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8.1 Introduction

I began this thesis by suggesting the importance of an enquiry into the nature of main course ELT materials and their processes of creation. The modern-day main coursebook, I suggested, is a very complex phenomenon which, in contrast to its counterpart of previous decades, now assumes a considerable amount of responsibility for the structuring of class time and manner in which teachers and learners are to interact with each other. Decisions concerning the aims, content, methodology and the evaluation of outcomes, I noted (and later showed), were typically assumed by the materials.

The overall intention in my enquiry, I said, was in the greater empowerment of those involved in language teaching such that they may take more control over the materials with which they are involved. At the implementation stage of classroom use, I suggested that a careful consideration of what may be involved in the use of a particular set of materials would enable educational administrators, teachers and learners in deciding upon the necessity for any further courses of action (such as rejecting or supplementing the materials). At the design stage, too, such a consideration would facilitate those commissioning materials, materials writers and,

indeed, publishers, in the realisation of alternatives and the general direction in which materials development may need to proceed.

At this point in the thesis, we are now in a position to reflect on what we have gathered from my enquiry. In order to do this, I propose first, in Section 8.2, to review my findings in the previous chapters and draw together some overall conclusions. In the following section, Section 8.3, I will then consider where these conclusions may lead us, particularly in respect of two main areas: the analysis and evaluation of materials, and innovation in materials design. Section 8.4 will provide some further concluding remarks.

8.2 Summing up: *Why are ELT materials the way they are?*

My enquiry began, in **Chapter 2**, with the elaboration of a framework for the analysis of language teaching materials. The model which I proposed offered a distinction between the *process* and the *product* of description. In terms of the process of description, I set out three levels of analysis and inference, moving from 'what is there', explicitly in the materials, through 'what is required of users', before finally setting out 'what is implied' by their use. The outcomes from these steps in the analysis could then, I showed, be mapped onto elements in the product of description, within which I suggested two main categories: aspects of *design*, involving the underlying approach of the materials, and aspects of *realisation*, involving the nature of their published form. The separation between process and product, and the identification of levels of inference, I suggested, would make it easier to see when it is the materials which are 'speaking for themselves' and when it is the researcher's subjective interpretations which are involved.

In my next chapter, **Chapter 3**, I turned to five sets of main course materials and applied my framework for analysis. This involved describing the explicit nature of each set of materials as a whole and analyzing over 600 tasks extracted from the student's books. In summary, I found that the materials are characterised by a high degree of internal standardisation through repetitive unit structures, pagination and so on. In terms of classroom work, the materials maintain an emphasis on developing the learner's linguistic competence with very few broader 'educational' or 'non-language learning specific' aims. Language learning is to be achieved, according to the materials, principally through 'reproductive' tasks in which the learners are required to reproduce (often identically) the content with which they are presented. This, I suggested, placed them in a largely reactive, disempowered position in the classroom. I noted, however, that both teachers and learners are placed in a subordinate position to the materials writer by the degree of scripting set out in the materials.

Chapter 4 then turned to Applied Linguistics to discover whether the nature of the materials as analysed in the previous chapter could be explained by reference to ideas current in the literature in the time leading up to publication. Whilst I was able to find a degree of correspondence in the basic methodological assumptions in both applied linguistic thought and the materials, the overall finding of the chapter was one of considerable mismatch. Applied linguistic discussion at the time, had, amongst other points, emphasised the development of the learner's communicative competence, the replication of the target language situation and greater learner involvement in course management, none of which were strongly evident in the materials.

In **Chapter 5**, I then turned to a consideration of the authors' role in writing the materials. Through the use of repertory grids and interviews, I was able to

establish an explanation for the materials in terms of the authors' typifications of teachers, learners and language learning. Their main concerns, I deduced, lay with assumed cognitive limitations and a propensity to misbehave on the part of learners, and with assumed feelings of insecurity and a lack of experience and good judgement on the part of teachers. This led the authors to conclude that their responsibility lay in setting out precisely what was to happen in the classroom, thereby, it was inferred, minimising the potential problems for teacher by reducing the risk of unpredictable learner behaviour.

