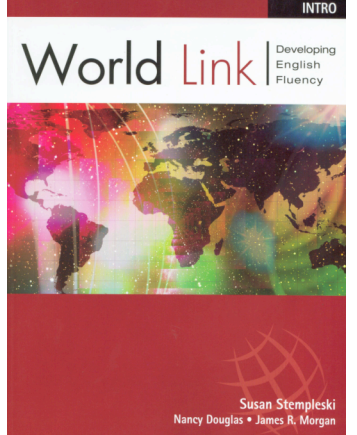



REVIEW OF *WORLD LINK INTRO – STUDENT BOOK AND VIDEO COURSE*

<p>World Link Intro: Developing English Fluency</p> <p>Susan Stempleski Nancy Douglas James R. Morgan Andy Curtis</p> <p>2005 Student Book: ISBN 08384-0661-0 US \$ 20.95 154 pp. Audio CDs: ISBN 0-8384-4614-0 US \$50.95 Workbook: ISBN 0-8384-2522-4 US \$13.95</p> <p>Thomson Heinle Boston, MA</p>	
<p>World Link Intro: Developing English Fluency</p> <p>Video Course</p> <p>Susan Stempleski Nancy Douglas James R. Morgan Andy Curtis 2005 DVD: ISBN 1-4130 -1073 – 3 US \$34.95 Workbook: ISBN 0-7593-9638-8 US \$21.95</p> <p>Thomson Heinle Boston, MA</p>	

Review by Ruth Mendel, Michigan State University

The *World Link* series is a four-level ESL series ranging from *World Link Intro* (reviewed here) at the low beginning level, to Level 3, high intermediate. The series stands out for its global perspective as well as its innovative courseware. It contains a Video Course, consisting of a DVD (or VHS) and Workbook, and a Textbook Course, which includes a Student Book, two audio CDs, a Workbook, and an accompanying web site. Both the *World Link* Video course and *World Link* Textbook course (henceforth referred to as *WLV* and *WLT*) are divided into twelve units covering the same topics, beginning with lessons on *Greetings and Introductions* and *Countries and Nationalities*, concluding with *Jobs and Ambitions*, and

including such topics as *Family, Food, Interesting Products, and Homes*. Although the targeted grammatical structures are the same in both courses and the vocabulary overlaps, the content of each is quite different. *WLT's* listening activity in Unit 7 on *Time*, for example, involves schedules of a dinner party, exam, and movie; the corresponding video clip in *WLV* is a humorous account of Mike's day. The different focus of each, within the same overarching theme, almost necessarily involves different vocabulary and different structures. Certainly, the divergence between the two enriches, rather than diminishes, the series in a way that a video course that dovetailed completely with the written one would not. It does, however, also require more effort on the part of the teacher to determine which course to use, or how to integrate the two, especially since *WLT* and *WLV* are not cross-referencing.

While the Student Book clearly identifies which CD tracks correspond to which textbook activities, neither the *WLV* Student Book nor the video reference each other. *WLV's* introduction indicates only that both options are possible: *WLV* may be used "in conjunction with the *World Link* textbooks, or as the basis of a stand-alone course" (p. iii). Yet, *WLV* does not include group or pair work, and thus, consonant with the series' communicative approach in *WLT* (discussed below), would not appear suitable for exclusive use in a communicative classroom. More specific guidelines about integrating the series into such a classroom would be helpful. More broadly, the series as a whole could benefit from more information in a preface or introduction that would highlight the book's features and describe its approach. The only general information about the series approach in *WLT* is on the Student Book's back cover, and its website is flagged at the bottom of some text pages but not introduced specifically. Analogously, it would be helpful if the existence of the very useful video transcripts that follow the final unit of *WLV* was introduced, or otherwise noted, earlier.

The global perspective of *World Link* is commendably realized through a variety of different features: characters of different nationalities featured in the *City Living* segments of *WLV*; interviewees from around the world who speak in the *Global Viewpoints* segments; the cross-cultural content of many of the unit topics in *WLT*; and the short *World Links* inserts in the Student Book that report interesting worldwide facts. The series as a whole is dynamic and stimulating. In the video course, these qualities are evidenced by video clips which are entertaining, engaging, and relatively fast-paced, without the stilted and flat delivery that characterizes some non-authentic materials. The creativity and high-interest level in the textbook is reflected in the book's visual appeal, contemporary orientation, and wide range of interesting activities in each unit. The drawbacks to both *WLT* and *WLV* relate to potential problems in how some of this creative content may translate to successful implementation by the learner. As there are clear distinctions between the two courses, and because *WLV* is presented as, optionally, a stand-alone course, this review discusses each course separately below.

