ELT-33

ELT Textbooks and Materials: Problems in Evaluation and Development

Milestones in ELT

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The British Council was established in 1934 and one of our main aims has always been to promote a wider knowledge of the English language. Over the years we have issued many important publications that have set the agenda for ELT professionals, often in partnership with other organisations and institutions.

As part of our 75th anniversary celebrations, we re-launched a selection of these publications online, and more have now been added in connection with our 80th anniversary. Many of the messages and ideas are just as relevant today as they were when first published. We believe they are also useful historical sources through which colleagues can see how our profession has developed over the years.

ELT Textbooks and Materials: Problems in Evaluation and Development

This frequently cited 1987 publication focuses on textbooks designed for use by English language learners, and dictionaries. A range of authors explore different theoretical and applied aspects of textbook production and evaluation. They discuss teaching materials from various perspectives, including those of learners, teachers, course designers, editors, reviewers and teacher trainers. The 11 short chapters cover topics such as designing English as a foreign language coursebooks, testing, and criteria for selecting the most suitable materials for particular learners. Practical guidelines for the evaluation of purpose, content, and design of textbooks are included in the final two sections, along with thoughts on the constraints faced by publishers and those wishing to adapt materials.

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Preface

Early in my teaching career, in Africa, I managed to persuade a number of publishers to give us a set of new textbooks on the condition that we piloted them through a whole school term or year, and sent out detailed reports, together with copies of the books, to as many schools as possible. This remains one of the activities with which I am proud to have been associated. Since then, I have constantly been surprised by the profession's failure to provide adequate public feedback on teaching materials. My first unsuccessful attempt at innovation when I moved to the London Institute of Education in 1974 was a proposal for a textbook evaluation and monitoring scheme.

Consequently, I am delighted that ELT Documents is publishing a collection of papers on materials development, evaluation and adaptation. The kind of information provided on dictionaries in West's paper follows the successful format of journals and magazines like 'Modern English Teacher' and 'English Language Teaching Journal' and could be a basis for a genuine consumers' guide to major textbooks, if only the teaching profession and an enlightened publisher could co-operate. Perhaps teachers' associations like IATEFL and TESOL could set up something more consistent than the present random activity.

Meanwhile, we owe Leslie Sheldon a debt for collecting papers on all the major issues in materials development. Written materials are central to almost all language teaching, yet they are discussed all too rarely. This collection, full of useful practical advice as it is, is intended to fill that gap.

C. J. BRUMFIT

Introduction

LESLIE E. SHELDON

Pitman Education and Training Ltd

For the purposes of this volume, a 'textbook' may be loosely defined as a published book, most often produced for commercial gain, whose explicit aim is to assist foreign learners of English in improving their linguistic knowledge and/or communicative ability. Within this definition are a variety of diverse examples, ranging from books aimed at general English contexts, to those centring upon any one of a number of specialist applications. Some try to develop global ability across a wide front, while others focus more narrowly on specific skills. Some are intended for use as central coursebooks over extended periods of time, some for short, intensive revision courses and still others for reference/ resource purposes. Most evince an eclectic pedagogical stance, fusing grammatical, situational, topic and functional components in various ways. Many have peripheral supporting material such as cassettes, video packages, workbooks, teacher's books and, on rare occasions, CALL programs; this collection of essays perceives the textbook to be very much the centre of the published materials orbit. Methodological, teacher education or Applied Linguistics textbooks are not discussed.

   It needs to be said at the outset that the relationship between ELT textbooks and their users is a rather fraught one. Mariani (1980) goes so far as to call it a love/hate affair, which is nothing less in real terms than 'a sort of compromise through which a temporary armistice has been reached'. Basically, as Swales observes (1980), the textbook is a 'problem' evincing a complex of difficulties in its creation, distribution, exploitation and, ultimately, evaluation. Given the fact that textbooks often claim too much for themselves, for example by purporting to be suitable for all students at all levels, the dashing of expectations at the chalkface is inevitable. The result has been a 'coursebook credibility gap' (Greenall 1984) of long standing, in which the textbook becomes something to be endured rather than enjoyed or used effectively. Of course, as Allwright observes (1981): 'The whole business of the management of language learning is far too complex to be satisfactorily catered for by a pre-packaged set of decisions embodied in teaching materials'. Quite simply, even with the best intentions no single textbook can possibly work in all situations. As teachers know well, published materials must be used with caution, and must frequently be

supplemented by homegrown work produced in reaction to the perceived deficiencies of the commerical product.

Though it is nevertheless true, for the most part, that 'Books are good value for money' (O'Neill 1982), especially when compared with the sheer labour-intensiveness and expense of teacher-produced materials, this value is still not being maximized for many teachers throughout the world. Most do not practise their craft in affluent, unconstrained environments, and the need for non-indulgent, pertinent EFL textbooks that are easily adaptable remains very acute.

There is, for whatever reason, a lack of communication between the parties involved in the textbook question. Authors, publishers educational administrators and teachers are often ignorant of one another's true priorities and constraints. It is one of the purposes of this volume to generate and focus discussion on such matters. I see this volume of essays as attempting to collect between single covers, for the first time, a range of diverse, lively perspectives on both the extent of the current textbook/materials problem and on possible evaluative solutions which could be of direct benefit to the classroom teacher. Indeed, the criterion of practicality must perforce be one of the central yardsticks by which *ELT Textbooks and Materials: Problems in Evaluation and Development* is judged.

The eleven articles by applied linguists, educational purchasers, authors, editors, reviewers, course designers, teachers and teacher-trainers, do not offer total comprehensiveness or prescription; but they do explore many theoretical and applied aspects of textbook production and assessment which have not been previously considered. In their turn, these articles should at least provide a cue for further discussion of this neglected and thorny issue.

In the main, the contributors focus upon the three critical areas of Evaluation, Production and Adaptation. Both published and unpublished materials are considered, as there is obviously a vital feedback relationship between them: teacher-produced materials often provide the seedbed for the next generation of textbooks. The typical worksheets, cassettes, self-access and grammar units which are intended to supplement, or even replace textbooks, are clearly related to them. Similar evaluative criteria may be adduced for both types of materials or, to put it another way, the same kinds of questions can be asked. There would seem to be little profit in Swales' call (1980) for a fundamental .division between published and unpublished materials, and a consequent separation of assessment standards.

Before considering the specifics of this collection, it is as well to explore the problematic aspects of the textbook a little further. It would seem that the difficulties one would expect are compounded by a multitude of recurring and probably avoidable design flaws, which hamper the realization of a viable chalkface compromise just as surely as does the absence of a sustained, coherent professional dialogue on matters of evaluation.

To name but a few of these difficulties, most textbooks are tantalizingly vague about target learners, especially in regard to the definition of entry and exit language levels. One textbook unhelpfully describes its putative audience as having a 'high school' level of English; other books merely use the bald terms 'intermediate', 'advanced', etc. Since the Council of Europe scales, and the ELTS band descriptors are readily available and well known, such continuing imprecision makes teacher selection of appropriate textbooks needlessly difficult.

Grammatical explanations in some ELT textbooks (as opposed to reference grammars) often take too much terminological and linguistic knowledge for granted. Some ancillary workbooks force students to adopt microscopic handwriting, and are not meant to be worked in at all. Many books have a density of text or diagram which is disconcerting to the hapless learner trying to find his/her way round. Very few books provide linked achievement or progress tests, leaving this vital task for the already hard-pressed teacher. Some 'Teacher's Books' are no more than student editions with an inserted answer key.

Perhaps more importantly, course rationales, for instance in regard to the introduction and recycling of new lexis, or the grading and selection of reading passages, are rarely explained for the teacher's benefit. In many cases such omissions lead one to suspect that there is no real system at all, and that the textbook reflects its classroom origins by seeming to be a cobbled collection of disjunct one-offs. There is almost never any indication of the needs analyses on which a particular textbook was based, nor of the pre- or post-publication trials undertaken.

The list could go on, and one need only read ELT reviews to discover more. Whatever one's reservations about the academic rigour displayed in assessments published in the ELT press, they frequently represent a deeply felt, grassroots complaint about the published materials *status quo*. From an academic viewpoint as well the textbook is often perceived to be a flawed creation, textbook production (particularly in ESP) seeming to take place without sufficient regard for the findings of linguistics research (Ewer & Boys 1981); too often published materials simply fail to rest upon sound theoretical bases.

It is fairly clear, then, that textbooks and their ancillary aids are seen by most consumers as commercial ephemera which are often aggressively marketed, and which necessarily involve a compromise between the pedagogical and the financial. But whatever the teacher's opinion as to the limitations, or indeed the very centrality of the textbook, learners are nevertheless likely to consider it an integral part of the educational process. Frequently, the seriousness and the validity of a course will rest upon the selection and faithful application of a relevant classroom tome. Most learners will evaluate progress in a linear, cover-to-cover way, and will probably prefer not to dip into a textbook here and there or to use selections from a variety of printed sources.

Moreover, the discrete handouts and photocopies which typify teacher-generated materials have to be 'sold' as valid educational exercises. Many learners feel that the 'sampling' methods which are a corollary of the communicative approach evince teacher disorganization and a lack of sure, expert, course direction.

In such a situation it does the teacher little good to know that it is unnecessary (and probably unwise) for teaching material to attempt either linguistic completeness or the provision of a relentless instructional ladder (Candlin & Breen 1979), and that his/her reluctance to depend on a textbook might be theoretically valid.

All these problems make the whole question of evaluation of textbooks even more urgent, particularly as their assessment is clearly related to a significant level of chalkface grievance. Christopher Brumfit (1979) observes ruefully that textbooks do not actually help teachers most of the time; in addition, 'There is no *Which* for textbooks, and masses of rubbish is skillfully marketed'. Though there is still no *Which?* to help the consumer steer through such shoals, sporadic attempts have been made to develop teacher-friendly systems for intelligent, rigorous assessment. For instance, various elaborate evaluative questionnaires have been designed, e.g. by Tucker (1975), van Lier (1979) and Williams (1983), with the aim of arriving at meaningful 'scores'. These have involved assigning appropriate 'marks' in association with various materials criteria, or merely filling in plus/minus boxes. Such factors as the relationship between the written work set and structures practised orally (Williams 1983), or the adequacy of drill model and pattern display (Tucker 1975), can be scrutinized; alternatively, simple questions like 'Is the teacher's book expensive?' (van Lier 1979) are asked. Tucker's ingenious scheme actually involves graphical display of the resulting scores, which can then be compared with an 'ideal' textbook curve drawn up by the teacher, the ideal profile reflecting the practicalities of his/her situation. Unfortunately, these and other attempts have not had as wide an audience as they deserve. Coming across appropriate back numbers of ELT periodicals is no easy task in most teaching contexts.

The published studies in any case represent only the tip of the iceberg, as all TEFL/TESP training programmes have probably developed their own assessment techniques, many of them extremely sophisticated. A typical scheme would probably make use of a detailed score sheet which considers, among other things, the nature of the skills bias underpinning a particular coursebook, the scope and utility of the methodological notes that accompany it and the quality of associated aids. A textbook could come in for both an overview and a close study of the exercises and language tasks set for learners. The book could be examined as a language learning tool and as a physical artefact. Analysis and scoring might be done in pairs, with teacher-trainees later comparing notes in a plenary session. The latter could result in the formulation of a consensus evaluative summary, which

might set out numerical scores and lists of strengths and weaknesses (see also Cunningsworth 1979 and Williams 1981).

Alas, many of these good ideas simply do not come to light, and overworked teachers do not find out about them unless they have by chance taken the appropriate training course, in which case their lecturers will have devised their own evaluative system and assessment strategies, which may or may not demonstrate an awareness of what others have written or said on the matter. The teacher-trainee will have at best been exposed to a fragmentary picture. Despite the good work of journals and international and local teachers' associations, ELT is still profoundly isolationist. In sequestered educational pockets the world over there are enthusiasts busily re-inventing the wheel for themselves. There comes a point at which the diversity inherent in ELT teacher-training and educational practice becomes nothing less than a confusion which impedes professional development. Nowhere is this clearer than in the inchoate state of affairs surrounding the development and evaluation of textbooks.

Generally speaking, I think that evaluative questioning of whatever ilk clusters round a tripartite framework which considers textbooks and their peripherals in terms of input, throughput and output elements. In looking at input, for example, we would be considering such issues as the type of user for whom the materials are explicitly intended, as well as the assumptions made about the constraints operating in the target teaching situations. A book and an accompanying cassette package could thus be assessed as suitable or otherwise on the congruence between these assumptions and reality. Throughput would refer to the textbook's operation *in situ* after selection, i.e. whether or not it was acceptable (for both teachers and students), motivating, viable or congenial. In considering Output factors, we would want to know whether the materials really helped learners to achieve the sort of exit language competence demanded by teachers or by a higher authority. The various parts of this framework are not always distinguishable; however, what is made clear by such a schema is that evaluation is not only a static, preliminary activity. Like needs analysis, it involves ongoing data collection and fine-tuning. Global statements about the suitability of particular materials can only be made after the wisdom of the initial selection is viewed in terms of how well things worked in practice, and whether the book provided an adequate link with subsequent materials, textbooks or courses.

Frameworks and questionnaires notwithstanding, evaluative techniques cannot provide a foolproof formula by which all materials can be unerringly judged. Indeed, it has been pointed out that the more comprehensive and telling the assessment strategies, the more likely it is that a perfectly acceptable textbook or set of materials will be found wanting (Swales 1980). This is not to say that detailed evaluation is a futile exercise, but that it needs to be modified in the light of informed teacher input about the constraints and needs of particular learning

situations. If I may take my cue from John Dougill (this collection), 'insights are gained not through answers but by asking the right question'. We can expect no mathematical certainty, but perhaps it is possible to infer a valid common core of evaluative questioning which could be used by a majority of teachers (Sheldon, forthcoming). Textbooks are frequently chosen for such less than edifying reasons as mere availability, but where time and circumstances do permit the exercise of a more reasoned perspective, there should be some consistency of approach.

As a final and perhaps overly optimistic note, it might be worthwhile if discussion and questioning of the sort generated here eventually led to consideration of the establishment of the very kind of ELT *Which?* whose absence up till now many have deplored. The quarterly *ELT Update* and the *FELCO Book Review* represent a valuable first step in filling this gap, but they are both restricted to a small circulation, and are not easy to obtain. Moreover, as is the case with reviews in the ELT press, the opinions expressed remain fragmentary and subjective, displaying an uneven range of rigour and attention to detail. Some-thing more is surely required. ELT publishing is a multi-million pound business, yet the whole issue of product evaluation and selection remains lamentably confused. Perhaps it is time for a consortium of interested parties to establish a large circulation consumer's guide, which could reflect whatever assessment consensus exists at present. A materials *Which?* would in fact do much to assist the development of a viable consensus in the first place, and would provide a forum for input from all sides of the debate.

If such a periodical were not feasible, it might nevertheless be possible to develop a common criterial grid and scoring system that could be used in ELT reviews wherever they appeared (e.g. Fox & Mahood 1982). The purpose would be to provide a core of at-a-glance data to complement the more traditional textual commentary.

Let us now turn to the contributions in this collection.

Evaluating materials

Michael Breen and Christopher Candlin provide an interactive, step-by-step consumer's guide which aims to help teachers to make practical and informed textbook decisions. A set of wide-ranging evaluative questions is proposed, which examines such matters as the aims and content of teaching materials. There is considerable emphasis in the article on trying to understand the learner's point of view, and discovering judgemental standards that might be used by students themselves.

In John Dougill's opinion, the reviewer too must ask telling questions, particularly about the characteristics of the target groups at which the textbook is aimed, as well as the framework through which the linguistic content is communicated. The reviewer's assessments

need to be underpinned by a clear rationale as his/her job involves a responsibility to inform teachers about new books, whilst also being fair to publishers and authors. It is demonstrated that reviewers are frequently capable of bias and inconsistency, though the article describes a fourfold 'way' which should form the core of the reviewer's art.

Tom Hutchinson's article maintains that practical considerations, such as those revealed by close evaluative questioning about the 'surface' of materials, must be treated in concert with theoretical factors, especially the implicit assumptions made about the mechanisms of effective language learning. As the latter are rarely spelled out by authors, it is suggested that the teacher needs to pose his/her own questions to uncover them. A particular example of how such questioning might be done is demonstrated via detailed analysis of a writing exercise from *English in Focus: English in Mechanical Engineering.*

For Alan Cunningsworth too, textbooks and materials need to be evaluated with reference to linguistic theory, most notably in the area of Pragmatics. He examines how well a widely used EFL textbook accords with research findings on the nature of authentic conversational interaction. It is felt that much published material ignores the true nature of oral competence, and presents artificial, stilted dialogues as linguistic models. In many cases, students are not helped to learn the appropriacy of different utterances in specific circumstances. Cunningsworth's discussion of, for example, turn-taking is intended to help teachers decide how verbally realistic a set of materials might be.

Teachers are not only faced with assessing standard coursebooks and associated materials. Dictionaries have been increasingly seen as a central ELT resource, and Richard West gives the reader a detailed analysis of specific dictionaries, while at the same time presenting criteria which can be extended and generalized. His results, using a *Which?* format, were generated by workshop participants during a series of UK teacher-training courses.

Materials are evaluated not only by teachers and reviewers, but also by educational administrators charged with obtaining the best textbook value for money. Mike Kitto examines the financial and practical pressures exerted on the judgements made by such purchasers who, because of a concern for the maximization of profit and the student consumability of textbooks, frequently have priorities at odds with those of teachers.

Producing materials

Textbooks are frequently written from the perspective of specific teaching situations, and the publisher must decide how to effect a compromise between what authors, teachers and accountants would like to see. For teachers, the publisher often seems to move in mysterious, and sometimes exasperating, ways and Peter Zombory-

Moldovan outlines some of these, providing insight into how the final, commercial version of a textbook is decided upon. The financial bases of textbook production are sketched out, and a number of implications for idealistic authors and hopeful consumers are discussed. Zombory-Moldovan sees the teacher's evaluative criteria as not fundamentally incompatible with these pressures, though his article does consider areas for improvement on the part of the publishing trade.

Textbooks are physical artefacts, and the author needs to recognize that layout, format, typography and graphics are also essential for a successful coursebook. Today's textbook consumers have high expectations; it is now widely felt that colourful, motivating and accessible materials can legitimately be demanded. Mark and Printha Ellis explore this aspect of textbooks, and pose objective criteria, such as reading path clarity, which teachers can use to judge the visual effectiveness of published and, by implication, their own materials. Authors as well, have to take learners into account when designing a textbook, yet in many cases insufficient attention is paid to the backgrounds and expectations of many overseas target groups.

The article written by A. Dudley-Evans and Martin Bates, the authors of *Nucleus: General Science*, explores the rather different problem of revising a coursebook *after* it has proven itself in a third world environment for which it was not intended. They discuss the difficulties in obtaining vital feedback from teachers in Egypt, where *Nucleus* is used in secondary schools. This case study shows, however, that via such means as questionnaires and seminars, it is possible to strike up a professional dialogue. Concrete examples of how such information was used to revise the teacher's manual are described.

Adapting materials

Often, particularly in ESP, published materials must be modified or used selectively. Course designers have to accept the need to integrate off-the-shelf and teacher-produced materials in conformity with directions laid down by a client or an employer. Jon Leckey considers the differences between training and teaching, and the divergence in selection procedures implied by this distinction. He cites an in-company case study (which involved selection of a sample from four hundred textbooks), in which stages of criterial refinement were used to isolate the most appropriate commercial materials prior to their modification and supplementation.

Finally, Adrian Pilbeam explores more directly the blood relationship between published and unpublished materials, concluding that the seeming attractions of tailor-made materials are outweighed by the flexibility and economy that can be achieved by using textbooks whenever possible. It is suggested that this approach is especially apt in Business English, where there seems to be a generous core of language items underlying a wide range of jobs and industries. The question of

whether or not to use teacher-produced material, and in what proportions, is answered in terms of criteria such as cost, time, flexibility and appropriacy.

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Evaluating Materials

Which materials?: a consumer's and designer's guide

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Introduction

In this paper we want to offer teachers a set of questions they can apply to any published or locally produced language teaching materials. Our aim is to assist teachers in choosing materials which will be most appropriate to their own learners at various levels and in various teaching settings.

We hope, too, that from the questions teachers can derive criteria to help them explore what we can use materials for, especially in the classroom. As such this Guide has both an evaluative and a design aspect.

The Guide and its questions derives from our work with teachers from all over the world in materials design and evaluation workshops in the UK and in many countries overseas: teachers who work with all levels of language learners and in a broad range of institutions and teaching settings, from those where extensive facilities exist for materials development to those where teachers have to work with whatever materials have been selected for their classroom use.

How is the Guide organized?

The Guide is divided into two phases. Phase One poses some initial questions as to the *usefulness* of materials we either have or wish to adopt. Specifically, in relation to:

(a) what the aims and content of the materials are
(b) what they require learners to do
(c) what they require you, as a teacher, to do
(d) what function they have as a classroom resource

Phase Two evaluates these questions more closely and suggests some criteria for the choice and use of materials in ways which are sensitive to classroom language learning.

PHASE ONE: Initial questions

Try on your own or with colleagues to work out your own answers to these questions in applying them to either the materials you are currently using or those you are evaluating for possible future use. Keep *your* learners firmly in mind.

(NOTE: The questions are set off in boxes through the paper and are numbered)

I   *What do the materials aim to do and what do they contain?*

> 1. When they finish their course, what should your learners know *of* and *about* the target language?

> 2. What should they be able to do *in* and *with* the language?

Try to be as detailed as you can in your thoughts and notes about these questions. One way might be to think of *why* your learners are taking your course, what aspects of the language they will need to be able to rely on, and for what purposes in what situations they will need the language.

Once you have set out your answers, put them to one side. We shall need them later.

Now, working directly with the materials, note down your answer to the following questions, referring in each case to the materials themselves.

> 3. What knowledge about language and what guidance for using language appropriately for different purposes in various situations are offered in the materials?

It may be helpful if you set out your notes under three headings:

(a) What actual *target language data* is to be found in the materials?

(b) What *information about the language and its use* is provided?

(c) What *skills* (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and what *abilities* (interpreting speech and writing, expressing through speech and writing) do the materials highlight for the learner to work upon?

(NOTE: The first heading on language *data* refers both to samples of language for learning and language which your learners may use in working with the materials. The distinction is between exemplifactory language and language for actual classroom use.)

After working in Questions 1 and 2, and Question 3, go back to the answers that you set aside. Compare your views concerning what your

learners *should* know and be able to do in the target language with what you found out the materials *actually* offered. As you do this comparison, consider the following:

> 4. What do the materials offer which your learners will need to *know*?

> 5. What do the materials offer which your learners will need to be able to *do*?

> 6. What is *missing* from the materials?[1]

II *What do the materials make your learners do while they are learning?*

What we mean here is: what are the tasks and working procedures learners are expected to follow? Tasks are structured plans of work, from the simplest exercise to the most involved communication or problem-solving activity.

> 7. How do you think you *best* learn a language? What is most useful for learners to *do* to help them learn?

Once you have set out your answer, put it to one side. We shall need it later.

Now, working with the materials again, identify the different task types that are on offer. Think about the different types of task which are required; this will give you a good idea of the range of learning activity contained in the materials. Once you have done this, take each task type in turn and note your answers to the following:

> 8. What procedure or sequence of work does the learner have to follow in order to be successful at the task?

