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Book reviews

Language Learning Strategies in the Foreign Language Classroom.

Angeliki Psaltou-Joycey (2010). Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 293 pages.

The book extends over 10 chapters, which are evenly grouped into two parts. Part One, titled “Language learning strategies and related areas of interest”, presents the theoretical background to strategies, which comprises both a historical account of related theories and an appreciation of the research involving the successful use of strategies and styles in language learning. Part Two is titled “Developing language skills and strategy use” and focuses on the impact of strategies on the development of the four language skills.

Part One begins with a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of language learning strategies. Chapter 1 provides a brief introduction to second language acquisition (SLA) theories such as behaviourism, innatism, the communicative competence model, monitor theory and interlanguage theory, with reference to key readings in each case. This is followed by presentations of cognitive, interactionist and socio-cultural theories of SLA. The chapter provides the basic readings for each theory and a summative orientation of the potential each theory can have for understanding language learning strategies. In a way, therefore, this first Chapter sets the scene for the second Chapter, which exposes the reader to the vast complexity of language learning strategy theorising. The chapter has sections on terminology and the various subtle aspects of strategies that have been suggested over the years—to that end, Table 2.1 on p. 43 and the author’s definition on p. 42 provide a useful way of navigating the different perspectives to strategies. The chapter also cites the major “good language learner” studies of the 1970s to 1990s and wraps up by providing a helpful overview of the major taxonomies and classifications of language learning strategies (among which, Oxford’s and O’Malley and Chamot’s).

Chapter 3 is particularly useful as it contributes a series of characteristics (or variables) of individual language learners. The usefulness of this presentation is primarily its relevance with language learning strategies. The variables described here are learner age and gender, motivation, beliefs about language learning, proficiency level, field of specialization (when referring to university students), and culture. These descriptions are particularly handy for the foreign language teacher interested in understanding some of the requirements for a differentiated teaching environment. Further information, in this regard, is provided in Chapter 4, which focuses on discussing the perceptual, personality and cognitive dimensions of learning styles. Of particular interest to researchers is the account of learning style instruments. Part one rounds up with Chapter 5, which presents instruments for selecting information and assessing language learning strategies. Among the various tools described

are classroom observation, verbal report methods, and questionnaires developed by Oxford, Stoffer, Gu and Johnson, Dörnyei, and Psaltou-Joycey (pp. 144-6).

In the second part of the book, Psaltou-Joycey focuses on the impact of strategies on the development of the four language skills. Chapter 6 looks at reading, Chapter 7 on vocabulary learning, Chapter 8 on listening, Chapter 9 on speaking and, finally, Chapter 10 on writing. Each chapter presents a careful overview of the importance of strategies in engaging with the different language learning skills, with reference to published research that includes, among others, pre-, while- and post- reading strategies (which could also be useful in the teaching of the other skills as well), different ways of approaching, teaching and learning different types of lexis (discussed in section 7.5), aspects of engaging in oral communication (sections 9.5 and 9.6), or ways of approaching the development of a writing assignment (in section 10.4). Although there is no overt linking of the different language skills, the reader can draw parallels between the four skills (and their sub-skills) by looking into the different bibliographical resources presented in each chapter.

An important advantage of the book is that it does not merely consider language learning skills and strategies in an academic way, but it is concerned with the development of a teacher's understanding of the cognitive processes involved in a successful integration of differentiated instruction. As already mentioned, the book offers a lot of useful information for the teacher interested in the differentiated classroom. For example, section 5 of chapter 4 describes case studies that have researched different learning styles using various research instruments. The same can be said with most of the information provided in the second part of the book, where the focus is on understanding the needs of different learners and linking them with the demands of their corresponding proficiency levels—clearly, this needs a lot more care and attention, and it was not the original aim of the book, but what we are offered here is an excellent starting point which informs the uninitiated in the demands of working with groups of individual learners and catering to their specific needs by tailoring many different strategies that are discussed in the available literature.

