Challenges and tensions in materials design for English for Academic Purposes

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- Why is it important to research EAP teaching materials?
- 3 types of EAP teaching materials research:
 - -Studies of materials CONTENT
 - -Studies of materials CONSUMPTION
 - -Studies of materials PRODUCTION
- Examples of content, consumption, and production EAP materials research
- Various challenges and tensions for EAP materials design: genre, critical pedagogy, and more...



- Because EAP teaching materials are such important teaching and learning aids
- EAP classroom textbook/materials will likely shape learners' beliefs about academic discourse—and so the materials' content should be unproblematic

Problematic messaging in EAP textbooks

- Some EAP textbooks gave sweeping and misleading advice to writers:
 - -Write your paper with third-person narration that avoids "I believe" or "It is my opinion." (Lester & Lester, 2002, p.155)
 - -The general academic style used all over the world is detached and passive. Unless there is a special reason personal pronouns are to be avoided. Never 'I showed by my research that...' but 'The research showed that...'. (Swetnam, 2000, p.84)

Corpus data shows this advice to be overgeneralized...

Why do we need to conduct research on teaching materials? (contd.)

- It's important to determine whether the materials in focus are pedagogically effective; the quality of textbook materials has been critiqued for decades (e.g., Conrad, 2004; Gray, 2010; Harwood, 2005, 2022; Lee, 2006; Rühlemann, 2009)
- But it's also important to focus on the challenges of writing EAP materials, and of how teachers and learners respond to the materials—which many of today's talks are about...



How can we classify the different types of research conducted on teaching materials? Using the CONTENT, CONSUMPTION, PRODUCTION classification: (1) Research conducted at the level of the handout or textbook page (content); (2) Research conducted by exploring how the materials are used by teachers and their learners (consumption); (3) Research conducted by researching the practices and norms of the textbook industry, or the

designed in-house (*production*). (See Harwood, 2014)

processes/problems associated with materials writing,

whether the materials are commercially produced or

Studies of EAP materials content

Research conducted at the level of the handout or textbook page

What materials include and exclude in terms of topic, linguistic information, and culture



- we need to know how accurate and appropriate the
 - > linguistic
 - > cultural
 - > pedagogical information
 - ...is in the book

Corpus-based studies

These studies evaluate EAP materials by assessing the closeness of fit (or more commonly lack of fit) between textbook language and the language of the academy in authentic spoken and written genre samples, as attested by corpora (e.g., Biber and Reppen, 2002; Conrad, 2004; Holmes, 1988; Lee, 2006; Miller, 2011; Mukundan and Khojasteh, 2011; Römer, 2005).

A corpus-based study of textbook content: Hyland (1994)

■ Hyland (1994) analysed how 22 EAP textbooks taught the **language of modality**, an important feature of academic discourse

■ The textbooks' treatment was found wanting: "the range of modal verbs addressed and the information provided on their use is inadequate [...] with information scattered, explanations inadequate, practice material limited, and alternatives to modal verbs omitted" (pp. 247, 250).

More EAP textbook failures: spoken discourse

Studies (Deroey, 2018; Flowerdew & Miller, 1997) comparing the language of authentic university lectures with EAP textbook lectures (which are normally scripted and inauthentic) have again found the textbooks wanting.



More EAP textbook failures: 2 examples

Flowerdew and Miller (1997):

Many features of authentic lectures missing from EAP textbook lectures, such as hesitations, false starts, and redundancies, rhetorical questions, checking of understanding, personalization, and expressions of empathy.

Deroey (2018):

Comparison of the signposting language featured in 25 EAP textbook lectures with 160 authentic lectures found most textbook lectures featured unnaturally slow delivery and overexplicit signposting; and were very short and scripted

Are EAP textbooks getting better, though?

- A few EAP textbooks such as *Academic Interactions* (Feak et al., 2009) **incorporate corpus transcripts**.
- However, as Chan (2017) argues, it will likely be a long time before textbooks of this type are common.