As you note down your answer to this question, try to go beyond any stated rubric or instruction which may be in the materials, and think about the mental operations or steps which the learner has to undertake to be successful.

After working on Question 7 and Question 8, go back to the answers that you set aside. Compare your views concerning the ways in which a new language is best learned with the kinds of learning work required by the tasks in the materials. What answers would you give to the following questions?

> 9. Which types of task seem to be most conducive to *learning*?

10.   Which helpful ways of learning seem to be *missing* from the tasks provided in the materials?

III   *How do the materials expect you to teach your learners in the classroom?*

Here we are referring to your own role in using the materials. Most materials at least imply that you should work with them in particular ways. Many offer a Teachers' Book or Guide, though, of course, we all interpret such guidance in our own way and bend it to fit in with our own preferred ways of working.

11.   What can I do as a teacher which can best help my learners to learn a new language?

Once you have set out your answer, in as detailed a way as you can, put it to one side. We shall need it later.

Now, take a look at the materials. How are you *really* expected to use them with your learners? Go through the Teachers' Book or any information offered on the classroom use of the materials. As you work through the materials, note your answers to the following question:

12.   What are *you* expected to do to help your learners work successfully through the materials?

As you tackle this question, can you identify the main and recurring activities you are asked to undertake? Can they be categorized so as to provide an *overall picture* of what you are supposed to do?

Question 11 asked you to characterize your own role as a classroom teacher. Go back to the answer you set aside. *Compare* your preferred roles with those that the materials seem to ask of you. The following questions may help to focus your answer:

13.   Do materials give you enough freedom to adopt those roles which for you are most *helpful* to learners discovering a new language?

14.   Are you asked to take on roles you do *not* regard as appropriate?

15.   Do the materials *limit* what you want to do as a teacher in using them with your learners?

IV   *Are materials the only resource in classroom language learning?*

So far we have been considering three major aspects of language teaching and learning that materials might address:

    (a) how far they might provide for learners' needs in terms of knowledge and capabilities;
    (b) what learning activities they offer;
    (c) what roles they ask of the teacher.

Our aim now is to try to relate materials to the wider situation of the language *classroom* in which you work with your learners. All materials have, in some senses to be made to 'fit'.

> **16.** What contributions can a classroom and its participants make to learning and teaching languages?

In your notes, try to include your own contributions in the classroom, as well as those of your learners to classroom work.
    It may be useful to consider:

    (a) the knowledge and capabilities your learners already apply to classroom work;
    (b) what contribution they can make to managing their own learning as they work with you and any of the non-human resources in the classroom, for example, with the materials.

Once you have worked out your response, put it to one side. You will need your notes later.
    Now, turning again to the materials, relate them to your response to Question 16 by considering the following:

> **17.** Which of your contributions to classroom work are *referred to* and *extended* in the materials: your contribution as a teacher; your learners' contributions (as individuals or as a group); or the contributions of other classroom resources?

> **18.** During classroom work, which of these contributions are *additional to* those referred to and extended in the materials?

The reactions you have to these two questions (17 and 18) will clarify both the *value* and the limitations of the materials as one of the usable classroom resources for language learning. You may now be able to identify the place of the materials in relation to:

    (a) your own contributions to classroom work;
    (b) the resources provided by your learners as a group;
    (c) the contributions of the classroom situation itself.

In this process you may also have identified aspects of classroom work *not* addressed by the materials. You may want to extend and exploit the materials to serve just those contributions you believe to be important.

PHASE TWO: Your learners and the materials

In this Phase of the Guide, we offer some specific questions to help you make a more searching analysis of your materials, with your particular group of learners and your actual classroom situation very much in mind. As in Phase One, try on your own or with colleagues to work out your own responses to the questions, always with your own learners as a target.

The questions in Phase Two focus on the following issues:

    (a)   learner needs and interests;
    (b)   learner approaches to language learning;
    (c)   the teaching/learning process in your classroom.

The questions under each of these issues are aimed at helping you deduce usable criteria for evaluating materials, both in relation to your learners and in relation to the appropriateness of the work they stimulate among your classroom group. Finally, in Phase Two, we suggest what might be some desirable features of such classroom materials, and offer some ways in which you might benefit from what your learners think about the uses and values of materials.

I *Are the materials appropriate to your learners' needs and interests?*

In Phase One, and in questions 1–6, we focused on discovering what knowledge and capabilities were needed by your learners at the end of their course and the extent to which your materials answered those needs. Here we explore this issue in more detail.

We can evaluate what materials can offer from two perspectives. So far we have taken an end-of-course or *target* language use perspective. We also need, however, to see if the materials can meet the learners half-way, as it were, and harmonise with what the learners perceive their own needs to be. In any learning group, learners will differ in what they see as their learning needs in the new language. They differ from person to person and as work upon the language progresses, each will uncover new and changing needs. Now, if learners are to judge materials as genuinely offering them the chance to develop their language knowledge and capabilities, the materials must take account of what learners perceive their needs to be, no matter how various and imprecise these perceptions may be. We must consider how far our materials will harmonize with our learners' current and changing perceptions of their language learning needs. Only then can we estimate how well the materials will serve as a means to offer to learners routes towards target language knowledge and to the language capabilities which your course aims at teaching.

Any group of learners see its learning needs as deriving from two sources:

(a)   the learners' personal long-term goals in learning the language (what they aim to gain from their course);

(b)   what knowledge and which capabilities they have already achieved in the new language.

In other words, although long-term goals provide learners with personal criteria for progress, what they have achieved (or found difficult to achieve) and what they see as important, provide them with a more immediate concrete basis from which to identify what now has to be worked upon.

Turning now to your materials, and keeping your learners and your classroom situation in view, consider how your answers to the following questions highlight this issue of the *relevance* of materials.

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19.   How and to what extent do the materials fit your learners' long-term goals in learning the language and/or following your course?

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20.   How far do the materials directly call on what your learners already know of and about the language, and extend what they can already do with and in the language?

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21.   How far do the materials meet the immediate language learning needs of your learners as they perceive them?

(NOTE: these questions can be tackled in any order, although your answers to questions 19 and 20 might help you answer question 21)

Answering Question 21 might be helped by the following more precise questions:

(a)   Can the learners clearly see what they can learn from the materials from the way the materials present that information and organize what the learners have to do?

(b)   To what extent do the things to be learned through the materials match what your learners believe to be their immediate learning needs?

We assume that any materials ought to provide a bridge between what our learners currently know and can do and the ultimate aims of the course. Nonetheless, materials presumably also need to engage what learners bring *to* the materials and need to reflect learners' views on what they should *currently* work on in pursuit of these ultimate aims.

A second concern for evaluating the relevance of materials is the appropriateness of their content to the personal interests of learners. We know from our commonsense experience that if learners are genuinely interested in the subject matter — the topics and themes —

referred to and expressed by the language data in the materials, then they are likely to be motivated to make sense of those data and seek meaning from them. Not that we can take it for granted, as some materials do, that learners will automatically be interested in certain topics and themes, but we can at least try to anticipate what is *likely* to be relevant, interesting, and therefore motivating from whatever subject-matter is on offer.

Accordingly, we could pose ourselves the following questions:

> 22.   Which subject-matter (topics, themes, ideas) in the materials is likely to be interesting and relevant to your learners?

from which we could explore the issue of appropriate content further by asking:

> 23.   In what ways do the materials involve your learners' values, attitudes and feelings?

Learners will, of course, hold values and attitudes, and experience feelings about *learning* the language as well as about the subject-matter. The extent to which materials engage these feelings, attitudes and experiences is extremely important, as is the capacity of teaching materials to excite the learners' interest through other things of importance to them. No subject matter is ever affectively neutral; what is at issue is the extent to which we can encourage the subject matter of teaching materials to develop that affective involvement so that learning is facilitated.

In Phase One, Questions 1–6, we evaluated the content of materials from the perspectives of the target language data provided and the information about the language and its use displayed. We also referred to the opportunities offered in the materials for the 'training' or refinement of skills and abilities. We should look more closely at the time and space devoted to these opportunities. Our earlier inclusion of capabilities among desired course goals has already provided criteria for assessing what materials ought to offer towards the development of skills and abilities. We are thus in a position to assess what opportunity exists within the materials for refining and developing those specific skills and abilities needed by our learners at the end of the course. Referring specifically to your materials:

> 24.   Which skills do the materials highlight and what kinds of opportunity are provided to develop them?

> 25.   How much time and space, proportionately, is devoted to each skill?

26. How is your learner expected to make use of his/her skills?

It may be helpful if you considered these subsidiary questions:

(a) For what purposes?
(b) In what ways? (i.e. in isolation, in some sequence or cycle?)

27. How are the learners required to communicate when working with the materials?

(a) For what purposes?
(b) In what ways?
(c) On what topics?
(d) With which participants?

28. How much time and space, proportionately, is devoted to your learners *interpreting* meaning?

(a) Through speech and/or writing?
(b) For what purposes?
(c) On what topics?
(d) Of which addressors?

29. How much time and space, proportionately, is devoted to your learners *expressing* meaning?

(a) Through speech and/or writing?
(b) For what purposes?
(c) On what topics?
(d) To which participants?

Each of these questions highlights the issue of the extent to which the materials offer your learners chances to develop those capabilities essential for them at the completion of your course. From your answers you ought, in addition, to be able to anticipate what further activities may be needed.

There is, however, a further point to be considered. Learners will differ in their degree of development of the skills and abilities mentioned at different points within the course. We need, therefore, to evaluate how well the materials meet this challenge of differentiation in learners' needs for using and developing skills and abilities.

30. How and how far can your materials meet the desire of individual learners to focus at certain moments on the development of a particular skill or ability use?

II *Are the materials appropriate to your learners' own approaches to language learning?*

In Phase One, and in questions 7–10, we raised some initial questions on the nature of the learning work which the teaching materials required of learners. We made the point that tasks implicitly or explicitly assume that learners will work for learning in particular ways. Here we explore these assumptions about the language learning process. Specifically, we will highlight those ways which your learner may prefer, and the extent to which your learners' own approaches to learning the language may or may not harmonize with the assumptions contained within the materials.

It is not only through the way tasks are designed that materials intervene in learners' language learning processes. Through the selection and organization of *content* writers make clear the ways they think such content can be most easily accessed by learners; how it can be most profitably worked upon and 'internalized'. A very common criterion for this selection and organization process is the belief that learners should be led by the materials from simple and familiar 'things' to the more complex and less familiar. Even though the task of predicting what content is to be held as more or less simple, more or less familiar, for a single learner — let alone a whole class — must certainly be unenviable and difficult, it is routinely undertaken by most authors of teaching materials on just such variable criteria. Content is determined, divided up, sequenced and graded, and provided with particular continuity.

Turning once again to your materials, consider how appropriate they are in these respects to your learners' approaches to learning:

> 31. On what basis is the content of the materials *sequenced?*

As you tackle this question, ask yourself whether your learners are assumed to be following the materials in a particular order and direction.

> 32. On what basis are the different parts of the materials *divided* into 'units' or 'lessons', and into different sub-parts of units/ lessons?

Ask yourself whether your learners are assumed to be following through such units/lessons from start to finish.

> 33. On what basis do the materials offer *continuity?* How are relationships made between 'earlier' and 'later' parts?

Ask yourself in what ways your learners are guided to new content and new tasks on the basis of what they have completed in previous tasks.

The purpose of these questions is to uncover implicit assumptions in materials design about consumers' learning processes. We need now to compare our answers to questions 31, 32 and 33 with the view of language learning we came to in working on questions 7–10 in Phase One of the Guide. In doing so, you might want to consider whether the way content is organized in your materials is conducive to the learning processes of your learners. Furthermore, you might want to question whether the order in which learners are expected to work through your materials, and the time allocated to different parts of the materials is in harmony with their learning processes.

In short, to ask whether the materials are adaptable to fit in with each individual's learning needs.

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34. To what extent and in what ways can your learners impose *their own* sequencing, dividing up and continuity on the materials as they work with them?

As you tackle this question consider how your learners can make the materials match their own preferred ways of language learning and their own positive experiences of learning.

III   *Are the materials appropriate to the classroom teaching/learning process?*

We return here to some of the issues raised in Phase One when in questions 11 to 18 we evaluated the relationship between materials, your own role as the teacher and the contributions of the classroom and the people within it. Our concern here is with which procedures for classroom language learning you feel to be important, and the degree to which your materials fit in with them.

Procedures themselves depend on the answers we give to a set of tactical questions, all concerned with defining classroom action. What are these tactical decisions?

(a)   Who works with whom?
(i.e. deciding on classroom participation: groupwork, pairwork, individual work, whole class work.)
(b)   What is to be worked on?
(i.e. deciding on choice and planning of content)
(c)   How is the work to be done?
(i.e. deciding on planning and carrying out preferred ways of working)
(d)   What is the purpose of doing the work?
(i.e. deciding on the aims of classroom activities)
(e)   How long is the work to be done for?
(i.e. deciding on allocating time to different classroom activities)
(f)   What resources are needed for the work?
(i.e. deciding on, choosing and using non-human resources)

Do you take on yourself all these tactical decisions? Which do you prefer doing? What preferences do you have in making each decision? Do you share the decision-making with your learners, taking *their* preferences into account? Do you negotiate together with your learners what seem to be the best ways of going about the tasks of the language classroom?

Whichever answers we give to these questions, whatever general approach we adopt as teachers, we need to be sure that the materials we use are open enough to accommodate both our own and our learners' preferences on appropriate procedures. In order to discover that, we could apply each of the six decision points for classroom work to our materials and question *the extent to which they allow in a sufficiently flexible way for the preferences both we and our learners have in organizing and carrying out classroom work.* We may find out that our materials only prioritize certain modes of participation, and offer only limited opportunity for others we regard as valuable. Again, some materials may centre decision-making on the teacher and make difficult the shared participation we may prefer; others might directly require learners to participate in joint decision-making with you, the teacher, on how the materials are best to be exploited.

IV   *Seven design features of materials for classroom work*

Building on our experience so far in this Guide in evaluating materials for classroom use, what features can we propose for materials *design*? Before proposing these, however, we want to make clear that we are not concerned with materials which focus on *individual* language learning, but rather those which can be designed to exploit the *social nature of the classroom learning group.* We have particular reasons for this emphasis. Many, if not most, available published materials are not explicitly designed for classroom work. They may have classes of learners in mind; nonetheless they very often address the individual learner or assume that the main 'dialogue' in the classroom will be between him or her and the teacher, via the materials. We want to argue the case for materials whose characteristics make the most of the classroom as a gathering of people who have a shared purpose of discovering a new language.

What are these characteristics, these design features? We suggest seven, and pose them in the form of questions. In that way, design features and evaluative criteria merge, much in the way we have been implying that they should.

(a)   Can learners identify in the materials and share with other members of the group all those things they *already know* and can *do* in the new language?

(b)   Can the materials encourage learners to state, share and justify the judgements they make,

the values they hold and the attitudes they maintain concerning both the content and procedures of the materials?

(c)   Can learners communicate in whatever medium is appropriate, with the teacher, their fellow learners, and other sources of data, about the subject-matter that interests them? Can they also do this about the language learning process the materials advocate? Can learners use language (either the foreign language or the mother tongue) either to share what they feel or to take collective action in the class-room? Can the materials be made to portray language, and information about language in ways which serve these aims?

(d)   Can the materials provide for, and enable learners to choose alternative content on which to work?

(e)   Can learners choose different routes for their work in the materials, perhaps towards a common objective? Can they adopt their own preferred modes of working? Can the materials be made to provide alternatives and involve learners in considering which alternative to choose?

(f)   Can the materials involve learners in negotia-tion, problem solving, investigating their own learning, analysing data and evaluating their performance at these tasks? In short, can the materials encourage the decision-making pro-cess for establishing and carrying out the work of the classroom? Can they do so while enabling teachers and learners to work together, shar-ing, justifying and making views on this pro-cess available to each other?

(g)   Can the materials encourage evaluation of:

(i) the outcomes (both successful and proble-matic) of the group tasks in terms of their characteristics?

(ii) the appropriateness of the materials in relation to learners' aims, choices and preferences within materials?

In sum, can the materials encourage the class-room group to evaluate learning through the materials and to assess what the materials themselves provide?

What underlies all the above is the challenge of how to build optimally upon the social nature of the classroom, particularly on the diverse contributions that can be made by a group of learners during the process of teaching and learning. We believe that materials which are explicitly designed for use by such a group of learners ought to address that group directly so that its members become collectively involved in a dialogue with and through the materials in their daily work.

Our prime objective in this Guide has been to provide teachers with windows through which they can examine materials in particular ways. However, if we wish to honour what we have been maintaining about the centrality of the group process within the social world of the classroom, we clearly need to ask whether the materials evaluation and design process ought not also to be a classroom activity. To enable this we must, equally clearly, discover ways in which learners' criteria for materials can be evoked and disseminated. It is this process that we address in the final section of this paper.

V *Discovering learners' criteria for good materials*

Our premise is that teachers may benefit greatly in the evaluation, design and use of materials by engaging the help and the views of learners. Their participation will help to establish accurately the criteria for selection and design: their reactions to, and evaluation of, materials can be channelled towards the collective refinement of materials in use. Through this process the materials can be made more sensitive to those who work with them, and starting points can be provided for the design of new materials as part of classroom language learning work.

To enable this process to begin, all the questions so far offered in this guide could be adapted so that your learners could provide their own answers to each of them. No doubt, too, additional questions may need to be formulated, and the whole redrafted in the form of a user-friendly checksheet for classroom activity. To help you in doing this, we provide below a set of questions which might well form the basis of an investigation of your classroom. The order is not fixed, though the questions do move from consideration of the aims and content of learning to an exploration of tasks and their procedures. In a sense, any of them can serve as a starting point for discovering learners' views and judgements. Moreover, they might well be reorganized as part of a classroom activity, or augmented to reflect special local circumstances.

A: *On the aims and contents of language learning*
  - What are your long-term goals for language learning? What will you gain by learning a new language?
  - What do you already know about the new language? What can you already do with it?

- On the basis of what we have done in class so far, what do you now see you need to learn about the new language or learn to do with it?
- What particular subject-matter (topics, themes etc.) interest you? What would you like to find out more about through the new language?
- Which skills and abilities in using the new language do you feel you most need to work on now and in the near future?
- What do you believe you will know better and do better as a result of working with your present classroom materials?
- What problems and difficulties for you do your materials present?
....?
....?
....?

B: *On the procedures for working with tasks and activities in the classroom*
- What do you find are the most useful ways to learn a new language?
- What are the best kinds of language learning tasks and activities? What are the reasons for your choice?
- What can a teacher do which would help you most when you are learning a new language?
- What can other learners in the class do which would help you most when you are learning a new language?
- What is your favourite kind of language lesson? What are the reasons for your choice?
- What are the good things and the bad things about learning a language in a classroom?
- What can materials best provide you with to help you learn a new language?
- What are the best kinds of language learning materials? What do they look like? Why do you think they're best?
- What is good and not so good about the materials you are working with now? What do you think is missing from them? What changes would you make to them?
....?
....?
....?

These are just initial questions. They could easily be supplemented and followed up by the kind of specific questions we have illustrated in the Guide. Once you obtain the views of your learners on materials, however, you can begin to build up a picture of their assumptions and priorities. That information, as we have said, is crucial for the process of selection and design of materials for use in the kind of language

learning classrooms we have been advocating in this paper and others which are cited in the references. Learners, after all, are the main consumers of materials. It is they, as much as you, the teacher, who have to try and make any materials work for them in their learning. The more we involve them in exploring learning materials with us the more likely it is that they will want to refine the materials for their use. That, in turn, will produce materials which are in harmony with their learning priorities and their diverse ways of learning a language.

Footnote:
1. When we speak here about 'things' that are 'missing', we hope that you may find your notes valuable as guides for future design of supplementary and extension materials with your class.

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Not so obvious

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'Professional judgement, founded on understanding of the rationale of language teaching and learning and backed up by practical experience, lies at the base of the evaluation procedure.' (Cunningsworth 1984). There are approximately 500 new EFL-related publications each year. As a practising teacher and reviewer, I find myself constantly caught up in the business of evaluating EFL material, ranging in extent from almost instant assessments to more considered opinions. As a teacher in a language school, I am free to choose and use what I like and ignore what I dislike. As a reviewer I have to justify my likes and dislikes.

There is a tendency throughout the EFL world to state the glaringly obvious in a revelationary manner couched in jargon. Reading, for example, does not take place when 'there is a breakdown of interaction between reader and text'. Videos are beneficial teaching aids because 'the spoken language is given visual reinforcement through facial feature, body language and setting'. In writing about evaluation it is difficult to avoid stating the obvious because the main criteria are, to a large extent, common sense. To ignore them, however, would be to omit the key elements, the main course as it were of the menu. I therefore propose to list the chief considerations a reviewer will bear in mind when looking at a book and then to go on and examine some more general but less obvious points.

Target group

The first job of an evaluator is to establish the age-range, type of student and market aimed at, as well as the presumptions, aims and purposes of a textbook. It is important to establish whether the book is a course book or has another intention e.g. grammar practice. The remarks below refer to coursebooks.

FRAMEWORK

Syllabus

- The type (e.g. structural/functional/multi-syllabus etc.)
- How comprehensive is it?
- How relevant to the stated aims?

Progression
  - Is the course linear or cyclical?
  - How steep or shallow is it (compared to other courses)?

Revision and recycling
  - To what extent is this built-in or provided for?

Skills
  - Is there an integrated skills approach?
  - To what extent are all four skills catered for?

Cohesion
  - Does the course hang together as a whole or is there an imbalance?
  - Is there undue weighting on certain aspects?

THE UNITS
Length of Unit
  - Is the amount of material commensurate with the intended amount of contact time?
  - Does the unit seem forbidding or inadequate?

Presentation
  - Is the language presented in a clear manner and in an interesting way?
  - Is there an inductive or deductive approach?

Practice
  - Is it sufficient?
  - Does it allow for free production?
  - Is it meaningful or personalized? (In other words, does it involve the students in any way other than just as a mechanical exercise?)
  - Does it ensure that students will be able to generate language on their own outside the classroom?

Variety and regularity
  - Does each unit follow the same format? If so, is there sufficient variety to maintain student interest?
  - If not, is there sufficient regularity for teacher and students to establish a working pattern?

Clarity of purpose
  - How clear is it what students are expected to do?
  - How easy is it for students to carry out what they are supposed to do?

SUBJECT-MATTER
Interest
- How likely is the subject matter to hold the students' interest?
- Is there a fact or fiction bias?
- Is it intrinsically interesting, or does it merely serve as a vehicle for the language work?

Culture – or age-bound
- Is the material culture specific?
- Is it too childish or too sophisticated for the target-group?
- Is it sexist or racist?

FORM
Visual appeal
- Are the pages too dense or unappealing?
- Do the layout and typeface aid or hinder the purpose of the material?

Motivating
- Is the book likely to have a motivating effect or to put students off?

Illustrations
- Do they serve a function or are they decorative?
- Are they clear enough for their intended purpose?
- Are there too many or too few?
- Are they childish, sexist or culturally offensive?

Other features
- Are there any extra tables, lists or explanations for the student?
- How useful are they?
- How useful is the book for the student outside the class? Is there a key?

COURSE COMPONENTS
The cassette
- How clear is it?
- How natural? To what extent is it authentic?
- Does it necessitate a tapescript? If so, is it available?
- Is it sufficiently demanding?
- Are the passages too long to hold the students' attention?

