

OFF THE AIR: RADIO CONTACTS

Edmun B. Richmond, Editor

In a previously published article on the utilization of amateur radio contacts in the classroom,¹ I mentioned several possibilities for spin-off language activities such as the exchange of letters, magazines, cassette recordings, maps, photographs, etc. with the amateur in the foreign country. Communications to this writer from teachers and students have indicated positive results in this aspect of radio contacts. One local student of German, who is also a licensed amateur, maintains a weekly contact with an eighteen year old amateur in Weisbaden, Germany. They converse with both telegraphic and voice communications in English and German, exchange letters and cassettes, and have sent each other several small gifts. The enthusiasm of this student has motivated him to devote a great deal of free time to improving his German language skills. He has further invited the German amateur to spend his Summer vacation with him in Georgia.

You never know what will develop from one of these radio contacts. Last Winter, I contacted an amateur in The Gambia, a country in West Africa. Conversations about the indigenous languages and cultures of the country, life in the Bush, his work on a medical research team filled many pleasant hours. The amateur informed me of his intention to spend a six-week vacation in the States, during the spring. Further, that he would be flying into Atlanta. Naturally, I invited him to stay with me and use my home as his base of operations while he toured the U.S.

We became extremely close friends, and he invited me to visit him and his wife in The Gambia, during December, when I had finished the fall quarter at Tech. As a teacher of languages and linguistics, and a specialization in foreign language pedagogy, I wanted to incorporate some language research into my African trip. I wrote a letter to the president of The Gambia, offering my services as a pedagogical specialist to examine and analyze the language and literacy program of the country, while visiting my friend. An invitation was received from the president within six weeks. The Georgia Tech Foundation graciously provided me with round trip transportation from Atlanta to Dakar, Senegal, where my friend met me and drove me to The Gambia.

My two weeks in The Gambia provided me with an opportunity to engage in research dealing with the pedagogical growing pains of a Third World country, as well as to observe cultural patterns so very different from life in America. Time was spent in and around Banjul, the capital, and Sapu, an agricultural research station 175 miles up the Gambia River, in the Bush, where another amateur friend works.

The indigenous peoples of The Gambia are the Mandinka, Wolof, Fula, Jola, Serahule, Aku, and some smaller groups. Although each group has its own language, the national language of the country is English. This stems from the period of colonial rule by the British. Mandinka is the majority language of about 50% of the country. A program of adult functional literacy in that language was instituted in 1978. English is taught in the public schools, and actually becomes the language of instruction after the third year of elementary school.

Meetings with government officials and visits to Gambian public schools demonstrated to this writer the total commitment of the Gambian government to provide literacy and language teaching to its people. To further this story, the author has been invited to return to the Gambia, during the summer of 1980, and establish a language seminar for Gambian teachers of languages and literacy. All of this because of a chance radio meeting with an amateur!

In last month's column, we addressed the topic of listening for language transmissions on the various amateur wavelengths, and what part of the world would be available for reception at various times of the day. Beginning with this month's column, we want to discuss identifying the countries from which the transmissions emanate. This is a simple matter, which is accomplished by listening at the beginning or end of the transmission for the amateur's call sign.

Each country in the world is assigned a block of callsigns, i.e., a series and combination of letters and numbers. Some of these series are assigned by each country to the amateur service. By listening for these callsigns, you can identify the country, as well as listen to the foreign language. This month, the call prefixes of those countries in which Spanish is spoken is printed. Subsequent months will contain French, German, Russian, Portuguese and other callsign prefixes. The prefix indicates the country. It is followed by a number or usually two or three additional letters, which is the personal identification of the individual operator. In some countries, the number indicates the region within the country. Here is the list for Spanish:

Country	Prefix	Country	Prefix
Argentina	LU	Honduras	HR
Bolivia	CP	Mexico	XE
Chile	CE	Nicaragua	YN
Colombia	HK	Panama	HP
Costa Rica	TI	Paraguay	ZP
Cuba	CM/CO	Peru	OA
Dominican Rep.	HI	Puerto Rico	KP4
Ecuador	HC	Spain	EA
El Salvador	YS	Uruguay	CX
Guatemala	TG	Venezuela	YV

Next month, we shall supply the prefixes for those countries in which French is the prominent language. This will include member countries of the French Community in Africa. Until then, good listening!

Edmun B. Richmond, "Amateur Radio as an Aid to Foreign Language Learning," *Foreign Language Annals*, 11,3 (1978), pp. 259-263.

Editor's note: In addition to Ed's returning to The Gambia, this Summer, he has been invited by the Senegalese government to lecture in Dakar on the use of shortwave and amateur radio broadcasts at the National Education Seminar for Teachers of English.

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