World Links Textbook Course (WLT)

The 12 units of the Student Book are each divided into two lessons. Lesson A is sub-divided into section headings with the different skills, "links", that the sections target: *Vocabulary Link, Listening, Speaking, Pronunciation, Language Link, and Communication* (*Language Link*, which primarily addresses grammatical structures, could be more aptly named as the other links are surely language skills as well). Lesson B contains many of the same sections, except for a *Reading* and *Writing* link, instead of the *Speaking* and *Pronunciation* link (see [Figure 1](#) for a Lesson B excerpt). As a result, there is a greater reliance on the accompanying CD in Lesson A. A review unit follows every three units and includes *Storyboard*, and *See It and Say It* sections geared to producing independent student conversation.

5 Writing

My house

A Read the description of an apartment in Hong Kong. Then write about your house or apartment.

I live with my family in an apartment in Hong Kong. We live on the sixteenth floor. There are two bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen, a bathroom, and a balcony. There are plants on the balcony. The balcony has big glass doors. I share a bedroom with my sister. In the room, there are two beds. There is also a desk, a closet, and a stereo. We like to listen to music at night before we go to sleep. Sometimes, we talk about our day.

B **Pair work.** Share your writing with a partner. Ask questions about your partner's house or apartment.

6 Communication

Looking for a roommate

A Read the advertisement and answer the questions.

1. How many rooms are there in the apartment?
2. Is there a private room for you? What rooms do you share?
3. Where is the apartment?
4. What are the house rules?

B Imagine you have an apartment. You want a roommate. Write an ad on a separate piece of paper.

C **Group work.** Work with a group of 3 or 4 people. Tell them about your apartment. Your group asks questions about your apartment.

Is there a washer and dryer?

Is the apartment near shops?

What are your house rules?

Check out the World Link video.

Practice your English online at worldlink.heinle.com.

Lesson B • Student housing 113

Figure 1. Sample Student Book *Writing* and *Communication* activities (p. 113)

The difficulty level of each unit varies within the links. The *Speaking* and *Pronunciation* links, which correspond to CD tracks, are basic listen-and-repeat exercises that conform more to an audiolingual than a communicative model. Lessons target stressed syllables, rising and falling intonation, possessives, contractions and reduced speech, among other subjects. As a result, these CD activities seem lacking in utility for classroom use where instructors could more profitably carry out such exercises themselves, if deemed useful, and thereby calibrate the exercise to the students' performance – repeating words and phrases which students have difficulty pronouncing and moving on when mastery is demonstrated. Alternatively, grouped together at the end of each unit, these CD exercises could provide useful at-home reinforcement. The *Listening Link* provides beginning level CD activities that are more suitable for

classroom use, especially those that require holistic comprehension of a passage rather than ability to match the word that is heard to the written word. Examples of such listening activities include comprehending what different people are doing, what they are eating, and what event they will attend (*WLT*, pp. 37, 40, 47, 71). In rare instances, listening activities are confusing: In an activity on matching spoken information to a family picture, one speaker says, "That's my grandmother," when, in fact, there is no grandmother in the corresponding picture. In another exercise where the student must circle the correct family tree, two would seem to be possible candidates (*WLT*, pp. 56, 69).

At the other end of the continuum of difficulty level, the *Reading Links* contain passages that are stimulating and interesting, but also much more difficult for the targeted lower level learners. One passage consists of a web site that rates digital gadgets; another contains interviews with college students about who pays for a date; two cross-cultural passages describe international food festivals and the experience of living with a host family (*WLT*, pp. 23, 97, 53, 111). These varied readings necessarily introduce a great deal of new vocabulary, and, due to absent supplementary pre-reading or other activities, may be beyond the required proficiency level of the students.

The communicative emphasis of the book is its chief strength. It is evidenced in an interactive framework of meaningful pair work and group activities that include charts for students to complete with one another, classmate interviews, *find-the-difference* activities, role-plays, and *ask-and-answer* boxes for personal reflections on the unit theme. Overall, the questions and discussion topics are engaging in tone, natural rather than artificial, and pointed enough to elicit concrete responses while open-ended enough to enable students to express their own views with their own language. Students describe their favorite vacation places (p. 21), interview each other about weekend plans (p. 79), tell each other about important holidays in their home countries (p. 80), and explore what jobs would best fit their classmates' skills (p.133).

