
[Book Review]

Speaking by Clare Furneaux and
Mark Rignall

(Europe: Prentice Hall, 1999, 141pp., Student's book, ¥2,130,
ISBN 0-507591-2; Cassette, ¥2,400, ISBN 0-13-507609)

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This book is part of a series intended for students getting ready to study abroad. In using any text, adaptation and experimentation are often necessary. *Speaking* by Clare Furneaux and Mark Rignall is a topic and strategy based text. Its emphasis is on having students research, prepare, and present information on a variety of issues. The text also has lists throughout the units to aid students to monitor their own learning process. It is very important for university students to have, in addition to daily conversation skills, the skills necessary to discuss, debate, and analyze issues ranging from the popular to the profound. Particularly when they are overseas, students are often put on the spot by their locators with the expectation that they are representative of their culture, of their class, of their ethnic group, and of their gender. To have the advanced skills to speak to their classmates, teachers, and friends, they may first have to do a lot of listening at voluminous and voluble rate.

Being an American teacher, and having had both students and colleagues express interest in nice American texts, why would I advocate using information from British culture? Perhaps for the same reason I like using British or Australian texts with students. To give a rather mundane example: In

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America we say “gas,” in England one says “petrol.”

Many students dream of overseas study, and a lucky few find ways to go abroad. But for most, a native speaker and/or a foreign text may be the closest encounter with an out-of-country experience. Due to students’ limited budgets and the vast amount of books they are usually required to purchase, if they are recommended to buy an expensive texts, it should be worth their while.

Reviewing a book at the end of the school year at my previous schools, I decided to adapt a part of Speaking Unit 3 entitled Education. I took a list labeled the Ideal Education from this unit and from it chose those areas pertinent to my students. To this list I asked them to add what they considered as characteristics of a perfect language class. This was a good way to indirectly get feedback on my own conversation classes and would be a good way for teachers wary of inept or inconclusive evaluations to gauge their own teachings. And for me, using this sort of roundabout surveying was a good way to gauge both the positive and negative interactions of that academic year.

This text’s accompanying cassettes are quite thorough and have a variety of British Isle accents. One of the linguistic things that throws students is the fact that having learned from one speaker and having adjusted to one type of speaker, it can be quite difficult to readjust to speakers of English from different countries or within one country from different dialectical areas. As suggested in one of the tapescripts, these lectures are realistic listening information both in rate and amount of aural input for students who have to swim and not sink in the vast pool of native speaker students with whom they are studying. In other words, these lectures help students to learn to listen fast and to comprehend the natural speaking rate of lecturers.

A book, whether superficial or profound, has to have some catching quality, and for many students the glossy, advertising format of books is a catching and keeping quality. Or at least I glean this information from informal *enquêtes* of the past academic years. I suppose one reason there is only an eye-catching

interesting book cover and rather dense print, besides budget concerns, are the authors intent to be taken seriously and not as another song-and-dance routine to keep students amused while they wade through the “quote unquote” more serious courses required of them. A book not judged by its misleading cover will not cause students to stray to other more interesting media, but as any teacher wanting to educate and inform, I am quite aware of the media becoming the message. So from a very personal aesthetic point of view, I was disappointed that the pretty cover was not matched by more illustrations within.