

# Textbook analysis

Linguistics, Language



University of Latvia Faculty of Humanities Department of English Studies

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Introduction The “ Focus on Advanced English C. A. E. ” is written by Sue O’Connell and first published in Pearson Education Limited at the Edinburgh Gate, Harlow in year 1999, and the edition at hand is the thirteenth impression printed in 2006. The textbook is oriented for students preparing for the Cambridge Certificate in Advanced English examination.

Further, the analysis of syllabus will be based on the material given in the revised and updated edition of the “ Advanced English C. A. E. ” The whole text book consists of 240 pages. It includes fourteen units, which are divided according to different topics (e. g. Severe Weather, Time Eaters, Stress etc. ). Each unit of the “ Advanced English C. A. E. ” is devoted to the development of all language skills: reading, writing, listening, speaking. Moreover, there are grammar and vocabulary tasks in each unit. One unit from the “ Advanced English C. A.

E. ” (Unit 12 “ Living Dangerously”) was chosen for the analysis of the whole book, because each unit is devoted to the development of all language skills and thus, it is enough to analyze only one of them in order to understand how the whole book “ works”. Reading Reading can be defined as the process of constructing meaning from written texts (Online 1). Thus, learning reading skills means understanding the text what one reads. But why do we need to understand what we read? According to Harmer (2001: 200), there are two types of reasons for reading.

The first is instrumental reason, which means that people read because it helps him/her to achieve particular goal (e. g. people read road signs in order

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to know where to go). The other type is called pleasurable. That means that the reason for reading some particular text is to get pleasure (e. g. reading illustrated cartoon). Thus, it does not matter what reason the student has, it is important for him/her to practice reading skills. Unit 12 of the “ Advanced English C. A. E. ” offers the students two reading exercises.

The first text is the magazine article called “ Living Dangerously. ” It contains about 400 words and is divided into 8 paragraphs. There is a pre-reading exercise, which students should do before reading the main text. The pre-reading exercises motivate the students and encourage their involvement in the topic and theme of the text (Online 2). After doing a pre-reading and a while-reading activity, students are asked to fill the gaps in the article choosing the proper paragraph (from A-G) given after the text.

In order to achieve a general understanding of a text, the students do extensive reading, which includes scanning (a quick reading, focusing on locating specific information) and skimming (a quick reading to know how the passage is organized and to get an idea of the intention of the writer) (Online 3). Finally, the post-reading exercise is given to check how the students have understood the text and to develop their critical thinking. In this exercise the students are asked to find given expressions in the text and work out the meaning of them from the context (e. g. vested interest might mean a personal stake or involvement in an undertaking or situation). As the second task, a newspaper's article “ You are caught in a fire then what? ” is given. It is about two times longer than previous article (about 800 words). Firstly, students are asked to scan the text (to read it quickly) in order to be able to answer some questions in pre-reading activity (e. g. Who devised the

Survival Game and why? ). Then, students should read the article more carefully in order to do the following post-reading exercise. This type of exercise is different from the first one.

In the second case students have to answer multiple choice questions. There are 6 questions with 4 answers in each. Some advantages of this type of exercises are the following: multiple choice exercises require less time than some written tasks, it is considered to be more objective than a usual written task, and “ it will allow assessing one’s knowledge without taking into account all the irrelevant factors” (Online 4). Writing Writing is said to be a method of representing language in visual or tactile form (Online 5). And more important it is a skill of marking coherent words on paper and composing text (Online 6).

There are many reasons why writing is important, for example, the ability to express one’s thoughts and ideas, communicative competence (letters), also it serves as a record, as in expressing one’s ideas for future references (Online 6). There are different types of writing – writing to inform, educational writing, writing to entertain, persuasive writing and motivational writing (Online 7). To improve writing skills there are some essential instructions that need to be performed – research, think, organize, write, edit, revise, relax (Online 7).

