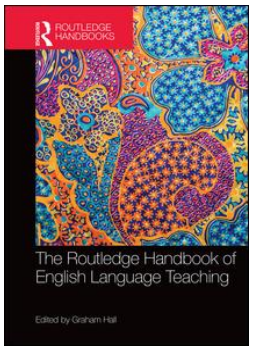

The Routledge Handbook of English Language Teaching

Graham Hall

ELT materials

Publication details
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315676203.ch7
John Gray
Published online on: 24 May 2016

7

ELT materials

Claims, critiques and controversies

John Gray

Introduction

Although materials have been defined very broadly in the ELT literature as consisting of more or less "anything which presents or informs about the language being learned" (Tomlinson, 1998: xi; see also McGrath, 2002), three main types have been identified. The most significant and widely disseminated type consists of *published materials*, which includes an ever growing array of items such as textbooks, ancillary audio-visual accompaniments, workbooks, learner dictionaries, guided readers, online courses and online supplements to traditional textbook-based courses. Increasingly, online resources comprise interactive white board activities and programmes (apps) designed to run on mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets. A second type is made up of so-called *authentic materials,* consisting of newspapers, magazines, songs and all other content which was not designed for pedagogical use but which is brought into classrooms by teachers. Finally, there are *teacher-made materials*, which comprise the wide range of sources of input or practice material which teachers design themselves and use to supplement or to replace existing resources. Regardless of type, materials have consistently been accorded a key role in the literature of "pinning down the procedures of the classroom" and imposing structure on the complexities of second language teaching and learning (Hutchinson and Torres, 1994: 319). The focus of this chapter is on published materials, given their enduring centrality in classrooms around the world as purveyors of thematic content, syllabus and curriculum (particularly in the case of state school education, where specific values may have to be imparted) and as realisations of method and sources of examination preparation and practice.

To date, the most common type of published material has been the textbook, also known in the literature as the 'coursebook', a term which refers to the fact that specific courses taking students through a series of pre-determined levels tend to consist of several books. Despite a considerable amount of discussion about the move towards postmethod pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2001; see also Hall, this volume, ch. 15), in which it might be expected that textbooks would play a less central role, scholars such as Akbari (2008: 647) have argued convincingly that "the concept of method has not been replaced by the concept of postmethod but rather by an era of textbook-defined practice". However, as the UK Publishers Association (2014: 53) points out, the concept of the textbook in ELT is undergoing significant change in the early twenty-first

century, as "core sales are now derived not only from course books and reference books, but also more modular, flexible, blended and online solutions". Examples are the many online courses whose software profiles students in terms of level, tracks their progress and offers what is referred to as 'adaptive' or 'personalised' learning. Although these 'solutions' are currently being actively promoted by publishers globally, the textbook (for the time being) retains its centrality – although the form in which it is delivered is becoming increasingly diversified (see Gruba, Hinkelman and Cárdenas-Claros, this volume, for further discussion in the context of blended learning and the flipped classroom).

Before going any further, it should be noted that European and North American publishers exercise a powerful influence on ELT publishing globally. Although local publishers in many parts of the world *do* produce materials for their own markets, in some settings they are not always able to compete with global competitors – particularly when it comes to the introduction of specific methods such as communicative language teaching (CLT; see Thornbury, this volume) or task-based learning (see Van den Branden, this volume). Kumaravadivelu (2016) explains how educational reform aimed at accelerating the move towards CLT in China in 2001 did little for local publishing houses. Despite the decentralisation of textbook production and local publishers being authorised by the authorities to produce suitable materials for the change in policy, Kumaravadivelu (2016: 74–75) notes that, with few exceptions, ELT textbooks:

> continue to be produced by center-based publishing industries or their subsidiaries located in China. In other words, the official policy of decentralization of the textbook market has not resulted in the devolution of power and authority to the peripheral ELT community. The dominating agency of the center-based publishing industry is too powerful to overcome.

As will be suggested below, this appears to be a process which is likely to continue, if not intensify. This chapter proceeds by outlining briefly the case that has been made for the use of published materials in ELT and some of the arguments traditionally put forward against them. I then consider developments in materials research before focusing in greater detail on key areas of dispute and debate which surround materials. Finally, I consider the future directions of published materials and the implications and challenges these are likely to presuppose for English language teachers.

Published materials: for and against

The most common arguments proposed in favour of published materials are that they are a source of linguistic and thematic input for teachers, who are thus spared the time and effort of having to produce such content themselves; that they are increasingly designed to align with syllabuses such as the evermore globally disseminated Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which they structure for both teachers and students; that they prepare students to take the proliferation of high-stakes international tests, as well as tests which are country-specific; that they provide students with opportunities for independent learning (by providing, in some cases, grammar summaries, self-check exercises and learner training activities); and that, when accompanied by a teacher's manual, they provide novice teachers with on-the-job training (McGrath, 2002; Richards, 2014). In addition, it has been suggested that they frequently contain information about the target culture (Harmer, 2001) – selective and problematic though this has been shown to be (Gray, 2010a; see also Kramsch and Zhu, this volume, for further discussion of the potentially contentious notion of 'culture') – and that they are particularly useful

for managing and effecting change in education sectors globally, where change (in the sense of curriculum renewal or implementation of new teaching methods or approaches to learning) has become endemic (Hutchinson and Torres, 1994).

