

**TEACH BETTER ENGLISH;
A TEACHER-TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS**

J.A. Norrish

Early History

This series of radio programmes was first suggested at a meeting of the now defunct Oxford University Press English Language Teaching Committee, at a time when the first books of the New Oxford English Course for Ethiopia were practically finished. Book I of the course was introduced into Elementary Schools in the school year 1966-67. What really started negotiations for the programme was the fact that so few teachers received a formal introduction to the book in the introductory courses of July and August 1966. These courses were held in regional centres around Ethiopia and in Addis itself, but even so, it was estimated that only a very small proportion of the teachers who should be teaching the new book had actually had any formal instruction on or assistance with it. A variety of solutions was offered, but the most practical was the idea of a radio programme which would "keep pace" with the classroom teaching, and be able to tell the teacher how to deal with problems he'd encounter, or how to teach certain structures, before he actually had to teach them. The model of this type of programme was actually on the air at that time in Uganda, produced and scripted by Gordon Watt-Wyness, an advisor at the Uganda Education Office.

Negotiations started at this time between those who saw the need for such a programme, and the two Ministries concerned, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Information, under whose "umbrella" Radio Ethiopia (as it was then called) came.

Eventually the Ministry of Education agreed to the need for a programme of this nature and the Ministry of Information undertook to give two periods of fifteen minutes a week. The British Council agreed to provide tapes for the programme, and at this stage, Christopher Grapes, another lecturer in the English Department, and the writer opened talks with Radio Ethiopia officials Solomon Deressa, the Production Operations Supervisor, and an American advisor in the department, Kenneth Clark. From these meetings came the choice of a theme tune; we were advised not to choose any music that sounded too "jazzy", but something rather more respectable, as teachers, especially in the provinces, tended to be rather conservative, so Dukas' "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" was selected. Another decision was to broadcast the first few programmes in Amharic and gradually to phase the series into English, once an audience had been attracted. The time of the programme was to be 7:45 to 8:00 a.m.; this was for two reasons: One; it was felt that this time would suit a large number of teachers who would be preparing to leave for school — the ideas in the programme would thus remain fresh in their minds. The second reason was that the programme was felt

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to be addressed to a specialist audience, namely, teachers of English, and so it would not be profitable to assign the programme to a peak listening time.

So, with no budget apart from free tapes and free air time, the programme was ready to begin recording. All that had to be settled was the format of the programme, the script writers, and the presenters.

The First Series

As the first series was to be, to a certain extent, experimental, it was decided that fourteen programmes, to run over seven weeks, would be sufficient. Requests would be made at the end of every programme for questions and comments from teachers; at this stage, any more formal listener research was impossible, for reasons both of lack of time and finances; the main thing was to get the programme on the air.

Projected Aims and Form of Series I

It had been previously decided that the programme, besides introducing the NOECE to teachers who hadn't seen it yet, should also, if possible, be of some use to other teachers of English at the Elementary level, and so should not only concern itself with the actual books of the Oxford course, but also with several teaching principles to be found in them and elsewhere. Thus the programme should teach by example, and should on no account indulge in any "short-cuts" in teaching, such as using translation or the formulation of doubtful rules. The teachers should hear only the sort of teaching they would be expected to produce; at this stage, it became clear that we would need to include in the programmes short demonstrations, preferably recorded in a real teaching situation, with a teacher and real students. As to the narration in the programme, it was decided that one voice only might give the impression of preaching to the teachers, so a conversation situation was envisaged, where a "teacher-figure" would ask questions and a "teacher-trainer-figure" give answers; the teacher-figure would also be able to give information based on experience in the Ethiopian classroom.

As mentioned above, it was decided that in order to attract a possibly wider audience, and also because the programme was to go out in the Amharic service of Radio Ethiopia, the first few programmes should be given in Amharic — at least, the narration part, in between demonstrations. This was translated from the original English into Amharic by the Ministry of Education; the problem then was to find someone willing to voice the programmes for us without being paid for it, and luckily, this was possible.

The first six programmes dealt more with several teaching principles, for example "What is the Oral Method?", "Situational Learning", "Choral Speech". These dealt with points which, it was felt, were necessary for teachers to understand before effective teaching from the NOECE could take place. We also looked at action chains, rhymes and songs and substitution drills.