The teacher's book
- Is it aimed at experienced or inexperienced teachers?

- Is it foolproof (i.e. sufficiently methodical to guide the inexperienced teacher through a lesson)?
- Does it provide (imaginative) alternatives?
- Is it easy to follow visually? Is it interleaved? If not, is it manageable when used in conjunction with the students' book?
- Does it leave the teacher with a lot of preparing to do?

Tests, laboratory drills and workbooks
- Do they accomplish what they set out to do?
- How far are they communicative?
- Do they provide a worthwhile investment, or would teachers be better advised to do without or make up their own?

The right question

There is a saying in Zen Buddhism to the effect that insights are gained not through answers but by asking the right question. In the same way the reviewer has to ask him/herself questions of the sort in the list above if he/she is to elucidate the good and bad aspects of the book. Checklists do exist (e.g. Cunningsworth 1984, Haycraft 1978, Savignon 1983), but the experienced professional will scrutinize materials with such questions very much in mind.

Perhaps there is no right way

In *The Lord of the Rings* Gandalf and Frodo come to a fork in the path they are following. Frodo turns to Gandalf and asks which is the right way. 'Perhaps there is no right way', replies Gandalf. Language teaching is full of choices and alternatives, and no-one is totally sure which way is right. We do have to make a choice, however, and we do so according to our training, knowledge and experience. The list of such decisions is virtually endless, but here are a few contentious issues:

- *Input.*   One theory has it that students can only cope with learning seven new items a lesson. Suggestopedia, on the other hand, suggests it is possible to learn over 500 words a day.
- *Realism.*   There are those who criticize any activity that is not of direct relevance to students' needs. On the other hand there is a powerful argument in favour of utilizing the artificiality of the classroom for language exploitation.
- *Overt Grammar.*   Like the lengths of skirts, grammar has often been a matter of fashion, either getting high visibility or being hidden from view.
- *Drills.*   Some teachers regard them as anathema while others see them as necessary to habit formation.

'We must grant the artist his subject, his idea, his donné: our criticism is applied to what he makes of it' (Henry James)

Such fundamental issues pervade the whole spectrum of EFL and each of us, whether teacher, author or reviewer, has to take a stand somewhere along the line. The key element here is informed opinion. While there may be no right way *per se*, there may be ways that tests, experience and consensus show to be better. For want of scientific evidence, value judgements have to be made.

Judge the book by its cover

Books have to be judged on their own terms. It would be patently absurd to criticize a book aimed at developing reading skills for not containing sufficient structural practice. It is here that the importance of title, sub-heading, blurb and introductions comes into play. Given the proliferation of materials in recent years, teachers need to be able to identify the aim and nature of a book as quickly as possible. In this respect it is possible to evaluate the effectiveness of book covers too.

Publishers like to have snappy and memorable titles. Take the following for example: *Beyond Basics* and *Investigations in English*. At first sight they might appear to be similar sorts of books. However, the first has a sub-heading, 'Issues and Research in TESOL', making it clear that it is of a theoretical nature. The other has no sub-heading but the blurb on the back cover tells us that it is a 'project course for young learners studying English in Britain'. Such information is obviously of paramount importance, but regrettably there are occasions where such vital information is obfuscated by vague and imprecise generalizations. The following real-life example tells us very little in actual fact, since it could equally be printed on the back of countless others: '[The book] is the first volume of a series of three lively, practical textbooks for intermediate and advanced students focusing on the English needed for everyday communication. [It] develops a practical awareness of language leading to independent activity by the learner.'

Understanding the underlying assumptions is of equal importance if an informed assessment is to be made. A good introduction should provide such information and it is here that the basic principles behind the course will be stated. One might disagree with the fundamentals but the content has to be seen in the light of the guiding concepts. Where books have similar aims, comparisons can and should be made, for the comparison itself will highlight strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, why jettison the old if the new is no better?

'One man's garbage is another man's class set.' (Kitchin 1985) Language Teaching is sometimes treated as a science, with the continual search for objective truth, the relentless research into the nature of language learning, and borrowings from the social sciences. Try as one might to make the evaluation process as objective as possible, there is still very much a subjective element of likes and dislikes. What is appealing and motivating to one person can be turgid and deadly to another. It is in fact these subjective elements that tend to prevail in teachers' preferences, as can be seen in the survey of

Oxford TEFL Teachers in the Appendix. There is also the matter of teaching style: one's reactions to materials will be affected by whether one is the restrained, the middle-of-the road or the colourful, communicative kind of teacher.

Just how personal evaluation can be was most clearly seen in an issue of the *EFL Gazette*, which carried a review of Swan & Walter's *Cambridge English Course 1*. The review followed use of the course by a class of beginners and contained praise of certain features as well as the following critical comments:

> The major problem in using the coursebook lies in the gap between the specified aims and their realization in the student materials. Sometimes the presentation itself consists of a task, which, for beginners, is confusing rather than instructive . . . Sometimes, the structural aim is too ambitious . . . where such a broad spectrum of alternatives is presented as to leave the student confused and unable to use any of the forms with confidence. The controlled practice that is crucial for learners at this level is inadequate and there is often no discourse frame for this . . . [Some of the listening tasks] are not clearly enough defined . . . The Practice Book, which is particularly good for extensive reading, again lacks sufficient basic controlled practice . . . [The Course] . . . falls down in the key areas of clear exposition of teaching points and controlled and thorough practice. (Morris and Pearson 1985:14)

The points being made are valid in their own right. The assertive language and use of terminology give the semblance of objectivity. Yet when seen in the following light they appear as highly personal, for the book was probably the most extensively piloted and tested in EFL history, with thirty-two institutions and more than two thousand people around the world involved. Considerable care was taken to weed out such weaknesses as 'confusing' tasks, 'inadequate' practice and unclear definitions. Moreover, other reviewers were far more positive in their response, some of them actually praising features that the above review condemned. Here for example are statements taken from a review of the same course that appeared in the *Times Educational Supplement.* They serve to illustrate how very different professional appraisals can be.

> The detailed notes in the teacher's book, the grammar/structure summaries, the very clearly recorded cassette, and the well studied student practice books provide the teacher with a large and exciting resource bank from which to draw ideas . . . Clear and detailed suggestions for use of the tapes are plentiful . . . the practice book is essential for developing reading skills . . . the *Cambridge* course seems to provide contexts for the learner to make his own decisions . . . a welcome addition to the EFL textbook scene. (Fish 1984:45)

Personal perceptions will thus necessarily remain the key element in evaluation, though when assessing it is well to remember T. S. Eliot's dictum, 'The critic . . . should endeavour to discipline his personal prejudices and cranks'.

The four-fold way

In the final analysis then, the art of evaluating turns out to be by no means so obvious. The mixture of objectivity, value judgements and personal response might seem unsatisfactory to some but makes for lively debate and continued interest in new publications. For myself, I rely on the following four cardinal points, for which I am indebted to Robert O'Neill:

Face validity

The extent to which the course is 'transparent', i.e. the aims and underlying intentions are clear.

Generative push

The extent to which the course enables students to generate language outside the classroom.

Coherence or pattern

The extent to which the course hangs together as a package.

Affective depth

The extent to which the content touches the inner person.

So far they have stood me in the good stead.

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Appendix

Survey of teachers in six Oxford Arels-Felco schools
NB: The reasons are given in order of frequency. Only those reasons are included that appeared more than once.

Reasons for liking an EFL course	Reasons for disliking an EFL course
Interesting (referring to texts, activities or tapes)	Boring
Generates discussion and argument	Bland
Varied subject-matter	Badly developed
Contains useful further practice	Unclear direction, 'messy'
Has 'meaty' texts	Lack of continuity or further practice
Clear	Childish
Systematic approach	Lack of relevance
Attractive, well set-out	Repetitive
Useful teachers' book	

What's underneath?: an interactive view of materials evaluation

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A. Introduction

A recent survey (Henrichsen 1983) into what EFL/ESL teachers wanted from their training discovered that the second most important item was 'training in TESL materials selection and evaluation'. Amongst non-USA respondents to the questionnaire, this item ranked as number one. The survey did not explore the reasons for the importance accorded to the item, but it is easy to see why materials evaluation and selection should be ranked so highly. Materials are not simply the everyday tools of the language teacher, they are an embodiment of the aims, values and methods of the particular teaching/ learning situation. As such the selection of materials probably represents the single most important decision that the language teacher has to make.

But what criteria do teachers have for selecting materials? Certainly, there are practical factors to consider: price, availability, length of course etc. The general suitability for the learners will also be taken into account — age level, linguistic level (beginner, intermediate, advanced), learning purpose (Social, Study Skills, EST etc). Important though these factors are, however, they are only very crude indicators of suitability, and while such general features of a textbook certainly need to be considered, the process of materials evaluation only takes on a real value when we look at what is underneath these surface categorizations.

This is important in the first place on practical grounds. Such is the wealth of materials now available that for any identifiable need there will be a number of possible alternatives to choose from. Thus the teacher requires more accurate and revealing criteria on which to base a final selection.

There is, however, a second reason for looking below the superficial features of materials, and this value extends far beyond the matter of choosing a suitable textbook. As already noted, materials evaluation plays such an important role in language teaching that its potential for influencing the way teachers operate is considerable. Materials evalua-

tion can and should be a two-way process which enables teachers not just to select a textbook, but also to develop their awareness of their own teaching/learning situation.

B. Looking at what's underneath

Any set of language teaching materials is an implicit statement about the nature of language learning. Thus, in evaluating materials, what we really need to know is what view of language learning they are based on. Unfortunately it is not always possible to gather such information from the publishers' own descriptions of the materials. What does it actually mean when a course is described as 'communicative' or 'functional'? Is it an accurate description or merely a fashion label? Does the concept of 'communicative' accord with your own interpretation? The terminology has become so meaningless that we cannot rely on it. The only reasonable way to evaluate is to ask your own questions about the assumptions underlying the materials.

We've seen already some of the questions that the evaluator must ask: How much does the book cost? How many hours teaching does it provide? etc. At the deeper level of materials evaluation the main question is not what? or how much, but why? — why are the materials as they are?

If we take an extract from some materials, we can see the kinds of questions that should be asked in order to discover the views of language and learning which underlie them. The following exercise is taken from *English in Focus: English in Mechanical Engineering* by Eric Glendinning, OUP, 1974, p. 21.

1. Language

(a) What view of language does the exercise put forward? It has structural, functional and discoursal features. Does it reflect their relationship effectively? Is it clear what the difference between the two sentences (a) and (b) is? Does the difference rest on the active/passive distinction or on the personal/impersonal distinction or on something else?

(b) Do you agree with the statement 'We would not normally write this type of sentence in a report on an engineering experiment?' Is this an accurate statement about engineering discourse? What do you think this statement will mean to the student?

(c) Is it clear from the explanation and examples what the active/ passive choice depends on? Does the exercise, in other words, help the learners to understand why a particular form is used? Does it help the learner to establish criteria for making a choice in any given instance between the active and the passive?

(d) Do the examples in the 'Now rewrite . . .' section follow the same pattern or rule as the explanation? What would you do, for example, if a student produced for number 3: "This force can be applied in any direction providing the *plane is acted up one component"?

IV GUIDED WRITING

STAGE 1 *The use of the passive in the description of an experiment*

Look at this sentence:

  (a) Bill and I measured the extension in the steel bar.

We would not normally write this type of sentence in a report on an engineering experiment. Instead we would write:

  (b) The extension in the steel bar was measured.

Sentence (b) is an example of the passive construction. The passive is common in scientific writing where the action described is felt to be more important than the actors.

  Look at the following examples of active and passive sentences:

active	*passive*
We suspend a 1 kg mass from a light bar.	A 1 kg mass is suspended from a light bar.
We measured the distance between the mass and the fulcrum.	The distance between the mass and the fulcrum was measured.
We may calculate the moment of the force in two ways.	The moment of the force may be calculated in two ways.

Now rewrite each of the following sentences in the passive.
  1. If we place a smooth roller on an inclined plane, it will run down the plane.
  2. Two other forces act on the roller.
  3. We can apply this force in any direction providing one component acts up the plane.
  4. We call the third force the normal reaction — R.
  5. We can therefore draw a triangle of forces for the system.
  6. The diagram shows this force — P — acting parallel to the plane. (In the diagram, this force . . .)
  7. To keep the roller in equilibrium we must apply a force to it. (A force . . .)

2. Learning

(a) What is the objective of the whole exercise? Is it to teach the
passive/active distinction or to help learners in choosing which to use?
Or is it trying to teach something about the nature of technical
discourse? Is the focus clear?

(b) The English in Focus series claims to be based on a cognitive
view of learning: 'The whole approach . . . is based on the assumption
that the students will be people whose minds are directed towards
rational thought and problem-solving, and the grammar exercises are
designed to take this fact into account.' (Allen and Widdowson 1974).
Do you agree with this view of learning? Do you think the materials
really do treat the learners as rational thinkers?

(c) The explanation of the use of the passive indicates a belief that
people learn by having rules and patterns explained to them. Do you
think this is true? Do you think it is better to get learners to work out
the rules for themselves? Do you think it is better to have no conscious
focus on rules?

(d) The 'Now rewrite . . .' exercise is a form of written structure
drill. It is saying: repetition is important for learning. Do you agree
with this? In what way does it help? Does it help learners to discover
the rule, because they get more chances to analyse it? Or is it based on a
need for reinforcement? Where does the structure drill come within the
materials? Does it come after an explanation of a rule to give practice in
applying the rule or is it supposed to help the learner discover the
pattern in the first place?

(e) What existing knowledge are learners expected to bring to the
exercise? Is their knowledge of communication exploited? What about
their technical knowledge? Do they need to know what the sentences
mean or simply to manipulate the forms? If the former, does the content
knowledge help or obstruct in reformulating the sentences? If the
latter, is this in accord with the stated functional/discoursal focus of the
exercise?

(f) What roles do teacher and learner play in this exercise? What
roles are possible? Is the teacher a giver of information, an evaluator of
correctness, a manager of learning, a further resource, or a combination
of these? Does the exercise limit the possible roles or does it offer
potential for a variety of roles to suit the individual situation? What
roles are available to the learner: is the learner a decision maker or just
a receiver of information?

(g) What does the appearance of the book tell you about the view of
learning? Is there a regular pattern to the chapters with the same
sequence of exercises following each text? Has this been done for ease of
layout, or are the authors perhaps saying that regularity is important
to learning? Are they thinking of the teacher: a regular chapter
structure helps with lesson planning? Do you agree, or do you think
teachers and learners easily get bored with a regular pattern? Do you

think the appearance of a book affects attitudes to learning? If so in what ways?

This list of questions is by no means exhaustive. There is, for example, a whole range of questions to be asked as to the relationship between this exercise and the remainder of the unit, as also to the relationship between the units of the whole book. In addition, it is very important to support such an analysis with classroom experience and learner feedback. What you think learners are doing in a particular activity may be very different from what the learners think they are doing. They may well enjoy and find useful something which you consider a poor activity and vice versa.

I hope that the questions above give some idea of the kind of questions that need to be asked, if teachers are really going to find out what view of language learning has influenced the authors of the textbook being evaluated.

C.   Materials evaluation as an interactive process

Asking questions such as those above will obviously help teachers to select the best book: the more information the evaluator can gather about the nature of a textbook, the better will be the choice. But the real value of this kind of materials evaluation goes much deeper. In order to see this we need to consider what is actually happening when we evaluate materials.

It will be clear from section B that analysing materials requires two basic questions:

- What does this tell you about the author's view of language and/or learning?
- Do you agree with this view?

This dual question illustrates the fact that materials evaluation is essentially a *matching process* in which the needs and assumptions of a particular teaching-learning context are matched to available solutions.

Evaluation is a matter of judging the fitness of something for a particular purpose. Given a certain need, and in the light of the resources available, which out of a number of possibilities can represent the best solution? (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).

This matching process has four stages:

1. Define the criteria on which the evaluation will be based.
2. Analyse the nature and underlying principles of the particular teaching/learning situation.
3. Analyse the nature and underlying principles of the available materials and test the analysis in the classroom.
4. Compare the findings of the two analyses.

These stages are shown in the following diagrams:

```
                    ┌──────────────────────┐
                    │ DEFINE CRITERIA.      │
                    │ On what bases will    │
                    │ you judge materials?  │
                    │ Which criteria will   │
                    │ be more important?    │
                    └──────────────────────┘
```

DEFINE CRITERIA.
On what bases will
you judge materials?
Which criteria will
be more important?

SUBJECTIVE ANALYSIS
What realizations
of the criteria do
you want in your course?

OBJECTIVE ANALYSIS
How does the
material realize
the criteria?

MATCHING.
How far does the
material match your
needs?

Materials evaluation is, then, by its very nature concerned with relative worth, and recognising the 'relativity' of the process is crucial, if materials evaluation is to be of real value to teachers. As already noted, any set of language teaching materials is an implicit statement about the nature of language use and language learning. Any language teaching situation similarly embodies assumptions as to the nature of language and learning. It follows logically from this that in carrying out the matching process, it is necessary for the materials evaluator to look not only at the materials to be evaluated, but also to carry out a thorough analysis of the teaching/learning situation that the materials are required for. You cannot, after all, effectively match a solution to a need, if you do not also identify the nature of the need. Thus the materials evaluation process, if used effectively, can take on an awareness building role, in which materials and teaching/learning situations help to inform one another.

Materials evaluation can develop awareness in a number of ways:

1.   It obliges teachers to analyse their own presuppositions as to the nature of language and learning. In carrying out an in-

depth analysis, teachers must question the assumptions behind their normal practices and observe their own and their learners, behaviour in the classroom more closely. In this way they might become more aware of what actually happens in their classrooms. They might equally find that some of their habits and established patterns are in conflict with what they actually know about language learning. Materials evaluation can thus help teachers to get a better concordance between their theoretical knowledge and their practice.

2.   Materials evaluation forces teachers to establish their priorities. It is almost certain that there will be a conflict between the various textbooks that are evaluated. It is unlikely that one book will meet all the requirements of the teaching/learning situation: one textbook might be preferable in terms of content and language areas; another might have exercises that fit better with the methodological criteria.

Teachers need to decide which criteria are the more important. This will help further to focus their views on language learning. It may also make them more aware of the needs and expectations of other people involved in the teaching/learning situation: other teachers who have to use the book, inspectorates, students and, in an ESP situation, probably sponsors, too. These people may have differing views as to the relative importance of criteria. These views need to be taken into account.

3.   Materials evaluation can help teachers to see materials as an integral part of the whole teaching/learning situation. In establishing priorities between the various criteria, teachers must consider not just which features of a given textbook are better, but also which unsatisfactory features are easier to remedy. Is it, for example, easier to change poor texts or to change the exercises based on the texts? If no grammar explanations are given and you feel they are necessary, how well can you supply them? The methodology may assume learners working as individuals, but, if you want them to work in groups, you need to consider how easy it is to adapt the given exercises for groupwork. In this approach to materials evaluation, rather than looking at materials in terms of what they bring to the teaching/learning situation, teachers can take a more positive view and analyse the existing potential of the teaching/learning situation in order to see what that situation can contribute to the materials. They can look, in other words, not just at what materials do, but what they make possible. In this way teachers can construct a more coherent teaching programme that exploits the full potential both of the materials and the teaching/learning situation.

In summary, then, materials evaluation should not only serve the immediate practical aim of selecting teaching materials. It can also play a useful role in developing teachers' awareness of the assumptions as to the nature of language learning on which they operate.

D.   Conclusion

Why the teachers in Henrichsen's survey (*op cit*) gave such importance to materials evaluation is not known for certain. What is clear, however, is that they highlighted a process which has considerable potential to influence language teaching practice. This potential can only be realized if materials evaluation goes beyond the crude categorizations of language level and syllabus content to the much more fundamental issues of what views of language learning the materials express. Materials evaluation also needs to be approached as a matching process, in which the values and assumptions of the teaching/learning situation are matched to the values and assumptions of the available materials. Carried out as an interactive process, materials evaluation not only helps to put the choice of materials on a sounder basis, but can also play a valuable role in in-service teacher training, by forcing teachers to examine in a positive light the views of language learning which inform their teaching.

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Coursebooks and conversational skills

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Introduction

Language teaching influenced by the grammar-translation or audio-lingual methods has traditionally been largely concerned with the areas of grammar, lexis and phonology, roughly in that order of importance. Meaning, taught mainly through translation, was limited to a literal understanding of the vocabulary and grammatical structures taught. The emphasis was either on written forms or on an idealised version of speech, set out in constructed dialogues acting as models for the presentation of new structures. Little attention was paid to the characteristics of naturally-occurring conversation, and as a consequence learners rarely became competent in conversational skills, even where they acquired a good knowledge of the form of the language.

The influence of speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle 1969) on language teaching made itself felt in the 1970s through the Threshold Level (van Ek 1975; van Ek and Alexander 1980) which set performance targets expressed in terms of the learner's ability to perform certain speech acts and to express certain concepts, or *notions* (Wilkins, 1976). The speech acts included in the performance specification were loosely categorized and were called *functions*, from where we get the notional/functional approach to language teaching.

However, the notional/functional approach, whilst it does add the important dimension of illocutionary force to our understanding of meaning in the context of langauge learning objectives, does not address itself directly to the central problems of equipping learners with conversational skills. As Widdowson (1979) points out, 'the focus of attention in the notional syllabus . . . is on items, not strategies, on components of discourse, not the process of its creation.' This continuing emphasis on teaching separate items of language, whether they are labelled as structures or functions, does not present the learner with adequate models of language in use, of language as discourse or of language use as the creation of discourse. There is far more to effective participation in a conversation than performing a number of isolated speech acts. A conversation is interactional and the participants work together in its development, mutually defining and evaluating each

contribution; it is essentially a collaborative process and must be seen as such for teaching purposes.

The use of role-play and simulation has been popular for some years as the most effective way of equipping learners with the skills they need to take part in oral interactions. However such activities, whilst useful for practising skills already acquired, do not provide a clear and well-graded presentation of models of interaction on which learners can base their own performance. The very richness of context and dynamism of interaction which they create and which make them excellent vehicles for communicative practice restrict their usefulness as models for presentation.

As Kramsch (1981) points out, 'what is almost totally absent . . . is material to develop . . . the interactive or discursive competence.' In the relative absence of such material, teachers tend to rely on some or all of the following:

    (a)   partly-contextualized lists of form-function equivalences;
    (b)   an assumption that conversational skills are directly trans-ferable from L1 (but see for example Thomas 1983)
    (c)   a vaguely-defined expectation that learners will in some way 'pick it up' through exposure to the language in contexts of use.

None of these positions is fully tenable (Cunningsworth and Horner, forthcoming) and a fuller view of the nature of conversation is necessary as a basis for the development of more effective teaching materials.

Pragmatics is able to provide at least the beginning of a description of the processes involved in conversation and I identify three areas of importance to language teaching. The first is the relationship between situation and meaning. This is far more than the contextualized presentation of new language items as found in situational language teaching techniques. It concerns the whole range of contextual variables which surround any conversation including, most impor-tantly, the linguistic context or 'cotext' (Brown and Yule, 1983), the physical situation, including the roles of the participants, and the participants' shared knowledge, values and assumptions. Only with such knowledge can judgements be made about the appropriate style, the level of explicitness and the amount of inferencing acceptable in a conversation.