Despite these claims, published materials – and textbooks in particular – have attracted a considerable amount of censure. Brumfit (1980: 30) famously argued that while textbooks (specifically those aimed at the global market) did have the potential to help teachers, "many of them don't . . . and masses of rubbish is skilfully marketed". He continued, drawing attention to what would become two of the most enduring charges levelled against them – their capacity to deskill teachers (Littlejohn, 1992) and their problematic status as educational tools which are also commodities whose "prime function [is] to earn their producers a living" (Apple, 1985: 149; see also Gray, 2013a). Deskilling refers to the way in which many such materials position teachers as mere deliverers of the content they contain rather than as decision makers who select, reject and modify content on the basis of specific local requirements. At the same time, it has been suggested that textbooks (when not produced locally) can be methodologically and culturally inappropriate – for example, failing to recognise that certain 'communicative' activities may be at odds with local educational culture or that the focus on consumerism often found in UK-produced textbooks for the global market may be alien to the students (Appleby, 2010; see also Holliday, this volume).

However, most criticism of published materials has been directed at the representational practices governing their production – on the one hand, the representation of language for pedagogical purposes and the inaccuracies and omissions this frequently entails (McCarthy and Carter, 1995; Wajnryb, 1996; Roberts and Cooke, 2009; Angouri, 2010); on the other hand, the representation of the world and the *mis*representation and/or erasure of specific categories of people and the consequences this may have for students (Gray, 2013b; Gray and Block, 2014; Chun, 2016). These issues are dealt with at some length in sections below.

Although many of these scholars are critical of the form published materials currently take, they are not necessarily against the idea of published materials *per se*. One critic who *is* against their centrality in teaching, however, is Thornbury (2000, 2001, 2013) who argues that languages are best learned through a materials-light pedagogy of scaffolded talk in which students experience language *use* (i.e. language deployed with communicative intent), as distinct from the study of language *usage* (i.e. language understood in terms of grammatical rules) of the kind found in published materials. From this perspective, textbooks and their inevitable attempts to pre-package learning represent an interference in a process which is understood as essentially experiential and "contingent on the concerns, interests, desires and needs of the user" (Thornbury, 2001: 11) – and he argues that language learning needs to remain so, if the conditions for learning are to be optimised.

However, persuasive as many have found his case to be, published materials look set to remain part of ELT for the foreseeable future. There are a number of reasons for this. On the one hand, instructed second language learning in most parts of the world is an activity of concern to ministries of education and testing bodies of various kinds, for whom pre-stated and measurable learning outcomes are considered essential. In such conditions, published materials continue to be seen as the most effective tools for guaranteeing that these outcomes are met – problematic though the implied cause-and-effect association between materials (if not teaching itself) and learning outcomes might be. On the other hand, as Akbari (2008: 646–647) has indicated, the material lives of many teachers are often difficult, and thus such artefacts, for all their shortcomings, are welcome, arguing that:

> Teachers in many contexts are not different from factory workers in terms of their working hours; in many countries, a typical language teacher works for 8 hours per day, 5 or even 6

> days per week. . . . Textbooks now take care of all the details of classroom life, and most of them come with teacher guides that include achievement tests and even all the examples teachers need in their classes.

In such circumstances, published materials assume a centrality in teaching – even in settings where the teachers who use them may be critical of aspects of content. Indeed, it could be argued that one of the reasons published materials have proved so enduring is that most teachers are neither trained nor (crucially) paid to develop alternatives.

Developments in materials research

A focus on micro and macro issues

Surveying the development of research into ELT materials at the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, Tomlinson (2012) noted that despite their centrality in instructed second language learning, it was surprising how little attention published materials had received traditionally in the applied linguistics literature – a situation he saw as having changed significantly in the mid-1990s. His own edited volume (Tomlinson, 1998) was significant in this change, and his subsequent work (e.g. Tomlinson, 2003, 2008, 2012), coupled with the appearance of a raft of books (mostly edited volumes) and academic papers (e.g. Chun, 2009, 2016; Gray, 2010a, 2010b, 2013c; Harwood, 2010, 2014; Mishan and Chambers, 2010; Littlejohn, 2012; Garton and Graves, 2014), are testament to the current vitality of research into ELT materials.

As this area of research has grown, two main interrelated tendencies have become noticeable in the literature – on the one hand, those involved in researching ELT materials are increasingly reflective about the nature of the field in which they work, and on the other, there is evidence of greater interdisciplinarity in the approach to research being carried out. With regard to the former tendency, one of the most commonly deployed terms in the growing literature is 'materials development', which is used by Tomlinson (2012: 143–144) as the superordinate term for *all* research in the area:

> 'Materials development' refers to all the processes made use of by practitioners who produce and/or use materials for language learning, including materials evaluation, their adaptation, design, production, exploitation and research.