Having laid down a fairly firm base of modern English Teaching Methods, we then, in the next three programmes, went on to look in detail at examples of these taken from Book I of the NOECE. After this came two sample lessons taken from the same book. These clearly could not be simple transcriptions or tapes of

an actual lesson, as each one of the programmes was only 14 minutes, approximately, so, again, we had to have a question-and-answer situation with pre-recorded demonstrations. These lessons were followed by two more programmes dealing with speech exercises, rhymes, situational and language games. The fourteenth, and final, programme of the series would, it was planned, deal with any queries we received and sum up the main points of the series once again. We had been warned that there would probably be no feedback at all, but in fact we received four letters from different parts of the Empire, asking fairly relevant questions, which were dealt with.

Ideally, this first series would have been followed up by some listener research, but funds are needed for such an undertaking, and at this stage, none were available. We had received informal feedback, not only from teachers in Addis, but from travellers who had passed through other areas of the Empire. Teachers were said to be finding the programmes interesting and informative. This information was sufficient for Radio Ethiopia to agree to repeat the series, starting in late November, 1967.

Script-Writing Problems

As the programme had no budget, and there was no full time worker on it, scripts were asked from most of the English Language teachers in Addis. This arrangement, highly satisfactory on the face of it, was, however, unsatisfactory. English teachers tend to be rather busy, and script-writing agreements were broken under pressure of other work. Again, there was a secretarial problem, as not all teachers were willing or able to type their scripts. Luckily, the English Department of the University was able to give some assistance here.

It would seem advisable in a situation of this nature to seek at least partial release of the producers and to make available some secretarial assistance. At the time when "Teach Better English" went on the air, this was impossible. It was felt advisable by the producers to get the programme moving, however, rather than wait until the ideal conditions obtained.

One conclusion was abundantly clear: that no radio programme of more than 30 minutes (2x15 minutes) a week could hope to exist without some official backing and at least part-time release for the co-ordinator/producer.

Voicing

The problem of voicing the programmes was the next to loom on the horizon. Clearly, for the programmes in Amharic, Amharic speakers were necessary, and luckily these were found among Radio Ethiopia staff and among students at the University. After the switch into English, the script writers themselves were asked to voice their own scripts. In most cases this proved agreeable, and the only remaining problem was to find a time when the recording studio was empty and which was convenient for the reader or readers.

The criticism of this system is that there was little continuity — the teachers heard a different teacher-trainer-figure every week. This was adjusted in the second and third series. An additional reason for the adjustment was the pass system which came into effect for entry into the studios. The writer and his wife became the permanent speakers, aided by an additional member of the English Department of H.S.I.U.

Series II

During the repeat of Series I, script requests had been sent out again to English teachers, requesting scripts based on the NOECE Books I and II, the latter having in the meantime appeared in the schools. Again, teachers were asked to bring out in their scripts, all based this time on suggested lessons from the Books, any general teaching principle which seemed to emerge from the lesson. In many cases, specific lessons were chosen by the producer for this purpose. Also included in this series were scripts on testing orally in grade 3 (the first year of English) and using what little reading and writing the students had in grade 4; there were also scripts based on general teaching points, notably those arising in the second book of the NOECE, which had not been dealt with in the first series; for example, there were programmes on teaching reading, teaching writing and the use of reading games. These were points which seemed likely to present difficulty. Series II went on the air in February 1968 and lasted for fifteen weeks — thirty programmes in all.

Feedback Information

It was during Series II that the need was felt for a more thorough investigation into who was listening to the programmes and whether they were regarded by teachers as satisfactory with regard to content and, last but not least, whether teachers in the more distant provinces could hear the programmes at all. The collaboration of Oxford University Press and the Ministry of Education was sought and obtained. The writer and Miss Mary Dyson of O.U.P. together worked out a questionnaire to be sent by the Ministry to all Government Elementary schools in the Empire. This was kept as short and as simple as possible, and the answers required only a cross or a tick in the appropriate column ("Yes" or "No"). Questions were asked about the status of listeners, grade 3 or grade 4 teachers, and whether the teacher answering knew teachers of other grades who were listeners to the programme. Next came a question on the quality of reception, and this was followed by a question on the speed of the readers. After this was a question about the convenience or otherwise of the time of the programme, with three more times given. Next came a question asking how the programme had helped teachers to cope with the NOECE — either by simplifying the language of the Teachers' Notes, or by giving Amharic explanation of various features of the book (very few were, in fact, given), or, finally, by giving the songs, rhymes and games. Lastly a space was left where any further comments on the books or the radio series could be written.

