

Book Review Section

The ESL Miscellany

Raymond C. Clark, Patrick R. Moran and Arthur A. Burrows. 1991. (Revised, Second Edition). ProLingua Associates. 292 pp.

Reviewed by Patrick H. Smith

First published in 1981, *The ESL Miscellany* is a cultural and linguistic source book for teachers and students of (American) English as a second language. Designed particularly for teachers needing to create their own materials, the *Miscellany* has served teachers seeking to supplement the course text as well as advanced students of English pursuing self-directed study. The availability of the second thoroughly revised edition in Mexico is the occasion for this review.

The new *Miscellany* maintains the basic structure of its predecessor with chapters devoted to the linguistic communicative cultural metalinguistic and paralinguistic aspects of American English. Checklists continue to be the main organizing feature (there are over 150 of them in the second edition) for each section, with the grammar lists in the first chapter keyed to a suggested teaching/learning sequence of 139 English structures. Chapter Two, *The Communicative Aspect*, is divided into sections on situations, topics and functions. Chapter Three, *The Cultural Aspect*, contains thirty-five lists ranging from "Peoples of North America" to "A brief history of the U.S." The fourth chapter deals with the metalinguistic aspect of English including a glossary of common grammatical terms with examples, phonetic alphabets and a guide to punctuation, among other features. The final chapter is dedicated to the "Paralinguistic Aspect," with photographs of some fifty American gestures and a description of contexts in which they are and are not appropriate (particularly apt for teachers whose first language/first culture is not American English).

Teachers familiar with lists of English structures in standard grammars and with computations like J.D. Hirsch's *Cultural Dictionary* or the New York City Public Library's series of lists, may wonder about the need for another book of lists. As the authors admit, a great deal of the information contained in the *Miscellany* can be found in other sources. Time aside, I can think of at least two advantages to using this source. First, while other works may handle a particular aspect of language or culture in greater depth, I am not aware of another which combines so many features in a single, portable volume. More importantly, the authors, being ESL teachers themselves, are sensitive to the needs of this audience. The linguistics material, for example, is presented clearly and with sufficient examples for teachers lacking formal training in linguistics. *The Cultural*

Aspect is an impressive effort at organizing a vast amount of information without presuming to dictate what every competent speaker should know about U.S. culture. The inclusion of a pedagogical atlas of the world, "nationality words" and population of immigrant groups in the U.S. reflect the diverse backgrounds of students studying English outside the U.S. just as the information about U.S. history and government will be of use to students learning English within the U.S.

Changes in page layout and an improved index make this edition of the *Miscellany* easy to use, and the many changes in cultural lists (In List 12, "Heroes: Captain Marvel is out and Mike Doonesbury is in") indicate that this section has been thoroughly re-worked. Unfortunately, the book is not as well edited as it should be. In List 22, "American Literature" the Robert Frost poem "Mending Wall" is listed as "Mending Fence"; List 23, "A Few Famous Quotations", renders Mark Twain's famous line "Reports of my death are greatly exaggerated" as "The report of my death was an exaggeration." There are also a surprising number of misspellings given that this is the second edition.

Despite these flaws, I highly recommend *The ESL Miscellany* Second Edition for anyone looking for an alternative to the "cookbook" approach to language teaching. I am now on my third copy of the first edition, the first two having been borrowed permanently by colleagues in Amecameca, Mexico and Lowell, Massachusetts. If you do decide to add the *Miscellany* to your library, a word of advice, Make sure you write your name all over it.

References

- Clark, Raymond D, Patrick R. Moran, and Arthur A. Burrows, 1981. *The ESL Miscellany*, Battleboro, Vt. ProLingua Associates.
- Hirsch, E.D. Jr. 1987. *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* Boston. Houghton Mifflin.
- Hirsch, E.D. Jr., Joseph F. Kett, and James Trefil. 1988. *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, Boston. Houghton Mifflin.