

## Chapter 2 | Towards a descriptive model of ELT materials

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 A review of descriptive models
- 2.3 A model for the description of teaching materials: product and process
  - 2.3.1 A model for the product of a description
  - 2.3.2 A model for the process of a description
    - 2.3.2.1 Level 1: 'What is there'
    - 2.3.2.2 Level 2: 'What is required of users'
    - 2.3.3.2.1 A definition of 'task'
    - 2.3.3.2.2 A theoretical basis for the analysis of tasks.
    - 2.3.2.3 Level 3: 'What is implied'
  - 2.3.3 A synthesized model of the process and product of description
- 2.4 Conclusion

### 2.1 Introduction

In order to begin examining the forces which may be instrumental in shaping the nature of English language teaching materials, we need first to establish a clear picture of what it is that is to be explained. The concern of this chapter, therefore, is to evolve a framework for describing materials which may then be applied (in the next chapter) to the five sets of materials which form the central data for this thesis. At the outset, however, it must be recognised that any framework for the description of an object as complex as a set of teaching materials will inevitably involve selection, and thus runs the risk of building explanation into the description. The danger is that, through selection, one may implicitly suggest forces which shape the materials, such as, for example, the identification of a particular theory of language learning suggesting that that theory had a significant role in shaping the materials.

The approach I will take in this chapter, therefore, is first to review a number of existing models for description which are relevant to teaching materials in order to establish which aspects of materials are thought, in the literature, to be of significance. My concern in doing this will be to identify, and avoid, points at

which existing models appear either to be biased in favour of particular types of language teaching materials or which appear to assume particular routes to the creation of materials (section 2.2). I will then endeavour to draw upon the insights gained through this to suggest the significant aspects to be included in a description of the materials discussed in this thesis (section 2.3.1). I will term this list of aspects the *product of description*.

An attempt at description which goes beyond that which is explicit within the materials, however, will unavoidably involve the researcher in making inferences about what is involved in the use of the materials. For this reason, I will devote attention to outlining a model for the *process of description* which highlights the various levels of inference required (section 2.3.2). Of central concern in this will be the analysis of the demands made upon learners by the tasks proposed in the materials. I will therefore also be concerned with defining 'task' and suggesting a theoretical basis for their analysis (section 2.3.2). I will conclude by proposing a model which synthesizes the significant features to be covered in the product of description with the process of description (section 2.3.3). This model will then serve a basis for analyzing the materials in Chapter 3.

## **2.2 A review of descriptive models**

For the purposes of building a framework for the description of the materials discussed in this thesis, there exist a number of models which may guide us in both the selection of relevant aspects to be described and the manner in which a description can be achieved. One of the most obvious sources for guidance is the large number of models which exist to aid in the selection of a coursebook for a particular group of students (see, inter alia, Harmer, 1983:237-45; Williams, 1983; Cunningsworth, 1984; Doughill, 1987). Whilst recognising

that such models frequently serve a useful purpose in choosing materials, they usually involve the analyst in making general, impressionistic judgements on the suitability of the materials, rather than in examining in depth what the materials contain, and work from assumptions concerning characteristics the materials should have. Features such as "up-to-date methodology of L2 teaching" (Williams, *ibid.*:252) and questions such as "Is it foolproof (i.e. sufficiently methodical to guide the inexperienced teacher through a lesson)?" (Doughill, *ibid.*:32) and "Is the language used in the materials realistic - i.e. like real-life English" (Harmer, *ibid.*:243) reflect the desire for particular qualities in materials in relation to particular circumstances. For my purposes here, therefore, I have chosen to review a number of models which propose a more analytical approach relevant to language teaching materials. Each of these was devised for a particular end but, in their separate ways, they suggest various aspects of materials which are felt to be significant. The four models I will be concerned with are Mackey's (1965) model for the analysis of teaching materials, Corder's (1973) model for materials development, Breen and Candlin's (1980b, 1987) model for materials evaluation, and Richards and Rodgers' (1982, 1986) model for method analysis.

Mackey's (1965) model for the analysis of materials centres on the manner in which principles of selection, gradation, presentation and repetition are realised in the text. Differences in materials result, according to Mackey, from (1) different theories of language, (2) different types of language description and (3) different ideas on language learning which jointly feed into the design of the materials (1965:139). His model can be summarised as in Figure 2.1, below.

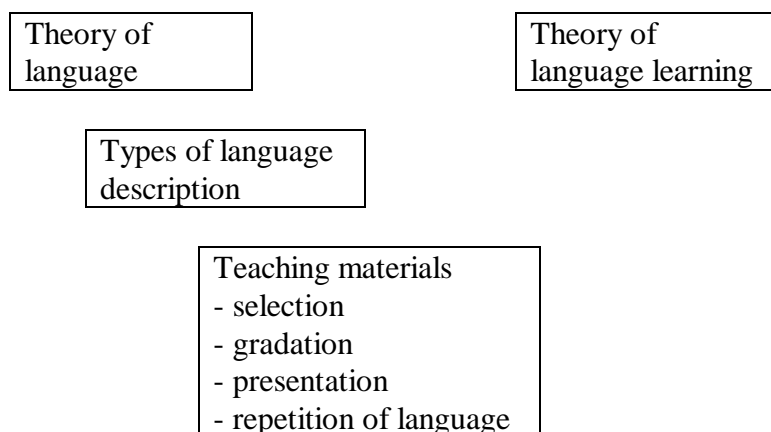


Figure 2.1: Mackey's model for the analysis of teaching materials

Mackey's model is useful in showing that one must look beyond the actual content and organisation of the materials and consider the underlying theories of language and language learning which are represented. The model is similar to that of Corder (1973), summarised in Figure 2.2, which sets out in further detail the structuring and selectional techniques that are involved in producing any set of teaching materials. This time, however, there is no specific mention of the role of a theory of language learning, although closer reading of Corder reveals that he views such a theory as determining the *presentation techniques* which are utilised in the materials.

One immediate problem which can be identified in both Mackey's and Corder's models, however, is that the proposed categories of analysis or steps in development themselves appear to assume particular theories of language, learning and teaching. In both cases, teaching materials are held to derive directly from an analysis of language which will produce a list of items and a view of teaching that will prioritise the selection, sequencing and presentation of these items. The models are therefore weighted in favour of materials which are organised this way and will clearly be inadequate as a basis for describing materials which do not focus on a linguistic specification. Furthermore, since

the emphasis in both models is on the linguistic content, the methodological aspects of teaching materials are underexplicated. Mackey's elements of *presentation* and *repetition*, for instance, are but two of the various possible teaching strategies which may be set out in materials. Both models also leave unconsidered the various other important aspects of classroom work which may be proposed by materials: What is the teacher's role? What is the learner's role? What is the distribution of responsibility? Who works with whom? What do particular tasks demand of the learners? and so on.