Of all the forms sent out (something over one thousand), six hundred and sixteen were returned. In some cases it seemed as if one form had served a whole school, and in others, on the contrary, it seemed, to judge from handwriting, comments and signatures, that one teacher had filled in several forms; consequently the actual number of teachers and answers frequently added up to more, or less than six hundred and sixteen. Some of the teachers left certain questions unanswered, so again, the figures did not appear to match, but nonetheless, much valuable information was gained from the forms.

Some of the answers were as follows: 406 grade three teachers and 346 grade four teachers listened to the programme (although one teacher filled in the form and added in the space for comments that he had no radio and could the Ministry buy him one?) and 239 teachers of other grades were known to

listen. As not all the forms were returned, we can assume more listeners than these figures suggest. 536 teachers claimed to be able to hear the programme clearly, as against 54 who couldn't. 434 teachers thought the reading was not too fast, but 117 were of the opinion that the reading should be slower. Notice was taken of this for Series III. In answer to the question on the time of the programme, 262 teachers found the time convenient, while 66 would have preferred lunch time, 119 early evening and 156 late evening. In view of the fact that a numerical majority seemed to have a preference for a time other than that which we were using, enquiries were made whether it would be possible to change the time. However, in view of the fact the programme appealed only to a minority of listeners, it was not thought fitting that the programme should go on during peak listening hours. Also, the numerical majority in favour of a particular time was, in fact, in favour of the existing time. The two most popular features in the programme proved to be the songs, rhymes and games and, secondly the simplifying of the Teachers' Notes. The final section for comments and questions brought in quite a few of both. Most often, teachers reiterated one answer from the questionnaire — a large number of the teachers who found the time inconvenient wrote why it was so. Comments on the NOECE books were passed on to John Rogers to deal with in a programme in Series III, and the questions on the radio series, and suggestions as to what else teachers would like to hear about were dealt with by the producer, also in Series III.

Series III

While Series II being repeated from October 1968 to January 1969, requests were sent out for scripts for Series III, which started in February 1969 and was planned to last 15 weeks and comprise 30 programmes. It had been hoped to deal in this series with the new grade five book, Book III of the NOECE, but it was not yet in the schools. Instead of this, then, more specific lessons were dealt with from Books I and II, and more general scripts were written on topics suggested by the teachers themselves in the feedback questionnaire, topics such as "The Function of Reading and Writing in a Language Course", "Translation — Why Not?", and "Suggestions for Overcoming Difficult Teaching Conditions." This latter topic was the result of many queries from teachers, all teaching in difficult conditions. In addition, three programmes were devoted to teaching the songs from the NOECE. This series started in February 1969 and lasted until late May. Originally intended to comprise thirty programmes, it eventually finished at twenty-nine as the script-writers found themselves too busy to complete the agreed number of scripts. This was the final series of programmes produced by the writer, who would like to thank Ato Amare Teklu of EBS, the staff co-producer of Series III. The programme was then handed over to the Ministry of Overseas Development Adviser on Radio.

Conclusions

There can be no doubt that a programme such as Teach Better English is valuable in a situation where very few teachers can be given direct in-service training, either in English Language Teaching generally or in introducing them to a new and unfamiliar type of text book. Lack of funds is, naturally, a problem in this sort of programme. With money the programme and, particularly, listener research and feedback could be carried on in a much more thorough manner. Lack

of funds should not, however, prevent such a programme being broadcast, given the good-will of the radio station concerned. Assuming the fact that we are still in the same hole of which John Rogers wrote in the last issue of this journal, the programme, it is felt, has at least helped to deepen it.

There now exist on tape a total of 74 programmes. The British Council have a copy of Series I but, as yet, there are no copies of Series II or III. This seems to the writer to be a pity, as the T.T.I.'s could surely find something in each of these series which would be of use. The best thing would be for each T.T.I. to have a copy of each series. This would surely not be too great an expense for the Ministry of Education or some international agency to afford?

Mrs. Irvin of the Elementary Education Department, Haile Sellassie I University, would be very grateful for any information, however minimal, regarding local plants or spices that can be used as dyes or paints in rural schools. Please give the names, stating whether Amharinya, Gallinya, etc. A phonetic transcription would also be appreciated. If possible, please give information on the methods used in preparing the dyes.