The Student Book incorporates language that is rich in contractions, reduced speech, and informal expressions, and innovatively presents information through illustrations of, and activities based on, the real-life venues where students see, hear, and use it – student ID cards, résumés, web pages, bulletin board announcements, emails, voicemail messages, classified ads, business cards, and even post-it notes. Both of these features, realistic language and the actual contemporary settings in which students will encounter it, reduce the artificiality of classroom language learning and promote the key objective of the communicative classroom--enabling students to use the language they find inside the classroom outside of it (Brown, 2001, p. 42). The book also integrates games within the units, which is a particular boon to teachers who must often look for such supplementary activities outside the textbook, and which has been noted to serve a communicative purpose in outcome-oriented use of language (Helgeson, 1987). These class activities, linked to the unit theme and clearly formatted, are easy for instructors to utilize and include both more familiar games (*Twenty Questions* and *Two Truths and a Lie*, for example) and creative new ones, such as a *Trivial Pursuit* styled *Country and City* game.

The chief disadvantage of *WLT* is that the linguistic foundations given for these creative activities are not always adequate. Students are neither given enough exposure to the relevant language structures nor provided with enough opportunities to practice them. The information on vocabulary and structures is sometimes given disproportionately little attention on the page compared to visual information, particularly in the *Vocabulary Link* sections. Prompts and modeling often appear in very small "bubbles"; structures are often conveyed through small images of post-it notes, complete with thumbtack. As a result, the visuals in the book sometimes dwarf, rather than enhance, the linguistic information. Overall, the linguistic information would benefit from being more prominently displayed and emphasized if students are expected to use it. There is also, at times, not enough context given to make vocabulary comprehensible. *Inexpensive* and *expensive* are repeatedly used, for example, without any attempt at transmitting the meaning that either a visual or corresponding CD track with a comparison could fairly easily provide.

Other shortcomings of *WLT* are the *Reading Links*, which introduce a great deal of new vocabulary, yet do not provide pre-reading support or otherwise help students understand key terms. Finally, certain exercises, chart activities as well as others, require only one-word answers from students. A group work gift-exchange activity, for example, involves students writing down the name of a gift and telling their partner the name of different gifts they receive from classmates (*WLT*, p. 26). These activities would benefit from minor modifications that would still retain an open-ended approach, perhaps even simply prompts to answer in full sentences, geared to eliciting more than single-word answers. In general, the very strength of the book in containing so much rich and contemporary vocabulary is accompanied by the challenge of providing adequate context so that vocabulary central to completing the activity is meaningful and understood by low-level learners.

World Links Video Course (WLV)

Each of the twelve video units in *WLV* contains two segments: *City Living* and *Global Viewpoints*. The six characters who perform in all of the *City Living* vignettes are twenty-something friends from different countries living and working in New York City. The *Global Viewpoints* video clips contain prepared interviews about the unit topic, with people from around the world speaking grammatically and comprehensibly – although also often in the accents of their home countries. As a result, the language used in these *Global Viewpoints* clips is commendably authentic and provides a concrete translation of the series' global perspective. It transmits English as a rich international language, flavored with the many different accents of its speakers.

3 While You Watch

A What's the story? Watch the video. Number the sentences from 1 to 6. Then write the sentences in order.

- ___ The group takes the subway to the parade location.
- ___ Claudia talks about the music and food.
- ___ Takeshi says he's hungry.
- ___ The group goes to a Puerto Rican restaurant.
- ___ Roberto asks a man about the parade.
- 1 Roberto says the Puerto Rican Day Parade is his favorite.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

B Who is speaking? Watch the video again. Circle the answers.

1. The Puerto Rican Day parade is my favorite!	Roberto / Sun-hee / Takeshi
2. Is it in June every year?	Sun-hee / Roberto / Claudia
3. So what do they do at the Puerto Rican Day Parade?	Claudia / Sun-hee / Takeshi
4. They play lots of cool music, and the food is delicious.	Claudia / Takeshi / Roberto
5. Great! I'm hungry!	Takeshi / Claudia / Sun-hee
6. Where's the parade?	Roberto / Claudia / Takeshi
7. I know it's today. It's on the second Sunday in June.	Sun-hee / Roberto / Claudia
8. Let's eat!	Claudia / Roberto / Takeshi

60 Unit 8 • Special Occasions

Figure 2. Sample *While You Watch* activity, Video Course workbook (p. 60)

The workbook contains *Real English* inserts that explain the nuances of such spoken expressions as *kind of, gee, pretty big, excuse me?, yeah?* and *excellent!* The *Global Viewpoints* material is appropriately tailored to the beginning level and serves as a useful reinforcement of the language focus of each unit. The more difficult *City Living* clips are fast-paced sitcom style vignettes that contain brief, engaging, and often humorous narratives delivered in natural-sounding, unstilted language. These attributes elevate the *City Living* segments above the usual fare of instructional videos, which have been categorized as a genre as overly prescriptive and artificial (Garza, 1996). The humor in some vignettes serves to transmit the grammar point effectively but unobtrusively. In Unit 3, for example, the progressive tense is taught by having one character revel in her new cell phone and its "bells and whistles" by repeatedly (and excessively) calling her friend to ask, "What are you doing now?" (*WLV Workbook*, pp. 26, 31), in an authentic use of the present progressive tense. Unit 8 similarly teaches prepositions of time effectively – and with a light touch – by having friends arrive at a parade and gradually realize they have mistaken the date (*WLV Workbook*, pp. 58-63).

