English for Tourism: An Analysis of Current Textbooks

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Abstract: As English increasingly becomes the lingua franca of the hospitality industry, English language education grows in importance within the hospitality curriculum. While many travel and tourism education programs are taught in English and most include supplementary English language courses, still a great deal is to be gained by integrating advances in language curriculum design with the modern hospitality curriculum. This paper is an attempt to demonstrate the rich educational resources recently made available and to suggest an analytical method whereby these resources can profitably be used by educators. A survey of twenty textbooks recently published for hospitality and tourism education found that teachers need to do a careful needs analysis when choosing from the wide variety of texts available; that niche texts are available for specific language goals such as reading; and that the latest texts on the highest level are useful not only for language study, but

Introduction

English is the international language of the tourism industry. English has become the most common second language in the world and this trend is accelerating. In my international travel experience the most commonly understood word is “OK” and the most commonly utilized phrase is “no problem.” It is no accident that these are words used to put a guest at ease. In remote marketplaces from the mountains of Thailand to the rainforests of Zimbabwe a traveler can find earnest salespersons who are quick to say: “You my friend!”, “I give you special price!” and “At that price I make no profit!”

Depending on how you add it up, the tourism industry is the largest in the world. For this paper I will consider the tourism industry to include the travel, lodging, sightseeing and restaurant industries. This also includes the many sub-industries caring for the legions of “accidental tourists”: business travelers.

The growth in importance of the tourism industry and a recognition of its uniqueness have led to a concurrent growth in educational programs teaching aspects of the tourism industry—from the most practical training institutes to university programs at the highest level of research and analysis. The need for language training within these programs has grown as well. Just a few years ago, textbook choices were limited to a few dry special purposes texts featuring typical dialogues in hotels or restaurants. Now the available textbooks cover the spectrum of language abilities and are targeted at many of the varied niches of the industry, serving a student body that ranges from prospective

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industry employees, to students of the tourism industry, to industry managers and government planners, and on to the tourists themselves. A few quick phone calls to the major textbook suppliers in Tokyo turned up over twenty different texts. Now the problem is not finding a good textbook, it is choosing from the many one that matches the abilities, needs, interests, and diversity of the students who will use it.

To choose the right textbook, the teacher needs to

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<th>Table 1  Comparison of the five books reviewed</th>
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<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
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<td>International Hotel English: Communicating With the International Traveller</td>
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<td>Going International: English for Tourism</td>
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<td>Welcome! English for the Travel and Tourism Industry</td>
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<td>Have a Good Trip! English for International Travel</td>
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<td>Workplace English: Travel File</td>
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analyze learner abilities and needs; to make teaching choices on approach, syllabus type, and skills to be taught; and to establish preferences for the style and organization of the teaching materials (See Table 1). For the needs analysis, level should first be considered.

The easiest textbook reviewed here, Travel File, is very basic, but would still be too difficult for an absolute beginner. The highest level text, Going International, has topical discussion sections which would be useful for even native English speaking students of the