The book is clearly targeted at undergraduate courses in applied linguistics and TESOL, but it can also be used as reference by postgraduate students as well. From a structural point of view, the book is very reader friendly, with the brief Preface and Epilogue providing a comprehensive introduction and conclusion to the chapters. The reader can also search the book with an extensive author and subject index and it offers helpful lists of abbreviations and illustrations as well.

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Economic and Business English in a Nutshell: A Coursebook for Specific and Academic Purposes for Business Administration, Accountancy, and Economics.

Fotini Perdiki and Zoe Malivitsi (2012). Kavala: TEI of Kavala, 399 pages.

The field of teaching English for specific and academic purposes in Greece has been a growing field for a long time. In particular, the area of teaching English at university-level has been in demand for at least two decades, with different disciplines having different levels of demand for English and enjoying different levels of student participation and subject-tutor involvement. In the 2000s, the global spread of English has brought about a widespread recognition of the “need for English” in both academia and the workplace. This has also resulted in better training of in-service teachers of English for academic purposes and a concomitant interest for the development of high-quality teaching materials that are relevant in terms of content and updated from an instructional point of view.

The work at hand is an example of a well-researched and well-written course book that is targeted at Business Administration, Accountancy, and Economics courses at university level. The course book has two key advantages. On the one hand, it is written by experienced teachers of English for academic purposes (EAP) who have worked long and hard with students and subject-tutors of these disciplines at the Technological Educational Institute (TEI) of Kavala. On the other hand, it is written with the express purpose of preparing students for the in-house EAP examination of the same institution.

True to its purpose, the course book spans 16 Units, a Practice Test, an answer key to the tasks of each Unit and of the Practice Test. According to the Foreword, the course book is targeted at upper intermediate and advanced level university students. The course book covers all the language skills, except for listening. The topics selected are well-researched and, most importantly, draw on a broad range of areas related to business and the economy, from the Euro zone to unemployment. There are vocabulary items and grammar functions that are very closely linked to these disciplines: for example, Unit 4 introduces terminology such as “debit”, “credit”, “balance”; in Unit 5 one will find “mortgage”, “interest” and “invoice”; other Units introduce terminology from banking, marketing and economics. More importantly, though, there are topics that are tangential to the disciplines serviced by the course book but equally crucial when using English to communicate, such as thinking about the importance of multiple intelligences, engaging with job searching and reflecting about the industry.

It is especially important that the course book also draws on issues that are topical and almost certain to elicit warm argumentation and participation from students. An example is Unit 13, which refers to the current financial crisis. It goes without saying that the authentic reading inputs and the tasks and activities that accompany them both engage students into critical thinking about the issues discussed and give them tools (in this case, argumentative vocabulary) with which to become involved in interesting debates about recession, depression and the financial crisis.

Reading inputs vary in length and integrate various genres, from newspaper articles (which tend to be the majority) to interviews. Language activities are, in the main, objectively tested activities (in the form of clozes, gap-filling tasks, multiple-choice tasks, multiple matching tasks, etc.) and, in this regard, it would be interesting to see more extensive activities in the form of role playing or even simulations. This does not imply, of course, that important subjectively assessed tasks are not at play here: we have letter/memo/report writing (although not emails), summarising, etc. That said, although the purpose of the

course book was certainly to teach the topics, functions and vocabulary as advertised, it is, as already mentioned, intended to support students in sitting the examination that leads to the “English for Specific Professional Purposes Certificate”, which is developed and administered by the Centre of Foreign Languages at the Kavala Institute of Technology. This is, of course, further corroborated by the existence of the Practice Test at the end of the course book, whose structure and content follows very closely that of the previous Units.

The print is large enough and the pages are not choke-full of information or activities but are allowed to “breathe”. This reviewer did not find any editing oversights (bar one: the word “aluminum” in the contents pages, under the “Unit” and “Topic” columns, on p. 8). It is obvious that the authors, being experienced EAP teachers themselves, have taken special care to provide the teacher with the necessary material that has to be covered, but also to allow her freedom to move around topics and activities, integrating, for example, online material if and where necessary. Having said that, the course book can be used completely independently of any additional materials, online or otherwise and, as the authors suggest in the Foreword, it can be easily used as a self-study course by the more diligent student.

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