Two writing exercises are included into the unit 12 of the “ Advanced English C. A. E. ” The first exercise is writing an article (~250 words) about an interesting adventure. The textbook has a good approach to the writing tasks as it provides a ‘ Task Checklist’, where there are several guideline questions concerning format and approach, content and organization, style and the <https://assignbuster.com/textbook-analysis-book-analysis-samples/>

target reader, for example, ‘ Who are the magazine readers? ’ or ‘ What language features are needed for this content? ’.

Also the textbook provides a ‘ Writing File’, where the features of different types of writing – formal and informal letters, articles, reports, reviews and so on – are shown. The second part of the exercise is the involvement of some structures in the article in order to emphasize or add some dramatic effect, for example, writing sentences using inversion (a reversal of normal word order) or cleft structure (A construction in which some element in a sentence is moved from its normal position into a separate clause to give it greater emphasis) (Online 8).

The second exercise on writing consists of writing a memo (~50 words) and a report (~200 words) about the security in collage. The essential part in this task is to use the information that is already given, but using one’s own words. The task also has a ‘ Task Checklist’ with the guideline questions and indication to the ‘ Writing File’ and also includes the explanation and tips on writing a memo. “ Advanced English C. A. E. ” aim is based on covering different types of writing.

The Unit 12 included persuasive writing (writing a memo), which improves the skills of argumentation (Online 7), and informative writing (writing an article). The tasks are well organized and easy to understand, they provide comprehensible instructions and also some tips for writing the given type of the text. Additionally there is a supplement, where the features of the different types of texts are enclosed, so it is easy for a student to rapidly find the necessary information. Listening Listening is the ability to accurately receive messages in the communication process (Online 9).

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Listening is not an easy process because the listener should concentrate and understand everything what he/she hears on the spot. It is impossible for the listener to adjust the pace of speech, listen again or check an unknown word. In addition, listening is not the same as hearing as listening means paying attention to not only what is being told, but also to the manner how it is being told. According to the statistics, adults spend approximately 70% of time communicating, while approximately 45% of the time spent on communication is listening (Online 9).

After a short explanation on what is listening and why it is so important in everyday communication, it is essential to look how listening is taught in schools. The textbook under analysis provides mostly two (in some units – one) listening tasks in each unit. According to Rost (2002), listening tasks can be divided into three phases: pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening. This division is not always present in the textbook because in quite many of the tasks pre-listening or post-listening is missing.

Pre-listening and post-listening are very important because pre-listening is like a warm-up for while-reading as it ‘ activates the background knowledge and integrates the directions of listening’ (Helgesen, 1998), while post-reading ‘ allows the learner to build mental representations and develop shortterm second language memory, and increasemotivationfor listening a second time’ (Rost, 2002). The textbook presents such pre-reading tasks as questions on the theme and vocabulary related exercises. In Unit 12 two vocabulary related exercises are offered as lead-in tasks into the following istening tasks as well as into the whole unit and theme. All while-listening tasks are divided into four different types or parts (as they are called in the

book). In parts 1 and 2 a monologue or sometimes a dialogue can be heard. The task type used in these parts is mostly filling in the gaps. The students are tested for ability of hearing specific information (or bottom-up listening), which, according to Helgesen (1998), is similar to scanning. He writes that listening to specific information is difficult as students 'try to catch everything, often taking the time to mentally translate it into their mother tongue' (Helgesen, 1998).

A longer recording of a discussion or conversation can be heard in the part 3. The student's ability of understanding the text as a whole (or top-down listening), including the gist and specific information, is tested in this part. The task types are filling in the gaps, sentence completion and four-option multiple choice questions. In part 4 five short extracts can be heard. Students are asked to identify the situation or topic, the manner and the attitude of speaking, the goal of the speaker or specific information. The task types are multiple matching or three-option multiple choice questions.

The while-listening texts are in the form of formal and informal conversations, public announcements and private messages. The while-listening tasks in Unit 12 are of parts 1 and 3. Both exercises are filling in the gaps, and the recording can be heard twice in each of them. The few post-reading tasks are mostly questions on the theme, for example, the task in Unit 12 asks to imagine yourself in the situation connected with the previously heard text and discuss what you would do yourself, which is quite creative and interesting post-reading exercise.

