

# Halfalogue Makes the NYT Words of the Year List

February 10, 2011

“There are buzzwords and there are great words,” said Sam Sifton and Grant Barrett, writers of the *The New York Times* article, “The Words of the Year” article. Debuting amidst “G.T.L” and “shellacking” was a word of the year coined from a [Psychological Science](#) journal article: Halfalogue. Lauren Emberson, PhD candidate in psychology at Cornell University, coined the catchy term for her research in “Overheard Cell-Phone Conversations: When Less Speech is More Distracting.”

*Halfalogue* is the hearing of only half of a conversation, like an overheard phone call on the bus or metro. Emberson set out to study why people become more irritated when overhearing halfalogues than when overhearing conversations between two people who are physically present. She found that there is in fact an important difference in how we process the two types of conversation: Volunteers performed less well on tasks that required concentration when they heard a “halfalogue” than when they heard a dialogue. Why? Because their brains may have been trying to figure out what the other person was saying. In short, they were distracted.

For more “halfalogue” press coverage check out this [New York Times](#) article as well as mentions in [The Washington Post](#), [Express](#), [Scientific American](#), [Time](#), [Los Angeles Times](#) .

Now if only we could get The Situation to read *Psychological Science*!