The second area concerns the unwritten rules or conventions of conversation, and to what extent they are universal. The best account we have is that of Grice (1975) subsequently developed by others, such as Leech (1983). It is through such accounts that we can begin to understand the crucial process of interpretation, assigning to instances of language their value as speech acts.

The third area is that of conversation analysis (CA) and includes the study of conversation organization and the physical and psychological

conditions under which conversations take place. CA deals with real data, naturally-occurring speech, and from studies in this field we can identify a number of significant features of conversation that need to be included in materials for teaching conversational skills.

I propose in the rest of this paper to examine some findings from the above areas and to establish some criteria for analysing and evaluating materials which aim to teach oral skills in English. Finally, for illustrative purposes, some of the criteria will be applied to a sample of published material.

1.   Criteria for evaluation

1.1   *Style*

Learners need to develop a sensitivity to stylistic variation in order to participate effectively in conversation. The range of variation does not have to be as wide as that of a native speaker but there should be an awareness of the difference between informal, neutral and formal styles, linked to a recognition of the types of speech situation which require particular levels of formality.

The most important variables in the speech situation are the physical context (setting), the social roles of the participants *in that context* and the goals of the participants. If we take the example of making requests, or, to give a broader definition, getting others to do things, we see that the utterances used will vary on a sliding scale along at least two axes. The first axis is that of relative social roles in the context of the conversation, the greater the social distance, the more formal the style. The second axis concerns the speaker's goal, in this case whether he is trying to get his hearer to perform a small task or a large task. Leech (1983) refers to this as the *cost-benefit scale*. The greater the cost to the hearer, the more formal (polite) is the style of the speaker.

We would expect teaching materials at intermediate level and above to begin a process of sensitisation to these variables in the speech situation so that learners develop an awareness of the factors which determine stylistic choice. This must be closely linked to the provision of sufficient and suitable models of language at different levels of formality, and where possible learners should internalize underlying principles which determine where a particular utterance lies on a formality scale.

To take again the example of requesting, presenting a number of utterances which can be used to make requests and grading them on a politeness scale with, at one extreme, *Shut the door*, and, at the other, *Could you possibly shut the door, please* will be of some use to the learner. But they are being presented with isolated exponents of a particular function, without a principled explanation of why one is more polite than another.

Two more things need to be done. First, the exponents need to be integrated into a realistic piece of discourse, such as a conversation,

which will (a) provide context in terms of social roles, goals, etc. and (b) demonstrate the exponents in use within the collaborative framework of the conversation. Second, in order to be able to generate appropriately-formulated requests rather than simply phrases learned parrot-fashion, learners need to understand why some utterances are more polite or formal than others. In the case of requesting, this can be explained relatively straightforwardly in terms of giving the hearer the opportunity to refuse without causing offence. He can best do this by claiming that he is unable to accede to a request. Hence an indirect request which questions the hearer's ability (rather than willingness) to comply is considered more polite. *Could you close the window* (questioning ability) is more polite than *Would you close the window* which arguably questions willingness. This concept of *optionality* (i.e. how easy the speaker makes it for the hearer to refuse) should not be a difficult one for learners to grasp and is certainly simpler than many grammatical concepts.

So far as style is concerned then, we should expect teaching materials to present exponents of language on a formality/politeness scale within a context rich enough to provide information about speakers' roles and conversational goals. And we should expect, where possible, to see some sensitisation of learners to why some forms are more or less formal or polite than others.

1.2   Interpretation and inference

Here we are concerned primarily with how explicit the contributions to a conversation should be, and to what extent the participants rely on inference to interpret what they hear. The major factor influencing the degree of explicitness is the background knowledge and the values shared by the participants. An example given by Levinson (1983) will make this clear:

A: Where's Bill?

B: There's a yellow VW outside Sue's house.

The exchange can be interpreted only with the shared background knowledge, or at least the assumption, that Bill drives a yellow VW. An intuitive knowledge of, and application of, the Gricean maxims would seem to be necessary for successful participation in conversation. In particular the maxim of quantity and the maxim of relation[1] are crucial.

Teaching materials which aim for learner competence in conversational skills should take account of the inexplicit nature of much naturally-occurring conversation and prepare learners for it. This is difficult because it is necessary to establish the amount and nature of shared knowledge and to determine what common assumptions exist between the participants. However by (a) drawing on what learners may reasonably be expected to bring with them as knowledge of the world and accepted values (e.g. that, if X's car is parked outside a particular house in a residential street, it is a fair assumption that X

will be in that house) and (b) establishing a rich enough context, coursebook writers should be able to produce conversational materials that embody relatively inexplicit exchanges which call for inference and interpretation.

1.3 The organization of conversation

One of the basic units of conversation is the *turn* and *turn-taking* is an essential skill for anyone who wants to take part in a conversation. The fact that turn-taking occurs with split-second timing between two or more people illustrates the collaborative nature of conversation and highlights the supposition that there are rules and conventions for turn-taking which are shared by all members of a speech community. The conventions are not yet fully understood, but certain features do seem to be established. First, there are certain points in a conversation (perhaps at the end of a main clause) where other speakers can come in and where the current speaker is most vulnerable to interruption. Second, where interruption does not occur, the current speaker has the right to nominate who speaks next. Third, he can do this by using a combination of linguistic, paralinguistic and kinesic cues, such as addressing the nominated speaker by name, or by the use of eye contact (Coulthard, 1977:61).

Teaching materials should provide practice in turn-taking and in interruption techniques. These could include the identification of places where the next speaker can come in, whether nominated or not, learning ways of nominating the next speaker, and learning suitable formulae for interrupting. Few coursebooks deal with these things and generally speaking dialogues and conversations in typical coursebooks are stilted and unnatural. One reason for this is that they are written, and written in sentences, whereas natural conversation tends to occur in loosely co-ordinated clause complexes in which sentence boundaries are difficult if not impossible to define (see Stubbs, 1983, chapter 2), and, in coursebooks, turns tend to correspond to complete sentences or sentence sequences. Another reason is the overexplicitness and lack of inference referred to earlier.

A further feature of turn-taking is the real-time constraint which applies in conversation. The split-second timing and the relative unpredictability of the next turn can pose serious problems to learners and should be dealt with in coursebooks. Learners need to develop their prediction skills so that they can predict the next turn not precisely but within a range of possibilities; in other words they should be able to predict the probable general shape of the conversation ahead. A small number of books do attempt to cope with this difficult problem by using cued pair-work techniques. See for example exercise B *Role-Play* on page 38 of *Advances* (Prowse and McGrath, 1984).

One way of helping learners to perceive the patterns of conversation organization is to focus on *adjacency pairs*, paired utterances such as question-answer, offer-acceptance, request-compliance. Practice with

typical adjacency pairs in short dialogues will help learners in prediction skills and develop their ability to respond in real time. Many coursebooks do this, although often in rather an artificial way.

Let us return to the example of *requesting* and see how teaching adjacency pairs might be handled in the case where speaker B signals that he will not comply. Refusal in this context is known in the language of CA as a dispreferred response, of a *dispreferred second* (see Levinson, 1983, chapter 6). Dispreferred seconds characteristically display some of the following features:

(a)   *delays:* (i) by pause before delivery, (ii) by the use of a preface (see(b))

(b)   *prefaces:* (i) the use of markers such as *Uh* and *Well,* (ii) the production of token agreements before disagreements, (iii) the use of apologies, (iv) hesitation in various forms

(c)   *accounts*: carefully formulated explanations for why the dispreferred response is given

(d)   *declination component:* suited to the nature of the first part of the pair, but characteristically indirect or mitigated

(adapted from Levinson, 1983: 334–5)

We may expect then that teaching material for responding to requests would include refusals and that there would appear in presentation and practice material instances of at least some of the above features. Of particular interest are (a) and (b) as checks on the authenticity or realism of teaching materials.

We should also look briefly at *preferred sequences*. In the context of getting others to do something, the preferred sequence is for A to elicit an offer from B, rather than for A to make a request to B. The following is an example of a preferred sequence:

C: Hullo I was just ringing up to ask if you were going to Bertrand's party
R: Yes I thought you might be
C: Heh heh
R: Yes, would you like a lift?
C: Oh I'd love one
R: Right okay um I'll pick you up from there

(Levinson, 1983:359)

Coursebooks abound in dialogues and exercises for making requests as in the following typical example:

Diana: Oh, Paul. Can you do me a favour?
Paul: Yes, certainly.
Diana: Can you ask Vince and Joanne to come and see me this morning?
Paul: Yes, of course.

(Abbs and Freebairn, 1982)

We might, however, look for teaching material which equips learners to attempt to elicit an offer as a first strategy, and only to make a request if the attempt fails.

Other features of conversation organization which merit consideration when evaluating teaching materials include strategies for *repair* and *negotiation of meaning*. CA distinguishes between self-repair and other-repair, self-repair being preferred, and between self-initiated repair and other-initiated repair, again the former being preferred. Conversations in a foreign language may well break down and one of the first remedies that a learner has should be the appropriate strategies and language for repair, preferably self-initiated repair. There appears to be little in published coursebooks on repair or negotiation, but some useful exercises are given in Kramsch (1981) under the heading *Negotiating for Meaning* (pp. 49–52).

In materials for developing learners' conversational skills we should above all be looking for an awareness that a conversation is a collaborative activity involving two or more people competing for the floor and negotiating meaning; that it is a dynamic piece of discourse being created by the speakers and developing sequentially in time; that it is subject to real-time constraints; and that it is relatively unpredictable and certainly is not a pre-determined series of perfectly-formed sentences.

To conclude this section we may note Sajvaara's comments on fluency reported by Kramsch (1981): 'It is not the good language competence that is an indicator of fluency, but the perception of the hearer, what sort of attitudes various elements in a speaker's performance trigger in the hearer.' Grammatically correct sentences do not constitute fluency: native speakers who produced more examples of false starts, incomplete sentences, rephrasings, etc. than second-language speakers were nevertheless perceived to speak more fluently.

2.   Applying the criteria

So far as *style* is concerned, most coursebooks present very neutral language, as in this example:

E: Could I have a tube of toothpaste, please?
F: With fluoride or without fluoride?
E: With fluoride please.
F: Is that all, sir?

(Hartley & Viney, 1979)

However, as far back as the late 1960s *Success with English* (Broughton, 1969) contained a number of exercises which presented and practised formal and informal language. (See for example Coursebook 2, p. 222.) What was missing was an effective social context which would help the learners to judge when formal or informal styles would be appropriate. *Topic English* (Harrison *et al.*, 1974) focused quite

heavily on stylistic appropriateness and provided several exercises which clearly linked language items graded on a formality scale to social situations. (See for example exercise C II, pp. 60–61.) Later books such as *Functions of English* (Jones 1981) have dealt with style in the same fashion.

In the case of *conversation organization* I propose to take part of a dialogue from *Functions of English* and discuss it in the light of my suggested criteria. The text for consideration is from unit 3 and the level is upper-intermediate. The topic is *Getting people to do things*.

	Brenda:	Ah, right, here we are!
	Bob:	This is the place I was telling you about.
	Brenda:	Yeah, could you ask the waiter if we can sit near the window?
	Bob:	Er, yes, of course. Er, waiter!
5	Waiter:	Good evening, sir.
	Bob:	We'd like to sit near the window if that's possible.
	Waiter:	Er . . . Ah! . . . er . . . I'm afraid all the tables there are . . . are taken. Would you mind sitting near . . . nearer the bar?
	Bob:	Oh, yes, alright. That suit you?
10	Brenda:	Mm, fine.
	Bob:	Good.
	Waiter:	Thank you, sir.
	Bob:	Now let's have a . . . er . . . oh, I . . . I don't seem to have any cigarettes on me. Have you got a cigarette, by any chance?
15	Brenda:	I'm awfully sorry, but you see I've given up.
	Bob:	Oh, you've stopped smoking at last. Well done! . . . Oh well, let's have a look at the menu, then. Um . . . oh, there isn't a menu . . . er . . . er, do you think you could ask the people at the next table if we could look at their menu?
20	Brenda:	Yes, of course. Um . . . excuse me, could you possibly let us see your menu? Oh, they haven't got one either.
	Bob:	Er, oh, I'll . . . I'll ask these people at this table. Um, I wonder if you could possibly let us have a look at your menu . . . Thank you! . . . Ah, here we are, then. Now, what's on? Um . . . oh, 'Soup of the Day' — well, I wonder
25		what that is.

The dialogue is concerned mainly with requests and there are six examples of requests involving the use of *could, would* and *we'd like.* These are fairly standard request forms, and display some stylistic variation, e.g. Bob uses *we'd like* when addressing the waiter, and this is more direct than *I wonder if you could possibly*, used when addressing another customer. However, when addressing the waiter Bob adds, *if*

that's possible, thus providing for the possibility of the waiter being unable to comply.

There are three instances of Bob trying to elicit an offer rather than making a request. The first two in lines 13 and 14 are linked: *I don't seem to have any cigarettes on me. Have you got a cigarette by any chance?* The first does not elicit a response and after a very short pause on the recorded version Bob tries again and this time meets with a polite refusal. The third instance is *oh, there isn't a menu* in line 17 which is arguably intended to prompt an offer, particularly as it is followed by a pause and some fillers, *er . . . er.* Having failed again to elicit an offer, Bob makes a more direct, but polite request. As eliciting an offer is the favoured sequence over making a request, it seems a pity that in the dialogue these attempts should meet with failure. Students might interpret eliciting an offer as an uncertain and therefore dispreferred strategy for getting someone to do something.

There are instances in the text of requests being refused, apart from Brenda's silence in line 17. These are in lines 7 and 15. In line 7 the dispreferred second is marked by a pause, prefaces (*Er . . . Ah! . . . er . . . I'm afraid . . .*) and an account (*all the tables there are . . . are taken*) and therefore seems to be a good model showing many near-authentic features. The second example, in line 15, displays a preface (an apology) and an account (the reason why she doesn't have any cigarettes) but no hesitation or pauses. This may be partly explained by the fact that Bob (lines 13 and 14) formulates his attempted elicitation of an offer twice, and in fact on the taped version Brenda comes in to overlap Bob's . . . *any chance.*

Lack of space prevents a more detailed analysis but the features identified suggest that this text contains several aspects of conversation organization that we would like learners to be aware of. Later in the same unit (3.7) Jones examines different ways of agreeing to and refusing requests. In refusals he includes examples of prefaces, but not pauses and hesitations, whereas in a later unit (unit 5) he deals with hesitation as a conversation technique, but only in order to give thinking time, not to signal a dispreferred second. Some hints on turn-taking are given in the same unit.

3.   Conclusion

An awareness of the main features of naturally-occurring conversation provides the basis for criteria for evaluating teaching materials which purport to teach aural/oral skills. A few current coursebooks such as *Functions of English* go some way towards equipping learners in conversational skills, but there is much scope for future development.

Footnotes

[1]Taking Leech's (1983) definition of *relevant*: an utterance is relevant to the extent that it contributes to the conversational goals of the participants.

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A Consumer's Guide to ELT Dictionaries

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Introduction

This is a report of a series of workshops held with groups of in-service teachers from Britain and overseas. The object of the workshops was to look at the ever-increasing range of dictionaries that are available to English language learners and to select criteria by which comparisons could be made, then applying these criteria to the dictionaries on the market. The results were collated as a *Which?*-style consumers' guide with star ratings and comments. These results are presented at the end of this report. First, however, there is some discussion of the dictionaries surveyed and the criteria that were identified to evaluate them.

1. The dictionaries

Fifteen years ago the choice of ELT dictionaries was rather like the choice of cars offered by Henry Ford in the early twenties: only one model and available in any colour so long as it was black. The Model T of learners' dictionaries was Oxford's *Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (ALD), first published in Japan in 1942, which dominated the market and sold in huge numbers. With the ALD learners were well-served, but there was not total satisfaction (e.g. Orszagh 1969) and today the situation has changed — the ALD is strongly challenged by Longman's *Dictionary of Contemporary English* (LDOCE — 1978) and others in the advanced students' category such as Chambers *Universal Learners' Dictionary* (CULD — 1980) and Harrap's *Easy English Dictionary* (HEED — 1980).

All the dictionaries included in the survey are monolingual dictionaries designed for speakers whose mother tongue is not English. No attempt was made to include either bilingual dictionaries or dictionaries designed for native speakers. These omissions were deliberate — the first made on practical grounds (there are too many of them, often available only in the country of publication and evaluation would have been difficult except by teachers working in that country) and the second on pedagogic grounds (the·two are designed for different functions and are modelled on different principles). These omissions did, however, lead to some discussion of underlying questions:

a)   What is the place of the bilingual dictionary?

Although most bilingual dictionaries are designed for the early stages of learning, most teachers reported that students buy them privately and continue to rely on them for too long, past the stage at which they could derive more benefit from a monolingual dictionary. There was general agreement that learners should be introduced to English–English dictionaries as soon as possible to discourage translation and the idea that there is a one-for-one equivalence between languages. Teachers working in countries where bilingual dictionaries are not available did not feel that their work was made more difficult by this lack (many felt the reverse).

b)   What is the best dictionary for students who have outgrown learners' dictionaries?

This question came up surprisingly often and there was widespread feeling that not only very advanced students should have access to a native speakers' dictionary as well as a learners'. *Collins English Dictionary* (1979) received a lot of support as the native speakers' dictionary which comes closest to the tradition of learners' dictionaries — unusually, it uses the IPA; it has far wider coverage than learners' dictionaries (162,000 entries) and it is good on recent additions to the language.

c)   What are the differences between learners' and native speakers' dictionaries?

On examination, the differences were revealed as being greater than many teachers had realized and seemed to fall under two main headings — construction and use.

Construction: Most native speakers' dictionaries grow out of the tradition of constructing dictionaries on historical principles. These principles were established in the great *Oxford English Dictionary* (1885–1933), but they can still be seen by comparing the historical approach of *Chambers Twentieth Century* (1972) with an extract from Chambers *Universal Learners' Dictionary* (1980), which takes a synchronic approach:

minister ['ministə] *nc* 1 a clergyman in certain branches of the Christian Church: *He is the minister of the local Presbyterian church; He is studying to be a minister.* 2 (*often with cap*) (the title of) the head of any of the divisions or departments of a government: *the Minister for Education.*—*vi* (formal: *with* to to give help (to): *She ministered to her husband's needs.*

Universal Learners' Dictionary

minister, *min'is-tor, n.* a servant (*arch.*): one who administers or proffers, in service or kindness: one who serves at the altar: a clergyman (not now usually, as in *Pr. Bk.*, of the Church of England): the head, or assistant to the head, of several religious orders: one transacting business for another: the responsible head of a department of state affairs: the representative of a government at a foreign court.—*v.i.* to give attentive service: to perform duties: to supply or do things needful: to conduce.—*v.t* (*arch.*) to furnish.—*adj.* **ministe'rial**, pertaining to a minister or ministry (in any sense): on the government side: administrative: executive: instrumental: conducive.--*n.* **ministe'rialist**, a supporter of the government in office. —*adv.* **ministe'rially.**—*adj.* min'- istering, attending and serving.— *n.* **ministe'rium,** the body of the ordained Lutheran ministers in a district.—*adj.* **min'istrant,** administering: attendant.—*n.* **ministra'tion,** the act of ministering or performing service: office or service of a minister.—*adj.* **min'istrative** (*-tra-tiv,* or *-trā-tiv*), serving to aid or assist: ministering.— *ns.* **min'istress,** a female who ministers; **min'istry,** act of ministering: service: office or duties of a minister: the clergy: the clerical profession: the body of ministers who manage the business of the country: a department of government, or the building it occupies: term of office as minister.—**Minister of State,** an additional, non-Cabinet, minister in an exceptionally busy government department. [L. *minister—minor,* less.]

Twentieth Century Dictionary

It can be seen that the meanings in the native speakers' dictionary are presented in order of historical occurrence and necessarily include obsolete or archaic meanings. Etymology is indicated, and if quotations are given they are included to illustrate historical development or literary usage. For the English language learner this historical information is of little practical value — all learners' dictionaries cover only 'contemporary' or 'current' English and include few archaic words; entries are arranged with the most common meanings first; and example sentences are given to illustrate usage. Etymological information is omitted altogether from learners' dictionaries, although some teachers felt that this was a shame (see Ilson 1983 for a similar view).

Use: Native speakers use their dictionaries mainly for receptive use: they want to know what unfamiliar words mean and how they are spelt (Quirk 1973) and for this reason their dictionaries are primarily semantic — their main function is to give the meanings of a large number of words. An indication of pronunciation and stress is given in most (but not for all entries and rarely using the IPA), but it is doubtful if this information is widely used (Abercrombie 1978). Native speakers

rarely use dictionaries for encoding (apart from spelling) and are assumed to know the grammar of English, so grammatical information is restricted to parts of speech and 'exceptions' such as irregular plurals and tense forms. Learners, on the other hand, are assumed to use their dictionaries more productively, for encoding (especially writing) as well as decoding (Bejoint 1981: 216). For this reason they are syntactic and phonological as well as semantic — in addition to meanings they include comprehensive information about usage and pronunciation.

2.   Recent innovations

Apart from the proliferation of dictionaries for advanced learners, the past 15 years have seen other changes in the dictionary market, and each of these changes has contributed to further proliferation.

2.1   *Dictionaries for learners at all levels*

Each of the major dictionary publishers now produces a range of dictionaries for learners at all levels to match the family first produced by Hornby. In most cases, of course, the dictionaries for elementary and intermediate learners are derived from a parent dictionary for advanced students and here, too, another difference from native speakers' dictionaries becomes clear — elementary dictionaries for native speakers are assumed to be for children and are written accordingly. Learners' dictionaries at the elementary level, however, are designed with adolescents and adults in mind, although children's EFL dictionaries such as Oxford's *Children's Picture Dictionary* and Longman's *My First Wordbook* are available.

2.2   *Pocket dictionaries*

A more recent development has been the production of mini or pocket dictionaries which can be carried around and used for handy reference at any time. Some teachers thought these to be especially valuable in encouraging the dictionary habit. Others were more doubtful, feeling that such dictionaries promote an over-reliance on the dictionary when other lexical decoding strategies should be developed.

2.3   *ESP dictionaries*

The development of ESP has been paralleled by the production of ESP dictionaries. The first produced specially for learners was *An Elementary Scientific and Technical Dictionary* (Longman 1952) but other ESP dictionaries were until recently slow to appear. There are, of course, difficulties with ESP dictionary publishing, notably the need to reconcile adequate coverage with a length (and so price) that the

market will bear. Several publishers — Evans, Longman and Collins in particular — now have ranges of ESP dictionaries and these were included in the workshops. The results, however, are not presented in detail here as their value was (as one would expect) thought to be more situation-specific than is the case with general ELT dictionaries.

2.4 Semantic dictionaries

Dictionaries arranged in alphabetical order are fine for decoding, but for encoding or vocabulary expansion they are of limited use, for words which are related semantically are scattered throughout the dictionary and there is no way of retrieving them. EFL dictionaries have all been arranged alphabetically until recently, but the first semantic dictionaries are now appearing. Semantic dictionaries are not new: Roget's *Thesaurus* was originally published in 1852 and has been through many editions. The main problem for foreign learners (and many native speakers) is that it includes many obscure, obsolete and foreign words, and gives no definitions or indications of style or register, so the learner has no way of knowing whether a word is appropriate. An attempt to overcome these shortcomings has been made in Longman's *Lexicon of Contemporary English* (1981), which was felt to be a valuable innovation. The thesaurus principle has also been applied to ESP dictionaries, notably the *Reference Book of English Words and Phrases for Foreign Science Students* (Pergamon 1966), the Longman *Dictionary of Scientific Usage* (1979) and the Longman *Illustrated Science Dictionary* (1981).

