Book Review

Louis Trimble   **English For Science And Technology : A Discourse Approach**
                         Cambridge University Press, 1986. pp. 180

From the introduction, the reader learns that the book is based on a piece of research into English for science and technology conducted by the writer of this book, together with some of his colleagues. The book describes various significant features in EST discourse at full length and incorporates many substantial examples. Emphasis is placed on written EST rather than oral EST.

The textbook under review is made up of ten chapters. From chapter 2 to chapter 9, the writer discusses and gives thorough explanations of different features in EST discourse, for example, the rhetoric of EST discourse, the individualizing process, paragraphing in EST, rhetorical techniques, rhetorical functions, rhetorical-grammatical relationships, and lexical problems. In each chapter, the writer provides several classroom-tested examples, including some supplied by students as their assignments. In the last chapter, the writer, deals with the teaching techniques of the rhetorical process. A particularly welcome feature of this book is that the examples incorporated are carefully selected and already tested.

To understand EST texts, ranging from technical manuals to texts written for laymen, it is essential to understand EST discourse as it is expressed in such texts. The writer defines 'discourse' as a collection of connected language units–such as sentences and paragraphs–that together make up a coherent, cohesive text : for him, language must be studied *beyond* the level of the isolated sentences.

Moreover, the book examines the rhetorical elements is the discourse of scientific and technical English. The term 'rhetoric' is defined as the process a writer uses to produce a desired piece of text. This process is basically one of choosing and organizing information for a specific set of purposes and a specific set of readers. The rhetorical approach involves two elements : rhetorical functions and rhetorical techniques. The rhetorical functions include description, definition, classification, instructions and visual–verbal relationships. Examples of rhetorical techniques are order (e.g., time and space order) and patterns (e.g., causality, comparison and contrast).

In addition to the rhetorical elements in EST discourse, grammar and lexis also play some major roles. The book deals with specific grammatical elements that appear to stand in a special relationship with some of the rhetorical concepts. The writer explores some areas that cause difficulties for students whose first language is not English when they read EST texts. These areas are passive-stative distinctions, modal use in instructions, non standard use of the definite article, and tense choice.

The writer also gives special attention to lexical problems in EST discourse. The focus is on sub-technical vocabulary and noun compounds. For the writer, technical vocabulary by itself does not pose an insurmountable problem to the majority of non-native students.

The last chapter describes how a particular course can be organized and structured. A complete presentation of the rhetorical process is given, some problems are examined, and some classroom-oriented solutions are suggested.

There are some interesting points which can be taken into consideration with regard to the teaching-learning of English in Thailand. Examples are as follows:

1) Selection of texts to be used as materials.

There are four types of texts : genuine, adapted, synthesized and created. In the writer's experience, the more advanced the class, the more useful are genuine texts. In other words, the less advanced the class, the less one should use genuine texts and the more one should rely on adapting, synthesizing and creating to get the most out of functional discourse units.

2) How to teach to a class of students which does not form an even, homogeneous group.

The writer introduces a procedure called 'parallelism'. First of all, the teacher discusses a text with some rhetorical functions with the students. Then they are asked to find examples of the rhetorical elements previously discussed from their subject-matter courses. The teacher can go beyond reading assignments, for example, he can give a final assignment, i.e., a research paper that contains examples of the rhetprical elements discussed during the course,

3) How to deal with lexical problems in EST discourse.

The writer focusses mainly on sub-technical vocabulary and noun compounds. One solution to lexical problems is to adopt the 'parallelism' procedure mentioned above.

Before adopting the discourse approach, it is my own view that teachers need to be aware of the following:

a) The students' need : do they need oral skills or writing skills, and if both, which do they need most ?

b) The teacher's ability in coping with the subject matter in science and technology : is the teacher able to discuss and focus on the rhetorical elements rather than the content ?

c) Adequate resources : are there plenty of books available in subject matter courses for the students to be able to use them and find 'parallel' texts ?

d) The atmosphere of the class : will the class be boring and passive when the teacher concentrates on the rhetorical elements ? If this is likely to be a problem, how can it be solved ?

However, it is likely that most readers will agree with the writer that this approach 'is still a valid and viable instrument's. This largely depends on the needs of the learners and the policy of a particular institution. In short, the book gives informative solutions to some genuine problems in teaching EST. Most important, all parts of the text–principles and examples–have been tested and used several times in real classroom situations.

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