

# *Beyond Language*

## Book Review by Harry Krasnick

BEYOND LANGUAGE. Deena R. Levine and Mara B. Adelman. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982. pp. 223. \$9.95.

*Beyond Language* is an introduction to American culture designed for use as a supplementary textbook for intermediate and advanced ESL students. It grew out of the authors' experiences teaching foreign students, and is oriented toward post-secondary students studying in the United States; however, it would not be unsuitable for immigrants or refugees.

In terms of content, the book represents a communication-oriented introduction to American social patterns, including: (a) sociolinguistic etiquette and nonverbal communication; (b) basic norms and values in personal relationships, the family, school, and the workplace; (c) time and space patterns; and (d) intercultural communication and cultural adjustment. The chapter on educational attitudes is particularly relevant for college students; some teachers might wish to cover it first. Another topic which might be treated early on is cultural adjustment, which includes not only culture shock but re-entry shock, both of which can be ameliorated to some degree if anticipated and dealt with.

The organization of the chapters reflects the cultural focus of the book. In the first part there is a three-to-five page reading passage containing the basic cultural information, followed by comprehension questions, a vocabulary list, and several types of vocabulary development exercises. The authors have done an excellent job in presenting readable treatments of the areas of culture which constitute the ten chapters in the book. The comprehension questions are also excellent, as are the vocabulary exercises.

The second section of each chapter is devoted to a number of individual and group

exercises where the topic is further explored. Some of these exercises are of the type familiar to ESL teachers (e.g., conversations, discussions, roleplays, and so on). Others are borrowed from intercultural communication training. These include cross-cultural comparisons, values exercises, and critical incidents and case studies. Throughout, the student is asked to think, whether this be reflecting on his/her own culture's practices, or making correct inferences about the meaning of North American behavior. The authors are careful to point out instances where American cultural patterns exhibit significant variability. Also, they rightly warn the instructor against cultural determinism, cautioning that an individual's behavior may be due more to personality than to culture.

There is enough material for one to two semesters, the authors state, depending on the level of the student's fluency and, of course, the amount of time devoted to the text. They recommend having the students pre-read part or all of the first section of each chapter, either as homework or in class as preparation for discussion. The guidelines for the teacher are quite clear and useful. No one will have any difficulty using this book. The book is well laid out, with adequate margins and appropriate graphics.

Since most ESL students are also learning a second culture and engaging in intercultural communication in their daily lives as well, a supplementary textbook such as this one is most welcome. The ESL classroom is the ideal place to assist students in adjusting to their new cultural environment. *Beyond Language* can be recommended as an excellent tool for achieving that end. It is theoretically sound, very well executed, and can be added to any curriculum. It is self-contained and ready-to-use—a true American product!

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