

## **Podcast vs Speech & Text: An Analysis of Modalities of Communication**

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### **1 Introduction**

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The world did not expect broadcasting to be taken to a new frontier through the birth of podcasts. Indeed, podcasts revolutionised the idea of making digital audio content on the internet available for automatic downloading onto portable listening players or computers for personal use; as listeners or creators. (Press, 2014) It provides a platform to create original content and for greater control of audio content handled at little or no cost. Convenient and engaging through its basic feed technology, it allows new instalments (often as a series) of audio content to be exchanged. In addition, podcasts level the playing field for creators' by including audio content outside media conglomerates. This allows consumers to listen and download a wide variety of audio content - podcasts of different genres and from various producers or industries.

This report will discuss how podcast as a new medium of communication is comparable to speech and text. It will analyse how the properties of podcasts affect the language used to communicate, drawing illustrations from the educational field. It will also offer insight to enabling new kinds of communication as well as the general effects it has on language and society.

#### **Emergence and usage**

Podcasting, originally known as 'audioblogging', first started in the 1980s before the introduction of the World Wide Web, when the Radio Computing Services (RCS) offered music and talk-related software to radio stations in a single digital format. In the 1990s, more jukeboxes and websites provided a system for sorting and selecting audio content of different digital formats, though only a handful offered audio subscription services. The conceptualisation of podcasts surfaced only in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century when easy creation, selection, download and storage of audio content on mobile listening devices and personal computers were available. The development of an aggregator - a software programme which

allows listeners to subscribe and receive audio content - also played a part. (Orden, 2013)  
(Wikipedia, 2013)

The word “podcast” reflects the history of this emerging technology. Though derived from a fusion of “iPod” (synonymous with a portable music player) and “broadcasting” (also known as streaming media), podcasts share subtle differences from broadcasts. Podcasts are unlimited in scope, and hence give users the freedom to listen to a variety of audio file and streamline to topics in their area of interest. On the other hand, broadcasts are usually controlled live from a studio, and have a fixed programme to adhere to. (Ashbrook, 2013)(Wikipedia, History of podcasting – Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia, 2014) In broadcasts, user interaction is key because users listen in real-time can request tracks or offer comments. However, podcasts allows both synchronous listening once connected online and asynchronous listening when offline at the expense of user interaction. Broadcast still remain more accessible due to radio, so they reach a wider audience. These differences show how both communication modes have their individual merits and reflect the changing dynamics of media users. (Graham, 2013) Figures 1 and 2 below depict the trend between broadcast and podcast worldwide and in Singapore respectively.

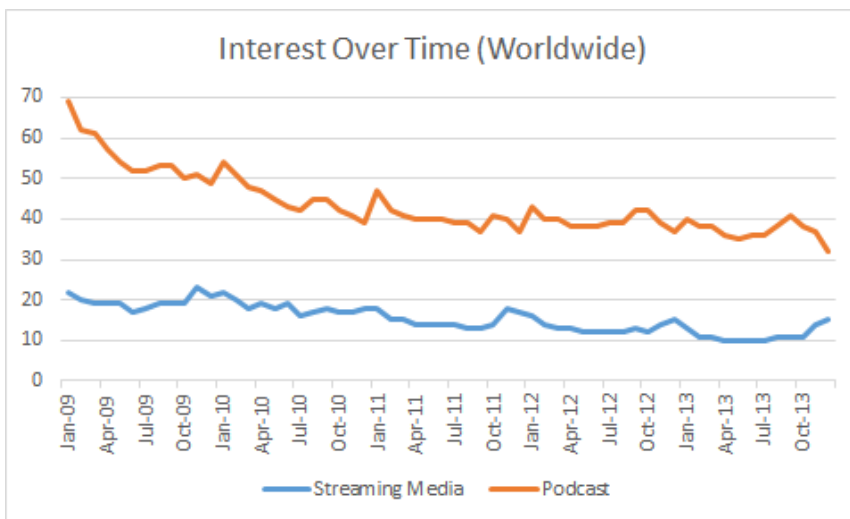


Figure 1.1 - Trend between broadcast and podcast worldwide

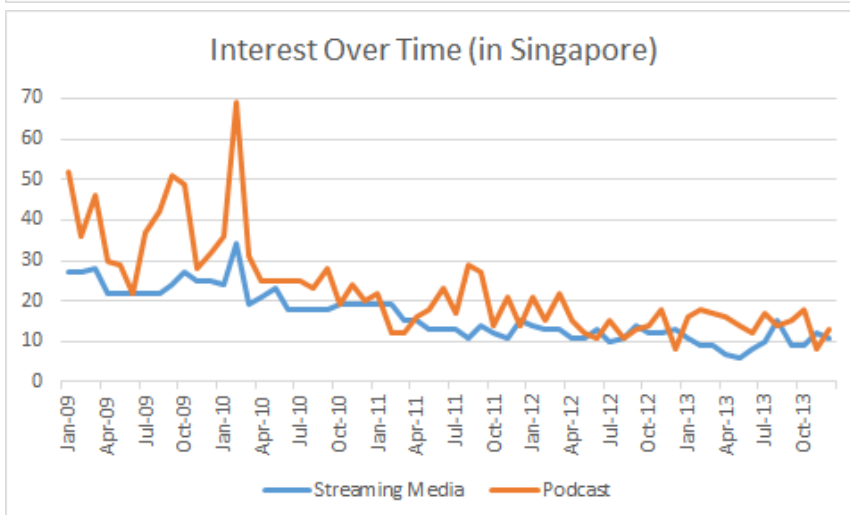


Figure 1.2 - Trend between broadcast and podcast in Singapore

Both figures show that current media users are probably more inclined towards podcast to broadcast. There is a sharp decrease in trend for podcast use as compared to the gradual increase in trend for broadcast use.