Meanwhile, textbook writers' lack of consultation of corpus data continues (Burton, 2012), and corpus-based textbooks like Feak et al. are the exceptions rather than the rule.

Other studies of textbook content: Focus on gender

Goyal & Rose (2020):

- Business English textbooks' treatment of gender over time (i.e., over the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd edition of the same book)
- 1st edition: Far more male (68) than female (27) images; 3rd edition: Difference between number of males and females non-significant.
- But analysis of the texts (as opposed to the images) showed continuing levels of female underrepresentation.

Other studies of textbook content: Focus on L1 vs. L2 interlocutors Si (2020):

- Si (2020) analyses the local editions of the Business English textbook *Market Leader Pre-Intermediate* produced for the Chinese market.
- Of the 138 L2 English speakers in the book, only four are Chinese, and all but a few L2 users are from Europe; thus the textbook 'represents a geographical imbalance in the representation of English users' (p.160), and fails to accurately portray the use of English (being predominantly among L2 rather than L1 speakers of English) in the business world.

Insights from studies of textbook content

It is disturbing to observe that the vast majority of content-focused studies reviewed find materials/textbooks wanting in some way.

Limitations of studies of materials CONTENT (1)

- Content analyses only focus on the materials on the page/handout, rather than examining how the materials are used in the classroom and received by teachers and learners
- Content studies tell us nothing about the adaptations teachers make to the materials; teachers' adaptations can be skilful or unskilful, making the materials more or less pedagogically effective than they were on the page
- Hence, to get a fuller, more valid sense of how effective materials are in situ, we need to study them in context. We can accomplish this by turning to studies of materials

CONSUMPTION

Limitations of studies of materials CONTENT (2)

Content studies tell us what is present or absent in materials, but are much less good at determining why this content looks the way it does. To answer the 'why?' question, we need to ask publishers and in-house materials writers for answers, turning to studies of materials PRODUCTION

Studies of EAP materials consumption

Research conducted by exploring how EAP teachers and learners use materials inside and outside the classroom

Consumption of a medical English textbook in a Saudi Arabian university

Menkabu and Harwood (2014):

- Investigated the English teachers' conceptualizations of, and adherence to, the prescribed textbook.
- Three principal factors were found to affect textbook use:
 - (1) the **lack of time** available to cover the materials in their entirety;
 - (2) a **high-stakes in-house exam** based upon textbook content; and
 - (3) some teachers' **lack of specialized medical knowledge**, leading to difficulties when students asked about meaning of specialist vocabulary

Menkabu & Harwood (2014) surfaces prominent tensions facing EAP practitioners

- EGAP vs. ESAP and teacher identity (participants had not received EAP teacher training; some teachers preferred to see themselves as general English rather than EAP teachers)
- Context-bound nature of EAP textbook use (teachers constrained by limited teaching time, high-stakes exam, lack of specialist knowledge)
- EAP practitioner-content lecturer collaboration (no contact or opportunity for teachers to liaise with medical specialists as they prepared/taught their classes)

EAP textbook consumption studies measuring learning gains

- Various EAP materials studies have measured the impact of their materials on learners, such as Corcoran (2022), Cotos et al. (2017), and Dong and Lu (2020)
- Dong and Lu familiarized their engineering students with Swales'
 Create A Research Space (CARS) model
- Students searched a corpus of engineering journal articles for specific moves/steps from the CARS model, identified language associated with the different moves, and wrote their own article introductions.
- Twenty nine of the thirty students agreed that the course's move/step exercises helped improve their writing skills, and most of the students' introductions successfully incorporated Swales' (1990) three moves into their texts.

Limitations of studies of EAP textbook CONSUMPTION

- Consumption studies provide us with much useful information about how teachers and learners use and view various types of materials.
- Nevertheless, like content studies, consumption studies cannot tell us why materials were designed in the way they are, or about the constraints associated with the materials writing process. Materials production studies duly give us insights into these aspects.

