COMMUNICATE IN WRITING.
Keith Johnson. London: Longman, 1981.

Phyllis Ryan,
Centro de Enseñanza de Lenguas
Extranjeras, Universidad Nacional
Autónoma de México

If we were to set about reviewing textbooks which teach the English language learner how to write in English, we would find, as Ann Raimes pointed out in Focus on Composition, a plethora of textbooks. Raimes attributes this to the complexity of the composing process and specific aspects emphasized by the author. The controversies generated over the past few decades in the L1 area- quantity versus quality, controlled/guided versus free writing, stress on rhetoric versus semantics or syntax -- have been carried over to the L2 area, but not with such fervor. Indeed, L2 methodology has followed in the footsteps of that of L1, imitating some of the trends, but on a smaller scale. Even so, the trends have been felt.

Writing has found its way into language programs as an afterthought, as a neglected skill because some teachers feel guilty about never including it, or as a misinterpretation of what writing or composing consists of (filling in the blanks or even the act of writing a word). Teachers have avoided it in basic courses -- time does not permit -- and have delegated it to a nebulous time in the future, or perhaps an advanced course. Arguments have been given for not including it: teachers need extra preparation; if students cannot write in L1, how can they in L2; the relevance of writing cannot always be proven for an ESP level student; there just is not enough time. The advanced or upper-intermediate level teacher then has the burden of developing a skill often overlooked by teacher and student alike. Within the area of available writing textbooks the needs of the Mexican student have frequently not been met, resulting in a patchquilt effect with the change of textbook each year accompanied by a continual search for a suitable one.

A new book, Communicate in Writing, by Keith Johnson, may just meet the needs of an institution wanting a tightly organized sequence of units (20), which is flexible, and easy to adapt to self-study, to the ESP student or to the student who wants to know how to write academic English (EAP). This text is for an advanced intermediate student or advanced level student. Although it includes enough material for a one-year course, modifications based on the teacher's feeling for classroom needs make it possible to reduce it to a short term course or even a self-study program. (The teacher's book explains in detail which exercises can be omitted.) The materials were, as Johnson noted in his general introduction, piloted at the University of Reading, other British universities, and universities throughout the world. These materials, in the form of discourse segments, are for developing reading comprehension skills as one means of transfer to writing skills. Johnson uses the term "functional" loosely as he discusses this course, because the main divisions are grouped around: the description of things and ideas (I), processes and events (II), and the development of an argument (III). He points out how loosely the functions in each area (I, II and III) are associated. Within these functional divisions each teaching unit is topic-based (e.g., "Dying Stars," Unit 2, or "Volcanoes," Unit 5) and divided into three parts: the first part is concerned with a reading passage and exercises to understand how it is organized, techniques in notetaking, and rhetorical points illustrated by the passage; the second concentrates on the communicative function of the language and includes exercises for writing semi-controlled paragraphs; and the third provides additional exercises to be inserted in the first and second parts, used after them, or deleted in order to modify the course. A consolidation unit follows every forth unit.

Throughout Johnson's textbook we find the application of theoretical concerns of his about methodology and communicative syllabus design (1982 a, 206), and the "analysis component" applied to reading passages, with activities exploring "intent/utterance relationships" (for example, the intent of a passage, paragraph, or sentence), "content/utterance relationships" (the cloze procedure used to introduce the students to the functions of the missing portions), and "exploring organization" (backward and forward speculation about a passage at some point within it). Johnson implements

his ideas by means of pieces of discourse on which the student is asked to perform operations such as inserting information (Unit 3, ex. 4 or Unit 2, ex. 10, for example), subtracting information (Unit 3, ex. 13), reorganizing a passage to make the same points but in a different order (Unit 19, ex. 9), rhetorical transformations (Unit 18, ex. 7); that is, rewriting a stretch of discourse to change its communicative value by changing the standpoint/point of emphasis (Unit 18, ex. 7) or style (Unit 13, ex. 8). Parallel writing exercises are interspersed throughout, some reordering the functions in a second paragraph to match those of the first, or rewriting using the same organization. Imitative writing could become very mechanical, but as Johnson handles it, it serves as a basis for branching out into more creative handling of information.

The techniques of taking notes on a reading passage are fairly consistently used in each unit as is the cloze technique. Summarizing information, including the main points of a passage, is introduced in Unit 3, "Skid Row." A student summary of the writer's main points is not asked for here; instead the cloze technique is applied to a summary. In later units the student produces a short summary after he has had experience outlining main points.

One suggestion might be made about the use of rhetorical transformations. They do not appear until Unit 9; they could have been exploited earlier on. Register transformations are included at times, leaving this reviewer with questions about whether a hypothetical class would have the linguistic resources to handle such transformations. In Unit 8, for example, the waterclock, an invention of the Greek Heron, is written about in a chatty, informal, descriptive manner assuming the student has enough linguistic sophistication to change it into formal register. Unit 11 also sets the tone in much the same way with instructions about not using I/my or you/your and using the passive voice. Oral discourse (a written conversation) is the basis of stylistic change into the form of an article (Unit 13, ex. 8), a technique Johnson uses freely throughout the exercises while varying the medium. The student becomes versatile in varying the medium by transposing a written description into a recipe, an interview into a formal essay, and data into an argumentative essay. He

can thereby begin to develop a facility for addressing his "specific audience to achieve a specific purpose" (1979 in 1982, 211) and a flexibility in selecting his writing strategies.

It is debatable to what extent the theoretical aims of the text can be achieved. For a student to handle information and make linguistic decisions, he needs a degree of sophistication in handling L2. Would an intermediate or advanced student have had sufficient prior exposure to the written language to handle it? Two constant problems for writers of this kind of text are the extent to which one can make assumptions about student preparation, and how to balance sufficient guidance through controlled exercises with challenges for the student to use his resources and writing strategies. As mentioned at the beginning of this review, very often strong opinions exist about the use of free writing. The balance of how much freedom and when to give it can be a quite delicate consideration for the textbook writer. Considering the self-study student, parallel writing would function best with him; on the other hand, the student in a writing course, directed by a teacher could receive, especially with the rhetorical transformation exercises, beneficial feedback through teacher/student monitoring.

Traditionally the synthetic approach has depended on examination of writing models and has used imitation to transfer the skills of the "professional" passage to the student. Although Johnson in his parallel writing exercises admits the mechanical use of imitation, he points out that Aristotelian rhetoric (1982 a, 210) required the "differentiation of alternative organizations in terms of intent and effect." The initial situations he proposes in his article "Communicative Writing Practice and Aristotelian Rhetoric" are forms of discourse written for specific audiences to achieve specific purposes. Throughout his text he develops the student's communicative flexibility at the functional and notional level and his perception of how to handle written discourse when its demands change.

What is new and fresh about this text is that it maintains a constant momentum by means of exercises calling on the student to exhibit controlled writing skills as a step in developing the free writing skills needed for handling the message one seeks to transmit. As

a final note (maybe it was a decision by the publisher or the pressures of the time) a title without the overused, now almost lifeless word -- "communicate" -- would have been more pleasantly received by this reviewer. But leave it to the student who probably hasn't been bombarded by it as yet!

References

Johnson, Keith (1982a). "Communicative Writing Practice and Aristotelian Rhetoric," in Keith Johnson, ed., Communicative Syllabus Design and Methodology, p. 201-213.

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