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<th>Treatment of Grammar</th>
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<td>systematically in terms occurring in e units, specific units are treated in e language reference section</td>
<td>mainly listening and speaking with some supplemental reading and writing for introducing elements and practicing</td>
<td>controlled and open-ended communicative tasks for hotel guest/employee interaction</td>
<td>17 unit with four parts each: 1) introduce vocabulary and patterns 2) develop the topic 3) follow-up with open-ended tasks 4) language reference</td>
<td>audio cassette, transcripts, glossary of hotel terms in French, Spanish Italian, German, and Greek</td>
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<td>systematic syllabus produces key grammar and functional language in language focus section of each unit</td>
<td>speaking, listening, and reading for communication in travel agency, tour operation, transport, guiding, and marketing</td>
<td>communicative skills are introduced from authentic sources and developed through practical output tasks</td>
<td>12 three-part units, each with some combination of listening, reading, speaking, language focus, and output tasks</td>
<td>vocabulary list at end of each unit, teacher's resource book, workbook, cassette, tapescripts</td>
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<td>includes some few grammar review exercises, but grammar addressed mostly in context of tasks, specifically</td>
<td>listening and speaking for communication with customers in tourism settings, also some reading and writing exercises</td>
<td>realistic and integrated communication tasks for industry problem solving and building fluency</td>
<td>ten thematic areas broken down into 50 nodular lessons on double pages, conveniently allowing teachers to move about</td>
<td>teacher's book, students book, audio cassette or CD</td>
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<td>small &quot;grammar tip&quot; or in each unit gives very brief review of a grammar structure appropriate to the theme of the unit</td>
<td>listening and speaking for finding a place to stay, ordering meals, going sightseeing, renting a car, solving problems, etc</td>
<td>basic pair work, dialogue, read and discuss, listen and decide, and role play</td>
<td>ten topics broken into 6-10 exercises</td>
<td>cassette tape, thorough English to Japanese glossary for each unit</td>
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<td>grammar goals appropriate for each of function/topic units (i.e. one grammar goal for each unit) are listed clearly in the table of contents</td>
<td>listening and speaking for the basic tourism communication functions, with additional work in each unit for business writing and numbers</td>
<td>Each unit includes a warm-up activity, a conversation, a listening activity, group and pair work, additional tasks, business writing, and number practice</td>
<td>18 units arranged according to function/topic: (e.g. asking/giving information, giving directions, telephone routines) with a grammar focus for each unit</td>
<td>student book, class cassette, teacher's manual, &quot;activity files&quot; for split-information tasks</td>
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tourism industry. Another important needs analysis issue is learner roles: are the students planning to work in hotels, restaurants, or the travel business, or are they students of tourism, or even future business persons whose use of tourism English will only be for business and leisure travel? There are books among those reviewed specifically targeted to each of these roles. Indeed one book, *Passport Plus*, is written just for Japanese nationals who expect to show their foreign guests around Japan.

Decisions on teaching choices of approach, syllabus type, and skills to be taught begin with a decision on whether the teacher wants a topic based syllabus or a structural syllabus. The lower level and perhaps more old fashioned books seem to be based on structural syllabi where grammar structures are fitted to a likely situation, like use of the past tense to describe some problem that occurred while traveling. As will be emphasized later, the better books in this category make it clear to the teacher, through the use of a chart-style table of contents, what grammar structures are to be featured in each lesson. The higher level books are often based on topics which range from likely problem areas in guest service up to more philosophical or sociological issues of tourism ethics, such as adverse effects of tourism on traditional societies or natural areas. These books seem to have recent theoretical notions of the value of interaction and productive output at the base of their approach. One intermediate level book from Cambridge, *Welcome!* relies almost exclusively on topical discussion and information gap output activities, using student opinions and judgments to create the substance of the dialogues.

Among these books the teacher also has a wide latitude for preferences on style and organization of the teaching materials. Many have very good teacher manuals and most have cassette tapes. The most recent thinking on listening materials is that they need to be at normal speed, come from realistic or better yet authentic sources, and include a wide variety of accents and inflections. If this is the standard, many are quite good, but the teacher needs to listen and decide which are not, and which are not appropriate for their learners.

Another preference the teacher needs to set is modular or progressive. A book specifically teaching reading skills, *Tourism*, by Neil McBurney, progresses slowly from very simple to quite challenging reading passages and exercises. On the other end of the scale, Cambridge's *Welcome!* is written in fifty modular two-page units, perfect for the harried (and lawbreaking!) teacher who needs to quickly photocopy a facing-page unit onto B4 paper to give their students a quick lesson on a necessary topic. Again in the cases of modular texts, it is a great help to teachers who are cognizant of their students' grammar strengths and weaknesses to have a table of contents which points out which grammar structures are to be developed in each unit.

A final style feature that is very important is the glossary. Some of the books which were written or localized for the Japanese market have very good Japanese to English glossaries. Others have glossaries which are tables including keywords in several of the major international languages, a particularly helpful resource for those who will live and work in Europe.

The following is not so much a review of the five main books listed as it is a comparison of the general offerings of the five major publishing companies from which they were selected.

