

# TEXTBOOK ANALYSIS: HEADWAY UPPER-INTERMEDIATE STUDENT'S BOOK

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## Abstract

This paper examines a book entitled *Headway Upper-Intermediate Student's book*, an English textbook popularly used in many academic institutions of the EFL countries more than ten years ago, and identifies what activities it suggests. The paper specifically discusses the issues of whether the activities/ exercises in the book give input, or are designed for output practice, ending with the final evaluation of whether the input is roughly- or finely-tuned, and the output activities are for practice or communication.

## บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้ศึกษาหนังสือชื่อ *Headway Upper-Intermediate Student's Book* ซึ่งเป็นตำราเรียนภาษาอังกฤษที่ใช้อย่างแพร่หลายในสถาบันการศึกษาของประเทศที่สอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ (EFL) มากกว่า 10 ปี และศึกษากิจกรรมที่หนังสือนี้แนะนำ บทความนี้อภิปรายประเด็นที่ว่ากิจกรรมหรือแบบฝึกหัดที่อยู่ในหนังสือนี้มีตัวป้อนภาษาเพียงพอหรือไม่ หรือมีการออกแบบเพื่อให้มีการฝึกปฏิบัติหรือไม่ บทความนี้ในตอนท้ายเป็นการประเมินว่าตัวป้อนภาษามีความเหมาะสมระดับใด และกิจกรรมที่เกิดขึ้นเป็นกิจกรรมเพื่อการฝึกหรือเพื่อการสื่อสาร

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## **SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE TEXTBOOK**

The full title of the book is Headway Upper-Intermediate. Authored by John & Liz Soars, the book is published by Oxford University Press. From the back cover of the textbook, it is learnt that Teacher's Book, a Workbook, two cassettes and Headway Upper-Intermediate Pronunciation accompany the student's textbook.

## **THE AIM OF THE TEXTBOOK**

The textbook writers have explicitly explained that the aims of the course are to encourage students to analyze the systems of the language in use, to expose them to a variety of challenging and interesting text-types in the listening and reading activities, and to bring their own experiences and feelings to the fore in order to achieve accurate and confident language use.

## **THE ORGANIZATION OF THE COURSE**

Each unit of Headway Upper-Intermediate has ten sections, though not necessarily in the same order.

1. A Discussion Point, which launches the theme of the unit by means of a speaking activity.
2. A reading activity, which practices different reading skills and which usually, contains significant exponents of the target language.
3. Vocabulary 1, arising out of the theme of the unit, or the preceding

material.

4. A Listening activity, which practices different language skills and which usually, revises the target language.
5. Vocabulary 2, arising out of the theme of the unit, or the preceding material.
6. A Speaking activity related to the theme, either a discussion or a role-play.
7. A Writing activity, which focuses on one aspect of the writing skill.
8. The Language Review, which gives the essential rules of form and use of the target language.
9. Controlled Practice exercises which consist of pair and group work, comparing and contrasting sentences, writing, and sometimes listening.
10. A Revision section, which revises/introduces areas of the language that students at this level need to be familiar with.

## **THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS PAPER**

Of the ten sections mentioned above with regard to the organization of the textbook, this paper mainly deals with the textbook's treatment of the four language skills (i.e., reading, listening, speaking and writing), plus grammar and vocabulary sections, which are required to assess the input/output nature of the textbook.

This paper begins with an overview of the syllabus. This is to be followed by my personal assessment of the skill-based ac-

tivities, a section that will help me to objectively deal with the issues mentioned in the abstract. The analysis of the book, the main part of this paper, will be explained under the topic 'Discussion', where I will explain about the facts that have led me to draw conclusions with regard to the above-mentioned issues that I want to investigate. The paper will finally be concluded with some of my personal observations.

