



18 Advances in Materials Design

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To derive the design of an object from its natural functions and conditions.

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Introduction

Any discussion of the topic of this chapter must begin with a clarification of the central terms involved. “Materials” can, of course, mean any or all of the very wide range of resources capable of aiding language learning. Here, however, it refers to major international language teaching textbooks, such as the *Headway* (e.g., Soars & Soars, 2003), *Interchange* (e.g., Richards, Hull, & Proctor, 2004) and other series. This is partly for reasons of space – the field is vast, and only a small part of it can therefore be covered here (and even then, not comprehensively) – but primarily in order to connect what follows with previous and ongoing discussions on the topic of developments in materials design, many of which have focused on the same type of resource. Also, because of the relative ubiquity of materials of this kind, such a focus makes it more likely that readers will already be familiar with and/or able to refer personally to the examples cited.

This leaves much out of account, particularly as the majority of language teaching materials used around the world, especially in state educational systems, are probably locally produced. Although unavoidable in this context, this is obviously an important omission, and one of a number of aspects of materials design (as will be seen) where a good deal more research might be undertaken. It should also be mentioned that all the samples of materials referred to are concerned with the teaching of English as a foreign language. Nevertheless, the underlying principles and issues involved should be of relevance to all areas of foreign language teaching.

It is also important to attempt to define the sense in which the term “advances” is being used. At least two major perspectives exist regarding the matter. The first of these is an applied linguistics point of view, as expressed in, e.g., Littlejohn (1992), Tomlinson (1998, 2003), and others. In a nutshell, this perspective argues that the design of teaching materials should, as far as possible, reflect advances in



academic theorizing and research concerning language, language learning, and education. The second view is what might be termed an “audience-based” one – that is, a perspective about materials design which makes primary reference to perceptions of the needs of end users of teaching materials. Though present in the literature on materials design to a limited extent (see, e.g., Bell & Gower, 1998; Mares, 2003; Richards, 2001), this view has been expressed mainly in the form of concrete developments in various aspects of materials design, as prompted by authors’ and publishers’ “readings” of audience feedback, i.e., their understanding of what design features are seen to work best in order to facilitate language learning and teaching in the situations where the materials will be used.

In practice, these two trends have often intermingled, with many sets of teaching materials attempting to reflect, to varying degrees, insights from applied linguistics, as well as those based on perceptions of audience need. Nevertheless, in academic discussions of the topic, it is the applied linguistics perspective which has tended to predominate. “Advances” in materials design have therefore usually been interpreted rather one-sidedly, as a reflection of the extent to which textbooks have succeeded in incorporating features which have been seen as desirable from an academic point of view.

It has been recognized for some time, however, that the general relationship between applied linguistics and language teaching should be a dialectical one, thereby granting due cognizance to issues of practice as the starting point (though not the only end) for “applied” intellectual enquiry (see, e.g., Widdowson, 2000). In what follows, therefore, the term “advances” has been conceived of in the first instance as a function of those developments in materials design that can be seen as likely to contribute to making classroom language learning, in the type of situations the materials are intended for, a more positive experience than would otherwise be the case. In other words, the overall criterion being used is one of “fitness for purpose,” regardless of “theoretical ‘correctness.’” As a corollary, a realigned and expanded research agenda in this area is delineated, with a view to creating the means for the two main materials design perspectives identified to develop a more productive symbiosis than has occurred hitherto.

The remainder of this chapter consists, first of all, of a brief reprise of the findings of two “benchmark” reviews of developments in materials design from the late 1980s. This serves as a “baseline” for the subsequent sections, which are concerned with investigating how a number of the main features of materials analyzed in the two reviews, as well as other aspects, have developed subsequently, via an examination of a range of contemporary textbooks. The final section attempts to draw the main threads together and to consider the implications for further development in this area.