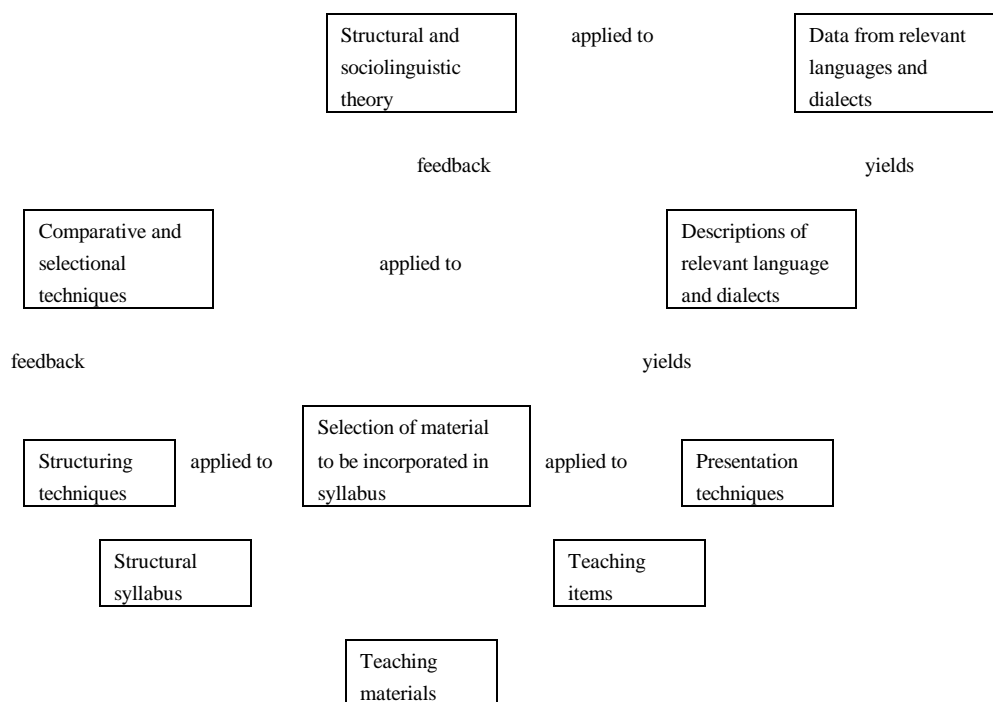
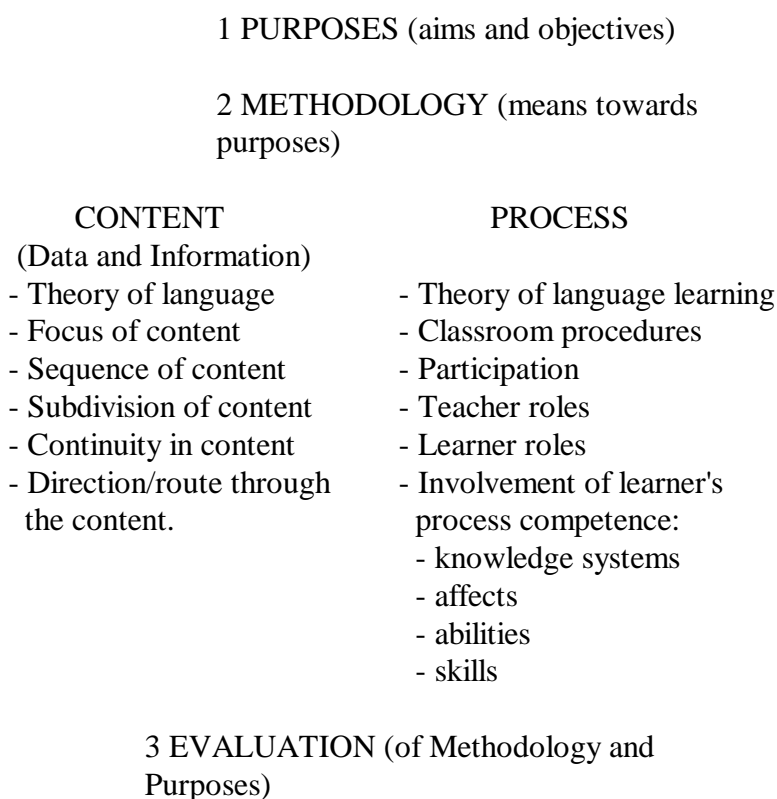


Figure 2.2: Corder's (1973:145-55) model of the development of teaching materials

A more elaborate and extensive model has been proposed by Breen and Candlin (1980b, further developed 1987), summarised in Figure 2.3 below. Developed for the purposes of analyzing materials as a first step in their evaluation, the model sees teaching materials as embodying three sets of considerations: *purposes*, which will include both long-term aims and short-term objectives; *methodology*, which serves as a means towards those purposes; and *evaluation* which concerns the effectiveness of the methodology and the appropriateness of the original purposes. Methodology, however, can be further analysed in their model in terms of two basic aspects: *content*, within which one can distinguish *data* (i.e. samples of the target language) and *information* (i.e. explanations and rules about the language and language use), and *process*, which refers to the actual procedures and participant roles involved in working upon the content. In terms of *content*, the model involves considering first the *theory of language* which may underlie the material. Next, the implicit and explicit *focus* of the content of the materials is to be considered. Materials may, for instance, have an explicit focus stated as the coverage of certain topics whilst at the same time have an implicit focus on certain grammatical or functional areas. The various ways in which the content is *sequenced* and *subdivided* and the manner in which *continuity* is established are to be considered next. The rigidity of this sequence and subdivision - that is the *direction* through the materials which is proposed - forms the final aspect of content identified.

In terms of *process*, Breen and Candlin's model involves first identifying the *theory of language learning* which the materials either implicitly or explicitly reflect. This theory will manifest itself in the types of *classroom procedures* which the materials propose. These procedures may imply decisions about *participation* - who does what with whom - and the nature of the *teacher's role* and the *learner's role* and the contribution each of them is expected to make in the teaching-learning process. The final aspect of materials which they identify

is what they term the *involvement of the learner's process competence*. This comprises four aspects: the learner's *knowledge systems* relating to ideas and concepts, interpersonal behaviour and the structure of text; the *affects*, attitudes and values which are aroused; the *abilities* of expression, interpretation and negotiation which are called upon; and the manner in which the *skills* of reading, writing, speaking and listening are exploited.