Clearly this covers a wide range of very different activities, and, indeed, Tomlinson (2012), following Littlejohn (1992), points out that *materials evaluation* (a normative activity which considers how materials *should* be) and *materials analysis* (a descriptive and hermeneutical activity concerned with how materials *are* and why) are distinct activities. For this reason Gray (2013a: 13), whose work has focused mainly on materials analysis, suggests that:

> materials analysis, precisely because it is focused on content (including the ways in which content comes into being and the ways in which it is used in classrooms), is best understood as an activity which does not take place under the umbrella of materials development. While the aim of materials development is the (immediate) production of materials for use in specific classrooms, analysis tends to be more concerned with identifying and interpreting actually existing content (whether contemporary or historical). . . . From this perspective *materials research* might be a more appropriate superordinate, consisting of materials development on the one hand and materials analysis on the other.

This case for an enhanced role for ELT materials analysis is in line with the established tradition of (largely textbook) analysis in mainstream education, in which macro socio-historical issues are accorded the same attention as micro issues of design, evaluation and adaptation (e.g. Anyon, 1981; Apple, 1985; Apple and Christian-Smith, 1991; Provenzo et al., 2011). In a not dissimilar vein, Garton and Graves (2014: x) argue that research into ELT materials needs to be broadly based, pointing out that "[i]f we narrow our view of materials to embrace only issues of design, evaluation, and application, we obscure their indexical significance", by which they mean the political and ideological systems within which they are located. Similarly, Littlejohn (2012: 285) makes the case for consideration of the social and historical context of materials production:

> Materials production, in this view, can be seen as potentially resonating in tune with social forces far beyond language teaching itself, and far beyond the immediate discussions of language teaching professionals, even though, to borrow Marx's words, materials writers may imagine that such discussions form the real motives and starting point of their activity.

These concerns with indexicality and social structures also relate to the second tendency noticeable in the literature, namely the above-mentioned increase in interdisciplinary perspectives, particularly in the area of materials analysis. The move towards greater attention being paid to materials in applied linguistics from the mid-1990s onwards can be related to developments in the field more generally. During this period, Holliday (1996), Rampton (1997) and Edge and Richards (1998) made the case for much greater interdisciplinarity in the field. For all of them, this entailed a broadening of the scope of applied linguistics to encompass a much fuller intellectual engagement with the social sciences. Holliday (1996: 235) argued the need for those involved specifically in ELT research to develop a *sociological imagination* (a term borrowed from the sociologist C. Wright Mills), which he took to mean "the ability to locate oneself and one's actions critically within a wider community or world scenario". In fact, a number of scholars had already begun to draw attention to the need to consider ELT critically from a more macro social perspective than had hitherto been the case (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994), and several had identified the centrality of materials analysis in this endeavour (Porreca, 1984; Auerbach and Burgess, 1985; Dendrinos, 1992; Littlejohn, 1992). In the long run, what this has meant is that the broader systems of relations within which published materials are imbricated – and specifically the political, commercial and ideological dimensions of these relations – have begun to assume greater significance in the literature.

Interdisciplinarity and academic rigour

This change of emphasis can be seen as a shift from a consideration of ELT materials exclusively as *curriculum artefacts* (in which the concern is with issues such as syllabus and methodology) to one in which they are also seen as *cultural artefacts* (in which the focus is on the meanings they seek to create for teachers and students, and the conditions of their production, circulation and consumption). Thus materials research currently reveals a variety of disciplinary influences which include cultural and media studies (Gray, 2010a; Harwood, 2014), sociology (Littlejohn, 2012) and theoretical perspectives derived from postmodernism (Kullman, 2003, 2013), Marxism (Gray and Block, 2014) and critical pedagogy (Thornbury, 2013; Chun, 2016).

At the same time, Harwood (2010, 2014) argues that while there has been a considerable amount of very useful qualitative analysis of textbook content, some research reveals the need for greater rigour, particularly with regard to coding procedures (such as rigorously determining

categories for counting and analysis) and reliability checks (such as inter-rater reliability tests). He gives examples of two studies from the field of education which looked at mathematics textbooks and those for the teaching of L1 reading from which, it is suggested, ELT research could benefit (Valencia et al., 2006; Drake and Sherin, 2009). Both were conducted over several years, both were rigorously triangulated in terms of research design, and both consisted of sizeable data bases consisting of hours of classroom observation and multiple interviews with the teachers involved. In line with Tomlinson (2012), Harwood argues that it is to the detriment of research into ELT materials that no such longitudinal studies exist in our own field. Similarly, Gray (2013a) has drawn attention to the work of the Georg Eckert Institute (GEI) as an example of an orientation to materials research from which there is much to be learned. This materials research centre was established in Germany in 1975 and is described on the GEI website as being dedicated to 'research into school textbooks', in which "structures of knowledge and models of identities conveyed via state education", along with "[c]onstructions of the self and the other, processes of cultural translation, and practices of memory in the context of educational media" are key areas of investigation (www.gei.de). The GEI has been influential in carrying out extensive historical and contemporary textbook research in a range of international settings, as well as initiating in 2012 a major study of digital materials in the German state school system. The *UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision* (Pingel, 2009), which was written in conjunction with the GEI, argues the case for a socio-political perspective on materials analysis and provides clear methodological guidelines for approaches to textbook research. That such work – in addition to the work of a wide range of scholars from across the social sciences – is now being cited increasingly in the ELT materials literature could be seen as indicative of the emergence of a more sociological imagination on the part of materials researchers.

