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Roloff, J. (2009). [Review of the book *Reason to write: Strategies for success in academic writing (intermediate)*]. *Accents Asia* [Online], 3 (2),57-59. Available: <http://www.accentsasia.org/3-2/roloff.pdf>

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Cohen, R.F., & Miller, J.L. (2003). *Reason to Write: Strategies for Success in Academic Writing (Intermediate)*. London: Oxford University Press.

### A Book Review by Jennie Roloff, Kanda University of International Studies

Academic writing in English is a challenge for all writers, but much more so for second language learners in an EFL context. Students need to grasp a wide variety of elements to manipulate, convince or inform their readership. The clearer the path through this “forest” the better off is the learner. *Reason to Write: Strategies for Success in Academic Writing* endeavors to do just that - guide students through the process of constructing academic papers.

The text has ten units covering eight academic essay types as well as two writing skills - writing about graphs and statistics and literature analysis. The text generally follows a process approach, but does not ignore the product. Each unit is divided into five sections, opening with Freewriting on a topic related to the unit’s final assignment. The remaining sections are: Reading for Writing, Prewriting Activities, Structured Writing Focus, and Additional Writing Opportunities.

The authors firmly believe that “in order to develop as a writer, one must be a reader” (Cohen & Miller, pg. v), so the sample texts in Reading to Write are rich and varied in terms of genre, though all American in origin. This input gives students the content needed for analysis in the Prewriting section which is designed to deepen students’ viewpoints on whatever the topic may be. From there, Structured Writing Focus directs students’ attention to the lexical tools (grammar points, phrases, certain verb tenses, etc.) that make an effective essay. All of this scaffolding is designed to help students realize that “all their work in previous sections has prepared them for [the] central writing assignment” (ibid) in Structured Writing Focus. The final section, Additional Writing Opportunities, is intended to encourage students to continue writing after the assignment is done because the authors believe that, only with practice, can writing ability truly flourish.



The authors pulled from a variety of teaching methodologies in constructing the units. Writing is viewed as a social endeavor and as such the book puts collaborative learning techniques to good use. Peer feedback is quite prominent in the drafting exercises and is meant to supplement, but not replace teacher feedback. Also, the Prewriting section includes discussions of unit themes designed to encourage intellectually stimulating conversation and deepen critical thinking skills communicatively.

I used this text with university sophomores to relative success. Each unit took 2-3 weeks (4-6 classes), but if all the practice exercises were done, it would take possibly another week. On its own, it is best suited to high intermediate students. While stronger students felt some exercises were redundant, some weaker students struggled with the content of the model texts. Their cultural irrelevance often “turned off” students with lower motivation. The repetitive exercises did prove to be a valuable asset later, often being done in response to class-wide errors. Most students did say it was a great resource outside of class.

Overall, it is a solid classroom resource with many strengths. The exercises are easily adaptable and grammar used with greater frequency can be substituted with little difficulty. This book’s layout and design make it easy to follow and there is a good balance of print, colored shading and white space on each page that is visually appealing but not overwhelming.

The only strong criticism I have is that the text appears better suited to a university level ESL context in the United States than an EFL one elsewhere. The reading samples are culturally relevant to the U.S. and draw on American history, social identities, newspapers, businesses and even the legal system. While useful for students heading abroad or already living there, these examples are too distant and irrelevant to my Japanese students. Frustrating at times, with a little extra research, more relevant examples can be used (e.g. comparing two Japanese businesses and their practices, rather than American). The exercises easily adapt to fit substitute material. Furthermore, all having been written by native speakers, the gap between the samples and what students are expected to produce is, at times, a bit too large for a Japanese university classroom, especially students with lower motivation.

With no modifications or additional materials, this textbook would fall short of addressing some of the needs and interests of Japanese university students. However in the



appropriate context (ESL in the U.S.), or in the hands of a motivated teacher eager to adapt, it is a very good learning resource, both inside and outside of class.



Citation

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Moreau, R. (2009). [Review of the book *Northstar 1: reading and writing*]. *Accents Asia* [Online], 3 (2), 60-61. Available: <http://www.accentsasia.org/3-2/moreau.pdf>

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John Beaumont (2009). *NorthStar 1: Reading and Writing*. White Plains, NY: Longman

A Book Review by Robert Moreau, Teachers College Columbia University, Tokyo

The second edition of *NorthStar 1: Reading and Writing* is part of a colorful, well sequenced series of five textbooks clearly aimed, through its choice of topics and visuals, at ESL students in the senior high school to university range. The first 3 volumes of the 5-textbook series have reading passages based on authentic materials while the final 2 books use only authentic materials, giving the students an ultimate goal of being able to work with real world genres proficiently.

