



## Language Support for Migrants *A Council of Europe Toolkit*

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### Tool 28 - Selecting and using texts for listening at elementary level

**Aim: To offer guidance on finding suitable texts for elementary listening practice and for adapting and using them in language support activities.**

#### Introduction

Migrants need to understand as much as possible of what people say to them and certain announcements in public places, e.g. in stations, on public transport, in shops, in social environments etc. They may also wish to listen to music on the radio or to watch television, for example the news or sporting events. Using simple dialogues and other texts in listening activities helps them to get used to understanding the spoken language and reinforces their developing language competence. It is also important for young migrants at school and college to be able to learn to listen to and understand their teachers' explanations and instructions.

#### LISTENING ACTIVITIES

When selecting texts and activities for listening you may find it useful to refer to the relevant *Common European Framework* descriptors in Tool 20 - *Setting objectives for supporting the language learning of migrants who are beginners in the language of the host country.*

#### Types of listening text that may be suitable for learners at elementary level

- announcements heard in public places, such as stations, stores and hospitals
- recorded messages, for example voicemail messages on a mobile phone
- dialogues between people asking for and offering information or services, such as at the supermarket, ticket offices
- short news items (or cartoons especially for children) on television, in particular if they are about a topic familiar to learners
- brief conversations between people communicating for different purposes, such as greetings, invitations, suggestions, asking for meaning to be clarified etc.

#### Questions to consider

**Is the listening activity suitable for your group? For example, Is the listening text related to topics you are dealing with in other areas of language support or to the learning of school subjects?**

It is often useful to select listening texts, including video and audio clips, that are related to topics and situations that have already been featured in your language support. For example, if migrants are working on a scenario about using health services, select a listening resource about a visit to a doctor's surgery, pharmacy or hospital. Migrants themselves can help here: they may have or mention listening texts that they want to understand for practical reasons or because they find them interesting, such as dialogues or explanations about medication.

Other questions to think about when choosing listening texts include:

- Is the topic and situation at least partly familiar to them? Does the text contain some familiar vocabulary and expressions?
- If the language level of the listening text is too difficult for learners in your group, is it possible to find ways of making it easier for learners, for example by introducing the topic and important vocabulary beforehand? Note: several suggestions for adapting texts are included in Tool 29 *Selecting and using texts for reading at elementary level*. However, with listening texts this kind of adaptation is not always relevant or possible, especially when using recorded video or audio materials for listening. The best means of making listening texts more easily accessible is to use materials that have been written or adapted and recorded by teachers.
- For young migrants, is the text related to one or other of their school subjects? Children at school will probably find it useful also to listen to texts or, for example, videos on the history, geography, science etc. topics covered in their lessons.
- If the listening text or dialogue is recorded on video or audio, is it clear?
- Do the speakers have unfamiliar accents, or speak very quickly?
- If the text is read aloud, does it sound natural? For example, does an 'announcement' sound like a real announcement?
- Can migrants listen to it more than once?

### **Is the listening activity related to topics you are dealing with in other areas of language support?**

It is often useful to select texts that are related to topics and situations that have already featured in your language support. For example, if learners are working on a scenario about shopping and buying clothes, select a related dialogue or text. Migrants themselves can help here: they may have or mention texts that they want to understand for practical reasons or because they find them interesting, or they may have been asked questions by a shop assistant or heard an announcement somewhere.

### **Is the listening activity relevant and/or interesting for your group?**

Listening and understanding what you hear can be difficult because of time pressure, unknown vocabulary or the speakers' pronunciation. If the information is useful or interesting to them, migrants will be more motivated to participate in listening activities. If one learner suggests a listening situation, decide whether it is useful for the whole group:

- Does it contain relevant information for their everyday lives (e.g. food, health services, leisure activities)?
- Is it about something they can identify with or have experienced? Is it about something topical, e.g. international news, famous people, a new app, or a local event?
- Does it have an interesting or amusing angle?
- Is it about how people feel, think and do things in the host country?
- Is it free of topics that might be considered offensive by your group or individuals in it?

### **Using listening activities in language support**

**Step 1:** if possible, record the text (announcement, dialogue, news item etc.) on a mobile device, or find a short recording or a video on the internet. Make sure the recording is audible to migrants (one or more loudspeakers may be needed in the room).

If you cannot record the text or cannot play it back to migrants so that it is easily audible, prepare to read the text aloud to them. If it is a dialogue, try to use different voices for the participants, or ask a learner or a colleague to read with you.

**Step 2:** before learners at low level listen to the text for the first time, orientate them to it by introducing the situation. For example, if it is a station announcement, ask who has been to a station, why they were there, what they did at the station, what they heard at the station etc. You can also check their understanding of one or two of the more difficult words in the text, and repeat them.

With more confident learners, you could play the recording or read the text first, and then ask them to identify the situation if they can.

**Step 3:** after they have listened for the first time, ask them some simple questions: 'where can you hear this?', 'how many people are speaking?', 'what is he/she saying?' etc. Do not correct their answers at this time: let them guess

**Step 4:** let them listen to the text a second time. If necessary, stop half way through and ask questions again to check understanding, then continue to the end before asking more questions. Then let them listen to the text a third time.

**Step 5:** if the text is a dialogue, it can be used as an example for a role play: migrants could take the roles of the different people in the dialogue. If the text is an announcement or a news item, it would be good to play or read a similar text to them so that they can listen to something similar and try to understand it.

### Example

**Step 1:** write a simple dialogue, for example about finding the way to the station: For example:

- A. *Excuse me, can you tell me how to get to the station?*
- B. *Yes, turn left at the end of this street, then cross the road at the lights.*
- A. *Sorry, I don't understand: where should I turn left?*
- B. *At the end of this street, where that supermarket is.*
- A. *And then I cross the road?*
- B. *Yes, cross the road and go straight ahead for about 200 metres. You'll see the station on the right.*
- A. *Thank you. What's the time?*
- B. *It's 10.15.*
- A. *Oh dear, my train is at 10.30!*

Include expressions and vocabulary useful to migrants in your dialogue.

**Step 2:** if possible, record the dialogue with a friend or colleague using natural voices, for example on a mobile phone. Then listen to it to make sure that it is clear.

**Step 3:** in the language support session, ask learners for simple expressions and vocabulary relevant to directions, e.g. go straight on, turn left, turn right. Then, connect the phone to a loudspeaker if possible, and ask them to listen carefully while you play the recording. If it is not audible, read the dialogue in a natural voice.

**Step 4:** ask migrants simple questions about the dialogue: where is the woman/man going? At the end of the street, should he/she turn right or left? etc.

**Step 5:** if necessary, introduce words or expressions learners aren't sure about, e.g. cross the road, where should I turn, I'm late etc. Then play or read the dialogue again, but stop half way through to check understanding. Then continue to the end.

**Step 6:** get migrants to prepare similar simple dialogues in pairs. Help them with vocabulary, then ask some of them to 'act out' their dialogues in front of the group. If necessary, help them with expressions and pronunciation.

**Step 7:** give them another situation, for example, helping someone to find the school or a shop in the local area. One learner asks the way, another gives directions. Move round the room listening to the dialogues and encouraging and helping migrants.