In several other units, however, the very stylistic techniques that maximize high-interest levels may in fact impair comprehension for the targeted low-level learners. Unit 7 discusses Mike's "busy" day, which is anything but busy. The entire clip thus revolves around understanding the sarcastic use of the word *busy* when learners at this level are trying to master literal meaning. The same unit introduces the term "*friend*" *friend* (*WLV Workbook*, p. 104, video transcript), even though understanding the nuances of "*friend*" *friend* implying a romantic attachment is difficult for an advanced learner, let alone one at a low-beginning level.

A narrative device used in other vignettes is to have a role-play within a role-play: the characters portrayed by the actors in *WLV* themselves pretend to be different characters. Thus, in Unit 1, the characters pretend to be famous actors; in Unit 12, one friend pretend-interviews another friend for a job (*WLV Workbook*, pp. 4-5, 92-93). In the first example, in particular, this double layer of identities may be excessively difficult for low-level learners to follow, both because no signal words are used to let the listener know this is a game, and because the actors swiftly change identities: "I'm Katie Couric," says one character, but then is told, "After you, J. Lo," referring to her previous impersonation as Jennifer Lopez (*WLV Workbook*, p. 100, video transcript). The confusion may be further compounded since many international students do not know who these "famous" people are.

In another unit, the visual information is confusing: *Roberto's Family Picture* (Unit 6) refers to a child's drawing of her family used to teach unit vocabulary. An interesting twist, but it would be more helpful for a beginning learner if the images for *grandfather, cousin, and uncle* did not all resemble each other due to a child's drawing ability, but instead had some verisimilitude to the generational differences in appearance that actually exist. The overall characteristic of these units of requiring reading beyond the text at least raises the question of whether an approach overly concerned with authenticity and learner appeal may in fact tax learner abilities at this level and result in less, rather than more, comprehension.

WLV is well-designed in its division of each segment into *Preview, Before You Watch, While You Watch* and *After You Watch* sections with different activities for each. (See [Figure 2](#) for a sample page of a *While You Watch* activity.) The provision of subtitles for the dialogues is also a pedagogically useful way of maximizing learners' comprehension by enabling them to correlate aural input to written words (Garza, 1996). Problematic, however, are certain *While You Watch* activities, which excessively take the viewers' attention away from the screen, where their interest should be. In the very first unit of this low-beginning level, an activity involves putting six sentences in chronological order and also writing the six full sentences (*WLV Workbook*, p. 12). Other *While You Watch* activities instruct students to check which statements are true and false and correct the false ones. Video in general is useful precisely because it provides a fuller communication framework than a listening tape (Garza, 1996; Lonergan, 1984) but that strength of the medium can only be realized if students *watch* the tape as

[i]t is usually difficult for learners to undertake extensive writing – or reading – tasks while watching the screen. Viewing guides which are to be completed simultaneously with viewing the video sequence should therefore be so constructed that the reading and writing load for the learner is kept to a minimum (Lonergan, 1984, p. 11).

In light of this caution against distracting activities concurrent with video watching, other *While You Watch* activities involving only matching or circling the correct answer are more effective.

CONCLUSION

World Link Intro as a whole would profit from clearer guidelines about incorporating the series into the classroom. Exclusive use of the Video Course would not seem adequate because of the previously mentioned lack of group work, yet its refreshingly unstilted, stimulating clips would provide a welcome addition to the Student Book. However, since neither the Video Course nor the Student Book reference each other, using them together requires that a teacher think through how to integrate the two types of instructional materials and exercise selectivity in formulating an approach. Such selectivity is also required in integrating the CD into the classroom, as many of the tracks interwoven with unit activities are more suitable for at-home use. Clarification and augmentation may also be required in both courses – for vocabulary that needs meaningful contexts and activities that would benefit from expanded prompts in *WLT* and vignettes that rely on subtle linguistic meanings in *WLV*. Of course, using any textbook involves selectivity, but the effort to do so is magnified when one is dealing with a series with so many components. Given the high-interest level and creativity of the series, it may be well worth the effort. Augmenting a dynamic creative series with more background information and omitting some parts of it that are not tailored to the level may ultimately prove more successful in a language classroom than searching for ways to enliven a level-appropriate, but not particularly stimulating, textbook.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

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