

AMERICAN JOURNEY

美國留學英語

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by Robert Storey

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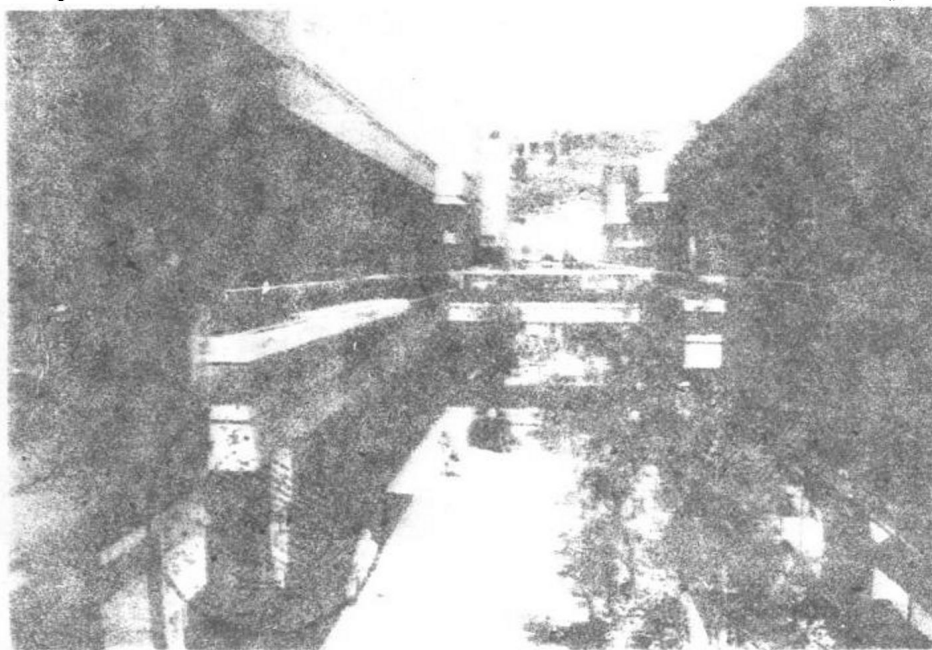
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INTRODUCTION

Today I am a teacher of English as a second language, but at one time I too was a student of foreign languages. As one who has suffered in tedious German and Spanish classes with dry teachers and dryer textbooks, I present this book in the hopes that it will offer a refreshing change to students of English as a Second Language (E.S.L.).

As a teacher of E.S.L. in Asia, I have long been less than satisfied with many of the textbooks I have had to use in my classes. I have complained about this situation to my colleagues, most of whom agree with my complaints but seem resigned to the situation. Then one day someone finally said, "Well if you don't like the textbooks we have available, why don't you write your own?" Never one to have my bluff called, I responded, "Why not indeed?"

Thus was born the idea of writing my own textbook. But as I soon discovered, it's a lot easier to criticize other people's books than to write one yourself. Writing a book, any book, is a sobering experience. During the course of my writing, I became thoroughly familiar with the principles of Murphey's Law, which are: 1)Nothing is as easy as it looks 2)Everything takes longer than you think it will, and 3)Anything that can possibly go wrong, will. I once heard that to be a good writer, one has to suffer. I can vouch for the truth of this old, wise saying.

Many months and lots of crumbled wastepaper later, I have completed the book that I believe will achieve my purpose. What is my purpose? Actually, the book has two purposes, which are: 1)To teach foreign students about American culture, and 2)To teach everyday, conversational English as painlessly as possible to the poor souls who are compelled to learn it.

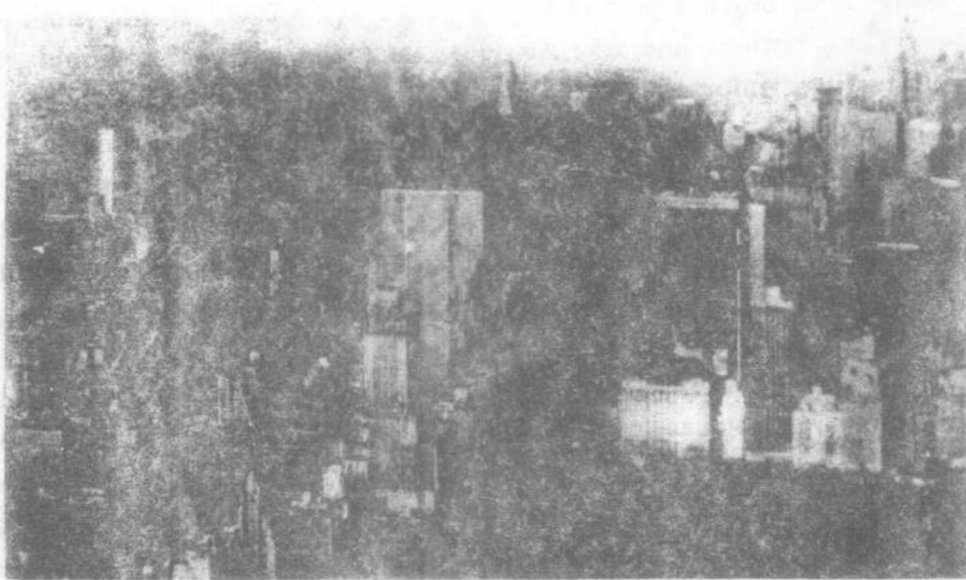
In writing this book, I have attempted to avoid the sort of teaching methods that caused me grief when I was a student of foreign languages in the USA. For lack of better terms, I will label these methods as follows: 1)The Olde Literature Method 2)The

