

Chapter 4

ELT materials as the application of applied linguistic thought

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Applied linguistic thought: the early 1970s to mid 1980s
- 4.3 Explanation: applied linguistic thought and the nature of the materials
- 4.4 Summary and conclusion

4.1 Introduction

In an attempt to seek an explanation for the nature of the materials as described in the previous chapter, I will first turn to a consideration of how far they may reflect discussions within the field of Applied Linguistics. As the overview of descriptive and evaluative models in Chapter 2 shows, it is this perspective which is conventionally applied to materials. I noted, for example, the models advocated by Mackey (1965) and Corder (1973), both of whom are concerned with the theoretical basis underlying a set of materials. Implicit in such a perspective is the notion that 'theory' is translated into practice, that is, that materials development proceeds 'top down' from the articulation of academic ideas to the realisation of those ideas in teaching materials¹.

For the researcher, the identification of a 'theory into practice' relationship within a particular set of materials poses a difficulty, given the obvious 'time lag' that will arise between the expression of 'theory' and publication of the materials. Precisely what length of time this might involve is, of course, impossible to determine with any degree of certainty, but, if one accepts that applied linguistic discussion may indeed influence the nature of language teaching materials, it would seem reasonable to allow a period of ten or so

¹I should stress here that the hypothesis with which I am concerned is the extent to which Applied Linguistic discussion influences materials design, that is, that the expression of theory has an impact on practice. This is not to deny that practice may inform theory, which would be a separate hypothesis for exploration, not addressed here.

years within which this may happen. Given that both the publication of academic papers and texts and the publication of teaching materials regularly take between two and five years (or more), this would imply a need to consider ideas published over a ten year or so period commencing twelve to fifteen years prior to the publication of a set of materials. In terms of the materials under consideration here, this would involve reviewing developments in Applied Linguistics between the early 1970s and the mid 1980s.²

Whilst it would clearly be a mistake to suggest that the evolution of applied linguistic ideas in relation to language teaching took place at this (or any other) time without conflict and disagreement among the major contributors, it should nevertheless be possible to outline the general issues discussed and, from this, set out the main implications for pedagogy and materials design. This would then provide a basis for investigating the extent to which the materials analysed in this thesis reflect the application of applied linguistic thought. The approach I propose to take in this chapter, therefore, is to first outline some of the key issues which were apparent in the literature of the time (section 4.2), drawing on the works of some of the leading commentators. The subsequent section (4.3) will then relate this to the materials as described in Chapter 2 and discuss the extent to which the nature of the materials can be explained by reference to applied linguistic thought. The final section in the chapter (4.4) will summarise the findings and draw conclusions.

²As a confirmatory example of this kind of time scale, one can cite the Council of Europe debates about functional syllabus design in the early 1970s. By the mid 1980s, such approaches had become established in teaching materials, such that it was rare to find coursebooks which did not explicitly include a functional element.

4.2 Applied Linguistic thought: the early 1970s to the mid 1980s.

By all accounts, the period from the early 1970s to the mid 1980s was marked by an unprecedented expansion in the discussion of language teaching practices (Breen, 1987:81; Shaw, 1982:91). A characteristic feature of much of this discussion was an attempt to re-evaluate the basis of contemporary approaches to language teaching and to propose new ways of approaching both syllabus design and classroom methodology. In the space available to me here, however, I am only able to indicate the main issues which were under discussion and to present a very brief review of the ideas which were expressed. For the purposes of organising my account, I shall focus on six main areas which represent some of the key themes which I have been able to identify in the works of commentators at the time. These are: 1) Communicative v. linguistic competence; 2) Communicative syllabus design and needs analysis; 3) Communicative classroom methodology; 4) Authenticity; 5) Task and acquisition based approaches; and 6) The role of teaching materials.

1 Communicative competence

At the heart of much of the discussion during this period, lay a redefinition of what constituted language knowledge and the ability to use language. In a seminal paper of 1971, Hymes extended Chomsky's (1965) notion of language knowledge to include not only linguistic (formal) knowledge but also knowledge of the 'rules of use', that is, how a language is used to accomplish particular goals and to participate in everyday social events and situations. For Chomsky (1965:3), the main concern of linguistic theory had been to identify the abilities which 'an ideal speaker-listener' possesses. Hymes, however, saw this as essentially an asocial, sterile conception of language abilities, far removed from the actual knowledge which is required in order to engage in

social interaction through language. To describe the knowledge involved in language use, Hymes introduced the now influential concept of "communicative competence", which consists of knowing:

1. whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible;
2. whether (and to what degree) something is feasible in virtue of the means available;
3. whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated;
4. whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually performed, and what its doing entails.

(Hymes, 1972:281)

Around the same time as Hymes' work, philosophers such as Searle (1969) were developing the notion of 'speech acts'. Building on Austin's work (1962), speech act theory was concerned with identifying the actual meanings (illocutionary force) which individuals attribute to what they and others say. These meanings may be distinct from the semantic or propositional content of the words involved, a frequently cited example of this being the interrogative 'Can you pass the salt?' functioning as a request.

