

## ON THE NET

### Listening: You've Got To Be Carefully Taught

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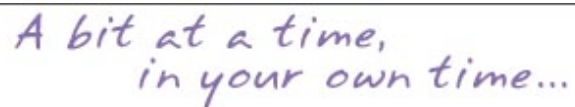
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#### INTRODUCTION

Listening is arguably the most important skill required for obtaining comprehensible input in one's first and any subsequent languages. It is a pervasive communicative event: we listen considerably more than we read, write, or speak (Decker, 2004; Omaggio Hadley, 2001; Wilt, 1950, cited in Hysop & Tone, 1988). Given the importance of listening, the natural assumption is that listening skills are actively taught to both first (L1) and second (L2) language learners. However, this is not necessarily so in L1 instruction (Hysop & Tone, 1988). The situation is slightly more sanguine in L2 instruction, but only in recent years. For some time, listening was regarded as a "passive" or "receptive" skill and, consequently, not particularly crucial as a skill area to be taught. Researchers then began to recognize the importance of listening and its role in comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982), and attention to and adoption of newer comprehension-based methodologies brought the issue to the fore. Listening became a skill to be reckoned with and its key position in communication recognized (Feyten, 1991; Omaggio Hadley, 2001). Listening is a skill to be taught, with concomitant strategies to help L2 learners be successful (Berne, 2004).

The proficiency movement, with its emphasis on the use of authentic materials, underscored the value of developing listening skills in L2 learners. Where and how, then, do educators obtain authentic materials for use in the instruction of aural skills? This was a particular problem for L2 teachers and learners in geographic areas devoid of native speakers (NSs). Technology has been a real boon to this conundrum, ensuring that no one need be isolated from L2 input generated by NSs anymore. An internet connection is all that is needed to gain access to a myriad of examples of NS speech. Nevertheless, the wise L2 instructor must prepare appropriate activities for working with NS audio and video clips that will maximize comprehension and minimize frustration on the part of the learners. For this column, we have chosen two sites to serve as examples of what is possible in online lessons through communications technologies. The sites discussed below will give the reader an idea of what can be done in terms of materials development and also how to prepare one's students for optimal work with the aural input.

#### BBC LANGUAGES

The logo for BBC Languages, featuring the letters 'BBC' in a small box above the word 'Languages' in a large, purple, cursive font.A handwritten slogan in purple ink that reads 'A bit at a time, in your own time...'

The BBC Languages site presents a smorgasborg of listening activities for several languages: French, Spanish, German, Italian, Mandarin Chinese, Greek, and Portuguese. Pages focusing on these languages are fairly extensive and offer several different listening exercises for language learners.

The [Better @ languages](#) section runs you through a series of "excuses" for not attempting to learn another language and asks for corroboration or denial. Then it presents a list of nine remarks and explanations tailored to your responses, designed to encourage you to begin language study.

bbc.co.uk Home TV Radio Talk Where I Live A-Z Index Search

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# Languages

Welcome

BBC Homepage  
 Languages  
 » Better @ Languages  
 Better @ Listening

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Like this page?  
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## Better @ Languages



Are you up for improving your language skills?  
 Whether you've just started or you're an old hand at language learning, answer the next 9 questions and get advice on making the most of your strengths and overcoming your weaknesses.

Start

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The [Better @ listening](#) section is based on the premise that language learners want to be able to "use" the language they are learning. In order to accomplish this, exposure to natural real-life language samples is imperative. The languages treated in this section are French, German, Italian, and Spanish. All languages have similar sections for listening activities.

## Better @ Listening



Prepare yourself for the speed of people speaking in their own language!  
 Learn how to apply the same listening skills you use every day in your mother tongue.

Select the language you're interested in:

French

Spanish

German



Italian

For each of the above-mentioned languages we find a series of 5 listening activities, including  
A recipe:

Italian *Ciao!* Languages

## Better @ Listening

1 of 5



Listen to this chef talking about a dish and type in the ingredients. We've given you the first letter.

- 1 p
- 2 o
- 3 l
- 4 s

Remaining chances to listen: 3 2 1

Check answers

Deciphering time in a context:

German *Hallo* Languages

## Better @ Listening

2 of 5



Listen to this TV presenter introducing the morning schedule and set the clocks to the right times. We've given you the hours.

- 1 Wunder der Erde
- 2 Nachrichten
- 3 Heimatmelodien

Remaining chances to listen: 3 2 1

Check answers

Recognizing the gist of a question:

**Better @ Listening**

3 of 5



Click on the speaker to listen. What are you being asked to do? Choose the correct option.

