

## **MP3 and MP4 recorders, and Ipods**

These recorders come in various brands and varieties, and the technology is changing fast. Most of them have built-in memory that allows you to record for a certain period of time, then you have to download the recording to your computer. They are reasonably cheap, highly portable, have few moving parts (which means they are robust) and often have pretty good battery life.

On the other hand, the quality of recording is not good enough to do phonetic analysis, with very low sampling rates (that's how you can fit a few hours onto a 256Mb chip). Also, mp3 is a compressed format, which makes it hard to use for spectrographic analysis (and how knows what other information is being lost on mp3 recordings that linguists in future might find useful)? The algorithm that computes the compression is proprietary, and so if the algorithm is changed it means it will be impossible for us to read the format. The built-in microphones that these devices come with are also usually not very good quality. The same is true, at the moment, of Ipods. Some types of Ipod have the capacity to plug in an external microphone to make recordings, but at present you cannot change the sampling rate, which is set at 8,000 Hz.<sup>1</sup>

Until the possibility for better quality recording becomes available, I can't recommend these recorders except as a last resort backup. For example, if you are taking a digital music player to the field to listen to music know that you might be able to use it as a backup in an emergency.

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<sup>1</sup> Information on this is available from Linda Barwick's site:  
<http://luddite.cst.usyd.edu.au/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Linda/InterimDigitalAudioReport>