

Learning English to Trade

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Col·lecció Universitas, 5. With CD. [Ordering information:
<http://sic.uji.es/pub/>; e-mail: publicacions@uji.es]

The publication of a textbook for learners of English is nothing new, much less in the business area, and the teaching of English to business students has received more attention in the field of ESP than any other specialization. The last decade, especially during its first half, although somewhat scarce in publications as to what constitutes business English (St John, 1996: 3), materials for learners in terms of textbooks, cassettes and videos appeared in many editorial houses. This trend, no doubt, will most likely continue in the years to come.

Learning English to Trade (LET) is an intermediate all-skills text aimed at students who have a basic command of English but whose level needs some extra work on language skills required in a business context. As the back cover reads, LET's purpose 'is to offer the right tools to those students who are eager to improve their competence in English ...in business-related fields.' The text is accompanied with a set of listening exercises presented in compact disk.

It is worth noting that the authors take a rather different stance from other recent publications which are aimed at learners of English in general; Palmer and Pérez take a viewpoint, enriched with and deeply rooted in their own business English teaching experience, and come up with a new teaching product aimed specifically at Spanish speakers learning English. Is this fact really so important? We think it is. Our own teaching experience has shown that a class group who share the same mother tongue (L1) presupposes that the teaching stance will differ considerably from the one faced with a group whose L1 is diversified. This is the reason why the 'Answers' section provides some translations into Spanish (Units 3 and 8). Furthermore, the emphasis placed by many existing textbooks, aimed at multi-ethnic groups, on certain vocabulary items has been shifted to other terms which the authors understand will be more complex and difficult to their Spanish-speaking learners. In addition, as the authors themselves point out in the introduction (p. 9), they of course aim at

enhancing the communication skills of business English students, but they also further specify their aim by "keeping in mind that many of these may be part-time (or even full-time) professionals, who may need English in order to fulfill their everyday duties within the enterprise." In other words, they have planned a textbook thinking of both students and professionals alike. Furthermore, despite a strong and almost unique focus on English for business, the materials included are perfectly suitable for use with general English learners since a business knowledge or experience is not a requirement to use the text and CD.

The book starts out with two introductory units, 'On the phone' (unit 1) and 'Meeting people' (Unit 2), introducing the learner to phone conversations, making and receiving calls, to the world of business and markets, commercial documents, faxes, e-mails, booking forms, etc. Unit 3 ('Our company') takes a look at the inner side of a company, its structure and layout, job titles, etc. 'Reading business data' (Unit 4) analyzes economic reports and statistics, quantities, graphs, tables, etc., and in the following chapters (Units 5, 6 and 7), the student is introduced to "Corporations" (Unit 5) and their internal structure, to "A profile" of a clothing empire (Unit 6) with a brief look into banking and the business press, and also how goods are being transported, followed by a section on "Products" (Unit 7), and how a new product is launched and payment methods. The text ends with a section on "Entertainment" (Unit 8) in which a chain of restaurants is explored, together with a series of commercial documents.

Each of the eight units includes a short reading extract on a particular topic within business English or 'English to Trade,' as the title suggests. Each unit begins with pre-reading activities, followed by a complete set of tasks around the general topic of the unit. These tasks focus on both, the information provided through reading extracts (reading and listening comprehension, vocabulary) and on grammatical points which are presented and explained in short notes (tasks on the use of English, commercial documents, writing exercises). The way the tasks are presented is very attractive and useful aimed at fostering various writing activities. There are numerous diagrams, building and office layouts, charts, etc. that are also very useful in that they help students generate sentences both speaking and/or writing. We could find one drawback in the grammar item selection where we could perhaps dissent in terms of its gradation, but it is also true they cover many structures which students will require in given business situations either in class or at work. These grammatical tasks, however, are particularly helpful because they are accompanied by a self-assessment section, not a very common practice in many language textbooks that often provide little opportunity for a self control of accomplishments.

The selection of tasks, which are aimed at enhancing both the receptive skills, such as reading comprehension exercises and listening excerpts, and the productive skills with the possibility of a question and answer exchange in class and the numerous written tasks included. It is not just another business English textbook; it is intended to cover most familiar topics in English that a business student must have seen in class in his/her own language; the inclusion of a user-friendly answer-key section also favors, not only the L1/L2 transition and vice versa, but most importantly it also favors self-study which must be considered a big plus when dealing with the teaching/learning of ESP to students of other specialisms.

St. John, M. J. (1996). "Business is booming: Business English in the 1990s." *English for Specific Purposes* 15:3-18.

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