

READING ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES

Cecilia Ortiz
Michael Scott

Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey,
1978

READ IN ENGLISH

Michael Scott

Longman Group Limited
1981 ("Pre-edición")

In the mid-seventies a group of English teachers at the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM) began a new research project. ESP was opening up challenging fields of inquiry to language professionals, and its Monterrey pioneers were quick to take interest. Under the direction of English Coordinator Cecilia Ortiz, and with the assistance of British Council linguist, Michael Scott, a solid needs analysis was carried out and a reading comprehension program was developed. The first pilot teaching materials, published in 1978, were called Reading English for Academic Purposes (REAP). They have been under continual study and revision ever since.

Ortiz, an ITESM graduate, veteran English teacher, and lifelong resident of Monterrey had the necessary academic qualifications, the familiarity with the region and its people, and the dedication to work full time on the REAP project. Scott, as an employee of the British government, shuttled back and forth between the Autonomous University of Nuevo León and ITESM, managing to spend only a couple of days a week helping out on REAP. Nevertheless, in what has turned out to be a regrettable gesture of goodwill and wrong-track diplomacy, the Institute listed Scott as second author, explaining:

Esta edición fue preparada con la colaboración del Prof. Michael Scott, M. A. quién fue asignado por el Consejo Británico como maestro visitante en el ITESM.

Standard copyright conventions also required:

Derechos reservados por el INSTITUTO TECNOLÓGICO
Y DE ESTUDIOS SUPERIORES DE MONTERREY.

Prohibida la reproducción total o parcial sin autorización
del ITESM.

REAP is a bold and highly creative, if unpolished, book. It is of historic importance to Mexican second language teaching. When the project was designed, "learner-centered" research was not yet viewed as crucial to ESL; nor was the idea of applied linguistics as a "problem-solving activity" as widely accepted as it is today. Among those leading the way in Latin America was the ITESM group, putting the philosophy ethics and scientific method of ESP into practice.

Possibly the most outstanding contribution of the ESP school to second language learning will prove to be its emphasis on needs analysis. The philosophical groundrules are that learning should be realistic, relevant and realizable - a re-formulation of the old three r's. The ethical implications, at least as viewed by humanistically oriented linguists like Pit Corder and Ron Mackay, are that the course designer is responsible for decentralizing and personalizing second language learning and for balancing individual and societal needs and goals. Criterion-based and dependent on formative evaluations and predictive validity, ESP research is not supposed to come up with standardized finished products, mass-produced for mass consumption. On the contrary, it is an ever-changing, ongoing, long-range experiment - subject to frequent modification based on feedback, follow-up studies and the emergence of new needs. In countries like Mexico, ESP can, as it has at UNAM and UAM Xochimilco for example, constitute an academic community's participation in national language planning and scientific and educational development strategies. Local Mexican experts, by carefully studying their student populations, see to it that individuals are not obliged to submit to a master plan rigidly limited to pre-fabricated priorities, but rather that national objectives grow out of and respond to local community "learner-centered" programs.

REAP, like Fernando Castañón's READ project for UNAM students, comes in a no-frills, minimally priced edition. Among the innovative features of both these programs is the use of the students' native language. ESL orthodoxy, at the time, had it that Spanish in textbooks was about as taboo as incest, but the ITESM, UAMX and UNAM teams were more concerned with student motivation than with dogma.

Committed to the development of cognitive rather than behavioristic responses, Ortiz pulls no punches, explaining in a direct ("Tú a Tú") Spanish, what she is up to with language learning strategies. She assumes that university-level students need not follow baby-talk instructions in English or respond automatically to drilled-in stimuli. Instead, they are encouraged to solve problems, to think critically, to formulate and test hypotheses just as they do in all their other courses, if they expect to pass.

El lector no solo recibe las ideas del autor, sino además las compara y contrasta con sus propias ideas y las de los demás. (pp 1-2).

Self-access and self-directed learning are stressed:

...puedas organizar y auto-regular tu aprendizaje
 ...Además se te da la libertad (emphasis added)
 de estudiar a las horas convenientes para ti sin
 necesidad de asistir regularmente a clases.
 (Third Edition, p. 4).

REAP contains references to ITESM internal grading procedures that of course only make sense in Monterrey. They would surely be incomprehensible to a Bolivian student and seem exotic to a London editor. But REAP, unlike Read in English, was not designed to be sold in Bolivia or edited in London.

REAP is a bulky text, and a commercial publisher would immediately insist on trimming it down to fit snugly into a school year's daily grind. The bulkiness and unevenness, however, are intentional, allowing students more freedom of movement and allowing ITESM researchers the opportunity to test-run their ideas, techniques and materials. None of us know enough about second language acquisition yet to condense everything-you-always-wanted-to-know about reading comprehension into a miniaturized, optimally cost-efficient semester dose. To attempt a commercially viable streamlining is to take unnecessary and undesirable risks: to trim off vital organs with the fat and to suppress essential research prematurely. Read in English by Michael Scott seems to be just such a commercial streamlining of REAP with Ortiz' and ITESM's names omitted.

Plagiarism is, of course, a serious charge, and it is beyond the scope of this review to adjudicate infringements of copyright law. Nevertheless, it certainly appears that Read in English is more than

a parody of REAP. It is a clumsily pirated version. When Scott's British Council mission was accomplished, he took the money and ran (apparently to Brazil). Was he off to enlighten the deprived, underdeveloped language teachers of yet another nation (coincidentally, the second biggest market in our hospitably illiterate Latin America)? He makes a buck, but disingenuously misses the ESP point of REAP entirely; sort of like stealing Macbeth, simplifying the language, cutting the long speeches, and turning it into a soap opera.