**Textbook Analysis and Review**


Prentice Hall Europe has produced two books in its *English in Tourism* series, *Check In*, for hotel reception staff and *May I Help You*, for restaurant and bar staff. They are basic, topical, and aimed at hotel and
restaurant personnel in Europe who will study on their own. Better is the Prentice Hall International series which includes *International Hotel English*, designed for both hotel staff and international travelers, and its companion volume *International Restaurant English*. *International Hotel English* is preceded in language level by *Be Our Guest*, also written by Donald Adamson. The three are a bit dry, with minimal photos and illustrations, but they are businesslike and thorough, and taken together would give a suitable basis for professional use of English in the hospitality business. All three have extensive tapes with realistic dialogues, and full transcripts in an appendix. Grammar teaching innovations include an appendix of verb forms used, with examples and page references, in *Be Our Guest*, and a chart-style table of contents for *International Hotel English* with a column detailing specifically the grammar structures to be introduced in each unit.

In their *Professional Reading Skills Series*, Prentice Hall also offers a reading book at the advanced intermediate level (*Tourism* by Neil McBurney) which is unique among the books described here in that it focuses just on reading. It is simple, well designed, and in the later, higher level chapters, takes readings from recent authentic sources which are topically relevant enough to be useful for native English speaking students of tourism.


*Going International* is a textually rich, thorough, and well illustrated upper-intermediate course for students training for the general travel and tourism industry, especially for tour guiding, ticketing, reservations, insurance, planning, promotion, and marketing. It would also be valuable for the non-native student or researcher of the tourism industry. Reading texts and taped dialogues come from authentic sources and output tasks show evidence of application of recent ESL theory. *Going International* is the new capstone to Oxford's very thorough series of ESP books on travel and tourism. The series begins at the pre-intermediate level with *Highly Recommended: English for the Hotel and Catering Industry*, and *First Class: English for Tourism*, both in British English, and *At Your Service*, for the general tourism and hospitality industry, in American English. Useful innovations include a good multi-lingual glossary including Japanese in all three books; a brief statement of grammar functions to be covered in the table of contents of *At Your Service* and of *First Class*; and an even better “unit contents chart” in *Highly Recommended* which breaks each of the 28 units into communicative area, situation/function, and grammatical structures to be introduced. This type of chart is an excellent way for the teacher to spot a good modular unit for an area that needs to be addressed. The “unit contents chart” is made even more detailed in the intermediate level of the series, *High Season: English for the Hotel and Tourist Industry*, with each unit broken down into categories for each of the 4 language skills as well as grammar, vocabulary, and profession related tasks. *High Season*, published in 1994, seems to be replacing the long running *Five Star English: for the Hotel and Tourist Industry*, which was first introduced in 1982. By comparison, *High Season* is more colorful, emphasizes more authentic documents and articles, and has a more contemporary topic-based approach.

Another new, stylish, and very colorful set of books from Oxford for the Japanese market is *Passport* and *Passport Plus*. In contrast to most of the books reviewed here, *Passport* teaches American English that a Japanese tourist would be likely to use while traveling abroad, and *Passport Plus* teaches English that a Japanese person would likely use at home while talking with foreign friends or guests. As such the books are for more general conversation and use travel and tourism more as a motivator for international communication. An innovation is an appendix containing detailed background notes in both Japanese
and English for each chapter, allowing the student to set their schemata for the lesson.


Longman’s offerings in English for tourism are few but good. Though not available for this review, the upper-intermediate level English for International Tourism by Miriam Jacob and Peter Strutt appears from its promotional announcement to be similar in level, content, and style to Oxford’s Going International, described above. On the other end of the scale, at the most basic level of any book reviewed, is Workplace English: Travel File, apparently part of a Longman business English series. In both British and American English this book goes through the most basic communication needs of an employee of the travel and hospitality industry. Travel File probably represents the lowest level at which travel English should be taught. Anything simpler would be more appropriately covered by a general beginner’s course. The book is brightly illustrated and attractive. The negative side of lavish illustration, in this book, the Passport series, and others, is that the teacher sometimes finds once a page has been completed that there was very little content on it, sometimes just one very simple dialogue with four or five alternative words to be substituted in. Still this book is well designed, and the treatment of grammar is especially good. Like several of the books already mentioned, this one includes a table of contents in the form of a chart with a column stating the grammar focus of each unit. Again, this is an excellent aid for teachers who are noticing their student’s grammar needs and who want to find a unit to address a specific weakness. Another innovation in this book is inclusion of a number exercise in every unit. This is especially appropriate for an industry in which timetables, exchange rates, numeric codes, and telephone numbers are so important, and also for students like the Japanese, whose system for large numbers is based on multiples of ten thousand where English speakers use thousands.