## **AN OVERVIEW OF THE SYLLABUS**

### **Reading and listening**

The sources of the reading materials include encyclopedias, classical, modern and popular literature, quizzes both serious and amusing, popular and professional magazines, and daily newspapers. The material in the listening developments is either an authentic interview or a script recorded by actors. Emphasis is placed on pre-comprehension tasks to motivate students to want to read/listen and to bring to the fore their prior knowledge of the subject. The reading syllabus includes:

- skimming
- summarizing
- inference
- exploiting topic sentences
- appreciating literature

The listening syllabus includes:

- gist listening
- listening for specific information
- note taking
- summarizing main points
- inference

### **Speaking**

There are at least two activities per unit to encourage free speaking. The Discussion Point at the beginning of the unit launches the theme, and the Speaking Activity, either a discussion or a role play, further exploits the theme and practises the target language in a freer more creative way.

### **Writing**

While the reading, listening, and speaking activities have the dual aims of revision of the target language and the development of the relevant skill, the writing activities have their own areas of input and practice. In each unit, one aspect (or sub-skill) of the writing skill is highlighted and practiced, and there is then a suggestion for extended writing for students to do as homework. Examples of these aspects are:

- formal versus informal style
- conjunctions and prepositions of time
- joining contrasting ideas
- reporting conversations

### **Grammar Section**

In each unit, there is a language review which gives the essential rules of form and usage. There is a further reference to the Grammar Section at the back of the book where the area is explored in more depth. This section also contains a detailed explanation of the role of aspect in English tense usage, and an overview of the Perfect and the Continuous aspects.

## Vocabulary Section

There are at least two vocabulary exercises per unit. As activities vary, so do the strategies. Some activities encourage the learners to use effective vocabulary learning strategies, by which the students themselves assume the main responsibility of their vocabulary acquisition. For example, in Unit 1, students are introduced to several ways of organizing their own vocabulary records. There are other activities that introduce students to the systems of vocabulary, otherwise known as 'the grammar of vocabulary' such as affixation, the formation of compound nouns, compound adjectives, etc. Vocabulary activities commonly used to introduce new words by means of matching exercises, gap filling, labeling diagrams, and referring to texts are also found.

## MY PERSONAL ASSESSMENT OF THE MAJOR ACTIVITIES IN THE TEXT BOOK

In order to evaluate the activities in line with the aim of this paper, it will be necessary to look at all the skill-based activities from a critical point of view. To do that, all the major activities under Reading, Listening, Speaking, and Writing Sections will have to be carefully studied. However, only the first five units (Unit 1 to 5) of the text-book will be selected for evaluation to fit in with the word limit allowed by this journal.

## Unit 1

### Reading activities

Prior to reading a passage entitled 'English as a World Language', students work in pairs to do the pre-reading task. They then skim the text to get the answers to the true/false questions. Finally they read the text more carefully, and answer the Comprehension Check/Language Work questions. The aim of the activity seems to be to develop students' reading abilities and to provide some background information about the English language. Students need to exploit their prior knowledge and also practise skimming to do this activity.

### Listening activities

Students listen to a radio program (an interview) about Esperanto, the artificial language. After listening to the tape, they are asked to fill in the two charts: **Advantages of Esperanto as a world language and Disadvantage of English as a world language**. The purpose seems to be to train the students to listen for specific information.

### Speaking activities

Students are asked to discuss a few questions under the topic "How do you learn languages?" in groups. Then they complete the boxes which contain the means to learn a language in order of importance with their own ideas. This task having finished, they start working in groups comparing their lists and justifying their order if necessary. Finally students

contribute their own ideas for effective language learning. The aims of the activities seem to be to encourage the students to discuss their attitudes to language learning and to make them aware of their own strategies for language learning.

### **Writing activities**

In the first activity, the students are asked to correct the mistakes in the twelve given sentences by using some special signs and abbreviations. The second exercise is the same activity, but this time they are asked to correct a composition. Obviously, the activities aim to give the students practice in proof-reading, and probably also to introduce them to the kinds of symbols used when correcting mistakes in writings.