Departure

The two earlier textbook surveys in question are Rossner (1988) and Clarke (1989). In Rossner, given the general acceptance at the time, as now, of the view that the





goal of language learning is communication, the point of departure is “to examine what materials-writers have understood to be the role of their work in the communicative classroom” (Rossner, 1988, p. 140). On the basis of an analysis of a representative cross-section of coursebooks (e.g., Swan & Walter, 1984), supplementary materials (e.g., Frank, Beres, & Rinvoluceri, 1989) and “resource books” (e.g., Sion, 1985) of the time, Rossner concludes that:

materials . . . have not suddenly become “communicative” . . . ; rather, materials have become more and more varied as the drive for more and more interesting, and less and less constraining, ways of carrying out language “practice” in the classroom has gathered pace. (p. 142)

In other words, a more “traditional” focus is perceived to have remained intact, despite the addition of a communicative “overlay.”

The following main criticisms of the materials are also made. First, they are seen to suffer from an “embarrass de richesses.” Getting to know, selecting appropriately, and using them judiciously are therefore viewed as more complex and time-consuming tasks than was the case in the pre-communicative era. Second, most of their communication activities are not regarded as providing “true communication with a real purpose” (Rossner, 1988, p. 160), because of their frequent artificiality and lack of relevance to learners’ lives. Third, the predominance of UK and US publishers is seen as “dangerous,” since, in general, they are “unable to avoid projecting through their topics and their approaches to them, through the language they select, and through the very ethos of the activities they craft, values and educational attitudes which are intrinsically Western and mainly ‘Anglo-Saxon’” (p. 160). The review as a whole concludes by saying that “In the communicative era, more than ever before, materials should not seek to mold teachers and learners but should be available for molding by them” (p. 161). As a whole, thus, the materials in question are seen as insufficiently suited to the needs of their intended audiences because of their logistical complexity, lack of personalization, and the cultural bias of their content and methodology. How subsequent sets of materials have fared with respect to all these features will also be explored in due course.

Like Rossner, the purpose of Clarke (1989) was to “indicate some of the ways in which the now established principles of communicative language learning have been translated into actual teaching materials” (p. 73). In doing so, the first part of the paper (i.e., sections 2–8) focuses mainly on the “authenticity debate,” in order to prepare the way, in the second part, for an analysis of the extent to which various concepts concerned with the notion of “authenticity” – of text, text use, and learner response – can be seen to have influenced the design of a range of then contemporary textbooks (e.g., Abbs & Freebairn, 1980; Soars & Soars, 1986; Swan & Walter, 1985).

With respect to authenticity of text, many of the materials are seen as having gone “to considerable lengths to stimulate [sic] real materials and to reflect ‘real life’ in order to create an aura of authenticity” (Rossner, 1988, p. 79). However, at



the same time, some of these features, such as photographs, are seen as having “very little or no direct pedagogical value,” and there is a “widespread phenomenon of ‘simulated realia’,” i.e., graphics, which “do not involve reproduction of the actual text but seek to suggest an identity with some authentic original by devices such as drawing book shapes round lists of appointments to suggest diaries” (p. 79). The latter is also seen to be a feature of many of the listening texts used in the materials, most of which are “scripted or semi-scripted,” despite claims to authenticity (p. 80).

In terms of the authenticity of tasks to texts, traditional *wh-* comprehension questions continue to dominate: “the authentic input data provide little more than pretexts for traditional ‘reading comprehension’ activities based, for the most part, on irrelevant details being excavated for no particular reason, with no further use proposed for this information” (Clarke, 1989, p. 81). “Authentic materials (which are by definition user-specific)” are thereby seen as being used “for the development of ‘general’ reading and ‘comprehension’ skills” (p. 81). Similarly, authentic texts are also reported as being frequently used as vehicles for traditional language focus exercises, such as substitution tables, and the texts themselves are often modified, e.g., by having gaps inserted in them. As a result “the focus of those materials tends to remain on the forms or functions of the language rather than the use to which the language can be put” (p. 82).

Authenticity of context (i.e., the building up of a realistic context of use around the language being focused on) is also seen as underdeveloped in most of the materials in question, with the language practice factor remaining dominant. Similarly, the development in the materials of authenticity of the task to the learner is seen as circumscribed by the difficulties of creating sufficient individuation and personalization at the same time as attempting to cater to a mass market: “Commercial requirements to sell as widely as possible necessarily vitiate the authenticity of much of this material insofar as the discourse types, situations and roles proposed can by no means be guaranteed to evoke learner authentication” (p. 83).

