The Language Scholar Journal

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Portcast

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The Language Scholar Journal (LSJ) is an open access and peer-reviewed publication. Its main objective is to provide a platform to promote the teaching and learning scholar activity within the School of Languages, Cultures and Societies at Leeds and beyond.

Alongside the annual printed issue, the LSJ digital's space hosts and showcases contributions, facilitating sharing and exchange of ideas. Submissions can be sent to the editors at any time. However deadlines may be announced for specific issues.

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Portcast

www.portcast.net

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PortCast is a website dedicated to educational podcasts to complement Portuguese language learning. It was launched in November 2015 in Stockholm to meet the demand for audio texts in different languages in the growing market for educational podcasts. What distinguishes this product from its competitors is that it offers both a European and Brazilian Portuguese version of each podcast. What's more, it offers a free-of-charge slow version of each language variant to facilitate comprehension. There is also a paid version, at normal speed, which comes with a glossary, exercises and an answer key. The podcasts are reasonably priced, ranging from €1.43 for a single podcast to €13.85 for a pack of 6-8 with supplementary exercises (correct prices at 21/09/2016). This product will particularly appeal to adult learners who enjoy working independently at their own pace. There are also plans to create materials for children, and packages for universities are in the pipeline.

With the English tagline "Portuguese has never sounded this easy", the site content is constantly growing, with podcasts being added weekly. Learners can receive updates by subscribing to the monthly newsletter or following Portcast's Facebook page where they can also read about Portuguese language events. On Pinterest, there are suggestions for places to visit in the Lusophone world and Portuguese language tips. Twitter users can receive a word/image every day.

When you first access the PortCast webpage, you can sense that this is an educational project with a difference. The page has an excellent design - uncluttered and well-maintained. There is no advertising and the pages are not crammed with images as is often the case on other websites of this kind. The webpage can be easily browsed in English or in Portuguese and the podcasts are clearly categorised into: *Free*, *Singles*, *Packs*, *Temas*, *Níveis* and *Consult* (sic), with information about the Portcast team and contacts. On other websites, the mix of languages in the toolbar could easily go unnoticed. However, as this is a Portuguese language

learning resource, it seems a pity that it isn't solely in the target language. Whilst Portuguese speakers often opt for English in tech-speak, in this case it would be enough to change "free" for "grátis" or "packs" for "pacotes". Facebook, Twitter and Instagram sites can be easily accessed from side icons. However, it would be very useful to have a tool for more advanced search options such as by language variant. It is not possible to find texts solely in European Portuguese, for example.

The site currently has 110 podcasts with accompanying exercises, of which 55 are free. These are organized into three levels: Level 1 (A1-A2), Level 2 (B1-B2) and Level 3 (C1-C2), according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, and by nine themes: *Atualidade e Curiosidades, Comes e Bebes, Dia-a-Dia, História e Estórias, Língua e Cultura, Mundo do Trabalho, Nós e os Outros, Sociedade e Tradições, Viagens e Bem-estar*. For those who just want to browse the site without additional costs, there is specific section with a wide range of free materials.

The majority of texts are original, written by Catarina Stichini (project co-ordinator) and Rosário Carvalhosa, which represents a tremendous amount work on the part of the authors. There are also interviews with transcripts, as is the case with the podcasts on the Gulbenkian Foundation and the Portuguese triathlon star, João Pereira. It is the texts, or rather scripts, that the authors use as a basis for the recordings and upon which the exercises are created. The podcasts have a rather educational slant. Whilst this might be helpful in the initial stages of language learning, the authenticity of the materials is compromised, as is, I would venture to say, the potential for real improvement in listening comprehension skills. When you hear the podcasts, even on the recordings at normal speed, you get the sense that you're listening to a narration, a reading and not a conversation, dialogue or real-life account. At other levels, particularly in the Brazilian podcasts, it is noticeable that expressions and constructions are often more typical of written than oral language, e.g. the formal collocation of pronouns in "Linda, muito linda, lindíssima" ("primeira vez que a vejo", "sentar-se") or the position of the adjective ("clássica missa") in "O intruso". In essence, the recordings lack a certain authenticity and naturalness of speech, which is unfortunate because the themes and podcasts themselves are rather interesting. And there is also a very welcomed special care in addressing and reveal Portuguese and Brazilian cultural aspects. On the other hand, a wider range of speakers (most podcasts in European Portuguese are read by Catarina Stichini), would be welcome, and even speakers from other Portuguese-speaking countries, such as Angola or Mozambique. This would not only demonstrate the true global dimension of the Portuguese language but would also provide learners with exposure to a wider variety of

accents and consequently be a better preparation for linguistic survival in any of the 8 Portuguese-speaking countries.

Each text comes with a glossary of keywords. Level 1 glossaries are Portuguese-English but Level 2 and 3 are Portuguese-Portuguese, which seems the most appropriate pedagogical option. The exercises and answer keys are available in a PDF document, allowing for self-study. Users can see a description of the podcast and the content of the exercises before buying. For example, the podcast "A troca" (Level 1) comes with vocabulary exercises related to clothing, travel and prepositions; while the podcast "A primeira mulher" (Level 3) focuses on word formation and the passive voice. In terms of the type of exercises, I found that they were the usual language learning activities we've come to expect: gap fills, word/phrase substitutions, multiple choice, etc. As this is an online learning environment, I would be tempted to suggest creating at least some interactive exercises with automatic corrections, which would make use of the true potential of Web 2.0.

To sum up, with the help of a well-organized and user-friendly learning platform, this is a good tool. Although it is let down by audio texts which lack authenticity and natural pace of speech, it is a useful addition to other Portuguese resources, especially those for beginners. It will also be of particular interest to teachers looking to teach Portuguese as a global language as it integrates the two main language variants in one course. This is the fruit of the almost exclusive work of a dedicated teacher and is certainly a project to follow!

Note from the Reviewer: This review was made possible thanks to the generosity of Catarina Stichini who made all materials available free of charge.

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https://www.portcast.net/ [last accessed 10 September 2016]