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## Book Review: English in Public Administration

**Manica Danko and Mihaela Zavašnik. Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, Fakulteta za upravo. ISBN 978-961-262-014-1.**

*English in Public Administration* is a coursebook for the 1st year of the university study program in Administration at the Faculty of Administration of the University of Ljubljana. In the foreword, the authors point out that the course is a result of a three-pronged needs analysis: study of the content areas covered by the other courses in the program, learner needs analysis, and a survey of workplace requirements. The authors' main aim was to provide material directly relevant to specific language needs dictated by the scope of the program graduates' employment opportunities. The foreword also clearly states the aims of the course and provides practical information such as that the coursebook will be piloted in the academic year 2008/2009, its use integrated with the use of a virtual learning environment (which is commendable), and that it should provide material for 60 hours of teaching.

### Content

The units cover a broad range of topics relevant to students of public administration, roughly falling into three categories:

- topics of general interest, e. g. being a student, gender issues, cultural differences;
- key concepts of the field, e. g. state, government, the EU;
- specific career-oriented topics, e. g. the procedure of obtaining a work permit.

In terms of language content, the coursebook mostly focuses on structures and skills, and to some extent on functions. Structural focus is on lexis; each unit contains a wealth of field-specific lexemes of various levels of complexity. Presentation, as a rule, is contextualized, while practice is mostly limited to meaningful lexeme grouping. A lot of attention is paid to word formation. Grammatical points are not dealt with in each unit; selected structures particularly relevant to situations in public administration are presented in appropriate topic

contexts (e. g. the passive voice, modal verbs). In terms of skills, the most systematic focus is on reading, which is practiced in each unit through a variety of authentic texts, usually adapted for length / level of difficulty. Most units contain at least one speaking activity (e. g. role-play on p. 50), and there are also many sets of questions presumably intended for class discussion. Some of the units, especially in the second half of the course, also include writing practice (e. g. formal letter, job application). The least explicitly covered skill is listening.

## Strengths

One of the key strengths of the coursebook is its learner-centeredness, which is apparent not only in the selection of content (non-linguistic topics and language content alike), but also in the fact that it consists almost exclusively of activities, with very little pure input. The authors have also considered the main aspects of didactic scaffolding in the design of units. Further features of learner-centeredness are personalization and encouraging students' reflection. At several points the students are asked to relate the topics of discussion to their personal experience (e. g. what they associate the EU with, p. 43, p. 99). In Unit 1, they are encouraged to reflect on their attitude towards language learning and their learning needs, and in Unit 8 on their prospects and plans of professional future.

Further strengths definitely include systematic attention to cultural differences between public administration practices and concepts in Slovenia, the UK/US, e. g. p. 13, p. 31., as well as the references to web-based resources (e. g. the Euroterm glossary on page 11, p. 37, p. 52) as an extension of the book itself.

The activities in the coursebook are quite varied; the authors have endeavoured to include tasks and exercises of different types in each unit, for all the main stages, from presentation and guided practice to production. The balance is still, however, tipped in favour of objective-type exercises (matching, transformation, T/F, gap filling). A type of activity that deserves particular mention is translation; most units contain at least one translation exercise, largely at the level of lexemes and sentences. Translation has been unduly ignored or even discouraged in the learning of English as a foreign language over the last decades, but in reality, working with a foreign language in a professional environment often requires translation, particularly so in a field such as administration in a country such as Slovenia. Another observation that could be made in terms of types of activities is that the inclusion of mind-maps as an open-ended and right-brain type of learning activity is welcome, but overall the coursebook could cater more to different learning styles.

The coursebook includes two mock exams, containing a mixture of objective and subjective types of tasks, which serve as summaries and encourage learner autonomy. The key at the end enables students to check their mid-term progress and end-of-course achievement.

## Points for consideration

The coursebook 'English in Public Administration' also has some features which detract from its overall quality or might do so when used with certain groups of students. It is to be noted here that at the time of writing this review, the coursebook was in manuscript form, which is why there are no comments on its graphic design, and a certain errata was noted which will surely be attended to before its final publication. A more viable concern, probably, is a lack of navigation through the coursebook, both within and across units (introductory and concluding comments, transitions between exercises, cross-references etc.) Also, the index of contents is limited to unit titles - short noun phrases indicating the content topic of each unit. It would be helpful if the index also contained information about the subtopics and language areas covered in each unit. All this, of course, can be provided by the teacher, but it would probably also be desirable for this coursebook to allow, if not encourage, some degree of self-study.

Another point worth considering is how demanding the coursebook is in terms of its content and extent, particularly given the English and general academic background of an average student of the target program. Some input and activities seem quite demanding, such as for example those on p. 9 (too much meta-language and meta-information), or the task of writing an abstract using the IMRAD scheme on pp. 41 and 44. Also overall, there is perhaps more material contained in the coursebook than can be effectively covered in 60 45-minute lessons.

## Conclusion

*English in Public Administration*, a coursebook for 1st year university students of administration at the University of Ljubljana, is based on the principles of modern EFL and ESP such as needs analysis, learner-centeredness and interweaving of different aspects of language study. The potential shortcomings of the coursebook, as indicated in this review, are expected to be identified and remedied in and after the piloting phase. In conclusion, it can be said that *English in Public Administration* is highly relevant to the students' future professional life and a valuable resource for the development of their EFL competence.