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B.A. (Hons); P.G.C.E.; M.A.

Why are English Language Teaching materials the way they are?

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
May 1992

Lancaster University

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Abstract

This thesis investigates 'main course' English language teaching (ELT) materials and the factors which shape their nature. A model for the analysis of language teaching materials is first developed and then applied to five main coursebooks. The materials are found to be characterised by reproductive tasks and high degree of scripting of classroom interaction. Four perspectives are then adopted in order to explain the materials. The first of these considers the impact of Applied Linguistics and finds only a relatively weak link with the materials. The second explanatory perspective turns to Phenomenology. Through the use of repertory grids and interviews, it is found that the materials can be explained by the manner in which the authors typify teachers, learners and language learning. The third perspective draws on Organization Theory to consider the role of the publisher in materials production. A documentary account of ELT publishing is presented and it is found that the premises for publication encourage conservatism in materials design as publishers endeavour to replicate the characteristics of established market leaders. The last perspective adopts Critical Theory to view the materials as cultural objects and finds an explanation for their nature in the overall societal context in which their production and demand is located. The final chapter shows how the findings of the thesis can be viewed as providing a coherent explanation, noting, however, the apparent failure of Applied Linguistics to influence main course materials design. A future role for the descriptive model developed in the thesis is discussed and some indications for possible innovation in materials design are offered.

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ix

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1	The purpose the present study	1
1.2	Selection of data	5
1.3	Outline of the thesis	9
1.4	A biographical note	16

Chapter 2 Towards a descriptive model of ELT materials

2.1	Introduction	18
2.2.	A review of descriptive models	19
2.3	A model for the description of teaching materials	29
2.3.1	A model for the product of a description	29
2.3.2	A model for the process of description	31
2.3.2.1	Level 1: 'What is there'	32
2.3.2.2	Level 2: 'What is required of users'	35
2.3.2.2.1	A definition of 'task'	35
2.3.2.2.2	A theoretical basis for the analysis of tasks	38
2.3.2.3	Level 3: 'What is implied'	46
2.3.3	A synthesized model for the process and product of description	47
2.4	Conclusion	50

Chapter 3 Applying the model

3.1	Introduction	51
3.2	Applying the model	52
3.2.1	Level 1: 'What is there'	52
3.2.1.1	The schedule for recording the explicit nature of the materials	52
3.2.1.2	Findings	53
3.2.1.3	A description of the materials at level 1	60
3.2.2	Level 2: 'What is required of users'	63
3.2.2.1	The schedule for the analysis of tasks	63
3.2.2.2	Findings	64
3.2.2.3	A description of the materials at level 2	74
3.2.3	Level 3: 'What is implied'	80
3.2.3.1	A description of the materials at level 3	80
3.3	Summary and conclusions	87

Chapter 4 ELT materials as the application of applied linguistic thought

4.1	Introduction	94
4.2	Applied linguistic thought: the early 1970s to mid 1980s	96
4.3	Explanation: Applied linguistic thought and the nature of the materials	112
4.4	Summary and conclusion	118

Chapter 5 ELT materials as representing the personal perceptions of authors

5.1	Introduction	120
5.2	Investigating authors' perceptions: a theoretical context	122
5.2.1	Introduction	122

5.2.2	A phenomenological perspective	123
5.3	Data gathering procedures	126
5.3.1	Outline of data gathering procedures	126
5.3.2	The repertory grid technique	128
5.3.3	The use of interviews	134
5.3.4	Data treatment	135
5.4	Investigating authors' perceptions: the data	137
5.4.1	The repertory grids	137
5.4.2	The interviews	146
5.4.2.1	Introduction	146
5.4.2.2	Authors' typifications of teachers	147
5.4.2.3	Authors' typifications of learners	154
5.4.2.4	Authors typifications of the nature of successful classroom language learning	164
5.4.2.5	Summary and discussion of interview findings	176
5.5	Explanation: authors' typifications and the nature of the materials	178
5.6	Summary and conclusion	188

Chapter 6 ELT materials as a publishing product

6.1	Introduction	190
6.2	Investigating textbook production: a theoretical context	192
6.3	Investigating textbook production: the publishing process	198
6.3.1	Sources of data	198
6.3.2	ELT publishing in context	200
6.3.3	The development of an ELT textbook	207
6.3.3.1	Pre-commissioning	207
6.3.3.2	Commissioning, writing and pre-production	215

6.3.3.3 Editing, design and production 219
6.4 Investigating textbook production: summary 220
6.5 Explanation: the publication process and the nature of the materials 223
6.6 Summary and conclusion 232

