Book Review

BUSINESS RESULT: ADVANCED - STUDENT'S BOOK, SECOND EDITION - REVIEW AND CRITICAL EVALUATION

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Abstract. *The article reviews and critically evaluates the second edition of Business Result: Advanced – Student's Book by Kate Baade, Christopher Holloway, John Hughes, Jim Scrivener and Rebecca Turner. After a brief overview of the structure of the coursebook, the article evaluates the coursebook and identifies its strengths and weaknesses, taking into consideration characteristics such as suitability of topics to the interests of target learners, suitability of teaching approach to the needs of target learners, recycling and revision of material, coverage of all four language skills, use of authentic materials (texts and audio), use of authentic tasks and flexibility of use. The article concludes with a recommendation for course instructors on the use of this coursebook.*

Key words: *coursebook evaluation, review, communicative language teaching approach, authentic tasks, Business English, Business Result: Advanced*

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's business environment efficient communication is key to success. The high level of internationalization of the business world fuels an increasing demand for business practitioners who can communicate with their multinational partners effectively. The communicative language teaching approach is one that seems to achieve this aim in the most straightforward manner.

The *Business Result* coursebook series employs the communicative language teaching approach. The coursebook series aims to offer "business students and professionals more communication and language practice than ever before, helping students develop relevant business English they can use immediately in the workplace" (OUP). The series consists of six levels. This article will review the second edition (2018) of the last book of the series: *Business Result: Advanced – Student's Book* written by Kate Baade, Christopher Holloway, John Hughes, Jim Scrivener and Rebecca Turner.

2. COURSEBOOK STRUCTURE OVERVIEW

Business Result: Advanced – Student's Book opens to a two-page Contents section. Here the units and their subsections are listed in detail along with their expected learning outcomes. This makes it easier for students and teachers to navigate the coursebook and to select the appropriate units to cater for students' needs. The Contents pages are then followed by an Introduction which spells out which language component or skill each subsection helps develop.

Business Result: Advanced – Student's Book is made up of 12 units. The units help students develop and practice the four skills of learning a new language. The units are divided into 5 subsections, each concerned with acquiring a different language component or skill. The structure of the units is consistent and easy to follow.

The first section, "Working with words," is concerned with building vocabulary and eliciting language connected to the central theme. This is done through a short introduction and questions designed to initiate a discussion on the central theme ("Starting point"). This is then followed by the introduction of new vocabulary through a reading exercise connected to the theme of the unit. Afterwards, the relevant vocabulary is identified and students are encouraged to put the new vocabulary into use through speaking and listening exercises.

The second section titled "Business communication" helps improve a communication skill that could be useful in business situations such as meetings, presentations, socializing and phone calls. The third section, "Language at work," introduces a grammar item through a brief explanation and then provides exercises to practice the grammar item in question. Section 4, "Practically speaking" develops students' communication skills through teaching them specific language and phrases to be used in real-life business situations. The target language is generally introduced through listening exercises where students can get a taste of how these phrases are used in the context of a dialogue. After identifying the phrases and understanding their meaning, students are provided with opportunities to work with a partner and use the target language in speaking exercises themselves.

"Talking point" is the final section in every unit and it is aimed at developing speaking skills and using the acquired vocabulary through participating in a longer discussion on a real-life situation. "Talking point" is replaced by "Viewpoint" in every third unit. "Viewpoints" are longer video lessons related to the theme of the unit they are part of. They contain authentic interviews with academics, business experts and students from the Saïd Business School, University of Oxford.

At the end of the book, students can find additional material for further practice and reference. The first of these is "Practice file," which contains additional exercises for the "Working with words," "Business communication" and "Language at work" sections. Inside the units, clear directions lead teachers and learners to these extra exercises. The next section is "Grammar reference" which provides explanations of grammar items covered in the units, together with additional examples for their use. The third reference section is "Useful phrases" where key phrases from each unit are listed. This section is followed by "Communication activates" which provide input for scenarios for pair- or group-work. The final section of the book is "Audio scripts" where students can find the scripts for all listening tasks. The book does not contain a glossary, although one can be found on OUP's website for the book.

