

Reviews

THE REAL THING: EXTRACTS FROM UNIVERSITY TEXTBOOKS FOR ESL STUDENTS. Stratton Ray and Patricia Nardiello. New York: Macmillan, 1986. Pp. xvi + 264; *Instructor's Manual*, pp. 26.

Reviewed by Betsy Soden

While there are many ESL reading textbooks aimed at advanced students, relatively few focus on the special problems inherent in reading academic texts. *The Real Thing* delivers what its subtitle promises — authentic extracts from university textbooks, sweetened by a range of interesting and challenging exercises that introduce students to many of the characteristics of academic prose by skillfully exploiting specific textual features of each passage.

The 24 chapters of the book are divided into three broad sections: “textbook passages with paraphrases, supported reading of textbook passages and textbook passages for independent reading” (Table of Contents, pp. xv–xviii). The passages included were obviously carefully chosen to be broadly representative of a number of fields: biological and health sciences, business and economics, chemistry, earth sciences, ecology and natural resources, engineering, math and computer sciences, and psychology. In each of the six chapters of the first section, the concepts of the authentic passage are introduced through prereading activities followed by a simplified version of the passage. The authentic passage is then presented in the form of a TOEFL practice exercise, which requires close analysis of each sentence of the passage and provokes discussion about some of the lexical and syntactic features of the passage. Generally, practice is also given here in identifying phrasal referents and supplying words not stated in ellipsis. In addition, the compactness of academic prose is noted through a comparison of the authentic and paraphrased versions of the text. Some chapters in this section also offer supplementary passages which present information related to that of the core passage. Comparison of the two passages reveals differences in scope, viewpoints, and style.

The passages included in this first section are all fairly brief, ranging from two to four paragraphs. Here the focus is on a close and careful analysis of the features of each of the passages with special attention to those characteristic of academic prose, for example, the use of concise and impersonal language, Greek and Latin derivational forms, participial and gerund phrases, and passives.

The textbook extracts in the six chapters of the second section are led into by prereading activities that activate the reader's background knowledge of the topics presented in each of the passages. These activities include crossword puzzles and experiments, small group discussions, and TOEFL practice exercises. The textbook passage is then presented, followed by comprehension questions and other activities that provoke discussion of the content of the passage

and focus on particular textual features, such as the use of the conditional and the language of formulas. Supplementary passages are also included in some chapters. The passages in this section are, with one exception, fairly short: four to five paragraphs or fewer. That of chapter 11 is purposely longer, over three pages of very dense prose, to give the reader the experience of dealing with a complex, extended text.

The third section of this textbook contains 12 chapters, with textbook extracts ranging in length from a brief paragraph to two pages. Because the topics of several of these passages are similar to some in the first two sections, they can be assigned as supplementary reading for those particular chapters. Although some of these chapters offer introductory exercises which can be worked through prior to the reading of the text, because this section is designed to give practice in independent reading, most begin straightaway with the authentic passage, followed by comprehension questions and exercises that focus on textual features.

The strengths of this textbook are many. While other ESL reading textbooks for advanced students may offer authentic selections, often they are passages taken from periodicals or pieces of literature; few offer verbatim textbook extracts. None, that this writer is aware of, consistently utilizes a paraphrased version, rather than glosses, to introduce an authentic text, then leads the reader through supported reading to independent reading of textbook material. For pre-sessional students whose major concern is “passing” the TOEFL or Michigan English Language Assessment Battery (MELAB), the TOEFL practice exercises in each chapter add a real incentive to working through this textbook. Another real plus is the variety of exercise types and activities; none of the boring repetition and predictable patterns found in so many textbooks. The suggested activities often engage students in small group discussion or tasks. For instance, in a chapter with an extract from an engineering textbook, students are told they are Peace Corps engineers and that they must brainstorm in groups to find solutions to several problems. Another chapter presents a visual paradox that leads into verbal paradoxes. Still another uses an experiment to introduce a passage on the normal probability curve. The discussions of one class that used this textbook were so animated that it was often difficult to bring them to a close to move on to another activity.