*Figure 2.3: Breen and Candlin's model for the analysis and evaluation of teaching materials*

The strength of the model proposed by Breen and Candlin lies in the fact that it takes into account not only any linguistic analysis which may precede the design of the materials but also the proposals for classroom methodology and the demands made upon the learner which are implied in the particular task types included. As such, the model is more flexible than those proposed by either Mackey or Corder since it should enable a description of a wide range of

teaching materials. Many of the features which Breen and Candlin identify are also found in the last model which I shall consider, that proposed by Richards and Rodgers (1982, 1986).

METHOD		
Approach	Design	Procedure
a. Theory of language b. Theory of the nature of language learning	a. General and specific objectives b. Syllabus model c. Types of teaching/learning activities d. Learner roles e. Teacher roles f. The role of the instructional materials	a. Classroom procedures, practices, and behaviours observed when the method is used.

*Figure 2.4: Richards and Rodgers' model for the analysis of teaching methods*

Richards and Rodgers' model (Figure 2.4) was originally developed to provide a model for the description and comparison of methods such as the Silent Way, Suggestopaedia, Community Language Learning and so on, but it clearly has considerable relevance when looking at teaching materials. The model consists of three basic levels of analysis, somewhat misleadingly represented in their diagram as categories. *Approach* consists of the underlying theories of language and language learning which may be either explicit or implicit. *Design* consists of the definition of aims and objectives, the syllabus model utilised including principles of selection and gradation, the choice of subject matter, types of teaching/learning activities, teacher and learner roles and the role of teaching materials. The final level of analysis, *Procedure*, however, lies beyond the analysis of teaching materials since it is concerned with how a particular method is realised in the classroom, how lessons as events actually unfold, and the techniques and behaviours which are involved.

The four models which I have reviewed share some common ground and suggest that there is a degree of consensus about which aspects of teaching materials will be significant and thus would need to be taken into account in



arriving at a description. Mackey and Corder, for example, both suggest that the view of language and language learning are important, whilst Breen and Candlin and Richards and Rodgers extend this to encompass methodological considerations such as teacher and learner roles. Each of them, however, was produced with a particular purpose in mind and thus will not, on its own, be sufficient for the purposes of a general description of *any set* of language teaching materials. I have already noted that the models proposed by Mackey and Corder emphasise the contribution of Applied Linguistics in the design of materials. The model proposed by Breen and Candlin enables further aspects of materials to be taken into account but the suggestion that the organizing principles of selection, sequencing and subdivision are principally related to content will not adequately account for materials which do not place their focus on content as such. I am thinking here, for example, of materials which may focus their organizing principles on task complexity or group dynamics or of materials which encourage the classroom group to research and supply their own content. Richards and Rodgers' model covers much of the same ground as Breen and Candlin's but the inapplicability of the third level which they propose (procedure) makes the model, as it is, an unsuitable basis for the description of teaching materials.

There is, however, a further consideration relevant to all the models discussed. In constructing a model for the description of teaching materials, it is important to ensure that the model does not involve assumptions about the process of their creation. I have already noted in relation to the models advocated by Mackey and Corder that they appear to assume that teaching materials will (or should) derive from an analysis of language and a view of learning that will prioritise the presentation of linguistics items. Implicit in such an assumption is the belief that materials designers need to work, either consciously or unconsciously, from a theory of language and a theory of language learning. This may indeed be the

case but it is a statement concerning origination not one of description; it is an answer to the question 'Why are the materials like this?' not 'How are the materials?'.

A more fundamental problem arises in the *use* of each of the models discussed above. Although together they represent a very useful outline of the areas which a description of teaching materials would need to address, they leave unexamined the various levels of inference through which the researcher will have to go. They represent, one may say, models of the *product* of description rather than models of the *process* of description. As an example of this, we may turn to the model proposed by Richards and Rodgers. Richards and Rodgers' first level of description is 'Approach'. This consists of 'Theory of Language' and 'Theory of Language Learning'. I have already noted that the inclusion of theoretical considerations belongs more appropriately to a discussion of origination than of description. In their own use of the model for the description of teaching methods, however, Richards and Rodgers set out their conclusions about theory as an initial step in a description, yet, as they acknowledge, it is difficult to see how one can come to any deduction about the theoretical underpinning in either materials or methods without *first* thoroughly considering the manner in which the language is represented and the suggestions that are put forward as to how the learners should go about learning.

A similar problem exists within the next layer of description which they propose, 'Design'. Here Richards and Rodgers suggest that aims and objectives, principles of selection and gradation, subject matter, types of classroom activities, teacher/learner roles and the role of teaching materials need to be set out. Each of these areas, however, presupposes a consideration and 'working through' of what is involved in the use of methods or, in this case, materials. 'Aims and objectives', for instance, are rarely explicitly stated and it will usually

be necessary to deduce these from the actual nature of proposed classroom work. Similarly, any claims about 'teacher/learner roles' advocated in a set of materials will require the researcher to consider precisely what is expected to be done and by whom. In relation to the Richards and Rodgers model particularly, it would appear that conclusions about 'Approach' entail conclusions about 'Design'; conclusions about 'Design' entail conclusions about 'Procedure', and it is precisely at this level that the model provides no systematic outline to form a basis for the higher levels of description.

What is involved, therefore, is a distinction between the *explicit nature of the materials* and the *subjective nature of the researcher's inferences* about the significance of certain features of the materials. Such a distinction is important to make since it will enable a distinction to be seen between 'reporting' on the one hand and 'interpreting', on the other (Littlejohn, 1988a), allowing readers and the researcher to retrace the steps involved in constructing a description of the materials. This distinction is, however, not an unproblematic one. Clearly, any attempt at reporting requires selection and, as such, involves subjective judgements as to which aspects are significant enough to cite. We are, however, talking about the degree of inference required. An account of the 'explicit nature' of the materials will operate at a low level of inference, where one should expect general agreement on the existence of the features listed. An account of the implications of those features and an account of the principles which appear to underlie them, however, will take place at a higher level of inference where one may expect another reader to take perhaps a different view of things. The task of the researcher is therefore to set out clearly the grounds on which claims about the implicit nature of the materials are based, such that one may reasonably expect others to agree.