In overall terms, thus, the most obvious feature of Clarke’s analysis, like Rossner’s, is the identification of a number of fundamental ways – principally to do with issues of “realism” – in which the majority of the teaching materials reviewed were seen to have failed to live up to the theoretical ideals of the communicative approach. However, Clarke concludes by pointing out that the theoretical basis for advocating authenticity in teaching materials is characterized by contradictory stances, even though there is a tendency for this to be overlooked, and for the pro-authenticity view to predominate regardless. He feels it is therefore important to note that “the use of authentic materials does not inevitably result in performance-based activity, while such activity *can* be generated without the use of authentic materials” (1989, p. 84, original emphasis). He characterizes the teaching materials of the time in overall terms as follows:

While most modern textbooks work hard at achieving at least the aura of authenticity, it should be noted that much of their content still focuses on knowledge of the





language rather than its use . . . it is quite apparent that there is no escaping from the production of pedagogical materials and no need to conceal the fact that there will always be a need for transitional materials, which, while not in themselves authentic, can be authenticated by the learner. The extent to which modern materials tend not to exemplify the communicative principles they purport to embody seems to support this assertion. (p. 84)

The implication here – that materials have to address needs that extend beyond or in contradistinction to the incorporation of “authentic data” – echoes the flavor of the discussion in the second part of the introduction to this chapter. Clarke appears to argue that the reason why the materials in question have the characteristics identified is not so much because of shortcomings on the part of the authors and publishers, but because the goal of authenticity in its conventional formulation is inappropriate, since what counts as “authentic” from the learner’s perspective may well be a different matter.

In other words, a fundamental dichotomy of tendencies is perceived to exist. On the one hand, the main thrust of applied linguistics was (and has continued to be) toward accounting for the factors involved in “natural” language *use*, and advocating that these should form the basis of teaching materials. On the other hand, however, we have teaching materials which, while decked out in the trappings of target situation authenticity, remain, at root, fundamentally language *learning* oriented, i.e., based on the view that the kind of authenticity most required for foreign language learning should relate first and foremost to the learner as a current interim acquirer rather than as a potential future user of the language. As will be seen, a similar tension underlies most subsequent developments in language teaching textbook design.

Analysis

Authenticity

Authenticity of text

In the *New Headway Intermediate Teacher’s Book* (Soars & Soars, 2003), the authors state that the Student’s Book reading and listening texts “come from authentic sources with the necessary adaptations to suit the level” (p. 4). This is confirmed by an examination of the texts in the Student’s Book itself, which have many of the attributes of authentic texts in terms of layout, subject-matter, cohesion, and so on, but, in most cases, the language, while natural-sounding, lacks the idiomaticity and complexity of normal native-speaker discourse. They are thus “simple accounts” (Widdowson, 1979, p. 184). Much the same appears to hold true for a wide range of other recent coursebooks, e.g., *New Hotline Elementary* (Hutchinson, 1998), *Cutting Edge Intermediate* (Cunningham & Moor, 1999), *Language to go Intermediate* (Crace & Wileman, 2002), *In English Elementary* (Viney & Viney, 2004a), *Interchange Student’s Book 1* (Richards, Hull, & Proctor, 2005),





and so on. In other words, rather than a move toward greater use of genuinely authentic texts, there seems to have been a consolidation of the status ante quo, i.e., the use of pseudo-authentic or specially-constructed texts has become something of a norm in modern textbook design.

Authenticity of text use

The way in which such texts are used in most modern textbooks tends to be mainly for comprehension or language work purposes, although there are also often pre- and/or post-comprehension or language work activities which involve the learners in relating the information content of the texts to their own lives. Thus, in *Language to go Intermediate* (Crace & Wileman, 2002, p. 69), the “Listening” section begins by getting the students to look at pictures of a number of possible future electronic communication inventions and describe them. They then listen to four short texts about the inventions and match each of them to the relevant picture. After this, they listen again in order to match a list of the inventions with the year when it is predicted they will be available. This is followed by a “Grammar focus” section containing a number of exercises concerned with the main language point (*will* and *will have done*) in the texts. The page ends with a “Get talking” section in which students make predictions about their futures.

