# Reviews
# *Comptes rendus*

## A HANDBOOK FOR ESL LITERACY

**Jill Bell and Barbara Burnaby, O.I.S.E./Hodder and Stoughton, 1984.**

Here is the book that many ESL teachers have long awaited: a comprehensive, very basic approach to the perennial problem of teaching adults language and literacy simultaneously. Our traditional ESL classes rely heavily on the written word to serve as back-up for our aural-oral activities. Similarly, good literacy programs for native speakers are based on the language experience of the learner. Illiterate ESL students have neither the oral fluency of native speakers, nor the knowledge of print of literate ESL learners. Bell and Burnaby do an excellent job in addressing this issue.

The handbook is directed at classroom teachers and does not assume any prior knowledge of literacy theory. It begins with the basics: What do we mean when we talk about ESL literacy? How is the teaching of both reading and writing to be approached when the syntax and vocabulary of the language are not in place? How can the fact that our students are adults be used to advantage in the learning process? What is reading? These questions and others are dealt with clearly and, given the relatively short length of the book, quite thoroughly. It is my experience that few ESL teachers have been trained in teaching reading, and I know that for myself, it would have been extremely helpful to have had the basic understanding of the dynamics of the reading process before I began working with illiterate and semi-literate students. The theory is presented to us very simply and cogently, unlike some texts whose explanations lose their meaning between looking up new words in the dictionary!

One important strength of the handbook is that it offers an alternative to the old phonics approach:

> When we come to consider ways of actually teaching students to read, it is apparent that we can approach the subject in two ways. We can begin with whole pieces of language which are then broken down into individual words, syllables and letters. Or we can begin with the

> individual letters and sounds and build up to the words and sentences. Most of us learned to read by the second method. We learned the sound for [d] and [o] and [g] and worked through duh-o-guh to reach *dog*...Perhaps we are fluent readers *despite* having learned by this method.

Although the authors do not negate the usefulness of including phonics in the literacy program, their entry point into the learning process is via the language experience approach (LEA) in which the words the students learn to read are their own words. I am, in this regard, disappointed that the authors do not deal with the issue of syntactic correction. While it is true that one of the keystones of LEA in native speaker literacy is that of *not* correcting grammatical errors, it becomes a problem in an ESL class where everyone makes different mistakes. Whereas I orginally took the position of the authors, the resulting confusion for my students has caused me to alter my approach and resort to group correction. This issue poses a dilemma. In theory, I agree with the authors. In practice, I think the choice depends very much on the nature of the students in the class. If the class is from one language group at the same level, then yes, use the classic LEA. If, however, one has a multi-level, multi-language class, that context must be addressed in planning an appropriate program which recognizes that the student is learning a language as well as becoming literate.

I predict that this book will receive an enthusiastic welcome from ESL teachers because it is eminently practical. From start to finish, we are presented with clearly described techniques for every aspect of the literacy process from pre-literacy activities and materials to the teaching of writing. It is obvious that the authors have consulted a wide range of practitioners in the writing of their book and have given us the best ideas from each. As well, the authors address most of the problems we face, including multi-level classes with some literacy problems.

Readers will appreciate the format of the theoretical sections with cartoons depicting the main ideas. The book is easy to read, and will give both experienced and inexperienced teachers many new ideas.

Whether you are a classroom teacher, a tutor or a university professor, there is something for you in this handbook. It may be primarily a "cookbook," but it has a good variety of excellent "recipes." Enjoy!

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## GAMES LANGUAGE PEOPLE PLAY

**Jerry Steinberg, Agincourt, Ont.: Dominie Press, 1983.**

Jerry Steinberg, familiar to many English as a Second Language teachers in Canada through his workshops and handouts on games for the ESL classroom, has now collated his material into a book entitled *Games Language People Play.* The style of the book is personal and conversational, in keeping with the fact that it has grown out of Mr. Steinberg's own classroom experiences with language games.

In the introductory section of the book, Mr. Steinberg justifies the games as useful pedagogical tools which "reinforce newly acquired information, review previously taught material, reward students for cooperating with the teacher during less enjoyable activities, relax the class, reduce inhibitions, raise attentiveness, aid retention, provide motivation and restrain rebellion." If a teacher accepts all or any of these values of games, and decides to use games in the classroom, then the book will be a useful aid, for it is what it purports to be on the back cover—"a professional reference book."