*NorthStar 1* includes a clearly defined set of teaching principles, an explanation of the parts of a typical thematic unit as well as an easy to follow scope and sequence chart. A teacher's manual is also available for the text with teaching suggestions and assessment tools for each unit in the book. *NorthStar 1* also includes a grammar reference chart, which matches the grammar content of the book to Azar's *Basic English Grammar* and Longman's *Focus on Grammar Level 1*.

Each of the ten units of *NorthStar 1* presents a topic that should be engaging for the target learner age group. Themes include school uniforms, famous people, groups helping teens in urban centers and issues facing young athletes, among others. These themed units are divided into 3 main areas of focus, an introduction, reading and writing sections.

These color-coded sections provide both mechanical skills tasks and activities that encourage critical thinking. *NorthStar 1* aims to reinforce basic reading and writing skills such as skimming, scanning and grammar use as well as providing practice with sentence structure and proper paragraph formats.

Beyond purely mechanical activities, the text encourages the use of skills that will be valuable to students during their academic career. Forming opinions, integrating ideas from



two different texts, exploring pre-writing and editing skills are a few of the important skill areas addressed in the text. Throughout the book a multimodal exploration of each theme's vocabulary gives the students a chance to learn and contextualize the words in a variety of activities. This gives the students a means to practice new vocabulary beyond the two readings presented in each unit.

A true strength of *NorthStar 1* is its focus on genre-based pedagogy which, according to Hyland (2003) allows students to “develop as readers and writers who can examine, initiate, and respond to the many rhetorical situations they will confront in school, in work, and in their social and cultural lives” (Hyland, 2003, p. 248). In each unit two readings usually of different genres are provided. The readings usually represent two different viewpoints about the topic. For example, in the chapter dealing with school uniforms the first reading is a letter from the principal dealing with the school's rationale for introducing a uniform and the second reading is a student response to the principal's letter. After reading these points of view, students can examine for and against arguments, engage in a role-play situation as well as write an opinion letter about clothing at school.

Group and pair work, such as the role-play example noted above, is incorporated into each of the three main sections of each unit and is definitely another strength of this textbook. Brown (2001) points out that group work such as this not only generates interactive language in the class but also promotes a positive affective climate in the classroom and fosters learner responsibility and autonomy.

One criticism that could be made against *NorthStar 1* it is that a great deal of its content is North American-focused. Instructors in a non-American context such as Japan may need to make a special effort to try to link the topics to the students in their particular environment. The alternative writing and research topics presented in the text are a good place to start for teachers to build a bridge between the textbook and their students.

Overall, *NorthStar 1* has a lot to offer. There are opportunities for students to engage in critical thinking, to explore a variety of genres, and to reinforce their basic skills in reading and writing. Whether a teacher is looking for a book to use in a stand-alone reading/writing class or is considering an expanded series of materials for an English program incorporating all four skills, the *NorthStar* series definitely delivers a variety of options worth looking into.



Citation

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Glasgow, G. (2009). [Review of the book *Language and politics*. In A. Davies & K. Mitchell (Eds.) *Edinburgh textbooks in applied Linguistics*]. *Accents Asia* [Online], 3 (2), 62-65. Available: <http://www.accentsasia.org/3-2/glasgow.pdf>

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John E. Joseph (2006). *Language and Politics*. In Alan Davies and Keith Mitchell (Eds.) *Edinburgh Textbooks in Applied Linguistics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press

A Book Review by Gregory P. Glasgow, University of Queensland, Australia

Lakoff's (1990) assertion that language is politics and its "power governs how people talk" (cited in Ferrari, 2007, p. 603), and that the "analysis of language from this point of view is ... today, more than ever...a survival skill" (p. 603), is a compelling one – and one that is soundly corroborated by John E. Joseph's volume in the Edinburgh Textbook in Applied Linguistics Series, *Language and Politics*. From the beginning to the conclusion, Joseph captures his reading audience with his coverage of an area that he forewarns may be too wide to handle by some, however still an area well worth exploration and empirical study. Linguists, students of applied linguistics and TESOL as well those interested in communication in general will have a lot to benefit from reading this volume in the Edinburgh series, since it is one of the few instances where such a topic has been covered in such a thorough yet accessible way.