Key areas of dispute and debate

While the field of materials research may be said to be entering a period of maturity, a number of areas of dispute and debate surrounding materials themselves have proved enduring. As suggested earlier, these revolve around the representation of language for pedagogical purposes and the representation of the world and its inhabitants.

Representation of language

The issue of *authenticity* is central to ongoing discussions of ELT materials (McGrath, 2002; Waters, 2009; Harwood, 2010; Richards, 2014). Traditionally, *authentic language* referred to the kind of language found in what were called authentic texts – i.e. those which were not produced for pedagogical purposes but for audiences of so-called native speakers or highly proficient second language users. The rationale for the privileging of such language and such texts (particularly in CLT) was that exposure to language being used with communicative (as opposed to pedagogical) intent was held to give students "a taste of the real world" and served to prepare them "for that real world" (McGrath, 2002: 23) – in ways which exposure to contrived and simplified texts produced by materials writers did not.

From the late 1980s onwards, authenticity was also invoked in the case for a more corpus-based approach to the description of language in which attested examples of language-in-use were seen as providing more accurate models than those normally found in pedagogical grammar (Willis, 1990; see also Frankenberg-Garcia, this volume). The proliferation of various kinds of corpora (e.g. written English, spoken English, academic English, etc.) provided information

about frequency and collocation, and also showed that much of what speakers and writers produced was pre-packaged and heavily reliant on fixed and semi-fixed chunks of language. In addition, corpora of spoken English (Carter and McCarthy, 1995; McCarthy and Carter, 1995) revealed that informal British speech was characterised by pervasive ellipsis (omissions as in 'Having a lovely time'), the use of vague language (expressions such as 'kind of', 'Where's that thing for propping the door open?'), reinforcement tags ('Nice drink, that'), varieties of syntactic 'dislocation' whereby elements within an utterance could be placed outside clause boundaries for greater emphasis ('They went to Greece, Mel and Debra, just to get away from it all') – to say nothing of false starts, overlaps, incomplete utterances and other disfluencies. Corpus studies also showed that many of the 'rules' of pedagogical grammar as described in published materials were not always confirmed, while additionally revealing that particular functions of certain grammatical forms were entirely absent (McCarthy and Carter, 1995).

Scholars such as Cook (1998), while recognising that corpus findings did have pedagogical implications, were quick to point out that new descriptions of language did not automatically translate into prescriptions for teaching. Given that ELT takes place in such diverse settings, not all students can be said to have the same needs or require access to the same kinds of English (see also Seargeant, this volume). For example, the idiomaticity of spoken British English may be relevant to migrants to the UK and those planning on studying there, but may be of less use to students whose needs are more focused on academic writing, those who may wish to learn North American English, or those living in countries where English is an established second language with its own local standard. And, indeed, Carter and McCarthy (1995) recognise that corpora need to chosen carefully if students, teachers and materials writers are to benefit from the descriptions they provide.

However, despite the impact of the corpus revolution in descriptive linguistics, corpora have made a limited impression on published materials such as textbooks (although they have impacted significantly on dictionaries and grammars). This is partly as a result of opinion being divided over the value of so-called authentic language in ELT generally (Waters, 2009; Tomlinson, 2012), with many scholars and teachers taking the view that such language may be of limited value and culturally too remote to be accessible to students and teachers, many of whom are L2 speakers, but also because contrived samples of language in which linguistic items can be artificially repeated for purposes of salience may be considered more useful from the perspective of learning. The limited impact of corpora can also be related to the lack of uptake of the first corpus-based course – the *Collins COBUILD English Course* (Willis and Willis, 1988). This course was based entirely on a lexical syllabus consisting of individual words selected on the basis of frequency, along with a high proportion of lexical chunks and an eschewal of what might be called traditional grammar. A product of the early days of the corpus revolution, the course simply proved too unfamiliar for many teachers.

Several years later, and keen to sound less corpus-driven, materials writers Gairns and Redman (2006) described an alternative approach. Their *Natural English* course is based on an initial analysis of a corpus of English language students' talk (which helped them determine what they felt students at various levels needed) and information derived from the British National Corpus. Their approach to the vexatious issue of the relevance of the kind of idiomaticity often found in corpora containing spoken data was clearly informed by the view that not all corpus descriptions were appropriate for pedagogy:

> We have, therefore, tried to focus on language which is used naturally by native speakers or proficient speakers of the language, but also sounds natural when used by L2 learners. So, at this elementary level for example, we want learners to use high-frequency and relatively

> informal ways of thanking people such as *thanks* and *thanks a lot*; but we have not introduced the more colloquial phrases such as *cheers* or *ta*.
>
> *(Gairns and Redman, 2006: 6)*

Although somewhat vague as to what sounding 'natural' actually means, their caution regarding 'more colloquial phrases' resonates with the views of teachers interviewed by Gray (2010a). These teachers took the view that when English was being learned as an international language, so-called native speaker idiomaticity was not a high priority. A similarly judicious approach to corpus data has been adopted in the *Touchstone* course (McCarthy et al., 2005). This is marketed as being corpus-*informed* – as opposed to corpus-*based* – and the course website states that it *draws on* (rather than *is driven by*) "extensive research into the corpus of North American English in the Cambridge English Corpus – a large database of everyday conversations and texts that show how people actually use English"(www.cambridge.org).