The book is organized in such a way that for each game the following information is clearly stated: optimum group size, linguistic skill(s) to be practised, level of learner, objective of the game, materials needed, and description of the activity. Where the author felt it necessary, samples of materials required and examples of procedural steps are also given. In some cases adaptations of the game to different sized groups are provided too. For all games, the final section is "suggestions" which derive directly from Mr. Steinberg's personal experience conducting the game in his classes. The table of contents at the front of the book lists the games by name and groups them according to the level of the learner. The index at the back of the book classifies the games according to their objectives. Although a good many of the games may already be familiar to ESL teachers, the organization of the book makes it a handy reference for teachers who want to pull out an activity to fit the moment or the class.

The book, however, is not without its limitations. For one, no time frame is indicated for the games. Then, too, the games do not always meet the criteria which Mr. Steinberg himself established at the very beginning of the book under the heading "Game Essentials": ease of explanation, absence of expensive or complicated materials, and versatility. Several of the games are not at all easy to explain in any language. (Mr. Steinberg suggests teachers use the students' language(s), if they can, to explain game rules in order not to waste time that could be better spent playing the game.) "Question Baseball" requires four pages of text with diagrams to explain the rules. "Ninety-Eight" would probably have most teachers

stumped before they had finished ploughing through the three pages of explanation. Furthermore, a few of the games have as their objectives some rather obtuse topics (from the point of view of the ESL teacher). For example, "Hybrid," the objective of which is "to review the names of lesser known animals," has students creating names for imaginary hybrid animals such as cLAMprey and fiSHrew. One might also question the value of the game "Relatively Speaking" which has as its objective "to review various idiomatic expressions," but does so in such a way that students must decipher $\frac{his\ iiii}{0\ \ 0}$ as "dark circles under his eyes"!

These limitations notwithstanding, ESL teachers can find many games in *Games Language People Play* which suit, or are readily adapted to, their classes, and which could make their teaching more effective, more lively and more interesting. Small and light as the book is, it should prove a useful addition to an ESL teacher's bookbag.

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## FUNCTIONS OF AMERICAN ENGLISH

**Leo Jones and Cornelius Von Baeyer, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.**

Most teachers have used discussion, role play and problem solving techniques successfully in speaking classes. Most have also taught functions, incorporating them into grammar and speaking lessons. It is this integration of the teaching functions and the teaching of speaking that the authors have managed to accomplish in *Functions of American English.* The book is a serious attempt at bringing communicative activities into the ESL classroom. The focus is on student comprehension of the many different ways a function can be expressed and on selection of the most sociolinguistically acceptable forms. The book is a compilation of activities which enable the student to choose appropriate expressions and practise using them in conversations.

The underlying philosophy of the authors is that fluency involves more than facility with grammar and vocabulary, that communicative competence must be taught. The text does not, however, seek to replace traditional language teaching, only to add a new aspect to it. The materials are based on and reflect the authors' belief that an information gap must exist in order to promote communication.

*Functions of American English* is intended to be viewed as a self-contained course (15 units, 45-60 hours of classroom activities) for students at the intermediate or advanced levels. Each unit sets out a general

function such as "Getting people to do things." This is then divided into more specific functions such "attracting attention, requesting, agreeing and refusing."

Every unit begins by introducing the functional objective and indicating the grammatical and lexical items the students should be familiar with in order to do the activities (teacher's manual only). There is a short taped conversation illustrating the function in a fairly natural manner. The conversation involves two, possibly three, of the same six characters with whom the students soon become familiar. Once the students have identified and discussed the function which is highlighted in the conversation, a formal presentation of the function follows on the tape. Next there is a class exercise followed by a communicative task. The teacher's manual suggests alternatives to using the taped conversations, additional ways of expressing the function and also suggests correction techniques. In many instances there are follow-up consolidation exercises for pairs or small groups involving communication activities more personally related to the members of the class. At this point, the teacher's manual focuses on evaluating the students' use of the particular language function. Written work, usually a letter or a dialogue follows.

Each exercise in the student's book is number-keyed to the teacher's manual. The communicative activities, of which there are 153, are found only in the student's book. For these, each student has a different set of instructions, on a different page from his/her partners. Students are asked not to reveal their roles or their information, thereby creating an information gap and an unpredictable language situation in which real communication can take place. A complete guide through the exercises and communication activities is found only in the teacher's manual, which also sets out the theoretical rationale and gives the teacher explicit procedures.

The layout and explanations in *Functions of American English* are straightforward if the teacher has the manual, the student's book, and the audio tape. A practice run-through of several of the units is mandatory in order for the teacher to grasp the overall picture of how the three components are interwoven. It is by doing this that one appreciates the progress of the lessons from teacher-controlled to essentially free communication, that the balance of class, group and pair activities becomes obvious, and that one realizes that the activities call for each student to play a variety of roles with many different partners.

The authors deserve credit for having produced a good tape and well-organized, creative materials which utilize effective methods of stimulating the kind of communication in the classroom which the students can transfer to their real-life situations.

