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A Review on Grammar Teaching of English Textbook Entitled "Skillful: Listening and Speaking, Student's Book Pack 2" By David Bohlke and Robyn Lockwood

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Abstract: - Grammar, one of the language elements appearing in many student course books targets learners at specific proficiency levels. Since the textbook entitled Skillful: Listening & Speaking, Student's Book Pack 2 written by David Bohlke and Robyn Lockwood, published by Macmillan in 2013 has just been adopted to freshmen aging from 18 to 19, at pre-intermediate level of the academic year of 2017 – 2018 at Department of English, University of Foreign Language Studies – The University of Danang, the issue of how the book is organized in terms of grammar, how the grammar patterns are presented, and what students' attitudes are towards the use of grammar is the matter of our concern. The descriptive, quantitative and qualitative methods were taken advantage of to discover the organization and presentation of grammatical points in this course book for students by reviewing one particular grammar activity.

<u>Keywords</u>: - grammar review; organization; presentation; attitudes; freshmen.

1. Introduction

Department of English of University of Foreign Language Studies – The University of Danang (DE, UFLS-UD) is always trying to improve the teaching and learning quality. Choosing textbooks which suit our aims has been always our concern.

The textbook entitled Skillful: Listening & Speaking, Student's Book Pack 2 written by David Bohlke and Robyn Lockwood, published by Macmillan in 2013 has just been adopted to freshmen aging from 18 to 19, at pre-intermediate level of the academic year of 2017 - 2018. It is a part of a complete package including this printed student' book, the printed Skillful: Listening & Speaking, Teacher's Book Premium Pack 2; Teacher's Resource Center containing a variety range of class audio, video, testing package, and additional resources for use both in and out of classrooms; Digital Student' Book; and graded online resources. This textbook is aimed at developing two macro-skills including listening and speaking, three language elements vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation for the first year students of English.

Since this book was first used to DE's first year students, researchers conducted a review on the presentation and organization of grammatical tasks and whether these grammatical points are compatible with the first year students' language competence. DE also required its lecturers to report main features when teaching and learning this material to evaluate the appropriateness of this textbook for other academic years for freshmen. Such reasons motivated researchers to carry out this review. As stated on the university website of New South Wales (2013),

The critical review is a writing task that asks you to summarise and evaluate a text. The critical review can be of a book, a chapter, or a journal article. Writing the critical review usually requires you to read the selected text in detail and to also read other related texts so that you can present a fair and reasonable evaluation of the selected text.

1.1.Research Questions

This study aims to seek the answers to the following three primary research questions whose subquestions are also listed to help researchers clarify the main ones.

1. How is the book organized?

- Are there any explicit treatments of grammar integrated in the units or separately? Or both?
- Does the book adopt a particular view of language/grammar and language learning?

• Does the book adopt a particular pedagogical approach and/or technique to the grammar points?

2. How is the grammar patterns presented?

- Are the explanations mostly about form or form and function or form, function, and use of the grammar patterns?
- Are the grammatical features presented in a way that is perceptually salient?
- Are examples and activities at both sentence and discourse level provided?

2.2. Scope of the Research

According to Ellis (1998), a materials review should be conducted both in macro-evaluation and microevaluation which is "carried out accountability and developmental purposes by information relating collecting to various administrative and curricular aspects of the programme" (p.218) and "characterised by a narrow-focus on some specific aspect of the curriculum or the administration of the programme" (p.219), respectively. This material review with the focus on the latter targets organization, presentation of grammatical points of the whole text book by analysing one particular grammar activity.

The results of this research on Skillful: Listening & Speaking, Student's Book Pack 2 written by David Bohlke and Robyn Lockwood, published by Macmillan in 2013 will not be generalized to other books in the series of Skillful: Listening & Speaking since it has three other different materials namely Skillful: Listening & Speaking Pack 1 in 2012, and Pack 3 and Pack 4 in 2016 written by other authors.

This textbook review was based on the theoretical framework by Breen (1985) and Candlin (1982) who developed a set of questions with the aim at supporting lecturers or book reviewers to make a decision to choose the appropriate textbooks suitable for their students' capacity. The researchers adapted the questions to find out answers to the first two research questions.

2. Definition of Key Terms

2.1. Grammar Presentation

2.1.1. Grammar and Language Teaching

Simpson and Weiner (1989) define grammar as "The whole system and structure of a language or of languages in general, usually taken as consisting of syntax and morphology (including inflections) and sometimes also phonology and semantics."

