

Reader's review of **Exploring Spoken English**

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Target audience

Many of the oral language features described and illustrated in the book should, in the future, be taught at beginner (eg ellipsis), elementary and lower intermediate levels. However, given the fact that such teaching has been absent in the past, the level of the currently realistic target audience is intermediate to advanced.

The most urgent audience is non-native teachers of English . I can see such a book becoming a standard text on Pilgrims ENGLISH FOR TEACHERS courses. It would be used as something between a reference book (which is what the 1997 edition is) and a partial coursebook.

These learners would be studying English because of a deep wish to **know** the language accurately so as to teach it truthfully.

The book has a strong “culture of UK” side to it and so I can see it being used in the 12th class in France, when they study UK culture.

Some of these students would be studying English because there is no escape for them. Others would be studying in the knowledge that a weak grasp of this language will jeopardise their future.

Teachers of advanced adults in systems like the German VHS would find this book a God-send, an answer to the question “*What more can I teach these folk , after seeing them twice a week for five years?*”

These people in adult education, some of them elderly, are the “pleasure” market for language. Why am I currently studying Polish? To prove to myself that at 66 I can still learn a language well.

I see the book's **largest market** as being in universities, in the language classes for people specialising in English. I feel this holds true for Europe and Latin America. For these people a full command of English is a central, proto-professional need.

Though I disagree with the market, I do not think the market will see the book as being useful for people studying business English. Here Jenkins and Widdowson's ELF ideas have more of a grip.

Approach

This is a **remedial** book for intermediate and advanced learners of English and its principal aim would be presentation and practice of oral syntax, oral grammar , oral

lexis, and oral collocations. In Hoey terms, the book would try to offer students the chance to absorb the fullest possible oral “primings” in all areas of the language. You might ask “*In what way remedial?*” to which I would answer that since most students have learnt “EFLESE”, a dialect of English which happily imposes the shape of written English on the oral language, these hapless folk will have some unlearning to do as well as plenty of thrilling learning.

How would you practise these features in a lively and interesting way?

The answer to this question is the kernel of this report. Let me take Unit 1 Page 23 and make a series of exercise suggestions:

(It is not my intention that any sane teacher would do all these exercises around this one conversation. My aim is to suggest a lively and human way of “methodologising” the material and you would have many different activities in different Units. What is offered here is merely a whiff, a taste)

Stealing from Natives

Tell the students they are going to listen to the whole text. Their task is to jot down anything any of the speakers says which they feel they would not themselves say when speaking English. In other words they are to jot down things that are outside their current idiolect. Tell them that they are not to focus on “difficult “ words (like in this conversation REME) but to try and notice the “small” words that make one sound native.

Ask them to compare their notes.

Play the CD a second time and ask them to expand their notes.

Again they compare their notes, working in small groups

If they are advanced, you then take them thru a third to half of the things that Mike and Ron have highlighted in their commentary.

(this is a tried and trusted exercise I have used for 15 years and one which I use on daily basis when teaching an English for Teacher courses (two weeks-very intensive) In my case instead of a recorded conversation they listen to a live native. Since it has become available I have used bits of the Carter and McCarthy grammar following work with a native.

Eg.....I bring in a teenager who uses LIKE 5 times a minute. We then study the pages on LIKE in the Green Grammar. Next day I bring in the teenager’s girl friend who uses LIKE 7 times a minute!

The most conservative teachers are unable to argue with two teenagers and two revered professors whoever reluctantly amazed they are!

Guessing who the speaker is from their voice and the things they say.

Play the conversation once through with them following in the tapescript.

Tell the to read thru the tapescript focusing on Speaker 3’s reactions and inputs

Play the conversation again with them reading the transcript in parallel,

Now tell them to work on their own and write a page about how they imagine Speaker 3 to be.

They read each other's texts, working in sub groups.

Transcription

Ask the students to take down lines 31-54 as accurately as they can, paying attention to the rhythms of speech, the tempo, the volume etc of the speaker's voice.

(Transcription is hugely under-rated language learning exercise)

Choice of the voice students prefer.

Tell the students they are going to listen to the tape twice and their task is to choose which of the four voices they prefer and why.

When they tell you their preferences ask them to justify their choice in terms of timbre, pitch, tempo volume, modulation, resonance etc....