Although there is variety in terms of whether the main focus is more or completely on the comprehension or language development side, and as to whether there are also activities which relate the language and/or ideas to the students’ own lives, many other recent textbooks follow the same basic pattern in terms of listening and reading text exploitation (see, e.g., *Cutting Edge Intermediate* (Cunningham & Moor, 1999, pp. 104–5); *Interchange Student’s Book 1* (Richards et al., 2005, p. 111); *New Hotline Elementary* (Hutchinson, 1998, pp. 58–9); *In English Elementary* (Viney & Viney, 2004a, pp. 142–8); *New Headway Intermediate Student’s Book* (Soars & Soars, 2003, pp. 84–5), and so on). Thus, in overall terms, as with the type of text used, most contemporary textbooks, while allowing for a measure of authentic text use via activities which encourage the learners to relate the content to their own lives, tend to focus primarily on exploiting them for comprehension and language development work.

Authenticity of task to learner

As with trends in terms of text type and text use, communication tasks in many modern textbooks appear to have become more closely based on the likely knowledge and interests of the typical learner rather than involving communication situations taken more directly from real life. They are therefore mostly of a kind that might also occur outside the classroom, but appear to have been constructed primarily in order to provide an opportunity to use the language being studied in conjunction with the students’ existing world. Thus, for example, in *Cutting Edge Intermediate*, Module 7, the main task (Cunningham & Moor, 1999, pp. 74–5) is concerned with getting the learners to make a list of “dos and don’ts” for visitors to their countries about everyday behavior; in *New Headway Intermediate*,



Unit 11, one of the main tasks (Soars & Soars, 2003, pp. 90–1) involves the students in making a poster concerned with asking and answering a question about an area of world knowledge; in *Language to go Intermediate*, the main task in Unit 29 (Crace & Wileman, 2002, pp. 60–1) consists of having the learners discuss what they will or might do if a variety of everyday situations were to occur; in *In English Elementary*, Unit 27 culminates in a task (Viney & Viney, 2004a, p. 141) in which the learners give their views about the likelihood of a variety of predictions about the future of the world; in *New Hotline Elementary*, Unit 7 ends by getting the learners to stage a class fashion show (Hutchinson, 1998, p. 62); and so on. The primary concern of such tasks appears to be one of authenticity to the learning situation, i.e., the provision of tasks that have the potential to enable the learners to put the language knowledge in question into practice in a lifelike way, by being geared sufficiently closely to their level, interests, and so on – a matter of attempting to simulate rather than replicate real-life use.

In overall terms, thus, many major textbooks have evolved to reinforce and develop further the tendencies noted by Rossner and Clarke at the end of the 1980s, namely, on the one hand, to deploy pseudo-authentic texts and exploit them in inauthentic ways, and, on the other, to move away from (more authentic) “target” tasks and closer toward (less authentic) “pedagogical” ones (Nunan, 2004, pp. 1–4). This has occurred despite a continuing growth of interest in and belief in the pedagogical value of “real language data” and real-world tasks in applied linguistics (see, e.g., Carter, Hughes, & McCarthy, 1998; Skehan, 1998).

This trend appears to have occurred because of the important pragmatic advantages which can thereby accrue to textbook writers in their attempts to make their materials fit for their primary purposes. In reflecting on their experiences in writing a major international textbook series, Bell and Gower (1998) say, “our original intention to draw target language out of authentic texts failed at the intermediate level, partly because of the difficulty of finding texts which contained clear examples of the focus language together with interesting content” (p. 127). They also go on to add that, as the writing process progressed:

it was clear there were going to be problems with unadapted authentic texts. Finding texts with a generative topic of the right length and the right level of comprehensibility for the level . . . as well as an accessible degree of cultural reference and humour was not easy. So we compromised on this ambition and wonder now whether we should have compromised more and simply gone for texts which were interesting. (p. 128)

In other words, texts for learning purposes clearly need to satisfy a number of needs, primarily related to fitness for the learning purpose, and “authentic” texts may often be inappropriate in this respect. It therefore seems plausible to regard the long-term trend away from “authenticity” and toward “artificiality” in textbooks as concerned with increasing their potential to cater more adequately to the full range of students’ learning needs. Artificial but life-like texts make it possible to provide a much greater variety of texts that are likely to be accessible



to most learners than would otherwise be the case; their use as vehicles for comprehension and/or language work is not inauthentic to the purposes for which they were constructed; and the use of “pedagogic” tasks can increase relevance to the learners’ world, while still providing a meaningful simulation of real-life language use.

