

Learning English podcasts ... from the
Hellenic American Union©

Level: Advanced
Lesson: 34
Title: "Snail Mail"

Summary:

Vanessa and Nick about the possibility for many post offices in the UK to be closed.

In this episode of World Report Vanessa and Nick are in the middle of a live show in a radio studio. Nick is reporting live from London. Listen to their conversation and answer the question that follows about the main idea.

Dialogue:

Vanessa: Hello to all our listeners. Hi Nick. **So what's the scoop on snail mail?** Are there actually signs that it's going the way of the dinosaur?

Nick: Hi Vanessa. Yes, all the signs are that the familiar image of a postman in uniform delivering mail in all kinds of weather may soon be history, at least in many areas of Britain.



Vanessa: Wait a minute. **Is this official?**



Nick: Well, the spokesperson for the Department of Trade and Industry said approximately 3,000 post offices may be closed in 2007 under cost-cutting plans. And some of the services they provide will now be taken over by local shops.



Vanessa: How was this received?

Nick: It's sparked a controversy. Some say this was to be expected; others feel post offices, at least those in the rural areas, must be kept open to give people access to essential services.



Vanessa: Nick, you mentioned **the government's cost-cutting plans**. So **the state-owned postal operator...**

Nick: That's the Royal Mail...



Vanessa: Uh-huh...

Nick: ...They've been competing with private enterprises since they lost their 350-year monopoly on postal services a year ago. Plus they lost key business when the government started paying benefits like state pensions directly through claimants' bank accounts.



Vanessa: Can you give us any figures?

Nick: Yes, last year, the loss was two million pounds a week. This year it's expected to double.

Vanessa: The widespread use of e-mail and texting on cell phones must have dented profits!



Nick: That's certainly an explanation.

Vanessa: Well, let's face it. We live **in an ever-changing world** and it seems there's no going back: we're forced to keep up with the times. Thanks Nick.



Now answer the following question...

What is going to happen to the post offices in the U.K?
They are going to close

Now listen again to the dialogue in parts. After each part there will be 3 to 4 questions on some details...

Part 1

Vanessa: Hello to all our listeners. Hi Nick. **So what's the scoop on snail mail?** Are there actually signs that it's going the way of the dinosaur?

Nick: Hi Vanessa. Yes, all the signs are that the familiar image of a postman in uniform delivering mail in all kinds of weather may soon be history, at least in many areas of Britain.

Vanessa: Wait a minute. **Is this official?**

Nick: Well, the spokesperson for the Department of Trade and Industry said approximately 3,000 post offices may be closed in 2007 under cost-cutting plans. And some of the services they provide will now be taken over by local shops.

Vanessa: **How was this received?**

Nick: It's sparked a controversy. Some say this was to be expected; others feel post offices, at least those in the rural areas, must be kept open to give people access to essential services.

Now answer some questions...

1. What does Vanessa mean when she asks **"So what's the scoop on snail mail?"**

When Vanessa asks "What's the scoop on snail mail?" she means "Can you tell me more details about snail mail?"

2. What does Vanessa mean when she asks **"Is this official?"**

When Vanessa asks "Is this official?" she means "Is this based on a government announcement?"

3. What does Vanessa mean when she asks **"How was this received?"**

When Vanessa asks "How was this received?" she means "What was the public reaction?"

Now listen to the second part of the dialogue...

Part 2

Vanessa: Nick, you mentioned **the government's cost-cutting plans**. So **the state-owned postal operator...**

Nick: That's the Royal Mail...

Vanessa: Uh-huh...

Nick: ...They've been competing with private enterprises since they lost their 350-year monopoly on postal services a year ago. Plus they lost key business when the government started paying benefits like state pensions directly through claimants' bank accounts.

Vanessa: Can you give us any figures?

Nick: Yes, last year, the loss was two million pounds a week. This year it's expected to double.

Vanessa: The widespread use of e-mail and texting on cell phones must have dented profits!

Nick: That's certainly an explanation.

Vanessa: Well, let's face it. We live **in an ever-changing world** and it seems there's no going back: we're forced to keep up with the times. Thanks Nick.

Now answer some questions...

1. What do Vanessa and Nick mean when they say **"the government's cost-cutting plans"**?

When Vanessa and Nick say "the government's cost-cutting plans" they mean the government's plans to cut costs.

2. What does Vanessa mean when she talks about **"the state-owned postal operator"**?

When Vanessa talks about "the state-owned postal operator" she means royal mail or the postal operator that is owned by the state.

3. What does Vanessa mean when she talks about **"in an ever-changing world"**?

When Vanessa talks about "an ever-changing world" she means our world is always changing.