## **2.3 A model for the description of language teaching materials: product and process**

As I have argued, the weakness in the models described is not that they fail to set out important aspects of materials but that they do not offer guidance in the various levels of deduction and inference which are required in the production of a description. What would seem to be needed, therefore, is a model which takes the researcher through various stages in a description, identifying clearly the levels of inference involved. Equipped with such a model, it should then be possible to map the areas of the *product* of a description (such as those cited in the models discussed) on to the appropriate level of the *process* of description, in which one moves to progressively higher levels of inference. We need therefore to attend to two tasks: firstly, the construction of a model setting out the areas for description and, secondly, the construction of a model to guide the process of description itself. It is to these two tasks which I now turn.

### **2.3.1 *A model for the product of a description***

Potentially, there will be an unlimited number of aspects of teaching materials which may be included in a descriptive account. It would be possible, for example, to describe materials in terms of topics, text types, gender usage, graphic design, layout, typeface, binding and so on. Selection, I have already noted, is therefore inevitably required, making any account partial. It thus needs to be acknowledged that the areas set out in the models discussed above represent selections which are held to be significant from a particular view of materials, that is, materials as primarily an aid to teaching and learning a foreign language. Since this is the view-point which forms the basis of this thesis, I propose, in identifying the main areas for the description of teaching materials, to draw upon the models already discussed for guidance in determining which aspects of materials are to be included. My intention is thus not to argue for a greater degree of objectivity but rather for a more comprehensive product of a

description. I have, however, already noted that the inclusion of theories of language and language learning represents assumptions about origination and for this reason I propose only two main areas of description, as summarised in Figure 2.5 below.

### 1 Design

- 1 Aims
- 2 Principles of selection
- 3 Principles of sequencing
- 4 Subject matter and focus of subject matter
- 5 Types of learning/teaching activities:
  - what they require the learner to do
  - manner in which they draw on the learner's process competence (knowledge, affects, abilities, skills)
- 6 Participation: who does what with whom
- 7 Learner roles
- 8 Teacher roles
- 9 Role of materials as a whole

### 2 Realisation

- 1 Place of the learner's materials in any wider set of materials
- 2 Published form of the learner's materials
- 3 Subdivision of the learner's materials into sections
- 4 Subdivision of sections into sub-sections
- 5 Continuity
- 6 Route
- 7 Access

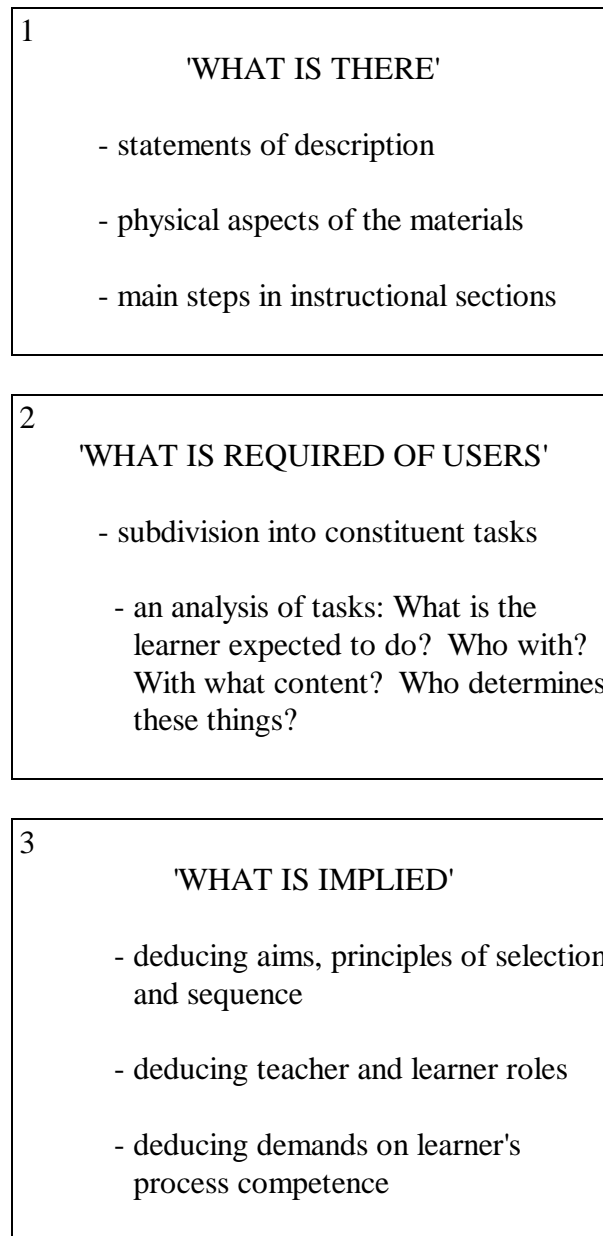
*Figure 2.5: A model for the description and analysis of language teaching materials*

Following Richards and Rodgers, we need to consider the *design* of the materials. *Design* concerns the apparent aims of the materials (here defined as long term 'end of course' goals), the syllabus around which the materials may be structured as reflected in the criteria for selection and sequencing, the subject matter of texts and tasks, the types of teaching/learning activities, classroom participation, learner and teacher roles, and the role which the materials, together with any other related components (e.g. tapes, filmstrips), are to play in bringing about learning. The second area which I propose, *Realisation*, parallels Richards and Rodgers' *procedure*, but is concerned with how the materials are realised as a complete set or book. Here we will be concerned with the relationship that may exist between the student's materials and any

other components (e.g., a teacher's book, tapes, filmstrips etc) and the actual form of the material (e.g. durable v. consumable, worksheets v. bound book). Following Breen and Candlin, however, we will also need to consider the way in which the learner's material is divided and subdivided into sections and sub-sections, the manner in which continuity throughout the materials is maintained and the degree to which any route through the materials is prescribed. This final aspect suggests one further element: how access into the materials is facilitated, for example, through contents lists, word lists and indexes and the categories that are used to do this.

### ***2.3.2 A model for the process of description***

Following my discussion in section 2.2 above in which I suggested that the inferences required in describing materials need to be made explicit, the model which I envisage for the process of constructing a description involves three basic levels. These are: 1. a consideration of 'what is there' explicitly in the materials; 2. deductions concerning 'what is required of users' of the materials; 3. deductions concerning the principles that appear to underlie the nature of the materials established at levels 1 and 2. These levels are summarised in Figure 2.6.