Grammar-Drill Method. 3) The Formal Stuffed Shirt Method. I elaborate on this below

"The Olde Literature Method" is based on the idea that students can learn "good English" by reading great classics from English literature, the older the better. Thus the students are force-fed quotes from ancient literary masterpieces. As a result, students will learn "good English," with useful everyday expressions like the following: "Whan that April with his showres soote the droughte of March hath perced to the roote" (the Canterbury Tales). Fortunately, this method has become widely discredited in recent years, and only a few hardcore literature buffs still use it. Not that I have anything against the Canterbury Tales, the plays of Shakespeare, or other old English classics. Undoubtedly Shakespeare spoke excellent English in his day, but I do believe that most of my students would like to learn English as it is used in the current century.

The second false method, the Grammar-Drill Method, is still fairly common among English teachers despite the fact that it is an overwhelming failure. It is the most common method used in the United States to teach Spanish, French, and German, which perhaps explains why so many Americans cannot learn to speak these languages. Users of this book will note that there are no grammar lessons whatsoever. It has been my experience that foreign language students have overdosed on grammar drills, most of which are of little use anyway. The result of such grammar-trauma is to produce students who can define a "relative clause," containing "whom" with a "past participial modifier" in the "subjunctive mood," but they still can't say, "Hey, come here." (though perhaps they will learn to say, "Hark, cometh hither!").

The third false method I refer to is related to the Olde Literature Method. The Formal Stuffed Shirt Method is used by teachers who try to speak with what one might call an "English-teachers' accent." Naturally, these people always stress words such as whom, and shadn't, as well as "proper pronunciation"



Above: New York City skyline

(let's hear those t's in butter and that h in what). The Stuffed Shirts insist that it is "more correct" to say "You are welcome" rather than "You're welcome." The Stuffed Shirts are horrified when their students pick up common expressions such as, "I'd like a Coke with a cheeseburger and fries, to go." These teachers have cardiac arrest when their students start using words such as "rip-off, junkfood, macho," and "xerox." As any Stuffed Shirt will tell you, all linguistic change is bad unless it occurred before the 19th century. And the tragic final result of this style of teaching is that the students will learn to speak with a "weird foreign accent."

In all honesty, I must confess that I am not the first to make these criticisms of traditional language teaching methods. Indeed, the last few decades has seen a rising movement of trained linguists who question the usefulness of Archaic English Literature, Grammar-Drill, and Stuffed Shirt teaching methods. I fully confess that I received my education from these linguists, many of whom have also written excellent textbooks for teaching E.S.L. I wish to thank them now for their teaching and guidance.

Everyday slang is used in this book. Most linguists agree that

slang is as much a part of the language as "whom," if not more so.

