
Reviews/Comptes rendus

New International Business English: Communication Skills in English for Business Purposes

Leo Jones and Richard Alexander

Cambridge University Press, 1996

ISBN 0521 45576 6 (Teacher's Book); 0521 45580 4 (Student's Book); 0521 45579 0 (Workbook); 0521 42735 5 (Video Teaching Guide); 0521 42732 0 (Video Cassettes VHS Pal)

Most business English teachers probably have a well-thumbed-through copy of the first edition of *International Business English* on their shelves and might ask themselves whether they should acquire the new 1996 edition. In my opinion, the answer is a resounding *Yes!*

New International Business English contains much of the excellent material of the first edition with several significant changes. The most striking of these changes are the addition of color, larger layout of the pages, and interesting use of fonts in the Student's book. As a result the book is visually attractive, and the instructions and tasks are much easier to follow. Another important change is in the content: The transfer of the vocabulary, grammar and language exercises from the Student's book to the revised Workbook leaves the focus on the communicative activities, making the material coherent and cohesive. In addition the instructions and tasks have been simplified and in many units the steps in the integrated activities have either been increased or decreased to allow for better exploitation of the material. Finally, the Students' book is shorter than its predecessor and would be easier to cover in a typical intensive language program of 40 to 60 hours.

Most of the 15 unit topics have remained the same. A typical unit involves four lessons of about 90 minutes each, depending on the level of the class and their background knowledge in business. In order to allow for this, the authors have organized the material so that it progresses from basic to more demanding activities. Thus Units 1 to 4 cover the basic business English skills such as communicating face-to-face, modern forms of written communication, using the telephone, and writing notes, summaries, and reports. In Units 5 to 14, these skills are subsequently applied to various business situations. For example, in the unit "International trade" students make and answer inquiries regarding a product, make and accept offers, and place, acknowledge, and fill orders. Each of these activities involves several authentic tasks: reading background information in various genres, making and listening to phone calls and making notes, and drafting a memo, letter, and

fax. An important component of every section is a final activity in the form of a discussion prompted by a controversial issue raised in the activity itself or by recorded texts, interviews, or short reading passages. This type of debriefing session has proven to be invaluable in the learning process for both students and teachers and is too often neglected due to lack of time. I am glad to see its importance recognized here.

The various skills introduced and practiced in these units form the basis of the simulation in Unit 15 in which students have the opportunity to encounter, identify, understand, and solve an actual business problem while increasing their language competence. I suggest that teachers familiarize themselves with the process of running a simulation before attempting one. I would recommend reading Chapter 4 in *Simulation, Gaming, and Language Learning*, by Crookall and Oxford (1990) in which they discuss the techniques and importance of the briefing prior to the simulation and the subsequent debriefing. The authors maintain that the debriefing is of such importance that it should be allowed as much time as the simulation itself.

The revised Workbook, with its vocabulary and language exercises, serves an integral function in the course. Each unit begins with a background information section designed for those students who have little or no background in business or in the topic of the unit. This information is often sociocultural in nature. These readings are well written, concise, and informative. The Workbook also contains valuable supplementary material on language functions, listening practice, and writing tasks. The Workbook has been written for self-study and includes an answer key and transcripts of the listening exercises. However, because most of the exercises of the course are now in the Workbook, students will need careful guidance, monitoring, and follow-up when using it. When used judiciously this book is well worth the additional cost. The excellent video, which was developed with the first edition, relates directly to the units, giving students the opportunity to view, discuss, and evaluate realistic business interactions. The corresponding Video Teacher's Guide includes questions that help students to focus on the content, language, and behavior of the interactions and to relate them to their own experiences. Students are encouraged to focus on intonation, tone of voice, and other vital clues in nonverbal communication. For example, in the sequence "Face to face," students follow a British consultant and a Dutch business person from their initial meeting, which begins on a formal, awkward note and has relaxed slightly by the end of the day. In their second meeting all traces of formality and awkwardness have disappeared. The sequence raises important cultural and cross-cultural issues encountered at a first business meeting such as greetings, levels of formality, protocol, dress code, and appropriateness. The suggested procedures in the Teacher's Guide may have to be adapted according to the level of the class because students may find the accents of the speakers hard to understand. In addition the

detailed comprehension questions, although useful, may be too easy for some students. I have found that students enjoy and benefit from the video if it is used as a supplement to the lesson.