*Figure 2.6: A model for the process of the description of teaching materials*

### 2.3.2.1 Level 1: What is there

At the top of the model lies a description of the 'explicit nature' of the materials. We may begin first with the descriptive statements about the materials made within the materials themselves. These statements might, for example, cover the publication date, the intended audience for the materials, the type of materials (e.g. 'general' or 'specific purpose', 'supplementary' or 'main course'), the amount of classroom time provided for, and the general manner in which the materials are to be used (e.g. for self-study or for class use, in any order or according to a specified route). Beyond this, we may then consider the physical aspects of the materials such as their published form (for example, durable books or consumable worksheets), the number of pages, use of colour, the various components in a complete set (for example, a student's book, a teacher's book and cassettes), the various sections within the materials (for example, tapescripts, an answer key and tests) and the various means of access into the materials provided (for example, an index of vocabulary items). With regard to the last two aspects, we might also wish to set out how the various sections and means of access into the materials are distributed between teacher and learner, since this may provide data upon which to draw conclusions about teacher-learner roles. A further physical aspect might involve stepping inside the materials to discover the basis of subdivision. This might set out the number of instructional units provided, the length these units typically have and any form of patterning which is evident both across units and within units. This pattern is often identifiable through sub-section headings (e.g. 'Comprehension Questions') or rubrics to learners (e.g. 'Listen and repeat after the tape') which indicate the type of activity involved<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> I am using the term 'activity' here to refer to the general type of work involved (for example, 'text + questions' or 'game'). This, as I will show later, is distinct from my use of the term 'task' which operates at a much more detailed level of analysis, such that one *activity* may in fact involve numerous *tasks*.



**A. BOOK AS A WHOLE**

Year of publication : e.g. 1985

**1 Type:** e.g. 'General', 'main course', class use for 2nd year of English.

**2 Intended audience**

age-range: e.g. 12-16

school: e.g. secondary schools

location: e.g. world-wide

**3 Extent**

**a. Components**

e.g. learner's material: durable 'student's book' and consumable 'workbook'

teacher's book

tests

cassettes

**b. Total estimated time** e.g. 1 school year

**4 Design and Layout**

e.g. 4 colour, A4 size, 'student's book', 128pp

2 colour, A4 size, 'Teacher's book', 256pp

**5 Distribution**

**a. Material**

e.g. cassettes(s)

tests

answer key

guidance on use of material

transcript of cassette

	teacher	learners
e.g. cassettes(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
tests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
answer key	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
guidance on use of material	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
transcript of cassette	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**b. Access**

e.g. contents list:

section name

section objective

index of language forms

**6 Route through material**

e.g. specified

user determined

**7 Subdivision**

e.g. 24 units each with 7 sections over 4 pages; 3 fifty minute lessons. Units have similar pattern: text - questions - grammar notes - exercises - text - writing. Units alternate between an episode of a continuing story and a non-fictional topic.

**B. OVERVIEW OF EXTRACT**

**1 Length:** e.g. 3 sections out of 24, 13% of the student's book

**2 Sequence of activity**

e.g. Section 1:

1 text and questions (listening)

2 text and questions (reading)

3 grammar notes

4 text and questions (reading)

5 oral practice

6 guided writing

Figure 2.7: A schedule for recording the explicit nature of the material (level 1)

Figure 2.7 represents a schedule which may be used at this first level of description, with examples of possible responses. Since the length of most course books would make it impractical to analyse their entire contents in any further depth, Part B in the schedule records the proportion of the material examined and the main sequence of activity within that extract.

### 2.3.3.2 *Level 2: What is required of users: the analysis of tasks*

Here we move to a higher level of inference as we draw deductions about the processes through which users of the materials are likely to have to go and the demands which will be made upon them. In order to formulate such deductions, it will be necessary to subdivide the materials into their constituent 'tasks' and then to analyse the nature of those tasks. Dividing the materials into constituent tasks, however, will rely largely upon introspection on the part of the researcher and it is principally for this reason that a description of tasks lies at the second level within the model. It is thus important to define as precisely as possible what may constitute 'a task' and the theoretical basis upon which an analysis may proceed.

#### 2.3.3.2.1 A definition of 'task'

One commonly encountered use of the term views 'task' as referring to a specific type of classroom work in which learners, normally in groups, are engaged in a problem-solving activity, the emphasis being upon group interaction and the use of language to communicate rather than upon the language itself. Nunan (1985:10), for example, defines 'task' as:

...a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focussed on meaning rather than form.

Numerous materials now exist which would claim in this sense to be task-based (see, for example, Geddes and Sturtridge 1979, 1982; ; Grellet et al, 1982; Littlejohn, 1988b; and materials from the Bangalore Project (Prabhu, 1987)). For a general framework for describing materials, however, this view of 'task' will be too narrow since it will be inapplicable to materials or sections of materials which are not characterised by meaning-focussed classroom work.

An alternative, broader definition is offered by Breen (1987:23). Breen sees 'task' as referring to:

...any structured language learning endeavour which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task.

The advantage of this definition is that it will apply to:

...a range of workplans which have the overall purpose of facilitating language learning - from the simple and brief exercise type to more complex and lengthy activities such as group problem solving or simulations and decision-making.

As Breen (prompted by Allwright, 1983) explains, however, 'outcomes' belong not to an analysis of 'tasks-as-workplans' produced by a materials writer but to 'tasks-in-process' in the context of a classroom lesson since outcomes will hinge, amongst other things, upon learner reinterpretations. Breen (ibid: 25) proposes, therefore, four questions which may be considered in order to anticipate learner reinterpretations. They are:

- Why is the task being undertaken?
- How is the task to be done?
- Where is the task being done?
- What is the content of the task?

These questions suggest the basis of a definition of task which may be used as a guide in the subdivision of a set of materials. Following the first of Breen's questions, 'task', we may say, refers to *any proposal, contained within the*

*materials, for action to be undertaken on part of the learners which has the direct aim of bringing about the learning of the foreign language.* Whilst the recognition of aims related to language learning is important in identifying tasks, however, they belong more correctly to a description of the intentions of (in this case) the materials writer in designing the task, than with the task itself. For this reason, in defining tasks further, we may draw upon Breen's remaining questions to suggest three key components in the nature of a task: 1) a *process* through which the learners are expected to go; 2) a mode of *classroom participation* concerning with whom (if anyone) the learners are to work; and 3) *content* upon which learners are to engage. Viewed in this way, an individual task may be seen as a particular configuration of these three elements.

