

Unit Two: Traffic Education

Lesson 1

How Your Brain Negotiates Traffic

3. Read the passage below and complete the activities mentioned at the end of the passage.

When you are in the driving seat of a car, you have the steering and the horn in your hands, the brake and accelerator under your feet, eyes open looking ahead, left and right. The same can be said about a motorcycle rider, with some modifications. These are all very visible. But, behind all, there is something that keeps working unseen. And that is the Central Processing Unit (CPU), your brain. CPUs are artificially intelligent machines that are programmed to do specific jobs under fixed conditions and judgements. But the human brain is intelligent by nature. It is the most sophisticated machine that is able to operate on ever-changing conditions and standards of judgement. As conditions in the traffic keep invariably changing, this virtue of sophistication of your brain must be at work when you are driving. The difference between traffic in the roads and highways and racing circuit must not be blurring inside you. Never imagine yourself to be a Michael Schumacher driving an F-1 at 300 mph. Leave no room for fantasy. You must always be ready to encounter unexpected behavior from any vehicle or pedestrian. "Keep your cool" is easy to advice but difficult to maintain. Still you must always restrain yourself because, at the end of the day, you don't want to be regarded as a killer. Now you see, the last thing that differentiates you from a computer is your conscience.

Lesson 2

Traffic Capital of the World

I am in a tiny steel cage attached to a motorcycle, stuttering through traffic in Dhaka, Bangladesh. In the last ten minutes, we have moved forward maybe three feet, inch by inch, the driver wrenching the wheel left and right, wriggling deeper into the wedge between a delivery truck and a rickshaw in front of us. Up ahead, the traffic is jammed so close together that pedestrians are climbing over pickup trucks and through empty rickshaws to cross the street. Two rows to my left is an ambulance, blue light spinning uselessly. This is what the streets here look like from seven o'clock in the morning until ten o'clock at night. If you're rich, you experience it from the back seat of a car. If you're poor, you're in a rickshaw, breathing in the exhaust. I'm sitting in the back of a CNG, a three-wheeled motorcycle shaped like a slice of pie and covered with scrap metal. I'm here working on a human rights project, but whenever I ask people in Dhaka what they think international organizations should really be working on, they tell me about the traffic. Alleviating traffic congestion is one of the major development challenges of our time. Half the world's population already lives in cities, and the United Nations (UN) estimates that the proportion will rise to nearly 70 percent by 2050. Dhaka, the world's densest and fastest growing city, is a case study in how this problem got so bad and why it's so difficult to solve. Dhaka's infrastructure doesn't match the scale of its population. Just 7 percent of the city is covered by roads, compared with around 25 percent of Paris and Vienna. Dhaka also suffers from the absence of a planned road network. There are 650 major intersections, but only 60 traffic lights, many of which don't work. That means the police force isn't enforcing driving or parking rules; they're in the intersections, directing traffic. The cost of Dhaka's traffic congestion is estimated at \$3.8 billion a year, and that's just the delays and air pollution, not the less-tangible losses in quality of life. Paradoxically, the poor infrastructure is one of the reasons why the city is growing so fast. Without roads or trains to whisk them to the suburbs, Dhaka residents have no choice but to crowd into the middle, set up slums between high-rises, and walk to work. Then there are the users of the roads. Besides pedestrians, the narrow lanes are shared by bicycles, rickshaws, scooters, motorcycles, CNGs, buses, and cars. All these modes take up a different amount of space and have different top speeds. Most people you

talk to in Bangladesh blame the traffic jams on the rickshaws. There are too many of them, they say, and they drive so slowly that they trap the cars, buses, and CNGs behind them. The government is under pressure to designate some lanes as car-only, to build wider roads and overpasses, to take the slow traffic out from in front of the fast. And this brings us to the third reason why the traffic problem is so difficult to solve. All of these fixes sound easy and obvious, but they come at a cost. One and a half million people drive rickshaws for a living, plus another few hundred thousand own and repair them. Government efforts to get people out of rickshaws and into buses and trains are going to attract huge opposition. Even increasing bus capacity is more complicated than it sounds. A 2009 World Bank analysis found 60 separate bus companies in Dhaka. Since the bus companies compete with one another, the drivers have every incentive to drive aggressively and take more passengers than the buses can hold. What's more, the public transport isn't all that public. Many of the bus companies are owned or linked to political parties or powerful trade unions. Government efforts to unify or regularize the system would amount to a hostile takeover of all of these small companies. The obvious solution is to separate the rickshaws from the cars, from the CNGs, give each of them lanes and lights according to their top speed, and, crucially, make car drivers pay the cost of taking up more space on the roads. But that, politically speaking, is unrealistic. Car owners are a small part of the population, but they are the most influential. Every year, Dhaka adds an extra 37,000 cars to its already overcrowded roads. Think about all this from a Bangladeshi politician's point of view. Any attempt to solve the traffic mess means annoying the poor, the middle class, and the rich all at once. Thanks to the donors, In 2012, the government announced a \$2.75 billion plan to build a metro rail system and a \$45 million bus rapid-transit line from the airport. For residents of Dhaka, it will come as a relief. Whenever I asked my Bangladeshi colleagues how long it would take to get somewhere, they always gave two answers: "Without traffic, maybe fifteen minutes. But with traffic? Who knows?"

[Adapted from the article published in www.newstatesman.org]

Lesson 3

The Traffic Police

Amidst killer speeds I stand

Facing the traffic, stretching my hand.

I am seen on kids' books and as cartoons everywhere

Educating people and asking them to beware

Of the erratic traffic and the signboards

Seen on almost all the roads.

So that you're safe I see each one of you

But my sweat, my plight on the road sees who?

Be it sunny or rainy,

For your safety I must be

Vigil and agile, on the middle

Standing erect, as fit as a fiddle.

Oh! My ear hurts! Oh! My head aches!

Oh! Look at the weather...such unpredictable days!

But I cannot swerve; I must be on duty.

I care for your safety.

Be it noisy or dusty; Be it sunny or rainy;

I must be on duty. I care for your safety.

Lesson 4

From Filippos Fylaktos' Film

"My Brother, the Traffic Policeman"

The persona of a traffic policeman has always been a curious one. It has often found important space and close treatment in literature and other arts. Besides the many poems about this fascinating character, there is at least one movie where the central character is a traffic policeman. In 1963, Greek film maker Filippos Fylaktos made this film named My Brother, the Traffic Policeman. It featured a slightly manic traffic policeman, Antonis Pikrocholos, who is utterly devoted to service and duty, and applies the traffic code with unyielding severity. Tickets rain down upon law-breakers in particular taxi-drivers and especially Lampros, who happens to be in love with Pikrocholos's sister, Fofa. In his turn, the traffic policeman is in love with a businessman's daughter, Kiki, who is afraid to reveal her feelings to her father. Besides, Antonis has given lots of traffic tickets to a bus belonging to her father's company. For all these reasons, the road to marriage for both couples is long and strewn with obstacles, but the outcome is a happy one for everyone involved.