The criticisms of *Functions of American English* by no means outweigh its usefulness. One must remark, however, that although the authors stimulate communication by means of an information gap, for the conversational exchange to be really meaningful and purposeful, the student should have a reason for obtaining the information or playing the role. The student should have a specific task to perform with the information which he has obtained. Discussing the activity with the class, as the authors direct, does not really satisfy this requirement. A further criticism is that the student is given no choice in selecting what it is he would like to find out, or what roles he would like to play.

Another drawback is that the content of the communication tasks neither identifies nor relates specifically to any particular segment of ESL students. With the present emphasis on filling the differing needs of ESL students, it could be argued that such general content as that in *Functions of American English* is applicable to no specific program. As well, since the format is quite similar from lesson to lesson, after a certain period, students may tend to lose some of the motivation necessary to do the activities, particularly if they feel that the content is not relevant to their situations.

*Functions of American English* claims to improve listening comprehension and writing skills. Listening comprehension, however, is not really fully developed. Students are not presented with specific listening tasks. As a method of introducing a language function these natural conversations are excellent, but there are no listening activities to speak of, in the text. There is, likewise, no systematic approach to writing. Teachers are directed to discuss the writing tasks and to mark them holistically, on the basis of how well the student managed to express the function and communicate his ideas. Nowhere is there a hint that writing might involve more than the recording of spoken language.

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## READING SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

**R. Susan Lebauer, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1983.**

The teacher whose objective is to prepare intermediate level students for university programmes in scientific or technological subjects would do well to consider *Reading Skills for the Future* as one of several course texts.

The reading material of this new book by R. Susan Lebauer is adapted from literature dealing with energy and its related technologies and encourages the student to deal with both social and technical questions

concerning alternatives to non-renewable energy resources. As such, it is timely, thought-provoking, and an excellent vehicle for helping the student to learn lexical and syntactical forms that frequently appear in technical literature.

A decision to adopt the book as a course text, however, involves a commitment to follow a very structured approach. This is not a book which lends itself to skipping around. In fact, the preface contains a warning not to do so since important points of vocabulary and grammar, once introduced, are practiced again and again in subsequent chapters.

Ms. Lebauer's approach is basically deductive. Following an initial reading, each chapter proceeds to offer an explanation of a chosen structure, grammatical form, sentence type, or vocabulary item, and then asks students to identify examples of the material that is explained or to construct examples of their own. Certain study skills are incorporated into most chapters. For example, the text will explain the characteristics of a paraphrase, a summary, or an outline and students will be asked to produce one. The exercises force them not only to read critically, but also to understand the words and word forms, the sentence structures, the types of sentences, and the organizational or rhetorical forms that are used. The method also cultivates the fundamental habits of thought that are required for reading scientific and technical English, and, by extension, for pre-writing activities such as outlining and note-taking.

Explanations of word forms, points of grammar, principles of organization, and other such structures are presented at a level of simplicity that is appropriate for students at the intermediate level, and teachers may have to supplement these presentations for students who are more advanced. The text is good in the way that it teaches students to use context clues, excellent in the way it helps them to review points of grammar, and especially strong in its approach to building vocabulary.

Because of the specialized nature of the text, in most cases it will have to be supplemented by other types of texts which highlight other language skills. Teachers who have given their allegiance to the new wave of communicative methodology will probably find *Reading Skills for the Future* excessively structural, but the book requires no apology. What it does, it does well, and Pergamon Press might very well consider a series of additional titles under Ms. Lebauer's supervision using the same basic approach but applied to reading material which is drawn from other subject areas and which illustrates other types of discourse.

A final point deserves mention. Canadian ESL teachers, deluged by texts from abroad, frequently first check new publications for their country of origin so as to prepare themselves to make appropriate adjustments in the classroom for differences in idiom or cultural bias. I am happy to

report that little or no adjustment is required in the case of this book. If there is such a thing as "universal English," *Reading Skills for the Future* comes as close to it as any text I have seen.

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## SURVEYS 2: EIGHT STATE OF THE ART ARTICLES ON KEY AREAS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

**Valerie Kinsella (Ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.**

Those language teachers and applied linguists who warmly applauded the first volume in the *Cambridge Language Teaching Surveys* series will welcome this second collection: eight state-of-the-art articles on various areas of language teaching. However, in contrast to the earlier work, in which all articles could be seen to be directly related to second language teaching, the present volume's first four articles are highly theoretical and may prove less interesting to practising language teachers than the second set of four articles. These latter are directly related to recent developments in English language teaching and suggest very practical applications.