Semantic dictionaries of a different kind are picture dictionaries. These are arranged thematically or topically, so that a number of related words can be seen on a spread. This approach has been adopted for the *Oxford English Picture Dictionary* (1971) for beginners and for learners beyond the elementary stage, the *Oxford-Duden Pictorial English Dictionary* (1981). This originated in Germany, where Duden produce a series of bilingual picture dictionaries, and the quality and coverage should dispel any idea that picture dictionaries are merely for children.

3   The survey

In order to assess and compare the dictionaries, they were first divided into four categories:

  (a)   Dictionaries for the advanced learner
  (b)   Dictionaries for learners at lower levels
  (c)   Pocket dictionaries
  (d)   ESP dictionaries

Within each of these categories each dictionary was examined using criteria which were selected in the earlier workshops. These criteria very much reflect the concerns of practising EFL teachers and are not necessarily the same as those that might be identified by lexicographers (cf Hartmann 1981). Each of these criteria is discussed separately below.

3.1   UK price, format and date

Price is obviously a major consideration for teachers with limited budgets, especially as dictionaries are often bought in bulk. The price is not indicated in the tabular findings here as there is often local variation and cheap ELBS editions of some dictionaries (e.g. Longman's oldish — 1965 — but still useful *International Reader's Dictionary*) may be available. Price is also linked to format, with paperback editions often bringing good savings. Oxford were thought to be putting themselves at a disadvantage by not offering the ALD in a paperback edition in the UK. Where price is particularly crucial, Harrap's *Easy English Dictionary* was thought to offer outstanding value in the advanced learners' field by combining paper of poorer quality with a paperback format.

Date was selected as being an important indicator of coverage of recent additions to the language, particularly important for those working overseas and away from daily contact with the ever-changing language. Almost all the dictionaries surveyed were commendably recent, either totally new or new editions of older dictionaries, and up-to-dateness did not emerge as an effective discriminating criterion.

3.2   Number of pages

This gives a first impression of coverage and, therefore, the level of the dictionary. Again, there was remarkable uniformity within different categories, except in the ESP field where few pages is a sure sign of limited coverage.

3.3   Level/coverage

These give a more precise indication of the headwords in each dictionary and the student level for which each is appropriate. As a rule of thumb, the following coverage seemed typical at each level:
Beginner   — bilingual or picture dictionary up to 5000 words
Elementary   — approximately 10,000 words
Intermediate,— approximately 35,000 words
Advanced   — at least 50,000 words
From these figures it can be seen that dictionaries at each level do not aim for comprehensive coverage of the language (as do native speakers' dictionaries) but rather they aim to provide detailed information about a limited core of words representing a plateau for each level of learner. This underlying principle was not altogether accepted by most

teachers, and students, too, apparently find 'missing words'. This is one of their greatest frustrations when using their dictionaries (Bejoint 1981: 217). Teachers' criticism was directed not so much at inadequate coverage of areas that are problematic for lexicographers — slang, taboo words, idioms, phrasal verbs, specialist, technical or new words — but against the omission of common core words at each level. Each workshop produced its own examples of words that 'obviously' should be included, but all felt some unease with the idea that learners' dictionaries should be so limited in their coverage. Perhaps it was this feeling that led to the widespread opinion that learners should have access to a good native speakers' dictionary.

3.4   Workbooks
Learners' dictionaries have become more and more sophisticated as more and more information is included, but there is a possibility that this sophistication will exceed the learners' skills in retrieving what has been built into the dictionary for them to refer to (Cowie 1981: 206). For this reason teachers are increasingly concerned with training their students to use dictionaries to their full extent. In some cases it was felt that some features were over-sophisticated and exceeded the skills or the patience of the teachers themselves, but everyone agreed that training was needed and for this workbooks were essential, to the point where any dictionary without one (notably *Collins English Learner's Dictionary*) was severely disadvantaged in any comparison. The principal advanced learners' dictionaries now all have workbooks and so, increasingly, have dictionaries at lower levels. Longman's *Active Study Dictionary* is novel in that the workbook is included within the covers, and this was particularly welcomed.

3.5   Pronunciation
Now that OUP have renounced their heresy of the mid-70s, all learners' dictionaries use much the same version of the IPA. This seems to be taken for granted by dictionary makers who believe 'it is clearly right that, in EFL dictionaries, the less ambiguous IPA should be used' (Gimson 1981: 256). Not all the teachers were convinced: many reported that the IPA represented a learning load which many students did not master and this may help account for the low 25% of students who stated that they used their dictionaries as pronunciation guides in Bejoint's survey (1981: 215). Experiments with systems other than the IPA were thought to be interesting (e.g. that with the *Heinemann English Dictionary* — 1979), but the tapes and workbooks accompanying *ALD* and *LDOCE* were considered most helpful.

3.6   Ease of use
Although most dictionaries are arranged alphabetically, there are differing interpretations of alphabetical order. Some dictionaries claim

to be organized in strict alphabetical order with separate entries for related words. Others prefer to nest entries with related words under a single headword. In fact neither system is adopted rigidly by any dictionary, although it was clear that the dictionaries which were worst-rated in this category made greater use of the heading nesting system and the poorest use of bold typefaces. Some individuals expressed a dislike of the tilde, but dictionaries which have abandoned it did not rate noticeably better than those which still use it extensively. Teachers reported that alphabetical order still presented a major problem for many learners, emphasizing the need for this to be practised in workbooks.

3.7 *Definitions*

Johnson's famous definition of *network* illustrates the problems facing dictionary writers:

> Anything reticulated or decussated, at equal distances, with interstices between the intersections.

The general principle that each definition must use defining words which are not only simpler than the word being defined but also simple enough to be within the vocabulary of the learner is accepted in all learners' dictionaries and the traditional solution adopted in many is to employ a defining vocabulary of 1500–2000 words, a technique first used in Michael West's *New Method English Dictionary* (Longman 1935; latest edition 1976). However, the evidence of the survey suggests that dictionaries using a defining vocabulary do not necessarily produce better or simpler definitions than those relying on intuition and common sense.[1] The teachers were generally more satisfied than the students in Bejoint's survey, 29% of whom found definitions unsatisfactory, either too vague or too complicated (Bejoint 1981: 217).

3.8 *Grammatical assistance*

It is perhaps in this area that learners' dictionaries differ most from native speakers' and from each other. There are two traditions in ELT dictionaries. The first of these, associated with the name of Hornby, is to code entries to indicate the ways in which a word can operate in the grammar of English. This technique was first employed in the *ALD* and it has also been adopted in *LDOCE* using a system relating to Longman's *Grammar of Contemporary English* (1972). It was hoped that the survey would be able to choose between them, but, while both received four-star ratings in this category, this was in spite of their coding systems rather than because of them. Teachers felt that both systems presupposed a linguistic sophistication which most students do not possess and no one claimed that they had successfully trained their classes to use either system, most stating that they did not even try. This finding seems to support that of Bejoint, who reported (1981: 216) that more than half the students did not use the grammatical coding in their dictionaries at all and 25% said that it was unsatisfactory.

The second tradition, employed by other advanced dictionaries and all dictionaries at lower levels, is to illustrate usage through example sentences. This system was felt to be clearer, easier and more useful for students and the ALD and LDOCE scored well in this section because they use this system in addition to their syntactic coding.

3.9   Illustrations

One picture may be worth a thousand words but publishers know that it costs considerably more. For this reason some dictionaries, notably Chambers *Universal Learners'* and Harrap's *Easy English*, have no illustrations at all, and this undoubtedly accounts for their lower price. Other dictionaries make varying use of pictures to illustrate individual words, but a newer and welcomed feature is to incorporate features of the picture dictionary with full-page spreads illustrating particular topics such as the bathroom, the bedroom, the body, clothes, etc. This list is taken from Harrap's *2000 Word Dictionary* (1981) but other dictionaries are making use of this technique and wall posters are available free from Longman with bulk orders of their *Active Study Dictionary*. The number and use of illustrations emerged as a criterion which separated different dictionaries far more than traditional linguistic features.

3.10   Appendices

Appendices have become a common feature of dictionaries and range from grammatical (irregular verbs) to cultural (kings and queens of England), utilitarian (public holidays) and geographical (longest rivers). Harrap's dictionaries include them more than those of other publishers and their *Easy English Dictionary* has a thirty-page guide to English grammar which is published separately. Although there are wide differences in the number of appendices and although students reported that they use them quite widely (Bejoint 1981: 216), no one contributing to the survey felt that they were sufficiently central to a dictionary's purpose to be a deciding factor.

4   Conclusions

The workshops and their findings were interesting as much for what they revealed about teachers' attitudes to dictionaries and the ways in which they use them in the classroom as for what they demonstrated as a practical exercise in dictionary evaluation. As such an exercise, the workshops did reach conclusions on dictionaries which they considered to be 'best buys' in each category:

a)   Dictionaries for the advanced learner
   Here the major considerations were good coverage, clear grammatical assistance and a good workbook combined with reasonable price. If price is the overwhelming consideration then Harrap's *Easy English*

Dictionary has much to commend it — it is rather shorter than its competitors in the same category but it has a good workbook and it is by far the cheapest. It has disadvantages — it is printed on poor paper and it has no illustrations — but it was felt to meet most of the needs of advanced students. Where price is not the only consideration, however, the best buy was judged to be the paperback edition of the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, which scored well in all categories and was faulted only on its treatment of 'offensive' words.

b)   Dictionaries for the intermediate learner
    This was felt to be a particularly important category as it must take students from the elementary stages towards using a full advanced learner's dictionary. It was at this level that learners should develop the skills of using a dictionary to the full, and for this reason a workbook was felt to be essential. However, many dictionaries in this category do not have workbooks and this is why the *Longman Active Study Dictionary* with its built-in workbook was judged to be best buy. It has broader coverage than other dictionaries in this category and was criticized only for its poor use of pictures to illustrate individual words, although the pictorial spreads and accompanying posters were well-liked.

c)   Dictionaries for the elementary learner
    This was a difficult category to evaluate as many teachers felt that no single dictionary could satisfy learners' needs. It was at this level that bilingual dictionaries have a most obvious role, but as a first monolingual dictionary the *Oxford English Picture Dictionary* (which is available in an increasing range of bilingual editions) was recommended. It was thought to have an immediate pictorial link to a learner's surroundings and to encourage vocabulary expansion in a more semantically-systematic way than an alphabetical dictionary. The workbook is a useful bonus. The workbook too was the deciding factor in choosing a first conventional dictionary for the post-beginner. Several dictionaries in this category were well-rated but only one, *Harrap's 2000 Word Dictionary*, has a workbook. Coverage is more extensive than the title suggests and the dictionary received good ratings for its full treatment, clear presentation and good use of pictures.

d)   Pocket dictionaries
    Here wide coverage was thought to be the most important criterion as the learner can use these dictionaries most profitably outside the linguistically-controlled environment of the classroom. Although the publisher's claim that it includes 125,000 words and meanings was thought to be a little misleading for comparative purposes, there was no doubt that Harrap's *Mini Pocket English Dictionary* has the widest coverage in this category, and time and again it was found to include words that its competitors omitted. Grammatical apparatus is minimal

but this was judged unimportant for a dictionary whose principal function is to give clear meanings wherever you may be.

e) ESP dictionaries

The concept of a best buy is difficult to apply in this section as, by definition, the dictionaries are designed for a specific purpose and relevance and usefulness will depend on how closely the user's purpose matches that of the dictionary. For general use and for many ESP fields outside the most obvious ones for which ESP dictionaries are available (business, science, technology), the *Oxford-Duden Pictorial English Dictionary* was recommended. The coverage is wide enough to include most ESP fields (e.g. forestry, printing, aeronautics) and as most specialist words are nouns these can usually be explained more effectively by illustration than by definition.

As an exercise in dictionary evaluation the workshops enabled teachers to see what was available, formulate their own criteria and apply these in a practical way to select their best buys. As practising teachers, everyone was concerned with classroom considerations and budget constraints, and it was these factors which determined recommendations. As a reflection on the state of the art of learners' dictionaries, it was rewarding to note how far most participants felt that dictionaries had come in the past fifteen years in making dictionary production a pedagogic as well as a lexicographic undertaking. Where there were criticisms, these usually arose from a feeling that there was still some way to go.

[1] A survey by MacFarquhar and Richards (1983: 121) among students, however, showed a clear preference (51.1%) for definitions written within a defining vocabulary over those written in 'simple' English (28.5%) and those produced for native speakers (20.0%).

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TITLE	Chambers First Learners' Dictionary	Chambers Second Learners' Dictionary
DATE & FORMAT	1972 p/b	1978 p/b
NUMBER OF PAGES	320 approx	376
LEVEL/ COVERAGE	Elementary 5000 entries	Intermediate 24,000 entries
WORKBOOK AVAILABLE? QUALITY?	no	no
PRONUNCIATION	Simplified IPA	Simplified IPA
EASE OF USE	■ ■	■ ■ ■
DEFINITIONS	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■
GRAMMATICAL ASSISTANCE	◻	◻ Few examples
ILLUSTRATIONS	◻	——
NUMBER OF APPENDICES	——	5
COMMENTS	Very good definitions which do not degenerate into telegraphese. No example sentences or workbook.	Smaller and with less extensive coverage than others in this category. Considered rather pedestrian.
RATINGS:	■ ■ ■ ■ Highly recommended ■ ■ ■ Recommended ■ ■ Fair ◻ Not recommended	

TITLE	Chambers Mini Dictionary	Chambers Universal Learners' Dictionary
DATE & FORMAT	1978 p/b	1980 h/b + p/b
NUMBER OF PAGES	634	907
LEVEL/ COVERAGE	Pocket 38,000	Advanced 54,000 entries
WORKBOOK AVAILABLE? QUALITY?	no	yes ■ ■ ■
PRONUNCIATION	Non-IPA	Simplified IPA
EASE OF USE	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■
DEFINITIONS	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■
GRAMMATICAL ASSISTANCE	■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ Many examples
ILLUSTRATIONS	——	——
NUMBER OF APPENDICES	3	9
COMMENTS	Pronunciation system like that of native speaker dictionary but contains examples to show usage. Good coverage.	Extensive labelling showing usage and registers. Widespread use of example sentences liked. No illustrations.

TITLE	Collins English Learner's Dictionary	Collins English Learner's Dictionary
DATE & FORMAT	1974 p/b	1980 p/b
NUMBER OF PAGES	622	699
LEVEL/ COVERAGE	Intermediate 30,000 entries	Pocket 18,000
WORKBOOK AVAILABLE? QUALITY?	no	no
PRONUNCIATION	Simplified IPA	IPA
EASE OF USE	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■
DEFINITIONS	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■
GRAMMATICAL ASSISTANCE	■ ■ ■ ■ Many examples	■ ■
ILLUSTRATIONS	▫	——
NUMBER OF APPENDICES	11	——
COMMENTS	Good coverage, useful appendices + wide-spread use of clear examples were well-liked. Poor illustrations and no workbook.	Fair coverage with examples to illustrate usage. Plastic cover may add to durability.

TITLE	Harrap's Easy English Dictionary	Harrap's 2000 Word Dictionary
DATE & FORMAT	1980 h/b + p/b	1981 p/b
NUMBER OF PAGES	542	271
LEVEL/ COVERAGE	Advanced 85,000 entries	Elementary 2000 + derivatives
WORKBOOK AVAILABLE? QUALITY?	yes ■ ■ ■	yes ■ ■ ■
PRONUNCIATION	Simplified IPA	Simplified IPA
EASE OF USE	■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■
DEFINITIONS	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■
GRAMMATICAL ASSISTANCE	■ ■ Separate review but no x-refs	■ ■ ■
ILLUSTRATIONS	——	■ ■
NUMBER OF APPENDICES	27 grammar review + general inform.	——
COMMENTS	Good number of entries and many derivatives. Poor paper, dense layout and no illustrations but very cheap.	Selected as best buy in elementary category. Very clear entries with plentiful examples and usage notes. Picture-dictionary-type illustrations. Workbook.

TITLE	Harrap's Mini Pocket English Dictionary	Longman Active Study Dictionary
DATE & FORMAT	1983 p/b	1983 p/b
NUMBER OF PAGES	633	710
LEVEL/ COVERAGE	Pocket 60,000 approx	Intermediate 38,000 entries
WORKBOOK AVAILABLE? QUALITY?	no	yes ■ ■ ■ ■
PRONUNCIATION	IPA	IPA
EASE OF USE	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■
DEFINITIONS	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ uses 2000-word vocab.
GRAMMATICAL ASSISTANCE	▫	■ ■ ■
ILLUSTRATIONS	——	■ ■
NUMBER OF APPENDICES	19	3
COMMENTS	Best buy in the pocket category because of wide coverage and straightforward definitions. Larger format edition available.	Best buy in this category for combining good coverage and examples with built-in workbook and exercises.

TITLE	Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English	Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English
DATE & FORMAT	1978 h/b + p/b	1981 h/b + p/b
NUMBER OF PAGES	1303	910
LEVEL/ COVERAGE	Advanced 55,00 entries	Intermediate 15,000
WORKBOOK AVAILABLE? QUALITY?	yes ■ ■ ■ ■	no
PRONUNCIATION	IPA + guidebook & cassette	IPA in index
EASE OF USE	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■
DEFINITIONS	■ ■ ■ Uses 2000-word defining vocab.	■ ■ ■ ■
GRAMMATICAL ASSISTANCE	■ ■ ■ Coding system + examples.	■ ■ ■
ILLUSTRATIONS	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■
NUMBER OF APPENDICES	9	——
COMMENTS	Thought to be the best in the advanced category. Paperback edition voted 'best buy'.	An EFL thesaurus designed for vocabulary expansion. Definitions provided. Easy to use once you get the idea. Recommended.

TITLE	Longman New Junior English Dictionary	Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English
DATE & FORMAT	1984 p/b	1980 h/b + p/b (not UK)
NUMBER OF PAGES	320	1037
LEVEL/ COVERAGE	Elementary 10,000 entries	Advanced 50,000 entries
WORKBOOK AVAILABLE? QUALITY?	no	yes ■ ■ ■ ■
PRONUNCIATION	IPA	IPA + guidebook & cassette
EASE OF USE	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■
DEFINITIONS	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■
GRAMMATICAL ASSISTANCE	■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ Coding system + examples
ILLUSTRATIONS	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■
NUMBER OF APPENDICES	——	10
COMMENTS	Wider coverage than others in this category, with clear layout and good use of pictures. Some picture-dictionary-type pages. No workbook.	The original and still a strong contender. Conventional IPA has been re-adopted for latest edition. Chinese version now available.

TITLE	Oxford-Duden Pictorial English Dictionary	Oxford Elementary Learner's Dictionary of English
DATE & FORMAT	1981 h/b + p/b	1981 p/b
NUMBER OF PAGES	824	297
LEVEL/ COVERAGE	Intermediate + above + ESP 28,000	Elementary 10,000 entries
WORKBOOK AVAILABLE? QUALITY?	no	no
PRONUNCIATION	n/a	IPA
EASE OF USE	■ ■ ■ ■ Thematically arranged; good index	■ ■ ■
DEFINITIONS	pictures only	■ ■ ■
GRAMMATICAL ASSISTANCE	☐	■ ■
ILLUSTRATIONS	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■
NUMBER OF APPENDICES	——	——
COMMENTS	Extensive and clear. Superb illustrations, some in colour. Specialist coverage surpasses most ESP dictionaries.	Good coverage but more crowded layout than competitors. Also published in smaller format as *Oxford Basic English Dictionary*.

TITLE	Oxford English Picture Dictionary	Oxford Learner's Pocket Dictionary
DATE & FORMAT	1977 p/b	1980 p/b
NUMBER OF PAGES	96	439
LEVEL/ COVERAGE	Elementary	Pocket 17,000
WORKBOOK AVAILABLE? QUALITY?	yes ■ ■ ■ ■	no
PRONUNCIATION	IPA in index	IPA
EASE OF USE	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■
DEFINITIONS	pictures only	■ ■ ■
GRAMMATICAL ASSISTANCE	□	■ ■
ILLUSTRATIONS	■ ■ ■ ■	——
NUMBER OF APPENDICES	——	——
COMMENTS	Very useful for beginners but usefulness rapidly diminishes. OHP acetates and workbook available. Several bilingual editions available. Recommended.	Sets out to be an encoding as well as a decoding dictionary, resulting in wider treatment of fewer items.

TITLE	Oxford Student's Dictionary of Current English
DATE & FORMAT	1978 p/b
NUMBER OF PAGES	769
LEVEL/ COVERAGE	Intermediate 35,000
WORKBOOK AVAILABLE? QUALITY?	yes ■ ■ ■ ■
PRONUNCIATION	IPA
EASE OF USE	■ ■ ■ ■
DEFINITIONS	■ ■ ■ ■
GRAMMATICAL ASSISTANCE	■ ■ ■
ILLUSTRATIONS	——
NUMBER OF APPENDICES	4
COMMENTS	Designed to bridge the gap between elementary and advanced dictionaries. Uses same workbook as ALD. No illustrations.

The Pragmatic Purchaser

Mike Kitto

Communication Training Consultants Ltd.

There are three groups of people involved in making a book a success: authors, publishers and users. As far as textbooks are concerned, each regards the final product from a somewhat different viewpoint. For the authors, the book is their brainchild, for whom they expect a brilliant future. Unable to find suitable textbooks for a given group of students, they develop their own materials. If these work well, they expand them into book form in the hope (if not the certainty) that other students and teachers will find them equally useful.

To the publisher, the book is a traded commodity. Like authors, publishers are concerned to find gaps in the market, whether they are topic gaps (no satisfactory book exists on a given topic), level gaps (no satisfactory book at a particular level) or approach gaps (no satisfactory book adopting a specific approach). The main differences between publishers and authors are often in their perception of the size of the gap, and consequently of the return on investment that can be expected by producing a book to fill it, and in their estimation of the quality and marketability of the proposed book itself.

The group which has been labelled 'users' comprises both teachers and students, but as far as purchasing is concerned, it is the teachers who are dominant. In a commercial language school, the responsibility for book selection and ordering normally falls on the Director of Studies, and it is the criteria of choice employed by this person that I wish to examine. If my observations appear rather subjective and anecdotal, it is because they are based on personal experience, but I believe this experience to be sufficiently typical to warrant some consideration.

It must first be stated that the modern Director of Studies is normally a well-trained and well-intentioned person who, in an ideal world, would probably choose precisely those books which are favourably reviewed by the academic specialist. Unfortunately, however, the world is seldom ideal, and all too often the Director of Studies is obliged to work within constraints which necessarily emphasize practical rather than theoretical considerations. My concern is therefore to describe some circumstances which may occasion a compromise choice of book: it should not, however, be assumed that such circumstances will always

obtain. I shall group my observations under five headings: utilization, length, methodology, level and price.

1.   Utilization

All textbooks used in a language school may be categorized as student consumable or student non-consumable. Whilst the level of generosity varies considerably from one school to another, it would be very unusual for students to be given a free copy of every book used during their course. The normal practice is to give them a copy of one or two 'core' texts and for all other books to be used on a 'hand out–hand in' basis, although students may have the option of buying their own copies of these books from the school.

