
Reviews of Books

Tomoko Yabukoshi & Braven Smillie. *Upward Reading for the TOEIC Test*. Tokyo: Kinseido, 2011. 49p ISBN978-4-7647-3922-2, ¥1,200.

Upward Reading for the TOEIC Test is a counterpart of *Upward Listening for the TOEIC Test*, both of which are written by the same authors. I have reviewed *Upward Listening* favorably in the past (*NUCB JLCC*, 13(2) 2012). This time, I used *Upward Reading for the TOEIC Test* for a five-day intensive “Reading and Grammar Review for TOEIC” course. Just like *Upward Listening*, *Upward Reading* is an excellent textbook and practice material for a short-term intensive course.

The basic structure of *Upward Reading* is the same as *Upward Listening*. The target score of the textbook is 400–500, and the book consists of 24 units. Every unit, except the “summary practice” units, starts with a “Strategy” section written in Japanese. Then two sections of practice questions, “Check it Out” and “Let’s Try” sections, follow. Each unit deals with only one TOEIC part; therefore, Units 1–10 cover Part 5, Units 11–14 Part 6, and Units 15–24 Part 7. Units 10, 14, 20 (for single reading passages), and 24 (for double passages) provide summary practices that integrate all the strategies introduced in each unit.

For Part 5 (Units 1–10), the “Strategy” sections are particularly useful for the purpose of grammar review. These units cover: vocabulary, parts of speech, subject-verb agreement, tenses and conditions, transitive/intransitive and causative verbs, gerunds/infinitives and participles, comparatives and relatives, prepositions and conjunctions, and nouns and articles/quantifiers. Even though the grammar explanations are very simplified, the book covers the majority of the frequently tested grammar points. The “Strategy” sections in Units 1–10 provide a good start into grammar review and practice.

Following the “Strategy” section comes the “Check it Out” section. I also find this section of Part 5 very valuable. It presents some questions with “hints” in Japanese. For example, the following question and hint is used in Unit 6, which covers gerunds/infinitives and participles (p. 12).

The manufacturer hopes _____ orders for at least 10,000 hybrid vehicles by next July.

(A) receiving (B) receive (C) received (D) to receive

ヒント 動詞“hope”の目的語は（to不定詞・動名詞）です。

The “hint” here reads, ‘The object of the verb “hope” takes (to infinitive・gerund),’ so this prompts the students to choose one. These “hints” serve as good scaffolding because they lead students’ attention to focus on the reviewed grammar points in identifying the correct answers. This approach worked very well in the intensive course. After working on the “Check it Out” questions together in class, the students individually worked on the “Let’s Try” questions. This gave them a smooth transition from grammar rule explanation to application of grammar rules on practice questions. Unlike using practice tests that require

students to work on multiple grammar points simultaneously, students were able to focus on a few grammar features at a time. They seemed to understand grammar rules and handle practice questions better this way even though the actual validity of the approach is still left for investigation at this point.

For Part 6 (Units 11–14), the “Strategy” sections cover tenses, pronouns, and transition words. Reviewing these grammar points in Part 6 is effective because these features often require discourse-level comprehension. Only four units are assigned for Part 6, but this is understandable given the fact that only 12 questions are allocated for this part on the TOEIC test.

The Part 7 “Strategy” sections (Units 14–24) summarize common reading test strategies for single-passage and double-passage questions. The strategies for single passages (Units 15–19) include previewing, analyzing question types, paying attention to rewording/rephrasing, and utilizing background knowledge (email, letters, help wanted advertisement). The Units 21–23 strategies for double passages suggest understanding topics and identifying the relation of the two passages. Units 20 and 24 are summary practices for single passages and double passages respectively.

The practice questions in the “Check it Out” and “Let’s Try” sections of Part 7 are adequate. In particular, double passage reading practices were valuable this time. I talked to the students individually at the beginning of the intensive course and asked how many questions they usually could complete on actual TOEIC. Many of them said they were not able to complete last 10–20 questions, which are all double-passage questions, and they just filled out the bubbles on this part. Units 21–24, thus, gave my students good reading practices on double passage questions even though some of the passages were very difficult for them.

As to the accompanying materials, *Upward Reading for the TOEIC Test* comes with a teacher’s manual that includes the answers, answer explanations, Japanese translation of the texts, vocabulary quizzes (one quiz per unit), a 30-question practice test, and the answer keys to the vocabulary quizzes and the practice test. Just like *Upward Listening*, the vocabulary quizzes use the sentence-level vocabulary examples taken from each unit. In the intensive course, I used these quizzes for vocabulary review and chose some vocabulary words for daily vocabulary quizzes. The accompanying practice test consisting of 30 questions (12 Part 5 questions, six Part 6 questions, and 12 Part 7 questions) was also used for extra practice during the last class session. Both the vocabulary quizzes and the practice test were very useful.

