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Book Review: English in Action 3 (Third Edition)

Considering the ever-increasing number of English language learners in the United States and the limited resources ESL teachers have, finding the right course book is of crucial importance. The book options out there can seem to be endless and overwhelming at times, so this book review aims to concisely present an up-to-date series, *English in Action (3rd Edition)*, that caters to the needs of young adult and adult ESL learners in the U.S. context. Not only does it gradually introduce learners to the essential grammar rules, but also promotes critical thinking and 21st century skills that will help them find their feet at work and/or college. The relevance of the topics to learners' lives and authentic content from National Geographic set this series apart from its competitors in the market.

English in Action is a four-level academic and work skills textbook series that comprehensively covers four main language skills (i.e., reading, listening, speaking, and writing) through detailed grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation sections. In addition to that, the content in the *Academic, At Work, and Civics* sections is created based on the goals established by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and some other national and state standards such as College and Career Readiness (CCRS) and English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS). Unlike the two previous editions, the third edition features authentic and engaging content from National Geographic such as short documentaries embedded in the classroom presentation tool designed for teachers. What is more, the student book comes with an online workbook without any extra cost, and the interactive activities help learners build digital skills as well. The seasoned authors adopt an explicit grammar-teaching approach throughout the series and strive to present the rules in context and reinforce them through a variety of practice activities.

In this review, I will particularly focus on the third book of the series, which I have used in my own ESL class for adults, and analyze the rationale behind some sections. This intermediate-level book is organized into 14 units, all of which have different thematic content: *the first week, life in the U.S., working and saving, the States, technology, a healthy lifestyle, around the world, moving, natural disasters, wedding plans, at work, working parents, crime, careers*. On the first page of each unit, learning objectives covering academic and work skills as well as civics are shared with learners. All the units include *active grammar, listening/pronunciation, reading and writing, and English in action* sections. The most striking of all is the *English in action* section because it teaches learners a variety of real-life skills through task-based activities. For example, in Unit 6, *a healthy lifestyle*, learners practice calling 911 with a role play activity and learn how to speak with a 911 dispatcher. As well, *civics* sections in each unit prepare adult learners for real life in the U.S. even mentioning how to serve on a jury.

Considering the space allocated for grammar in each unit, it is safe to say that the emphasis is primarily put on *active grammar* sections consisting of grammar charts and mainly traditional grammar activities such as filling in the blanks or completing the sentences. You can easily see the influence of authors' other books like *Grammar in Action* on the structure of this book because they manifestly favor explicit grammar instruction throughout the book. They also follow a deductive teaching approach in which "grammatical structure is presented initially and then practiced in one way or another" (Ellis, 2006, p. 97). Having said that, they do not fail to contextualize these grammar activities and connect them with communicative ones in the sections titled *Let's talk*. Pronunciation sections incorporate both segmental (e.g. final *-ed* in Unit 8) and suprasegmental (e.g. sentence stress in Unit 1) features by urging learners to notice

them through listening activities. However, in some units they do not go beyond listen-and-repeat method to teach pronunciation, thereby lacking communicative essence of language learning/teaching.

In addition to the aforementioned sections of the series, the authors also present different aspects of the English language. One of the additional features of the book is the *word partnerships* boxes which provide learners with word collocations (e.g., air/water/noise pollution) even if you cannot find them in all units. One of the challenges learners face is not knowing which words go together due to their arbitrary nature. Therefore, collocations should be taught explicitly and be an essential part of language teaching courses and materials. Similarly, you can find reading and writing tips across all units, which equip learners with useful learning strategies. To illustrate, they learn how to find and write supporting details in an informational text in Unit 4. Moreover, *culture note* boxes all over the book aid learners with gaining sociopragmatic knowledge and help them realize different aspects of American culture. For instance, in Unit 10 they talk about some customs in the U.S. and then compare them to ones in their home countries.

Overall, *English in Action 3* succeeds to whet adult learners' interest thanks to its captivating images of different spots, mostly national parks in the U.S., taken by professional photographers and the videos featuring National Geographic footage. All the activities and moderately challenging tasks facilitate the development of fundamental academic and professional skills ranging from understanding graphs to researching a career. One of the drawbacks of the series, however, could be the grammar-heavy structure of the book if you are looking for a primarily task-based teaching material that focuses on form when the need arises (Long, 2016). Teaching grammar has always been a controversial issue in SLA research, and yet

establishing connections between form and meaning has been proved to be the crucial component of language acquisition (VanPatten, Williams, & Rott, 2004). This series certainly encompasses both form and meaning from start to finish, and it could be quite functional for adult/adolescent immigrants and newcomers settling in the U.S.

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