- ▶ Order the drinks
- ▶ Say how much you'd like
- ▶ Say what you want
- ▶ Order a taxi
- ▶ Give your card details
- ▶ Order your dessert
- ▶ Respond to an invitation
- ▶ Give your name
- ▶ Pay for what you've bought
- ▶ Buy a ticket

Remaining Chances to listen: 3 2 1


Third step: Guess | Next step: Ask >

Getting directions from someone in the street:

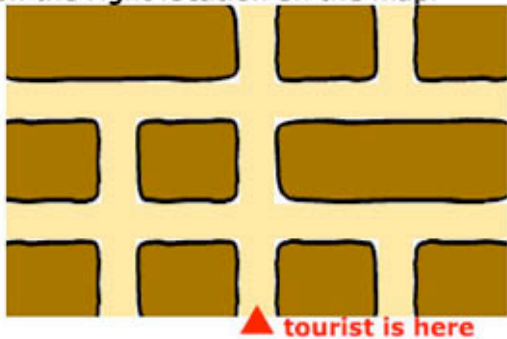


**Better @ Listening**

4 of 5



Listen to this passer-by giving instructions to get to la calle de la Cerámica, Pottery Street, and click on the right location on the map.



Remaining Chances to listen: 3 2 1





Shopping in a market and asking prices of items:

French
Bonjour! Languages

Better @ Listening

5 of 5

Listen to this stall-holder giving the price of two different types of cheese, livarot and raclette, and then type the prices in numbers

Livarot

?

le kilo

check answers

Raclette

?

le kilo

Remaining chances to listen: 3 2 1

The language learner has three chances to listen, opportunities to confirm/corroborate one's response, and eventually the transcript of the clip is provided for reinforcement or checking. After the fifth activity, several strategies are suggested to improve listening comprehension.

**French**  
Gauge your level, French Steps, Ma France and more...

**Spanish**  
Gauge your level, Spanish Steps, Talk Spanish and more...

**German**  
Gauge your level, German Steps, Talk German and more...

**Italian**  
Gauge your level, Italian Steps, Talk Italian and more...

**Mandarin Chinese**  
Real Chinese and more...

**Portuguese**  
Talk Portuguese, Brazil Inside Out and more...

**Greek**  
Talk Greek, The Olympic Game and more...

**More Languages**  
A Guide to Urdu, Languages across Europe, A Fan in Japan and more...

Other activities for these languages can be accessed through the main Languages page: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/>

The activities for Chinese, Greek and Portuguese are slightly different and include videos that demonstrate useful phrases and basic language structures to a beginning language learner.

For example, the Portuguese section presents videos of NSs in the process of interacting on the following topics: greetings, introducing yourself and others, saying a bit about yourself, buying coffee and drinks, finding your way, shopping for food, finding and booking a room, getting around by public transport, ordering a meal, and summer in Brazil.

In addition to listening, the listener has the option of hearing *and* seeing the text in either the target language (TL) or the L1. Once through all the phrases in a given selection, the entire video can be played, giving more context and flow to the conversations.

In this *Talk Portuguese* lesson on shopping for food, we see the background information provided to set up the situation presented in the Flash player.

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BBC Homepage  
Languages

Talk  
Portuguese  
Pronunciation  
Guide  
Language  
Notes  
User Guide  
Tutor's guide

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**Talk Portuguese** **ese** **Languages**

Shopping for food

Click through this slideshow to see how people buy fish and olives in a market

Queria is a very useful word to remember when out shopping. It means -I'd like- and you can use it anywhere. Queria um café -I'd like a coffee-, Queria meio quilo de azeitonas -I'd like half a kilo of olives.

Start >

If you can't see the picture, it's best to install the free software **Flash** or you can use the **basic version**, though you won't hear the sound.

In this *Talk Greek* lesson we see the Flash player options for viewing the Greek text, the English text, or pronunciation assistance as the sentence is heard.

The screenshot shows the BBC Talk Greek website. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Home', 'TV', 'Radio', 'Talk', 'Where I Live', and 'A-Z Index'. The main heading is 'TALK GREEK' with the subtitle 'Saying where you're from'. The Greek text 'Είμαι από την Ελλάδα' is shown. Below it is a video player with a man pointing to a globe. Navigation options include 'SHOW GREEK', 'SHOW SOUNDS', 'SHOW ENGLISH', and 'AUDIO ONLY'. A 'NEXT' button is also visible.

The Chinese section, in addition to the sorts of audio activities already mentioned, includes introductory material for a variety of topics.

**REAL CHINESE**

A lively introduction to Mandarin Chinese in 10 short parts. Click on the topics in order to see the **slideshow** and hear the language. You'll also find **useful phrases** with tips on pronunciation and grammar, **cultural notes** and a short **challenge** to check what you've learnt. At the end of each slideshow there's a chance to watch a short (approx. 1 min) videoclip taken from the **TV series**. Find more information in the **User guide**. Click on the topics to start >

- For starters ●
- Introducing yourself ●
- Family introductions ●
- Saying a bit about yourself ●
- Ordering drinks ●
- Ordering a meal ●
- Doing some shopping ●
- Asking for directions ●
- Getting around by public transport ●
- Finding and booking a hotel ●



These activities use Pinyin script instead of Chinese characters.

