

French Podcasting

Over the past two years, the iPod has become a very popular product. Several companies are now competing with Apple for market share, but it seems that the iPod will remain the most popular reference for portable players of digital audio and music files, similar to the brand name Xerox, which has become synonymous with photocopy machines in general. In addition to buying and downloading audio and video files that can be played on an iPod (or a computer) from on-line music stores, people can download audio and video files through a system or process called podcasting (a contraction of *iPod* + *broadcasting*). Podcasting was made popular by authors of weblogs (also known as blogs) who began posting audio or video files (i.e., podcasts) for visitors to download.

Clicking on links to access audio and video files on line might not sound too innovative or spectacular. However, podcasting actually goes a step further since you can subscribe to a specific podcast, and software will download a new file whenever one becomes available. This means that you do not have to bookmark several sites and check them several times per week or month to see if new content has been made available. The Office of Instructional Development at the University of California at Los Angeles has a very good on-line tutorial, "Introduction to Podcasting," and a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). This might be a good place to start if you're not familiar with podcasting, or you may want to consult the technology support staff at your institution since they will know which resources or tools would be best to use with your operating system, configurations, software, or network.

Like many new terms related to new technologies, the origin of *podcasting* is English, so many languages have either adopted the English term or created a new one that is more in line with their own linguistic system and conventions. Francophone countries seem to diverge on the "best" way to translate *podcasting*. In October 2004, the *Office québécois de la langue française* (OQLF) recommended *baladodiffusion* (*baladeur* + *diffusion*) as the official term, and they also recognize *baladiffusion* as a synonym. One advantage of using *baladodiffusion* for *podcasting* is that a distinction can be made between *podcasting* (the system or process of making files accessible and downloadable) and *podcast* (the file itself), which is *un balado* (i.e., *un fichier balado*). Given the novelty of these terms and their relative unfamiliarity to the general public, there is still some

confusion related to grammatical gender in on-line discussion forums when people refer to *balado*, since it is sometimes understood (or used) as a truncated form of *baladodiffusion*, which is feminine, as opposed to *un (fichier) balado*, which is masculine.

In 2006, the *Commission générale de terminologie et de néologie* in France recommended *diffusion pour baladeur* as the official term for *podcasting*, and it was adopted in March of the same year (*Journal officiel*, n° 72 du 25 mars 2006, page 4581, texte n° 150). This term, *diffusion pour baladeur*, was considered, yet nonetheless rejected, by the OQLF. "En raison de sa forme trop descriptive, plus difficilement implantable, de son inaptitude à produire des dérivés adéquats et d'une concurrence inutile avec le terme *baladodiffusion*, déjà utilisé par un grand nombre d'utilisateurs du Québec et de la francophonie, le terme *diffusion pour baladeur* n'a pas été retenu pour désigner la présente notion" (OQLF, Bibliothèque virtuelle, Technologies de l'information, *Baladodiffusion*). Although *diffusion pour baladeur* was officially adopted by the French government, there is nonetheless a very noticeable preference for the English terms *podcast* and *podcasting* on sites in France. For example, *podcast* is used on the *Portail du gouvernement*, the web site of the Prime Minister of France. The term *podcast* is also used on the site of Radio France to guide visitors to the web page where information about subscribing to podcasts can be found.

In Switzerland, the term *poddiffusion* seems to be emerging as the preferred translation of *podcasting*. Incidentally, this term was also rejected by the OQLF. "Très peu attesté, le terme *poddiffusion*, formé de *pod* (issu de *iPod* = *baladeur*) et de *diffusion*, n'a pas été retenu car il a été créé à partir d'une marque commerciale (tronquée). De plus, comme *baladodiffusion* peut aussi convenir pour les contenus multimédias (le mot *baladeur* n'est pas associé uniquement à l'audio, car il existe des baladeurs « multimédias » capables de lire l'audio et la vidéo), le terme *poddiffusion* (qui serait lié à ces contenus) devient inutile" (OQLF, Bibliothèque virtuelle, Technologies de l'information, *Baladodiffusion*). Although there is no clear preferred translation of *podcasting*, most Internet users who visit a wide variety of sites will certainly become familiar with the various terms used in Francophone areas of cyberspace. This phenomenon of lexical divergence (or non-convergence) is still unraveling with the different translations into

French of technology-related terms such as *chat*, *e-mail*, and *blog*, to name a few.

Podcasts available in French (or any language) are created by a variety of people and organizations for a number of different purposes. Over the past two years, many radio programs have been archived as podcasts so that people can listen to them whenever they want. For example, Radio-Canada offers a variety of podcasts with diverse themes such as politics & current events (*Ici vos correspondants*), technology (*Le carnet techno*), nature and ecological issues (*La semaine verte*), and sports (*Le sport autrement*), among others. They also provide a *Foire aux questions* for visitors who have less experience accessing and subscribing to podcasts. Another source for archived radio programs is the site of Radio France, where you'll find podcasts for all the different stations of the Radio France group: France Inter, France Info, France Bleu, Le Mouv', etc. The list for France Inter alone includes more than 30 programs that have podcasts, with topics such as history (*200 ans d'histoire*), international politics (*allô la planète*), the regions of France (*carnets de campagne*), media and multimedia (*j'ai mes sources*), current events and everyday life (*le téléphone sonne*), business (*rue des entrepreneurs*), and many others. The variety and accessibility make podcasts an ideal resource for both teachers and students.

In addition to radio programs that have been archived as podcasts, there are several people and organizations that have created lessons and tutorials for learners of French. If you have the free iTunes software, you can search the Music Store using the keyword *french*, and in the results you will notice many free podcasts. When they are listed in order of most to least popular, the top two are Learn French by Podcast (LFP) and The French Pod Class (FPC). The topics covered by LFP appear to be current and might be of interest to many students (e.g., *I've got a hangover!* and *My cell phone isn't working. I'd like to have it repaired.*). FPC has similar topics, but there are both audio and video podcasts in addition to text files (in PDF format) that can be downloaded and used along with some of the podcast content. The authenticity of the discourse in some of the free materials found on line (and elsewhere, for that matter) is questionable at best. However, this can be weighed against the price (i.e., free) and the potential value of these materials as supplements.

Other types of podcasts can be found on individual weblogs (i.e., blogs), but these

are more difficult to identify, characterize, and explain because there are so many different types. Large blog providers such as Mon Blogue might have a high concentration of French-language podcasts, but the only way to find them is to browse through the directory of blogs and choose at random.

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