Whilst Chapter 5 was able to offer a convincing explanation for the materials in the typifications held by their authors, **Chapter 6** enabled me to contextualise the production of the materials and account for why *those particular authors* had achieved publication. Publishers, I found, select and commission authors on the basis of their known willingness to adhere to the publisher's premises for publication. In the case of main course materials, these premises, I showed, emphasise a return on the considerable financial investment involved and thus a desire to reproduce the design characteristics of current market leaders. Authors, I suggested, are thus more appropriately seen, not as autonomous in their development of materials, but as *agents of the publisher*. The coherence which I had identified in Chapter 5 between the views of authors and the *design* aspects of the materials was thus of prime importance. The materials achieve publication precisely *because of* this coherence and its compatibility with the views and aims of the publisher.

The chapter, however, left us with a further problem in explaining the materials. Whilst it may be true that publishers exercise considerable control over materials production, the question of why the materials analysed in this thesis have the *particular* nature which they do, was still unresolved. The publishers' premises for

publication, I had noted, emphasise financial goals and they thus appear to have few vested interests in the precise nature of the materials (apart from cultivating continued purchasing of teaching materials). In my last explanatory chapter, **Chapter 7**, I therefore widened my focus to a macro-sociological account of the materials. From the perspective of critical theories, I was able to establish an explanation in terms of the manner in which the materials replicate 'representations and material practices' within the wider society. This related the social, political and economic processes of commodification, deskilling, standardization and centralization of control to the materials and found that, *by virtue of their form*, the materials reproduced many of the features of modern day capitalist society.

Taken together, my findings in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 provide, I believe, a convincing account for the nature of the materials. Like a Matrushka doll, they offer various layers of explanation, one fitting within the other, each complementing the previous layer. The materials may be seen as reflecting the views of their authors, the authors as agents for publishers, and publishers as producing cultural objects the form of which is ultimately shaped by the wider society. As I briefly indicated in Chapter 7, we can see these layers as together constituting a coherent and broadly-based explanation. Viewing textbooks as the 'phenomenal form' of an ideology (Sumner 1979; see Chapter 7) and taking the three levels of social organization proposed by Fairclough (1989), we may see authorship as relating to the *situational* or immediate social environment of materials creation, publishing and the consumption of main course materials as relating to the *institutional* context (that is, 'the institution of publishers' and 'the institution of the teaching profession'), and the wider society as the overall *societal* context within which authors' perceptions, publishers' goals and the consumers demands are shaped.

With the coherence established in the explanations offered by Chapters 5-7, however, we are left, as I noted at the end of Chapter 7, with the logical suggestion that there is relatively little which the individual publisher, author, educational administrator or teacher may do to depart from the imperatives of the societal context. As my review of critical theories showed, however, this is far from being the case. The basis of societal representation in the materials is not one of determination or direct *correspondence* (as Bowles and Gintis, for example, had suggested) but rather one of *transformation*. Common sense meanings and established social practices do exist at a societal level as part of the dominant ideology and do find their expression in the form and content of cultural objects. But in the situational and institutional context of materials creation (authors and publishers) and the situational and institutional context of the demand for materials (individual teachers and learners, and the language teaching profession), transformation and mediation of societal meanings can and do take place. Innovation and social contestation in materials creation and demand thus depend crucially on the awareness of those individuals involved and their own *personal* ideologies and lived experience.

But what is the route for innovation and contestation of established paradigms in main course materials design, if this is desired? From the (somewhat limited) evidence of an analysis of five coursebooks, it would appear that discussions within Applied Linguistics are singularly unsuccessful in bringing about substantial change within materials. Main course materials, my analysis has shown, respond to quite different pressures than those exerted by 'the literature'. Potential commercial viability, in particular, appears to act as a 'filter' on innovation, leading materials to respond only very slowly to applied linguistic ideas. The market, it seems, is the final arbiter.

But this need not be so, I believe, if we consider this thesis as providing support, as I indicated earlier, for the development, selection and implementation stages of materials. Through its contribution to a much-needed debate about the internal nature of materials and its contribution towards procedures for analysis, the findings of this thesis may have a potential role in raising consciousness on the part of those involved with materials and thus a more articulate expression of their views. In the closing sections of this thesis, I would therefore like to offer some personal remarks in relation to how this may be achieved and some indications of an alternative basis for materials design.