Whilst acknowledging the importance of Hymes' view of language knowledge and Searle's work on speech act theory, later scholars developed the concept of communicative competence still further. Widdowson (1978), Levinson (1983) and Leech (1983), for example, argued for a view of language knowledge which incorporated the ability to deal with discourse, rather than isolated speech acts. Indeed, by 1980 in fact, Canale and Swain, in a much cited paper, were able to distinguish what they saw as four dimensions of communicative competence which thus far had been identified: *grammatical competence*, referring to formal knowledge of the language; *sociolinguistic competence*, referring to an understanding of social context and factors such as they extent of shared knowledge, social roles and so on; *discourse competence*, referring

to an ability to interpret and express messages in the context of an extended piece of speech or writing; and *strategic competence*, referring to the strategies that interlocutors use to direct, initiate, maintain, terminate or repair communication. In the years since Chomsky's initial paper, much ground, it seemed had been covered.

2 Communicative syllabus design and needs analysis

In the discussion of language teaching practices, the direct impact of the shift towards an emphasis on communicative language competence was to introduce a concern with "real world" language use, rather than merely the formal aspects of language. Clearly, influenced by Hymes' work and the concept of speech acts, Wilkins (1972) drew up a landmark document on syllabus design for the Council of Europe (later developed into a book *Notional Syllabuses*, Wilkins, 1976) in which he set out two categories of meaning: semantic-grammatical notions (such as time, sequence, and frequency) and communicative functions (such as requests, denials, and complaints). His analysis was subsequently expanded by van Ek in *The Threshold Level* (van Ek, 1975), one of the earliest examples of an inventory of functional and notional categories for syllabus construction.

As a forerunner of many similar syllabus types that were to come, *The Threshold Level* was based on an analysis of the needs of adult learners of foreign languages and attempted to detail the situations in which they might need to use a foreign language, their likely social roles, the topics they might need to talk about and the notions and functions they might need to express. This approach to syllabus design through the specification of language needs in relation to a target language situation was also evident in numerous other publications of the time, most notably Richterich and Chancerel (1978/1980),

and Munby (1978) who devised an elaborate "instrument" for needs analysis and subsequent syllabus specification.

One of the most immediate problems which concerned those engaged in functional syllabus design was the manner in which a functional specification could relate to existing approaches based on formal specifications. To this end, Brumfit (1979) proposed a 'spiral syllabus' in which the grammatical and other formal features of language to be covered in a course would form a linear 'core' of increasing surface complexity around which a spiral functional syllabus would recycle speech acts at various levels. Thus, for example, the function *making suggestions* might appear as *Why don't you....?* at an early stage in a course but reappear later as *Have you ever thought of....?*

Whilst the bases for a detailed specification of language content dominated much of the discussion, a conflicting view was advocated by number of other commentators, most notably Breen and Candlin (1980a). Rejecting an adherence to content syllabuses detailed prior to the commencement of a course, Breen and Candlin maintained a central role for the classroom in its own right as the site for negotiation and communication about learning, arguing that if the goal of the language classroom was to develop communicative skills, then the classroom methodology should itself be communicative. This, in their view, meant that it should involve the exchange and negotiation of ideas and feelings about the learning process, the syllabus in this case emerging as the course unfolds. Part of the rationale for this was the belief that the process of learning places similar demands upon learners as does the process of communication:

Rather than encourage learners to learn language in order to communicate, we may encourage learners to communicate in order to develop their own learning ... We would be justified

in doing so if we consider that the same abilities which underlie the communicative process also underlie the learning process.

(Breen, Candlin and Waters, 1979: 4)

The classroom, in this case, would no longer be "a pale representation of some outside communicative reality" (Breen and Candlin, 1980a:98) where learners are engaged in rehearsing for a performance at some later time and place, but would instead offer an opportunity for "realistically motivated communication" as learners shared their views about the learning process.

3 Communicative classroom methodology

The concern with 'real world' language use, influenced by concepts of communicative competence and of syllabus design which reflected target language needs, also found expression in the discussion of classroom methodology. For Canale and Swain, methodology, too, had to relate directly to outside communication activities, a point which they expressed with some urgency:

With respect to teaching methodology, it is crucial that classroom activities reflect, in the most optimally direct manner, those communication activities that the learner is most likely to engage in.... Furthermore, communication activities must be characterised (at increasing levels of difficulty) by aspects of genuine communication such as its basis in social interaction, the relative creativity and unpredictability of utterances, its purposefulness and goal orientation, and its authenticity.