Such innovations aside, Waters (2009) points out that contrived texts and contrived samples of language continue to predominate in most published materials. While the case for such language has been convincingly made (Ellis, 1999), it has also been argued that greater use of corpora would provide students with the opportunity for exposure to naturally occurring language which many actually need (McCarthy and McCarten, 2010; see also Thornbury, 2005). A number of areas – all related to spoken discourse – have been identified as worthy of attention. Gray (2010a) has argued that despite the fact that English is being used increasingly as an international language, there are few instances in the listening components of published materials of students being exposed to authentic samples of English from Outer and Expanding Circle countries (Kachru, 1985; also Seargeant, this volume). He contends (in line with interview data he collected from teachers working in Spain, most of whom saw themselves as teaching English as an international language) that if students are to be empowered to decode the speech of those who do not speak with General American accents, Received Pronunciation (RP) or modified RP, the listening components of published materials might usefully include more diverse samples of naturally occurring speech than is currently the case. On the same theme of student empowerment, Wajnryb (1996) argued that the contrived dialogues found in textbooks being used in Australia were of little use in preparing students for the kind of interactions they were likely to have to engage in outside school. Her study revealed an absence of any consideration of the role of context in affecting linguistic choice. There was no attention to pragmatic meaning – for example, the way in which a statement such as 'It's hot in here' might actually be an indirect request to have a window opened. There was also a focus on interactions which were typified by symmetrical power relations which were devoid of all threats to face (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Threats to face, or face-threatening acts, most frequently refer to requests or commands which are generally worded in such a way so as to signal the speaker's awareness of the degree of imposition and the speaker's wish to show respect for the addressee's sense of self-worth – for example, 'I can see you're busy at the moment, but I just wanted to remind you I need those figures by 4 o'clock.' These charges can still be made of most published materials.

Other studies have compared the representation of particular speech events such as job interviews, doctor-patient consultations (Roberts and Cooke, 2009) and business meetings (Angouri, 2010) found in published materials with ethnographically gathered data. These have shown that the pedagogical representations are often seriously misleading – not only in terms of language used but also in terms of the way in which such events are structured. While recognising that ethnographic data, like corpus data, do not translate straightforwardly into recipes for teaching, Roberts and Cooke make a very plausible case for published materials being much more research-informed in this regard.

Representation of the world

A second area of concern in the materials literature is with the representation of the world and the people in it. This work has focused mainly on the cultural and ideological aspects of materials produced in Inner Circle countries (Kachru, 1985) aimed at the global market. Critics argue that, since the 1980s, celebratory discourses of individualism, entrepreneurialism and free-market capitalism have been, and continue to be, repeatedly deployed in these materials in ways which give cause for concern (e.g. Dendrinos, 1992; Pegrum, 2004; Chun, 2009; Gray, 2010a, 2010b, 2012). Referred to by publishers in interviews (Gray, 2010a) as 'aspirational content', the assumption appears to be that the repeated association of English with spectacular personal and professional success, effortless global mobility and the power to consume is what motivates students to learn (although there are no studies to support this). At the same time, such materials are shown to be typified by the progressive erasure of working-class characters, themes and concerns from the late 1980s onwards (Gray and Block, 2014) and a relentlessly heteronormative view of human relations in which lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) characters are rendered invisible (Nelson, 2006; Gray, 2013b). Such practices, these writers suggest, have potentially negative consequences not only for those working-class and LGBT students who are denied recognition (see also Liddicoat, 2009) but for all students who are thereby presented with a skewed view of the world and who are simultaneously denied a vocabulary for talking about a reality in which social classes (and the inequalities they imply) and sexual minorities exist. Other scholars have identified the deployment of culturally and racially essentialised discourses in accounts of immigrant success stories in materials designed to teach English for academic purposes (Chun, 2016). Given the highly competitive nature of ELT publishing, it has been argued that such representational practices are in most cases commercially motivated – whether in terms of perceived market sensitivity regarding supposedly 'inappropriate' content or ascribed student aspiration (Gray, 2010a). And it is to the commercial aspect of published materials that the final section of this chapter now turns, given that this is likely to impact significantly on future developments.

Future developments

Across much of the world, education in the twenty-first century is increasingly being subjected to commercial forces under the aegis of neoliberal economic policies, which seek to extend the reach of the market. In such an environment, multinational companies (memorably described by Ball (2012) as 'edu-businesses') providing a range of 'educational services' and 'solutions' have come to occupy an important role, not only in the private sector but also in increasingly privatised public sectors. Ball cites Pearson, the world's largest education company, as emblematic of one such edu-business, which produces not only ELT materials and tests for the global market but also provides a raft of additional services. He reports that, in 2011, Pearson signed a new memorandum of understanding with the Chinese Ministry of Education and the General Administration of Press and Publishing (the agency responsible for regulating all print and digital media), which saw the company become involved in teacher training, translation and Chinese and English language teaching and assessment. Such involvement, Ball argues, means that edu-businesses (and Pearson is only one of many) are often powerfully positioned "*to agitate for policies which offer further opportunities for profit*" (Ball, 2012: 126) (emphasis added).