8.3 ELT Materials: *where do we go from here?*

8.3.1 *Materials analysis , selection and evaluation*

In my brief review of existing models for the analysis and evaluation of teaching materials (Chapter 2), I noted how the objective facts of a set of materials, subjective interpretations, and assumptions about how materials *should* be, are often mixed together, making it difficult to separate the reviewer's personal account from the nature of the materials themselves. This lack of a systematic approach to materials analysis and evaluation in the language teaching professions is evidenced, as I suggested, by the absence of a substantial debate about the nature and proper role of teaching materials.

Some years ago, Dick Allwright (1981) posed the vital question *What do we want teaching materials for?* and offered some indications of what materials can aspire to achieve. Since his initial paper and a brief reply by O'Neill (1982), however, the question has largely met with silence. Instead, we are faced with a plethora of reviews of individual titles in journals, many of which appear largely unprincipled,

speculative, and frequently conflicting in the accounts they offer¹. Language teaching materials are, however, one of our main "tools of the trade", and it is thus essential that we endeavour to adopt a systematic framework for materials analysis, evaluation and the exchange of ideas on materials design. In this respect, we can see the model elaborated in this thesis as a potential component in such a framework. Figure 8.1 below outlines a tentative proposal and shows how this may function.

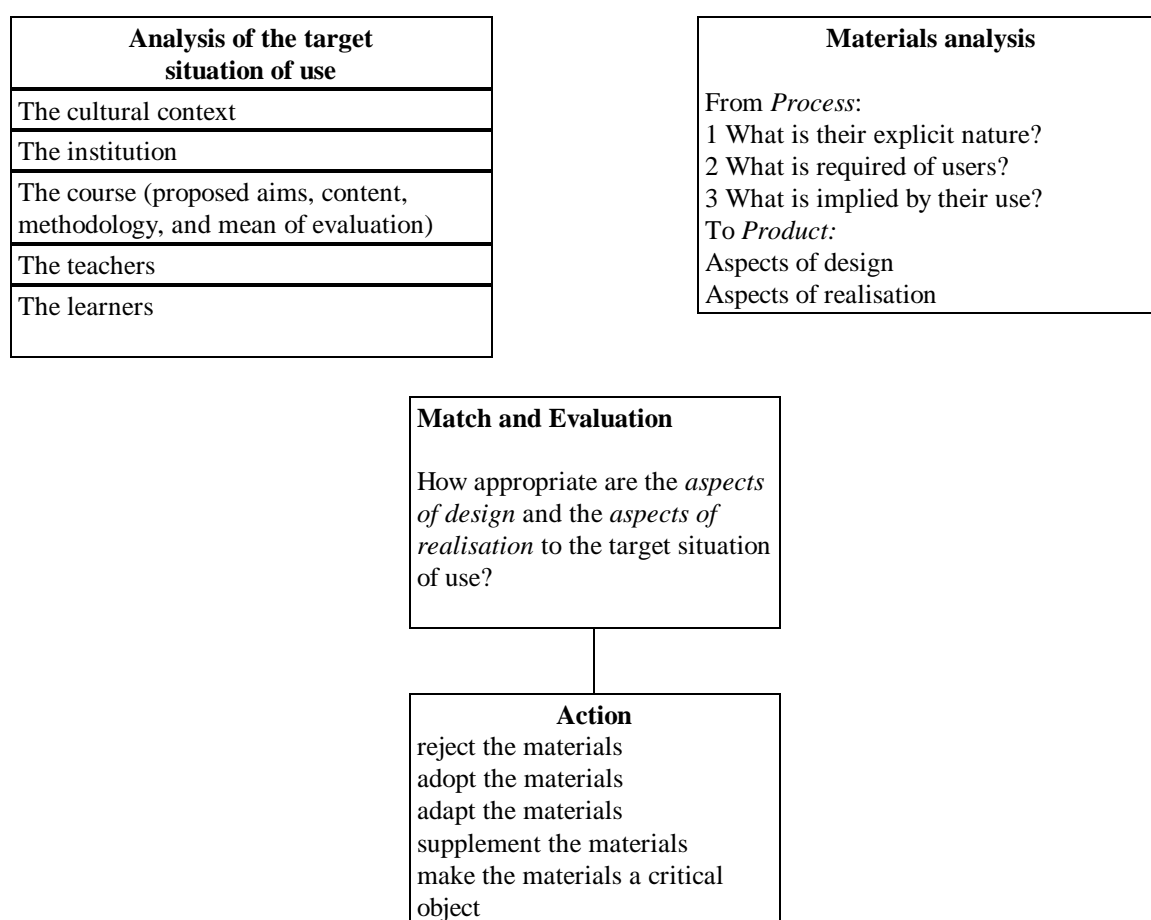


Figure 8.1: A preliminary framework for materials analysis, evaluation and action.

¹As an example, I can cite one of my own coursebooks, *Company to Company* (Littlejohn, 1988b). *EFL Gazette* found the text "...very successful...[with] a wide range of model business letters, relevant to most learners' needs, as well as a teaching/learning methodology which will be systematic and clear to both teachers and learners". *EA Journal* (Australia), however, despite finding the book "excellent" thought that "only an ambitious teacher would use the text" whilst *Modern Language Journal*, described the book as "a repository of cliché and dull prose" and concluded that "those who can comprehend this text can be [better] taught elsewhere to produce natural and effective letters". It is hard to imagine what use such conflicting accounts can possibly serve.

At the heart of the framework lies a clear distinction to be made between an analysis of the materials, analysis of the proposed situation of use, the process of matching and evaluation, and subsequent action. By clearly dividing the various stages involved in this way, a focussed account can be taken of each element and a more articulate expression of materials related needs/wants may be achieved.

Materials may be analysed and described by a process which exposes their internal nature and makes the reviewer's subjective interpretations more easily visible. The nature of the target situation of use and the requirements which it places on the materials (rather than, as is frequently the case, the reverse) can also be addressed independently. (See Stern, 1983:497-513 for further indication of variables involved here.) Matching and evaluation then follows in which an evaluator would need to set out precisely which aspects of the materials are appropriate or inappropriate and why.

