll.”

Putting a tick next to these boxes creates links for these pages on the main podcast page. On the same page, the “Podcast” tab allows users to make some modifications to the layout and the content of the main podcast page and the podcasts published.
As for creating and editing a user profile, in order to create a profile the users need to go to the “Profile> Edit Profile” page.

By pressing the create profile button the users are taken to a page where some profile information needs to be provided.
After putting in the required information, a user profile is created, which can be viewed through the podcast main page.

By creating a profile and modifying the published podcasts, PodOmatic allows users to get a personalized page which enables them to widen their audience and allows visitors to get information on the creators of the podcasts they are listening to, and in this way a podcasting community is created.

d. Facilitators
The PodOmatic webpage has a user-friendly design which allows users to navigate easily and smoothly around the pages and the sub-sections of the site. One of the user-friendly elements found on every page is the menu on the right side of the page. Here, posting a new podcast, personalizing an existing one, visiting the podcast main page and seeing the storage usage statistics can be reached by just one click. This really makes the navigation simple, easy and effective.
For visitors to the podcast main page, there is also a right menu which enables them to easily subscribe to the podcast they are viewing at that time. There is an iTunes button which directly adds podcasts RSS feed into iTunes. Moreover, with the help of the links the RSS feed can also be added to Google, My Yahoo! and NewsGator. This feature saves the novice users from dealing with complex XML URLs and makes the whole subscription a click-and-go process.

![Figure 17. Permanent right menu for visitors on podcast main page](image)

Apart from these additional features, PodOmatic also gives users an email account which can be accessed with the same username and password. PodMail is reached via the podmail tab on the top of the page. This email service has a decent amount of storage (500 MB) and functions just like other email providers.

![Figure 18. PodMail main page](image)

In addition to PodMail, PodOmatic gives its users a chance to communicate with other podcasters via a forum. The “Forum” link can be reached through the navigation panel on the top of the page as well. The forum functions like a normal forum, and the main topics are determined by the website. The users can go in any topic and join a discussion.
There is also a search function, which can be found on the main navigation panel, and gives users a chance to search for podcasts created on specific topics. The search page has a simple layout and by typing in either the podcast name or a keyword a podcast search can be managed easily.

All of these features mentioned above add to the user-friendliness of PodOmatic, making it a very easy to use website for even the most novice users. Making podcasting a very easy process, PodOmatic presents an invaluable ground for language learners and teachers to take their part in the constantly growing podcasting world and make use of podcasting to the fullest.
Final Comments

“Stipulations aside, technologies, mobile or otherwise, can be instrumental in language instruction. Ultimately, though, they are not in and of themselves instructors; rather, they are instructional tools. And the effective use of any tool in language learning requires the thoughtful application of second language pedagogy.” (Chinnery, 2006, p. 9)

As it is stated above, any language technology can have pros and at the same time cons, and the trick is finding the best way to integrate them. Podcasting has revolutionized the old radio broadcasts and makes them available for anyone, at any time they want from anywhere in the world. As is stated by Stanley (2005), the idea that a podcast can be produced by just about anyone with access to the Internet has generated a lot of interest in educational circles. In ELT, the appeal is not only in providing additional listening input for students, but that students themselves can become involved in recording and producing the podcast. Moreover, Stanley (2005) categorizes podcasts into three classes:

- authentic podcasts
- teacher podcasts
- student podcasts

In accordance with this categorization, it can be seen that podcasting can also be used by language learners, where they record and publish their projects and listen to friends’ projects. Keeping this in mind, and taking the fairly hard process of publishing a podcast into account in the past, one can easily see how useful PodOmatic can be for both language learners and teachers. In just a matter of a few clicks, users can get a podcast published in PodOmatic. Achieving this complicated process by spending just a few minutes is a groundbreaking innovation.

In the corporate fact sheet of PodOmatic it is stated that until recently, podcasting had been restricted to the crafty, tech-savvy and patient and some podcasters had spent hundreds of dollars on complicated audio equipment and software for producing their shows; moreover, many would-be podcasters were confronted with an array of technical hurdles (i.e., recording software, RSS and XML syndication, hosting, etc). PodOmatic claims that by simplifying the process and making podcasting accessible and free for everyone, they have expanded the technology’s viral growth and become the industry leader.

PodOmatic is a really user-friendly, click-and-go website. By completing a very simple sign-up form, users are introduced to the almost endless world of podcasting. Keeping the innovations in MALL (mobile assisted language learning) in mind, enabling everyone to publish podcasts so easily makes PodOmatic an invaluable resource for everyone in language learning business (teachers, learners and educators), and through the use of PodOmatic, the amount of broadcasts available for language learning can only be expected to increase in the future.
References


