

Ecopod: Survival

Title	Ecopod: Survival
Author	CASLS (Center for Applied Second Language Studies, at University of Oregon)
Contact Information	https://casls.uoregon.edu/student-programs/residential-immersion/
Type of Product	Adventure game mobile app for iOS
Platform	iOS 4.0 or higher
Price	Free
Languages	Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, German, French, English
Requirements	Requires a device with iOS 4.0 or higher with the ARIS app installed. ARIS is an iOS app (Android is forthcoming) freely downloadable from the Apple App Store; ARIS requires registration, but it is free.

Overview

Ecopod: Survival is an adventure survival game that language learners play in their second language (L2). The game is built on the ARIS platform, which is a free iOS app for iOS 4.0 or higher. To begin playing Ecopod: Survival, users must download and install ARIS on their devices and then search for “Ecopod: Survival” (if not on the University of Oregon campus, users should add “ – Offsite Version” to the search for a version that is not place-specific) and select the result in the language they are looking for.

Built on ARIS, Ecopod: Survival’s user-friendly design lets users progress through the game by making decisions, each of which leads them to a new scenario. The game starts with users being informed of the Georgia Flu outbreak, and having to make decisions about whether to stay in their dorm or evacuate, and what they should take with them. Each time users make a selection, it leads to a new page, with a supporting graphic and sounds and a short target-language passage (see Figures 2-6 for examples of the language), followed by different options, ultimately resulting in death or survival as the

user moves throughout the years after the outbreak. The game takes about 45 minutes to complete, with options for students to start again if they die in the game.

Ecopod: Survival is designed as a placed-based game on the University of Oregon campus (see Figure 3), but it can be used in any location. Place-based games seek to leverage the learning opportunities afforded by particular locations and to situate learning in real contexts. Therefore, those in other locations may wish to view the game as an example of what can be done with the ARIS platform and then create their own place-based games. Learners can play it as part of a class, either individually or in groups, and there are many cultural analysis activities that can be done around the game. The game is ideally suited for secondary and university settings, where learners can leave the classroom and interact with the language through a place-based game and where they can get support from supplemental activities that enhance the language and cultural conversation that are a part of Ecopod: Survival. These activities include group discussion, guiding worksheets, and extension activities that help students think critically about the role of language and culture in emergency situations. It has so far been used in college settings in a residential immersion environment. The language in the game is appropriate for learners from intermediate-low to advanced-high.

The game is based on the book *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel (2014), which was the required reading for all incoming University of Oregon freshmen in 2015. The book follows the story of a post-apocalyptic world where the danger of contracting the deadly Georgia Flu and being mugged by other survivors clashes with the dangers of isolation and loss of cultural values. Learners have to make decisions and try to survive through five years in the game, and each section of the game has a slightly different focus, with various choices that the learner has to make in order to survive through that day or year. For example, the first day is focused on mere survival of the outbreak, with other themes, including helping others and community integration, coming later.



Figure 1. *Ecopod Logo*

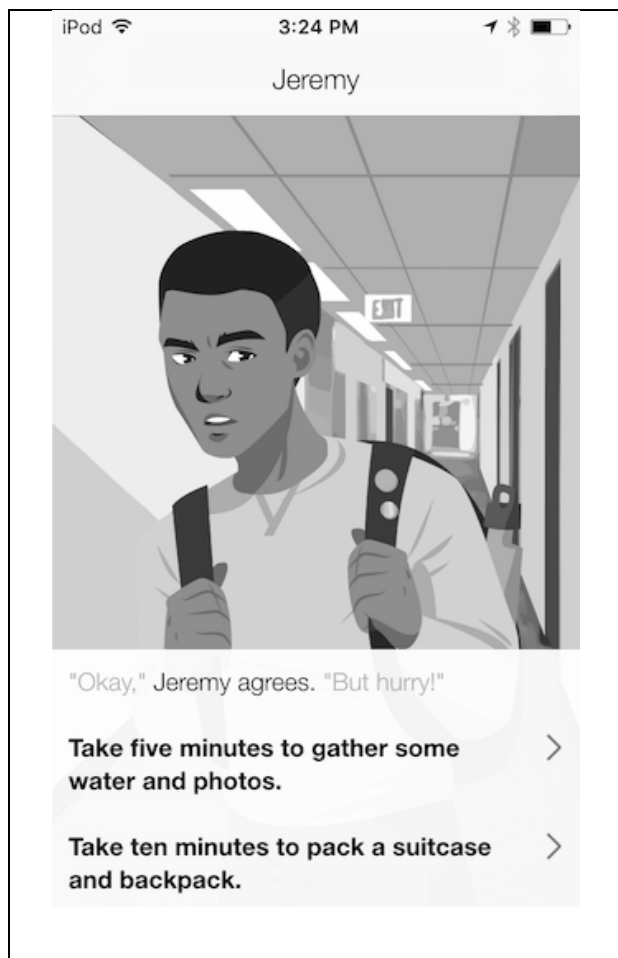


Figure 2. *Example of the type of choices users make in the game*

Evaluation

Game-based activities are especially useful for language learning, because of the way that they allow learners to interact with specific pieces of language they might not encounter in the classroom (Sykes & Reinhardt, 2013). The language and themes in *Ecopod: Survival* reflect this, using survival and outdoor language that learners may not have the opportunity to encounter elsewhere, as seen in Figure 4. The game is the central material and learners interact with it as a source of authentic language and engaging theme.