Whether grammar should be taught inductively or deductively, or in a particular teaching method which is mentioned in the next part, or included in textbooks has been raised for years since foreign language teaching is supposed to focus on communicative purposes or fluency in other words, but not on accuracy. However, Swain (1985) states that learners should obtain grammatical knowledge first in order to acquire the effectiveness of communicative language. Spada (1997) also affirms that "learners are exposed to grammatical points communicatively through the use of formal instruction over a period of time, their awareness of forms lasts longer and their language accuracy improves"

2.1.2. Salience of Grammar Presentation

Goldschneider and DeKeyser (2001) suggest five determinants which help identify in what ways grammatical features are presented namely perceptual salience, semantic complexity, morphophonological regularity, syntactic category, and frequency. Perceptual salience is one of these determinants defined as a tool to consider "how easy it is to perceive or hear a given structure" (as cited in Kech and Kim, 2014, p.127).

2.2. Pedagogical Techniques

2.2.1. Grammar Translation Method (GTM)

According Richards and Rodgers (2014), "Grammar Translation Method approaches the language first through detail analysis of its grammar rules, followed by the application of these rules to the tasks of translating sentences and texts into and out of the target language, the grammar rules are memorized." (p. 3-4).

2.2.2. Presentation – Practice – Production (PPP)

The Presentation – Practice – Production is defined by Tomlinson (2011a) as "an approach to teaching language items which follows a sequence of presentation of the item, practice of the item and then production of the item" (as cited in Criado, 2013, p. 98).

- The Presentation phase (P1) is considered to be the teacher highly controls the teaching/learning process since teachers or textbooks explain target structures or vocabulary explicitly; or provide students with examples of those which are later induced by students.
- The Practice phase (P2) still remains teachers' high level of control since teachers

- have to check students' understanding on what are taught on P1. Therefore, the accuracy use of forms is the main goal of teachers on this phase.
- The Production phase (P3) aims at fluency in linguistic use based on a freer use of target structures or vocabulary which can be organized through discussions, debates, roleplays or problem-solving activities, and so on.

2.2.3. Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Task-based language teaching has attracted researchers, educators, and teachers to study and take advantage of it. According to Bygate, M., Norris, J., & van den Branden, K. (2012):

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is an approach to pedagogy in which communication tasks are fundamental to language learning. In TBLT, the notion of task indicates language-learning activities in which students are required to use language with a primary focus on meaning, in order to achieve some communicative outcome. They range in scope from brief spoken exchanges to extended written performances to integrated, multimodal language use in face-to-face or virtual environments.

2.2.4. Textual Enhancement (TE)

Textual enhancement of input has been considered to be one of the focus on form procedures made use of to enhance the saliency of input and thereby enhance the learners' acquisition on the input. In the other words, TE is regarded as a consciousness raising technique through which "the perceptual salience of the target items could be increased"

3. Data Collection and Analysis

3.1. Data Collection

The data were drawn from and collected by skimming and scanning through the textbook, listing the topics and contents, examining the organization of the textbook, listing the main sections and sub-sections.

Each unit consists of four main sections namely Digital video for discussion point, Listening skills, and Speaking skills Study skills as shown below:

Digital video for discussion point

Listening skills:

- 1) Vocabulary preview
- 2) Listening 1:

- + Before you listen: predicting
- + Global listening
- + Close listening
- + Developing critical thinking
- 3) Listening 2:
 - + Before you listen
 - + Global listening
 - + Close listening
 - + Developing critical thinking
- 4) Vocabulary skill:

Speaking skills:

Speaking:

- + Grammar
- + Pronunciation skill
- + Speaking skill

Speaking task:

- + Brainstorm
- + Plan
- + Speak
- + Share

Study skills

3.2. Data Analysis

After the collected data had been categorized descriptively, the researchers analysed all the data both quantitatively and qualitatively to answer the research questions.