At the same time, as part of Pearson's declared aim to become "the world's pre-eminent provider of English language learning content, technology and services" (Pearson website, in Ball, 2012: 126), the company acquired the Wall Street Institute chain of language schools in 2009 and the Global Education and Technology Group (specialising in ELT testing) in 2011. The UK

Publishers Association (2014: 53) commented on the "striking case of Pearson" as indicative of the transformation of the ELT industry "into vertical integration, from curriculum design and other consultancy services through the traditional materials publishing to high-stakes assessment and continuing professional development for teachers". The Wall Street Institute has its own 'method' and, although students do have periodic access to a teacher in what are known as 'encounters' (rather than lessons), content is delivered digitally and learning takes place almost entirely online. As suggested earlier, 'solutions' to teaching and learning in which digital materials figure prominently are currently being promoted by most ELT publishers – partly because such materials are cheaper to produce and partly because of the opportunities they provide to further structure learning. In recent years, the UK Publishers Association (2010, 2014) has drawn attention to the commercial challenge posed by the increased costs of print production, increased storage and transportation costs, the fluctuating price of paper, the difficult economic situation in southern Europe and political turmoil in many parts of the world. For ELT publishers, it states, "this means continuing the push into digital" with the prospect of offering "complete solutions" (The Publishers Association, 2014: 54). Complete solutions refer not only to the learning management systems (LMS) which allow for the delivery of digital content but increasingly to *adaptive learning* – that is the ability of the LMS being used to profile the software user in ways which theoretically allow for more personalised learning. At the same time, adaptive learning is linked to assessment in ways that could be seen to be advantageous to those edu-businesses which are also test providers:

> It is more important than ever that publishers get close to their end users – the learners and teachers. This is the age of 'big data', which is nowhere more important than in education, where individualised learning can be possible only with better data about learning through continuous assessment. This data feeds back into more effective learning materials and better learning outcomes for students. In line with these trends and market demands, publishers are investing directly in and combining forces with assessment bodies, linking learning to assessment, providing formative and learning-orientated assessment for personalised learning, and tapping into the emergent technologies of adaptive learning.
>
> *(The Publishers Association, 2014: 54)*

Despite the case for the affordances of technologically mediated teaching and learning materials being addressed in the literature (e.g. Rahman and Cotter, 2014), a number of critical voices have been raised with regard to the ways in which this is happening and the interests which are ultimately being served (Selwyn, 2014). Significantly, a major systematic review of computer-assisted language learning concluded that an "exhaustive search of the literature on technology in primary and secondary teaching of English as an L2 has not yielded clear or sufficient evidence of its effectiveness", and added that this was "of some concern given the very large amounts of funding that are being made available worldwide for the purpose of encouraging its use for whatever reasons, political, economic or pedagogical" (Macaro et al., 2012: 24). Furthermore, as materials writer Kerr (2014) has pointed out, "[w]hat LMSs, adaptive software and most apps do best is the teaching of language knowledge (grammar and vocabulary), not the provision of opportunities for communicative practice." Ironically, as Kerr explains, such moves towards adaptive learning are being carried out (in conjunction with major publishing companies) in settings (he gives the example of Turkey) where the government's aim is precisely to make teaching more communicative. It could be argued that in such a scenario, the deskilling of teachers referred to by Littlejohn (1992) with regard to print materials is currently entering a new phase. The classroom event, traditionally seen as a

co-production between teacher and students in interaction with materials (Allwright, 1981), is potentially being reconfigured as a co-production of students and personalised digital materials, to the near exclusion of teachers.

Conclusion

By way of summary, we can say that ELT materials research is enjoying a period of great vitality and, in common with developments in applied linguistics more generally, has assumed an increasingly interdisciplinary character. Meanwhile, in a globalised world where a plurality of varieties of English are used and are constantly evolving, the kind of English contained in published materials has become a matter of debate and looks set to remain so. At the same time, issues related to the representation of the world in published materials have been put firmly on the agenda, as indeed has the political economy of materials production, dissemination and consumption. More research is now needed in the area of materials-in-use and the ways in which inscribed meanings are recontextualised in classroom settings. Such work is necessary to complement the recent wave of textbook analyses, which has shed much needed light on the way materials currently are and the reasons for this. Against this backdrop of burgeoning research, published materials themselves are changing as new technologies are embraced by publishers. Such change tends to come with the promotional promise of enhanced learning – a claim which some have viewed with considerable scepticism. Certainly the implications of new technologies are likely to be central to debates about the role of published materials in ELT for decades to come.

Discussion questions

- What role, if any, should corpus descriptions of English play in materials design?
- What options do teachers have for dealing with ideological content and systematic omissions in published materials?
- Is it alarmist to suggest that adaptive learning 'solutions' have the potential to deskill teachers?
- Given the concerns and critiques of ELT materials outlined in this chapter, why do you think ELT textbooks continue to be so widely used in the profession?

Related topics

Appropriate methodology; Communicative language teaching in theory and practice; Corpora in ELT; Language and culture in ELT; Method, methods and methodology; Politics, power relationships and ELT; World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca.

Further reading

Littlejohn, A. (2012) 'Language teaching materials and the (very) big picture'. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 9/1. 283–297. (This paper locates ELT materials production firmly within the macro social and historical context.)