Although it is not my intention to deny presumption of innocence, try this, for what legal experts call, "probable cause".

REAP contends that there are:

Tres claves para obtener una comprensión general:
a) semejanzas inglés/español; b) palabras frecuentes;
c) claves tipográficas. (p.4).

According to Scott, three years later:

... Las tres claves ofrecidas para la comprensión general (son)... a) palabras que se repiten; b) palabras parecidas al español; c) indicaciones tipográficas. (p.3).

If you have not caught on yet, here is another among the myriad examples of minimal paraphrasing.

(ITESM): En el curso REAP no pretendemos dedicar mucho tiempo a la gramática consciente del inglés. Una razón es que la gramática inglesa es bastante parecida a la del español. (p. 21).

(Longman): No vamos a detenernos en muchos detalles gramaticales porque la gramática (organización) del inglés es muy parecida a la del español. (p. 42).

I have quoted the 1978 ITESM copyright. Longman (1981) states:

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

The exaggerated tone suggests our modern day Lady Macbeth

also protests too much. Quick to declare, "We are grateful to the following for permission to reproduce copyright material..." over twenty sources are acknowledged, including Reader's Digest, Sears Roebuck, Random House and Oxford. Conspicuously absent, however, are Ortiz and ITESM.

Mr Scott's book does have one obvious virtue. It is prettier than Ms Ortiz'. Longman has given REAP a glossy red cover, and cut its hefty 325 pages to a slender 126.

Scott edits out all that subjective nonsense about self-directed learning and "liberty". Might not go over big with South American Junta censors. And forget about learner-centered needs analysis for Monterrey college students. If carrying out a needs analysis with Mexican agronomy students in mind to apply to high schoolers in Bolivia or Buenos Aires (or wherever they are buying) sounds crazy, Mr Scott is crazy like a fox. If you thought the whole idea of ESP was making things specific and discovering needs rather than making them up, try again. Why bother with lengthy and cumbersome questionnaires like the ones Ron Mackay applied at the UNAM, when you can appropriate what is already there and market it for a whole continent? Who wants primitive, handmade, Mexican folk art for farmers, when you can have speedy assembly line production - uniform, unisex, one-size-fits-all, for Mom, Dad and the kids as well?

Instead of Ortiz' straight talk to ITESM students, we get banal jacket-blurb promises worthy of a "Learn French While You Sleep" ad.

"By the end of the book he (the student) is able to tackle even a complete academic article with confidence".

Or double his exported dollars back if not fully satisfied?
At tomorrow's rate of currency exchange?

One might think Scott would be declared persona non grata in this country, but on the contrary, he is frequently invited back to Mexico to sell his product.

Marx warned that history repeats itself; the first time as tragedy, the second as farce. When Western civilization "discovered" America, Mexico inaugurated its language planning policy with the Malinche. The nation's first applied linguist became a legendary, negative stereotype by cooperating with foreign experts

who would altruistically develop her country. The result was that the Spaniards took the gold and the land, and in return began a long-term Bible reading comprehension program. Almost five hundred years later, there are lots of bilingual Bibles, along with 8.5 million Mexicans who still cannot read, and another applied linguist gets stuck playing a reluctant and overqualified Malinche in a 20th Century farce sponsored by a transnational conglomerate. But might not history cease to be farsical if we stopped being passive, uncritical readers of it? We could begin by raising some tough questions.

Although I cannot bring myself to believe that either Longman or the British Council really knew what was going on, ignorance of the facts hardly absolves them of responsibility. One might even consider their ignorance negligent. Scott had previously been censured by Monterrey educational authorities for misuse of intellectual property. In 1979 the Second Latin American Conference on ESP was held in Morelos, and Ortiz and Scott presented a detailed and accurate account of the REAP project. Why then did Longman, an eminently respectable publisher, as far as I know, fail to check Scott's authorship claims more carefully? Has the British Council dismissed Scott for violating the terms of his contract by pursuing private business interests while he was supposed to be working for his government and for Mexico? Why has ITESM not protested energetically? The silence is disturbing.

David Howard

An accusation of plagiarism (stealing the work of another) is a very serious charge against a materials producer. Mr Howard makes it against me. I repudiate it categorically. It is untrue and damaging, as is his story that I was censured in some unspecified way "by Monterrey educational authorities".

Mr Howard is full of praise for ITESM's ESP project (to which I contributed actively from 1977 to 1980), but he is most unhappy with "Read in English" which incorporates a similar ESP methodology.

The similarities in methodology between REAP and "Read in English" reflects the fact that I was instrumental in writing them both. The "3 claves" idea comes in both books because it is a good idea and works in ESP, building up coping strategies (in fact in "Read in English" it grew to 4 "claves") and it was actually my idea in REAP. I wrote most of the REAP book.

This was in accordance with a simple distribution of labour agreed between Cecilia Ortiz and myself from the very start - I was to write the Units, she would do the tests and course organization in terms of "Plan SIP" (ITESM's version of the Keller personalized system of instructions). This division of labour was flexible; we discussed things and shared teaching and so on, but suffice it to say that Mr Howard's claim is essentially that I have been copying (plagiarising?) my own work!

Just two further comments, both with reference to Cecilia Ortiz. I should like to record here my warm appreciation of Cecilia as a colleague who was always very committed, effective and supportive of my and our students in ITESM. Secondly, Cecilia herself knew of my plans to publish "Read in English" from about Spring 1979 when the possibility first arose. She helped to correct many of the mistakes or poor phrasing in Spanish in "Read in English" and kept abreast of the project right up to our last meeting at the last Mextesol Convention in Guadalajara in 1981.

Mr Howard might have used the occasion of this review of REAP and "Read in English" to contribute usefully to the real issues in the current ESP debate.

Mike Scott