*Language and Politics* is comprised of seven chapters in total, with the first two providing an overview of the national and social contexts that permeate the political nature of the use of language. In "Overview: How politics permeates language (and vice versa)", he initially provides the reader with the consideration made by a past philosopher that "all animals are political, but some are more political than others" (p. 1). But, at the same time he qualifies this statement by stating that some may disagree with it, with "disagreement being a necessary precondition for politics" (ibid). This sentence sets the tone for the rest of the book, as Joseph avoids communicating his thoughts in absolutes; he encourages the reader to engage with his nuanced viewpoints of issues that are discussed. In the second chapter, "Language and nation", the notion that nationality is constructed through language, and that



divisions are created between varieties of English is explored. Also touched is the control of variation and the clash between constructions of what is and is not a language. One in particular is his reference to the *Ausabu* criterion for dialect recognition created by Nazi member and German scholar Heinz Kloss, in which he states that the status of a new dialect will become secure with the acceptance of a critical mass of the elite, but “even that acceptance is a matter of persuasion and rhetoric, and is not dissociable from the political status of language” (p. 39).

The next two chapters, “The Social politics of language choice and linguistic correctness” (Chapter 3), and “Politics embedded in language” (Chapter 4), touch upon themes that involve individual choices with respect to language. The key point that Chapter 3 advances is that the “choice of which language to speak, and how to speak it – in the standard way, in a way marked for region, social class, educational level generation, etc. – positions me vis-à-vis my interlocutors, whether I intend to do so or not” (p. 43). This fact is “masked by strong cultural forces” (ibid), and may have important implications in today’s debate in EFL contexts about teaching World Englishes versus standard forms. Joseph illustrates the social politics of choice and correctness in language with examples such as countries that construct themselves discursively as “monolingual”, like Japan. He declares such constructions as a “figment of the imagination” (p. 45), citing Patten (2003), who states that countries with foreign language teachers and foreign military personnel (like Japan and Korea) cannot possibly be monolingual, not to mention the fact that these countries have indigenous and ethnic communities. Chapter 4 expands on how politics is embedded in language through an initial discussion of key thinkers in modern linguistics such as Saussure and Voloshinov, who differ in their conceptualizations of language as what binds people together (Saussure) and what keeps them apart (Volshinov), the latter being what Joseph states as what ‘social’ has come to mean in sociolinguistics these days. After exploring issues such as the concept of face, deferential address, and how language embeds gender relations, Joseph finishes the chapter by suggesting that we cannot take politics embedded in language at face value – it can be interpretable in many ways.

The manner in which language may surprise, offend and manipulate its users is addressed in the following chapters “Taboo language and its restriction” (Chapter 5) and “Rhetoric, propaganda and interpretation” (Chapter 6). Joseph takes a nuanced position about taboo language, recognizing its power to “break taboos” and to bond people together. Joseph finds that taboo words “may gradually become conventionalized” (p. 87), which seems to



suggest as Battistella (2005) did that “we need to ask, case by case, what is really offensive, [and] what is appropriate verbal license” (p. 100). He provides information – which seems to be probably a bit lengthy, but still interesting – about how swearing evolved through the 16<sup>th</sup> through to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, followed by the tensions caused by hate speech in today’s language. In Joseph’s discussion of rhetoric and interpretation in Chapter 6, he does not deny the need to study how words work through rhetoric is as important for those “in favor of plain speaking” (p. 112) as well as “those who want to bend language to their own advantage” (ibid). After his discussions of rhetoric with mention of viewpoints of thinkers such as Socrates, Plato, Sapir and Whorf, he introduces the reader to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and its current efforts to capture “the dynamic nature of both power relations and text production by uncovering the hegemonic structures within texts” (p. 127). Joseph cautions the reader by recognizing that the receiver of a text is not just a passive recipient in the interpretation of rhetoric, but that there will always be oppositional voices who rail against propaganda, with such resistance being “fundamental to human nature” (p. 134).

In the Conclusion, “Power, hegemony and choices”, Joseph contends that agency in language use exists, and that it may depend to some extent on the circumstances that people are in or the circumstances that they seek to improve for themselves. The key point that ends the book is that there are many new questions to be raised about language and its political dimension as we move ahead into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, especially when considering the extent to which language and politics has evolved.

What I found compelling about this volume is the nature in which Joseph grapples with a topic seemingly larger than life and proceeds with a discussion that heightens awareness to how politics and language intersect in various contexts. Perhaps Joseph is not telling readers familiar in this area anything that is particularly new; however, he succeeds in capturing the essence of how language is political for those unfamiliar with the areas covered. The issues central to this book become critical for teachers as we consider the best way to teach about aspects of language beyond issues of structure and form. We need be also cognizant about the way that we represent languages ourselves, which may transmit to our students. Although the book has a tendency to employ complex terminology at times, the compact nature of it makes it a useful reference tool, and it would supplement readings for any TESOL teacher education or applied linguistics program well.

Overall, *Language and Politics* is an enjoyable book to read. For teachers interested in a deeper understanding of the political dimension of language in various aspects of social



life, it provides a very thorough and helpful overview. For anyone interested in this area, it would make a wonderful library addition.



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