Macaro, E., Handley, Z. and Walter C. (2012) 'A systematic review of CALL in English as a second language: Focus on primary and secondary education'. *Language Teaching*, 45/1. 1–43. (A comprehensive overview of the use of technology in second language learning which identifies the lack of evidence for its effectiveness.)

Tomlinson, B. (2012) 'Materials development for language learning and teaching'. *Language Teaching*, 45/2. 143–179. (A comprehensive overview of the state of research into materials development and the ways in which it is likely to develop.)

References

Akbari, R. (2008) 'Postmethod discourse and practice'. *TESOL Quarterly*, 42/4. 641–652.

Allwright, R. (1981) 'What do we want teaching materials for?' *ELT Journal,* 36/1. 5–18.

Angouri, J. (2010) 'Using textbook and real-life data to teach turn-taking in business meetings', in N. Harwood (ed.) *English language teaching materials: Theory and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 373–394.

Anyon, J. (1981) 'Ideology and United States history books', in R. Dale, G. Esland, R. Fergusson and M. MacDonald (eds) *Education and the state: Politics, patriarchy and practice*. Basingstoke: The Falmer Press. 21–39.

Apple, M. W. (1985) 'The culture and commerce of the textbook'. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 17/2. 147–162.

Apple, M.W. and Christian-Smith, L. K (eds) (1991) *The politics of the textbook*. London: Routledge.

Appleby, R. (2010) *ELT, gender and international development myths of progress in a neocolonial world*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Auerbach, E. and Burgess, D. (1985) 'The hidden curriculum of survival ESL'. *TESOL Quarterly*, 19/3. 475–495.

Ball, S. J. (2012) *Global Education Inc.: New policy networks and the neo-liberal imaginary*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Brown, P. and Levinson, S. C. (1987) *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brumfit, C. (1980) 'Seven last slogans'. *Modern English Teacher*, 7/1. 30–31.

Carter, R. and McCarthy, M. (1995) 'Grammar and the spoken language'. *Applied Linguistics*, 16/2. 141–158.

Chun, C. (2009) 'Contesting neoliberal discourses in EAP: Critical praxis in an IEP classroom'. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes,* 8. 111–120.

Chun, C. (2016) 'Addressing racialized multicultural discourses in an EAP textbook: Working toward a critical pedagogies approach'. *TESOL Quarterly*. 50/1. 109–131.

Cook, G. (1998) 'The uses of reality – a reply to Ronald Carter'. *ELT Journal*, 52/1. 57–63.

Dendrinos, B. (1992) *The EFL textbook and ideology*. Athens: N.C. Grivas.

Drake, C. and Sherin, M. G. (2009) 'Developing curriculum vision and trust: Changes in teachers' curriculum strategies', in J. T. Remilliard (ed.) *Mathematics teachers at work: Connecting curriculum materials and classroom instruction*. New York: Routledge. 321–337.

Edge, J. and Richards, K. (1998) 'May I see your warrant, please?: Justifying outcomes in qualitative research'. *Applied Linguistics*, 19/3. 334–356.

Ellis, R. (1999) 'Input-based approaches to teaching grammar: A review of classroom-oriented research'. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 19. 64–80.

Gairns, R. and Redman, S. (2006) *Natural English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Garton, S. and Graves, K. (eds) (2014) *International perspectives on materials in ELT.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gray, J. (2010a) *The construction of English: Culture, consumerism and promotion in the ELT global coursebook*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gray, J. (2010b) 'The branding of English and the culture of the new capitalism: Representations of the world of work in English language textbooks'. *Applied Linguistics*, 31/5. 714–733.

Gray, J. (2012) 'Neoliberalism, celebrity and "aspirational content" in English language teaching textbooks for the global market', in D. Block, J. Gray and M. Holborow (eds) *Neoliberalism and applied linguistics*. London: Routledge. 86–113.

Gray, J. (2013a) 'Introduction', in Gray, J. (ed.) *Critical perspectives on language teaching materials*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 1–16.

Gray, J. (2013b) 'LGBT invisibility and heteronormativity in ELT materials', in J. Gray (ed.) *Critical perspectives on language teaching materials*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 40–63.

Gray, J. (ed.) (2013c) *Critical perspectives on language teaching materials*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gray, J. and Block, D. (2014) 'All middle class now? Evolving representations of the working class in the neoliberal era: The case of ELT textbooks', in N. Harwood (ed.) *English language teaching textbooks: Content, consumption, production*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 45–71.

Harmer, J. (2001) 'Coursebooks: A human, cultural and linguistic disaster?' *Modern English Teacher*, 10/3. 5–10.