Language practice

Despite the addition of various elements giving the textbooks they reviewed a more communicative “gloss,” both Rossner (1988) and Clarke (1989), as has already been pointed out, saw them as nevertheless retaining an overall focus on “language practice.” Since those reviews were written, academic ideas in this area have, in general, continued to move further and further away from viewing a direct focus on the conscious study of language forms as being a desirable pedagogical strategy, with various more “indirect” alternatives being favored instead, such as “consciousness-raising” (Ellis, 1993). However, while many textbooks have for some time incorporated activities of this kind, a language practice element has also remained prominent and, over the years, rather than declined, appears to have actually increased.

Thus, for example, in Unit 7 of the original, 1986 version of *Headway Intermediate* (Soars & Soars, 1986), the language work element comprises two Presentation and Practice sections, the first consisting of two consciousness-raising (C-R) exercises concerning the meaning of the main language structure in focus (the present perfect) and two related “practice” exercises, the second a further C-R activity and related practice exercise, plus a “language review” section (i.e., overall explanation of the rules), a translation exercise, and an “analysis” exercise. In the subsequent Skills Development section, there is a further analysis activity and related practice exercise, and a focused role-play. So all in all, the unit contains three C-R and five language practice activities. In the equivalent unit in the latest edition of the same textbook (Soars & Soars, 2003), the language work concerning the main language focus (once again, the present perfect) is as follows. In the first two pages (pp. 54–5) there is a practice exercise (Test your grammar) in which the students show their existing ability to use the form under focus, as well as to analyze it. This is followed by two fill-in-the-gap practice exercises and a C-R exercise. In the next two pages (pp. 56–7) there is one C-R activity, three analysis ones, and seven language practice exercises. The Listening and Speaking section on p. 61 contains two further practice exercises. There are, thus, altogether, two C-R and twelve language practice exercises concerned with the main language focus of the unit in this edition. Similarly, in Unit 6 of the original edition of *Hotline Elementary* (Hutchinson, 1991), which focuses on the past continuous, there were three C-R and seven language practice exercises. In the later edition, *New Hotline Elementary* (Hutchinson, 1998), the equivalent unit contains three C-R and thirteen language practice exercises. Thus, while the number of CR exercises in the two textbooks has remained reasonably similar, the language practice ones have increased substantially.



Many other modern textbooks also contain a substantial proportion of exercises of both kinds. On the basis of their survey of nine sets of materials published between 1991 and 2000 (with the majority having been issued in the latter half of this period), Nitta and Gardner (2005) show that approximately equal numbers of C-R and language practice exercises were used. As they conclude, "While recent SLA research continues to provide arguments against the efficacy of practising tasks, the evidence from our analysis suggests that they still occupy an essential place in general ELT materials . . . moreover, many suggest using workbooks for further practice" (p. 9). However, as they also go on to say:

Notwithstanding this continued emphasis on practice, our findings have revealed that contemporary coursebooks usually juxtapose C-R tasks with practising tasks. Rather than exclusively selecting one approach, material writers tactfully design grammar syllabuses building on both C-R and practice. Accordingly, though researchers insist on the effectiveness of C-R rather than practice in theory – and rationally their arguments are convincing – ELT practitioners may not be prepared to abandon the familiar, tried and true "practice" exercises. (p. 10)

In other words, it appears that the pragmatic experience of classroom teaching – as it feeds into materials writing via data obtained from practitioners by publishers' agents (Donovan, 1998) – has added a dimension to textbook design in this area which is generally lacking in the academic paradigm, based, as much of it is, mainly on a model of "natural" language use not redolent of the circumstances pertaining in the average school-level or adult language learning situation. As Widdowson (2003) points out (cf. Prabhu, 1992):

a moment's reflection makes it clear that what is taught in classrooms in certain crucial respects *cannot* be in accordance with actual language use. Actual language use occurs naturally within the continuities of social life, appropriately activated by context, and motivated by the needs of communication and the expression of communal and individual identity. The language subject does not occur naturally at all: it appears, like other subjects, discontinuously on the timetable, fitted into a schedule as suited to administrative convenience. Usually, there is no natural communal or individual impetus to use the language: contexts have to be contrived and motivation created. And this is done within restricted units of time called periods and units of activity called lessons, which are organized into such things as exercises, tasks, tests, group work, and so on. Furthermore, these events are, for the most part, controlled and orchestrated by teacher authority, and directed at an eventual measurable outcome. On the face of it, it is hard to see any resemblance to the natural conditions of actual language use at all. (p. 112, original emphasis)