The opening article, "Language Universals," written by Bernard Comrie, has as its major concern the developing interest in universals from the time of Greenberg (1960) to the present day (Comrie's own studies of aspect, 1981). Greenberg's work—emphasizing a wide data base of languages and analyzing surface levels—is contrasted with that of Chomsky who views universals as innate priniciples by which children acquire language, universals which can only be studied by examining the deep structure of language. Since the 1960's, major interests have been the universality of passive transformation, relativising on a given position, and word-order typology. Teachers will be particularly interested in the proposed accessibility hierarchy, as this has support from studies of relative clause acquisition in foreign language classes.

The second article, by Stephen C. Levinson, considers the advance of "Speech Act Theory" over the past twenty years, from Austin's theories of locutionary, perlocutionary, and illocutionary acts; to Searle's systematisation of these theories; to those studies of the 1970's which purported to reduce Austin's theories to matters of syntax and semantics; and to the most recent approaches related to the functions of utterances. In this last instance, attention is given to the work of Sacks and Schegloff with recorded natural conversation, to the work on ethnography of speaking, and to the study of first-language acquisition.

Language teachers, being for the most part pragmatists, will be particularly interested in the list of references for those three more empirically based areas of research related to the function of utterances.

Richard Coates' article, "Phonology," first considers Chomsky's 1968 *Sound Patterns of English* as the basis of more recent studies. *Sound Patterns of English* offered new insights into (1) relationships between allomorphs, (2) the bases for mental representation, (3) the relationship between abstract underlying forms and pronounced forms, and (4) a morpheme-based phonology. Coates then discusses more recent studies that debate permissible degrees of abstraction, others that concentrate on rule-ordering principles, and still others that advocate a more "natural" approach than that offered by *Sound Patterns of English.* Coates concludes by noting developments in distinctive feature theory, syllable analysis, and the applications of markedness theory to current views. Although an excellent article, it is perhaps of greater interest to linguists than to practising teachers.

Francis Nolan's article on "Speech Research" considers recent work on speech production, acoustics, and perception. He notes the many developments in techniques for such research, specifically, radiography, glottography, and electromyography, as well as improved computer implemented modelling of the interactions of physiological and aerodynamic factors. Although this article will particularly interest phonologists, it will also excite applied linguists working in first or second language acquisition and teachers of foreign languages who will see application to their field of the research in automatic comparison of sounds.

A.M. Shaw's "Foreign-language Syllabus Development: Some Recent Approaches" will be of special interest to teachers and teacher trainers. It traces the move from the old grammatical or structural syllabus to the now nearly universally commended communicative approach—from Corder's "Contextual Method" and Van Ek's "topical approach" to Wilkin's "notional-functional" syllabus, the Council of Europe's "Threshold Level," and Johnson's work in applying the notional-functional approach at the school level. Practising teachers will welcome the excellent bibliography provided for further reading. They will be especially interested in the debate between those who question the need for any conventional syllabus and those who advocate a "target repertoire." However, as 1981 is the latest date for any bibliographical reference, we must remember that much has been written since then (e.g., Krashen's work) to profoundly influence this debate.

Two articles by J.T. Roberts on "Recent Developments in ESL" also consider the communicative approach as the one most responsive to

students' needs. Roberts correctly notes that this approach has no established teaching procedures and that teachers are usually advised to be eclectic in their use of techniques. He discusses, too, the humanistic approach to communicative learning. Although he quite rightly sees flaws and inconsistencies in such new approaches as "The Silent Way," "Counselling Learning," and "Suggestopedia," he applauds the humanistic techniques employed in each. His second article considers a variety of current issues in ELT. The first of these relates to the psychological dimensions of communicative competence, lauding the work of R. Di Pietro which urges the preservation of the individual's personal integrity. Next he discusses Krashen's Monitor Model: the concept that adults both acquire and learn their second language and that the classroom must provide input for acquisition and enough information "about" the language so that the learner can self-monitor. Roberts then considers English for Special Purposes, regretting its seeming lack of progress, caused by problems of needs analysis and register descriptions. Although Roberts' last section on "materials" presents only British materials, many being unsuitable for the North American market, the final seven pages of references should be presented to all teacher trainees, for these articles form a complete list of the most significant work related to today's approaches.

The final article, by B. Hill, entitled "Media Technology," considers the relationship between the new communicative approaches to FLT and the use of the video, radio, and television—particularly as developed in Britain. Hill recognizes the difficulties inherent in producing a learning system which integrates media production with students' textbooks. He also realizes that the teacher's role is paramount in exploiting the media resources, and he notes, too, the media's importance to distance teaching.

All in all, this survey collection is a superb book. The very full bibliographies at the end of each article will be invaluable for teachers, teacher-trainers, and applied linguists who wish to pursue in-depth study of any of the seven areas of language teaching presented in *Surveys 2.*

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