

Radio news: listening comprehension for beginners

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Finding authentic listening texts which are suitable for beginners is rather difficult. There are, however, certain types of radio broadcasts that can be used quite early in the EFL-classroom: station identifications, jingles, programme announcements, parts of news bulletins, weather reports, commercials and the like. Recordings of travel news items, which are broadcast regularly by most stations, prove to be particularly motivating and effective with beginners: normally these messages are very short and have a predictable, stereotyped character, which makes comprehension easier for the learners; and the students can imagine real situations during a visit to the UK when they might profit from listening to the traffic news.

The listening texts printed below were recorded from the two commercial stations in London, Capitol Radio and LBC. When using authentic texts like these with beginners, the

teacher will have to play the cassette at least three times to make sure that the students have understood the information asked for in the work sheets. (/)

Example 1

The teacher informs the students that they are going to hear some travel news about three sets of faulty traffic lights in London. He hands out this work sheet:

Please underline the correct version:

The first set of faulty lights is at

- Walpole Road and Union Street
- Wandsworth Road and Union Road
- Walden Road and Undine Road.

The second set of faulty lights is at

- Elmcourt Road and Kingswood Avenue
- Elsted Road and Kirkwood Road
- Eltham Road and Kidbrooke Park Road.

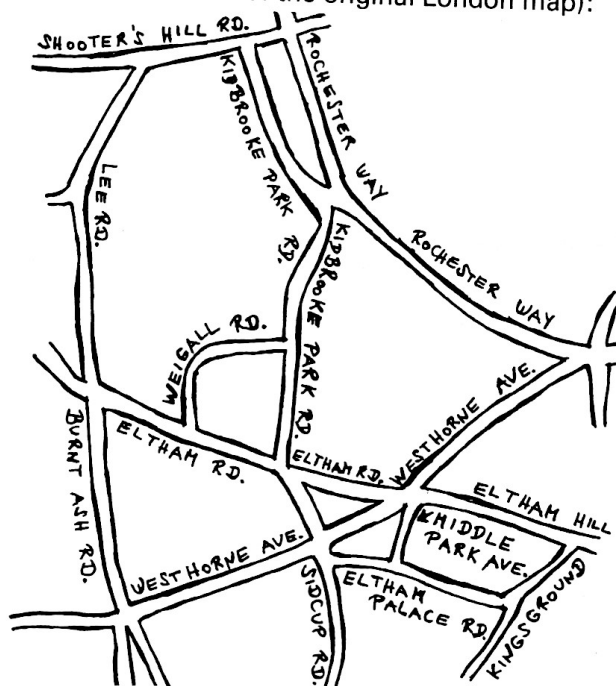
The third set of faulty lights is on Ealing Road underneath the A1 - A3 - M2 - M4 - M11 flyover.

Before playing the tape, the teacher reads out the street names so that the students know how they are pronounced. He also explains the meaning of A1, etc, if this is necessary.

Transcription of the recording:

Sound of a car horn. Good morning, 7.33, the travel news. And we have three sets of faulty lights, er the first one at Wandsworth Road and Union Road, the second it's er Eltham Road and Kidbrooke Park Road and on Ealing Road underneath the M4 flyover.

After the listening exercise, the teacher hands out a map showing the area near Eltham Road (it is a simplified version of the original London map):



He sets the following task (pairwork): *You are driving along Eltham Hill (Weigall Road) and want to get to Lee Road (Kingsground) when you hear the news about the faulty traffic lights at the crossing of Eltham Road and Kidbrooke Park Road. You suppose that there is heavy congestion in the area. Tell your partner which way you take.*

Example 2

The teacher tells the students that they are going to hear some traffic news about the bus and underground services of London Transport. He hands out this work sheet:

Please fill in the gap and underline the correct version:

The . . . bus route is back to normal.
The Bakerloo - Jubilee - Piccadilly - Circle Line is a little below its best.
The trains from Amersham on the Metropolitan Line are a little late reaching Bond Street - Old Street - Baker Street - Broad Street.

Transcription of the recording:

Michael Neech (?), London Transport. The 57 bus route is now back to normal as is the Hammersmith and City Service on the Underground but the Jubilee Line is still a little below its best and fast trains from Amersham on the Metropolitan are likely to be a minute or two late reaching Baker Street as they're having to use the slow line.

After the listening comprehension exercise, the students get transcriptions of the recording so that they can understand the rest of the announcement. Then the teacher gives them

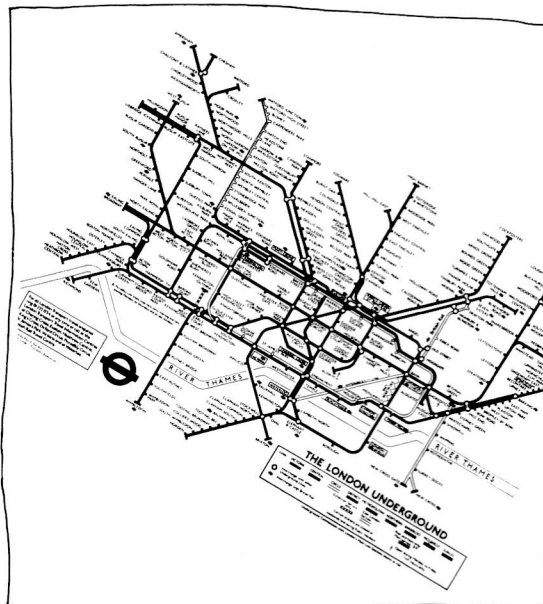
Example 3

The teacher tells the students that they will hear some air travel news about Heathrow airport. He hands out this work sheet:

Provisional arrival time:
BA282 from Los Angeles via Manchester:
BA154 from Cairo:

Transcription of the recording:

BA er 282 that comes from Los Angeles, it's routed via Manchester on this trip, now has a provisional arrival time of 3 o'clock this afternoon and 154 from Cairo has a technical delay in Cairo with a provisional time of 5 past 3 at Heathrow. Neville Powley (?), air travel news.



maps of the London Underground system, and asks them to perform the following role-play (pairwork): *You want to go from Amersham to Baker Street by tube and have heard the traffic news on the radio. You buy a ticket and ask the clerk if you should change to the Jubilee Line at Wembley Park since the Jubilee Line train stops at Baker Street, too. The clerk informs you that it is not advisable to do so.*

After the listening comprehension exercise, the teacher gives transcriptions of the recording to the students so that they can understand all the details of the message. As a follow-up activity, the learners perform the following role-play (pairwork): *You expect a friend on flight BA282 (BA154) at Heathrow and inquire at the information desk why the plane is late and at what time it will arrive.*

- (i) For a rationale of the procedure suggested in this article, see: W. Beile, 'Towards a Classification of Listening Comprehension Exercises', *Audio-Visual Language Journal* Vol. 16 No. 3;
D. Porter / J. Roberts, 'Authentic Listening Activities', *ELT Journal* Vol. 36 No. 1;
G. Burger / I. Poscher, 'Iberischer Lokalrundfunk im spanischen Anfasengerunterricht', forthcoming in *Neusprachliche Mitteilungen*.

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