

DAT recorders

DAT recorders have been a favourite with musicians and musicologists for a while. They make excellent recordings with high sampling rates. There are small, portable units available which cost about the same as compact flash recorders, and are cheaper than CD-recorders.

DAT recorder have drawbacks for linguistic field work, though. The equipment is expensive and can seize up and break down with sudden changes in humidity. The media is also expensive and tapes are only available in specialist shops (although the media is reusable so if you can transfer your recordings to another format regularly you can reuse them). Moreover, DAT tapes and recorders are becoming increasingly hard to find, and solid state recorders take over their market.

Another disadvantage of DAT recorders is that to transfer your recordings to your hard drive you have to redigitise the tape. That is, transfer has to occur in real time (by playing it back); many sound cards can't cope with digital input from DAT recorders and they treat the signal as analogue and re-convert it. This still produces a higher quality recording than a cheap analogue tape in the first place, though.

We don't know much about the longevity of DAT tapes, and the format is already being superseded by compact flash recorders. They are not a good archival format either. The recorders sometimes require mics with pre-amps, which means more equipment to carry around and more batteries to charge. DAT recorders don't have a great battery life. They work best with a mains supply.

Therefore if you are thinking of buying a DAT recorder, I would recommend a compact flash recorder instead.