(Canale and Swain, 1980:33)

Canale and Swain's call for "genuine communication" activities was echoed by Morrow (1981) in another important paper which endeavoured to set out principles to guide the development of a communicative methodology. It is worth quoting from Morrow's paper at length since it described in some detail

many of the 'received' views then current. In Morrow's opinion, communicative language teaching activities should be characterised by:

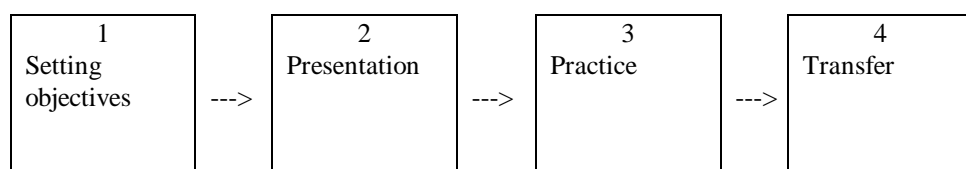
- 1) *A goal orientation*: "Every lesson should end with the learner being able to see clearly that he (sic) can do something which he could not do at the beginning - and that that 'something' is communicatively useful". (p61)
- 2) *Extended discourse in real time*: "What is needed is the ability to deal with strings of sentences and ideas and, in the oral modes (speaking and listening), these strings must be processed in what is called 'real' time". (p61)
- 3) *Replication of the processes of communication*, comprising:
 - *an information gap*: "In real life, communication takes place between two or more people, one of whom knows something that is unknown to the others".(p62)
 - *choice*: "Another crucial aspect of communication is that participants have choice, both in terms of what they will say and, more particularly, how they will say it." (p62)
 - *feedback*: "What you say to somebody depends not only on what he has just said to you...but also on what you want to get out of the conversation". (p63)
- 4) *Learning by doing*: "learning becomes to a large extent the learner's responsibility...The teacher can help, advise and teach; but only the learner can learn". (p63-64)
- 5) *A greater tolerance towards 'mistakes'*: "Trying to express something you are not quite sure how to say is a vital feature of using a foreign language"
(Morrow, 1981: 61-64, my headings)

In an attempt to meet the demands of replicating 'real world language use' in the classroom, Johnson (1981:99) introduced a further principle for the design of communicative language activities: the 'task dependency' principle. For Johnson, the difference between the classroom and the 'real world' could never fully be eradicated. The classroom would always remain an artificial, protected

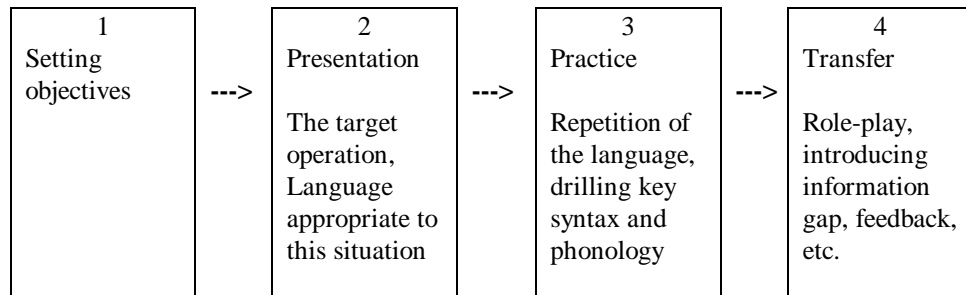
environment which "shields the student from the consequences of his mistakes". To reduce this difference, however, Johnson suggested that tasks should be linked one to another such that Task 2 could only be done if Task 1 had been successfully completed, a principle which was evident in a good deal of supplementary materials produced at the time, such as 'jigsaw' reading and listening, role plays, and simulations which required learners to work in pairs or small groups independent of the teacher (see, for example, Geddes and Sturtridge, 1979, 1982; Hicks et al, 1979; Jones, K., 1982; Jones, L., 1983, Grellet et al, 1982). Activities such as these were intended to provide opportunities for learners to use language for particular purposes, to make decisions upon language appropriacy, react to unpredictable language, and use their productive and receptive abilities interactively (Taylor, 1983).

The proposals for the incorporation of a communicative methodology had a number of direct implications as many writers acknowledged. Byrne (1981), for example, noted that the previous insistence on the separation of skills and a fixed sequence for skill use was to be abandoned in favour of skill integration, such that reading and writing, for example, could be introduced right from the beginning of a course. The proposals also raised the question of the nature of the tasks which should come first. For Scott (1981), however, the call for a communicative methodology posed few basic changes to the sequence of classroom work:

There is nothing particularly mysterious about the process of teaching speaking on a communicative basis. It consists of the same stages as learning any language skill:



Only, in the case of teaching for communication, there is a difference in the type of language item and the type of activities. So we may have the following:



(Scott, 1981:72)

Similarly, Littlewood (1981:89) saw a communicative methodology as comprising "pre-communicative" activities followed by "communicative activities". Pre-communicative activities, according to Littlewood, aimed to "give the learner fluent control over linguistic forms, so that lower-level processes will be capable of unfolding automatically in response to higher-level decisions based on meanings" whilst "communicative activities" aimed to "increase [the learner's] skill in starting from an intended meaning, selecting suitable language forms from his repertoire, and producing them fluently". Littlewood (1984) later set this out more fully in his discussion of a "skill-learning" model of second language learning:

As with other kinds of performance skill, [the use of a second language] has a cognitive and a behavioural aspect. The cognitive aspect involves the internalisation of plans for creating appropriate behaviour. For language use, these plans mainly derive from the language system - they include grammatical rules, procedures for selecting vocabulary, and social conventions for governing speech. The behavioural aspect involves the automation of these plans so that they can be converted into fluent performance in real time. This occurs mainly through practice in converting plans into performance, i.e. through productive language activity, with receptive activity playing a less clearly defined role.

(Littlewood, 1984:74)

For Brumfit (1979), however, the essence of a communicative approach lay in a reversal of the traditional sequence of classroom work. Thus, communicative tasks, which would require learners to use language in order to accomplish communication goals would come first, thereby exposing the areas of learners' weakness to which teachers could then teach. Whatever the sequence proposed, however, it was clear that, in any case, language learning was still being seen as comprising "skill-getting" and "skill-using" phases (Rivers, 1972), incorporating many of the established devices for the teaching of form, as shown by the proposed "communicative drill" and the repetition of dialogues (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983:107-8). (But see point 5 below).

In contrast with the so-called traditional role of the teacher as determining and correcting all language work in the classroom, the implication of much of this discussion was that the teacher needed to take on a wider set of responsibilities whilst at the same time withdrawing from the centre-stage position. The design of communicative activities, as described above, necessitated a teacher who would help and facilitate learners as they made their own attempts to complete tasks and, as Morrow noted, a teacher who would exercise a greater degree of tolerance towards learner error. Additionally, the emphasis placed on course design being tailored to the particular students involved, suggested that teachers were also to undertake the role of needs analyst in determining the most appropriate course content and methodology for their students. Learners, for their part, were to be required to be considerably more active in the classroom, working in pairs and groups and accepting responsibility for their learning.

The potential for teachers and learners as co-participants in the classroom group was, however, more strongly argued for by Breen and Candlin (1980a)

who saw learners as being more fully involved in the negotiation of both course content and methodology and mutually responsible for each others learning:

The role of learner as negotiator - between the self, the learning process, and the object of learning - emerges from and interacts with the role of joint negotiator within the group and within the classroom procedures and activities which the group undertakes. The implication for the learner is that he should contribute as much as he gains, and thereby learn in an interdependent way.

(Breen and Candlin, 1980a:110)

Whatever particular writers' views were on the extent of learner involvement in the management of a course, it was evident that a recurrent theme in the discussion during this period was that classroom work should in any case involve the 'whole person', that is, address both the affective and cognitive aspects of the individual (Stevick, 1976). This was something which Littlewood, for one, saw as being a characteristic of a communicative methodology:

In short, communicative teaching methods leave the learner scope to contribute his own personality to the learning process. They also provide the teacher with scope to step out of his didactic role in order to be a 'human among humans'

(Littlewood, 1981:94)

4 Authenticity

The issue of *authenticity* more correctly resides under both the discussion of syllabus content and classroom methodology, but, as a topic which generated a considerable amount of debate during this period, it is worth examining in closer detail. The debate addressed both the nature and sources of content used in classrooms and the manner in which learners interact with that content.

Much of the discussion centred on the then conventional practice of simplifying texts to accord with the learners' assumed level on a structural syllabus. A

number of writers, notably Philips and Shettlesworth, (1978:105) and Grellet (1981) rejected the practice. In an influential book concerning reading skills, Grellet argued against the simplification of texts and insisted on the use of authentic texts "whenever possible". 'Authentic' to Grellet meant that "nothing of the original text is changed and also that its presentation and layout are retained" (1981:8). In addition to photographic reproduction of the original, Grellet stressed the need to utilise texts in ways which mirrored the purpose for which they were originally produced:

Exercises must be meaningful and correspond as often as possible to what one is expected to do with the text (sic). We rarely answer questions after reading a text, but we may have to:

- write an answer to a letter
- use the text to do something (e.g. follow directions, make a choice, solve a problem)
- compare information given with some previous knowledge.

(Grellet, 1981: 9)

This view of authenticity was, however, challenged, notably by Widdowson (1978) and, later, by Breen (1983,1985). Widdowson saw a distinction to be made between 'genuineness' on the one hand and 'authenticity' on the other:

Genuineness is a characteristic of the passage itself and is an absolute quality. Authenticity is a characteristic of the relationship between the passage and the reader and it has to do with appropriate response.

