Heinemann Guided Readers

INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

A Guide for Intending Writers

ORIGINAL BOOKS

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Aims and Intentions of the Series as a Whole

The Heinemann Guided Readers is a graded series of supplementary readers at four levels:

(a) Beginner
(b) Elementary
(c) Intermediate (lower)
(d) Intermediate (upper)

The aim is to provide foreign learners of English at varying levels of language learning, with reading practice which is interesting, enjoyable and easy to read. Readers, in other words, which may generate the genuine motivation of a normal book.

We do not feel this has been successfully achieved in other reading series because (1) the application of rigid mechanical structure and vocabulary controls is unsatisfactory; it rejects reading as a skill in its own right and usually ignores the prime obstacles, comprehension -- the load or density of information which is too often compressed in so called "simplified" readers. (2) the choice of subject matter if often too narrow and limited, (3) the approach to simplified readers is too often to produce reading fodder, without paying any serious attention to content interest and writing style. (4) the school book appearance is unsuitable for more adult learners.

The Market for this Series

This is obviously very broad and diverse, and the readership will span different age groups from 11 to 50. Because of the varying markets and age groups, the content and mental age suitability of the readers will vary. However, we are not primarily interested with the younger less sophisticated end of the market.

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The four main areas are:

1) Middle East and Asia - 11-16 yr olds. (depending on level of reader)
2) North Europe - 11-16 yr olds, sophisticated (depending on level of reader)
3) South Europe - young adults, adults.
4) South America - young adults, adults.
5) Africa - top primary/secondary schools.

Original Readers at Intermediate Level

A. Why very few originals have been published at this level and what is wrong with them.

1) The influence of the 'classics'

In the twenties and the thirties most of the people involved in the teaching of English as a foreign language and in the production of text books were greatly influenced by the attitudes to English Literature prevailing at the time. English Literature was considered to consist of a number of 'classics' (mainly nineteenth century and earlier) and these classics were treated as sacrosanct. This exaggerated feeling of respect for the classics influenced the production of reading-texts considered suitable for learners of English as a foreign language in a number of ways:

a) It caused a strong bias in favour of re-writes of accepted literary works rather than originals by unknown authors.

b) It engendered a strong feeling of respect for the style and the language used by nineteenth century authors. This can easily be seen in some of the earlier re-writes of, for example, the novels of Charles Dickens where in one long sentence we get the piling up of clause after clause, which Dickens was so fond of, and other features of language peculiar to his style, but quite unsuitable for foreign learners of English.

c) It dictated absolutely the choice of subject matter in the books. It was never considered necessary to consult the learners to find out what interested them.

This exaggerated feeling of respect for the classics continued to have some influence in the post-war years. It might be claimed that it still has some influence today as far as a) and c) are concerned.

2) Word Counts and Structure Control

In more recent times, however, there has been a strong reaction against 'literary style'. In fact we might say there has been a rejection of the idea of style at all. Various vocabulary frequency counts and language schemes were hailed as the answer to all the problems. Linguistics in the late fifties and in the sixties claimed to be 'scientific' and this led to an over-emphasis on method and procedure both in the teaching of English as a foreign language and in the

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provision of teaching materials. It was believed that, if you stuck rigidly to a scheme for limiting vocabulary and controlling structure, you would produce a reader which foreign students could read.

3) Word Counts and Structure Control are not enough by themselves

The strict limiting of the vocabulary and the rigid control of the structures used in a book were supposed to produce texts which the student could read easily. The results were not successful for a number of reasons:

a) Simple vocabulary and simple structures often conceal the real difficulty which is the density of information that is being presented to the student.

b) The style of the language used in a book is an important feature in deciding whether a book is readable or not and too rigid an application of controls makes a readable style impossible.

c) What a student 'can' read is closely related to what he 'wants' to read.

Let us look more closely at these problems.

4) Density of Information

The differing degree of difficulty between the two sentences:

a) The road to London runs through High Wycombe.

and

b) The history of Scotland begins in legend.

lies only partly in the individual words used in the sentences, and structurally the sentences are the same -- Subject + verb + preposition + complement. But I would maintain that b) is a much more difficult sentence for the foreign student than a) because a) refers to the real world and can easily be explained with the help of a map, but b) refers to the world of the mind and involves abstract concepts which are not so easily explained. b) is much denser in information than a) and is, I claim, much more difficult, but in any language scheme based solely on word counts and structure controls the two sentences would be given almost equal grading.

5) Style

In everyday English when we say that a book is unreadable we generally mean that a book is so badly written that no-one wants to read it. In the language of teachers of English as a foreign language, to say that a book was unreadable would usually mean that the language difficulties in the book were too great for a student. So much emphasis has been placed on this second interpretation that it has been forgotten that the first interpretation of 'unreadable' applies just as much to books specially written for foreign learners as to books written for the native speaker. A writer must

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struggle within the limitations placed on his use of vocabulary and structure to produce a lively style which adds to the interest of the book. This has too often been forgotten and style has been totally sacrificed to theoretical schemes of language control.