Most of the tasks are one-way as 'all input comes from an outside source (like a videotape) to the learner' not from outside, for example, a speaking

partner (Rost, 2002). In addition, the listening sub-skills, such as skimming, scanning, note-taking, understanding attitudinal and conceptual meanings, understanding unfamiliar lexical items through context, understanding relationships within the sentence, also are taught in the textbook (Online 10). Speaking Speaking is the delivery of language through the mouth (Online 11). Speaking skills enable learners to enter the community of the target language (Kramina, 2000: 86).

This vocalized form of language usually requires at least one listener (of course, some people talk to themselves! ) - speech can flow naturally from one person to another in the form of dialogue, or it can also be planned and rehearsed, as in the delivery of a speech or presentation (Online 11). According to Kramina (2000), to act as a speaker participating in the communicative process, the learner must be able to carry out a sequence of skilled actions which comprise: cognitive, linguistic, and phonetic skills. There are speaking tasks throughout the textbook under analysis that help practice and enhance those skills.

There are four parts to the speaking tasks in “ Advanced English C. A. E. ” each focusing on different speaking skills and sub-skills. Part 1 focuses on general social language – general social English and the ability to interact with other people in English. Part 2 focuses on transactional language – ability to give information clearly. Part 3 practices negotiation and collaboration skills, and Part 4 is designed to test the ability to report, explain, summarise and to develop a discussion naturally. Pictures and other visual prompts are used in Parts 2 and 3 to cue various tasks.



Unit 12 of the textbook under analysis includes four speaking tasks – three of them concerning Parts 3 and 4, and one on Part 2. According to Kramina (2000) the development of communicative ability requires a range of suitable classroom activities that should provide learners with a degree of communicative urgency so that they have something interesting to say and a reason to communicate with their partners. Learners may be motivated to communicate by the enjoyment of playing a game, the challenge and satisfaction in solving a problem or completing a project.

Tasks 1 through 3 focus specifically on problem solving. In task 1 the learners are faced with an unfinished statement and five possible variants to conclude it: the learners are to engage in a discussion and give well-founded answers to the follow-up questions. The correct answers can then be found on the answer page of the book. Task 2 consists of parts a and b. Part a is a work in pairs, where each of the participants are to imagine themselves in a particular problematic/ difficult situation and have to come up with a sound solution, or choose one from the already given visual prompts.

In part b, the participants have to briefly explain to the rest of the class the decisions they came to with their partners, and say how far they agree or disagree with the opinions of others. Task 3 is a discussion of points concerning the topic of the unit. Several questions are given, designed to encourage the learners to use their existing knowledge on the subject, brainstorm for new solutions and express personal opinions. Next to these three tasks, tips are given on how to develop the discussions further by listening and responding to what your partner says and allowing the partner to comment on what you say.

The last speaking exercise of the unit concentrates on both presenting information clearly and listening carefully to the information given by a partner. Students have to work in pairs and each gets a picture to look at – the pictures are of the same scene but there are several differences between them. First, Student A is to describe the left-hand side of his picture in detail, while Student B listens carefully and notes any differences (without interrupting), and when A has finished, B should mention any differences noticed.

Then vice versa, Student B describes the right-hand side of the picture, while Student A studies for differences. When students are done with both parts of the task, they are to look at the two pictures together and compare their answers to the list given on a different page. This textbook is, however, lacking tasks that would help with the phonetic skills development, so it would be up to the teacher to help students learn the skills to articulate the utterance appropriately. (Kramina 2000: 65)

Conclusions Although “ Focus on Advanced English C. A. E. ” is a textbook designed specifically as an integrated course for students preparing for the Cambridge Certificate in Advanced English examination, it covers all the essential language skills for foreign language learning and is suitable for English language acquisition, and is generally a good material for the preparation of several other English examinations, e. g. , the English examination of Secondary education in Latvia.

The textbook offers 14 units covering a wide variety of stimulating topics, authentic reading texts from a range of sources, thorough practice of all language skills, a Grammar File with detailed information of all points  
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covered in the units, and a Writing File with model text types and useful language, all coming from the experienced teacher, teacher trainer and examiner Sue O'Connell. References

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