This approach will have two main implications. Firstly, any classroom activity which does not include all three elements, and have the aim of enabling language learning, will not qualify as 'a task' (for example, copying a chart as preparation for a listening comprehension task, the former *in itself* not relating directly to language learning). Secondly, a change in any one of the three key elements will imply a new task even though the activity may remain identical in all other respects (for example, learners reading a text aloud with the whole class and then reading the same text aloud to each other in pairs, the mode of classroom participation having changed). As we shall see in Chapter 3, it is this particular definition and the identification of the key elements of process, participation and content, which I have adopted in the subdivision of the materials into their constituent tasks.

#### 2.3.3.2.2 A theoretical basis for the analysis of tasks.

Once the materials are subdivided into their constituent tasks, it will then be necessary to analyse the nature of each one. Clearly, tasks may be analysed against numerous possible features and one will be obliged to restrict oneself to

a limited number of features in order to make the analysis a feasible undertaking. Of immediate interest will be the three elements of process, classroom participation, and content described above but, as has been suggested earlier in the discussion of descriptive models, determination of the precise nature of a task will embody consideration of various 'sub-features' and it will therefore be necessary to devise a more detailed system of analysis. For guidance in doing this, I propose to draw upon aspects of each of the three elements which have been identified as significant in the relevant literature. Figure 2.8 below summarises the main sub-features under each heading in the form of a proposed schedule for the detailed analysis of tasks, phrased as questions which may be addressed to the materials. The rationale for each of these is as follows.

I What is the learner expected to do?

A Turn-take

B Focus

C Operation

II Who with?

III With what content?

A Form

- input to learners

- output by learners

B Source

C Nature

IV Who decides?

*Figure 2.8: A proposed schedule for the analysis of learning tasks*

Question I: What is the learner expected to do?

The first question in the schedule relates to the *process* through which the learner is expected to go. One useful concept with which to examine what is proposed in the materials is Bernstein's (1971) notion of a 'frame' which refers to the actual relationship between teachers and pupils and the range of choices

which they have over what is done between them. A strong frame, he suggests, will reduce the power of the pupils over what, when and how they receive their knowledge. Whilst Bernstein himself does not consider either classroom interaction or teaching materials, Stubbs' (1976: 97-9) relates the concept of a frame to Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) identification of a 'teacher initiates/pupil responds/teacher feedback' (IRF) discourse structure common to many teaching situations. Stubbs argues that, in the IRF structure,

...the pupil's role is passive: he must respond. It is the teacher who initiates and then evaluates, before asking another closed question. ...the assumption is that it is the teacher who has control over who talks when; and that education consists of listening to an adult talking and answering his or her questions.

We may or may not agree with Stubbs' conclusions about the significance of an IRF structure in classroom work but it would seem important nonetheless to consider the general discourse role which materials propose for the learner. The first category of analysis I propose in this section is therefore *turn-take*.

Following a considerable amount of debate within theories of second language acquisition, we may also wish to consider where the learner is expected to *focus*: upon the form of the language presented, upon its message and meaning, or upon the relationship between form and meaning. Writers such as Krashen (1982), for example, have argued strongly that a focus on form is largely counter-productive in second language teaching since acquisition can only take place through the comprehension of messages.

The main body of analysis under this first question, however, will relate to *operation* - precisely what it is that the learner is required to do. Much significant work in the area of learner operations has been done in the study of learner strategies, although, to my knowledge, the emphasis throughout the

literature is not so much on what particular tasks require learners to do but on what learners, particularly 'good' learners, can additionally do to improve the depth, breadth and rate of their learning. Bialystok (1978:71), for example, defines learning strategies as "optional means for exploiting available information to improve competence in a second language" and several studies argue for or report on attempts to identify 'successful' learner strategies and to then teach these strategies to less successful learners (e.g. O'Malley et al, 1985; Rubin, 1975; Naiman et al, 1978; Wenden and Rubin, 1987)

The literature on learner strategies, however, has its origins in information processing theory (O'Malley et al, 1985:560), in particular, in attempts to specify 'basic abilities' and it is therefore to this field that we may turn for support in the conceptualization of learner operations. Central to information processing theory is the notion of humans as information processors in much the same way as a computer (Newell and Simon, 1972; Gagné, 1975; Simon, 1976; Resnick, 1976). It is suggested that cognition involves memory use of varying lengths - short term (a matter of milliseconds), intermediate term (a matter of seconds or perhaps minutes) and long term, which is thought to be permanent (limited only by the efficiency of recall) - and the use of operations which are selected by an 'executive control'. It is not actually claimed that the three types of memory and the executive control exist as physical entities in the brain but the conceptualization of cognition in this way has led to some success in the analysis of human problem-solving - verified to some extent by the design of computer programs designed to solve complex tasks (see, for example, Newell and Simon's program for playing chess).

The analysis of operations involved in performing a task requires, in the first instance, introspection on the part of the researcher to establish the basic abilities involved (Carroll, 1976:36-37). In the analysis of teaching materials,

this will involve the researcher taking the role of the learner and attempting to isolate those operations which are required by each task. For the purposes of a description of teaching materials, these need only be specified in terms which summarise the processes involved (for example, 'compare', 'select', 'hypothesize', 'repeat'). An attempt to program a computer to accomplish one of the tasks would, of course, require a considerably more detailed analysis.

As the literature on learner strategies shows, one important consideration in analysing tasks in this way is that there may be several distinct and different ways of approaching a task. This may imply that any analysis recorded will simply reflect those strategies personal to the researcher. As I have already noted, Breen (1987), for example, stresses the distinction between 'tasks-as-workplans' and 'tasks-in-process', the nature of the latter depending on reinterpretation on the part of users. This need not, however, present a major problem, provided that categories are chosen which preserve a variety of learner action within them, the term 'operation' being interpreted in a broader sense than is the case in information-processing models. One immediate effect of this will be that the coding of integrative tasks (which involve the integration of several operations) will require categories of a different scale than the coding of more discrete tasks ('negotiate', for example, as a broad coding to capture group decision-making, compared with 'repeat identically' as a coding for choral repetition). The fact of user, or in this case, researcher, reinterpretation does, however, suggest two things: firstly, that analyses of individual tasks must be based on a close reading of given rubrics and instructions in accompanying teacher notes, and, secondly, that the analyses need to be cross-checked with others readers to establish the reliability of the coding given to each task.

Question II: Who with?



