Evaluation of Highly Recommended: A textbook for the Hotel and Catering Industry

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The Book

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The Context

This book has been designed for younger adult learners on hotel and catering courses in schools and colleges, or for people training for a career in the hospitality sector. I am evaluating this book for 1st year Hotel and Tourism students in the general English program of Payap University, Chiang Mai, Thailand. All the 1st year students attend this course. This course focuses on all four language skills namely: speaking, listening, reading and writing. They have an assigned general English textbook *Straightforward pre Intermediate.* However at this point in time they have no specialized English book for their potential careers. I carried out a needs analysis of one of these classes and the results were that many students did indeed want careers in hospitality; therefore I will proceed to evaluate this book with the purpose of perhaps introducing it into their syllabus. McCarten (2007,26) states '*making vocabulary personal helps to*

make it more memorable.' Thus this book should appeal fully to the students' intrinsic motivation and aid their learning (Gardner, 2000, Walqui, 2000).

Zhang (2007) proposes 3 major steps in evaluation of a textbook. First select a unit from one volume of the textbook, decide on the criteria for your evaluation and lastly evaluate the effectiveness of the textbook in matching their claims with learners' needs. I hope to cover these steps in this evaluation. Evaluating materials for ESP (English for Specific purposes) is a vital skill which as Anthony (1997,3) states *'is perhaps the role that ESP practitioners have neglected most to date.'* However as Belcher (2006,137) points out *'ESP is often seen as a materials-driven rather than a methods-driven enterprise.'* Thus one can see a clear emphasis on materials from the start and an eclectic mixture of methodologies employed within the industry as a whole.

Appropriateness

This book has been revised and updated to take into account changing practices and new technologies such as computerized reservation systems in the hotel trade which is good. It also importantly is at the right level for the 1st year students at Payap. It is an elementary level course book. The majority of students I have determined in the first year at Payap are around the elementary level; therefore it would suit the majority of learners. The authors claim in their revised edition to include more listening and speaking practice which is precisely what the students' need. They also have included an extended real world activity at the end of every unit designed to get students talking about real situations, I believe this book has been well thought out and the revisions have kept it abreast of new vocabulary. This textbook feels very modern; the majority of exercises and tasks are for listening and speaking. The most important English skills needed for workers in the hospitality sector. Research by Newton (1995), Joe, Nation and Newton (1996), Nation (2001) emphasizes the importance of spoken communicative activities.

As suiting younger elementary students the units have been kept short, only 2 pages for 1 unit and as you can see from Appendix 1 they have divided units on the basis of Communicative Areas which is perfect for the students at Payap. In the needs analysis and class observation of the students the author could see a real lack of communicative skills amongst the students. As the length of the units has been kept short; there are 28

units in the book covering a large variety of situations which are common especially in the hotel and restaurant industry. Johns & Evans (1991) state *'that the students target English situations have identifiable elements.'* This book clearly covers many of those identifiable elements although it is of course impossible to cover all possible situations that students would encounter in their working lives. Also as Jasso-Aguilar (1999) found out specific language needed for work purposes may not meet the needs or long term goals of hotel workers. Clearly it is a hard task to design an ESP textbook which meets not just the immediate work related language needs but the long term goals of proficiency in English which students may desire.

<div align="center">Motivation</div>

This writer believes this textbook would be very motivating to learn from. Every unit has a large variety of authentic pictures, diagrams and computer screens to illustrate the unit and help guide the students as to what exactly the unit is dealing with. The pictures give a clear context for the activities and vocabulary that follow (Benz and Dworak, 2000; Cunningham, 1987; Harmer, 2006; Nation, 2001; Hunt and Beglar, 2002; Thornbury, 2002). Appendix 2 is an example of one of the units from the book, Unit 3: Taking room reservations. There are pictures of rooms and a computer screen showing a computerized room reservation system. In today's world we rarely phone a hotel to book a room, so this is authentic and up to date.

Each unit is laid out the same which the author thinks is fine for this level of student. Dudley-Evans & St John (1998, 171) state that materials need to be *'consistent and to have some recognizable pattern.'* The familiarity gained from studying the book should mean the students become accustomed to the book quickly and know precisely what is expected of them from each segment of the unit. Every unit starts with an outline of the unit and expected language structures to master. Every unit contains a starter or warm up exercise designed to elicit language and encourage motivation. There then follows a listening exercise which introduces language in an authentic manner. There then is a language study section with structures to practice. This section contains the grammatical structures which students should learn. Finally every unit contains a speaking activity for pairs which uses all the vocabulary previously covered. This matches Dudley-Evans & St John (1998, 172) aims for materials that *'the input would be*

used outside the learning situation.' This section is very practically focused designed for use in real life situations. It has a very purpose-related orientation which Gatehouse (2001) believes is an essential component of any material designed for specific purposes. At the very end of each unit is a section titled 'more words to use' this serves as useful vocabulary that students should know and learn if they haven't already done so.