I have one major reservation regarding the material found in two of the units. The authors claim that the course is suitable for people who have no business experience as well as for senior executives, and that it “covers the basic business or commercial terms that most business people use in the course of their work.” I beg to differ and would like to point out that the units on international trade and money matters deal with specific subject matter that is not common to most business people, for example, terms of payment, incoterms, various methods of payment, letters of credit, operating profits, and credit risk. These are not only the terminology of specific areas of business, but they also require a background in the subject area. The authors recognize this fact and have provided background information in the accompanying Workbook as well as recommended readings on the subject. However, I have found that students (as well as language teachers) who have had little or no experience in international trade or money matters such as invoicing and credit often find such content and language activities related to such specialized terminology frustrating. Thus in order to accommodate the material to students’ business backgrounds, language abilities and specific needs, the teacher may have to select, adapt, or supplement certain activities judiciously in these units.

Aside from this, the course is an excellent resource for anyone looking for a comprehensive, well-written, and user-friendly course on Business English based on the latest theories of second-language acquisition.

Helen Levitin

Reference

Crookall, D., & Oxford, R.L. (1990). *Simulation, gaming, and language learning*. New York: Newbury House.

The Reviewer

Helen Levitin teaches English at the English Language Institute, University of British Columbia. She taught ESL/EFL in Israel for most of her 35-year teaching career, specializing in business English. She has recently taught international business English to Indo-Chinese government officials in Singapore and Vietnam. She holds an MA in TESL and supervision/administration of international schools from Trenton College, New Jersey.

Very Young Learners

V. Reilly and S.M. Ward

Oxford University Press, 1997

ISBN 0 19 437209 X

Very Young Learners is an informative resource book for teachers with preschool children in their classrooms. According to the authors one of the aims of this book is to provide activities for children that are based on sound preschool practice and educational theory. Another aim is to support teachers trained to teach adults and teenagers but who find themselves with classes of very young learners. At the same time the authors wish to support many primary and preschool teachers whose first language is not English but who are asked to teach English in their classroom (p. 3).

This informative and user-friendly book consists of an introduction, six chapters of activities and lesson plans, lesson-related work sheets, and a list for further reading of books containing stories, songs, and games for teachers. In the introduction the authors discuss the key issues and theories in teaching foreign languages to young children. They provide helpful information for inexperienced teachers to understand the overall language learning process of young learners and a key framework for teachers to keep in mind while planning their lessons. They also discuss the organization of the book and ways of allowing teachers to adapt the book to their individual needs.

The authors organize the themes in the six chapters with relation to the child's cognitive, physical, and social stages of development. They deal with familiar themes (self, home, and school), and try to reflect in their lesson plans what teachers normally would be covering in a preschool class. In each chapter they provide a variety of lesson plans relating to each theme. The description of each activity is detailed enough to be replicated in a real classroom, and each activity involves various skills such as singing, playing games, storytelling, and creating arts and crafts.

The focus of this book is experience-based learning. The authors have tried to integrate the child's development of the different sensory skills into the language learning process. Thus children can learn English through working on pictures, songs, art, and role-playing, which eventually lead them to feel and experience the new language for themselves.

In chapter one the authors give a brief and comprehensive overview of how to set up a creative classroom. They present several lesson plans to show how to incorporate story, videotapes, songs, chants, games, and arts and crafts into language activities. I appreciate the authors' addressing the importance of making a child's first foreign language experience pleasurable, because this engenders a positive attitude toward that language for the rest of the child's life (p. 14).

Chapter two deals with basic language activities for children. The authors divide language activities into lively and calm activities that address both physical and cognitive development. Whereas the lively activities focus on the learning of verbs based on the Total Physical Response (TPR) method, the calm activities emphasize the acquisition of different nouns through drawing activities. I really appreciate this chapter because it focuses not only on the acquisition of nouns, but also on the acquisition of verbs in many contexts. *Very Young Learners* is well balanced in this regard. The description of the activities is sufficiently concrete to follow, and the idea of each activity is sufficiently creative to inspire the child's interest in learning English. In addition, the "variation part" in the lesson plans allows flexibility for teachers to adapt activities to their own classes.