## **Unit 2**

### **Reading activities**

In this unit, students are presented with a challenging text entitled 'As You Like It' (by W. Shakespeare), which contains several archaic or obscure words. Since T.4 (Tape 4) can be seen right under the topic 'Reading', it appears that students are supposed to listen to the tape prior to their reading of the text. From the layout of the lesson, it is evident that students need to listen to the speech without reading it, and try to find the seven ages that Jaques describes. Students are required to do the Comprehension Check questions after reading the text. A possible aim of the lesson may be to develop students' appreciation of a piece of classic literature.

### **Listening activities**

The listening activity in this unit, though different in terms of subject matter from the one in unit (1), also trains the students to listen for specific information. Students listen to a discussion and fill in the chart.

### **Speaking activities**

The first activity involves appointing a spokesperson from each group. Students need to think who should get the part and why. When they have come to decision, the spokesperson should report to the rest of the class. In the second activity, students work in groups of three in the role play. The purpose of the activities may be to provide the students with two opportunities for free speaking practice, in the discussion and then the role play.

### **Writing activities**

The two writing activities in this unit are (1) the word order in English and (2) writing the biography of someone (still alive) they admire. The aims of the activities may be to provide the students with some guidance on word order and also the opportunity to further practise the Present Perfect in the biography writing.

## **Unit 3**

### **Reading activities**

The reading text here is a scientifically devised quiz containing 64 questions. Entitled 'Now find out what's in you for the

job', the quiz requires the students to do some T/F questions to find out which area of work is suitable for each of them. The aim of the activity may be to help students practise intensive reading and also to make them familiar with completing a questionnaire.

### **Listening activities**

In this unit, students listen to a woman talking about her first job, teaching in Tanzania, and then find answers to the pre-set questions. The aim may be to develop students' listening abilities.

### **Speaking activities**

The speaking activity in this unit is called 'A maze' in which students are presented with a problem and a 'menu' of choices. They have to discuss, negotiate, argue, and persuade until they reach a group decision. They are then presented with the 'result' of their decision, another problem and another 'menu' of choices. This continues until they are out of the maze. The aims of the activity may be to provide students with an opportunity for free speaking practice and to practise the skills of negotiating and giving opinions.

### **Writing activities**

In this activity, the students are given a letter of application for a job. There are no grammatical mistakes, but there are mistakes of other kinds:

- the punctuation is wrong
- the style is too formal
- some of the information is irrelevant

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- conventions are broken e.g. of address, situation, position of sender's name.

Students are asked to discuss the mistakes and then rewrite the letter correctly. Obviously, the lesson is intended to develop students' awareness of the style and conventions of a formal letter.

## **Unit 4**

### **Reading activities**

In this unit, students read an extract from a popular novel. Since they are encouraged to predict the content from book cover, it seems that the aim of the lesson is to show how to approach a book by exploiting their prior knowledge and ability to predict.

### **Listening activities**

In this unit, the students will hear two friends talking about their experiences one of them had with strange powers while living in an old house. Since they are asked to listen to the tape and take notes under the assigned headings, the aim of this activity can be to teach the students how to take notes through listening.

### **Speaking activities**

Under the topic 'Fears and phobias', students are asked to fill in the boxes ranking their fear factors in sequential order. After that, they conduct a class survey to find out what the most common fears and

phobias are among their classmates. Probably the aim of the activity may be to provide students with an opportunity for free speaking.

### **Writing activities**

In this activity, students work in groups of three. They are asked to read the two appraisals of a book carefully and then to compare their organization, and the way they present points. Clearly, the purpose of the activity is to give students guidance in writing an appraisal of a book or film.

## **Unit 5**

### **Reading activities**

In this unit, students are asked to read an article entitled 'Travellers' Tales' quickly to find the answers to the two given questions. The aim, therefore, seems to be to develop students' reading abilities.