Please visit our site at www.hau.gr to find the transcripts, explanations and activities.

GLOSSARY

Benefit: **Benefit** is a noun that means money that is paid by the state to an employee as added financial help. For example, we talk about **housing benefit**, **child benefit**, **health benefit**, **unemployment benefit**, etc.

Claimant: A **claimant** is a person who is entitled to something or has the right to receive something. For example, we say "Pensions will be paid directly through the **claimants'** bank accounts."

Dent: If you **dent** something, you make a hollow mark in its surface. For example, we say, "I accidentally dropped a box from my balcony, and it **dented** the trunk of the car that was parked right under it." The verb **dent** is also used metaphorically to mean negatively affect or damage. For example, in the radio broadcast you heard, "The widespread use of e-mail and texting has also **dented** profits."

Go the way of the dinosaur: **Going the way of the dinosaur** is an expression that means expected to become extinct or obsolete. For example, when we say "Typewriters have **gone the way of the dinosaur**," we mean that they are obsolete.

History: To be **history** is a similar expression to '**Go the way of the dinosaur**'. When something is history, it's a thing of the past and it no longer exists. When we say, for example, that the image of a postman may soon be **history**, we mean that it may soon cease to exist.

Keep up with the times: The expression to **keep up with the times** (also **move with the times**) means to change your ideas, opinions or way of living or working in order to adjust to the modern way of doing things. For example, "The way technology keeps developing is forcing us to **keep up with the times**."

Snail mail: **Snail mail** is a noun used to refer to letters or messages sent by conventional mail and not by e-mail.

Spark a controversy / debate: If something **sparks a controversy** or a **debate**, it provokes a sudden reaction of the public and it divides their opinion: some people agree to it and some people object to it. The verb **spark** means cause the start of something, especially the start of a protest or an argument, and the noun **controversy** means disagreement.

Spokesperson: A **spokesperson** is a person who is chosen to speak to the media on behalf of the government, or an organization, or a company. This person makes public announcements and answers journalists' questions.

Texting: **Texting** is a noun referring to the process of sending a written message from one cell phone or pager to another. It's also called **(text) messaging**.

ACTIVITIES

Activity 1

Practice using words and expressions from the glossary. Choose the most appropriate word or expression to fill in each blank.

1. _____ is very popular among teenagers.
2. The new law proposal to ban smoking in all public premises will definitely _____.
3. All _____ are requested to fill out this form in order to receive a full refund.
4. Computerizing the whole procedure is a costly option, but one has to _____.
5. Cassette recorders were widely used for a number of years, but now it seems they are going _____.
6. I won't have my laptop with me. You'll hear from me by _____.
7. A _____ for the airline announced that the crash was attributed to technical failure.
8. The confidence of the team was _____ when they failed to make it to the finals.
9. Remember the school we went to? Well, it's now _____. A day care center was built in its place.
10. The low birth rate in many developed countries has prompted some governments to grant more generous child _____ to young parents.

Activity 2

A. Study the following explanations:

1. If you ask **'What's the scoop on...'**, you want to know some details or the latest facts about it.
2. The question **'Is this official?'** is asked when one wants to confirm that something was actually announced by someone in authority. If you tell someone **'It's official'**, you mean it has been decided on or announced by people in authority.
3. The verb **'receive'** is sometimes used in the passive voice to describe the way people react to something. For example, if we say that a new film is well received, we mean that it gets good reviews. The question **'How was this received?'** means 'How did the public react to this?' or 'What did people think?'
4. **Compound adjectives** are adjectives made up of two or more words that are linked by means of hyphens. The second word could be
 - a present participle (a **good-looking** man, a **fast-growing** industry),
 - a past participle (a **well-mannered** person, **ready-made** products), or
 - a noun (a **350-year** monopoly, an **eight-storey** building, a **three-hour** film).
5. Remember that when using a compound noun the second part of which is a noun, the noun form is **always** singular: an **eighteen-month** lease (not an 'eighteen-months lease'), a **four-page** introduction (not a 'four-pages introduction').

B. Complete the conversation below based on information from the radio program you listened to. Use expressions containing the words **'official'**, **'receive'** and **'scoop'** that are discussed in the explanations.

1. A: _____ on the UK's state-owned postal operator?
B: Have you been reading about it too? I read today that 3000 post offices will be closed all over the country.
2. A: My goodness. That's hard to believe. _____ ?
B: I'm afraid so. There's been an announcement.
3. A: And _____ ?
B: With mixed feelings. People realize the Royal Mail's profits have been steadily decreasing, but they would hate to see so many post offices close, especially in the rural areas.