(Widdowson, 1978:80)

The key factor here, therefore, was whether the reader - in this case, the learner - had sufficient knowledge of the conventions of the foreign language to recover the author's original intention in the text and then produce the appropriate response, such that a poem is read as a poem, a business letter as a business letter and so on. Development of the ability to do this, did not, in Widdowson's view, necessitate the use of 'genuine' examples of language use,

but could involve resorting to "pedagogic contrivance". The problem would then be of finding ways "to persuade the learner to consider [the contrived text] as normal language use when in fact it is not" (ibid) as, for example, in the use of pseudo-authentic texts such as mocked up newspaper articles and unscripted studio recordings.

Breen, on the other hand, emphasised the relative nature of authenticity. In contrast with Johnson's comments on the artificiality of the language classroom (noted above) and Widdowson's concern to encourage learners to treat contrived texts as "normal", Breen maintained that

what may be authentic to the learner at a particular stage of learning in the context of the language classroom may be something quite different from authentic communication in the target language

(Breen, 1983:59-60)

Reminiscent of his earlier position on not viewing the classroom as "a pale representation of some outside communicative reality" Breen thus saw the classroom as a social location in its own right, able to generate its own authenticity for both the content and process of language learning.

5 Task and acquisition based approaches

I noted earlier that a number of writers rejected the prespecification of content objectives as a basis for course and syllabus design. In addition to the position taken by Breen and Candlin (noted above) two further writers, in particular, argued quite different bases for course design. They are Prabhu (1982, 1987; also described in Johnson, 1982) and Krashen (1982).

In an experimental project in Bangalore, South India, a team led by Prabhu developed the procedural or task-based syllabus in which they deliberately

chose not to focus upon predetermined language content. The basis of course design which they instead adopted was to devise a series of problem-solving tasks graded according to their conceptual complexity. The thinking behind this approach was that "form is best learnt when the learner's attention is on meaning" (Prabhu 1982: 2), maintaining that the development of the learner's competence in grammar is an 'organic' rather than an 'additive' process, which takes place at a subconscious level. Prabhu (1987:69-70) set out the main theoretical premise behind the proposal:

Task-based teaching operates with the concept that, while the conscious mind is working out some of the meaning-content, some subconscious part of the mind perceives, abstracts or acquires (or recreates, as a cognitive structure) some of the linguistic structuring embodied in those entities, as a step in the development of an internal system of rules. The intensive exposure caused by an effort to work out meaning-content is thus a condition which is favourable to the subconscious abstraction - or cognitive formation - of language structure.

The position advocated by Prabhu had much in common with that of Krashen, whose work has frequently been cited in support of a variety of classroom procedures which have the ostensible aim of bringing about a focus on message rather than form. Krashen (1982) drew a distinction between 'acquisition' on the one hand (characterised by exposure to and use of the foreign language) and 'learning' on the other (characterised by a study of grammatical rules). Successful acquisition for Krashen depended on two crucial factors: i) whether or not the input provided to the learner is comprehensible; and ii) whether or not this input is relevant and interesting to the learner. In terms of classroom methodology, Krashen and Terrell (1983) thus advocated activities which were intended to focus on meaningful communication rather than language forms. This initially put no requirement upon learners to produce any language at all (based on an assumption of a natural "silent period" in language learning),

thereby allowing acquisition to take place without placing the learners on the defensive (that is, without raising their "affective filter"). Language development would develop, according to Krashen, when the message of the input was comprehensible to the learner but when its form was slightly above the learner's productive ability (" $i+1$ ").

In contrast with the skill learning approach advocated by Littlewood and others (see above) which saw the learner as needing to focus cognitively upon the form before being able to use language spontaneously, the position taken by both Prabhu (1982) and Krashen (1982) thus emphasised the subconscious acquisition of language form through a focus on meaning. The learner, in this case, would simply be required to use language in order to learn it. As their practical work demonstrated, both Prabhu and Krashen thus dispensed with the presentation, drills, and repetition stages as advocated by Scott (above) and instead required learners to work directly with the language, Prabhu emphasising productive use of language to solve problems and Krashen emphasising receptive acquisition simply through exposure to language meaningful to the learner.

6 The role of teaching materials.

From the above brief review of the ideas discussed from the early 1970s to mid 1980s, it will be clear that many of the innovations proposed assumed an increased role for materials in endeavouring to provide ways of promoting communicative language use (however defined) within the classroom. I noted, for example, proposals for 'jigsaw' reading and listening, and for 'pseudo-authentic' content. The implication in this is that materials were not only seen as vehicles for providing learners with samples of the language and explanations of rules or patterns but also as containing indications of precisely

how learners (and teachers) were to interact in the classroom. Materials, therefore, were to comprise appropriately selected combinations of content and method. In this, of course, the discussions between the early 1970s and mid 1980s offered no departure from previous views on the role of materials (Howatt, 1986). What was significant, however, was the extent to which materials were to be held accountable for the quality of classroom interaction. Byrne, for example, placed responsibility for creating "natural language use" squarely at the door of the materials writer:

In teaching materials the link between one language activity and another has to be contrived to some extent and it is part of the job of the materials writer to do this as effectively as possible. If, therefore, we can build into materials a mechanism which leads to the exercise of different skills in as natural a way as possible, we shall then be providing the learners with something that is often lacking in the classroom: a reason for exercising one skill rather than another. In short, through the contexts provided, the learners will listen, speak, read and write (although by no means necessarily in that order) when it is appropriate to do so.