The second question within the proposed schedule concerns participation. Motivation for this question comes largely from the considerable amount of debate within the language teaching profession about the value of group and pair work in preference to 'lockstep' teaching where the teacher sets the same instructional pace and content for everyone. Brumfit (1984:78), for example, argues that

...the small group stimulates the natural conversational setting more closely than any other mode of classroom organisation (if we include pair work with group work)...in the most integrated, non-threatening and flexible mode of class organisation available to the teacher"

Other arguments put forward in favour of group work (summarised in Long, 1985) are that it increases language practice opportunities, that it improves the quality of student talk, that it helps to individualize instruction, that it promotes a positive affective climate, and that it motivates learners. Long further argues that there is a psycho-linguistic motivation for group work in that it may provide opportunities for negotiation of meaning and, thereby, the provision of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982).

Further interest in the contribution of group work has come from attempts to share the responsibility for course management and lessen the 'risks of teacher dominance' (Allwright, 1978, 1981). Breen and Candlin (1980a) have argued that if the goal of a language course is to develop communicative skills then the method itself should be communicative - that is, it should involve the exchange and negotiation of ideas and feelings about the learning process with the teacher as co-participant, not dominant, in the group. Littlejohn (1983) further argues that the devolution of decision-making within a learning group can lead to 'other desirable outcomes', beyond the mastery of the foreign language, such as critical

thinking, responsibility for one's own growth and learning and interpersonal skills.

Question III: With what content?

The third question in the schedule concerns the nature of the subject matter with which the learners are to work. We may first be concerned with the *form* of the content which is provided as *input to the learners* and the form of the content which is expected as *output by the learners*. Here, the main criteria will be whether the content occurs as 'single words or sentences', as 'extended discourse' or, indeed, in a graphic form. The distinction between 'single sentences' and 'extended discourse' is an important one since it is currently argued that one of the main goals in language teaching should be the development of discourse processing skills, such that learners are able to work with language above the level of the sentence (see, for example, Widdowson, 1978, 1979; Morrow, 1981; Candlin, 1981; Cook, G. 1989). The distinction is, however, not always an easy one to make and, in undertaking an analysis of teaching materials it will be necessary to adopt a working definition which enables coding of samples of content. One such definition, which I have chosen to adopt, is to view as discourse any text which runs to more than 50 words and which includes supra-sentential features (e.g. anaphora).

Two further aspects of content would also seem important to record. Firstly, following the discussion concerning turn-taking and participation above, it will also be significant to determine where the content has come from - that is, its *source*, whether, for example, it comes from the learners themselves, the teacher or the teaching materials. Secondly, we may also be concerned with the *nature* of the content that is, whether, for example, it is fictional, 'general knowledge', personal information about the learners and so on. The nature of the content is of some consequence since it is widely argued that texts within language

teaching materials should themselves be 'worth reading' and be of an 'educational' nature (see, for example, Cook, V. 1983; Hutchinson and Waters, 1984: 112-113; Littlejohn and Windeatt, 1989: 157-159).

A distinction which is sometimes put forward in relation to content is one between *learning content* (i.e. the transferable knowledge which learners are expected to retain) and *carrier content* (i.e. the content which is used to 'carry' the learning content - for example, a text concerning a police investigation used to present irregular verb forms). The use of extensive amounts of carrier content is common in ELT materials, as the existence of story lines, topic-based units, situational dialogues, and so on, shows. In terms of an analysis of tasks, however, the distinction between carrier content and learning content is a problematic one. In common with *aims* (as discussed earlier), it belongs more appropriately to a consideration of the intentions of (in this case) the materials writer, than with the task itself. It is conceivable, for example, that a text may be viewed by one writer as a carrier, but as part of the learning content by another writer. For this reason, the analysis which I propose with regard to this aspect of content highlights only its *nature* rather than its purpose.

#### Question IV: Who decides?

The final question within the proposed schedule embraces questions I-III but focuses on the issue of decision-making. The concern here is in identifying who (or what) has decided what the learners will work upon and how they will work. Motivation for this final question, as an aspect which draws together the three preceding questions, comes from the concern with the issue of responsibility in learning and teaching within the literature of educational linguistics. As I noted earlier in respect of group work, a number of writers have argued that a devolution of the process of decision-making to include learners themselves is a vital ingredient in language learning and teaching (see, inter alia, Allwright,

1978, 1981; Nunan, 1988; Dickinson, 1987; Littlejohn, 1983, 1985). Increased learner involvement, it is argued, raises the possibility of self-direction in language learning and thus a shift from the teacher's "I think you need this" towards the learner's "I know I need this", thereby reducing the risks which have been associated with teacher dominance.

As an aspect of wide concern in the literature of educational linguistics, the location of decision-making can be seen as a significant element for inclusion in a description of teaching materials. In terms of the proposed schedule, we may anticipate three possible parties who may have a decision-making role: the learners, the teacher and the materials. Given that the initial three questions in the schedule represent what I have argued as the defining features of a task (methodology, participation and content), we need to establish what would constitute decision-making effectively lying with one party or another. For the purposes of the description set out in the next chapter, therefore, I propose to view as the primary decision-maker that party which appears to be responsible for deciding over at least two of the three aspects of the task.

### *2.3.2.3 Level 3: What is implied: principles underlying the materials*

Working from a description of the explicit nature of the materials (level 1) and an analysis of the requirements of the constituent tasks upon users of the materials (level 2), it should now be possible to begin to formulate deductions about the apparent underlying principles. At this third level, therefore, we should be able to make statements about what appear to be the overall *aims* of the materials and the basis on which *selection* and *sequencing* of task types and task content operate. This is likely to be accomplished through a review of any syllabus specification given in the materials, the main steps within instructional sections of the materials, the characteristic nature of learning tasks and the

sequence in which those tasks are found. Conclusions concerning aims and the selection and sequencing of tasks and content will largely depend upon identifying patterns within the organisation of the materials themselves. Support for this, however, may be provided by the introductory comments by the authors, although we should note once again the distinction between authors' intentions and the nature of the materials themselves (as interpreted by the researcher).