Harwood, N. (ed.) (2010) *English language teaching materials: Theory and practice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Harwood, N. (ed.) (2014) *English language teaching textbooks: Content, consumption, production*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Holliday, A. (1996) 'Developing a sociological imagination: Expanding ethnography in international English language education'. *Applied Linguistics*, 17/2. 234–255.
Hutchinson, T. and Torres, E. (1994) 'The textbook as agent of change'. *ELT Journal*, 48/4. 315–328.
Kachru, B. (1985) 'Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the outer circle', in R. Quirk and H. G. Widdowson (eds) *English in the world: Teaching the language and the literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press/ British Council. 11–30.
Kerr, P. (2014) 'Adaptive learning markets: Talking Turkey'. [Adaptive Learning in ELT blog] Retrieved from https://adaptivelearninginelt.wordpress.com/2014/12/15/adaptive-learning-markets-talking-turkey/
Kullman, J. (2003) *The social construction of learner identity in the UK-published ELT coursebook*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Kent.
Kullman, J. (2013) 'Telling tales: Changing discourses of identity in the 'global' UK-published English language coursebook', in J. Gray (ed.) *Critical perspectives on language teaching materials.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 17–39.
Kumaravadivelu, B. (2001) 'Towards a postmethod pedagogy'. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35/4. 537–560.
Kumaravadivelu, B. (2016) 'The decolonial option in English teaching: Can the subaltern act?'. *TESOL Quarterly*, 50/1. 66–85.
Liddicoat, A. (2009) 'Sexual identity as linguistic failure: Trajectories of interaction in the heteronormative language classroom'. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 8. 191–202.
Littlejohn, A. (1992) *Why are ELT materials the way they are?* Unpublished PhD thesis. Lancaster University.
Littlejohn, A. (2012) 'Language teaching materials and the (very) big picture'. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 9/1. 283–297.
Macaro, E., Handley, Z. and Walter, C. (2012) 'A systematic review of CALL in English as a second language: Focus on primary and secondary education'. *Language Teaching*, 45/1. 1–43.
McCarthy, M. and Carter, R. (1995) 'Spoken grammar: What is it and how can we teach it?' *ELT Journal*, 49/3. 207–218.
McCarthy, M. and McCarten, J. (2010) 'Bridging the gap between corpus and course book: The case of conversation strategies', in F. Mishan and A. Chambers (eds) *Perspectives on language learning materials development*. Bern: Peter Lang. 11–32.
McCarthy, M., McCarten, J. and Sandiford, H. (2005) *Touchstone*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
McGrath, I. (2002) *Materials evaluation and design for language teaching.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Mishan, F. and Chambers, A. (eds) (2010) *Perspectives on language learning materials development*. Bern: Peter Lang.
Nelson, C. (2006) 'Queer inquiry in language education'. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*, 5/1. 1–9.
Pegrum, M. (2004) 'Selling English: Advertising and the discourses of ELT'. *English Today,* 20/1. 2–10.
Pennycook, A. (1994) *The cultural politics of English as an international language*. New York: Longman.
Phillipson, R. (1992) *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Pingel, F. (2009) *UNESCO guidebook on textbook research and textbook revision*. Paris/Braunschweig: UNESCO.
Porreca, K. (1984) 'Sexism in current ESL textbooks'. *TESOL Quarterly*, 18/4. 705–724.
Provenzo, E. F., Shaver, A. N. and Bello, M. (eds) (2011) *The textbook as discourse: Sociocultural dimensions of American schoolbooks*. London: Routledge.
Rahman, A. and Cotter, T. (2014) 'English language learning through mobile phones', in S. Garton and K. Graves (eds) *International perspectives on materials in ELT.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 159–177.
Rampton, B. (1997) 'Retuning in applied linguistics'. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 7/1. 3–25.
Richards, J. (2014) 'The ELT textbook', in S. Garton and K. Graves (eds) *International perspectives on materials in ELT.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 19–36.
Roberts, C. and Cooke, M. (2009) 'Authenticity in the adult ESOL classroom and beyond'. *TESOL Quarterly*, 43/4. 620–642.
Selwyn, N. (2014) *Distrusting educational technology: Critical questions for changing times*. Abingdon: Routledge.
The Publishers Association (2010) *PA statistics yearbook 2009*. London: The Publishers Association.
The Publishers Association (2014) *PA statistics yearbook 2013*. London: The Publishers Association.
Thornbury, S. (2000) 'A dogma for EFL'. *IATEFL Issues*, 153. 2.
Thornbury, S. (2001) 'Coursebooks: The roaring in the chimney'. *Modern English Teacher*, 10 (3): 11–13.
Thornbury, S. (2005) *Beyond the sentence: Introducing discourse analysis*. Oxford: Macmillan.

Thornbury, S. (2013) 'Resisting coursebooks', in J. Gray (ed.) *Critical perspectives on language teaching materials*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 204–223.
Tomlinson, B. (1998) *Materials development in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Tomlinson, B. (2003) *Developing materials for language teaching.* London: Continuum.
Tomlinson, B. (2008) *English language learning materials: A critical review*. London: Continuum.
Tomlinson, B. (2012) 'Materials development for language learning and teaching'. *Language Teaching*, 45/2. 143–179.
Valencia, S. W., Place, N. A., Martin, S. D. and Grossman, P. L. (2006) 'Curriculum materials for elementary reading: Shackles and scaffolds for four beginning teachers'. *The Elementary School Journal*, 107. 93–120.
Wajnryb, R. (1996) 'Death, taxes, and jeopardy: Systematic omissions in EFL texts, or life was never meant to be an adjacency pair'. ELICOS plenary delivered in Sydney, Australia.
Waters, A. (2009) 'Advances in materials design', in M. H. Long and C. J. Doughty (eds) *The handbook of language teaching*. Oxford: Blackwell. 311–326.
Willis, D. (1990) *The lexical syllabus*. London: Collins COBUILD.
Willis, J. and Willis, D. (1988) *Collins COBUILD English course.* London: Collins COBUILD.