4. Discussion

4.1. Organization of the Textbook

4.1.1. Overview Organization of Unit 1

Unit 1: Nourishment

Digital video for discussion point: Living with supermarkets

Listening skills:

- 1) Vocabulary preview
- 2) Listening 1: Brain food
 - + Before you listen: predicting
 - + Global listening
 - + Close listening
 - + Developing critical thinking

- 3) Listening 2: Emotional nourishment
 - + Before you listen
 - + Global listening: Listening for

main ideas

- + Close listening
- + Developing critical thinking
- 4) Vocabulary skill: Phrasal verbs

Speaking skills:

Speaking: Offering advice to new students

+ Grammar: Modals of advice

+ Pronunciation skill: The schwa

+ Speaking skill: Offering advice and suggestions

Speaking task:

- + Brainstorm
- + Plan
- + Speak
- + Share

Study skills: Improving your memory

4.1.2. Discussion of Textbook Organization

This textbook is thematically written subdivided into 10 units relevant to 10 topics namely Nourishment, Community, Space, Scale, Success, Pressure, Fear, Stories, Water, and Persuasion (Appendix 1). Grammatical points are integrated as a part of speaking skill. The organization of Unit 1 as presented in Data Collection is taken as an example. In each unit, grammar is presented in the first half part of speaking skills. For example, in Unit 1, advice modal verbs (AMVs) are the linguistic elements presented in the speaking part on offering advice to new students.

In a general sense, grammar is integrated as one part of speaking skill which takes advantage of the PPP.

Presentation stage: AMVs are discussed in terms of meaning, form together with examples. Textual enhancement (TE) is also used in this stage to get students' notice on AMVs namely could, should, have to, and must by bold facing. Furthermore, verb forms are also italicized and color-coded in yellow. (Appendix 2, pp.13-14)

Practice stage: As seen in Appendix 2, p.13-14, students have to fill in gaps with correct AMVs which best complete sentences, and to correct mistakes in sentences, which are absolutely teacher-

controlled. The next exercise is semi-controlled and affectively asking students to complete four short dialogues with suitable advice (Exercise 2, Appendix 2, p.14).

Production stage: Students work in group, take turns to ask for advice for some situations suggested. Students listen to advice and choose best ones (Exercise 3, Appendix 2, p.14). The speaking task (Appendix 2, p.15) is divided into four different parts namely Brainstorm, Plan, Speak, and Share. It is a set of activities built up around one topic of giving advice. The P3 makes use of TBLT to maximize students' interaction.

4.2. Presentation

This textbook uses PPP, TBLT and TE as pedagogical techniques. The first two stages of PPP focus on accuracy of MVA forms, considered as structure-based tasks with an explicit focus on grammar.

First, it provides the meaning of AMVs when telling or advising people to do or not to do something. Following is the form taught with the support of TE whose effect is, according to Doughty and Williams (as cited in Jahan and Kormos, 2015, p. 47), "one of the focuses on form procedures in instructed second language acquisition." Brandl (2008) says "One of the debates about grammar teaching centered on the issue of whether to make grammar explicit or whether to have the learners figure out the rules themselves." (p. 19). In this case, modal verbs' form is explicitly presented in a table after their meaning is introduced by teachers. Despite the claim about the communicative approaches underlying the textbook (Appendix 2), grammar in P1 and P2 is regarded as machine in most units. Grammar as machine is a metaphoric comparison of Payne (2005) since its attention is paid to language structures. In other words, grammar is represented in mathematically precise formulas. Since the form is explicitly taught, the rules enable students as level B1 to do exercises easily. In P1 and P2, all exercises on AMVs are tightly teacher-controlled with the focus on accuracy; hence, they can foster memories of correct forms. However, as for meaning, we are not confident these exercises can foster memories of usage. AMVs, to our point of view, are not really perceptually salient since they have a variety of degree. For example, should or ought to can be used to give advice, and must is for stronger ones. For students, they will have difficulty identifying the degree of AMVs based on given situations. Looking at Appendix 2 - page 22, the answers for Exercise 1 are varied in each question. For example, question 3 has three possible correct answers; either should, has to, or must. Students may, to some extent, find it hard to distinguish the function of these AMVs.

P3 is hoped to enhance more fluency by providing a speaking context enabling students to use AMVs. To some extent, situations (Appendix 2, Exercise 3, p14) are related to giving advice when students worry about their diet, or exam, and so on. These situations are authentic, and familiar with students' everyday life. However, it does not set any clear real-life context where students play the role of doctors and patients. Furthermore, teachers have to make a note of correct and incorrect usage of AMVs (Appendix 3), when students have completed speaking activities, teachers will write these examples on the board and ask students to correct them in terms of form and meaning. By correcting students' errors, Scott (1999) states "Teachers convey the message that accuracy is important" (p.92). However, to a large extent, a set of exercises (Appendix 2 - p. 15) is authentic and relevant to the title of offering advice to new students on health problems. Students freely discuss the three best pieces of advice to send to the university committee. In P3, the primary method is which focuses grammar **TBLT** on communicative act with the context obviously set.