3. EVALUATION

In evaluating *Business Result: Advanced – Student's Book*, I will rely partially on Cunningsworth's (1995) criteria for evaluating coursebooks. Cummingworth's criteria was originally written for teachers looking for an appropriate coursebook for a specific learning/teaching situation, therefore some of the criteria will not be useful for the purposes of this article. The list, however, is quite detailed and helps to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a coursebook.

When evaluating a coursebook it is important to decide if the coursebook satisfies the needs of the target learner. *Business Result: Advanced – Student's Book* is aimed at business students or business professionals. The topics are mainly connected to management and HR issues (e.g., cross-cultural experiences, career paths, corporate culture, handling risk, teamwork, leadership styles, etc.) but there are units on persuasion and marketing, or on ethical issues such as corporate social responsibility or ethical consumerism as well. These are topics that can be of interest for the target group.

The design of the coursebook is student centred: the organization of units and subsections is clear and logical, the use of colours helps students find their way in the coursebook. There are many images in the units, but their role is mainly decorative instead of informative. There are a lot of stock photos of businessmen and women in typical business situations (meetings, negotiations, etc.), while in some other cases pictures are allegorical representations of unit themes (flying kites for the theme of Careers, paragliding for the theme of Risk, etc.). These do not serve the purpose of adding information or really creating interest. The authors could have used the images in a more purposeful way to gain a bigger benefit from their use. In some places graphs or charts could have been included to introduce new information and elicit vocabulary.

The coursebook is targeted at learners with a good knowledge of English whose main aim is to improve their ability to communicate in a business setting. This aim is well-served by the communicative language teaching approach the book follows. Out of the four language skills, two are extensively covered, while two could use more input. There is ample listening input in the form of high-quality listening exercises. Speaking skills are also extensively developed: each unit has dedicated subsections to develop natural and fluent speaking skills. Additionally, most tasks are done in pairs or groups which gives a lot of opportunities for students to practice this skill. This feature, on the other hand, makes this Student's book unsuitable for independent learners.

While learners' reading skills are developed through authentic texts included in the units, the reading comprehension exercises are not on the level of advanced students. More demanding reading comprehension exercises along with tasks that require learners to identify text structure would be a good addition to the book.

Another weakness of the coursebook is in its approach to developing learners' writing skills. When it comes to writing, learners are mainly required to fill in gaps in texts or, in some cases, to write one or two sentences to fill in tables. All-in-all, the coursebook does not provide enough opportunity for learners to practice their writing skills, especially when it comes to writing longer structured texts. In my view, this is a shortcoming as business professionals with advanced English would certainly benefit from practising how to write graph descriptions, memos, emails or reports, and other more demanding texts in English.

One of the strengths of the coursebook is the fact that it succeeds in creating authentic situations in which learners can use business English. One of the ways this is achieved is

through the coursebook's use of authentic reading materials. All reading tasks are taken from various websites, magazines or newspapers.

Authentic materials in language teaching are materials designed for native speakers of the target language, i.e., not materials designed with language learners in mind (Peacock, 1997). This type of material is created "to fulfill some social purpose in the language community" (Little, Devitt & Singleton, 1989, cited in Peacock, 1997, p. 146), therefore the language is 'real' and "it provides exposure to real language and its use in its own community" (Kilickaya, 2004). Very importantly for learners of LSP, such texts contain relevant and up-to-date vocabulary. Additionally, authentic materials allow students to develop strategies in the comprehension of written or spoken language, e.g., that comprehension does not necessarily require understanding every single word in a text or in a speech (Kiss Kulenović, 2015). This will prepare students for real-life business situations.

Using authentic listening materials is also important: students should be exposed to idiomatic expressions and authentic speech patterns. Specific accents (international or native) can make understanding a speaker harder just like background noise or music; all of these 'difficulties' can be experienced in real-life situations. While the listening tracks in *Business Result: Advanced – Students' Book* contain a wide variety of accents (native and non-native), the tracks are not authentic, i.e., they were specifically created for the coursebook and are voiced by actors. The four "Viewpoint" sections in the coursebook, however, contain interviews with leading academics, business experts and course participants from the Saïd Business School, University of Oxford. Although they have been created for the purposes of the coursebook and therefore do not completely satisfy the definition of authentic language, they come quite close to being authentic listening tasks.