Thus, rather than perceiving the continued or increased provision for so much practice work in textbooks as regrettable (as in, e.g., Tomlinson et al., 2001), it can be viewed more positively as evidence of a need for re-thinking research and theorizing in this area. In other words, as Swan (2006) argues, the policy adopted by textbooks in this matter can be regarded as helping to avoid the perils of a "subtractive" approach:



Changes in theoretical or pedagogic fashion often come about because of disillusionment: our teaching doesn't seem to be getting very good results, and the temptation is to drop what we are doing and look for alternatives. But this may not bring about any net gain. If we are doing too much formal input and not enough communicative output, the solution is to balance things up, not to move to a position where we are doing too much communicative output and not enough formal input. . . Such approaches [i.e., the latter] are nearly always subtractive as well as additive, putting a great deal of emphasis on one or other ingredient of language teaching while neglecting others. (pp. 53–4)

The implications of this policy for the further development of a materials design research agenda within applied linguistics will be considered in the final part of this chapter.

Syllabus/Unit structure

An additive approach is also evident in the way that contemporary textbooks tend to be structured in terms of their "horizontal" (syllabus) and "vertical" (unit) dimensions. In terms of the former, the "multi-syllabus" (Swan & Walter, 1990) is nowadays the norm. Thus, the Contents of each unit in *In English Elementary* include "Language Focus," "Communication Skills/Functions/Formulas," "Topic/Vocabulary," and "Extension" (additional language work, etc.) (Viney & Viney, 2004b, pp. 3–7); in *New Headway Intermediate* (Soars & Soars, 2003), in addition to the Unit Topic (e.g., "It's a wonderful world!"), the categories are "Grammar," "Vocabulary," "Everyday English," "Reading," "Speaking," "Listening," and "Writing"; in *Cutting Edge Intermediate* (Cunningham & Moor, 1999), in addition to the overall Module topic, (e.g., "About you"), the main contents headings are "Language focus," "Vocabulary," "Speaking," "Reading/Listening," "Task," and "After the task." Other books also include additional elements, such as a "learning to learn" syllabus (see, e.g., *New Hotline Elementary* (Hutchinson, 1998)). Such multi-stranded forms of organization typify nearly all modern international textbooks.

Such a trend can be interpreted as a "cover all bases" approach, aimed at ensuring that no "market need" is overlooked, or, more positively, as an implicit recognition of the complex, multi-layered nature of the language learning "task." It can be argued that the earlier type of textbook syllabus, in which only a single aspect tended to predominate (e.g., structures, functions, situations, etc.), probably lessened the extent to which other elements were properly developed. The more explicit acknowledgment of a wider range of syllabus components in modern materials has the potential to reduce this problem, and is more in keeping with (some) contemporary views about language and language learning.

It might be argued, however, that a more appropriate textbook design response to a growing recognition of the complex nature of language learning would have been to *reduce*, rather than increase, the degree of explicit segmentation and specification of the ingredients in the language learning "cake." As Skehan (1996, p. 19) states:



SLA research... has established that teaching does not and cannot determine the way the learner's language will develop. The processes by which the learner operates are "natural" processes. Teachers and learners cannot simply "choose" what is to be learned. To a large extent the syllabus is "built in" to the learner.

The development of the multi-syllabus as a mainstay of the modern textbook is therefore noteworthy in terms of the way that, in this respect also, theorizing and research appear to have gone in one direction, and textbook design in another.

