

Using the newspaper (2)

Alan Moore



This second article on using the newspaper looks at newspaper reports. When we turn over the pages of our daily newspaper many short reports about murders, accidents, meetings, sports events, film stars, singers, political events, etc catch our eye. Some of these may be unsuitable because of subject matter or linguistic content. Others may need adaptation, or can be used as they stand. Some appeal to us at first glance, others look completely unpromising.

I have chosen one of these "unpromising" ones in which a rather mundane local event is treated just to show that many newspaper reports are worth a second glance. An added incentive is that these reports are about incidents, however prosaic they might be, which have happened to real people. And of course they are expressed in authentic language, not a specially contrived classroom variety.

The report in question is about roads and traffic in Kuala Lumpur. A scheme of work follows which will involve listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. The aim is to familiarize the pupils with the general situation before making actual use of the report. At the same time the pupils will be drawn gradually from using simplified language to the unedited variety of the original.

The scheme is as follows:

1. Listening Comprehension Exercise
2. Oral Presentation. Question and Answer Practice
3. Reading (a) Adapted version
(b) Full version
4. Role-Playing exercises
5. Written exercise

1. Listening Comprehension

The teacher reads out, or gets a friend to record on cassette, the following instructions. The pupils show they understand by drawing a map.

Since this is not a test we can repeat the instructions as often as we wish, within reason of course. The important thing is to couch the instructions in language which the children can understand and only include a few new items which can easily be demonstrated.

"Now children I'm going to ask you to draw a map. A map. I want you to draw a map of some roads.

Have you got some paper? You will need a piece of paper, a pencil, a ruler and a rubber.

These are roads in Kuala Lumpur. First of all, draw Jalan Maarof 4 inches long. Start at the top of the paper and go down like this. (Teacher demonstrates.)

Draw both sides of the road. Make the road half an inch wide. Now at the top of the page I want you to draw another road, Jalan Bangsar, also four inches long. Listen carefully. Jalan Maarof meets Jalan Bangsar at the top of the page. Jalan Bangsar is at right angles (translate if necessary) to Jalan Maarof. Jalan Maarof goes down the page and Jalan Bangsar goes across the page. It goes across the top of the page and Jalan Maarof joins it in the middle.

Make Jalan Bangsar three-quarters of an inch wide. What letter of the alphabet does your map look like? It should look like the letter T.

Write in the names of the two roads. (Pause.)

Now look at Jalan Maarof again. On the right there are four roads which join it. The distance (translate if necessary) between them is the same. The one near Jalan Bangsar is Jalan Tempinis, the next one down is Jalan Ara. Draw both of these. Draw both sides of the road. Put in the names. (Pause.)

The third road is Jalan Telawi Empat and the fourth road is Jalan Telawi Lima. Draw these two roads too, and put in the names. (Pause.)

Have you finished? Good. We still have a little more to do.

Just before we start, show me your papers. (Check that they have got roughly the right diagram. If they haven't, go back and try again!)

You must listen very carefully to the next part.

Opposite Jalan Telawi Lima there is another road. This road is on the left of Jalan Maarof. It goes into Jalan Maarof. It's called Jalan Maarof Tiga. Draw it one and a half inches long. Label it. If you go along Jalan Maarof Tiga from Jalan Maarof you meet another road, called Lorong Maarof. Lorong Maarof is parallel (translate if necessary) to Jalan Maarof. It goes up towards Jalan Bangsar. But it does not go into Jalan Bangsar. Before reaching Jalan Bangsar it curves to the right and joins Jalan Maarof nearly opposite Jalan Tempinis. Draw Lorong Maarof. (Repeat all this if necessary.)

Shall I say it all again?"

This is a difficult exercise especially if your pupils have not been used to drawing things following the teacher's instructions. If the majority of your pupils have not done very well you will have to go back to simpler instructions and see if they can do those.