P1 and P2 are mostly about form and meaning; use to some extent is presented but practised out of context. Therefore, grammar as communicative act which is, according to Payne (2005), an act performed and interpreted in context, is not apparently illustrated in this activity although students have opportunities to interact with each other sharing and giving advice to problems given. Exercises in P1 and P2 with their explanations focus on form and meaning, not on the use of AMVs. In a stark contrast, the adaption of TBLT in P3 encourages students' interaction in using a grammatical point of modal verbs to advice on improving their partners' health and sending their suggestion to the university. In other words, grammar in this textbook is taught as machine in P1 and P2, and as communicative act in P3.

The grammatical explanations about the meaning of AMVs, for us, are not easy for students to understand with a very long explanation, and confusing meanings. Also, it is not really accurate since this part is entitled "Offering advice to new

students"; however, Exercise 3, Appendix 2, page 14 in P3, instead of providing students with situations on giving advice to new classmates, it focuses on health problems in general. On the other hand, the activity and the title do not match which leads to the irrelevance to learning objectives of giving advice to new students.

The examples and activities (Appendix 2) are at the sentence level only with gap filling, correcting mistakes, and completing 4 short dialogues with suitable advice. However, each dialogue contains only 2 sentences which are supposed not to provide students with enough meaningful contexts.

Regarding explanations about frequency of use, this particular activity does not explain how often these AMVs or whether they are used more frequently than the other models. The variation is also not mentioned. Take "should" as an example. This activity does not tell students that they can use "ought to" instead of "should". Exercises on P1 and P2 aim at accuracy and meaning of AMVs' form; however, they do not allow students to explain their responses. Whereas, Exercise 3 (Appendix 2 – p.14) allows students to choose best answers which means they have to give justification for their choice. Also, they have to use checklist (Appendix 4) for peer-assess advice.

5. Conclusion

Personally, the authors of this review think in this textbook the intergration of grammar with other skills is beneficial for students since it makes students themselves aware of the importance of grammar in relation with other language skills and a part of linguistic competence. Also, the extension of P3 by making use of TBLT helps teachers set a clear and authentic context to students, which is to large extent effectively designed for communicative purposes, and enhances students' interaction and fluency. The exercises for P1 and P2 help students memorize form and meaning.

However, it also has some drawbacks. According to Krashen (1981), learners acquire a second language through natural exposure to meaning input, not through formal grammar lessons which means formal grammar instruction is not necessary, and helps learners develop only declarative knowledge of grammar structures, not the procedural one (as cited in Chingchit, 2008). We suggest teaching modal verbs in this speaking task or grammar in the whole textbook should be implicit by introducing the context first, students elicit the forms and

practise them later; or vice versus since Cunningsworth (1995) advocates teachers should find their own ways of using and adapting textbooks if necessary since there are no textbooks which can be totally suited to a particular teaching context (as cited in Nguyen, 2007, p.58).

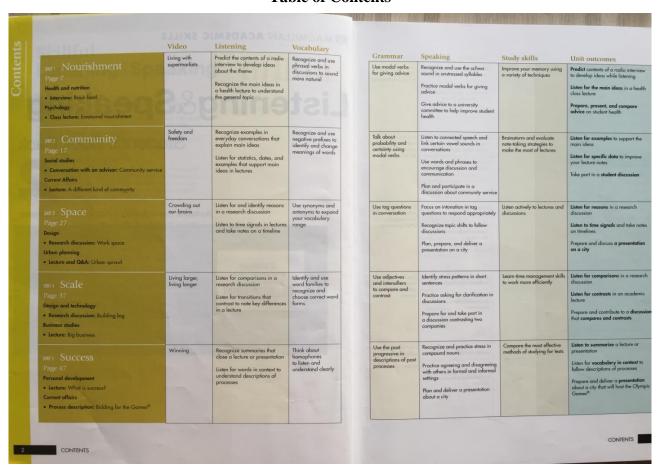
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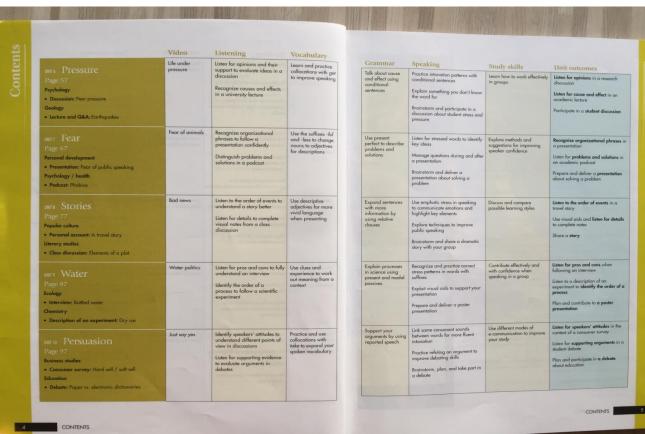
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Appendix 1:

Table of Contents



Appendix 1 (con't)

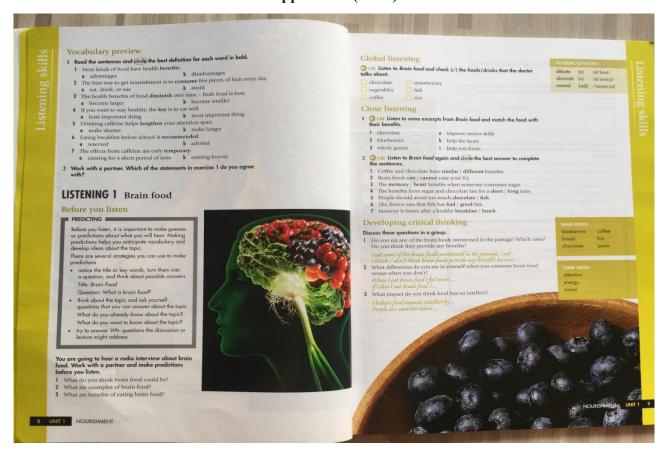


Appendix 2

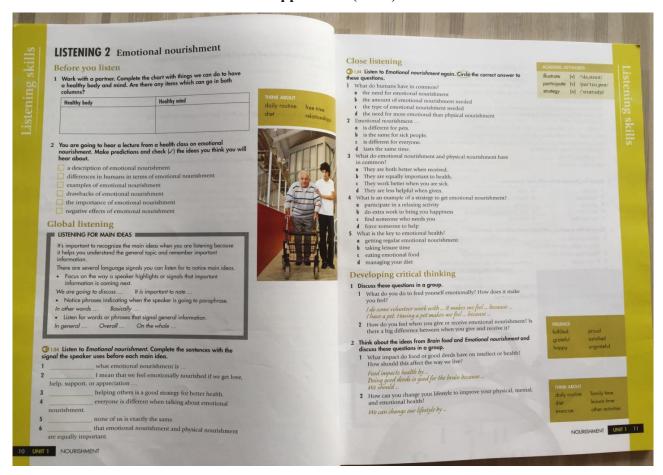
Unit 1: Nourishment



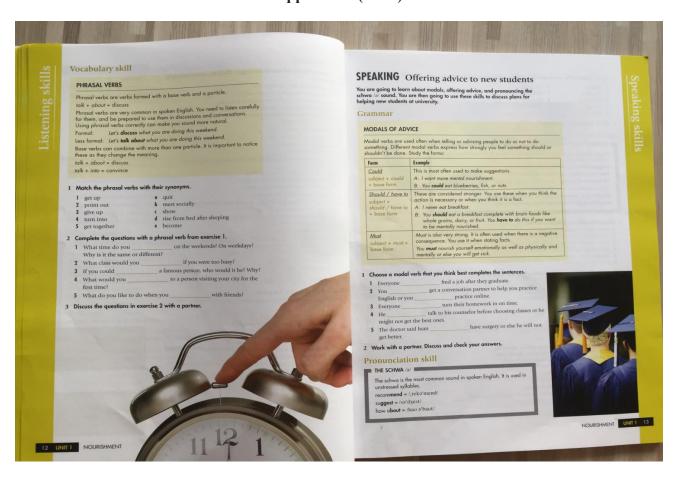
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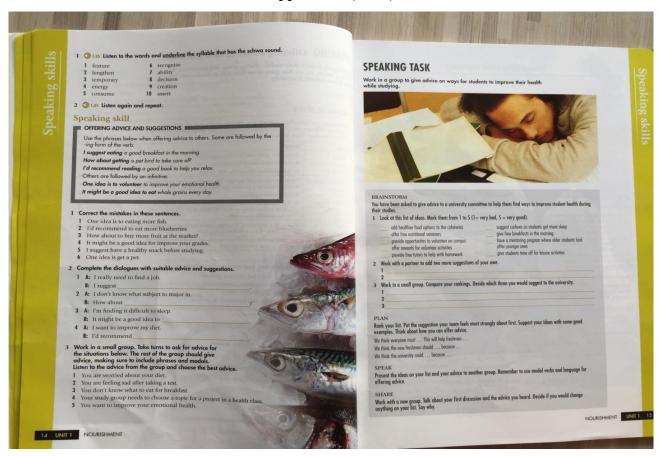
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Appendix 2 (con't)