Also at this third level of description, we should be in a position to make statements about the *roles proposed for teachers and learners*. We may do this by initially examining the distribution of sections of the material between teachers and learners (for example, any answer keys, introductory rationale, etc) but we are likely to find greater data in relation to teacher and learner roles vis à vis each other in the analysis of tasks, particularly under *turn-take* and the various categories comprising *source*. These categories may reveal the manner in which teachers and learners are to participate in the classroom and the various responsibilities they each have with respect to the tasks proposed in the materials. Role may, however, be interpreted in a wider sense as not simply referring to the social roles between teacher and learner but to the *learner's involvement in the learning process* itself (Wright 1986). Here, therefore, we will be concerned with the demands placed upon learners, particularly in relation to what Breen and Candlin (1982; see also section 2 above) term 'process competences' of knowledge, affects, skills and abilities. Data concerning the nature of these demands may be found principally through the analysis of tasks, where the detailed identification of the operations required of learners will become available.

Finally, at this level, we will be able to review the findings which emerge through levels 1, 2 and 3 in order to make statements, by way of a summary,

about what appears to be the *role of the materials as a whole* in facilitating language learning and teaching.

### **2.3.3 A synthesized model of the process and product of description**

In my discussion of a model for the *process* of description (section 2.3.2), I have already suggested how aspects identified in the model for the *product* of description (section 2.3.1) may relate to each of the three levels proposed. At this point, however, I would now like to set out more clearly the relationship between process and product so as to construct a synthesized model which will support the analysis and description of the five selected coursebooks. This will inevitably involve some repetition which I hope the reader will bear with.

Central to the workings of a synthesized model will be the data gained through the application of the two schedules I have proposed: the schedule for recording the explicit nature of the materials (Fig. 2.7, p.34) and the schedule for the analysis of tasks (Fig. 2.8, p.38). The manner in which I see the data from these two schedules being utilised is set out in Fig. 2.9. This shows how progressively higher levels of inference can be supported in forming a description of the materials in respect of their *realisation* (published form) and *design* (underlying principles).

PROCESS	PRODUCT	
<u>Levels of inference</u>	<u>Related aspects of the material</u>	<u>Source of data (schedules)</u>
	<i>Realisation</i>	
Level 1: 'What is there'	Place of learner's materials in set Published form of learner's materials Subdivision of learner's materials Subdivision of sections into sub-sections Continuity Route Access	<i>EN/A3 Extent, A5 Distribution</i> <i>EN/A3 Extent, A4 Design and layout</i> <i>EN/A7 Subdivision, B2 Sequ. of Act.</i> <i>EN/A7 Subdivision, B2 Sequ. of Act</i> <i>EN/A7 Subdivision, B2 Sequ. of Act</i> <i>EN/A6 Route</i> <i>EN/A5b Access</i>
	<i>Design</i>	
Level 2: 'What is required'	Subject matter and focus Types of teaching/learning activities	<i>AoT/III With what content?</i> <i>AoT/I What is the Lr expected to do</i>

of users'	Participation: who does what with whom	<i>AoT/II Who with?</i>
Level 3: 'What is implied'	Aims Principles of selection Principles of sequencing Teacher roles Learner roles (classroom) " " (in learning) Role of materials as a whole	<i>syllabus, Sequ. of Act. (EN/B2), nature of tasks (AoT/I-IV), sequence of tasks distribution (EN/A5), turn-take (AoT/IA), source (AoT/IIIB) demands on process competence (AoT/I-IV) deductions from levels 1 - 3</i>

EN = schedule for recording the explicit nature of the materials; AoT = schedule for the analysis of tasks; A3,A4, I, II, III etc = item/question on the relevant schedule

*Figure 2.9: a synthesized model of the process and product of description*

Level 1 of the process model, What is there, will principally derive from completion of the schedule for recording the explicit nature of the materials (Figure 2.7). The data gathered through the use of this schedule will enable us to formulate statements about the areas listed under *realisation* in Figure 2.5 above, *realisation* being primarily concerned with the physical nature or published form of the materials. These areas (discussed in sections 2.2 and 2.3.1) include the *place of the learner's materials in any wider set* (deduced from data given under *A3 Extent* and *A5 Distribution* in the schedule), the *published form of the materials* (from *A3 Extent* and *A4 Design and layout*), *subdivision into sections and sub-sections* (from *A7 Subdivision* and *B2 Sequence of Activity*), *continuity* (from *A7 Subdivision* and *B2 Main steps*), *route* (from *A6 Route*) and *access* (from *A5b Access*).

The next level of the model, What is required of the learner, involves the use of the schedule for the analysis of tasks (Figure 2.8) and will allow us to complete some of the *design* aspects of a description. At this level, it will be possible to describe the *subject matter* of the materials (from *III With what content?*), *Types of teaching/learning activities* (from *I What is the learner expected to do?*), and *Participation* (from *II Who with?*).

The final level of the model, What is implied, concerns the principles underlying the materials and, as discussed in the previous section, will therefore involve drawing on deductions made at levels 1 and 2 to complete the *design* aspects of a description. Statements about the long term aims of the materials and the basis of selection and sequence within the materials may be formulated with reference to any given syllabus specification, the main sequence of activity in the instructional sections (B2 in the schedule of the explicit nature), the nature of the tasks themselves (I-IV in the analysis of tasks) and the sequence of those tasks. Deductions about the nature of *teacher and learner roles* will be enabled by considering the *distribution* of components of the materials (A5 in the schedule of the explicit nature), *turn-take* and *source* (IA and IIIB, respectively, in the analysis of tasks). The role of the learner in the learning process itself may be described by considering the manner in which the materials place demands on the learner's process competence (knowledge, affects, skills and abilities) as suggested by the analysis of tasks. Finally, given the deductions set out in levels 1 and 2 and the afore-mentioned deductions within level 3, it should be possible to make statements about the *role of the materials as a whole*, summarising what appears to be the overall purposes of the materials and the manner in which they relate to teachers and learners.

## 2.4 Conclusion

From the afore-going discussion, we can see that the resulting synthesized model of the product and process of description, together with the schedules for identifying the explicit nature of the material (Figure 2.7) and the analysis of tasks (Figure 2.8), offers the possibility of constructing a broadly based description of a set of teaching materials. Its strength lies in the fact that it combines those main areas suggested by previous researchers whilst at the same time making explicit the various levels of inference through which the



researcher will have to pass. It should be possible, therefore, to determine to a greater extent when it is the materials which are 'speaking' and when it is the researcher's subjective assessments which are being offered.

In the following chapter, Chapter 3, I will be concerned with applying the proposed schedules for analysis to the five sets of materials and with utilising the synthesized model of product and process to enable a description of what emerge as their key features. With a list of such features we should then be in a position to begin our investigation into the factors which bear upon materials design (Chapters 4 to 7).