

it is 'one of my friend' or 'one of my friends' – the puzzle is more easily answered by ordinary, simple logic than by a grammar book.

A section that I consider important is that dealing with articles, the incorrect use (or non-use) of which plagues many a South Asian. I do not think that the chapter is extensive enough for a raw student to be comfortable with the use of articles after studying the book. As a teacher teaching engineering students, I know how my students struggle to understand why 'Poisson's equation' and 'the Poisson equation' are correct, but not 'the Poisson's equation' or 'Poisson equation'.

I also think that there would have been some benefit if at least one of the books had addressed the matter of US English versus the Commonwealth English that we use. Particularly, in these days of the word processor – that dreadful but indispensable corporate supervisor of our writings, Microsoft Word – which automatically changes what we type as 'travelling' into 'traveling' and marks the word 'favour' with a red-underline. Such a section would have been useful to young undergraduates to churn out written assignments.

It is in pushing the use of English or practical English that Jansz's book admirably complements Wijesingha's. For it explores the other side of the Syllabus A – Syllabus-B division, I think the most important side. Although the cover misleadingly lists her as the editor, she really is the single author of the book. She simply uses the published writings of several persons in an intelligent way to teach. The focus is on practical English, i.e. the skills of speaking, writing, reading and listening. The book uses extensive essay-like material from various authors – consisting of stories, histories, biographies, etc. – to engage the students and promote these skills in them. Well-structured exercises, including group exercises, build on the pedagogy of each chapter.

The drawings and illustrations with local scenes are quite welcome. However, if I have a complaint, it is that the book, in seeking to indigenize English, commits the very political incorrectness it seeks to avoid. For instance, in a country where some 26% are Tamil-speaking, to use the majority-language words in the middle of a sentence (albeit in italics), as if everyone knows or, more ominously, has to know the language, creates fear,

annoyance and hurt. The same feelings are evoked in me on reading well-known English magazines from India, where suddenly there is a full Hindi phrase. This oversight in Jansz's book would also be a hindrance to Indian readers, particularly because the names in the stories will also be a little alien and this weakness would hurt the Indian market, particularly if the intention in publishing in India is also to make inroads there. It is well to remember – and easy to accept if we leave political positions aside – that, to a general reader, John Smith is a more familiar name than is Padmalal Dhammananda.

The deficiency is to be excused because it does not arise from insensitivity, but rather because Jansz's teaching experience is mainly with a mono-ethnic class at her university and especially because her book overcomes this deficiency by rising to pedagogic heights with its experienced use of story and conversation. In fact, the stories themselves are so delightful that they can be used as light reading for entertainment. The group exercises that come from several years of her teaching experience are thoughtfully designed to get students to converse. Topics for debates are used for enabling students to express themselves. Jansz's methods are most useful to teachers who struggle with grown-up students not familiar with English and are perhaps a little shy about their mistakes.

As an aside the important US/Commonwealth difference shows in the books. In the matter of a quoted passage on Abraham Lincoln, presumably from the US, Jansz's book has the close-quotation mark and then the comma, whereas in the other parts by Commonwealth authors, it is first the comma and then the quotation mark. Such questions are of everyday occurrence to students who write thoughtfully and must be usefully dealt with – for some of them will see the difference and wonder why, without being told why.

In Sri Lanka, where the English language divides people into classes, to make a mistake in public is a shameful thing. In that milieu, to presume to teach English through a book is daring, especially since even a single grammatical mistake would evoke snide comments and would be doubly shameful. The authors have dared and have generally succeeded. If there are mistakes to grumble about, it would be over the prefix 'sub'-being used as a stand-alone word and – a

matter for debate – whether a shortened form of refrigerator is a fridge, as the authors use (and Microsoft Word accepts) or, as I would say, 'frig' corresponding to the middle of the word 'refrigerator'. Other gaps are in using the superfluous conjunction 'and so' and the phrase 'three spoons full of sugar' (rather than 'three spoonfuls of sugar'). A sentence beginning with 'And' is said to be unusual. But, as I recall from Fowler¹, a look at King James' Version of the Holy Bible, which is considered a masterpiece of the English language, shows how wrong it is to argue that sentences should not begin with the word 'And'.

It is said that at a publisher's a dictionary uses five copy-editors and, given its even greater importance, a pharmacopoeia seven. How many for a language book? I do not know, but given the skills in English in Sri Lanka and how they are today confined mainly to people in retirement, the book is well edited.

To conclude, the two books meet the needs for which they were written. Even old hands who function well in English but know no formal grammar, would find the books fascinating and useful. Indeed, at the level for which they are designed, they can make a useful vade-mecum for young undergraduates.

1. Fowler, H. W., *Modern English Usage*, 2nd edn as revised by Sir Ernest Gowers, Oxford, 1965.

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LASERS – Principles, Types and Applications. K. R. Nambiar. New Age International Publishers, 4835/24, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110 002. 2004. 772 pp. Price: Rs 325.

Nobel Laureate Glenn T. Seaborg, who was also the former US Atomic Energy Commission Chairman, once commented that if Samuel Glasstone were not born, then science would not have lost much; but the world would have lost a great

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textbook writer. Good textbook writers are a rare species and among those who are knowledgeable ones, few are inclined to write textbooks in place of authoritative reviews. The former requires clarity of concepts and flair to present them in a lucid, interesting and non-confusing style. Few Indian authors can be included in this category; but there are many who make an earnest effort to bring out good-quality books on contemporary topics. The book under review is a reasonably good example of such an attempt.

Although a large number of books on lasers and their applications exist at this point of time, this book is bound to be useful on the topic, catering to the needs of the community of students and teachers as a good text as well as a reference book. The book is fairly well organized and systematically structured into three separate parts. Keeping the non-specialist readers in mind, relevant topics in optics and modern physics along with basic laser principles have been included in Part A. A person with formal graduate education in physics may find this part as a useful recapitulation of topics he might have covered during his degree course. Part B of the book is devoted to a detailed description of a variety of different classes of lasers – 17 to be exact! The chapter on solid state lasers touches upon all con-

ceivable types of such lasers, excluding semiconductor lasers for which an entirely separate chapter has been devoted. This reviewer was eagerly searching for a section on diode pumped solid state lasers, which have become popular and handy in recent times; but was disappointed to note that only four lines are available on this topic included in the section on Nd:YAG lasers. Thus it becomes obvious that although the topics to be included in a book of this size (772 pages) are to be decided by the author based on his background and exposure, their relative practical importance and timely relevance will be determined by the future course of technological progress.

The author of this book is a former Commodore in the Indian Navy and understandably he has included a chapter on military applications of lasers, which is a topic rather difficult to find in other books of this type. The third part, namely part C of the book contains chapters on industrial and medical applications of lasers as well as laser communications and holography. Thus, one notes that this book has an ambitious list of contents. However, the level of treatment of topics in the book is not uniform. While some topics like laser resonators are dealt with at an advanced level with appropriate mathematical treatment, many other top-

ics are presented in a simple qualitative fashion. This is a practical difficulty faced by many authors when they attempt to have an encyclopaedic coverage in their work. One striking feature of the book, especially where students are concerned, is the great care the author has taken to explain in a simple yet detailed fashion, some of the intricate concepts in laser physics. The section on mode locking is an example of such simple elucidation of complex processes.

The author has also taken great care to include a large number of tutorial exercises along with worked-out answers with the student community in mind. This aspect and the miscellaneous notes at the end of the volume obviously enhance the utility of the book. This modestly priced book is sure to find a prominent place in college and university libraries and in the book collection of (postgraduate) physics students.

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