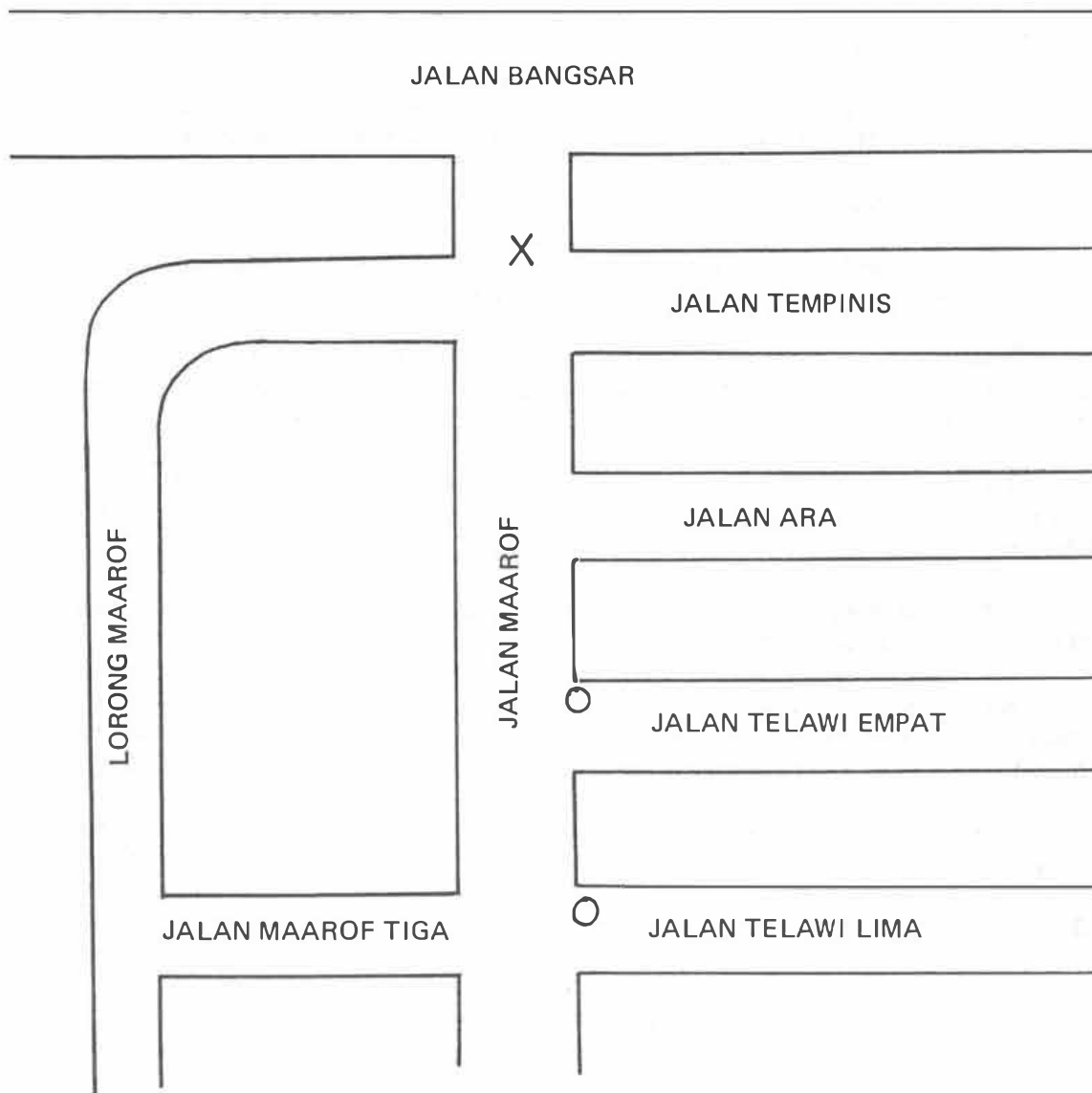
eg Draw a house. It has a door and four windows. On the right of the house there is a durian tree, etc. etc.

Again the exercise would not be suitable for very young children. A good class of 9 or 10-year-olds could probably handle it, and older children too would benefit from the activity.

2. Oral Presentation. Question and Answer Practice.

The teacher can now check through a random sample of the pupils' work, give praise to those who have done well and point out the little slips in the work of the others. He will now reveal his own immaculately produced map, made from the finest Manila card and drawn with the choicest felt tip pens.

The map should look something like this (I think!).



**Bangsar
folk
foxed
by those
signs**

MOTORISTS in Bangsar Park are puzzled by the newly-erected traffic signs along Jalan Maarof.

The signs prevent them from driving down Jalan Maarof to Jalan Bangsar directly. They have to divert, turning to Jalan Tempinis.

Those coming down Jalan Telawi Lima and Jalan Telawi Empat are not allowed to make right turns.

"This is ridiculous. There is no reason for such a sign," said a motorist.

"I see no danger in making the right turns which we have been doing all this while. We can understand the no entry from the junction

of Jalan Tempinis. But this no right turn from the off-roads of Jalan Maarof is distinctly odd."

Although the signs are there, many have chosen to ignore them. They drive right through, pausing only to ensure the coast is clear.

The teacher is ready for the next stage!

Step 1

I'm going to tell you a little story about this map. And this photograph shows Jalan Maarof and some cars driving along it.

If you are in Jalan Maarof and want to get to Jalan Bangsar you are not allowed to go into it directly. You have to use Jalan Tempinis and then go to Jalan Bangsar.

(Show all this with the aid of the map.)

There is a sign here (shown by the letter X). It says No Entry. You are not allowed to go any further. You must turn right into Jalan Tempinis.

There are also signs here. (Point to the map, to the letters O.) These signs are at the end of Jalan Telawi Empat and Jalan Telawi Lima. They are No Right Turn signs. You cannot turn right. You are not allowed to turn right. You must go left.

One motorist who lives in Jalan Telawi Empat said this. "Why must I go left? I want to go right. I want to go to Jalan Bangsar. How can I go there if I have to turn left?" He was very angry.

"Why have they put up these signs? Before I was able to turn right, now I can't. How can I get to Jalan Bangsar now?"

Another motorist who lives in Jalan Telawi Lima was also angry. "I want to go to Jalan Bangsar. How can I now? These signs are silly. I can't understand why they put them there. If I turn right there is no danger."