(This kind of work, which seems to have little to do with the task of consciously learning the patterns of spoken speech, offers the conscious mind a diversionary task, thus freeing up the unconscious mind to interiorise the language.)

Judging a speaker's stance and attitude

Ask the student to listen to the conversation and to note down all of Speaker 2's Utterances, laughings, noises.

Give the students two listenings.

Ask each student, referring the tapescript, to write half a page on this woman's stance and attitude, caught as she is in this rather male conversation.

Creating dialogues to practice ellipsis

Dictate the four short-form questions from the Commentary on Page 28.

Pair the students. Ask them to pick one of the questions and write a four-line dialogue including the chosen utterance.

The students read these dialogues round the class. Correct any pleonastic writing.

Phrases I really like

Tell the students to underline 4-8 phrases/utterances in the tapescript that they really like.

Get them to tell each other the utterances they have chosen and the reasons for their choice.

Variation: the students underline phrases they feel are typically oral.

The students underline phrases that make the language vague etc.....
“ “ “ “ that they find to be typical of English
culture etc.....

Story opening gambits

Draw the students attention to THIS in 1.17

Start three different stories using “this” that sucks the listener into the narrative.....

Just tell the class the first three or four sentences, using THIS a couple of times.....

(you will have prepared these in advance)

Now dictate the story openings to the group.

Ask them to work in pairs coming up with a couple of story openings per pair.....

They tell these **beginnings** round the class.

Let them then tell the full anecdotes in fours.

Past continuous with “always” to express emotional reaction

P29 1 .44

Yourselves bring to mind three significant people from childhood. Prepare emotional reactions to them using the above pattern.

Tell the students about each person briefly. Tell them your reactions and then write them on the board or click them on the IAWB

Ask each student to think of three people from the past and write sentences of their own on your model.

Communication phase.

Mise en scene of Lines 23-54

Group the students in fives. Focus them on lines 23-54

Ask them to answer these normal drama questions: Time of day
Season
Weather
Place
Bodily positions etc....

Make clear that they can decide on non-probabilistic answers to these questions, if they want to. . They could decide that the conversation took place huddled round a bus stop on the darkest day of the Artic winter in the Hudson Bay area.

They then listen to the CD and cast the four actors and one director.
They listen again.

They rehearse the reading.

A couple of the fives perform for the whole class.

Teacher models three or four salient oral story features in text of her own.

You prepare to tell an anecdote of your own incorporating three or four normal oral story-telling features.

You tell the students your story.

Ask the students to prepare to tell an anecdote , incorporating the same features. Tell them to mumble their text to themselves...maybe taking a ten minute walk outside the classroom.

They tell their stories in groups of four.

*The above examples go to show that modern person-centred methodology has ample resources for bringing **Exploring Spoken English** to life in an upper intermediate classroom.*

Organisation of the book

I feel that the genre organisation of the material is clear and makes good sense. It gives a unity to otherwise very bitty focuses.

Genres: Alternative terms:
Types of Conversation,
Ways of relating to people,
Shifting language for changing situations.

At upper intermediate level all the situations currently portrayed in the book are relevant.

Topics

I think the book should take the rules of written grammar as taught in the EFLESE dialect as read. The book should concentrate on the thrill of the new knowledge about oral grammar.

Meta-language: I think there should be a glossary with each technical term and a colloquial version of it. Eg:

Deixis = referring backwards and forwards

Delexical verbs = hollow verbs, scooped out verbs etc....

Ron and Mike have already sometimes done this with terms like HEADER and TAIL instead of TOPIC in the technical phrase TOPIC and COMMENT

Audio component

Lay-out of tapescript is fine... though you have to get used to it.

There should be two recordings of each conversation: the original and an acted one. The acted one needs to be spoken by really fine mimics like Mirren rendering the Queen's speech patterns.

Conclusion

I feel very strongly that the proposal that EXPLORING SPOKEN ENGLISH be rendered "teachable" is an excellent one.

As a teacher wanting and needing a book of this sort I shall feel very disappointed if you do not go ahead with the work.

The revered professors are brilliant linguists but when Mike does methodology with Fliss O'Dell (who is a friend of mine) the results may sell, but then Murphy does too. The people you need for this work are methodologists with a good grasp of corpus thinking.... a person like Luke Prodromou springs to mind