Chapter three concentrates on the topic of the children themselves and their immediate surroundings. Most of the activities focus on identifying and describing self and expressing their preferences and emotions. In this chapter the authors introduce many songs and games that are suitable and enjoyable for preschool children. Although these songs and games that appeal to young children are a valuable resource for teachers, it would have been even better if the authors had provided the sources (references) for each song. Without the recordings for these songs it is difficult to use them in a real classroom. In other chapters the authors cite sources for several songs in a reading list, but in this chapter there are none. Perhaps they assume that every song will be familiar to the teachers, but in some foreign countries English songs may not be familiar. Thus an audiocassette tape or a compact disk with a transcript would be a good addition to this book. This chapter, which also incorporates stories and arts and crafts in the activities, provides opportunities for students to acquire the language in a creative and experiential way. For example, in the "pizza faces activity" children can learn the name of pizza ingredients while drawing a pizza. In "making a robot" children can learn the name of each part of the body while making the robot.

Chapter four is concerned with developing children's conceptual awareness of number, color, and shape. According to the authors, this chapter is designed to complement a child's regular first-language preschool classes. The activities develop skills needed for math, literacy, aesthetic perception, and scientific understanding while learning a second or foreign language. This chapter demonstrates particularly well how each activity can be integrated in one lesson plan as a pre- and a post-activity. For example, according to the lesson plans, children can acquire both the conceptual and linguistic content through the arts or storytelling followed by singing a song or an acting-out activity that reinforces their previously acquired knowledge. In the "ten green bottles" activity, for instance, the teacher asks children to count bottles while drawing them on the board. Then the song "Ten Green Bottles" is introduced and sung together, followed by the children acting out

being bottles in front of the class. Such integration of sensory learning is a useful technique in teaching language to young children.

Chapter five deals with themes related to the child's environment: home, school, and community; weather, animals, and insects; doctors, emergency services, and traffic. Children recognize the content of the real world around them as the range of vocabulary is extended and elaborated in this chapter. One of the strengths of this book is that this chapter incorporates many sentence-level activities. It is through these activities that children can be exposed to a higher level of linguistic input. At the same time, they promote good listening skills and the cognitive ability to comprehend more complicated instructions for particular tasks. I appreciate the activities presented in this chapter because other language textbooks for young children tend to focus more on the acquisition of vocabulary than on the acquisition of sentences, a focus that may impede the development of adequate language learning environments for children.

Chapter six deals with festivals, in order to allow children access to the culture of English-speaking countries. This chapter provides a good opportunity for children to expand their knowledge of the world while learning English.

In summary, this book is a wonderful resource that provides creative and enjoyable language activities for young children who are preliterate but have to learn a second or foreign language in their classrooms. The authors have provided well-devised language learning activities with thoughtful consideration of the overall cognitive, physical, and social development of learners 3 to 7 years old. This book provides sufficiently diverse linguistic input to encourage young children to be interested in learning a foreign language. It should be a valuable resource for preservice and inservice teachers around the world who are asked to teach English to young children.

Sook-Kyung Jung

The Reviewer

Sook-Kyung Jung is enrolled in the doctoral program in the Department of Language Education at the University of British Columbia. Her area of specialization is bilingualism and bilingual education for minority children. She taught English in high school and in university for five years in Korea.

Creating Stories with Children

Andrew Wright

Oxford University Press, 1997

ISBN 0194372049

No written word
Nor spoken plea,
Can teach young minds
What man should be.
Not all the books
On all the shelves,
But what the teachers
Are themselves. (Anonymous)

Children develop language when they have a wide variety of experiences, when they hear good language models using rich vocabulary, when they have an opportunity to shape, share, and discuss these experiences, and when they have an opportunity to evaluate these experiences.

In *Creating Stories with Children* Andrew Wright provides teachers with a collection of activities to stimulate children learning English as an additional language into becoming creative authors themselves. The activities are suitable for children between the ages of 4 and 14 years, with some appropriate for near beginners in the English language, although some level of fluency in English is necessary for most of the exercises. Keeping in mind the need to monitor each child's progress, the teacher is encouraged to nurture creativity, fluency, and accuracy as the children move through the activities that draw on reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. The teacher, as facilitator, takes on the role of "editor-in-chief," challenging the children to publish their work and to collate books of stories. Tips for hands-on book projects are included.

Throughout the activities the editor-in-chief teacher reminds students that working through several drafts is a common procedure in good writing, but cautions them not to overdo the revisions. The author advises the involvement of learners in the evaluation of their work as a means of identifying progress and as a significant language learning activity. Besides working alongside the teacher, each child is encouraged to refer to peers as sounding boards for comprehension of their written work.