Chapter 7 ELT materials as social products

7.1 Introduction 235
7.2 Understanding textbooks: formulating a macro-sociological explanation 237
7.2.1 The perspective from critical theory 237
7.2.2 Investigating conditions of existence 244
7.2.3 The societal context 250
7.2.4 Summary 255
7.3 Explanation: the nature of the materials and the wider social context 258
7.3.1 ELT publishing: a reassessment 258
7.3.2 The nature of the materials 262
7.4 Summary and conclusion 270

Chapter 8 Conclusion

8.1 Introduction 273
8.2 Summing up: *Why are ELT materials the way they are?* 274
8.3 ELT Materials: *Where do we go from here?* 279
8.3.1 Materials analysis and evaluation 279
8.3.2 Materials design: *some directions for change* 282
8.4 Envoi 288

Bibliography 289

Appendix I (bound separately)

Extracts and task analyses of Coursebooks A-E 300

Appendix II

Co-occurrence grids of features of the analysed coursebooks 416

Appendix III

Authors' personal construct repertory grids 435

Appendix IV

Documents relating to publishing processes 442

FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1.1 Outline of the thesis 10

Figure 2.1: Mackey's model for the analysis of teaching materials 21

Figure 2.2: Corder's model of the development of teaching materials 22

Figure 2.3: Breen and Candlin's model for the analysis and evaluation of teaching materials 24

Figure 2.4: Richards and Rodgers' model for the analysis of teaching methods 25

Figure 2.5: A model for the description and analysis of language teaching materials 30

Figure 2.6: A model for the process of the description of teaching materials 32

Figure 2.7: A schedule for recording the explicit nature of the material (level 1) 37

Figure 2.8: A proposed schedule for the analysis of learning tasks 38

Figure 2.9: a synthesized model of the process and product of description 48

Figure 3.1: Pattern of main activity types found in the extracts 59

Figure 5.1: Brief biographical notes on the five authors 127

Figure 5.2: Maps of the authors' psychological space 142

Figure 6.1: Publisher's questionnaire to prospective authors 208
Figure 6.2: Outline example of an initial course profile 211
Figure 7.1: Class structure in a capitalist society 251
Figure 8.1: A preliminary framework for materials analysis, evaluation and action 280

Table 1.1: 'Top ten' UK ELT publishers and upper primary/lower secondary materials. 8
Table 3.1A: The explicit nature of the materials: books as a whole 54
Table 3.1B: The explicit nature of the materials: extract overview 55
Table 3.2: Rank order distribution of main activity-types 58
Table 3.3 : Numbers of tasks identified for analysis 64
Table 3.4A: Percentage of tasks having identified features: What is the learner expected to do? 66
Table 3.4B: Percentage of tasks having identified features: Who with? 69
Table 3.4C: Percentage of tasks having identified features: With what content? 71
Table 3.4D: Percentage of tasks having identified features: Who decides? 74
Table 3.5A: Summary of the description of the materials: Design 89
Table 3.5B: Summary of the description of the materials: Realisation 91
Table 4.1: The nature of the materials and applied linguistic thought, early 1970s to mid 1980s 114
Table 5.1: Authors' personal constructs grouped by topic 139
Table 5.2: Summary of findings from the authors' personal repertory grids 145
Table 5.3: Summary of findings from the interviews 177

Table 5.4: The nature of the materials and findings from the repertory grids and interviews 179
Table 6.1: Major changes in ownership affecting UK ELT publishing 202
Table 6.2: Main course production: Publishing related premises, problems and solutions 221
Table 6.3: The nature of the materials and main course publishing processes 224
Table 7.1: A critical perspective on ELT textbooks: summary of propositions, relations of encoding and the societal context 256
Table 7.2: The nature of the materials and a critical perspective 264

To Lita, Daniel, Fiona, and the one on the way, for all the unread stories and unplayed games

To Mike Breen, for his unfailing support, energy and clarity of thought

Acknowledgements

In the years with which I have been occupied with this thesis, I have become indebted to many people, too many to cite here in full, for the insights they have shared with me. I would, however, like to record a big 'thank you' to some people in particular:

- the authors who agreed to give up their valuable time to participate in my research project;
- Stef Slembrouck and Srikant Sarangi, with whom I began my research and who inspired in me the excitement of discovery;
- Dick Allwright, for all his help very early on;

Finally, and most importantly, to Mike Breen, my supervisor, who was always one step ahead.