### **Listening activities**

In this activity, students hear a man talking about his experiences of driving a lorry for the first time. After hearing half of the story, students are given 8 words and then they are asked to imagine what happened to the driver during the rest of the day. The aim of the activity may be not only to develop students' listening abilities but also to practise prediction and anticipation.

### **Speaking activities**

The speaking activity in this unit re-

quires the students to work in pairs to think of good and bad points resulting from the possibility that most parts of the world can be traveled easily and quickly at affordable prices nowadays. The aim of the activity may be to provide students with an opportunity for free speaking.

### **Writing activities**

The topic for the writing activity is 'Time expression'. Students are explained how and when to use conjunctions of time such as *when, while, whenever, as soon as*, by the time, and *as* and conjunctions and prepositions of time such as *until, after, before*, and *since*. The aim of the activity may be to practise narrative tenses.

### **Vocabulary section**

The vocabulary sections (unit 1-5) introduce the students with words concerning parts of the body, periods of one's life, means of transport, adjectives describing personal characteristics and the like. Occasionally, skills like guessing the meaning of unknown words via linguistic and contextual clues, guessing the spelling of words are also practiced.

### **Grammar**

In unit 1, the tense system (the continuous and perfect aspect, and basic tenses namely present, past, and future) plus passive and active voice are explained by giving example sentences.

In unit 2, the students are provided with further controlled practice of the Present Perfect Simple and Past Simple. The stu-



dents' understanding of the difference between the Present Perfect Simple and the Present Perfect Continuous is also tested.

In unit 3, students are provided with controlled practice of gerunds after preposition, verbs, and as the subject of a sentence. There is also an activity that shows how infinitives can be used after certain adjectives and verbs.

In unit 4, students are taught Question forms: Subject/Object questions, Short questions, Indirect questions, Tag questions and Questions + preposition through controlled practice.

In unit 5, the differences between Past Simple and Past Continuous, and between Past Perfect and Simple Past (narrative tenses) are explained.

## DISCUSSION

Based on what have been discussed so far, the issues raised previously for the analysis of the textbook will be discussed in this section.

First, with regard to whether the input being finely tuned or roughly tuned, it is found out that the textbook contains a lot of finely-tuned input. Roughly tuned input as explained in ([http://wiki.answers.com/Q/Finely\\_tuned\\_and\\_roughly\\_tuned\\_input](http://wiki.answers.com/Q/Finely_tuned_and_roughly_tuned_input))

- is more complex than learners' current proficiency and stretches the boundaries of their current knowledge.
- focuses on authentic use of language in listening or reading passages.
- is used with minimal alteration by

the instructor or textbook author.

- is used in the activity stage of the lesson.

The language level in the textbook, however, is about right for upper intermediate level students. It is not complex enough to pose the students with learning problems. Though authentic use of language in listening or reading passages can be found in a few units, majority of the reading and listening materials are not original – that is – they have already been adapted to suit the level of the upper intermediate level students. In addition, the textbook is readymade; all the activities can be done both by the teacher and the students just by following all the procedures mentioned in it. Above all, the input is used in every stage of the lesson, not just at the activity stage. For these reasons, the input found in the textbook is not roughly tuned.

On the other hand, there is sufficient ground to say that Headway Upper-Intermediate is designed to provide a finely tuned input, a book which is graded and requires students to pay attention to the relationships among forms, meaning, and use for specific grammar rule. Obviously, the syllabus of the text book also is in harmony with the characteristics of a finely tuned input. The following characteristics of the finely tuned input (found in the same web page) will confirm the truth of my observation. Finely tuned input

- is matched to learners' current comprehension level and connected to what they already know
- focuses on conscious learning of a specific point: the pronunciation of a word, the contrast in the uses of



- two verb tenses, new vocabulary, useful social formulas
- is controlled by the instructor or textbook author

A careful study of the textbook will reveal the fact that it is designed in such a fashion as to extend students' understanding of the grammar, comparing and contrasting items as necessary. It begins with an overview of the tense system, and then deals with one of the most difficult areas of the language for foreign students, the Perfect Aspect. Among the verb forms dealt with as the course progresses are indirect and tag questions, several future forms, modal verbs expressing possibility, and **will** and **would** to express habit.