If the book is to be kept by the students, it can be highly specific to their particular needs, since one is not concerned at the time of purchase with the question of its potential re-use by other groups. It can also be written in, and the purchaser need not be concerned about tempting gap-filling or table-completing exercises which, however many times students are asked not to do so, some will complete, in ink, in the book.

The non-consumable textbook, on the other hand, should have a repeat use value. This means that it should not be so student-specific that the chances of ever finding another group to use it are infinitesimally small. Nor should it appear to be a workbook, for the obvious reasons stated above.

The core textbook will occupy a major part of the students' classroom time and will therefore tend to be a book of fairly wide coverage and general application. Books dealing with particular skills or topics of relevance to the group or to individuals within the group are apt to be used on an occasional basis as supplementary textbooks, and are therefore unlikely to be given to the students to keep. One result of this policy is that a book which has been very well reviewed for a particular purpose does not achieve the expected level of sales simply because schools are buying it as a re-usable rather than a consumable item. Those 'general special purpose' books, on the other hand, in which a course of general English is disguised as a course in business or technical English, sell extremely well.

A second problem which may be dealt with under the heading of utilization is that of novelty. Very few students attend a course with no previous experience of English language training. The Director of Studies therefore has to guard against boredom by trying to select textbooks which the group is unlikely to have studied before. Whilst he or she might therefore consider a given book perfect in the light of the description received of the incoming students and their needs, it might well be decided, from information about their background, that there is a very good chance that some or all of them will already have studied it. That the Director of Studies suspects that their previous studies may

not have been particularly effective does not alter the decision to choose another title: novelty must prevail if one is not to have a disgruntled class (and teacher) to contend with at the outset of the course.

2. Length

Whilst one can make generalizations about the probable length of course preferred by various types of students, such generalizations will always be subject to exceptions. Suppose, therefore, that a group is coming for a one month intensive course, when an analysis of their needs and level suggests a shorter or longer period of study. In surveying suitable published textbooks, all are found to be of an inappropriate length. The choice is therefore to pad out a short course, cut down a long one or use two or more short courses back-to-back, with a certain amount of inevitable repetition of subject matter. On the whole, most teachers prefer to have too much material at their disposal rather than too little, so the 'padding out' option is often rejected. Whatever decision is reached, though, it is unlikely to be a satisfactory one. This is not a problem to which there is an easy or obvious answer. The very fact that the demands of the group are unusual implies that there is too small a market to justify the publication of a book to meet their needs.

A second problem of length is that of unit length in relation to lesson length. If a unit can comfortably and conveniently be handled in one lesson (or multiples thereof), there is no problem, but frequently this cannot be done. Once again, therefore, teachers are faced with the options of expanding the content or cutting it down. Whilst they would probably prefer to do the latter, there is often resistance to this from the students. They want to know why they are instructed to leave out a particular section or exercise, perhaps becoming suspicious about the book's authority, or they may feel aggrieved if they do not methodically work their way through the text from cover to cover.

Even if students accept it, the practice of editing or dipping into a book is not always feasible. Some texts have a narrative thread running through them, or some other form of cross-reference which prohibits the omission of certain sections. In this case, a book will have to be rejected simply because it does not lend itself to edited presentation, even though in all other respects it is ideal for the students' needs.

3. Methodology

Whilst there is fairly widespread agreement on what constitutes bad teaching methodology, there is less of a consensus on the nature of good methodology. One of the reasons for this is that effective teaching and learning depend to a great extent on the preferences and prejudices of the teacher and the learner. In selecting textbooks, therefore, the wise Director of Studies will not simply evaluate the material in the abstract, but will also take into account the teacher and the students

who will use the book, hoping that he or she can make a choice that will keep both parties happy.

The likes and dislikes of teachers are legion, and it would be futile to try to make generalizations. Suffice it to say that teachers who are ill at ease with the books which they are using are unlikely to perform very effectively. In the case of students, however, some broad guidelines can be drawn up. As an example, there is a certain type of mature student who is put off by a general coursebook which contains no overt grammar practice. I remember one Saudi Arabian student, obviously dissatisfied with the amount of attention paid to syntax in his coursebook, who came to lessons armed with a copy of *A Grammar of Contemporary English*, despite the fact that his proficiency in the use of English was little beyond beginner level. He was clearly registering his disappointment at the nature of the text provided, and this disappointment was probably in a large part the result of his own educational background, and the way in which he had studied his own language. This is only an isolated example, and of course there will be exceptions, but it remains true to say that, for students as for teachers, book choice depends on more than purely abstract, impersonal considerations.

4. Level

With students of whom one has a good, first-hand knowledge, selecting books at an appropriate level is not (or should not be) a difficult task. Very often, however, one has to choose starter texts for a new group, yet to arrive at the school, of whom one has little or no prior knowledge. Such assessments of their level as one has may be inexpert judgements, made by fellow non-native speakers, for example, or by native speakers who have no experience of English language teaching.

The Director of Studies therefore has two choices. The first is to order no books until after the students have arrived and a proper analysis has been made of their needs. Such a course, although undoubtedly very correct, is fraught with difficulties. On the one hand, the teaching staff object to having to occupy the students' time for a week or so without being able to start on the course proper. On the other, the students themselves rapidly lose patience with a stream of random photocopied handouts and the like, with the result that a general air of grievance can develop amongst both staff and students at an early stage. The harm done to morale and motivation may take a very long time to remedy.

The alternative course of action is to piece together whatever scraps of information are available, combine these with one's own intuitions, and buy some books speculatively. If this alternative is chosen, it will influence the selection of texts considerably. If they are not to be a complete waste of money, the books will have to cater to quite a spread of potential levels and needs, and to have a good chance of being used elsewhere if totally unsuitable for the group in question. Publishers, it

seems, are aware of this problem, for who has not seen the type of 'blurb' which states (more or less) that 'although designed for intermediate students, the book can be used equally effectively at higher or lower levels' and so on. Such middle-of-the-road catch-all titles may not be to the purist's liking, but they sometimes offer the only stop-gap solution to the problem of lack of foreknowledge of the eventual users.

Whilst not strictly concerned with level in the linguistic sense, there are other related factors which might influence the choice of book. There was a time, now thankfully past, when publishers seemed to assume that anybody just starting to learn English as a foreign language must be an infant, an imbecile or both. Books based on this assumption were an insult to the intelligence of the mature adult beginner, and whilst such examples are now few and far between, one still occasionally finds oneself rejecting an otherwise suitable textbook because elements of presentation, especially visual presentation, render the book intellectually off-putting to the intended students. On other occasions, certain cultural references achieve the same result. It may seem foolish to reject a 'perfectly good' book merely because it is, for example, too adolescent or too trendy in appearance, but it is even greater folly to present students with materials certain features of which will immediately arouse their animosity.

5. Price

It has been implicit in much that has been observed already that the bookbuyer's role is to strike a balance between maximizing profits and ensuring that both students and staff are content with the quality and quantity of materials offered to them. The budget for books may be set in a number of ways, or may not even be formally established, but the Director of Studies who is overspending will very soon be advised of the fact, and few experienced teachers can have escaped the warning: 'Make those books last. They're all you'll be getting until next term.' Price, therefore, can be another cause of compromise in the choice of books.

If a book is too expensive, its use as a student-consumable item may be precluded. It is all very well to say that the cost of the selected texts can be built into the price of the course, but the fee is usually quoted at the proposal stage, before such details have been seriously considered, and when other organizations are probably being asked to quote in competition. Whether or not they are intended to be given away, some coursebooks which form part of a package become very costly when bought as such. The purchaser must then decide whether some of the ancillary materials can be dispensed with. Even if this can be done, the Director of Studies will sometimes find that a particular book is simply too expensive to be considered, and a cheaper, if less satisfactory, alternative must be found.

All this assumes availability, but if students arrive at short notice, one has no option but to contact one's supplier and find out what can be

delivered immediately from stock. It is quite uncanny how often the first-choice book is either being reprinted or has just been re-ordered and cannot therefore be despatched in time.

6.   Conclusion

At the beginning of this article, I listed those people who make a book successful. I did not include reviewers among them, for I was referring to commercial rather than critical success. Whilst the two are not mutually exclusive, I have tried to suggest some of the reasons for lower or higher sales of particular titles than might be expected on the grounds of 'academic' evaluation alone.

In doing so, I may have given the impression that the commercial language school is a world of eternal compromise. It is not, but such schools set out to achieve the objective common to all businesses — to make a profit — and this inevitably involves a trade-off between what is theoretically desirable and what is practicable. In managing those resources available — time and labour, as well as money and materials — the Director of Studies sometimes applies a different logic to the subject of textbook evaluation and selection from that employed by the author, the publisher or the reviewer. It should never be forgotten that books are published to be sold. Given the purchasing power of the language schools, those who ignore or deride this pragmatic brand of logic must surely do so at their peril.

Producing Materials

Publishers and the Art of the Possible

Peter Zombory-Moldovan

At its most Utopian, the production of teaching/learning materials is an unbroken and essentially private loop between teacher/writer and learner, where the processes of needs analysis, syllabus design, course planning, implementation, feedback, evaluation and adjustment are inextricably linked and defiantly independent from interference by agencies from outside the charmed circle of the classroom. Most ELT practitioners engaged in the production of their own materials would regard this as a hopelessly unrealistic aspiration; they point to, and daily struggle against, the mountain of obstacles, bureaucratic, financial and otherwise, that exist in even the best-run teaching institutions in an apparently deliberate conspiracy to thwart the course planner and his/her colleague the materials writer. At its most cruelly mundane, the problem is simply one of impossibly heavy teaching loads which squeeze the task of materials writing into exhausted and unpaid evenings; but even in those relatively rare environments where time and resources are provided for the job, there is often an endemic shortage of accurate information on the nature of the student intake. How many in the group? What level(s) are they? How many hours of actual teaching will be possible? What are the students' real, perceived and self-perceived needs? What are the targets? What facilities can be counted on to be made available? These and many other questions vital to the materials writing process, are all too frequently unanswered (and, for that matter, unasked) by the people who could, or should, have access to the relevant information. And even where answers are, grudgingly, provided, as often as not they leave the hapless course planner/materials writer marvelling at their inaccuracy.

Those who regard this picture as unduly pessimistic or cynical may count themselves fortunate. They either belong to the select and privileged company of those who work in near-ideal conditions, or to the larger but no less enviable category of those who prepare others for a reality they themselves have never been exposed to. This article is not intended for them. It is intended for those of their colleagues who daily, and in contract after contract, are faced with the challenge posed by this prosaic state of affairs. In short, this article is addressed to those who, for whatever reason, need to rely wholly or in part upon commercially produced teaching materials; and particularly to those

whose responsibilities include the evaluation, selection and implementation of such materials.

The term 'commercially produced' is used advisedly. A great deal of material which is, technically, 'published' falls outside the scope of the foregoing comments, since it is material that is produced, often to a remarkably high standard, by institutions for internal and intragroup use; and its production, distribution and financing forms a part — often, a 'loss-leader' part — of the wider activities of the school, institution or agency. (There have been numerous instances, however, of such 'cottage industry' publishing operations blossoming into small but profitable businesses in their own right.) 'Commercially produced materials' are books (or, in current publishers' parlance, 'product'). It is, however, the notion of commerical production and distribution which underpins the observations that follow; it is hoped that an analysis of — to borrow a term from the post-structuralist — the conditions of production of the books currently available will at least enlighten those faced with the bewildering task of choosing between them.

Publishers come in for a lot of stick, often wielded by the better-informed sectors of the teaching profession This is depressing to the idealists within publishing houses because the approval of the gallery counts for something, after all, alongside the profitable applause of the vastly more numerous groundlings; depressing, because it is criticism which cannot be defended against; and, let us face it, most depressing because it is so frequently justified. Pity the poor publisher? Certainly not. But, perhaps, try to understand the criteria by which he/she has to evaluate new ideas for teaching materials — and, if nothing else, appreciate that the criteria needed to asses *publishability* are significantly different from, though not one ultimately hopes, fundamentally incompatible with, those applied to the evaluation of *teachability*.

Publishing is a business. To say it is a business like any other is perhaps going too far; it is in many ways unique, weird and wonderful — although, no doubt, those who earn their living in the road haulage industry would also proudly claim that theirs is a business distinguished by its arcane mysteries from all others. At the risk of repeating the obvious, it should be said that those engaged in the production of ELT textbooks must produce a profitable return on capital employed and provide the owners of the enterprise with something to show for their trusting investment in so volatile an activity as the selling of ideas. This means not merely arguing persuasively but demonstrating, in cash terms and without remission, that the shareholders have been wise to invest their money in book publishing. This, in turn, means publishing books that customers can be persuaded to buy in sufficient numbers and at a high enough price to cover such costs as: the initial investment ('fixed Cost'); the recurring costs of materials; printing and shipping ('variable cost'); the salaries of those involved in this endeavour; costs of running the business, including lunches for authors ('overhead'); costs of authors, royalties and costs of paying the Inland

Revenue their portion, not to mention the interest costs of the money borrowed to finance all this activity in the first place. Still, after all these costs the publisher must show a sufficiently healthy profit to pay the shareholders a dividend. Daunting? Well, yes, actually, it is. It is certainly a challenge; and a particularly invigorating challenge to those who believe that it ought, indeed, *must* be possible to achieve all this by advancing the ideas and ideals of progressive thinking in materials design and teaching methods.

This may sound like an apologia for 'lowest common denominator' publishing. Certainly publishers, particularly where courses for a broad global market are concerned, have their equivalent of the man on the Clapham omnibus: gender and nationality depend on individual prejudice. But this portrait of the mythical Ur-teacher is not exactly flattering, even to the stratum of the profession it purports to represent. But the market is an implacable judge, and 'out of print' is the legend writ large above the gates to the elephants' graveyard of pieces of so-called courageous publishing. Accountants are not impressed by good reviews; and if the accountants are sufficiently unimpressed there will very soon be nothing to review at all. The costs involved in producing a major course consisting of several levels and numerous components at each level, particularly if the use of colour is involved, run easily into six figures in fixed costs alone; and it should be remembered that some of the 'trimmings' that teachers now regard as essential for a main course — wallcharts, filmstrips and the like — are often produced at a loss. For such a piece of publishing to be feasible, therefore, unit sales of many tens of thousands per year are necessary; and, given the constantly and indeed increasingly changing nature of teaching methodologies and syllabuses, the ELT publisher cannot, like the publisher of fiction, look forward to steady sales extending over the decades. A title which peaks after three years, and may no longer be economic to reprint after five or six, is not the joke it might once have been; it remains a profoundly depressing prospect to publisher and author alike.

Economies of scale also play an important part: printing costs come down steadily as the print run gets longer, although for many types of book the publisher cannot really hope to hit the jackpot in terms of dramatically reduced unit costs (and thus, of course, dramatically improved profit margins) until the print run stands at about 100,000.

Now, not all publishing needs to be, or even can be, on this sort of scale. Simple black-and-white (or, in publishing speak, one-colour) books without too many illustrations can be produced for reasonable sums and can be made to pay with correspondingly lower sales. Prospective authors tend to talk a little more lovingly than publishers of 'niches' in the market for this or that state-of-the-art supplementary reader for English for Dental Purposes; one problem being, for the latter, that the editorial, design, production and administrative time and resources consumed by this little niche-filler are not correspond-

ingly reduced. Nevertheless, providing the potential market is not too microscopic, and that the product can be sold conveniently without having to incur disproportionate marketing costs, or has to stand up against a perfectly adequate title from a competitor, the prospects for such a textbook can be attractive. It should by now be apparent why it is that, reading the comment 'it would have been nice to see some colour', the only colour the publisher can see is red.

The implication of all this, in terms of the criteria by which the publisher evaluates an author's proposal, is to impose a number of imperative constraints. Above all else, assuming that a substantial market is believed to exist (as a result of market research, variable as this is in scope and reliability), the publisher's overriding consideration must be the suitability and acceptability of the material under consideration for its given and clearly defined market.

An added complication is often the fact that the end user of teaching material is not necessarily the person who decides on its adoption; indeed, in many cases the demands of those empowered to select course material are fundamentally at variance with those of the teacher — let alone those of the student. For material designed for a global market, it will be evident that major compromises will have to be arrived at, without, ultimately, compromising the coherence and basic concept of the material. Most publishers will, under these circumstances, concentrate on their major geographical markets, (especially if these have certain basic requirements and preferences in common) and hope with crossed fingers for 'spin-off' sales into other, less 'spoiled', markets. Inevitably, most large publishers regard the same countries as their key markets, although the very largest have access to markets that the rest cannot realistically hope to compete in. The result of this, predictably enough, is that some teachers (those teaching young adults at elementary to lower intermediate level in southern Europe, for instance) are, in relative terms at least, spoilt for choice and elaborately courted by publishers' representatives, while others have good cause to feel unwanted and ignored. It is not that publishers follow one another with sheeplike docility into the same old markets.

Despite the somewhat depressing picture I have painted, it is not true to say that everything that can be profitably published has been published already; for one thing, a lot of people's careers depend on this not being the case; for another, publishers are constantly suprising themselves and each other by discovering, whether through luck or judgement, that some stones are not as bloodless as they may appear to the casual observer. Markets change over time and new markets appear (a number of publishers are eagerly eyeing the People's Republic of China); generally speaking, it is an ill wind indeed which blows no one any good; an act of divine intervention may yet cause every photocopier in the world to auto-destruct simultaneously, an event which more than any other would herald a renaissance in ELT publishing.

Could Do Better? Certainly. Publishers are notoriously slow to respond to changes and developments in ELT thinking. This may be understandable to a certain extent given the long gestation period required for major projects (it can easily be five years from concept to published book); and, perhaps, slow response is forgiveable in the light of the number of badly scorched fingers following the leap, some years back, onto the functional bandwagon. Few newly-published main courses would now admit to following anything other than an 'eclectic' syllabus; there is a discernible born-again structuralist glint in a number of eyes, but, for the moment at least, more cautious counsels prevail. Some would say that ELT publishing in Britain has entered a period of extreme wariness and conservatism; this would not be good news.

There are those who argue that publishers have a duty to reform by stealth: that is, to smuggle in 'progressive' ideas under the mantle of 'acceptable' material. Those who look closely at some recent and superficially predictable material for global markets may discover that this is happening already. There are undoubtedly many aspiring materials writers who deserve more attention, although accusations that publishers operate a closed shop of authors are not well founded in most cases. In all these areas, and others, there is certainly room for more enlightened self-interest on the part of publishers. Teachers, too, have a part to play; too many suffer in silence, when more active and critical assessment of the materials they are given to work with would galvanize those responsible for choosing that material into action.

This is particularly true in the nine tenths of the world that publishers tend to think of as 'out there'. Every book contains the address of its publisher; it is remarkable how few teachers take the trouble, or have the nerve, to answer back to those who have presumed to know what materials they need. Publishers and teachers may in some respects have different aims. Different; but not diverging. It is hoped that a greater degree of understanding by each of the two halves of this partnership will result in progress to the benefit of both.

The views expressed in this article are solely those of the author.

Learning by Design: Some Design Criteria for EFL Coursebooks

Mark and Printha Ellis

Over the last twenty years the broadcast of information through a combination of written text and visual display has become much more sophisticated, and at the same time more complex and more daring throughout a variety of media. Television advertising ties into poster and magazine advertising, transmitting a coherent message that is seen by the consumer to be coherent. Magazines have proliferated, catering to a public which is increasingly prepared to pay for what it considers to be a high quality product. Even junk mail has gone up-market. The advertisements that come through our front doors more often than not are addressed to us personally, can come accompanied by colour spreadsheets and plastic cards, and very often take us through a complex reading path which has been designed by experts.

In brief, this means that a great many people today are educated to be critical about the transmission of information through a display of text, artwork and photograph — to be critical, to react, and to select or reject.

All this has considerable implications for the classroom textbook, and, perhaps more than anywhere else, for textbooks used in language teaching. This article takes up this question and addresses itself in particular to developments in textbooks used to teach English as a foreign language.

It is fairly safe to say that for many years an English language textbook has been easy to recognize: an abundance of typefaces and typesizes covers the page, highlighting here and there a person's name, an irregular verb, what somebody's great aunt ate for dinner last Tuesday night, a note to the teacher, encouragement to the student, a division in a unit, a page, or an activity. For a decade or two an overwhelming greyness lurked among the pages, giving way here and there to a rather sober drawing, an animal, perhaps, or the gestures, features and other accoutrements belonging to our hero or one of his numerous friends and relations.

And then there was the photograph, bringing the textbook into the real world, except that photograph lay by photograph in extraordinary assembly, with a cow here and a person there and an aerial view of Liverpool stuck between the two. When colour was used it was seized

eagerly and squeezed into strange caricatures of people in the text, perhaps as a message to the student that these people weren't real anyway, and any seeming inanities in the text itself should therefore be ignored. This, after all, was an English language textbook, and the real world could be ignored for a while. Colour photographs were used, but as often as not there was no apparent reason for a particular photograph, or for a particular photograph being in colour, set uncomfortably amid a group of other photographs which were, for some equally unfathomable reason, all in black and white.

All this might seem rather hard, but we are constantly being educated by the media to expect more. Of course, there have been developments and we should have a look at where they are taking us. But first of all, perhaps it might be worthwhile to make a note of some of the things in the media at large which have implications for the effectiveness of English language textbooks and, in particular, course-books.

1. What the media tell us
Design sets the scene. Good design signals clearly what is going on and it is not necessary to ask 'What is all this about?'

Good design attracts attention and arouses interest. It creates motivation in the reader to read further.

Design should clarify what is being asked of the reader by indicating the weight of importance of different matters within the text, and how they relate to each other.

Some implications for EFL coursebooks
What are some of the criteria of successful media presentations and how can these be applied to EFL books?

— At a glance recognition of what is happening on the page so that the EFL learner and teacher are both fully aware of theme, purpose and intended result.

— Clear information paths which help the EFL learner and teacher to understand the relationships between the texts, exercises, artwork and photographs so that they know where to go/what to look at next.

— Accessibility to target group ensuring that both EFL learner and teacher feel that they can relate happily to the material on the page.

— Encouraging both the EFL learner and teacher to feel motivated to use the information which the design is helping to transmit.

2. Design criteria
In this section some of the points already raised will be expanded. Three main criteria will be looked at: relevance, accessibility and cohesion.

Relevance

Relevance in the context of design, be it applied to an advertisement, an article in a magazine or a textbook, can spell the difference between excellence and mediocrity. For the purposes of examining relevance in the area of textbook design, we will pay attention to the following: signposts, audience, colour and mimesis.

Signposts

A recent publication has a magnificent headline with the tantalizing question 'Where's Stockholm?' set right across the top of the left hand page of the spread. Underneath there is a line drawing of the island of Jersey, the Channel Islands. It certainly is an interesting question.

A headline, or in a coursebook, chapter or unit heading, has a number of purposes. To attract interest is the most important. To summarize what is to be expected is another. The two should not be mutually exclusive.

Some of the best headlines utilize *double entendre*, but the line between the exquisite and the absurd is painfully fine; the best of course give the gist, and hint at the depth. Placement and design of the headline is also important. The eye should be drawn to it, through size, colour and placement, but not necessarily all three. Some headings are so obvious and repetitive that one ceases to pay attention to them: they have become irrelevant.