In addition to the above-mentioned top-down exercises, which cause students to call forth background knowledge related to the topic under discussion, there are many bottom-up sentence-level exercises, which require close analysis of new information. In these exercises, the focus is not only on meaning but also on features typical of textbook prose, such as cohesion markers, participles, passives, and conditionals. Attention is also paid to the use of derivational forms, reference, ellipsis, the lexis of formal academic prose, and citations, charts, and graphs.

The welcome *Instructor's Manual* gives answers to most of the exercises found in the textbook and invaluable teaching suggestions for each chapter. Written in a delightfully chatty style, it involves the reader in a dialogue with the author. For instance, in a discussion of one answer to a TOEFL practice exercise, the author states, “The TOEFL doesn't like this kind of redundancy though it doesn't bother me. How about you?” (*Instructor's Manual*, p. 7). Also, it offers

helpful admonitions like, “You will be happier if you have read and understood this passage before going to class” (*Instructor’s Manual*, p. 13). And believe me, you will!

From this writer’s own experience, teaching from this textbook is a pleasure. It is well laid out, and the directions and explanations in the text itself, combined with those in the *Instructor’s Manual*, make lesson preparation a breeze. Because most chapters are fairly short, they can be covered in two to three 50-minute class periods, assuming some exercises are assigned for homework. The suggested activities provide material for a happy blend of full group, small group, and individual work. And the exercises provide a good deal of practice in identifying textual features, reading chunks of material rapidly, predicting, reviewing, comparing, classifying, analyzing, and so on. The change of topic with each chapter maintains interest throughout the textbook and ensures that concepts related to each student’s field are touched on more than once. In addition, students are able to sample and discuss concepts and lexicon from a number of fields other than their own, a valuable opportunity for them to broaden their world knowledge and their vocabularies.

Student reaction to this text is also enthusiastic. One student wrote on a course evaluation form: “I learned a lot of things with the teacher and the book. Especially the textbook, *The Real Thing*, is very useful for me to learn academic things in every field.” Another wrote: “This book is very good. In each unit it includes two kinds of paragraphs describing the same thing but in different form. It’s really helpful.” Still another remarked in casual conversation that she liked the comparison of the paraphrased and authentic versions of a passage so that she could note the sophisticated language of the actual extract. Also, she enjoyed the careful analysis of the sentences of each extract so that she could notice how structures were put together. Although she generally felt able to grasp the main ideas of fairly complex material, she found that this microscopic look at language revealed to her new insights about the interrelationships of its parts.

While this student and others relished the opportunity to examine closely the bits and pieces of language, others would have liked more exposure to longer passages. As mentioned previously, most of the textbook extracts included are very short; in fact, only one exceeds three pages in length. One wishes the authors had chosen to include some longer passages in the section for independent reading. As a bridge between the reading practiced in ESL classes and that in the real academic world, students need the experience of reading 10 to 20 pages of material overnight. When they return to us after enrolling in university courses, they always complain about the immense amount of reading they must do and the hours it takes them.

Longer passages would also provide material for analysis of rhetorical patterns; for example, recognizing conceptual paragraphs, that is, chunks of orthographic paragraphs with an underlying theme, identifying topic shifts, and distinguishing controlling ideas from supporting details. While this textbook offers a good deal of practice in text analysis at the word and sentence level, aside from attention to reference and ellipsis, it offers little at the paragraph level, and there is only brief mention of discourse level features: “Organization is very important in textbook writing because many new ideas are introduced and explained that

can be confusing to the reader” (p. 61). Following this statement is an exercise that asks students to identify the paragraph topics in that chapter’s textbook extract, after which the authors recommend: “As you read, take note when a new paragraph begins. This change signals a change of ideas or change of focus” (p. 62). Although orthographic paragraphs do indeed signal a change of topic, topics can also shift within a paragraph and, conversely, often several orthographic paragraphs focus on one general topic. Advanced students need to be made aware of textual discourse features and given practice in recognizing them. It is a pity that the authors of this textbook make such brief reference to these features.

