

FROM ACCURACY TO EXPRESSIVITY

Teachers of students at the upper-intermediate level often find their classes problematic. Students at this level tend to feel that they are no longer making the progress they felt they were achieving at lower levels. They may feel that they are losing control of the language and that their teacher, who cannot continue to correct every error, is sacrificing accuracy in favour of fluency. The greater emphasis given to skills work often leads to the cry of 'more grammar' as most students sense the need for remedial work. Equally they frequently find themselves at a loss for the right words in the situations in which they find themselves. Our common goal of communicative competence can seem very remote indeed. Robert O'Neill and Patricia Mugglestone have written a course*, aimed at this level, which tries to bring the student closer to achieving fluency, accuracy, intelligibility and a fourth dimension — expressivity.

In his introduction to the Teacher's Guide O'Neill defines expressivity as 'the ability to use language with an understanding of choices, and how those choices affect the meaning of what you say.' This emphasis on the making of choices can be seen throughout the book, but is perhaps best illustrated by reference to the Language Study sections in each unit. As their name suggests, these sections cover the structural, lexical, functional and phonological components of the course. The presentation stage of each exercise explicitly asks the learner to distinguish between the meanings of two pieces of language. They may be similar in surface structure, for example 'I used to smoke' as opposed to 'I'm used to smoking', or semantically difficult to distinguish as in 'I wish I had children' versus 'I would like to have children'. Lexis work focuses on morphology, denotation and connotation while providing students with useful lexical sets. In one exercise students are asked to divide character adjectives into 'positives' and 'negatives' and then to discuss to what extent such a division can be objective. The functions that Mugglestone and O'Neill have chosen tend to be those rather unusual but useful functions not often met in course books nowadays, such as 'asking for favours' and 'suggesting that things are easy to do'. The relationship between function, stress and intonation can be clearly seen. Intonation in its own right is given a healthy emphasis in the course. Once again the importance of drawing distinctions is stressed. The learner may be asked to differentiate between 'What did you turn the TÉLEVISION on for?' and 'What did you turn the TÉLEVISION on for?' or 'What?' and 'What?' Further pronunciation practice is provided by frequent opportunities to read aloud, a refreshing addition to a non-Cambridge examination course. Much of the material covered in the Language Study sections is consolidated in the Self-Check exercises which conclude each unit.

The Fourth Dimension while focussing particularly on communicative competence does of course provide the student with integrated skills work. Each unit begins with a text in which much of the vocabulary and many of the structures and functions covered in the Language Study sections occur. The texts are preceded by attractive black and white photographs, drawings or cartoons which lend themselves to exploitation. Pre-reading questions prepare the reader for many of the difficulties he/she may encounter in the text. The texts are graded and many are authentic, though they are not printed in their original form. The authors

* *The Fourth Dimension*, Longman, 1986. (Coursebook, 128 pp; Teacher's Guide, 79 pp.)

provide the learner with practice in skimming, scanning, reading for detail, and inference checked by a range of questioning techniques. Whole class or small group discussions follow.

Listening work is thematically linked to the reading material and once again is graded. Most transcripts are printed in whole or in part in the Student's Book. While some teachers may feel that this makes the listening task too easy, I believe it should be born in mind that the learner is frequently under stress when approaching listening exercises and access to the transcript may alleviate this considerably. Furthermore the transcripts are exploited in effective pre-listening activities such as a matching/prediction exercise in which the student matches B's responses to A's utterances. The students then read the dialogue aloud leaving them with the listening task of comparing their intonation and stress with the taped version. As the course progresses, extra information is included on the taped version and in the final units we meet longer dialogues without student access to the transcript. Writing skills are also effectively dealt with in *The Fourth dimension* with writing activities occurring as integrated skills and in Study Sections which aim to give the student practice in a good range of writing tasks, including areas sometimes ignored such as refusing invitations and reference writing. Many of the exercises are introduced by gap filling activities, the most successful of which ask the students to complete sentences in their own way. Each piece of guided writing leads on to free writing done as homework.

The emphasis placed on the autonomy of the learner will please most teachers, allowing them to adopt the role of 'facilitator' rather than 'authority'. The Teacher's Guide offers a variety of different approaches to the material and suggests further extension activities in some instances. In the earlier units it is cross-referenced with Leech and Svartvik's *Communicative Grammar of English* (Longman 1975) but it seems odd to me that this cross-referencing disappears as we move through the course. Less experienced teachers often appreciate a teacher's book that 'teaches the teacher'. For the same reason it would also be helpful if the Teacher's Guide included more information on phonology. It is, however, a useful tool in lesson planning, and its reduced versions of the Language Summaries from the Student's Book provide the teacher with a handy overview of the 'shape' of the unit.

The Student's Book may lack visual appeal for some students used to the colourful art work of lower level coursebooks. Equally staging within the unit could, at first glance, seem repetitive to some but an effective teacher should be able to provide enough variety to stimulate his/her students. A further criticism is the occurrence of typographical errors, the most serious of which is in Unit 12. The marker sentences in section 2 of the Language Summary on page 103 are printed in reverse order. No doubt the printers will rectify this in reprinting.

Having used *The Fourth Dimension* with a multilingual adult class, I can attest to its suitability for such a group, particularly during a summer school or as lead-in to Cambridge FCE preparation. It would also be appropriate at late secondary school level, though is perhaps too adult in tone and presentation to appeal to younger teenagers or children. As it does not form part of a series, it provides teachers with an alternative course for the fourth level. Having said this, I hope that O'Neill and Mugglestone plan further coursebooks aimed at lower levels, or, better still, a course for non-examination advanced students. Their choice of title seems to hint at a 'fifth dimension' -creativity perhaps? Come what may, the authors have highlighted another facet of the language learning process and in so doing have offered learners and teachers a valuable addition to the range of upper-intermediate material.

Sally Burgess
University of La Laguna