My concerns with the content of *Upward Reading* mainly relate to grammar instruction in Part 5. As to the grammar points presented in Part 5 and Part 6, they are well selected. They cover the frequently tested grammar points and provide a sequential review. The progression through the three sections (“Strategy”, “Check it Out” and “Let’s Try”) also works very well as explained earlier. However, the grammar explanations are oversimplified and in some cases not clear enough. I considered providing more comprehensive supplementary grammar handouts for the intensive course but chose not to do so this time. I was afraid that exposing the students to too much information at once in such a short time would confuse them instead of helping them. I used the grammar information in the “Strategy” sections and provided further explanations as needed when we went over the “Let’s Try” questions. This approach worked fine, but at the end of the course I was left with the feeling that more detailed explanation could have helped the students. It is a challenging task to review many grammar points in a limited amount of textbook space and class time. This is definitely one of the decisions left for each teacher’s discretion depending on the course length and the level of his/her students. Extra grammar information and scaffolding, especially on more complex grammar features such as passives and conditionals, are obviously needed for this book, too.

Another concern I have regarding grammar instruction is the sequence of some grammar points presented in *Upward Reading*. The book introduces subject-verb agreement in Unit 3 and nouns and articles/quantifiers in Unit 9. I personally feel it is better to cover count/noncount nouns and articles/quantifiers before going over the subject-verb agreement. Even though subject-verb agreement is mainly related to singular/plural nouns, this often involves count/noncount distinctions. Many Japanese learners get confused with subject-verb agreement not because they don't know singular/plural differences but because they are not able to differentiate count nouns and noncount nouns.

I am aware, though, that the order presented in *Upward Reading* can be used as a review opportunity for subject-verb agreement when students work on nouns and articles/quantifiers. For example, the Unit 9 "Let's Try" section contains the following question (p. 19):

We never expected that _____ of our requests would be approved, but they were.
 (A) much (B) all (C) one (D) little

In order for students to identify the correct answer, they need to recognize not only the quantifiers but also the subject-verb agreement and pronoun rules from the expression *they were*. Therefore, the sequence presented in the textbook (i. e., first subject-verb agreement then count/noncount nouns) is acceptable, but the reversed order probably makes more sense to the students and is more effective.

Additionally, I am slightly perplexed with the way in which some grammar points are combined in one unit. For example, Unit 3 deals with both subject-verb agreement and active/passive voices. My students had some problems dealing with these two features simultaneously when they worked on Unit 3 "Let's Try" questions. Also, it helps students to review transitive/intransitive distinctions before working on active/passive voice questions, but in this book transitive/intransitive verbs are introduced later in Unit 5 with causative verbs. Integration of different grammar points is important especially for more advanced learners, yet in terms of reviewing grammar rules for lower-level students, putting related grammar features seems to work much better. I prefer connecting more closely related features, such as count/noncount nouns with subject-verb agreement, transitive/intransitive verbs with active/passive voices, and modals with conditionals. Modification of the presentation sequence of these grammar features could make this book an outstanding material for a short-term TOEIC grammar review course.

Lastly, even though the textbook contains very few mistakes, one of the grammar questions includes a relatively serious problem. Unit 7 (Part 5) "Let's Try" Question 5 reads as follows: (p. 15).

The new office decorator, _____ we hired last month, will bring drapery samples today.
 (A) whom (B) which (C) whose (D) who

The intended answer listed in the answer keys is (A), *whom*, and the answer key explains why the accusative case relative pronoun *whom* should be used here. However, answer (D), *who*, is also a possible (although may not be preferable) answer. In fact, the sentence in the Unit 7 vocabulary quiz from the accompanying material is written as: *The new office decorator, **who** we hired last month, will bring drapery samples today* (emphasis added). I used this question to explain *who* vs. *whom* and preference differences in written vs. spoken languages. However, something like this is problematic as a test question and should be avoided completely. I hope this correction be incorporated in their next edition.

As I have reported in my article *Use of TOEIC Practice Tests and Repetition Practice for Low-level Grammar Review* (this volume), using practice tests alone in a short-term grammar review was not effective for low-level learners even with repetition practices. *Upward Reading for the TOEIC Test* deals with one or two grammar points at a time, and students seemed to review grammar points better this time. However, I must emphasize the value of the summary units and the accompanying practice test from this book. Students may be able to figure out the correct answers when they are working on one grammar point, but this does not mean they are able to choose correct answers on summary practices, practice tests, or ultimately on actual TOEIC. This is largely due to the fact that they are not able to sort out multiple grammar points and rules. Therefore, even though it is more effective to deal with a few grammar points at a time for the purpose of low-level grammar review, working on questions with mixed grammar points is extremely important. Without the summary sections and the practice test, the value of the strategies and practices provided in this textbook is minimized because students would not learn how to apply multiple grammar rules in answering the questions. After reviewing frequently tested grammar points in an organized fashion, integration of grammar features and comprehensive test-like grammar practice is absolutely necessary even for low-level learners.

In the intensive course, the students completed all the questions from *Upward Reading*. I rearranged the sequence of the lessons so that the students worked on all three parts (Parts 5, 6, and 7) every day. They completed the entire textbook, even worked on the majority of the “Let’s Try” questions second time around, and reviewed the ones they did not understand. For a fast-paced intensive course, using one textbook and thoroughly completing it seems to be an important factor to keep students’ motivation going because it gives them the feeling of accomplishment. Looking at the textbook again and going over the questions can also give them a quick summary of what they need to review before a TOEIC test. I hope the students who took the intensive course will keep the book and utilize it in the future. Once again, just like the *Upward Listening*, *Upward Reading for the TOEIC Test* is a very good material for a short-term, intensive course.

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