6) What the students want to read

We are now beginning to realise that it is not only the student's ability in English which decides whether he finds a particular book difficult or easy: it depends just as much on the strength of the motivation which is driving him to read the book. There are all kinds of motivations, but the value of the internal motivation of a well-written book whose subject matter attracts the student to read it cannot be overestimated. There is obviously a complex relationship between the ability and the desire to read a particular book, but it is fairly clear that within certain limits, the more a student wants to read a particular book, the easier he will find it. Ignoring this principle of giving a student a book that he wants to read has led frequently in the past to giving the student a book which he cannot read.

B. What writers should aim for

1) Subject matter

We are looking for stories which are adult in content and appeal to a wide readership. We presume a minimum age of fifteen for the foreign learner who will read the books. There is a demand among young adults abroad for knowledge of the life of their counterparts in England and stories involving young adults in real life activities are especially welcome. They can be involved in an adventure against a typically modern British background.

The following suggestions are examples of what is possible, but writers will naturally have their own ideas:

tensions in the home between the young adult and his parents ---

growing up in a world where adult standards vary widely on attitudes to sex, alcohol, drugs, money, etc ----

the many possible situations in which the intelligent 'drop out' can still make a living and follow the dictates of his conscience -----

growing up and assuming greater financial and personal responsibilities -----

reacting against a school system which is heavily biased towards the passing of examinations -----

life at university or at work for a young man or woman of about eighteen-----

life in a large industrial city or on a council house estate -----

etc.

We do not, of course, mean these situations to be treated as an essay in sociology. The characters must come alive with some situation; like the ones referred to, in the background and they must attract the sympathy of the foreign student who will read the book. They can come alive in situation involving crime; but we do not want too many detective stories, and crime need not involve detection. For example, being put into a situation where you have to make a choice of committing a crime or refusing to commit a crime is a possibility. Many other everyday situations can be used to produce drama and tension -- getting into debt, making friends with 'doubtful' characters, serious illness involving self or parents or friends, getting involved in a 'racket' at work, etc. Other situations are possible which are more in the realm of fantasy, but on the whole extreme fantasy should be avoided. Whatever is written about should be plausible, even if not possible.

Science fiction is a possibility but it is very difficult to write for foreign learners because we cannot presume the same familiarity with the genre which a native English reader will have. Mystery and ghost stories are also possible.

Non-fiction can be of great interest to foreign learners if the subject matter has a strong appeal. We are going to publish a book on football in 1974 and a book on athletics in 1975. Suggestions for other non-fiction subjects are welcome.

2) Language, style and control of information

a) General

Obviously the restrictions on the kind of language which it is possible to use in a reader for foreign learners of English can seriously limit the style of the author, but we know from experience that it is possible to achieve within the limitations a style of one's own which is suited to the subject matter of the book. Writers should constantly strive to achieve an enjoyable and readable style. Strings of disjointed, simple sentences should be avoided. They are just as difficult to read as a long, involved complex sentence. The author should try to vary his sentence types frequently by the use of simple connections like 'and', 'but', and 'or'. He can also vary his sentences by frequent change of subject avoiding repetition such as: "X did this. Then X .... X ..." etc.

It is important to remember that further simplification can be done at the editorial stage and the editorial policy is strongly biased towards accepting a well-written story even if it is linguistically slightly too difficult.

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b) Structure and Vocabulary Control

Appendix A gives some idea of those structures which can be used freely, those which may be used occasionally, but which should be avoided, and those which should be avoided altogether. The list is only a suggestion and commonsense should be used when referring to it. Commonsense should also be used in the selection of vocabulary. We are working within a vocabulary limit of approximately 1,600 words, but we do not give lists because many writers find these quite inhibiting. Again we ask authors to use commonsense and use simple words and avoid the use of synonyms.

c) Words necessary to the story

Every story demands the use of some words which are essential to the subject matter. These should not be avoided. For example, in a story where the characters ride around on motor cycles it may be necessary to use the words 'pillion passenger'. The word 'pillion' would not be familiar to nearly all foreign learners of English, but it can be used and, if possible, explained within the context of the story itself. Or a difficult word can be related to an accompanying illustration. Or, if necessary, it can be explained in the brief glossary which is given at the back of each reader. On page 5 of Bristol Murder the author uses the technique of John having to repeat and explain "I've run away from home" because the noise of the engine prevents Peter from hearing what John has said. Such devices can be made to appear quite natural and can be very useful.

d) Use of Idiomatic Expressions

Highly idiomatic expressions and very unusual words should be avoided. But the difficulty here is that it is often an idiomatic expression which is needed to convey atmosphere or character. If it is absolutely necessary to use an idiomatic expression, then it should be paraphrased immediately in a simpler form. One technique is to have one character use the expression and another repeat it in a simpler form either in a query or in a statement of agreement. If an unusual expression is used once, it should be used two or three times again later in the story so that the student becomes quite familiar with it.

The occasional use of a difficult or unusual word is not the main obstacle for the foreign student. It is the density of difficulty which is much more troublesome. When difficulties are piled up on top of one another, the overall effect is too much for the student and he abandons his attempt to read the book.

e) Control of Information

The most important feature of language and style is the control of information. Every new character introduced in a story adds to the total amount of information which the student must absorb and retain. For this reason, the number

of main characters should be strictly limited to three or four and there should be as few incidental characters as possible.

