

A Practical Way to Learn Languages

Difficulty:



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Discussion activities to be done after completing this EA lesson

Today's report was about a new idea to teach languages. What does it involve? How does it work? When will it be available and for which languages?

Extension discussion topics

A. Talking about and going over the specific topic / idea / issue in listening text

Introduction = What is the new method of learning a language? How does it work? When will it be available and for which languages?

1. What do we learn in the report about the new language learning method?

- Developed by Professors Paul Seedhouse and Patrick Olivier.
- They work at Newcastle University, England.
- It teaches students French.
- It teaches students how to cook.
- It uses technology similar to that used in satnav (satellite navigation).

2. How does it work?

- Kitchen equipment, tools and packaging have sensors in them.
- Sensors can tell whether an action has been carried out correctly.
- If one action has been carried out correctly, it continues to the next instruction.
- If all actions are carried out correctly, students can eat what they prepare.

Have you ever tried to follow a recipe in a foreign language? Did you make the dish successfully?

3. What other facts did you learn about the system?

- Sensors are ruined by water.
- So students must not fill sinks with water and throw implements in to clean them.
- Increase of the pH (to reduce the acidity level).
- System could be available by 2012.
- EU is giving money to develop system for 6 other languages.
- Can be added to an existing kitchen.
- Would add 10-20% to building costs of a new kitchen.

Would you consider adding the system to your kitchen, if you are / were a home-owner? Why / why not?

B. Expanding on (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = The Talking Kitchen.

1. What do you think of this idea? Do you think it will work? Will it appeal to many people or not? Why / why not? Will its appeal depend on whether students are male or female? Why / why not? (many male chefs, cooking has much higher profile nowadays due to TV...)
2. Do you think students would need to be able to cook beforehand to get the most out of the program? In particular, are there any skills you think a student would definitely need to have before being able to use this program? How do you think you personally would find such a system? Would you enjoy it because you like cooking already? Would it encourage you to cook / learn English or another language?
3. Think about your favorite recipe / dish. Write out the recipe instructions then try to work out all the movements the sensors would need to monitor to check that the recipe was followed correctly.

C. Extending discussion of (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = Satellite Navigation Systems.

1. If you have a car, do you have a satnav? Or have you been in a car when satnav was used? What system is / was it? Are you happy with it / did you think it was useful? If neither, can you describe in detail what satnav does? Would you like to have one, if you don't already? Why?
Do you / would you use satnav on a bicycle or on foot? If you were on foot, do you think the system would be helpful or not helpful? Why / why not? (*e.g. too slow to react, traffic lights, heavy traffic, pedestrian areas...*)
2. In which situations is satnav particularly useful? (*strange city, foreign country, traffic jams, finding a particular place of interest (POI), e.g. petrol station, bank, police station...*)
When could it be less useful or even dangerous? (*e.g. temporary diversions, coming out of tunnels (no signal inside tunnel), new roads, outdated maps...*)
3. Imagine you are writing a program for a satnav. Work out all the directions you'd need to say, satnav style, (*i.e. give meters to changes of directions, go left on the roundabout, 3rd exit, etc.*) to direct someone from where are now to the nearest bank (*or other useful place, if there is no bank in the neighborhood*) either by car or by foot. Compare your instructions with the others in your class. Are they the same? If you followed someone else's instructions, do you think you would get to that place easily? If not, which instructions were incorrect?

Audioscript

This is the VOA Special English Technology Report.

A "talking kitchen" teaches students how to cook French and speak French. Researchers at Newcastle University in the United Kingdom have developed the French Digital Kitchen.

Professors Paul Seedhouse and Patrick Olivier led the project. Professor Seedhouse told us on Skype that it works like a satellite navigation system in a car.

"The sat nav speaks to you and it tells you, for example, to turn left. And if you turn left then it continues with the program. If, for example, you turn right, then it's a mistake, so it loops back and it gives you further instructions."

The kitchen equipment and tools use motion sensor technology similar to the Nintendo Wii game system. The sensors help a computer guide the students through instructions in French.

"The system can tell whether you've done what you were asked to do or not. So let's say, for example, the system tells you to take some butter and cut it with a knife, right? There's a sensor on the package containing the butter so it can tell that the butter's been moved. The sensor in the knife not only knows that the knife is moving, but it also knows what motion the knife is making. So it can detect whether the knife is slicing, whether it's scraping or what. And so it doesn't go on to the next stage of the program unless you've done what it senses you've done."

Students can ask the computer to repeat the instructions or translate them into English. There are vocabulary lessons before and after the cooking.

Professor Seedhouse became interested in the idea after he visited a talking kitchen designed for a different purpose.

"It was actually for communicating with people who suffer from dementia. And so, for example, it can speak to those people and it can tell them, for example, that they've left the oven on and they should switch the oven off."

He says the French Digital Kitchen turns the process of learning language into a real-life experience.

"Here you're taking it out of the classroom and you're actually using the language to produce something which you can eat at the end of it. It's very enjoyable."

But the idea - known as task-based language learning - required a few changes as the researchers were designing the system.

"For example, we've found that we put a sink full of water, right, and as soon as people have finished cooking with an implement, they throw it in the sink of water, right? And for us that's deadly because the digital sensors are immediately ruined by being in the water. Okay, so - so you have to take actions so that you don't have water in the sink and you tell people not to throw them in the sink."

The system could be available for sale by the end of twenty twelve. Adding the technology to a new kitchen could add an estimated ten to twenty percent to the building costs. The system could also be added to an existing kitchen.

The researchers are also developing portable versions and the European Union has given them money to begin programs in six other languages, including English, Italian and Spanish.

And that's the VOA Special English Technology Report, written by June Simms. You can find a link to videos of the talking kitchen at voaspecialenglish.com. I'm Steve Ember.