(Byrne, 1981:109)

Materials, therefore, were not only required to provide learners with (ideally "authentic") samples of the language but would also give them "a reason" for interacting with the text and with each other. They were thus viewed as being capable of determining the orientation which a learner might take to samples of the language, replacing, presumably, anything else the learner might have otherwise done.

The emphasis on language skills and language sub-skills (for example, skimming and scanning as a part of reading), as components in a specification of course design, also placed on materials the responsibility for achieving particular learning outcomes, often specified to a considerable level of detail.

White (1981), for example, argued against what he called "the pedagogical approach" to reading (characterised by a text followed by comprehension questions), and suggested that in "the communication approach to reading...the student is first of all given a reason for reading" and then given "some instructions as to how he should go about the reading task, [this depending] on the type of reading style we wish him to develop" (White, 1981:89).

Whilst a number of writers clearly saw "effective" materials as comprising carefully selected combinations of method and content, always with an eye on aims, an alternative role for materials was proposed by Breen et al (1979). As I have previously indicated, the position taken by Breen, Candlin and others was that classroom methodology should involve negotiation between teachers and learners about the process of learning itself. To facilitate this, predetermined combinations of method and content would need to be replaced by two distinct kinds of materials: *content* materials, which would consist of a range of authentic samples of the target language ("data") and linguistic analyses offered in grammars, dictionaries, etc. ("information"); and *process* materials, which would consist of "frameworks of activity" which could be applied by teachers and learners to selected samples of content (Breen et al, 1979: 5-6). Far from being directly responsible and accountable for the quality of classroom interaction and for learning outcomes, therefore, the role of materials in this case would be to facilitate the joint negotiation in the classroom of an unfolding syllabus.

From the above brief review, we can see that see that the period from the early 1970s to the mid 1980s was characterised by a shift in emphasis in language teaching away from a concern with the formal, linguistic properties of language

and the transmission of language knowledge towards a view which stressed the use of language to achieve communication goals and the replication or facilitation of these in the classroom. This, as we have seen, had a number of direct implications for classroom procedures, both in terms of the types of content supplied to learners and the kinds of tasks in which they were to be engaged. At this point, then, we are now in a position to return to the materials under analysis in this thesis in order to discover how far their nature is explicable by reference to these developments in applied linguistic ideas.

4.3 Explanation: applied linguistic thought and the nature of the materials.

In order to facilitate a direct comparison between the review of applied linguistic ideas which I have just presented and the nature of the materials, I propose to draw on the classification of features of materials presented in Chapter 3. This classification, it may be recalled, involved two main categories: *design*, which concerned the underlying principles and approach of the materials, and *realisation*, which concerned the physical aspects of how the materials are realised as a complete book or set. Given, as we have seen, that applied linguistic discussion generally takes place at the level of underlying principles of approach rather than the physical details of layout, format etc, I will, however, restrict myself to those areas listed under *design*. Table 4.1, below, sets out the description of the materials as presented in Chapter 3 and, utilising the same basis of categorisation, presents ideas from applied linguistics for comparison.

As an inspection of the table shows, a comparison between the nature of the materials and the review of applied linguistic ideas shows a degree of match in some areas and a significant degree of mismatch in other areas. One of the

most obvious areas in which the nature of the materials appears to concur with ideas put forward within applied linguistic discussion is in the assumptions underlying the organization of teaching/learning activities and the necessity for distinct "skill-getting" and "skill-using" phases. The concern, on the part of some commentators in applied linguistics, with *preparing* learners to communicate prior to engaging them in communication focussed activities (through, for example, form-focussed "pre-communicative" work prior to meaning-focussed "communicative" activities), has echoes in the presentation-practice-transfer structure for classroom work in the materials, where closed form-focussed work gives way to freer language use on the part of the learners. Whilst the nature of the tasks involved in each of these stages within the materials do not perhaps reflect the "communicative" activity types noted earlier, the underlying assumption of enabling automatic control over linguistic forms through repetitive practice (as described by Littlewood) seems similar. The position advocated by Scott (who saw no significant methodological difference between established teaching procedures and communicative language teaching) and the proposals for "communicative drills" (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983) would also seem .. **[continues after tables]**

...