Some motorists obey the new signs. They turn left. But some motorists do not obey the signs. They turn right. Are they breaking the law?

Step 2

The teacher reads it again, stopping to ask questions.

- eg
1. What road is this? (Pointing to the different roads on the map.)
 2. Show me where the No Entry sign is. What does this sign tell you?
 3. How can you get to Jalan Bangsar?
 4. What must you do here? (Point to No Right Turn signs, and then back to No Entry sign.)
 5. Are you allowed to drive down Jalan Maarof to Jalan Bangsar?
 6. Are you allowed to turn right here? (point to junctions at X, O).
Are you allowed to turn left here? (point to junctions at X, O).
 7. Why can't you turn right here?
Why can't you go straight on here?
 8. What does this sign say? (Point to each of them, in turn.)
 9. Where must you go if you are in Jalan Maarof/Jalan Telawi Empat/ Jalan Telawi Lima and want to go to Jalan Bangsar?
 10. Why was the first driver angry?
 11. What could he do before? What can't he do now?
 12. How did the second driver feel?

13. Why?
14. What did he say?
15. Do all drivers obey the new signs?
16. Are they breaking the law?
17. If a policeman was standing at the corner (point) what would he do and say?

Step 3

Pupils ask these questions. See the previous article for advice about how to get the pupils asking each other questions. You could also try some group work. Divide the class up into groups of four or five, and give each group leader a card with some or all the above questions written on it. Members of the group can take it in turns to ask the questions.

3. Reading

The original report contains certain words and expressions which taken together would be too difficult for the average primary school pupil. I would suggest the following changes.

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Are puzzled by | — cannot understand |
| 2. newly-erected | — new |
| 3. prevent | — stop |
| 4. divert | — use another road |
| 5. ridiculous | — silly |
| 6. distinctly odd | — very strange |
| 7. have chosen to | — omit altogether; add 'people' |
| 8. pausing | — stopping |
| 9. ensure | — to make sure |
| 10. the coast is clear | — there are no policemen around |

The passage now reads as follows:

Motorists in Bangsar Park cannot understand the new traffic signs along Jalan Maarof.

The signs stop them from driving down Jalan Maarof to Jalan Bangsar directly, turning to Jalan Tempinis.

Those coming down Jalan Telawi Lima and Jalan Telawi Empat are not allowed to make right turns.

"This is silly. There is no reason for such a sign," said a motorist.

"I see no danger in making the right turns which we have been doing all this while. We can understand the no entry from the junction of Jalan Tempinis. But this no right turn from the side roads of Jalan Maarof is very strange."

Although the signs are there, many people ignore them. They drive right through, stopping only to make sure there are no policemen around.

The pupils are given a copy of the text (ideally) or have it displayed to them on the blackboard. They read silently, having been instructed previously to make a note of the words or sentences they do not understand. The teacher normally will be able to predict what may cause trouble.

The meaning of most of the passage will be clear to them because of all the oral work they have done. Now by reading they will be adding to their store of language, and noticing how the language of writing is different from the language of speaking.

The teacher can ask a few questions which will elicit the new vocabulary and structure.

- eg What are motorists not allowed to do?
What did the motorist say first?
Do people obey the signs?

The next stage is to give them the full version, with no modifications. You might like to record it on tape and play it once or twice before they see the passage, and then again when they are reading it silently. Again they will be familiar with the general meaning of everything they hear. But now they will be hearing alternative ways of saying things. These words, phrases and idioms they might never come across otherwise. Items such as 'puzzled', 'ridiculous', 'to choose to ignore something', 'pausing only to', 'the coast is clear' would certainly not appear in elementary textbooks. Our pupils may not acquire this vocabulary actively – that is, they may not actually use it in their own speech – but at least they will have a passive understanding of it.

Again the pupils should be encouraged to ask about words or phrases they have not understood. The teacher might translate parts of it if he thinks necessary or get one or two pupils to do so. Obviously the emphasis must be on getting the pupils to understand the passage, and then getting them to use some of this new language.

4. Role-playing exercises.

There are several possibilities here. We might imagine a policeman standing on the corner stopping one of the errant drivers. What would they say to each other? Ask your pupils! If they can't say it in English let them say it in Bahasa Malaysia and then translate. Let **them** make up the dialogue. The teacher can write it down on the blackboard, and afterwards get pupils at the front to act it out.

Another possibility is for a newspaper reporter to interview one of the drivers. The same procedure as before can be used.

As I mentioned in the previous article children really enjoy acting out these little playlets.

5. Written exercise.

Provided the pupils (and you!) are not bored to tears now with so many no right turns, you could always round off the oral and reading activities with some writing. What about a letter to the newspaper, for example, written by an angry motorist living in Jalan Telawi Lima, who has been fined by the police for turning right? No doubt you could come up with other interesting ideas for written work.

The moral behind all this is that even such a mundane example as this one can be exploited for classroom purposes. Newspapers, generally, are full of "human interest" stories much more exciting than the one I chose, and once again they are all about Malaysians living in Malaysia!

Give it a try!