The final stage, 'action' involves the evaluator in making decisions over what to do next in the light of matching and evaluation. A number of conventional responses are listed here but there is also the possibility of adopting a set of materials in order to make it an object of critical focus. In this way, the contents and ways of working set out in the coursebook can be viewed as *proposals* which may be open to critical examination and evaluation by teachers and learners. In much the same way as Freire's (1972) 'problem posing' approach to education, a critical focus would aim to analyse and question the prescriptions contained in the materials.

By viewing the processes of materials analysis, evaluation and implementation in this way, the 'hidden agenda' of the evaluation guides I described in Chapter 2 (Harmer, 1983; Doughill, 1987; and so on) can be lessened. In its place, an open procedure is proposed in which the evaluator is called upon to investigate the

internal character of the materials and the proposed situation of use, to make clear his/her personal judgements and act accordingly. In this way, the framework may be seen as potentially empowering educational administrators, teachers, learners and others to voice their needs and to take more control over the materials with which they are involved.

8.3.2 Materials design: some directions for change

Throughout this thesis, my concern has been with an analysis and description of five sets of materials and with an explanation of their nature. At this point, however, I would like to offer some comments in relation to the characteristics of the materials as they emerged in my analysis, particularly in respect of the roles allotted to teachers and learners and the emphasis on reproductive task types.

From the point of view of empowerment, the appropriacy of the approach taken by the materials raises a number of issues. In its weakest form, the notion of empowerment is central to any language teaching enterprise. The ultimate autonomy of the learner in using the language - that is, in expressing and understanding the language without direct support - is likely to be the goal of any language course. Yet, there would appear to be a conflict between this and a methodology of reproduction. It is doubtful, I believe, if one can learn to express oneself independently by a methodology which consistently emphasises repetition, a respond role in classroom discourse, and the learning of 'bits' of language knowledge. As E.M. Forster once remarked (and as Gitlin and Apple in their various ways would agree), such spoon feeding is in the long run likely to teach us nothing but the shape of the spoon. But the notion of empowerment has a wider implication in the suggestion of allowing teachers and learners to take more control over the content of their language courses and the ways in which they

work. From this perspective, the extent to which materials writers (as evidenced by the materials discussed here) currently engage in scripting the interaction that is to unfold in the classroom does, I believe, a great disservice to both teachers and learners.