Design aspect	Nature of the materials	Ideas from Applied Linguistics
1. Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - main and probably exclusive aim: develop learner's linguistic competence - emphasis on developing oral skills - metalinguistic knowledge has a low priority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - development of learner's communicative competence; - mastery of speech acts - development of interrelated grammatical, socio-linguistic, discourse and strategic competences; ability to negotiate language use - focus on fluency and ability to accomplish communication goals
2. Principles of selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - tasks: oral output, low cognitive load, one mental operation at a time; - content: mainly non-message bearing linguistic items (held as useful to the learner), fiction, learner's personal information/opinion (in order) - language: common language patterns and their semantic meanings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - content and types of tasks determined by learner's target lang needs; needs set out in a socio-linguistic description (notions, functions, etc) - tasks for opportunities to use lang to communicate in the classroom - 'wants' as they arise during a course
3. Principles of sequencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - tasks: movement from presentation through practice activities towards freer, game-like tasks; writing in final stages - content: unclear (content mainly carries the linguistic syllabus) - language: simple to complex in terms of surface structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - tasks: skills integration, all skills from the beginning; - pre-communicative activities followed/preceded by communicative activities; skill getting and skill using phases; - 'spiral syllabus' of lang use with linear syllabus of form - task-based: sequencing on basis of task complexity
4. Subject matter and focus of subject matter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - input and output content mainly non-message bearing individual words, phrases or sentences - half of message bearing content fictional, approximately fifth is factual - source of content predominantly the materials themselves - little metalinguistic comment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "authentic" and/or pseudo-authentic texts - learning itself and learners' experiences of learning - oral and written discourse
5. Types of learning/teaching activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - learners in a predominantly respond position - classroom interaction heavily scripted for both teachers and learners - 15% of tasks require no learner response whatsoever - reproduction or repetition characterises the majority of remaining tasks - limited range of operations required: repeat, retrieve, formulate, decode semantic meaning, select information - little demand for "deeper" operations such as analysing, hypothesizing, - mother tongue not called upon - emphasis on textual knowledge; ideational/interpersonal knowledge 'carry' textual knowledge - little requirement for negotiation - group/pair work also characterised by repetition - emphasis on production rather than reception; speaking rather than writing, reading rather than listening; words/phrases/sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - tasks which replicate target language situation - characterised by creativity and unpredictability - balance between focus on form and focus on meaning - communication goals involving discourse in real time - skill getting: drills, repetition (pre-communicative activities) - skill using: information gap, jigsaw tasks, etc ("communicative activities") - learners independent of teacher's direct control, working in pairs/group - tolerance towards learners' errors - negotiation of course content and methodology - drawing on 'whole person' - task and acquisition based: tasks which focus on problem-solving; tasks which focus on comprehension

Continued

<p>6. Participa- tion: who does what with whom</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - four basic modes of classroom participation evident: teacher-learner(s) interacting (class observing), learners in concert together, learners individually simultaneously, and learners in pairs/groups simultaneously - focus on meaning for 'teacher-learner' and 'learners individually simultaneously' tasks; focus on form for 'learners in concert together' and 'learners in pairs/groups simultaneously' - content mainly supplied by the materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - learners working in pairs/groups producing and reacting to language; meaning focussed - teacher advising/facilitating learners in their work - learners interdependent in the learning
<p>7. Classroom roles of teachers and learner</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - unequal distribution of power between teachers and learners, in favour of the former - both teachers and learners in subordinate position in relation to the materials writer: curriculum decisions taken by the materials writer; materials are 'curriculum packages' - teacher's role: to manage a preplanned classroom event; not required to consider curriculum issues; scripting attempts to reduce the risk of unpredictability - Learners' role: to be managed, not required to consider learning or classroom issues, little recognition of the individuality of the learner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - teacher: withdrawal from centre-stage but wider set of responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - needs analyst, adviser, knower, facilitator - learners: cooperation in groups, responsible for own learning - teacher and learners as co-participants in the group, negotiating course content and methodology - involve 'the whole person'
<p>8. Learner roles in learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to be taught, undertaking tasks as directed by the materials, via the teacher - not required to consider learning or classroom decisions - learning as the gradual accumulation of items accomplished mainly by repetition or reproduction of texts supplied by the materials - learning as 'work' leading to game-like 'rewards' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'skill getting' and 'skill using': focus on form of language and internalise it mainly through repetition, so as to automatise control over linguistic forms ("skills development" model) - learning through focus on meaning or language use - learn interdependently: learning from and contributing to the group
<p>9. Role of materials as a whole</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to structure the teaching and learning of English, classroom time and classroom interaction - to provide packages of predetermined curriculum decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - promote communicative language use in the classroom - provide predetermined combinations of method + content - give learners a reason for using language - responsible for precise learning outcomes - facilitate negotiation of selection of content and process and the unfolding syllabus

to confirm this finding. Similarly, the syllabus adopted by the materials, which sequences language according to increasing surface complexity, is broadly in sympathy with the linear syllabus for form, advocated by Brumfit and others, albeit without the addition of a 'spiral' syllabus of language use.