Chinese 你好 Languages

**ORDERING A MEAL**

Useful phrases  
Cultural notes  
Challenge

**Nimen chī diǎnr shénme?**



 SHOW CHINESE   
  SHOW ENGLISH   
  SOUND ONLY

NEXT 

Useful phrases      Cultural notes      Challenge

They also include short videos with transcripts.

**SAYING A BIT ABOUT YOURSELF**

Useful phrases  
Cultural notes  
Challenge

**Doing business in China**  
Connections, known as **guanxi** in Chinese, are very important when doing business in China.

To establish good connections, you need to take your clients out for meals and get to know them.

If you can speak a little bit of Chinese, it will definitely leave a very good impression on your Chinese partners.



 USEFUL PHRASES   
  CHALLENGE   
 WATCH VIDEO 

 BACK TO START

All of these languages provide additional links to cultural notes, pronunciation guides, language notes, and additional useful phrases with each selection. At the end, the learner can take a quiz to check comprehension and progress.



**Quick Fix**

Printable holiday phrases with audio and mp3 downloads.

- Albanian
- Basque
- Belarusian
- Bosnian
- Bulgarian
- Catalan
- Croatian
- Czech
- Danish
- Dutch
- Estonian
- Finnish
- Flemish
- French
- German
- Greek
- Hungarian
- Icelandic
- Italian
- Latvian
- Lithuanian
- Luxembourgish
- Maltese
- Macedonian
- Moldovan
- Norwegian
- Polish
- Portuguese
- Romanian
- Russian
- Serbian
- Slovak
- Slovene
- Spanish
- Swedish
- Turkish
- Ukrainian

Not to ignore the [less-commonly-taught](#) (but not less-commonly-spoken!) languages, another page is devoted to an extensive listing of more languages found across Europe, as well as Japanese and Urdu. While not represented to the depth of the above languages, these languages are acknowledged, their history provided, and some key phrases represented in audio clips as well as in written form, including non-Roman scripts where appropriate.

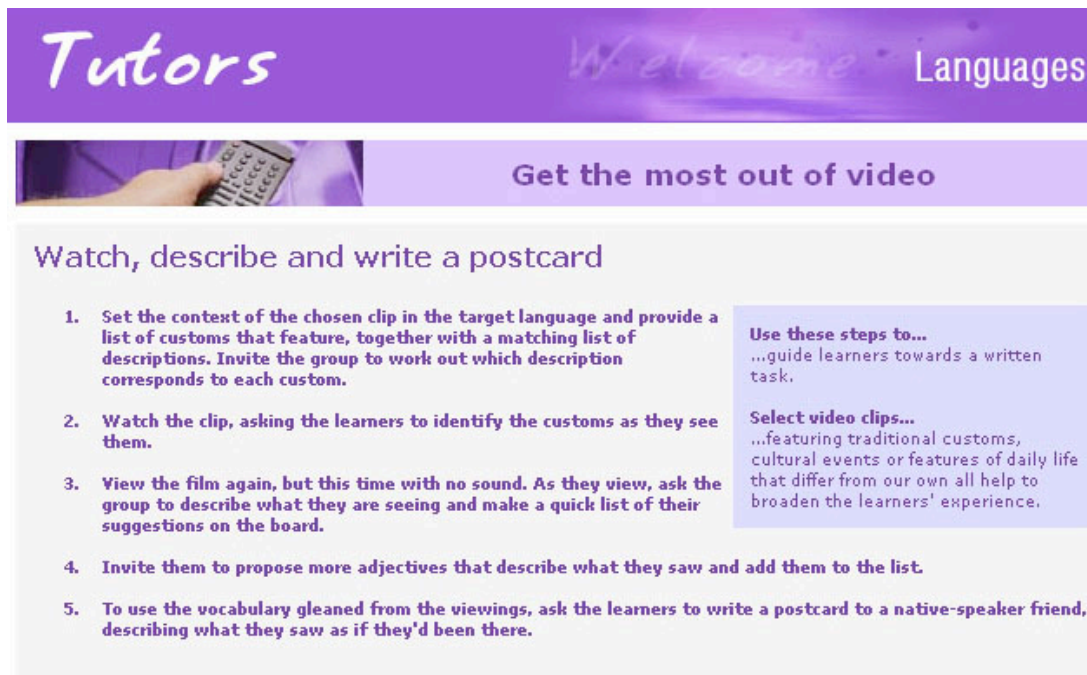
Here, for instance, is a sample from the [Guide to Urdu](#).