Appendix 2 (con't)



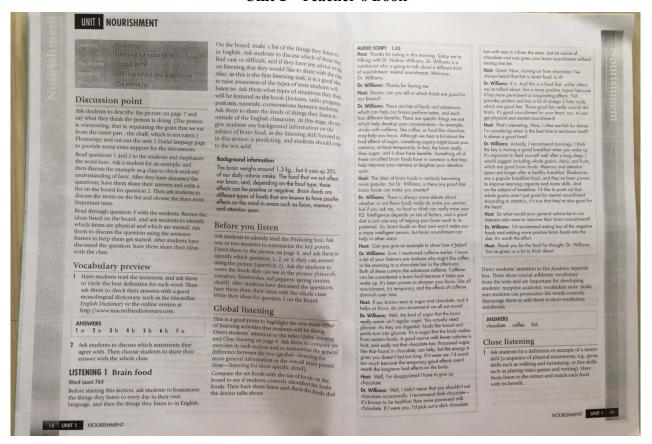
Appendix 2 (con't)



Listening and Speaking, Student's Book Pack 2" By David Bohlke and Robyn Lockwood

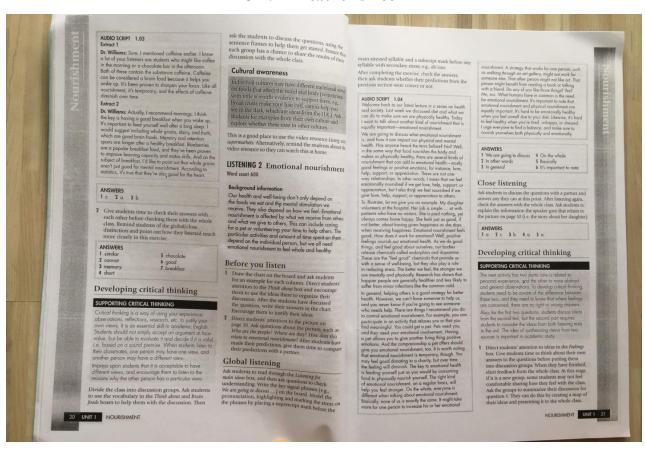
Appendix 3

Unit 1 - Teacher's Book

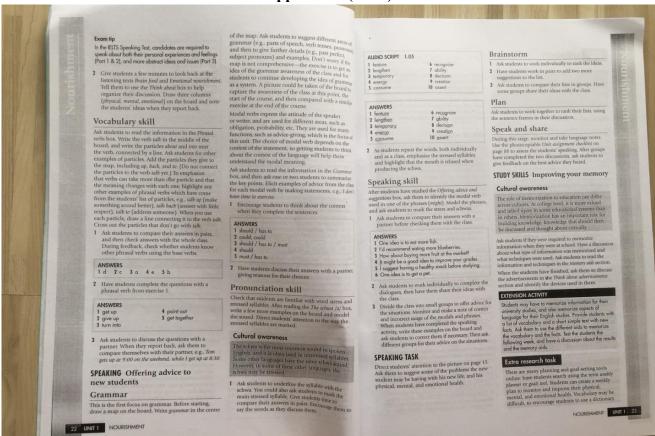


Appendix 3 (con't)

Unit 1 - Teacher's Book



Appendix 3 (con't)



Appendix 4
Checklist for Production Stage

