

## Book Reviews

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*Peter Viney and Karen Viney. Grapevine. Books 1, 2 3. (Student's Books, Workbooks, Teacher's Books, Cassettes, Videos and Video Activity Books). Oxford University Press, 1989-1992.*

*Reviewed by Martha Maurer Ortiz Monasterio and JoAnn Miller, Universidad del Valle de México<sup>1</sup>*

*(Note: In this review, two different writers examine the same textbook. Both authors have used the books in question in university-level classes for over two years. This format will allow us to illustrate the great differences in opinion two teachers, teaching in the same situation, can have about the same material.)*

### General Overview

*Grapevine* is a three-level general English textbook designed to be used with both false beginners and zero beginners. At each level there is a Student's Book, two workbooks (A and B), a Teacher's book (interleaved with the Student's Book), stereo cassette and optional video and Video Activity Book. Each book consists of forty, two-page units which can be completed in thirty class hours. There is no storyline and the units are all independently developed.

### Opinion One

I feel there are various deficiencies in the series:

- I find that the skills are not evenly balanced. In the Student's Book 1, the authors say that they develop the listening and speaking skills. In every unit there are exercises based on questions and answers presented in unreal speaking situations. At this level there are more listening exercises than any other kind and there are very few reading and writing exercises.
- The students find the instructions unclear. The purpose of this, as we will see later, is to allow the teacher to control the entire situation. Students

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<sup>1</sup> The reviewers would love to hear from readers. You can also contribute reviews through the following means or by sending them to the MEXTESOL office. Fax: (525) 550-9622. e-mail: [mextslj@servidor.unam.mx](mailto:mextslj@servidor.unam.mx).

nowadays are willing to learn on their own and often want the teacher to be a guide only. They want a book that can help them to learn, not one which is primarily a foundation for the teacher to build upon.

- As I analyzed the text, I concluded that instead of being a communicative textbook, as is expressed in the Teacher's Books, it really follows the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM). As in the ALM, all the lessons are exploited based on drills and dialogues. Students are even encouraged to repeat chorally. Whenever possible, students repeat after the recorded model. This is classic ALM, where you get the students to repeat until they know the structures or functions automatically. The teacher-controlled classroom is also advocated in the ALM. The presentation of vocabulary and grammar explanations are entirely in the teacher's hands. Even the instructions for using the exercises in the Student's Book are mostly in the Teacher's Book. Only the Workbook has instructions since it is designed to be done at home.
- There is also very little opportunity for students to use language outside of the exercises. The role plays are extremely structured and students rarely create a conversation with their own ideas. The role plays are basically used when the students are asked to go through a known dialogue with free substitutions in the best of cases, though most often complete cues are supplied for the students' use. There are no exercises in the first book in which students are asked to improvise freely in a given situation.

### Opinion Two

*Grapevine* is typical of textbooks developed in the 1980's when the overt teaching of grammar was out of favor, when communicative exercises were extremely structured and teacher-controlled and when it was felt necessary to include certain audio-lingual components in order to convince stubborn teachers to join the communicative experience.

There are no clear grammar explanations in the text. All grammar explanation is relegated to an appendix and even there it is only minimally explained. There are mostly frames and examples so that students can come to their own conclusions. Related to this limitation is the lack of comprehensive grammar exercises in either the text or the workbooks. Students are given little opportunity to compare or contrast verb tenses. Past tense ap-

pears in one unit and present perfect in another and they are contrasted in very limited situations in only one unit.

There are also few free communicative opportunities for the students. They are provided model conversations and limited situations to follow. As a result, there is very limited free student input. However, the topics presented in each unit are interesting enough to allow teachers and students to develop their own communicative opportunities.

Also the Teacher's Books carry multiple suggestions for the use of choral repetitions, substitution drills and other audio-lingual practices. These could be useful in some situations, for example with third person present tense or *to be*, but they are almost useless in many other situations.

Another weakness of the text is the lack of reading and writing exercises in the first two books. There are very few reading strategies and the students are given almost no opportunity to express themselves in writing.

However, even though there are a myriad of aspects which can be criticized in this text (as with most others), it does give good results in class. The wide variety of topics covered (especially in Books Two and Three), the great use of humor, wonderful artwork, exceptional quality and variety of recorded material and innovative video component make this text a good choice for most situations when used with experienced teachers who do not need detailed grammar explanations and who are willing to dedicate a little time to developing additional practices. In reality, most of the negative criticisms mentioned above can be overcome with some extra effort on the part of the teacher. The substitution drills are optional; a few grammar explanations (from the teacher or even from students) and fill-in-the-blank exercises take care of the lack of grammar explanation and practice. In fact, the variety of interesting and imaginative topics and rapid change of subjects considering the units are so short, let every teacher and student find something of interest.