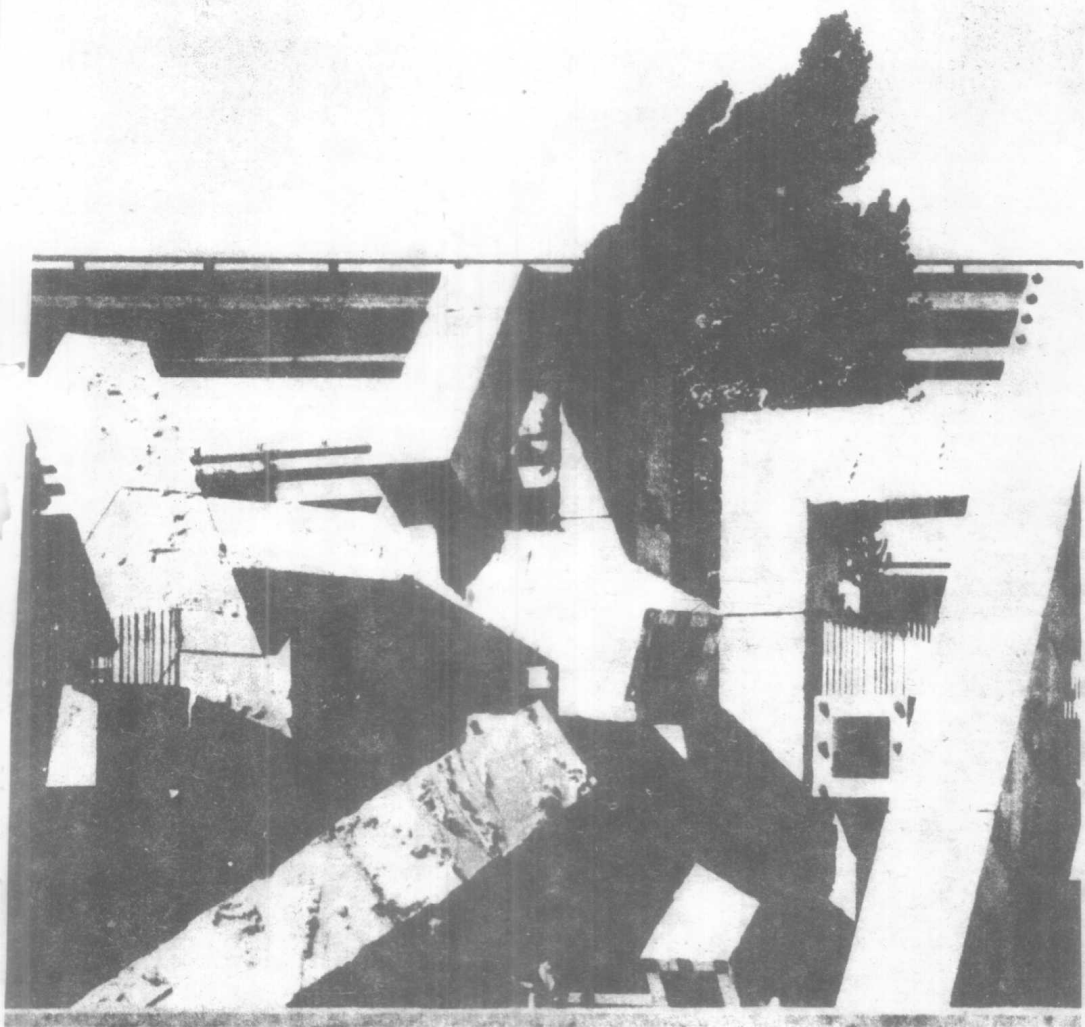
The bottom line is: An ideal language textbook should be interesting, informative, up to date, realistic, natural, and fun. In writing this book, I discovered how difficult it is to do all those things at once. What I present here is my attempt, and I will continue to revise and improve this text with future editions. Comments, criticisms, and suggestions from users of this book are welcome. Feel free to write the author, care of the publisher's address shown on the title page of this book.

Just a few brief words here about American culture. The author no doubt has his biases, but in depicting American life, I have made every effort to be fair and neutral. American society isn't perfect. No society is. On the other hand, the USA isn't as rotten as many say it is. I have tried to strike a balance, mentioning serious social problems such as unemployment, crime, drug abuse, pollution, quack religions, weirdos and misfits, along with the wonderful things about the USA like democracy, justice, education, our beautiful national parks, economic accomplishments, and technological achievements. If my students are genuinely interested in understanding the USA, I hope this book will answer some of their questions.

Finally, I must thank certain people who made this book possible. Thanks to my professors at the Linguistics Department of San Diego State University for their patient teaching. Thanks to professor Lien Wen-Hsiung in Taiwan for getting me started on the wordprocessor; thanks to Harriet Grumet for much moral support and technical help; thanks to Martin Grumet and Daniel Grumet for donating numerous photographs. This book is dedicated to Meimei.

A set of cassette tapes is available with this book.









1.1 Chen Tong An, a Chinese student, and Usman Malik, an Indonesian student, are both on the same airplane which has just landed in Los Angeles International Airport. They are both headed for the same final destination, San Diego State University in San Diego, California.

Chen: I'm glad we've finally arrived in L.A. That certainly was a long flight, 12 hours. We crossed 8 time zones.

Usman: It was even worse for me. I first had to fly to Singapore, then Hong Kong, Taipei, and finally Los Angeles. I wish I could have taken a non-stop flight. I'm exhausted.