Macmillan’s texts for travel and tourism seem a bit old fashioned. At least their Macmillan Career English series, including Tourism: Managers, Agents, and the Agency, and Hotel Personnel were published in 1984 and have pictures of international businessmen with wide lapels, wide ties and too much hair. These two are a throwback to the days not so long ago when they and Oxford’s Five Star English were about the only titles available for the field. They may indeed be no longer available in Japan. Newer but not much more interesting is Have a Good Trip! English for International Travel, which seems to have been written in Germany with a European perspective and adapted slightly to the Japanese market. To its credit it includes a fairly detailed English to Japanese Glossary. This feature is shared by Macmillan’s unique and very useful Hotel English in 1000 Words, perhaps the only vocabulary development book for this industry written specifically for Japanese students. This small volume, with varied and effective vocabulary drills, would help Japanese students to learn many new industry-specific words while studying on their own.


Considering that it is a major textbook company, Cambridge offers surprisingly few texts for travel and hospitality. The two they have are unique, though not necessarily the most useful of the books reviewed. Welcome! English for the Travel and Tourism Industry is unusual in that it seems to be based almost completely on the output hypothesis—the idea that students learn by being challenged to communicate. It actively teaches professional practices for the tourism industry through the medium of English, even to the point of having students discuss ethical questions and
good business practices. The authors seem to be setting communicative and professional challenges for the learners and expecting them to learn in the process of overcoming them. Grammar is addressed only incidentally, and there is no evidence for the student which grammar construct might be expected by the author in any of the problem solving situations. If the teacher is a firm believer in the value of allowing students to overcome their communication challenges however possible, then this is the one textbook to choose. Another unique feature of this book is its organization into 50 modular two-page units, allowing the teacher flexibility to choose desired topics.

Another book from Cambridge that is unique among those reviewed here is How to Survive in the U.S.A.: English for Travelers and Newcomers. This book is targeted at tourists or prospective residents of the US and presents in great detail the various things such persons might want to know. The problem with this approach is that unless a student is going to America the many details are not interesting, and that those who are going will find most of these things out easily enough anyway. The book is also at a fairly high level. Students who are capable of understanding its readings and completing its exercises probably have English ability sufficient to communicate very well in America. Still there are a lot of travelers who want to be thoroughly prepared and this book will suit them fine.

Conclusion

The bottom line is that with this many varied texts to choose from, the teacher should not avoid the responsibility of doing a thorough needs analysis before making a decision. I have used texts that have been slightly too easy or slightly too hard and the students know it and respond negatively immediately. Likewise choosing a text designed for front desk managers when most students are only interested in survival English for international tourism is a sure way to de-motivate the class. With demonstration texts or at least sample lessons being available from most if not all publishers, there is really no excuse not to try out several different texts on a particular class.

Although my annotated bibliography grouped books according to publisher, there really seems to be no reason for a tourism English program to choose one of the publishers as a provider of a series of books. With the exception of Prentice Hall’s Be Our Guest leading into International Restaurant English and International Hotel English, the publishers reviewed seem to provide books that stand alone, and could profitably be mixed and matched within a program for specific needs. I recommend that care be taken to find the best book available for the goals and characteristics of each class, regardless of publisher, and that small niche books such as Prentice Hall’s Tourism for reading or MacMillan’s Hotel English in 1000 Words for vocabulary, be considered to supplement the more general texts where necessary.

My final recommendation is that teachers take advantage of the chart-style tables of contents and other clues as to the grammar approach that a textbook takes to give thorough consideration to this most important area. Whether the teacher believes that grammar is best acquired through output and interaction in a book like Cambridge’s Welcome!, or is better learned through the traditional structural syllabus still found even in some of the very contemporary-looking books reviewed, it is the teacher’s responsibility to consider the needs of their students to acquire and improve grammar, the engine of communication.