In my account of the typifications held by authors, I showed how the nature of the materials may be inspired by their largely negative image of both teachers and learners. There can be no doubt that many of the aspects which the authors described are part of the day-to-day reality of many classrooms: poorly planned and conducted lessons, bored students, a lack of training and experience, inadequate support from the environment and so on. But the remedy for such situations is unlikely to lie in materials writers assuming all the responsibility for deciding what is to happen in the classroom, for reasons which I will explain.

Some twenty years ago, McGregor (1961) set out two opposing views on motivation and human nature. The first, which he termed 'Theory X', sees human beings as essentially disliking work and as thus needing to be motivated (principally through coercion) in order to get them to put in the required effort. People, according to this view, need to be directed and want security more than anything else - they want, in other words, to be told what to do. The second theory, 'Theory Y', on the other hand, sees humans as enjoying work, as actively looking for responsibility because of the rewards of achievement. People, according to this view, can show a great deal of imagination when they are confronted with problems. If one thinks back to the nature of the materials and the views expressed by the authors it is not difficult to see the parallels here. The materials, such as they are, and the views of the authors are predominantly 'Theory X' in character. But the most important point in McGregor's work is his suggestion that each of these theories are, in fact, *self-fulfilling* prophecies. A Theory X

approach to workers, students or whoever, is likely to produce Theory X behaviour on their part. Systems set up to prevent cheating at school, for example, are likely to encourage cheating to take place. Materials which assume teachers do not have any curriculum planning skills are likely to produce deskilled teachers.

If we see the approach adopted by the materials in this way, then we are able to see the authors' response of assuming control in the face of classroom difficulties as *part of the problem*. A Theory X situation (unimaginative teachers and unwilling learners) is likely to remain so whilst materials (amongst other factors in language teaching) continue to adopt a predominantly Theory X approach.

Breaking out from this vicious circle will require materials writers, for their part, to adopt a different set of assumptions which recognise that, given appropriate support, teachers and learners *are* able to assume more responsibility for managing their lives. But, in the context of main course materials writing, what would such a Theory Y approach entail?

The answer, I believe, is an approach which places more trust in the capacities of teachers and learners to resolve classroom issues for themselves and which views materials as providing a *supportive* rather than *directive* role. This will suggest the provision, not of *prescriptions* for classroom work, but of a variety of *proposals*, explicitly presented as such, for ways of working and for possible content. But the exercise of choice on the part of teachers and learners which this entails must be an *informed* choice if it is to be meaningful. This will place the joint evaluation by teachers and learners of what they have done as a central component in planning and carrying out classroom work. In the design of materials, this may involve the inclusion of specific evaluation phases in the materials for both the process and the product of language learning. Teachers and learners may, for example, be invited to discuss the problems which they have in going about classroom work (such as

working in groups, utilising specific task types and so on), in addition to problems in relation to specific details of language knowledge (such as the learners understanding of grammar, vocabulary and so on).

But there is also a need to consider the precise nature of the tasks and content which are offered as proposals. The current emphasis on fictional dialogues and texts, for younger students increasingly concerned with the 'pop culture' of mass entertainment, clothes ,etc., does, I believe, little to enrich the lives of teachers and learners. As essentially a 'contentless' school subject (apart, that is, from linguistic content) the potential for language teaching as a vehicle for wider 'educational' content would seem to be considerable. Such a view would involve challenging the distinction between *learning content* and *carrier content* and suggest that *all* content with which learners are presented should potentially be worth learning. Thus, rather than viewing the non-linguistic aspects of content as simply a means of motivating learners to learn, a Theory Y approach would assume that learners *want* to learn and endeavour to meet this desire through the provision of content worth learning about.

