

OFF THE AIR

By Richard E. Wood

I am the author of a book, now out-of-print, *Short Wave Voices of the World*. Of glottopolitical interest was the fact that *Voices* was also published in Finnish translation, as *Lyhytaaltojen Maailma*, an edition which sold better than the English original. The reasons? Well, for one thing, *Voices* was published in the U.S. by a specialty publisher, and sold mostly to the in-group of SWL's (Shortwave listeners) and DXers. In Finland, *Tietoteos* ("The Book of Knowledge"), a general publisher, responsible also, for example, for the first and only Finnish/Spanish dictionary, marketed it. Shortwave listening is popular in Finland. Those long winter nights, a high educational level, an awareness of international affairs, and other cultural advantages combine with the natural advantage of a subpolar location which reduces the interference of south and central European stations, jamming transmitters and the like (on nights of auroral activity, these may be eliminated) and brings in transpolar signals from East Asia, Alaska, the Pacific, the West Coast of the Americas, etc., areas that are much more difficult to receive, for example, in my native British Isles or at other middle latitudes.

The big news for shortwave listeners in the U.S. at the beginning of 1982, and especially for teachers and students of Chinese language and culture, is that a Chinese station which was hitherto poorly audible and had few listeners, even on the U.S. West Coast, has established a relay in the U.S. and shot to the top in audibility, ranking alongside or ahead of the BBC from London, Deutsche Welle from Cologne, Radio Canada International in Montreal, and the other biggies.

It is the Voice of Free China, Taipei, which, in a surprise move which has still not been widely publicized, has bought hours of daily relay time on the most modern powerful, best-located shortwave transmitter in the U.S., WYFR, "Family Radio" in Okechobee, Florida. This represents a real change of program format for WYFR. Previously, this intensely powerful station, which dominates the international broadcast bands in most parts of the country, had broadcast only fundamentalist, conservative religious programming, both syndicated and live from its studios in Oakland, Calif. Now, in addition to that and partially replacing it, the political and cultural message of Taipei is heard. All broadcasts begin and end with the resonant, moving melody of the Nationalist Chinese anthem, "San Min Chu I," the Four Pillars of Democracy, the song of Sun-Yat Sen. The whole service is so new that I have yet to determine a full schedule. However, an hour in English can be heard at 0300-0400, Coordinated Universal Time (UTC), formerly known as Greenwich Mean Time (GMT), beamed to North American at 5985 kHz is the 49

meter band. The frequency is extremely easy to identify, even on an older receiver which does not have digital frequency readout. The low-frequency end of the 49 meter band looks like this, during the prime-time American evening listening hours:

kHz	5950	5960	5975	5985	5995
station	La Voz de Radio Nicaragua	Radio Canada Intern- ational	BBC London	WYFR/ VOFC	Voice of America

Two hours before English begins, Chinese, also relayed from Taipei, is heard on 5985 kHz, i.e., 0100-0300 UTC. More Chinese can be heard earlier, at 2200-2300 on 15130 kHz on 19 meters, and more English one hour earlier, at 0200-0300, on 11855 kHz in the 25 meter band, beamed to Central America. It is not yet clear how Okechobee obtains the programming from Taipei. English at 0300-0400 UTC can be heard simultaneously directly from Taipei, on 17800 kHz, but the signal here in Missouri is variable--good some nights, nil to fair others; it is probably about the same in Florida; not consistent or interference-free enough for off-the air relay, even using diversity reception techniques (reception with different antennas and receivers simultaneously, balanced and blended through electronic devices). Perhaps it is a satellite relay, as now used by most BBC, VOA and other major relay stations. I hope to be able to report in the next column.

Language Lessons on Shortwave

Let's look this time at the lessons broadcast by Spanish Foreign Radio (Radio Exterior de Espana) in its English-language transmissions for North America. They are heard as follows:

time UTC	language lesson
0000-0100	0050-0100
0100-0200	0150-0200
0515-0615	0605-0615

always on two frequencies, 9630 kHz in the 31 meter band and 11880 kHz in the 25 meter band. The latter frequency is the best here, although subject to weak-to-moderate co-channel interference (QRM) from Radio Sofia, Bulgaria, at 0000-0200 at present. The lessons are heard weekdays only, Monday through Friday in the American target area (i.e. already Tues. thru Sat. in UTC reckoning). They are titled "El espanol. Un idioma sin fronteras. Learn Spanish, a language without bounds." The linguistic standard used in the English explanations is British (BBC standard)--this is exceptional, in fact, unique in the otherwise American-accented North American service listed above, and appears to indicate that the lessons were chiefly prepared for the European transmission of SFR (1900-2045 UTC). The lessons are at two, possibly three, levels--definitely

intermediate and advanced; some evenings' lessons might be appropriate for second-semester students of the first year. Male and female voices alternate, and a *castizo* standard (with *ceceo*) is adhered to (which is not always the case in Spanish-language broadcasts to the Americas from Radio Exterior de Espana, heard on the same frequencies and others at different times, e.g. starting at 0230 UTC on 9630 and 11880 kHz, where some announcers appear to be Andalusian or Latin American, using *seseo*). The advanced language lessons are heavily literary; for example, one recent lesson featured a reading from a novel by Juan Gaytisoló, of a vessel cruising offshore and entering harbor. It was followed by "vocabulario y ejercicios" on selected maritime vocabulary, and some of the idioms and sentence structures of Gaytisoló.

The lesson is organized into brief segments, introduced, not always by announcements in words, but by stereotyped melodies and bells, with which the student must become familiar. Response time allowed in the "ejercicios" is limited, possibly because of the general fear in radio broadcasting (although less in Europe and on shortwaves, than in the U.S. and on AM) of "dead air." In any event, the student will have to be bright, well-motivated and dedicated to make full use of these brief, material-packed, somewhat sober, sombre, dignified--one might say classically Castilian-language lessons. An advantage is the thrice-daily broadcast (although the 0605 UTC release will be too late for most East Coast and Central listeners); also the generally good reception which permits cassette recording for frequent replay, e.g. in the language laboratory. The address of Radio Exterior de Espana is: Spanish Foreign Radio, Broadcasts in English for America, Apartado 150 039, Madrid-24, Spain. Unfortunately, the station does not appear to send accompanying or explanatory materials for the lessons.

Next time we'll discuss more language lessons available, go down the times and frequencies of some interesting stations, review the shortwave news, and look at some new receivers. I'll be glad to hear in writing from readers, but no phone calls, please

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