Sub-headlines are equally important: they are a device for skimming and an important part of communicating the overall picture; they break up large and unpalatable areas of text and tell the reader why they should read on. They can also be badly designed to the point of uselessness. Highlighting a tense structure, for example, in enormous letters, cannot buy a reader's confidence in an exponent which is presented in miniscule print.

Similarly, the reader has the right to question the relevance of artwork and photographs to the theme. Pictures are *not* words and should not be depended upon to enlighten an obscure text, particularly in a language textbook, where things are difficult enough as it is. On the other hand they are an additional statement of what is going on, and as such provide excellent back-up. They can define, consolidate, and provide immediacy. They are good illustrators of vocabulary. They contextualize. In this context perhaps one should ask why some advertisements are so brilliant, and others not. One of the reasons has to be relevance: the gimmick is in some way, if only by association, relevant to the product, it supports the message; it is not condescending.

A noticeable difference between the coursebooks of the mid-eighties and their counterparts of the seventies is that there is in the eighties a greater degree of inter-relationship between the illustration and the text; again the media-conscious student and teacher will be inclined to

relate more readily to a spread where the photographs and artwork interact with the text and are not seen to be purely gratuitous and therefore condescending. It does seem a curious characteristic of certain coursebooks to assume that the English language learner belongs to a not particularly representative section of the human race, best taught by being presented with gross caricature of representation and behaviour. Surely, one lesson the media have taught us is that a good photograph of a human face can be identified with, and is worth a thousand line drawings or caricatures. Why, for instance, are there so few animated television advertisements?

Audience

There are a number of observations which come to mind when talking about relevance to audience, apart from the relevance of theme, which is not really what this article is about.

Perhaps these observations are best expressed as questions, rather than as statements.

— Does the book contain sufficient variety of design to interest the learner?

— Is the use of cartoon and photograph at the right level for the learner?

— Is the density and variety of text at the right level for the learner?

Colour

As mentioned above colour is becoming more common, in books for adults and younger learners alike. Colour naturally attracts but it also highlights — the good and the bad.

Again, perhaps specific questions can point out some of the problems encountered when meeting colour in textbooks.

— Is it really necessary? How does it frame or enhance the text? Is the choice of colour accidental or does it complement and bring out a particular theme or topic?

— If the layout is at all mimetic — if it is an attempt to copy an accepted format such as an advertisement — then is the use of colour believable? Is it relevant to everything else that is being attempted on the page, or is it rather a distraction?

Mimesis

This is the act of deliberately attempting to copy an established and recognized format: in the attempt to look like or represent an advertisement, for example; one format often copied is schedules, such as TV programmes and train timetables. These are sometimes fictitious, but quite often a direct lift from an original source. Attempts to

copy the more complex forms of advertisements are less common. Other formats are newspaper pages, dictionary pages, magazine columns or articles, letter or games pages, and extracts from commercial brochures.

It is very likely a lot more experimentation will go on in this area, as writers and publishers of textbooks realize the potential for realistic and motivating presentation. Mimesis also gives the weight of relevance to coursebook material — it reflects something recognizable which has life and validity outside the classroom.

It is also worthwhile saying here that there are very obvious constraints present in the classroom, and within a book which is designed for use in a classroom. An English language coursebook is what it is. It should be interesting, and even entertaining, but it is not a magazine; while it can take lessons from the media in general, it's purpose is to teach, and if it is to sell widely, then like any other product, some account will have to taken of the needs of the lowest common denominator teacher/student.

Accessibility

It is possible to produce material where the selection of topics and the exploitation of those topics is extremely good, but where the design and presentation of the material make it inaccessible for one reason or another, either to the learner or teacher, or both.

Accessible material will have a clear reading path, possess obvious quality of production both in text presentation and layout, and in choice and use of visual support, and will — in the event of the pedagogical approach being equally acceptable — therefore be both reader friendly and teacher friendly.

The reading path

The reading path is fundamental to easy access. A well designed path keeps the flow of information going. Any good advertisement or piece of copy will possess a clear path from one part of the text to another, from the text to pictures or diagrams, and indeed clarify the relationship of one picture or diagram to another. Above all there will be obvious and satisfactory interrelationship between this movement and the exposition of the topic being dealt with.

A recent German publication, used extensively in the teaching of English to adults, has the following confused reading path. A unit towards the end of the book contains six double page spreads. There are therefore twelve pages in that unit. There is quite a lot of artwork and a certain amount of colour photography, not of particularly high quality, either in definition or interest. The text is set in a variety of typesizes, which is both eyecatching and serves to highlight certain vital information. The reading path through the six spreads, however, is not easy. On the first double spread, the left page presents an array of British newspapers, and underneath there is this question:

"Which parts of the newspaper do you read and which is the most important part for you?"

It would be reasonable, therefore, to assume that in this unit the reader is going to be talking about newspapers — and in fact the work on the right hand spread supports this view. There is a short reading text, a listening exercise and two questions which refer to newspapers and which ask students to practise giving opinions. It's fairly easy to see what's going on, except that in one of the colour bands containing important information there is very confusing use of a colour tint. When you turn the page to the second double spread there are three very large extracts from television timetables, from the United States and the UK. The immediate instruction to the student is:

"Look at this American TV guide and then analyse the British TV guides on the opposite page."

There is no attempt, through design or explanation, to link the first double page spread and the second. (Except that TV guides occur in papers. So do weather reports, cartoons, stock exchange reports, advertisements for dogs, roof repairs, and stuffed parrots.) On the third double page spread we have left the world of TV and are now in the realm of public transport, talking about arrivals and departures, and wondering where to eat on the train to Leeds. (In fact, it turns out there's only a buffet service). Of course, it might be argued that there's every reason in the world to have a go at British Rail (the train is also running thirty minutes late) but one wonders if the right place to do this is within a unit that seemed at the start to be talking about newspapers. On the fourth spread we settle down to trains and people apologizing for being late, and the reading path itself is quite clear. Clear presentation of information is achieved through tinted boxes, and the exercises, which are telephoning exercises, are easy to follow. We turn the page.

Casting our eye down the left side of the spread we are pleased to see that we are still with trains — a whole page of true or false questions. No problem. But then, on the right side of this fifth double spread, the tenth page of the unit, we find ourselves staring into a television screen and before we know it, we are bang in the middle of a TV quiz game. Undaunted by this sudden transportation we read the interview (which is not in itself exploited), and move into the final double spread. We are still on TV. We perform the related task, and move finally onto the twelfth page of the unit, wondering if we are still on that quiz show, or merely looking for it among those timetables, or perhaps on that train to Leeds, or if perhaps through some wonderful circle we have not returned to that first question about newspapers. No chance. On the right side of this final double page spread we're all singing, wrestling with the crotchets and quavers, text and message of that popular refrain 'If I Had a Hammer'.

It is possible to create much easier reading paths than this. However, the designers of textbooks must ask themselves if they really want to deal with a unit that is as long as six double page spreads, which is a great deal of space to hold together in design or topic terms. One solution is to go for a double page spread with a unifying theme. In this situation the reading path is much easier to control.

Quality

There is much that is self evident about quality, and perhaps there is considerable uniformity of opinion these days. We are all subjected to similar media influences and are aware of what is good and what is bad in terms of visual acceptability. Most people today would allow that the general quality of textbook design has improved immeasurably. Use of colour photographs is now accompanied by the use of decent quality paper on which to reproduce them (see some of the 1986 and 1987 coursebooks for adults and younger learners). Attention to overall design is seen to be crucial to the final product. Certainly, the coursebooks on which the authors of this article have been working recently were conceived from the very earliest stage with the final design in mind as an integral part of the approach, and not just an afterthought. Units were written to very definite design concepts, and there was always the reassurance that in the production stage the expertise of designers would be employed to ensure the kind of quality deemed to be one of the main objectives of the series.

Perhaps it is enough to say that with the advent of each new series the buying public is becoming more aware of what the coursebook is capable of, and is therefore becoming very much more demanding.

Friendliness

Recent years have seen a shift to the idea that classroom learning can actually be fun. After years of kneebending to ossified attitudes which pictured the classroom as a dungeon and its inmates, both teacher and student, as condemned to years of miserable penance, we have at last realized that people learn faster when they're enjoying what's going on, and teachers teach better when they like what they're doing. It sounds simple, but it's taken years.

Coursebook layout and design can help this process enormously by helping teacher and student know precisely what is going on, and why. In the example of the German textbook, for instance, no attempt was made to use design (or explanation) to create a flow through a complex unit. (Nor, for that matter, was there any suggestion through the appearance of the unit that what was being presented was 'friendly' to its audience. The assumption appears to have been made either that there is something intrinsically interesting in newspapers, timetables and songs — or that interest doesn't matter.)

When looking at a coursebook can we answer 'yes' to these questions?

— Are you interested in this topic?
— Does the layout help you find your way round the page?
— Is there a logical movement from one page to another?
— Does the page tell you what language work you are doing?
— Are you motivated to pick up this book and look through it — Does it attract you?

Cohesion

This should not be a concept alien to language teachers these days. However, in this case we are talking about design cohesion. Do the various components of the book hold together, visually, and in terms of accessibility? Do the pages of a unit have a coherence about them which is instantly recognizable? Is each page coherent within itself?

Very often the answer is no, and quite obviously the example from the German coursebook already given is a case in point. However, the same allegation can be made against much more prestigious publications widely used in the seventies and eighties.

In a language text, as in any other publication, overall coherence is achieved through a variety of recognizable and consistent signals and patterns. These have all been mentioned in the article so far, but it is worthwhile drawing attention to some of them again:

— Uniformity of page allocation to units. Where this does not occur there should be good reason, because there are implications concerning language practice, classroom time, and student perception of the unit itself — if some units are long and some short then is the student to feel that some units are more important than others?
— Colour is a design feature, and one should question whether its use is successful on the page or the spread. Is the use of colour relevant? Is it professional? Is it put to good use? Is it pleasing?
— Typographical and design conventions adopted within the book are signals designed to indicate what is happening, to draw the eye and hold a page or other unit together. Do they give clues to the relative importance of items and the reading path? Are they used consistently?
— Is the overall coherence achieved through the binding together of a number of different and interesting components, or is the book merely a linear progression, an endless repetition of the same approach?

Conclusion

In this article we have made a series of observations, and there is no absolute conclusion to be drawn. Good graphic design is constantly evolving in response to the media, which are endlessly dynamic. Design

of coursebooks in the nineties may have to live up to critical standards of which we are only vaguely aware at the moment.

We are, however, dealing with the present, and it might be a useful exercise to set out some of the more recent coursebooks and ask the reader to look at them from the point of view of some of the criteria set out in these pages.

How do the following books score in terms of design?

0 = Bad   1 = Fair   2 = Good   3 = Very good

	READING PATH	ILLUSTRATION	ACCESSIBILITY	VARIETY
STUDYING STRATEGIES				
STREAMLINE DIRECTIONS				
ON THE WAY				
COUNTERPOINT 3				
MERIDIAN				
THE NEW CAMBRIDGE COURSE				
BREAKAWAY				

OTHERS?

_____

_____

_____

_____

The Evaluation of an ESP Textbook

A. Dudley-Evans and Martin Bates

Over the last twenty years or so ESP has become a recognized and lively branch of ELT, and has had considerable influence on the whole field of ELT, notably in the area of syllabus design and materials production. However, despite the claims made for the advantages of an ESP approach, very little evaluation of ESP programmes seems to have been carried out, and where it has, it is very rare for it to have been carried out in a systematic manner as part of programme design (McGinley 1984). In particular, very little seems to have been done in the area of evaluation of published ESP textbooks. Materials are often written in the first place for a teaching situation in which they are extensively trialled, and are adapted as necessary for future use at the end of each term or academic year. However, it is often difficult to make further adaptations after publication, (for use of the material in global situations for which they were not specifically designed) however desirable such changes may be. There are two main reasons for this, one is that the uncertain economics of publishing ESP textbooks make the revision of materials very unattractive to the publishing company; the second is the difficulty of obtaining regular feedback on materials from ESP situations spread out over the world.
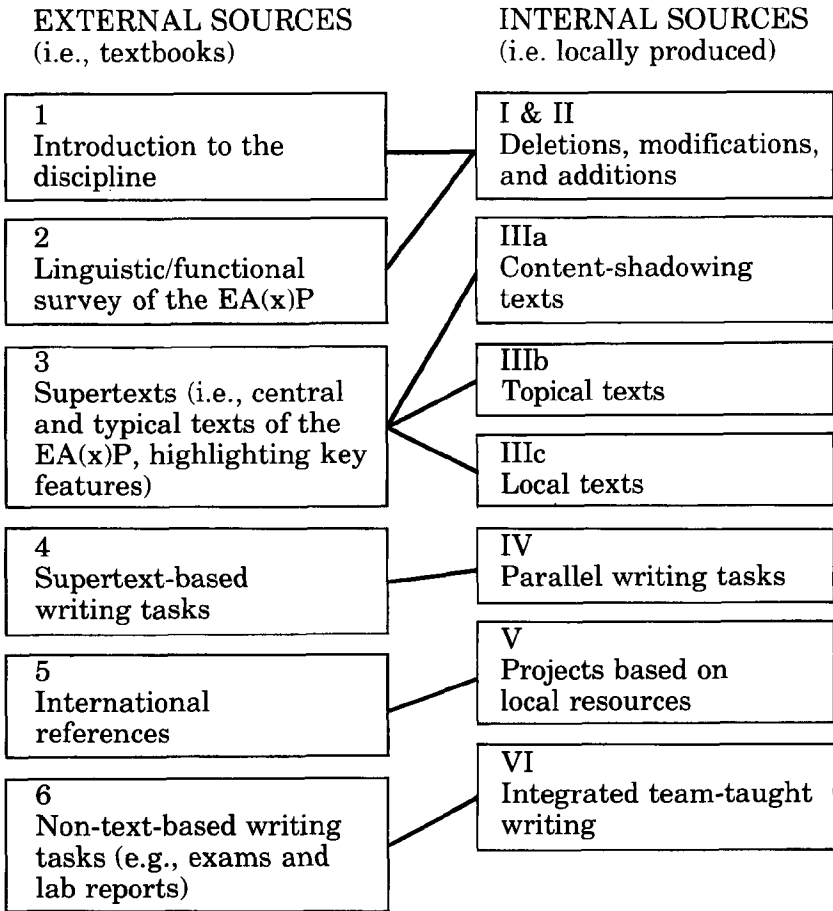
The need for adaptation is of two kinds. The first arises from research into the nature of English used for specific purposes. Materials production and textbook writing have unfortunately tended to take a place ahead of research into questions like the nature of Scientific English and Business English, and are based on the informed intuition and experience of the writers (Sinclair 1978). Ewer and Boys (1981) in an interesting review of the major EST textbooks show how the assumptions about what should be taught in those textbooks are, in a number of serious ways, inconsistent with the findings of research into the nature of scientific and technical language carried out at the University of Chile.

While it is perhaps unavoidable that ESP materials will be written ahead of the required research, it is unfortunate that there is no means of bringing existing textbooks more in line with research findings.

The second need for adaptation is to cater for local circumstances which differ markedly from the original situation for which the materials were written. Swales (1980) discusses the weaknesses of ESP

textbooks and the reasons for the relatively little use made of them in many situations. He suggests that much more allowance should be made for the needs of individual situations and that published materials should leave room for the integration of local materials catering for particular local needs. He suggests the following framework:

Figure 1
Links Between External and Internal Materials
EA(x)P Reading and Writing

EXTERNAL SOURCES   INTERNAL SOURCES
(i.e., textbooks)   (i.e. locally produced)

1 Introduction to the discipline	I & II Deletions, modifications, and additions
2 Linguistic/functional survey of the EA(x)P	IIIa Content-shadowing texts
3 Supertexts (i.e., central and typical texts of the EA(x)P, highlighting key features)	IIIb Topical texts
	IIIc Local texts
4 Supertext-based writing tasks	IV Parallel writing tasks
5 International references	V Projects based on local resources
6 Non-text-based writing tasks (e.g., exams and lab reports)	VI Integrated team-taught writing

In this article we wish to discuss the use of *Nucleus: General Science*[1] in the upper secondary schools in Egypt, the methods used to evaluate the effectiveness of the book, and the resulting changes made (in particular to the Teachers' Manual) resulting from that evaluation.

The need for adaptation and expansion of the Teachers' Manual arose because the majority of Egyptian secondary school teachers of English have had little experience with textbooks that involve the exploitation of scientific contexts for language practice, of a teacher methodology based on active use of the language, or of the use of diagrams to generate language practice and problem-solving activities.

We wish to concentrate on the procedure which was followed in evaluating the book, but should begin by clarifying the reasons for its adoption in Egypt. It is used with the science streams in the final two years of secondary school, and the main justification for its use is the need to prepare students, who are taught science in Arabic at secondary school, for study in English at university level. All technical, scientific and medical courses are taught and examined in English at Egyptian universities, so clearly students need to be prepared to study in English before actually entering university; *Nucleus: General Science* with its concentration on the basic 'notions' and semi-technical language of scientific description would seem to be well suited to this preparatory work. The main problems in its adoption have been to prepare teachers to accept the material, to understand the purpose of using the book, and to teach the material effectively.

The methods followed in evaluating the effectiveness of the book and the problems that teachers were encountering were:

    (a)   Questionnaires to teachers using this book.
    (b)   Visits by Egyptian senior inspectors to schools and discussions with the teachers.
    (c)   Visits by the authors to schools, observation of classes and discussion with teachers.
    (d)   Seminars with teachers and inspectors in which the book and the appropriate teaching methodology were discussed.

Questionnaires

The questionnaires which were devised focused on the teachers and on student reaction to the material. In particular they asked what difficulties both had in using the book. The questions below were key questions:

(Teachers) What are your main problems in using this book? Tick as many of the items as necessary and add any others below.

    (a)   The scientific background
    (b)   The language
    (c)   Presenting the exercises
    (d)   Extending the language to other situations
    (e)   Shortage of time
    (f)   The way the book is tested in the examinations
    (g)   Any others

What are the students' main problems in studying the book?

    (a)   The science
    (b)   The grammatical structures
    (c)   The vocabulary
    (d)   Problem solving exercises

The advantage of the questionnaire is that teachers are able to give a more long term, more structured assessment of the book than in face to face discussion with the authors or senior inspectors. The answers given, however, are often less revealing and less fresh than those given in individual or group discussion.

One particular form of evaluation by questionnaire used to some extent with *Nucleus: General Science* but rather more with other textbooks written by one of the authors (Bates 1979), is the detailed questionnaire on each unit in the course completed immediately after the unit has been taught. The questions concentrated on the following points:

    (a)   the learnability of the unit
    (b)   the workability of the unit and how long it took to teach
    (c)   the popularity of the unit with students
    (d)   evidence of understanding on the part of student

Face to face discussion with individual teachers after observation of their teaching from the book has the advantage that their reaction to the material in the book is immediate and fresh. In seminar discussions at courses run in the summer vacations the immediacy of reaction is lost, but group discussion will often set people thinking critically again. There are two problems with this kind of discussion. One is the difficulty of obtaining criticism; the majority of Egyptian teachers become very embarrassed by criticism of the book, which is seen as criticism of the authors, and when one teacher makes a critical comment, he is quite often shouted down by the others. It is considered vital that the authors should not 'lose face', however much they are trying to encourage teachers to make constructive criticisms of the book. The second problem with face to face discussion is that the feedback tends to be rather disordered. Some general comments will be made about the effectiveness of the book or of individual units but these are frequently combined with questions about the meaning of individual words, comments on a particular diagram or exercise or questions about the difference between words of similar meaning, e.g. sufficient/ adequate, situated/located, frequently/often. It is not unusual for seminar discussion to become bogged down with teachers' particular hobby-horses and to become entirely concerned with what appear to be insignificant points of detail about language rather than with more general issues related to the appropriate methodology or the scientific background. On other occasions discussion can become diverted to a discussion of the validity of an ESP approach in Egyptian schools,

clearly an important issue, but one which contributes little to the evaluation of the book.

It might appear that a more useful method of obtaining feedback would be to ask senior inspectors to conduct the discussions or seminars. Teachers ought to be more willing to make criticisms of the book to people other than the authors themselves. While discussions and seminars of this type have certainly taken place, the feedback obtained has again been rather limited. The major point that did emerge in the early years was the need for reading passages to be added to the book. When the course was originally written and taught, it was envisaged that *Nucleus: General Science*, as the core course in the series, would always be used in parallel with one of the specific books in the series (e.g. *Nucleus: Geology, Nucleus: Agriculture*) which include a reading and a listening comprehension passage in each unit. When *Nucleus: General Science* began to be used as a separate, independent course, it became necessary to add reading passages at the end of each unit to bring together in a scientific context the language taught in the unit and to practise relevant reading skills. Reading passages were written and incorporated originally in special editions for Egypt and subsequently in a new global edition of the book. Criticism of individual units, however, has not come from the reports of senior inspectors apart from the interesting comment that the section in Unit Ten concerned with the notion of 'probability' and the prediction of future rainfall in an area based on evidence of the figures for the previous fifty years was found to be a very difficult concept to grasp by both pupils and teachers. Again the attitude of the senior inspectors seems to be that any criticism made of the course made by teachers should be attributed to their lack of experience rather than weaknesses in the book itself.

Despite the difficulties of obtaining feedback, the authors have obtained a strong impression (from both the questionnaires and individual group or seminar discussion) of the difficulties that Egyptian teachers face in using *Nucleus: General Science*. These were described in a previous paper on the use of the book in Egypt (Dudley-Evans, 1984). These may be summarized:

    (a)   difficulties with the scientific and technical content of the book

    (b)   a feeling of inadequacy in teaching the book arising from (a)

    (c)   difficulties with exercises that require an active use of language on the part of pupils

    (d)   lack of time to exploit the book fully as a result of the timetable

    (e)   the 'backwash' effect of the examination system. Questions on the book carry relatively few marks and are largely multiple choice.

It is clearly virtually impossible for the authors to do anything about points (d) and (e). The first three points, however, had a very strong

influence on the writing of the much extended version of the Teachers' Manual. This was originally written with Egypt in mind but was published for global use. The Manual reprints the pages of the student book on the left and has notes for teachers on the right hand side, opposite the relevant exercise. The two main features of the notes are:

(a)   a very detailed step-by-step approach to the teaching methodology

(b)   a series of notes on the scientific content which appear on the page opposite the appropriate exercise.

In addition there is a very detailed introduction to each unit which discusses the notion being taught, how it relates to scientific description and which language forms are used to express it.

This article has not presented a systematic approach to the evaluation of an ESP textbook, nor has it discussed the question of how well prepared pupils who have studied *Nucleus: General Science* are for study through the medium of English at university. The latter question needs much more long term research and is now, we believe the subject of a number of research projects in Egyptian universities. What we have done is to present what proved to be a practical approach to gaining feedback on the use of *Nucleus: General Science* in Egypt and to discuss the difficulties involved in obtaining that feedback. The article has attempted to answer the question of what a textbook writer can do to revise a book when it is being used in a situation for which it was not originally designed.

Footnote

1. For a full description of the aims of the course see Bates 'Writing Nucleus' in Mackay and Mountford (eds) *English for Specific Purposes* Longman, 1978.