Chen: Well, don't fall asleep yet. We still have to go through customs. That will take at least an hour.

Usman: I thought that traveling would be fun. I guess I didn't realize how tiring it would be.

Flight Attendant: May I have your attention please ladies and gentlemen? We will be landing in Los Angeles Airport in 5 minutes. Please put your seats in the upright position, extinguish your cigarettes, and fasten your seatbelts. Local time is 3:30 P.M., temperature is 30 degrees Celsius, 86 degrees Fahrenheit. Before leaving the plane, check your seats to make sure you haven't forgotten your belongings. Thank you for flying Pan-Am.

1.2 The first thing the boys must do is pass through Immigration Control.

Immigration Officer: I see you have a student visa. Do you have enough money with you to pay your tuition?

Usman: I have \$10,000 in traveler's checks, right here.

Immigration Officer: I also need to see your vaccination card. Have you been vaccinated against cholera?

Usman: Yes, here's my card. I've been vaccinated for cholera, typhoid, polio, and tetanus.

Immigration Officer: Just remember, a student visa doesn't entitle you to work in America. If we catch you working, you can be deported. NEXT PERSON!

Chen: Gosh! That immigration officer certainly was mean and nasty.

Usman: I'll say. It seemed like she was trying to harass me. Why do you think she's so cruel?

Chen: Maybe she just had a bad day. She might have a short temper.

Usman: Well, I still think she was trying to deliberately hassle me. She thinks she's a big shot.



1.3 Chen and Usman have to find their luggage in the baggage claim area. They must show their baggage claim checks.

Usman: Do you see my luggage anywhere? It's a large green suitcase with a black handle.

Chen: There are so many bags here. I don't know where yours is. Hey, could that be it over there?

Usman: Ah yes, that's it. Thanks.



Attendant: Excuse me, sir. May I see your baggage claim check please?

Usman: Baggage claim check? What's that?

Attendant: It's a little ticket, and you need to show it before you can take that bag out of the baggage claim area.

Usman: Hmm, I don't remember what I did with it.

Attendant: They usually attach it to your airplane ticket when you check in with your luggage.

Usman: Yes, you're right. Here it is stapled to my ticket.

Chen: Excuse me, Miss. I have a bicycle I shipped on the same flight we came in on, but I can't find it.

Attendant: You won't find it here. You'll have to pick it up at the airfreight terminal.

1.4 Passing through customs is usually no problem, but sometimes you have to pay import duty.

Customs Agent: Could you open your bag, sir?

Chen: Yes, certainly.

Customs Agent: Do you have anything to declare?

Chen: Well, I've got my camera; a tape recorder, radio, two bottles of whiskey, and a carton of cigarettes.



Customs Agent: You'll have to pay duty on the second bottle of whiskey, sir. You're only allowed to bring in one liter duty-free.

Chen: I'm sorry. I thought I was allowed to bring in two liters. I guess I'll have to pay the duty. How much is it?

Customs Agent: It's four dollars in American money.

Chen: Oh dear, I just have foreign currency. No U.S. dollars at all.

Customs Agent: No problem. Just leave the liquor with me and I'll give you a receipt. You can pick it up at the customs office after you've changed money. There's a money changer just outside the gate.

Chen: Will they cash a traveler's check?

Customs Agent: Certainly. Sir, may I ask you, is that ring on your finger made of ivory?

Chen: No, it's plastic. Why do you ask?

Customs Agent: Because it is prohibited to import ivory into the USA. It's contraband, but some people try to smuggle it into the country. Sometimes we confiscate it.

1.5 Usman and Chen want to leave the airport. They look for a bus that will take them to downtown Los Angeles.



Chen: This airport certainly is big.

Usman: I'm not surprised. Los Angeles is such a big city.

Chen: Let's ask that woman over there at the information booth where we can catch the bus to downtown.

Usman: Excuse me, Miss. Could you tell us how to get to downtown L.A.?

Woman: Yes, the downtown bus stops just over there next to that sign.

Usman: Oh, I see. Thank you.

Woman: Just a moment. You have to buy a bus ticket before you can board the bus. You can buy it from that ticket booth over there.

Usman: I see. Thank you. You've been most helpful.

Woman: My pleasure. Hope you enjoy your stay in the United States.

Usman: I'm sure we will. Good-bye.

