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Survey review: Graded readers

David R. Hill

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Survey review: Graded readers

Introduction This review updates and extends previous reviews (*ELT Journal* 42/1, 42/2, 43/3, 47/3) by Helen Reid Thomas and myself. All have been made possible by the readiness of publishers to provide the books which form the unique library and database of graded readers, which it is one of the objects of the Edinburgh Project on Extensive Reading (EPER) to maintain. This review differs from the previous ones in being more outspoken, reflecting partly the absence of my former colleague's restraining wisdom and partly the increasing fervour of my own enthusiasm for graded readers. I can fairly claim to have read all the books reviewed here and to have listened to the limited feedback from programmes with which EPER is associated. I cannot claim, however, total consistency, much less infallibility.

Definition of graded readers Graded readers are extended texts, mostly fiction, written in language reduced in terms of structures and vocabulary. They were initially simplified versions of classics, modern novels, and fairy tales (simplifications), but since the 1960s an increasing proportion have been written specially for a series (simple originals). They are a product of the British ELT industry, and almost unknown within the American TESOL industry. The EPER database of graded readers contains records of 164 series containing 3,182 titles, of which 69 series and 1,621 titles are currently in print. While a few series are published outside the UK, only one series, containing 15 titles, is published in the USA. This review confines itself to 39 series containing 1,259 titles, some of which have already been considered in previous survey reviews.

Graded readers in English constitute a major teaching resource, greatly prized by foreign teachers and learners of English, who buy them in their millions, but generally disparaged by applied linguists and native-speaker teachers of English as a foreign language on the grounds that they are not authentic. If these critics are merely pointing out that graded readers are not written for native speakers and use a modified language, they are stating the obvious. If they go further, and say that only materials written for native speakers should be used for language learning, they seem to me to be harming the interests of learners. Fortunately, most teachers of English are not native speakers, and their own experience of using readers to learn English encourages them to exploit the most versatile resource ever developed for teaching a

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