This book contains a collection of 72 activities organized into eight chapters. Each chapter begins with the author's perspective of its title and a rationale for involving the students, providing fresh reminders to prepare sufficiently a program catering to the child's individual needs as well as providing opportunities for group and whole-class activities. Some of the author's overviews are interspersed between activities to guide the teacher,

who in turn interprets the book and adapts the suggestions, making them meaningful to the students.

For each activity the estimated duration, the prescribed level of language fluency required, and the necessary skills to participate successfully in the tasks are presented. For each activity the author suggests a step-by-step procedure for the teacher to draw the children into the work. Some activities are prerequisites to successive ones, requiring the children to be acquainted with the idea or procedure in order to proceed with the new task. Other activities promote the transfer of skills across activities. The children are encouraged to listen, to discuss, to predict, to ask, and to answer, and their responses can be recorded on the board as a vocabulary aid when they begin their tasks.

The text is reader-friendly, written in a clear, concise manner with illustrative examples and tasks, thereby enhancing the reader's ability to understand the author's intention. I became imaginatively involved in each activity as I read through the book, imagining myself as one of the students participating in a creative atmosphere. I enjoyed my imaginary participation in several activities. In Chapter four, for example, the children are given either the beginnings or endings of familiar stories and are required to provide a reconstructed ending or beginning. Children may rewrite a Grimm Brothers' fairytale or Hans Christian Anderson's "Thumbelina." Or in conjunction with the above activity, the teacher could link it with an activity (p. 102) in which a letter is written to one of the characters in one of the familiar stories, responding to an incident in the story. (This activity not only helps to develop the child's letterwriting skills, but helps the child to reason why an incident is favorable or disappointing.)

The children could "Pass the story" either orally (p. 68) for the elementary level group, or in written form (p. 69) for the pre-intermediate level group. They can improvise their own beginnings and then contribute to one another's stories. The oral version requires each contributor to take turns providing a sentence to the story being invented. This requires the next contributor to listen carefully as well. The written version has participants writing the first sentence on their own sheet of paper. The paper is then circulated for classmates to add a one-line sentence before each story returns to its originator challenging the child to read the text before constructing an original sentence, which may be a simple but valuable contribution to the story line. Vocabulary development can also be promoted. The teacher's role can be that of a "walking dictionary," printing the prescribed words on the board.

Though the author does not specify class size for these activities, it should be assumed that classes using this text would not be large and may be of mixed levels of fluency and ability. In such a class more proficient peers can act as tutors or buddies to support their less proficient classmates. The

cultural diversity of the class should also be considered, as some Western stories may not be familiar to certain ethnic minorities. It would be feasible to ask children to share stories from their various cultural backgrounds as a way of orienting others, as well as the teacher, to the different and wide variety of narratives as well as to encourage speaking in English. For instance, some concepts such as dragons differ from one culture to another, or in a particular culture may not exist at all.

Finally, *Creating Stories with Children* acquaints children with the process of writing as a collaborative developmental activity that culminates in the production of a publication. Chapter 8 describes two ways of assembling books: "Creating the story, then the book" and "Creating the book, then the story"; in addition, an overview of the advantages and disadvantages of the different types of book presentation is presented.

Language experiences are of many types: They may be initiated by the teacher or taken from the episodes of children's lives; they may involve discussion in groups or among the class as a whole; they may be recorded in a variety of formats, by the individual, the group, or the class; they can be read about by the individual to the group or the class. *Creating Stories with Children* is a valuable resource for experienced teachers looking for fresh ideas. This book invites the teacher who may also be a hesitant writer to enjoy the imaginative process as the lesson is being prepared and to look forward to the little gems the students spontaneously generate. This book is of particular value to substitute teachers and to anyone in an 11th-hour preparation situation, because of the flexibility of the activities that build on children's strengths and help them develop strategies that in turn encourage a positive attitude to writing. Native English-speaking students should find the projects equally challenging.

By involving teachers in sharing the enjoyment of, and enthusiasm for, the activities, this book enables teachers to stimulate and motivate children to develop meaningful spoken and written language.

Constance Chai

The Reviewer

Constance Chai graduated with a Master of Arts in education from the University of Auckland, New Zealand, and is now pursuing a doctoral program at the University of British Columbia.