Appendix 3 shows the workbook content for Unit 3. The workbook has also been designed well with a clear layout, a variety of interesting tasks and further pictures from the genre of Hotels such as emails, information cards, maps, menus, and recipes. The workbook could be used in class for further writing practice or as a self study aid for students to do in their own time to review vocabulary and grammar from each unit. The workbook fulfills Dudley-Evans & St John (1998) requirements in that it has answer keys at the back of the book. Also the books (textbook and workbook) can aid self study in that they provide a clear matrix of objectives, skills and language functions that students can choose from if the self study route is employed.

As mentioned previously the book is very up to date with the new edition being revised and produced in 2008. Many of the units use examples of computer technology where appropriate. Appendix 4 is a collocation of terms used with room from the Collins Cobuild database with items of language used from the book outlined in yellow. Clearly the language is common and used frequently and therefore of use to the students.

Methodology

The methodology of the book is modern and communicative based. New language is presented in PPP form (presentation, practice and production) in the first sections of the unit and then students are expected to produce the language firstly in more controlled activities and then finally in freer fluency promoting tasks at the end of each unit. Language structures are given clear examples in the language study section and then students are expected to practice specific grammar points or chunks of language by first practicing simple writing activities. I believe students are given a lot of autonomy in the book. It would be entirely possible for students to use this text book as a self study aid at home although they would need at least one other student to practice the pair work

speaking activities. Gatehouse (2001, 3) states that *'the catchword in ESL circles is learner-centered or learning-centered.'* This textbook meets those criteria.

The listening activities have been set deliberately easy as the expected level of the students is elementary. But each unit has different tasks, sometimes true/false or yes/no checklists. In other units; sorting sentences, matching, ticking correct sentences or labeling pictures are all used as activities. The whole book has been designed very well to include a variety of task types within the overall framework and structure of the book. The use *'of a wide range of types increases motivation for both the learners and the teacher.'* (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, 178).

Language

As can be seen from Appendix 1, following the communicative area the language items are broken down into two categories. First situational or functional language which is to be expected from a textbook designed to teach specialized language for hotel and hospitality students or workers. Second each unit has language structures outlined. These language structures closely follow that of an expected general English book containing mainly grammar points. For example Unit 3 (Appendix 1) lists situations/functions as requesting information and structures as Do, Does, prepositions of time: on, at, in, from….to. It seems though that the main decision for use of language covered in each unit was the actual communicative area. For example in Unit 7 the communicative area is serving in the bar, functions are requests and structures are requests and offers with can, could, shall, would you like?

The author doesn't believe that this mixing up of grammar is wrong, research has shown the students learn different grammar at different points in their lives and the grammar covered in this book would have been covered by all students at the middle or high school level.

The actual language used in the book isn't highly specialized considering the nature of the industry most of the language used could be considered general English; and as the book's level is elementary the language had to be kept reasonably simple and specific in the sense of getting students to practice the main structures of a unit without being bogged down by large vocabulary lists which can de-motivate students (McCarten,

2007). As was said earlier though the language feels to be authentic and realistic and I carried out a survey of hotel and restaurant workers in Chiang Mai, Thailand to find out their feelings about the language used and whether it was authentic and language they encountered in their every day lives. The results were positive with several workers saying they thought the language used was useful and relevant to their occupations.

Conclusion

The author was very impressed with this book, having taught for several years one gets an intuitive sense of whether you would enjoy teaching a book and whether your students would enjoy learning from it. The layout generally was excellent, colorful and clear. The units were well designed with a clear presentation, practice and production methodology. The language was well thought out for elementary level students. The units were short and very varied Dudley-Evans & St John (1998, pp.177)) state that *'variety is essential in any English class but……particularly important in an ESP class.'* and the tasks themselves changed although keeping a structure throughout the whole book. The book has clearly been designed with the goal of practicing a variety of situations which hotel or restaurant workers would encounter. Anthony (1997, pp.3) states that *'materials writers think very carefully about the goals of learners at all stages of materials production'* this book shows that. Bojovic (2006) believes that material should be authentic, up to date and relevant for the students' specializations. I believe this textbook meets all these criteria.

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