Another potential problem that needs to be addressed is the authors’ decision to use TOEFL-like exercises as a vehicle for careful analysis of bits of language. While there is no doubt that “the TOEFL format serves the purpose of encouraging very close study of the language in question, and it heightens the interest of even the most recalcitrant victims of ‘examinationitis’” (p. viii), it may be offensive to students not concerned with passing the TOEFL or similar English language proficiency tests, and it may cause instructors of in-sessional students to reject this particular textbook despite all the benefits it could offer their students. The majority of the students in the class alluded to earlier were very concerned with getting high scores on the TOEFL OR MELAB and thus found these exercises quite useful both for language analysis and test preparation. However, these students were pre-sessional. In order to use these exercises with in-sessional students or students already accepted and waiting to matriculate, one might need to stress their real purpose and downplay their title. In fact, they do the job they were meant to do as they cause students to ponder the particular lexical and grammatical features of English represented in each authentic passage, and they often result in lively and heated discussions as well. In addition, they provide a look at grammar and lexicon in a context, that of the sentences of a textbook extract, in contrast to the point-by-point and often boring treatment seen in more traditional textbooks.

Other smaller problems arise in presentation of material or exercises. For example, on page 42 there is a long list of terms for common phobias that is meant to lead into a discussion of the frequent use of Greek and Latin derivational forms in academic text. In the *Instructor’s Manual* there is the suggestion that the teacher help the students with the pronunciation of all these terms before they work through the exercises following them. Although I consulted three dictionaries, including an abridged one, I found it difficult to locate some of these terms or related derivational forms and was thus uncertain of their pronunciations. It would have been helpful if the authors had included a pronunciation guide in their manual.

My students also had a problem with a substitution chart on page 119. Although the directions warn: “Watch out for grammar in columns C and E,” it is unclear which items may or may not be used together. After consulting several grammar reference books, I was able to devise an ad hoc set of rules to give my class. Some help from the authors here would be appreciated.

Despite the occasional problem of the sort just mentioned, the lack of attention to discursal features, and the possible difficulty of persuading in-sessional stu-

dents to work through the TOEFL practice exercises, this textbook has much to recommend it. It offers an innovative approach to the analysis of textbook extracts through a comparison of two versions of the same passage together with skillfully constructed exercises that focus on many of the features of academic texts. It is also easy to teach from, and students find its contents both useful and interesting.

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SCIENCE, MEDICINE AND TECHNOLOGY: ENGLISH GRAMMAR AND WRITING. Peter Antony Master. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1986. Pp. xv + 335.

Reviewed by Mohamed Daoud

Science, Medicine and Technology is a natural and long overdue follow-up to John Swales' *Writing Scientific English* (Swales, 1971). While the latter coincided with the early interest in EST and incorporated the pioneering research findings in the field, the former applies the most recent theories about the structure and discourse of scientific and technical English. In this respect, the book is a welcome addition to the very few textbooks available that deal with such an elusive and often neglected skill as writing.

The author, who clearly has firsthand experience with teaching English to non-native speakers, presents his book as

. . . a textbook for foreign students who are studying or have studied science, medicine or technology. It is designed to motivate ESL students to learn English, appealing to their sense of what they will need in their professional lives by teaching the common forms of scientific writing and the necessary grammar to produce them. (p. xiii)

The book is composed of six units, which are built around seven major rhetorical functions and discourse types in English for science and technology. The Units 1-5 deal with amplified definition, the description of a mechanism, the description of a process, classification, and the abstract, respectively. Unit 6 covers two forms of writing, namely, the research report and the feasibility study.

Each unit is divided into two parts (Unit 6 has three parts), which are in turn uniformly subdivided into sections. The first part presents the grammatical