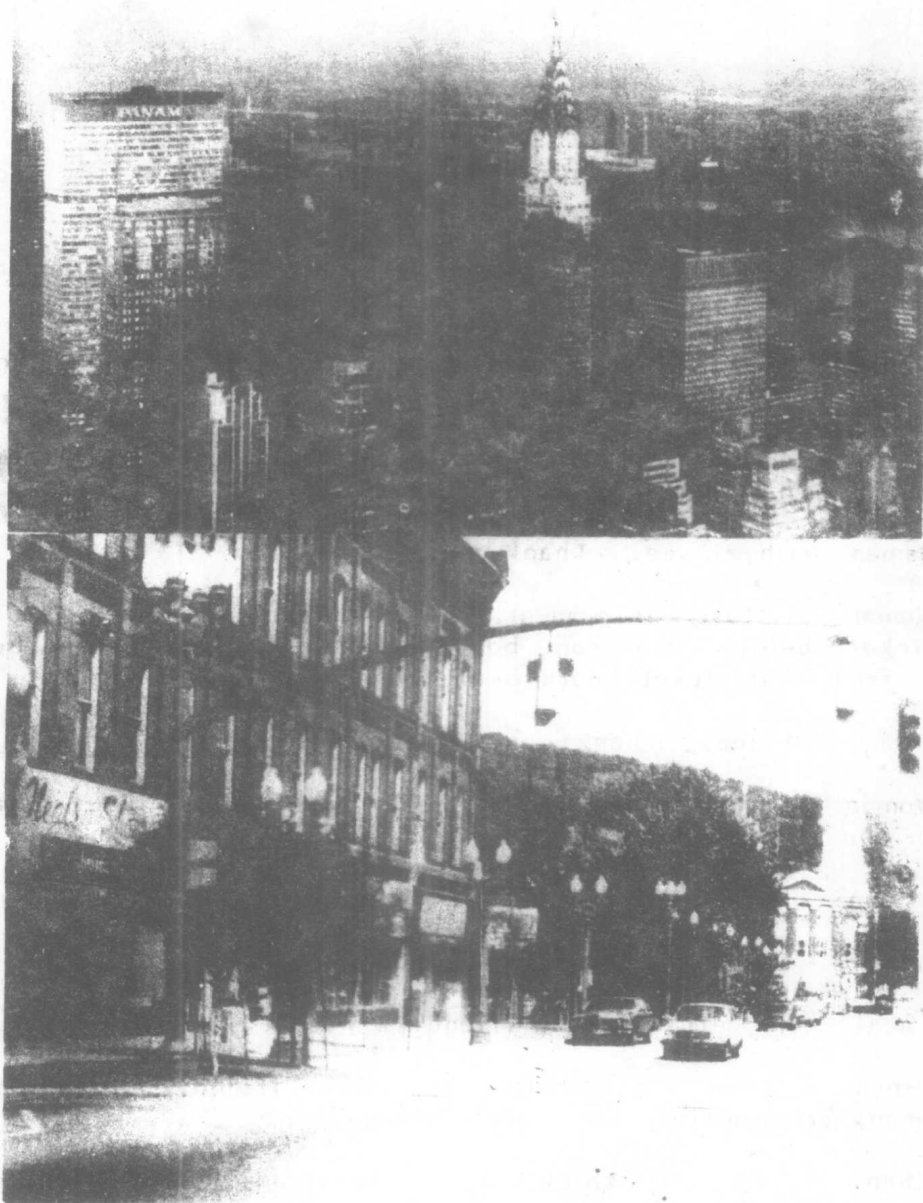
Woman: Bye-bye now.

Chen: She certainly was friendly, wasn't she?

Usman: Yes, a whole lot more friendly than the immigration officer we dealt with earlier.

Chen: Oh, I think most Americans are friendly, but of course not everyone is the same.

Usman: Yes, you shouldn't stereotype people in either my country or America.



Top: New York City

Bottom: A typical small town in the USA

1.6 Chen and Usman are in the Greyhound Bus Terminal in downtown Los Angeles. They are looking for the bus to San Diego.

Chen: Do you have any idea where we can buy a bus ticket to San Diego?

Usman: I don't know. This is a pretty big bus station.

Chen: Yes, and I don't see a ticket window anywhere around here.

Usman: Let's ask that man over there.

Chen: Excuse me sir. Could you tell us where the ticket window is?

Man: "No comprendo Ingles."

Chen: Pardon me?

Man: "No entiendo."



Chen: Erh, thank you sir. You've been most helpful.

Usman: What did he say?

Chen: I don't know. I don't think he can speak English at all.

Usman: But he looks like an American.

Chen: Maybe he is, but I hear that a lot of people in the USA speak Spanish.

Usman: Let's ask that woman over there.

Chen: Excuse me, na'am, but could you tell us where the ticket window is?

Woman: Yes, it's downstairs. This bus terminal has two levels.

Chen: Thank you.