Apart from the verb forms, the grammatical syllabus consists of gerunds and infinitives, quantifiers, relative clauses, participle clauses, intensifying verbs, and articles. In general, the grammatical input becomes increasingly difficult as the course progresses – a move from easy to more difficult level – which is one of the characteristics of finely tuned input.

Regarding vocabulary, the textbook encourages the use of any effective vocabulary strategies. Throughout the course, the use of dictionaries is encouraged, and several of the sub-skills of effective dictionary use are practiced. For example: finding compound nouns; finding the correct definition in multiple entries; pronouncing words from the phonetic script and the stress marks; guessing the meaning of a word from the example contained in the entry when the definition is not understood; and deducing the spelling of a word that has been heard but not seen – which are

all testifying to the fact that the input of the textbook is finely tuned.

Regarding listening and reading, great attention has been attached to including a wide variety of text-types on topics that appeal to educated young adults, which is diametrically opposed to the characteristics of the roughly tuned input. In both reading and listening activities, students are encouraged to predict the content and then to decide what they want to learn from the text mainly by placing emphasis on pre-comprehension tasks, ensuring that not a single student is left in a maze. Especially, the two sections in the textbook – **Notes on the language input** and **Notes on the unit** – clear away all the confusion the learners might experience by providing an analysis of the target language and step-by-step instruction on all the activities.

Even in treating the productive activities like speaking and writing tasks, students are led to do the intended activities only after some sort of introduction. For example, “**The Discussion Point**” at the beginning of each unit launches the theme of the intended speaking activity prior to the Speaking activity. Similarly, in Writing section, one aspect (or sub-skill) of the writing skill is highlighted and practised in each unit before students are given extended writing. To wind up the discussion on whether the Headway Upper-Intermediate is finely tuned or roughly tuned, the facts I have pointed out so far should be good enough to say that it is a textbook with a lot of finely-tuned input.

One more question left to discuss is whether the output activities are for practice or communication. I think it will be appropriate to include here a few lines of

the textbook writers' claim that can be seen at the back cover of the textbook. ***Headway** is a multi-level course for adults and young adults who want to use English both accurately and fluently. Grammar and vocabulary are taught and explained thoroughly, and all four language skills are developed systematically. The **Headway** series combines traditional methods of language teaching and more recent communicative approaches.* Their claim, no doubt, bears credibility. As discussed in the previous paragraph, both the writing and the speaking activities never ask the students to talk or to write about something impromptu. Necessary preparations are always made by giving the learners whatever input or practice that is felt helpful. This means the answer to the last question (whether the output activities are for practice or communication) cannot be a downright 'Yes' or 'No'. There are many activities to give the students practice for the required language forms and there are also activities that encourage them to talk freely. So I think I may not be mistaken if I say that the textbook provides ample opportunities to practise the language forms (for practice) and also to use them in a natural setting (for communication).

## CONCLUSION

Now I have examined an English textbook entitled **Headway Upper-Intermediate Student's Book** and identified the activities it suggests. I have also discussed these activities to decide whether the input is roughly- or finely tuned, and to answer the question of whether the output

activities are for practice or communication. However, it is common knowledge that no textbook can be relied on as a panacea. Though helpful to a certain degree, a textbook alone may not be able to transform a learner into a fully competent user of a language. To become such one, students should be encouraged to practise their English outside of the class as much as possible. Arguably, one of the easiest, cheapest, and most convenient ways of practicing English is reading. Aided with such good textbooks as Headway Upper-Intermediate and supplemented by extensive reading and other available exposures to the target language, language acquisition may be just a matter of time for any learners.

## REFERENCES

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