In addition to "syntagmatic" textbook structuring of this kind, something of a consensus also seems to have emerged over the last two decades regarding textbook unit structure. The mold appears to have been established in this respect by the appearance of the first *Headway* series (Soars & Soars, 1986) in the 1980s, and boils down to an initial section in which the main area(s) of language being focused on are presented, analyzed, and practiced, and the main subject-matter theme of the unit is introduced; this is followed by a series of skills-based sections in which the same and, often, additional, related language points are cycled through a series of reading, listening, speaking, and, sometimes, writing texts and related activities, most or all of them linked thematically to the subject matter introduced in the first section (see, e.g., Cunningham & Moor, 1999, pp. 48–57; Hutchinson, 2000, pp. 14–21; Soars & Soars, 1998, pp. 38–46). There are, of course, variations on this theme. Some textbooks contain extra sections on matters such as everyday expressions, (see, e.g., Soars & Soars, 2003, p. 93), "learner training" (see, e.g., Hutchinson, 1998, pp. 43 & 52), or include a more integrated, macro task section (see, e.g., Cunningham & Moor, 1999, pp. 96–9), and so on, but it appears that most modern textbooks use a unit structure along the lines indicated.

It can be argued that such a framework is, at root, a development and refinement of the traditional "PPP" (Presentation-Practice-Production) paradigm (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 69), the main differences being a greater focus on communicative practice and production work and the more consistent development of "carrier" content throughout the unit. Thus, the widespread use of a structure of this kind shows that, once again, in this respect as well, the evolution of the textbook since the late 1980s has continued to be not so much a process of wholesale "communicativization," but, rather, the grafting of a communicative "veneer" on to what has remained a basically language-focused stock. It seems likely that this has also occurred for reasons similar to those already discussed, i.e., primarily as a response to the wishes of end users, for whom an overall focus on language work, with a communicative gloss, appears to have remained the priority, despite the widespread criticisms of all forms of PPP in the professional literature in recent years.

However, it is also important to note the existence of exceptions to some aspects of a unit structure of this kind. For example, Crace & Wileman (2002) has a unit length which is much shorter than is typical. Likewise, the *Interchange* series (Richards et al., 2004), although also typically centering around a structural (or, in later parts, functional) area of language, and also possessing a common overall content theme, has a unit structure consisting of 10–12 "mini"-sections





(vs. the 4–5 longer sections typical of other textbooks), each of which usually occupies only half a page or less (vs. the whole page or more, typical of many other textbooks). Each unit contains two “cycles,” each comprising four core sections (three concerned with language presentation and practice, and one with language use), plus additional sections on, e.g., pronunciation, reading, speaking, etc. As a result, there is a proportionally greater amount of language focus than skills work in each unit.

In addition, each of the sections is relatively self-contained in contrast to the way interconnections will often occur across sections in other textbooks, e.g., in the cases of Activity 4 on p. 56 and Language Focus 2 on p. 62 in Cunningham & Moor (1999), pp. 46–8 and pp. 80–1 in Soars & Soars (2003), and so on. The former also consist of only one, two, or sometimes three activities, none of which is subdivided, once again in contrast to the layout of many other textbooks, in which there are usually 4–5 activities, often subdivided, in each section. Furthermore, texts are relatively short, even at higher levels, as are activity rubrics, giving only the main instructions (once again, in contradistinction to many other coursebooks).

The primary difference between the *Interchange* unit structure and the more typical one described earlier is that the former has a much less “all-embracing” feel to it. Because sections are relatively shorter and less complex, and more self-contained, it seems reasonable to assume that the learning focus is likely to be clearer and the teaching–learning process easier to manage, with both learners and teachers having greater potential freedom to use their preferred *modus operandi*, since they do not have to engage in so much detail and at such length with texts and activities of the kind used in many other textbooks. The very comprehensiveness of the more typical textbook unit model – with its extensive program of interlinked texts and activities – can thus also be seen as its main potential inherent weakness. Such a structure commits teachers and learners to adopting a particular type of learning–teaching methodology – one that appears to be less widespread and less well suited than other models, among non-native speaker teachers, in particular (see, e.g., Medgyes, 1994: ch. 3) – or requires them to modify or reject it and attempt to use the book in a way to which it may not readily lend itself.