At the same time, the *role* which the materials appear to claim in structuring classroom time, through detailed plans for teacher-learner interaction and the provision of predetermined curriculum decisions, has much in common with the role proposed for "communicative" activities which would similarly endeavour to determine the precise ways in which teachers and learners interact with each other. In this sense, therefore, both the materials and the views of some commentators in applied linguistics share an underlying concern to exercise control over what goes on in the classroom at the level of both content and process.

Whilst it is possible to identify areas of harmony between the nature of the materials and applied linguistic discussion, however, the force of the summary in the table is one of substantial mismatch. The discussions within applied linguistics between the early 1970s and mid 1980s were characterised, as the table reminds us, by a broadening of goals for language teaching to encompass both formal, linguistic knowledge and the use of language in communication. This had a number of direct implications in terms of content, where speech act inspired syllabus plans, needs analyses, and "authentic" texts were frequently advocated, and in terms of methodology, where the inclusion of "communicative" activities, which focussed on exposure to discourse and the use of language to achieve (replicated) communication goals, were proposed. At the same time, a reduction in the teacher's direct control over the language to which the learner was to be exposed and which the learner was to produce, was

suggested, with a greater tolerance for learner error and an increased emphasis on fluency in accomplishing communication. To varying extents, commentators at the time also advocated greater involvement in course management on the part of learners and classroom activities which drew on the "whole person" rather than purely the cognitive aspect.

Turning to the materials, one finds a very different picture in each of these areas. As the table shows, the principal concern of the materials is the development of the linguistic abilities of the learners, with an emphasis on "item" level exposure to language (words, phrases and isolated sentences) rather than discourse. Far from reflecting a desire to replicate outside communication events, to provide opportunities for creativity in using language and in dealing with unpredictability, the materials emphasise an accumulative approach to learning in which classroom interaction is heavily scripted for both learners and teachers. Reproduction or repetition, it will be recalled, and a limited range of mental operations, characterise the materials, suggesting the absence of an attempt to engage the "whole person", to involve the learners in managing their own learning or in learning in an interdependent manner. Rather than advocating a teacher role as a facilitator or learning adviser, the materials attempt to place the teacher in (assumed) direct control over language learning and language use in the classroom. I noted in my analysis of the materials, for example, that such pair/group work that is provided is concerned with repetition of language and a focus on form, and that meaning-focussed work (where the potential for unique responses and thus the risk of unpredictable outcomes is higher) is undertaken either by learners alone or between the learners and the teacher. The learners' role, I concluded, is predominantly one of being managed and the teachers role one of overseeing a pre-planned classroom event, quite distinct from calls for the sharing of

responsibility or for allowing learners to contribute their own personality to the learning process.

4.4 Summary and conclusion

In this chapter, I have been concerned with endeavouring to identify the extent to which the materials reflect ideas within Applied Linguistics and thus the extent to which, potentially, their nature may be explained by reference to those ideas. Working from an hypothesis about the likely time-scale involved in applied linguistic ideas finding their way into materials production, I first reviewed developments in Applied Linguistics between the early 1970s and the mid 1980s. I then compared my review of this discussion with the nature of the materials as described in Chapter 3. Whilst I was able to find some similarity between the underlying approach of the materials and proposals from applied linguistics (notably with respect to "skill-getting" and "skill-using" phases in language learning and the desire to determine the nature of classroom interaction), the overwhelming impression to emerge from the comparison is that there is little evidence of a very strong link between applied linguistic discussion and the design of these particular materials. Applied linguistic discussion, I noted, was characterised by a concern for a broadening of language teaching goals to encompass language use and for greater learner involvement in course management and course content, none of which were strongly evident in the materials.

Whilst we may be fairly confident in claiming no direct link between these materials and applied linguistic discussion, a number of important points must be borne in mind. Firstly, my investigation has centred on a review of applied linguistic ideas covering a period approximately ten to fifteen years prior to the

publication of the materials. I believe that such a time-span should be sufficient to allow the 'theory' of language teaching to find its way into the 'practice' of materials design, if indeed such a relationship does exist, but it is possible that one may need to look further back to find the theoretical seeds for the nature of the materials examined here. Secondly, the absence of a link which I have found relates to these *particular* materials and it would be unwise to generalise beyond that. I noted in my review, for example, that some of the suggestions for "communicative" activities were reflected in supplementary materials in the form of 'jigsaw' reading and listening tasks, roleplays and simulations. This may suggest, therefore, that a closer link exists between Applied Linguistics and supplementary materials than does with main course materials, such as those under discussion here.³

At this point, however, we may conclude that an investigation into applied linguistic ideas has not brought us substantially nearer to being able to explain why the materials are as they are. This would suggest that we need to turn elsewhere for a source of explanation and consider the process of materials creation from closer quarters. In the next chapter, therefore, I will turn to those immediately responsible for the nature of the materials, that is, the authors themselves.

³The distinction between supplementary materials and main course materials is an interesting one which I shall explore further in Chapter 6. As we will see, for a publisher, the production of a set of main course materials poses a significantly higher risk than does a set of supplementary materials.