Ecopod: Survival is distinct from many other language games, because of the direct and obvious focus on language as a tool for understanding and responding to situations, rather than focusing on grammar translation or isolated pieces of language, as many games and apps do. The language used in *Ecopod: Survival* is authentic, communicative, and created for learners to negotiate meaning and, in doing so, navigate their way through survival in the game.

Ecopod: Survival pairs well with activities that supplement the learning experience. These could be extension activities that help learners think critically about the content of the game, creative activities that allow learners to create their own survival scenarios, and linguistic or cultural activities that help learners look at the way that they negotiated the language in the game and the nuances of the specific language, or the way that culture was displayed through the game and how it might change based on different contexts.



Figure 3. Japanese language example of place-based object gathering that users complete as part of their Day 2 survival.

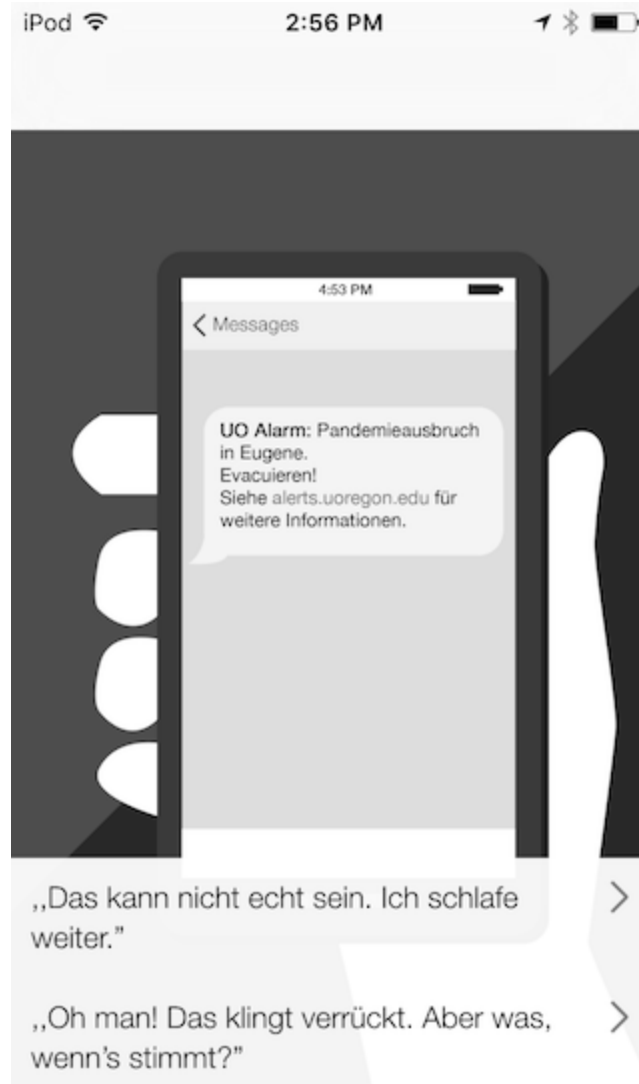


Figure 4. *German language example of how the game begins.*

In terms of cost and accessibility, *Ecopod: Survival* is free and readily available to those with an appropriate iOS device (iPhone, iPad, etc.) and an internet and/or data connection. A version for Android is being developed. If the number of devices is limited, students can work in groups sharing devices without losing the learning opportunities that the game provides. Indeed, sharing devices may provide additional opportunities for target language interaction. Versions of the game are available for several commonly learned languages, broadening its classroom application.

Ecopod is an ongoing project of the Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS) at the University of Oregon, and *Ecopod: Survival* is the first of multiple planned episodes of the game. The next iteration will be an earthquake simulation game.

When this game has been used in the past, there were multiple successes and challenges. *Ecopod: Survival* was successful in that learners showed engagement and interacted with the language and content of the game and appeared to be invested in succeeding in the game.

The challenges that came up included issues with the supplemental materials and their applicability to the specific learner context. This could be remedied by developing more situation-specific materials, and speaks to the importance of having strong supporting materials and scaffolding.

Overall, the game itself is successful in that learners interact with authentic, engaging language and negotiate meaning in the target language. *Ecopod: Survival* offers opportunities for actual, integrated language use, rather than having learners focus on divided aspects of language.



Figure 5. Spanish language example of choosing from among options.

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Acabas de darte cuenta de que dejaste tu móvil en tu apartamento. Al darte vuelta para recogerlo, ves equipos de materiales peligrosos empezando de poner el edificio en cuarentena. Miras al cargador solar que acabas de recibir de Jeremy y lo tiras. Ojalá que agarraras tu móvil...

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Figure 6. Spanish language example of using objects players find in the game.

References

St. John Mandel, E. (2014). *Station eleven*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Sykes, J. M., & Reinhardt, J. (2013). *Language at play: Digital games in second and foreign language teaching and learning*. New York: Pearson.

About the Author

Kathryn J. Carpenter <kjcarpenter907@gmail.com> is an English instructor/researcher at the Universidad de la Sierra Sur in Oaxaca, Mexico. While completing her MA in linguistics and language teaching at the University of Oregon, she was a graduate

teaching fellow at CASLS. She has experience researching and piloting games for use in language teaching, developing supporting classroom materials, and presenting on their use. She was also part of the team that piloted *Ecopod: Survival in a foreign language classroom*.

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