Activity 3:

Rewrite each of the sentences below, forming a compound adjective from the two words in italics and making any other necessary changes.

1. I'm supposed to write a project of **2000 words** on American cinema in the 1970s this month.

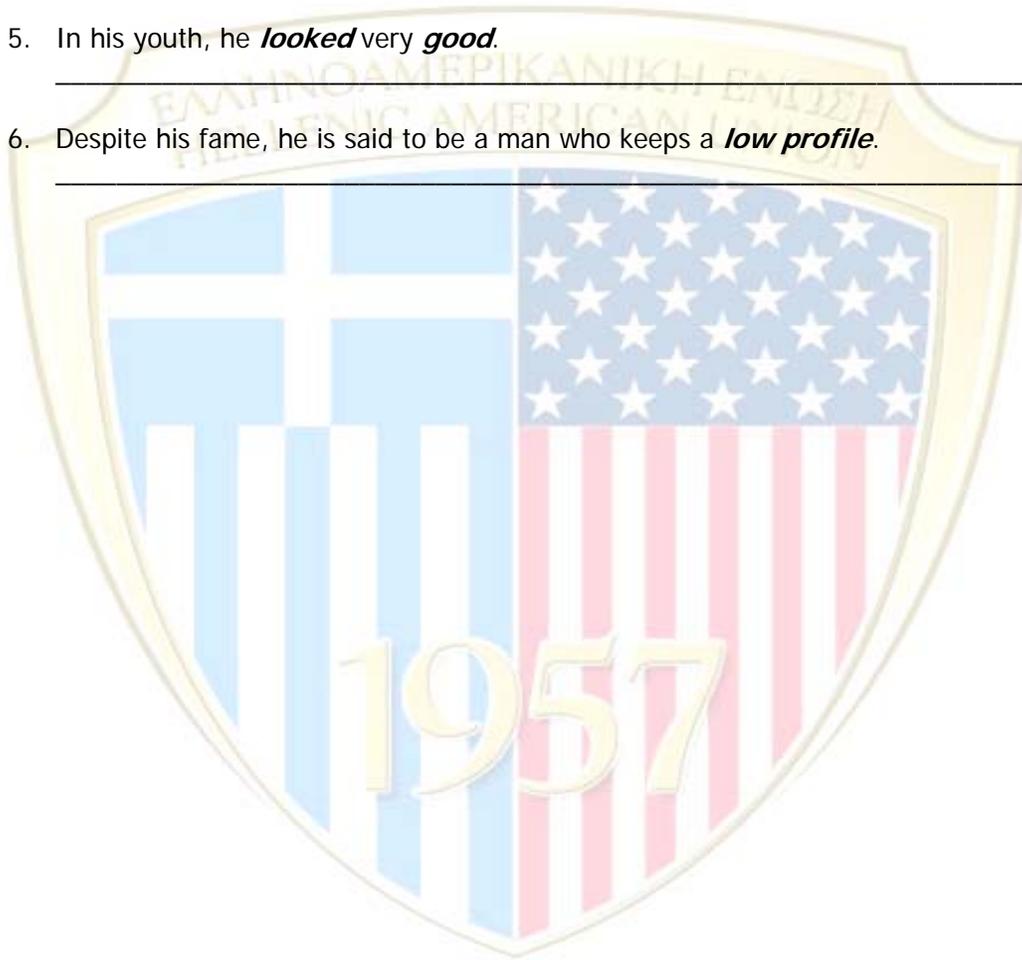
2. So I'm doing some research on my favorite actor who *speaks English*.

3. Al Pacino is a film actor who was *born in New York*.

4. He is *famous* all over the *world* for some of the finest role interpretations on screen.

5. In his youth, he *looked* very *good*.

6. Despite his fame, he is said to be a man who keeps a *low profile*.



KEY TO ACTIVITIES

Activity 1

1. texting / text messaging
2. spark a controversy / debate
3. claimants
4. keep up / move with the times
5. the way of the dinosaur
6. snail mail
7. spokesperson
8. dented
9. history
10. benefit

Activity 2B

1. *What's the scoop*
2. *Is this official*
3. *How was the news received*

Activity 3

1. I'm supposed to write a **2000-word** project on cinema in the 1970s this month.
2. So I'm doing some research on my favorite **English-speaking** actor.
3. Al Pacino is a **New York-born** film actor.
4. He is **world-famous** for some of the finest role interpretations on screen.
5. In his youth, he was very **good-looking**.
6. Despite his fame, he is said to be a **low-profile** man.