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Adapting Materials

Curriculum Cobbling: or How Companies can Take Over and Effectively Use Commercial Materials

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Developing intensive or extensive, company-specific English Pro-
grammes should be relatively simple. Take a small group of committed
ESL 'experts' with Curriculum Design and Development experience:
take a long hard look at the methodology of Instructional Systems
Design (ISD), i.e. analyse performance requirements — define training
requirements — develop objectives — develop instruction — monitor
and maintain: add to this the easy availability of company-specific
documents and what could be simpler? In reality it is a minefield of
considerable complexity. At each stage, and at each step of each stage,
crucial decisions have to be made. I want to argue that the most
important of these is made at the outset and that is whether or not the
Curriculum Developers perceive themselves as teachers or trainers.

EFL, ESL, ESP, EAP, EOP, ELT — the acronyms abound. But what
is the real difference (as opposed to the acronymous identicality)
between English Language Teaching and English Language Training?
Is it a matter of semantics, a distinction dreamed up by theoreticians
who want to give a more scientific, practical ring to what is essentially
'good old English Language teaching'?

A brief glance at the dictionary definitions of 'teach' and 'train' shows
that teaching characteristically focuses on the acquisition of knowledge
with an expert in a particular subject imparting the information.
Company training, however, is characteristically concerned with
making someone fit, qualified or proficient for a particular task. It
focuses on skills rather than knowledge and has a specified object or
objectives. But how in particular does this distinction affect an English
Language programme, the teachers or trainers and, of course, the
learners who are at the receiving end of the process?

There are, it seems to me, *FOUR* areas of major difference:

— TIME
— CURRICULUM MATERIALS/CONTENT
— INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES
— OBJECTIVES

Time

English Language programmes that are *taught* are usually long-term and are measured in gains. Completion of the programme is linked to years in the course or successful completion of some external examination. Company training programms are usually short-term and measured in days and weeks (only rarely in months). Completion of the course, is linked to the achievement of specific objectives which themselves are rarely connected to external, traditional examinations and tests; this is a major difference which I shall amplify later.

Curriculum materials

Teaching materials are usually general and selected on the basis of:

— public or internal examination requirements
— availability and cost of textbooks and other materials
— teacher factors e.g. interest, past experience etc.

Training materials, whilst of course sharing some of the above characteristics, tend to be much more specific and are selected on the basis of *appropriacy*.

Instructional strategies

'Teaching strategies' depend mainly on individual teacher interest and experience. Theoretically the teacher is free to choose — but in practice there may be little deviation from a 'laid-back, laconic' style. Instructional strategies in training are usually specified by the programme on the basis of the objectives. There is a greater chance that a wider variety of strategies will be prescribed.

Objectives

While I would accept, somewhat grudgingly, that the previous three points of comparison may be marginal, there can be little doubt that there are some major and fundamental differences in teaching and training objectives. It may be useful to make a direct comparison.

TEACHING OBJECTIVES	TRAINING OBJECTIVES
— Development of general English Language knowledge and skills.	— Development of specific English Language skills derived from needs analysis and job assessment.
— General understanding and appreciation of British/American culture, literature etc.	— Relation of programme to company and job needs/concerns, e.g. vocational skills, work attitudes, safety, etc.
— Selection of materials first and then loose objectives set e.g. to complete Textbook 'X'.	— Stating of objectives first and then selection/development of materials.

— Setting of more specific objectives, e.g. writing a letter. These tend to be derived from public or internal examinations.

— Stating of specific skill objectives in terms of trainee performance.

— Not informing students of objectives, or generally informing them of objectives only at beginning of course.

— Informing Trainees of objectives in advance of learning i.e. before each unit/lesson.

— Tendency to focus on content knowledge.

— Focusing on skill development

In developing training courses in ESP for large companies I maintain that we are unequivocally 'trainers' and not 'teachers'. The only successful route is to develop Job-Specific, Performance Based, Functional Programmes. The question is, how? How can we develop instructional materials that will fully satisfy the needs of the trainees? If we opt to write completely original, completely company-specific material, can we afford the cost in time, money and manpower? If we elect to 'go commercial' i.e. use only readily available shelf material, can we afford the compromise we have to make between course objectives and course content?

Before attempting to offer my suggestion as to a possible solution let me outline the background situation to the case study that follows, which will exemplify my argument.

Scenario

The situation was rather unusual but the task was not. I was working in the Middle East for the largest oil-producing company in the World. There were at that time approximately 17,000 trainees in thirty-one separate Training Centres. Some of these centres wanted to offer a Professional English Programme for employees with obvious management potential. The aim was to run twelve groups of roughly ten trainees, and to run them continuously, using only native-speakers of English, i.e. US and UK teachers. There was generous funding as well as good manpower and administrative resources. The task was to develop 1200 hours of instruction in Business and Commercial English. The levels (four) and the terminal performance targets were predetermined:

Level 1 — Absolute Beginners
:
Level 4 — Band 6+ (using Carroll's scales: Carroll, 1981)

The difficulties had by now distilled themselves down to 3.

(a) Original or Commercial/Shelf material?
(b) Statements of expected language performances at the end of each level.
(c) How to set about selecting the most appropriate materials if the complete programme was based on Commercial texts?

It was obviously important to resolve Problems a and b above before proceeding to Problem c. Surprisingly both were relatively easy to solve. For example, on mathematical and logistical grounds it made sense to develop Levels 1, 2 and 3 using almost exclusively commercial material. Development would consist of writing a Teachers Guide and preparing some supplementary or self-study material. Level 4, the exit level could also have been 100% commercial — but it was felt that the course should end by meeting, as fully as possible, the companies and the trainees' specific needs. The calculations that follow are based on the following, well-researched assumptions:

— The time (DH) required to develop one instructional hour (IH) from commercial material is three hours.
— The time (DH) required to develop one instructional hour (IH) of original materials is fifteen hours.

Therefore, based on commercial material the required 300 hours of instruction could be produced by four writers in thirty-two workdays. i.e. 300 IH × 3 DH = 900 hrs.
900 ÷ 7hr/developer workday = 128.5 workdays
128.5 ÷ 4 writers = 32 workdays

The number of workdays, or number of writers, required not only became unrealistically astronomical if we decided to go for completely original material — it would put the programme well beyond the prevailing start-up deadline.

The final decision was to develop Levels 1, 2 and 3 completely from shelf material and to delay writing Level 4 until the other 3 levels were complete. With all the developers working simultaneously on one level it was possible to write Level 4 inside the deadline and to make it 50% commercial material and 50% completely original and company-specific.

Problem 2

Statement of Language Task Performance for:

    (a)   Selection of Materials
    (b)   Development of Test Battery

This proved the hardest problem to solve and was probably the part of the programme that caused the most heated arguments and produced the greatest compromises between the practical need to progress with the project and the academic integrity of the development team.

Several well known documents were consulted. For example, the company had bought the ELTDU Stages of Attainment Scales and Test Battery; other development team members had worked with the IBM company language scales and the Foreign Service Institute scales. None of these however seemed, *in toto*, to be a solution. At this point we settled on Carroll's Banding Scale (Carroll 1981). This was decided

because it was, at that time, a general enough scale to be adaptable to some of the more specific needs of the company: and because Carroll himself was appointed as the company's Testing Consultant to work on the Test Battery development.

The development team had also been looking long and hard at Robert F. Mager's book *'Preparing Instructional Objectives'*. This seemed to have considerable merit and it was decided to write the Course Objectives in task performance terms.

    Therefore, Level 1 was to take the trainee to Band 4
                Level 2 was to take the trainee to Band 5
                Level 3 was to take the trainee to Band 6
                Level 4 was to take the trainee to Band 6+/7

Using Mager's terminology the team produced statements of language performance such as:

Level 2: Follow four-step job-related instructions containing simple complete structures without idioms.

Level 2: Ask questions of a factual nature which contain simple structures. No errors in grammar, pronunciation or diction which impede comprehensibility.

Level 2: Read and demonstrate comprehension of telephone messages, memos and two paragraph business letters.

The full taxonomy ran to four pages, one for each level. However the following example for Level 4 should be indicative:

Prepare and deliver a five-minute oral report containing complex structures, relying only single-word/short written cues as delivery aids, and following an acceptable format of organization.

Problem 3

How to select the most appropriate commercial materials to meet the company, course and trainees' needs. The factors that helped the team were that they already had a reasonable amount of hard knowledge. This included:

    (a)   Trainee Job Profiles (from company Personnel Division).
    (b)   A Needs Analysis (performed by team of US academics).
    (c)   Organisational Needs.
    (d)   Statements of Proficiency.
    (e)   The Course Design/Outline and Specifications

The last above included a list of 9 basic Functional Areas that each level would concentrate on, e.g.:

— Give and Follow Instructions
— Ask and Answer Questions
— Give and Follow Reports
— Engage in Social and Job-related Discourse
— Read Company Documents
— Write Company Business Documents

   The problem was not really obtaining shelf material: it was analysing and evaluating it when it arrived, to ensure that it met the course criteria.
   What we did was to develop some instruments to help us make our selection.

Step 1
At the very outset the Project Director and a team of two used publishers' lists and other standard sources to obtain about four hundred EFL/ESP textbooks which seemed to contain some, if not all, relevant business materials. It was obvious that the course would not be based on all these textbooks. So a method of 'prime-cut selection' was developed. The objective was to identify firstly any books that could be used as a *Primary Text* (i.e. one that would be purchased by the company and provided to the trainees) of which more than 80% would be actually used by the trainee on the course.
   At this stage books that had *some* useful and relevant sections were also identified and classified as *Supplemental Material*. The course was designed to have a REMAC component. This was a period of one hour a day when the trainee was given additional material, either for *REM*edial purposes, if the trainee had had some particular problem, or

Fig. 1

TITLE: LEVEL: REVIEWER:			
PRIMARY TEXTBOOK	SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL	REMEDIATION/ ACCELERATION	REJECT

Situational ☐
Functional ☐
Job-related ☐
Business
  based   ☐
Integrated ☐
	Usable sections ☐
	Specify pages: ☐
		Appropriate
		  exercises ☐
		Self tests ☐
		Not necessarily
		  notional/
		  functional
		  syllabus ☐
		Self-directed
		  study ☐
			Culture
			  bound ☐
			Non-situa-
			  tional ☐
			Non-func-
			  tional ☐
			Non-job-
			  related ☐
			Non-
			  integrated☐

*AC*celeration if the trainee required additional follow-up material.
Some books would be useful for this REMAC component, and so were
recorded. The following instrument (Fig. 1) was devised to facilitate the
process of initial evaluation and selection. As you can see from Fig. 1
there was also a REJECT category. The criteria for rejection will vary
from company to company and from country to country. The criteria in
this particular instrument relate to use of materials in the Middle East.
Therefore 'Culture Bound' (i.e. topics on sex, politics and religion) was a
major consideration — and the major reason for the majority of the
rejections.

Step 2

All prime text selections were then subjected to a 'Pinpoint Evaluation'.
The main objective was to establish the extent to which each book thus
selected addressed the functional skill areas identified in the Needs
Analysis i.e. Give and Follow Instructions etc . . . If this could be
assessed with a reasonable degree of accuracy it would enable the
course time allocation to be efficiently distributed across the most
relevant skills. As a result a second instrument was developed:

Fig. 2 Pinpoint Evaluation Sheet

TITLE:				
LEVEL:				
REVIEWER:				
Low	High	Yes		
			T.O.* 1	Follow oral instructions
			T.O. 2	Give oral instructions
			T.O. 3	Answer questions
			T.O. 4	Ask questions
			T.O. 5	Follow oral reports
			T.O. 6	Give oral reports
			T.O. 7	Verbal exchange (business-social)
			T.O. 8	Read business documents
			T.O. 9	Write business documents

*Terminal Objective or Language Function Area
  NB. At this stage the level of the material was not specified, except in
  very general terms at the top of the instrument.

Step 3

The final step was to break down each of the nine Language Function Areas into their specific micro-skills or Enabling Skills. This was a lengthy, though extremely useful and essential part of textbook evaluation. The principle was to establish which sections of which

Fig. 3

		TITLE:
		LEVEL:
		REVIEWER:

T.O. 4: Ask questions

Comments	Page/Section/Chapter	Enabling skills area	
		General Respond to role relationship	1
		Interrupt/intervene appropriately	2
		Overcome distractions	3
		Specific Ask questions to elicit actions	1
		Ask questions to elicit opinions	2
		Make polite requests	3
		Make offers by using questions	4
		Request permission	5

chapters of each textbook so far selected contained the material *most* relevant to the trainees' needs. This of course would also provide an invaluable input for the course writers/designers.

The underlying rationale of the course was that acquisition of these micro-language skills would enable the trainees to perform the language functions required for the job, at the appropriate level. In preparing these micro-skills the course developers acknowledge their debt to John Munby and *Communicative Syllabus Design*. However the skills that the developers were looking for were not Munby's Grammatical/Structural skills. This taxonomy was restricted to performance-based skills.

Opposite is an example of the Enabling Skills Areas for the Language Function of Asking Questions.

The information provided by this micro-analysis of each textbook was used for three main purposes.

1.   *Skill Spread*

It enabled the course developers to address each of the nine Language Function Areas as dictated by the Needs Analysis. It also allowed 'selecting-out'. For example, the Language Skills of Giving and Following Instructions may not need to be taught further than Level 1 of the course. Therefore any such material on Instructions contained in any texts selected for Level 2, 3 and 4 could automatically be deleted (unless required for REMAC).

2.   *Hours of instruction*

All companies impose constraints upon their trainers. The amount of money allocated is usually the first: the amount of time always the second. For a variety of good reasons each level had to be exactly three hundred hours of class instruction. In order to prepare the instructional material the developers could use the information above to very roughly calculate how many hours were to be used from each of the books.

3.   *Design and development of programme*

The information was finally used to develop the actual Programme of Instruction (POI). From the data it was relatively quick and easy to identify the most relevant sections of the commercial material. These were then matched to the trainees' needs, as defined by the Needs Analysis, at the appropriate level. In this way it was possible to meet both the trainees' and the company's needs.

Of course this was not the finished product i.e. the Final Course Content. The team had still to adapt and modify the 'shelf-material', where appropriate, to be more company-specific (i.e. provide company letters as a supplement to the general examples in the textbook, and other hand-outs such as company figures, charts, diagrams, etc.). Also the Teachers' Guide had to be prepared. But what had been achieved so far

was the development of a methodology, a systematic approach to the selection and evaluation of commercially available texts that enabled the speedy identification of materials that would most efficiently meet course, company and trainee needs. A curriculum had been cobbled.

Footnote

Copyright: in the example above the company concerned had a policy not to contravene the prevailing laws of copyright. A copy of each book used on the course was purchased equivalent to the number of trainees passing through the course.

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Can Published Materials be Widely used for ESP Courses?

Adrian Pilbeam

ESP courses have much greater constraints than general language courses in terms of limitations of time, precise objectives, particular background of the learners, special subject or skill content, and the expertise of the teachers who operate within these constraints. As a result general language books are rarely appropriate, and even many ESP books do not closely match the needs of each case. The question, therefore, needs to be asked — can published materials be used in ESP, and if so, what are the criteria for selecting and indeed writing them? Alternatively, we can ask — should all ESP materials be tailor made? These are the questions that this article will examine.

The vicious circle

In my early days of ESP teaching and course planning, I and my colleagues were firmly convinced that each case was special, both for individual and group courses. This belief held true for both business oriented language and technical English. The result was a constant need to create and write tailor-made materials which were inevitably more specific than creative. The need to produce material at speed led to short cuts, a certain sameness of approach, and a lack of time to test materials out. The alternative — using published material — threw up the problems of relevance, timing and presentation, and was rejected on all three counts. The dilemma seemed to be a choice between tailored material that was not well thought through due to lack of time, and published material that was not very usable for the cases in hand.

Criteria for evaluating ESP textbooks

Year by year, more and more ESP material is being published, and more of it is being written by practising teachers-turned-writers, who have become aware of the dilemma described above, and therefore try to steer a course around it in their writing, particularly in the field of business and management English with which I am most familiar. Nevertheless, published ESP materials must always be a compromise, and it is the job of the teacher or course designer to apply rigorous

criteria to weed out the good from the bad, the suitable from the unsuitable. The criteria by which any ESP materials, published or unpublished, should be judged include the following:

1. *Is it specific?*
Any ESP course should begin with a needs analysis to define the needs of the students. These needs should be expressed in performance terms, and then become objectives for the course. Examples of typical objectives for people in business include:

— to present information to an audience for ten/fifteen minutes and answer questions at the end.
— to take full part in discussions and meetings where different points of view may be expressed and argued.
— to give and receive information on the 'phone about arrangements, figures, names and dates . . . etc.

Any material to be used for such courses should have been written with similar objectives in mind. There is no real justification for using material that takes articles from 'The Financial Times' or similar and exploits them from the point of view of comprehension and vocabulary if the real need of the students is to take part in discussions. The specific needs of the students will not be met because the objectives of the material will be different. Therefore the question 'Is it specific' refers not only to specialized content but also to specific objectives. Material to be used for developing the skills of discussion in meetings as outlined above, should have been written to meet those objectives. Any material to be used for an ESP course should, therefore, have clearly defined objectives expressed in performance terms, and these objectives should correspond to those for the course.

2. *Is it appropriate?*
The word appropriacy means different things, but in this context the question to be asked is — Is the material at the right language, professional and cultural level? The question of language level is an obvious one, and needs little comment except for the fact that it is quite possible to teach material 'up' or 'down' a level if it is appropriate in other ways. The second question about professional level concerns the levels at which the material is pitched as it relates to the background of the students. For example something written for science students at undergraduate level, e.g. the *Nucleus* series, is not appropriate for practising engineers. Equally something written for clerical and administrative office staff, e.g. *We Mean Business* is not appropriate for business executive and management personnel. The mere word 'business' or 'technical' in the title does not automatically qualify material for all kinds of courses that could come under that loose heading.

The final question concerns the cultural orientation of the material. Much of the published technical English material on the market has been written specifically for a non-European target group, typically workshop trainees or technical and science students in the Middle East and the Far East. It is evident, therefore that the style, approach and content of the material would not be appropriate for a European target group.

3. *Is it valid?*

This question is partially linked with the previous one, and concerns the matter of face validity. Material written and used for a particular target group should mirror and reflect the world of that group. Thus *Nucleus* and similar material was written spefically for university undergraduates in science faculties, and the content reflects this. The books are essentially descriptive and concerned with learning about science in English, which is the situation of the students who used them. The material in the books probably reflects the kind of science textbooks used on other courses at the university. The type of language, and the context used to present and practise this language are both valid.

In the world of business and industry, and consequently in material used for this target group, face validity is even more important because you are dealing with a sophisticated audience who have justifiably high expectations. A problem here is that if EFL writers have little direct experience of business, the situations, problems and facts used as a context for language work run the risk of appearing simplistic and ultimately uninteresting. It is important for this audience that the business transactions and problems discussed are realistic, that the facts and figures used for illustration are credible and of the right order of magnitude.

4. *Is it flexible?*

A particular feature of many ESP courses, particularly those aimed at professional people, is the time pressure under which they have to operate. Many courses for business people are short intensive sessions of one or two weeks (thirty/sixty hours). Any material used on such courses must therefore bear this in mind, so that it can be used in a flexible way to fit into the specific time constraints that exist. In real terms, this means that the material should be 'chunkable' — it should be possible to break it up and dip into it, using only parts and not the whole. Absence of strong story-lines, and the use of non-sequential units are important here, together with some awareness by the writer(s) when writing the material that it may never be used in its entirety, from Page 1 to Page 101. A useful tool here, if it is a full book, is to highlight a number of routes through the book to show how the material might be used in different circumstances.

5. *Is the approach suitable?*

This question concerns the underlying methodology of the material. To some extent it overlaps with part of question three about cultural differences. For instance material designed for use in the Middle East is unlikely to be useful in Europe, and vice versa. The important things here are that the teacher feels happy with the approach taken by the material, and that the approach optimizes the learning rate of the students. An example of this from my own experience is the difference between French and German learners on the one hand, who tend to respond well to an approach based on language analysis leading to the formation of hypotheses followed by practice, and Swedish and Norwegian learners on the other hand who much prefer a full activity based course, and who do not respond so well to a more text based (written or spoken) approach.

6. *Is the material of high quality?*

This does not refer to the standard of reproduction, but rather to the variety of material and exercise types, and their usability in the classroom. A danger with hastily written in-house ESP material is that it tries to be specific and content based and sacrifices creativity. Therefore it is not unusual to see material based on highly relevant spoken and written texts with rather uninspired exploitation — straightforward comprehension, gap-filling, sentence completion and the like. Varied and creative exercises and activities that present and practise language in interesting and demanding way are slow to write and require an element of trial and error. It is also better for more than one writer to be involved. It is more likely that published material that has been through a full editorial process will be of a higher quality in this respect than in-house material that is rushed from the typewriter to the photocopier.

7. *How long does it take to produce?*

This question follows on naturally from the previous one. Good material takes time to write, and time is expensive. Material written quickly tends to be written to a simple format, and is bound to have inconsistencies. In the business world, where some companies commission writers to produce material specially for them, ratios of between 10:1 and 5:1 (writing hours: teaching hours) are not unusual, which is not surprising if you consider the time required to go from the first briefing about the general needs to the final typed master copy. Relatively few organizations are prepared to invest this time for specially tailored material, and producing it more quickly leads to the problems mentioned above.

8. *What is the cost of producing material?*

Cost is directly related to time, and published materials have a huge

advantage here with their relatively high volume sales to pay back the investment. It is highly unlikely that one-off ESP courses justify the expense of producing tailor-made materials.

Published or in-house materials?
If the above criteria are applied to all ESP materials, whether published or written in-house, it is very likely that tailor-made materials will score highly on points 1–5, and very low on points 7–8. Point 6 depends on the experience and expertise of the writer (there are some very uninspiring published materials around in the ESP field which probably take a good deal of time to put together).

The choice of one or the other inevitably depends on the situation — some needs are very specialized, particularly in technical fields, and published material does not exist because it would be uneconomic to produce. But for business and management English areas there is a great deal of common ground that underlies different job functions and industries. This 'core' language area can and should be incorporated into any material designed to cover the main language skills needed by professional business people. On this basis it is reasonable to choose published material, provided that it has the following characteristics:

— a clear picture of the target users of the material, incorporating needs and objectives
— a clear language syllabus underlying the material
— an emphasis on 'core' language that is relevant to a wide range of users in the target group. A business English book should be less job specific and more task or skill specific.
— an awareness of the constraints of time, group size, type of course (intensive or extensive) and hardware available.
— a modular structure that permits flexibility of use, e.g. 'stand alone' units or parts of units, very loose storyline, if any, and non-sequential.

Conclusion
If published materials adhere to the above sets of criteria, and the target group corresponds to the target group for a particular course then it is likely that much of a course can use published materials. The rest of the material, which should be truly specific to the group being taught, can come from them in the form of their own presentations, business case studies and subjects for discussion. It need not necessarily be written in detail in advance. Nevertheless there will always be some courses that are so specific that they are truly 'one-off', and it will be difficult to find core-material. But in general terms I firmly believe that published material can be widely used for ESP courses, especially business ones.

Notes on Contributors

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Tony Dudley-Evans has, since 1976, been a member of the English for Overseas Students Unit at the University of Birmingham. Before that he worked in Libya and then Iran, where the *Nucleus* series was first written. In 1980–81 he was KELT Adviser to the English Language Centre at Ngee Ann Polytechnic. He is also involved in teacher training, particularly in the area of ESP.

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