Also, the writer should constantly have in mind the cultural and background differences between himself and the foreign student. He will have to spell out many things very clearly which if writing for native English speakers, he would simply refer to and presume complete familiarity with. No such presumption can be made when writing for foreign learner of English. Many things will have to be made explicit or the development of the plot, the relationship between characters etc. will not be understood by the student because he has missed the point completely. Of course, it is all a matter of balance and too much explanation must be avoided. This can become dull and tedious and put the reader off completely. The ideal balance is one where explanations are kept to a minimum but those which are given are necessary for the student to enable him to follow the story with fuller understanding and enjoyment.

This feeling of enjoyment is very important. We are convinced that if a writer tackles the question of language limitation as a challenge which he can enjoy, this feeling of enjoyment will come through into the book and an enjoyable book is one which is read.

C. Some practical hints for intending writers at Intermediate Level

1) Length of Book

80pp reader (approximately) --- allowing space for illustrations and prelim pages. This means 16-18 thousand words.

2) Length of Chapter

5 to 8 pages of quarto double spaced typescript. Can vary, but 5 is about the minimum and 8 the maximum.

3) Length of Paragraph

Maximum length is about 8 lines of typescript. Even this is rather long, and, if a paragraph reaches 8 lines of typescript, it is better to ask oneself if it can be broken at any point to make it into two paragraphs. This number can be exceeded occasionally if done for deliberate effect.

4) Plot

This should be fairly straightforward and fast moving. Sub-plots should be avoided as they are often confusing. Time switching -- either flashback situation or jumping forward --- should be avoided. They are often confusing for the foreign student. The word 'avoided' is used here very deliberately - i.e. they are not forbidden. Nothing succeeds like success, and if time switching is used cleverly and does not confuse, then, of course, it is permitted.

5) Characters

The fewer the better is a general rule. Three or four main characters with three or four subsidiary is about the maximum possible. Every character adds to the load of information which the student must absorb and retain. Characters should be introduced slowly and situations should be avoided where two or three new characters suddenly appear in a few paragraphs.

6) Descriptive Passages

Descriptions in general require a liberal use of adjectives and this is difficult to do within a tight vocabulary control. Descriptions should be short and very much to the point. Descriptive passages used to set a mood should be avoided altogether and the mood should be stated quite bluntly. For example, instead of giving a long description of the desolateness of the countryside around Tom, it would be better to say: "Tom felt sad and lonely."

7) Direct Speech

This should be used frequently. It can make the story come alive and it is easier to use simple language in direct speech because no verb of reporting, saying or asking is added to the complexity of the sentence.

Always begin direct speech indented on a new line and state the name of the speaker on all occasions. A pronoun can be used in cases where it is absolutely clear who is being referred to.

A main character should not be left too much on his own in the story. The technique of a character thinking aloud can be used occasionally, but over-use of this technique should be avoided as it can be tedious and appear unnatural. It is better to give the main character a foil with whom he is in fairly regular contact either in a relationship of co-operation or of antagonism. This provides more opportunities for direct speech between the two.

8) Use of Pronouns

Great care should be taken with the use of pronouns. Even when the antecedent is quite clear, it should be restated from time to time to remind the reader who is being referred to. Particular care should be taken to ensure that pronouns like 'this', 'that', 'what' are never too far from their antecedents and, if necessary, the antecedent should be repeated. For example, a sentence like: "No one was pleased with what he had done." should only be used when it is clear that the reader is already quite familiar with "what he had done."

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9) Short Forms

Short forms (I'm, I've, We're etc.) should be used regularly in direct speech, but not otherwise unless a deliberately colloquial style is being established throughout the book.

10) Illustrations

These will run to about one illustration per chapter, but the final decision on the number and choice of illustrations is not made until the stage of editing the completed manuscript. However, writers are asked to suggest illustrations at any point in the text where they think one would be useful and helpful. The aim of any illustration should be to help the student to understand more easily and more fully. It is easier to explain an unusual word by referring to an illustration than by a gloss.

11) Questions on each chapter

The questions put at the end of each chapter should be carefully chosen to highlight important points in the plot or in characterization. The author can suggest his own questions, but, if he is in any doubt, he can leave them to the editorial staff at Heinemanns.

D. Editorial and Financial Arrangements

1) This may begin with an initial suggestion of a possible plot. We are always ready to give advice at this stage on whether or not we think a particular plot or background situation suitable for this level of the series.

2) The next stage is the submission of an outline of the plot together with the first three chapters of the story. The plot, of course, need not be rigidly adhered to as the story is written, but it should be given in sufficient detail so that we know roughly where the writer is going to take the story.

3) On approval, perhaps after some re-writing, of the plot and first three chapters, and advance on royalties of £200 will be paid.

4) A further advance on royalties of £200 will be paid when the complete manuscript is received and accepted for publication.

5) After publication a royalty payment will be paid to the author of 8% of the published price on UK sales and 8% of the net receipts on sales overseas.