

Reading and Speaking on Biology and Medicine with a Special Textbook

Natalya Snytnikova

(N. Snytnikova, Clones, Viruses, etc.)

1. The textbook “Clones, Viruses, etc.” is intended for both undergraduate and graduate students of higher institutions and colleges with biological and medical specialization, and also for biologists and medical specialists who want to improve their English skills.

The aims of the book are:

to develop the skills of reading authentic texts on biology and medicine;

to further develop oral communication skills;

to accumulate the vocabulary on the topic;

to review the basic grammar structures of the English language.

2. The book consists of six units, a grammar section, and three appendices.

Each unit includes the main text followed by the vocabulary, the exercises on grammar and vocabulary, and two or three supplementary texts to be read and discussed.

The main texts are devoted to such urgent and interesting problems as the causes of diseases, cloning from the point of view of the science, the moral, and the ethics, using bacteria to make pharmaceuticals, etc. These texts are Disease (unit 1), Bacteria: the Workhorses of Biotechnology (unit 2), Cloning: Duplicating Human Beings (unit 3), Virus (unit 4), Cells (unit 5), and Blood (unit 6).

The text opening each unit thoroughly considers the problem in question. The text is followed by a wordlist, which presents the active vocabulary on the topic, e.g. Disease. There are a lot of exercises aimed at developing new lexis as well as speech exercises. The words on specialty that are to be acquired turn up in different contexts and are used in both oral and written exercises. After that students may be ready to use them in translation from Russian into English (there are two translation exercises in each unit).

The supplementary texts are connected with the main texts of the units by subject matter. They develop and intensify the topic, and allow students to use in practice what they have acquired while studying the main text and the accompanying exercises. These texts are: Heart Disease, and The Greatest Agent of Natural Selection (unit 1); A Bellyful of Bacteria, and A new Dawn for Microbes (unit 2); Cloning will be done (unit 3); Searching for Antibodies Specific for Human Cytomegalovirus, and AIDS-Related Infections (unit 4); Natural Selection and Malaria Parasites, and What is Cancer (unit 5); Blood Cells, and Blood Diseases (unit 6).

3. The Grammar section is written in English. The way of presenting grammar is similar to that of

English textbooks, e.g. Headway. (Headway is used to teach our students General English). This is done on purpose. The textbook is intended to be used with low-intermediate students in the first place. They are already familiar with the basic rules of the English language, and they can use these rules more or less successfully when speaking on everyday topics. But it is psychologically hard for them to speak on topics related to their specialty. Being adult learners they face difficulties in mastering speaking skills. The difficulties are deeply rooted in the psychology of learning. At lower levels, (e.g. low-intermediate) they are connected with the fact that adult learners can speak about very serious things in their native tongue, but have very limited means to express their thoughts and ideas in English. That makes them shy to speak and creates a certain communication barrier.

The students often think that in order to speak on the topics connected with their profession they are supposed to use some special grammar rules. One of our main goals here is to show them that this is not the case. All the grammar rules included are provided with examples that deal with professional topics. So the students understand little by little that they do not have to learn any special “scientific” or “professional” grammar to speak on scientific and professional topics. They realize that the grammar rules are universal, which helps them greatly to overcome the psychological barriers when speaking on serious matters such as heart and blood diseases, AIDS-related infections, cancer, etc.

The emphasis in Unit 1 is on forming questions in English and on choosing the right word form. Unit 2 deals with verb tenses, word order, etc. Modal auxiliary verbs, pronouns, prepositions, etc. are among the categories outlined in the Grammar section of the textbook.

4. There are three appendices. Appendix 1 is the Glossary, which includes some of the most important words from the active vocabulary with definitions in English taken from English monolingual dictionaries. This is useful for students as they acquire the skill of giving definitions to various biological and medical phenomena and processes, e.g. embryo, infection, liquid, virus, etc. Appendix 2 offers a list of English medical and biological terms – word combinations – with their Russian equivalents. Appendix 3 shows how Latin plurals are formed.

5. The textbook is issued in two variants: with key and without key. The audiocassette is also available. All the texts – the main ones and the supplementary ones – are recorded on the tape by a native speaker.

The textbook is to be used with low-intermediate and intermediate students. It is supposed to help them acquire (or extend) active vocabulary on their specialty, develop their reading and speaking skills, and enable them to discuss different medical and biological problems on the basis of studied authentic materials.

At present the textbook “Clones, Viruses, etc.” is being used for teaching biological and medical students at the Department of Natural Sciences of Novosibirsk State University, medical students at St. Petersburg State University, etc.

About the author:

Natalya Snytnikova teaches English at the Department of Natural Sciences of Novosibirsk State University

Home address: Morskoi Prospect, 9, apt. 26, Novosibirsk, 630090, Russia
Home tel.: (3832) 33 13 04
e.mail: natasny@mail.ru
snytnikova@fija.nsu.ru
nisnytnikova@ngs.ru

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