**Listen & learn: Urdu Key Phrases**

Listen	Urdu Phrase	Pronunciation	Meaning
	اسلام و علیکم	Assalam-o-Alekum	Hello
	خدا حافظ	Khuda-hafiz	Good Bye
	جی ہاں	Jee haan	Yes
	جی نہیں	Jee nahin	No
	برائے مہربانی	Bara-e-Meherbani	Please
	شکریہ	Shukria	Thank You
	آپ سے مل کر خوشی ہوئی	Aap say milkar khushi hooe	Pleased to meet you

An added benefit for each of the language sections is a *tutor page*, which provides instructions on use of the activities and materials. Several activities have accompanying worksheets that can be downloaded as .pdf files. Also available within the tutor section is a page entitled *Get the most out of video*. This section

provides tips and strategies for using video in teaching. Twelve different approaches to using video are listed. Clicking on each individual approach yields more in-depth directions for lesson activities while using the video.



**Tutors** Welcome Languages

Get the most out of video

Watch, describe and write a postcard

1. Set the context of the chosen clip in the target language and provide a list of customs that feature, together with a matching list of descriptions. Invite the group to work out which description corresponds to each custom.
2. Watch the clip, asking the learners to identify the customs as they see them.
3. View the film again, but this time with no sound. As they view, ask the group to describe what they are seeing and make a quick list of their suggestions on the board.
4. Invite them to propose more adjectives that describe what they saw and add them to the list.
5. To use the vocabulary gleaned from the viewings, ask the learners to write a postcard to a native-speaker friend, describing what they saw as if they'd been there.

**Use these steps to...**  
...guide learners towards a written task.

**Select video clips...**  
...featuring traditional customs, cultural events or features of daily life that differ from our own all help to broaden the learners' experience.

Perhaps owing to their geographic proximity to the UK, added activities for French, Spanish, German, and Italian include further tutorial courses. One, called *Talk French (or Spanish, German, Italian)*, addresses basic topics, and includes video clips, word games for practice on the computer, and worksheets for comprehension checks. A second one, *French Steps (or Spanish, German, Italian)*, is a 24 step online course for beginners that addresses survival French, the basics of L2 vocabulary, and allows learners to track their progress through the activities for each section.



**French Steps** Languages

New visitors: [Create your membership](#) Returning members: [Sign in](#)

**Bonjour!**

Welcome to French Steps, a new online course for beginners. Learn practical spoken French with the help of French teacher Hakim M'Barek in just 24 manageable steps.

Find out all about the course by clicking on [this user guide](#). Or just **start** straight away.

New! You can now also keep track of **your progress**.

This BBC site for languages is extensive and offers many things for many people in many languages. Considerable thought an organization has gone into its development, making it a useful tool for language teachers. Authentic language can also be found on a great many web sites that are much less ambitious.

### VIDEO CLIPS OF SURVIVAL CHINESE

The *Video Clips of Survival Chinese* site developed by Jianhua Bai and supported by the Andrew Mellon foundation uses a series of 20 Quicktime movies of survival situations including: *Hotel Check In*, *Hotel Check Out*, *Changing Money*, *Asking Directions*, *Ordering Meals*, *Seeing A Doctor*, *Bargaining*, *Post Office*, etc. Each clip can be viewed with an annotated transcript in which key expressions are glossed. There is also a series of questions for each video. The acknowledgements section thanks Clara Yu and Middlebury College for the use of the video clips, pointing out the value of collaborative efforts in developing such materials in an academic environment.



[View with the Annotated Transcript](#)

[View and Answer the Questions](#)

- A: 哎, 先生, 请问, 去北京博物馆怎么走?
- B: 呵, 顺着这条路一直走, 就在市政府大楼对面.
- A: 噢, 离这儿远不远?
- B: 大约得走15分钟, 不过你可以坐23路电车, 就一站地.
- A: 那车站在哪儿?
- B: 就在马路斜对面, 瞧, 车来了.
- A: 谢谢

### CONCLUSION

Improved speed of the Internet and the generalization of broadband access, along with faster processors, has greatly facilitated the distribution of audio and video media online. In addition to sites like the ones highlighted above that incorporate media into language lessons, an unending stream of audio and video from around the world is now accessible to the language learner for practice and to language as a basis for lessons. Television and radio, including news and documentaries, music videos, indeed, almost any video imaginable and unimaginable, is now at our fingertips through sources such as [Google Video](#) or [YouTube](#) (see this issue's [Emerging Tech column](#) for further discussion of video in language learning). As search tools improve as well, finding just the right video clip to support a language lesson keeps getting easier. Five years ago the Internet held the promise of access to authentic audio and video. Today that promise is realized, but the future is likely to exceed our wildest imaginations.



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