## 2 Properties

Podcast can be considered a computer-mediated communication (CMC). Looking at the interactions from its physical context, it can be observed that complex interactions among different media and different modes of communication take place: from the creator’s text, transformation of speech through the creator’s voice to a digital audio format for the listener’s downloading, and subsequently for the listener’s pleasure. The properties of podcast can be analysed using the table 2.1 below, derived from The Cambridge encyclopedia of English Language, on the differences between speech and text (also known as writing). (Crystal, 2006)

<b>Speech</b>	<b>Writing</b>
Time-bound	Space-bound
Spontaneous	Contrived
Face-to-face	Visually decontextualized
Loosely structured	Elaborately structured
Socially interactive	Factually communicative
Immediately reversible	Repeatedly revisable
Prosodically rich	Graphically rich
<b>(output)</b>	<b>(input)</b>

Table 2.1 – Differences between speech and writing

Whilst weighing each individual factor, it is discovered that due to the way podcast relies on characteristics belonging to both sides of speech/ and text , it is discovered that the input properties of podcast is most text-like while its output properties are more speech-like. In other words, podcast can be viewed as a transformation of one traditional mode of communication; from text-like to speech-like, as indicated by the arrow in table 2.1.

In the producer's perspective, podcast is likened to be more text-like because before producing the podcast, he has the choice to organise thoughts and expressions in a careful manner, and will therefore have to ensure that boundaries such as sentences and paragraphs must be clear. Though the producer is distant from the receiver, he has an audience in mind. Podcast can also be suited to record facts and communicate ideas. In addition, the producer is unable to receive immediate feedback because he is uploading the podcast to the Web for the receiver's listening pleasure.

In the receiver's perspective, podcast are more speech-like because there is no lag between production and reception due to the automatic download available, as long as the receiver is a subscriber to the producer's channel. Podcasts can be seen as an interaction between an addressee and a known speaker. The podcast is also dynamic in terms of its intonation, loudness, tempo, rhythm and pause tone of voice. Not forgetting that once the podcast is published, the errors recorded cannot be withdrawn.

However, there are distinctive differences that should be noted. Podcast may not be entirely text-like for a producer because he cannot communicate with the consumer using longer statements, otherwise the consumer is unable to grasp all the information in one hearing. He would also refrain from pronouncing items such as equations, which are more effective when written. Similarly, podcast may not be entirely speech-like for the consumer because the amount of informal words used by the producer in a podcast depends on its genre. To consumers, podcasts would not contain extralinguistic cues and deictic expressions because they do not get to meet the producers face to face, and hence would need more contextual information in order to understand what those terms refer to. (Further Features of Exchanges, 2012) Podcasts with more contractions and informal vocabulary are more suited more informal events such as social gatherings. On the other hand, producers are likely to be more formal in their podcasts if it were meant for a classroom teaching or formal presentation.

### 3 Effects

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Podcast has profound effects on language and communication, and in particular the educational field. It is regarded as a popular medium in academic circles because students can listen to them anytime, anywhere as an assignment or supplement to their academic courses. (Nancy Bird-Soto, 2009)

#### Language

Is podcast emerging as a homogeneous linguistic medium, whether it is a collection of distinct dialects, reflecting the different backgrounds, needs, purposes, and attitudes of its users? (Crystal, A linguistic perspective, 2001) In the educational field, podcast can be seen to have a direct impact on the learning of a second language. In an analysis of selected aspects of discourse of podcasts in French, Guikema noted that there are features commonly associated with scripted versus non-scripted speech. Learners who analyse the genre of the podcast realised that it can be very difficult to understand because of the wide range of registers or levels of speech in addition to the frequent use of both embedded and overt social and cultural references.<sup>9</sup>

However, podcast, through extensive practice, can also be seen to have immense improvement in students' listening skills.<sup>10</sup> MacBride added that sharing impressions and reactions to the podcast among students could also be a springboard for discussions and offer many opportunities for follow-up speaking and writing assignments, and hence boosting students' confidence in the language or subject they are studying.<sup>10</sup>

Another potential effect podcast can have on linguistic interaction lies in multitasking (also known as simultaneous management or facilitation of multiple activities). It facilitates the tracing of moves and strategies across multiple simultaneous interactions (a phenomenon called 'inter-activity').<sup>8</sup>

#### Communication

One general effect podcast has in the area of communication lies in the ability to accurately identify other people's emotional states. This is a feature of pragmatics that contributes to a person's social skills.<sup>11</sup>

#### **4 Conclusion**

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Podcast, as a new mode of communication, may truly enrich the written language if used appropriately. The medium can reshape the intended message for a good or ill cause, depending on the manner it is used. It can also be concluded that in analysing podcast as a communication mode, we must not only pay attention to the content of our interlocutor's words, but we must also monitor the ways in which the interlocutor distributes attention throughout the situation. Thus, not only is attention organized around behaviour, behaviour is organized around attention. However, podcast will still continue to augment our language abilities, and may perhaps cause people to take language technology as a whole for granted. Nonetheless, we must still recognise the importance of more traditional modals of communication despite the advent of new communication modals, or in this case, podcast.

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