There are also other grounds for asking whether the current predominant textbook unit structure serves the best interests of teachers and learners as well as it might. An important concern in both earlier, as well as more recent, critiques of textbooks (e.g., Atlan, 1995; Tomlinson et al., 2001) is the extent to which, on the one hand, the content of texts and the setting of activities tend to promote an Anglo-Saxon worldview, and on the other, restrict the opportunities for learners to learn by using the context of their own lives. Shorter texts with fewer activities directly related to their content, in the manner of books such as *Interchange*, can, on the face of it, lessen the amount of “investment” learners (and teachers) are required to make before reaching a point where the language can be used meaningfully for their own purposes. This would seem especially important to take into account in view of the increasing recognition in recent years that English is





nowadays most often learned for the purpose of communication with other non-native speakers, rather than with native speakers (see, e.g., McKay, 2002).

In other words, just as the communicative approach has gradually come to be seen as a culture-specific rather than context-free methodology, so, perhaps, it is time for some of the design principles underpinning many modern international textbooks to be similarly reappraised, so that they become more attuned to building on the potential that exists within the main styles of language learning and teaching that exist around the world, and cater better to the communication needs of an English as an International Language situation, rather than reflecting so strongly so much in terms of learning methods and content that can be regarded as specific to Western/Anglo-Saxon culture. Rossner's stricture in this respect (see above) can, therefore, still be seen as applying to the majority of cases.

Conclusion

The earlier parts of this chapter have attempted to document a number of the main developments in language teaching materials design over recent years. An historical perspective was adopted, in order to clarify the extent to which the current situation can be seen as a reflection of previous trends. The findings indicate that, first, by and large, in terms of the aspects analyzed, earlier tendencies have been reinforced, with something of an orthodoxy in textbook design having now emerged. Nevertheless, as has also been adduced, other well-established and widely used publications exist which serve to provide something of an alternative to, and potential critique of, the more prevalent model. In addition, in both cases, the analysis indicated that the ontogenesis of the majority of the developments appeared to be related to perceptions of audience need, and were largely in contradistinction to concurrent trends in academic conceptualization.

In terms of the prevailing academic viewpoint, thus, the extent to which the current situation can be seen as representing a set of "advances" in materials design is, of course, problematic. As was noted at the outset, there has been a tendency in academic circles to view advances in textbook design as a function of the extent to which materials reflect succeeding developments in applied linguistics. However, in addition to its "applied science" orientation, such a stance assumes that writers and publishers, in taking the opposite tack, would willingly pursue a course that is against their best interests. It also implies that teachers' and learners' views, when they differ from academic perspectives, are to be discounted (cf. Widdowson, 2003, pp. 130–1).

A sounder stance would, therefore, appear to be one which views academic ideas more as means of illuminating and critiquing textbook design features, rather than being regarded as their prime determiner. Equally, a more humane attitude to the perceptions of textbook users and the efforts of writers and publishers seems called for. As accounts such as Bell and Gower (1998), Richards (2001, ch. 7), and Mares (2003) indicate, arriving at what might constitute a satisfactory textbook design is a difficult, complex, and highly skilled process,



involving, in particular, the notion of a *compromise* between what might be theoretically desirable and what is practicable and appropriate in audience terms.

Alternative perspectives of this kind might involve, for example, viewing the notion of authenticity less as a wholesale prescription and more as a safeguard against too much artificiality in texts and activities. Similarly, the less linear, more process-oriented focus on form approach to the teaching of language structures, rather than being seen as a replacement for the PPP paradigm used in many current textbooks, can instead be viewed more productively as a way of raising awareness of the limitations of a language teaching approach which is too segmentary and deterministic; and so on.

Such a realignment of attitudes might also desirably underpin a far larger program of empirical enquiry in applied linguistics into textbook design than has occurred hitherto. For example, very little academic research appears to have been done on attempting to establish what learners and teachers in various situations actually think about competing textbook designs, in terms of the various features which have formed the main focus of the analysis in earlier parts of this chapter. Equally, a larger number of studies of the kind conducted by Hutchinson (1996), into actual textbook use, would be a very useful source of further data for informing optimization of their design. And, of course, third-person accounts of the textbook design process itself would be likely to increase understanding in the area. In such ways, it is to be hoped, both a better basis for determining what might constitute advances in materials design, as well as enhanced means of enabling them to occur, might be achieved.

NOTE

- 1 At the same time, the later C-R exercises adopt an inductive approach, a trend which has become widespread in other modern textbooks as well.

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