

## English in Action

- Marcelle Meyer and Robert Sugg. *Action English*. London: Evans Brothers Ltd., 1979. 'Pupils' Book', 56pp., Paperback £1.60; 'Workbook I'. Paperback £1.15; 'Teachers' Book I', 89pp., Paperback £1.70.
- Michael Knight and Ronald Ridout eds. *Evans Graded Verse*. London: Evans Brothers Ltd., 1978. 4, 46pp., Paperback 75p; 5, 46pp., Paperback £1.10; 'Teachers' Guide', 4-5, 36pp., Paperback.
- Roger Hargreaves and Mark Fletcher. *Making Polite Noises*. London: Evans Brothers Ltd., 1979. 62pp., Paperback
- Kate Schrago-Lorden. *English for Hotel Staff*. London: Evans Brothers Ltd., 1979. viii + 180pp. Paperback £2.95.
- Nicolas Ferguson and Máire O'Reilly. *English for International Banking*. London: Evans Brothers Ltd., 1979. vi + 104pp. Paperback £1.95.
- Marguerite Poland. *The Mantis and the Moon: Stories for the Children of Africa*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1979. 120pp. Paperback R3.95.
- Mboma Dladla and Kathy Bond. *The Story of Mboma*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1979. 46pp. Paperback R1.00.

There is a minor tendency for South Africans to believe that their language needs, as they pertain to English, differ from those of Americans and the British. While there exists some foundation for this belief - *vide* the two recent dictionaries of English usage in

Southern Africa - it is a mistake to exaggerate differences of dialect and register, or to conclude that there is no unified English-speaking language community.

The divergence of function and practice between 'British English' and 'South African English', for example, is not so marked as to exclude the use of British-inspired handbooks in South African schools. Difficulties could arise if one of these books were to represent a purely regional idiom, which might preclude easy assimilation of its material by, say, the rural language learner. What is needed in language and grammar books exported to this country is primarily a levelling of the colloquial standard, in order to reach as wide a range of user as is commensurate with the contexts. Books written and published in Africa need to satisfy the accepted process of linguistic assimilation, while accommodating many personal and social variables occasioned by an astonishing admixture of race, tribe, colour, creed and position.

All the Evans books under consideration comply with the criterion for imported works. The *Action English* series is admirably suited for Grade 2 first-language learners, and for second- and third-language learners in either Standards 1 or 2. Although the compilers insist that *Action English* 'is a course in three stages for young children who are beginning to study English as a foreign language' (p. 1), the presentation and development of structures is of such a nature that the course is eminently suited to the early school years of the first-language learner. New structures are presented either through beautifully (and always appositely) illustrated dialogues or by 'a demonstration using familiar objects'. The stages that follow are: concentrated oral practice, oral and written composition, reading and writing practice (co-ordinated with illustrations) as well as dialogues and listening practice. The result is a course of three books (the pupils' introduction to new structures, a workbook for practising structures learnt, and the teacher's book) finely attuned to both the needs and capacities of young learners.

*Evans Graded Verse* is somewhat similar in approach and, for this reason, has the same potential for the young learner:

*Evans Graded Verse consists of five books of poems carefully chosen according to their linguistic difficulty. This Teacher's Guide covers the last two. The books are accompanied by cassettes on which all the poems are recorded.*

A variety of speakers was used for this purpose in order to present students with a wide range of spoken English. Where the poems have been set to music, they are first spoken and then sung to the accompaniment of a guitar.

(p. 2)

An added bonus is that the poems of Book 4 match - structurally speaking - the grading of Ridout's *Modern English Structures* (teachers who have kept up with developments will know that this is published by Macmillan Education). There is, furthermore, a detailed enumeration of these structural items in the *Evans Graded Reading Teacher's Guide*. A vital feature of the series is the general consolidation of language learning: the editors give as example 'the short poem "The Human race" [p. 9 of Book 4]... where "unfulfilled wishes" (wish + the past tense) are practised five times in the space of six lines'. Because the context of this consolidation is in *every* instance proper and natural, pupils will be able to discover for themselves the rules of appropriateness.

Examples just as pertinent can be found in three further Evans books: these are *Making Polite Noises*, *English for International Banking* and *English for Hotel Staff*. The unifying factor, here, is the cohesive force exerted on social functions. I might add in this respect that the three books are aimed at the adult, or nearly adult user. In a layout of units that is commendably uniform in approach, Hargreaves and partner present dialogues, scenarios and 'situations' as a base for discussion. Maire O'Reilly and Kate Schrago-Lorden have obviously analysed the vocabulary and structures pertaining to the banking and hotel businesses, and then set out to teach consultation techniques and language. They succeed admirably, as do the others in this finely-crafted Evans 'English library'; Departments of Education are strongly recommended to consider these works as a replacement for the tired and jaded books that supplement the English course in so many of our schools.

The system of local option administered through the library committees of the various Education Departments should ensure that both books from the Ravan stable are acquired in sufficient number to introduce children to two excellent examples of current writing in South Africa. *Mboma* will also serve as a supplementary reader in the very junior classes. The African context of this first book in the newly-created 'Msinga Series' should ensure considerable popularity among many schoolteachers of both urban and rural origin, although it is unfortunate that they do not swing a big enough stick in the policy coun-

cils of the nation always to impose their preferences. *The Mountain and the Moon* shows another important innovation in that a book designed specifically 'for the children of Africa' is just this: the 'thyme and harebells', the elves, fairies and denizens of the tiny world are undeniably African; they are not their English counterparts transposed - always unconvincingly - to the alien veld. The book is excellently written, uses impeccable English with a relevant vocabulary and is delightfully illustrated. I cannot commend it strongly enough, particularly as it is one of the very few South African-inspired works to accommodate all the variables found in this country. This is, ultimately, the factor that should distinguish 'indigenous' books from those exported from other countries.

A.D.A.