

For any of you who have found yourself idly watching the shopping channel late at night (yes, sad I know... I have found myself doing this very thing though in hotel rooms) you may have come across a favourite product of these kinds of programmes – a language learning method that advocates learning while you sleep.

Hypnopaedia, or sleep-learning, has been a favourite of science fiction books and various quick money-making schemes. According to most scientists it is highly unlikely, if not impossible, that a person can learn during sleep. And attempts to teach sleeping adult subjects vocabulary or foreign languages or lists of items have almost universally failed.

However, there is something attractive about using sound recordings of a foreign language in your down time, even if it isn't sleeping. And ever since the advent of the walkman, it's easier than ever to do this.

Near the Macmillan offices in Oxford there is an Italian restaurant. It's rather unremarkable, except that in the restrooms there is a constant soundtrack of someone saying Italian phrases. Things like 'Piacere di conoscerti,' 'grazie', 'Dove è il bagno', and so forth. Simple stuff, but almost everyone comes out of the toilets happily repeating a phrase or two they have heard. Or at least I did, and so did the publisher for Global. We decided then and there to include something similar in the Global eWorkbook.

We started by including all the words from the corresponding level of the coursebook, grouped into lexical sets. Each set would be on a different mp3 file. But obviously words weren't enough. So we included phrases. Then someone said shouldn't we have these also in model conversations? Eventually what originally was a little idea became quite substantive. They were all put into a section called Listen on the Move. There are some free examples of these in this session.

Encouraging your students to use audio files of useful language is a very basic and simple way of MLearning, and it means getting them to use their down-time a little bit more productively. First, get students to download a group of these audio files and put them on their phone, ipod, mp3 player or other mobile device.

Then choose from the following suggestions, or give these as a menu for the students to choose from.

- Listen and repeat the words or phrases. Do this three times in a row every day.
- Listen to the conversations, and pause before the next person speaks. Try to remember what the response was.
- Listen and write down the words or phrases.
- Listen and write the translation of the words or phrases. Then test yourself with these.
- Make one of the phrases or words into a ringtone for your phone, or into the sound you receive when you get a text message. You may need an audio file editor to do this.

Finally, just listening is better than nothing. Tell the students to try to listen to the audio files every day, for example on the bus or while jogging or while waiting in a queue.

They could even play them for themselves just before they go to sleep. While actual sleep-learning is not proven, learning immediately before sleep can have some benefits. According to Florence Cardinal, of the Canadian National Sleep Foundation "Revise your material several times; try to commit it to memory. This allows the brain the time it needs to store and compile the information so it will be there when it's required. Then, off to bed, let the brain do the rest. You'll be surprised at how much you retain."

Reference:

<http://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-facts-information/myths-and-facts>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/wellbeing/7300986/Sleep-learning-Learn-a-language-a-week-you-must-be-dreaming.html>