I noted earlier that there is an apparent conflict between a methodology based on *reproduction* and an ultimate goal of the learner's autonomy in language use. Whilst acknowledging that a stage of reproduction and repetition may be important in language learning, a Theory Y approach, however, would credit the students with having ideas of their own and thus endeavour to provide tasks which allow for more *creative* use of the language. Such tasks would need to abandon the 'single correct answer' approach adopted throughout the materials analysed in this thesis and allow for variable responses on the part of learners. Knowledge, in this case, would be seen not as something *external* to the learner, as "thing-like entities" to be poured into "a bucket" (Popper, 1972), but as something which

develops *within* the learner, as emerging personal hypotheses and understandings, during the course of language learning.

We may also draw similar conclusions in respect of teachers. Here, a Theory Y approach would work from an assumption that teachers naturally have a desire to do well in their teaching and want to improve. It would stress that teachers have *reasons* for doing what they do in classrooms and credit them with an ability to make decisions. Thus, rather than providing scripts and lessons plans as *faits accomplis*, a Theory Y approach to materials design would endeavour to support teachers in reflecting on their teaching and explicitly offer curriculum decisions over what is to be learnt, when, and how. Teacher action would thus be seen (rather as personal construct theory might view it) as the result of "personal theories" about the most appropriate ways to go about language teaching and learning. Thus, in contrast to a series of explicit directions (do this, do that) found in many teachers books, Theory Y materials would attempt to aid teachers to refine and test their own the personal hypotheses in the course of their teaching.

If McGregor is correct, then the adoption of such alternative bases for materials design should aid in breaking the vicious circle of 'inexperienced teachers - control by the materials - teacher dependency - inexperienced teachers' which, I believe, materials to date have largely succeeded in compounding. As I have discussed elsewhere (Littlejohn, 1983), however, the movement towards such innovation must be a gradual one. If teachers and learners have, in the past, been viewed mainly from a Theory X position by materials writers (and if, indeed, they have adopted a Theory X view of themselves), then a transition to alternative ways of working will not be an easy one. A 'deep end' approach which plunges 'head first' into new ways of working is likely only to succeed in alienating both teachers and learners. Successful innovation will need to start where teachers and learners are

now. In terms of the practicalities of materials design, a working balance between familiarity and innovation is therefore called for.

But what of the publishers in all this? If my analysis in Chapter 6 is correct, then we may expect little in the way of the innovations I am proposing from the large, commercially-oriented publishers. The kind of uncertainties which the development of materials of this kind would involve and the obvious need for extensive piloting are unlikely to attract financial capital in search of low-risk, quick-return, high-profit investments. Truly innovative materials production, which goes beyond cosmetic adjustments to layout, content and syllabus items, will therefore have to take place outside the narrow constraints of commercial publishing. In this respect, the potential for 'home grown' materials has never been better. High quality, low cost desktop publishing is now widely available. There is, I believe, a clear role for teachers' associations in all this. Within the world of personal computing, the 'shareware' system, by which users pay a fee direct to the author of computer software, and the existence of 'public domain' software, in which authors gain nothing but the satisfaction of seeing their work used by others, are already firmly established. In the development of materials, such systems, perhaps initially administered by teachers associations (who would need to lay down minimum criteria) could have a clear role in facilitating the free exchange of ideas without the intervening variable of the cost-profit marketplace.

8.4 Envoi

In some ways, this thesis has bitten off considerably more than it has been able to chew. It has raised many issues beyond its primary concern with the analysis of materials and the factors which shape their nature. I have shown how the materials analysed in this thesis respond, not so much to the personal demands and needs of

teachers and learners, but to factors far removed from pedagogy in the personal perceptions of authors, the logic of the marketplace and influence of the societal context. In doing this, my overall aim has been one of empowerment for, as Berger (1963:199) remarks, it is only by looking up at the strings which appear to pull us that the first steps towards freedom lie. Further in-depth analyses of materials and a searching discussion of the role that language teaching materials should play are, therefore, of prime importance.

One must not, however, lose sight of Breen's (1987) distinction which I drew on in Chapter 1. Materials are *tasks-as workplans* quite distinct from *tasks-in-process* in the context of actual classroom use. Prescriptions for classroom action, whether involving the deskilling of teachers or the consideration of curriculum issues, will always be subject to the reinterpretation and personal response of teachers and learners. But, as I have suggested in my concluding remarks, the key for materials, I believe, is to capitalise on the potential of this and not to engage in a (largely fruitless) attempt to standardize classroom processes.