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Book review: Introduction to English for Business and Management, 331 pages.

Dubravka Celinšek. 2013. Koper: Faculty of Management. ISBN 978-961-266-136-6.

Introduction to English for Business and Management is a coursebook for full-time, part-time, and exchange students at the Faculty of Management of the University of Primorska that have selected Business English Basics (60 contact hours) as an elective course in their third year of studies. These are mostly students whose first foreign language is German or Italian. In the foreword the author explains that this course is designed for learners at levels A1 and A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference. However, the coursebook is also designed for users at higher levels of English communicative competence if their aim is to upgrade their Business English knowledge. The foreword clearly states that the coursebook is based on the results of a target needs analysis while also taking into consideration the structure and design of other A1 and A2 Business English coursebooks available on the market.

Content

The eleven units in the coursebook cover a variety of topics relevant to learners that would like to upgrade their Business English basics. Several units are highly specific and inherent to Business English, in particular the units found toward the end of the coursebook, for instance International trading and marketing; Financial matters, Economics and economy; and Management. The topics of other units are more general and reflect social rather than professional situations, for instance First contacts; Food and corporate entertainment; and Looking for a job. In addition to the eleven core units, the coursebook includes six appendices (Listening; Useful words and phrases; Additional reading; Grammar; Alphabet, sound and stress; and Numerals). The final sections of the coursebook are the references and keys to exercises. The aim of the coursebook is to develop all language skills, also the productive skills of writing and speaking, and contribute to the development of functional competence in Business English.

Strengths

One of the key strengths of the coursebook is its learner-centredness. This is reflected in the interdisciplinary integration between the carrier content of the coursebook (i.e., business and management) and real or language content. The latter corresponds to the level of communicative competence of students that the coursebook is designed for. Another significant point is that the coursebook was designed in cooperation with subject specialists, which corroborates the relevance of the coursebook carrier content. Introductory questions to unit

sections draw onto the professional and general knowledge of students, and thus contribute to the construction of new and consolidation of existing professional and language knowledge.

The difficulty of the textbook is at an appropriate level. Yet, the level of the texts in several units and primarily those in the appendix with additional readings reaches beyond the beginner and elementary levels. This provides for coursebook flexibility and adequacy for learners that would like to proceed at a faster pace or learners that have already acquired a high level of General English communicative competence but need an explicit focus on Business English.

The objective of the coursebook is balanced development of all language skills and elements, both receptive and productive. The underlying principle is that of scaffolding – learners are guided from the reception of simple structures and vocabulary toward independent production of simple phrases and sentences. Each unit, further subdivided into sections, begins with a focus on the vocabulary that will be used in it. There is a variety of vocabulary learning and revision tasks. These focus on the consolidation of single words as well as multi-words units or sentence chunks. Importantly, vocabulary input tasks are immediately followed by vocabulary revision tasks. The coursebook frequently returns to lexical and grammatical structures and elements previously covered, and therefore enables the recycling and further consolidation of knowledge.

The typical user of the coursebook will most probably be a Slovene student. This is the reason why the coursebook displays occasional Slovene translation equivalents of Business English terms. Another reference to the probable majority target group of users is the explicit treatment of grammatical structures that Slovene students often have problems with, for instance word order. Nevertheless, short explanations of other grammatical elements provide the assurance that non-Slovene learners will be equally well taken care of.

Importantly for A1 and A2 learners, the coursebook leads to the production of spoken and written phrases and sentences from the very beginning. In the first units, the writing skill is developed through sentence completion while at the end it encourages users toward the production of whole sentences (e.g., in e-mail correspondence) that are based on previously presented models and thus again follow the principle of scaffolding. The development of the speaking skill is based on the input of required lexis and grammar and then immediate production in pairs, groups, or in the form of class discussion. Another communicative competence element that the coursebook provides for is pragmatic competence, both in speaking and in writing.

In addition to language skills and elements, the coursebook aims at raising the awareness of typical Business English text genres, for instance oral presentations, minutes of meetings, and business letters. Despite the obvious focus on the needs of students of the Faculty of Management the coursebook provides a variety of topics and language tasks, always in business contexts and situations, that can be used for the development of language skills in everyday communicative events, for instance booking into a hotel or small talk.

Last but not least, the coursebook is designed for classroom teaching but also lends well to autonomous learning. As mentioned in the foreword by the author, the coursebook will be used with additional materials available in the e-classroom and in the form of handouts, so learning will be teacher-led. The last section includes the keys to exercises and there are several references to online

resources, also dictionaries, throughout the coursebook. In addition, in the appendix learners can find transcripts of all listening texts and there is an audio CD with all listening texts attached, which means that the coursebook can also be used by autonomous learners coming from other faculties and other learning contexts.

Points for consideration

The flexibility of the coursebook in terms of level of language difficulty is one of its most significant strengths but also weaknesses. In fact, the difficulty level of some reading texts is considerably higher than A1 or A2 (for instance International trade and international commercial contracts on page 171 or Shadowy economy – illegal or illegitimate on pages 197-198). The majority of these texts have been contributed by subject specialists from the Faculty of Management who may have been less aware of language learning needs of students at these levels. Although all among these texts are marked with a special symbol, explained in the introduction as indicating reading texts at a higher level, simpler and shorter texts would certainly be more beneficial and less intimidating to learners at this stage of learning.

Next, this comprehensive coursebook would benefit from more visual material. There are numerous photos in Units 1 and 2 but then they are no longer used until Unit 11. In addition to photographic material, charts or clipart animations could have been used. Finally, one cannot say that the price of 32 € is excessive for a comprehensive coursebook with CD included, but taking into consideration the target group that this coursebook is designed for, it might be too high for many student pockets. An interesting question to ask at this stage is how much students would be willing to spend on an app or e-book with these content and objectives.

Conclusion

Introduction to English for Business and Management is based on contemporary guidelines and trends in the teaching of foreign languages for specific purposes, and is appropriate for the students whose language learning needs it addresses. In conclusion, it can be said that the coursebook will make a significant contribution to the development of English language competence of students at the Faculty of Management as well as all other interested users.

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