Another way in which authentic language use is encouraged is the case study-type tasks included in the coursebook[1]. A case study is a "presentation of a specific situation taken from professional or everyday life, which is displayed through specific facts, attitudes and opinions, on the basis of which a decision has to be taken" (Kaiser, quoted in Basta 2017, 555). Case studies create real-life situations and problems for students to solve. In this way, they contribute to a coursebook's and, ultimately, a course's authenticity in a number of ways: they usually use authentic texts, they reference authentic, real-life situations and problems, and finally, they elicit an authentic response from the learners themselves (Basta, 2017). The information necessary for learners to successfully participate in these case studies is complete and is readily available in the coursebook.

Coursebooks should also fit the needs of teachers who use them in their classes. *Business Result: Advanced – Students' Book* is instructor-friendly, i.e., it provides sufficient direction for instructors to make class planning easier. The coursebook is designed for flexible use, which means that subsequent units are not connected or graded in terms of difficulty, although reading passages tend to get longer as the book progresses.

Further flexibility is afforded by the way individual units are structured. If we look at the organization of individual units, it becomes clear that the coursebook can be truly fine-tuned to specific needs. This is because within units subsections are not all interconnected:

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[1] The first edition of Business Result: Advanced used to have a section called "Case Study" in each unit. This was changed into "Talking points" / "Viewpoints" in the second edition, but still, the second edition has several tasks that could be considered case studies. The following units include such tasks: Unit 4: Talking point; Unit 5: Business communication; Unit 6: Viewpoint 2; Unit 7: Talking point; Unit 8: Working with words; Unit 9: Business communication, Viewpoint 3; Unit 11: Business communication, Talking point.

"Working with words" and "Talking points/Viewpoints" are connected as they introduce and elicit the vocabulary connected to the theme of the unit. "Business communication" and "Language at work" are also linked to each other as they both utilize the same listening exercises. They, however, are not strongly connected to the "Working with words" and "Talking points/Viewpoints" subsections. "Practically speaking" can be used as stand-alone exercises to practice fluency in specific business situations. While this modularity can be considered an advantage of the coursebook, it can also be seen as a disadvantage. The vocabulary introduced in the first part of a unit could be further used in different contexts if it was also included in more subsections of the same unit.

Due to the fact that the coursebook was designed for flexible use, material from one unit is not routinely recycled in subsequent units. The coursebook also does not provide tests or individual tasks for revision, although other parts of the coursebook package (*Workbook*, online resources on OUP's website) do have additional tasks and resources available.

4. CONCLUSION

The ESP coursebook market is inundated with coursebooks, therefore, Business English teachers may find it hard to select the book that best suits their own and their students' needs. Books that seem attractive and useful at first sight might turn out to be a bad match for some learners or classes. A critical evaluation of a potential coursebook can help decide if a coursebook will work for a teacher and a group of learners or not.

Business Result: Advanced – Student's Book's main focus is on developing spoken language skills so that learners can become confident and fluent communicators in a business environment. The book's use of authentic materials and case studies supports this aim as well. Student-centred in its design and approach, it is an attractive and enjoyable coursebook for the target learners. The modular structure of the book makes it easy for teachers to use it flexibly and adapt it to the needs of their students. Aside from the coursebook's many benefits, some shortcomings can also be identified. Material between units is not recycled and revised enough, which is a missed opportunity for practising key vocabulary and grammar. There is some imbalance in the coursebook's featuring the four language skills: speaking and listening skills are the most extensively developed, reading skills are developed but not necessarily on the advanced level, while writing skills are somewhat neglected in the Student's book.

Finally, the most important question to answer is: Does the coursebook satisfy the needs of advanced learners and instructors? This coursebook can be a valuable resource for advanced learners of Business English in a classroom setting. Instructors, however, should be aware of its few flaws to appropriately supplement it with material necessary to fully satisfy the needs of their learners.

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