Studies of EAP materials **production**

Research conducted by researching the practices and norms of the textbook industry, or the ways in which EAP materials writers work and the types of exercises they prioritise in their worksheets or textbooks

Why production studies matter

These studies:

- reveal constraints placed upon textbook writers and publishers (e.g., by the context, by the lack of access to specialists/content classes)
- reveal questionable practices and requirements of publishers, materials writers, managers
- help explain why content and consumption studies continue to identify weaknesses and shortcomings in textbooks and EAP materials



- Textbook writers explain their rationale for designing materials in a certain way:
 - -Evans et al. (2010) explain how and why they designed **EAP reading exercises** the way they did;
 - -Stoller & Robinson (2014) explain how and why they wrote an EAP writing textbook for **chemistry students** the way they did; and
 - -Tribble (2010) explains how and why he adopted a genre-based approach to developing EAP materials to teach **writing**

An exemplary study of textbook production: Stoller & Robinson (1)

- Stoller and Robinson (2014) describes the process used to write their textbook Write Like A Chemist (Robinson et al. 2008).
- The process consisted of the following stages: (i) articulating priorities and principles; (ii) scaffolding the instructional approach; (iii) selecting target genres, compiling corpora with full-length text exemplars, and analysing them using tools from corpus linguistics and discourse, genre, and move analyses; (iv) converting analytical findings into instructional materials; (v) piloting and assessing materials; and (vi) using feedback to improve materials (p. 262).
- The authoring team featured both ESP and chemistry specialists, the latter advising on the appropriacy and accuracy of the textbook's disciplinary content, surfacing the theme of liaison.

An exemplary study of textbook production: Stoller & Robinson (2)

- Extensive piloting: Stoller and Robinson's materials were piloted for six years at the authors' home institution, and for an additional two years at 17 different US universities as the textbook was under development, involving 16 chemistry lecturers and 200 students.
- Other studies (Amrani, 2011; Bell and Gower, 2011; Singapore Wala, 2003; Yildiz & Harwood, 2023, 2024) speak of textbook authors being permitted little or no time to pilot. In contrast to this unhelpful industry norm, Stoller and Robinson's account underscores the necessity for piloting to deliver optimal results.

Another exemplary study of EAP textbook production: Grapin et al.

- Like Stoller and Robinson, Grapin et al.'s (2021) design process for school science textbooks in the US featured 'rigorous cycles of development, testing, and revision over a 4-year period' (p. 4; see also Lee et al., 2016; Llosa et al., 2016).
- As part of the field testing process, the materials were subjected to a large scale randomized trial over a complete school year in 66 different schools, involving 258 teachers.
- Methodological robustness was achieved by including a control group who used standard science textbooks.
- The experimental groups using Grapin et al.'s innovative materials achieved higher scores than learners in the control group using conventional textbooks.



- When writing their science textbook for use in US schools, Scott Grapin, Okhee Lee, and their co-researchers tried to enhance teachers' knowledge of science and teachers' pedagogy.
- In other words, the textbook was designed to enhance teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge.
- This textbook therefore was designed in the tradition of educative materials (see Davis et al., 2014, 2017, for more on educative materials).
- Lee et al. (2016) duly reports the beneficial effects upon the teachers' knowledge and instructional practices of using these educative materials.

Some pressing challenges and tensions associated with EAP materials development

Challenge/Tension 1: Genre-based pedagogy and EAP materials design



- The need to disassociate ourselves—and our colleagues and learners—from the false idea of genre pedagogy as a pedagogy of mindless copying and recipe-like straitjacketing
- Anti-genre thinking at the last BALEAP conference?
- We would do well to bear in mind the power of genre analysis and the power of genre-based teaching



 Genre analysis can help teachers understand and teach these target genres more effectively

Text analysis, move analysis, and the Teaching-Learning Cycle are three powerful pedagogical instantiations of genre theory which work particularly well in EAP contexts to demystify target genres

The power of genre pedagogy: its insights for students

The genre approach develops students' understanding of various aspects of writing and speaking

- •Grabe and Kaplan (1996) listed various aspects of writing students need to understand:
 - -The setting
 - -The purpose
 - -The content
 - -The intended audience/reader
 - -General expectations/conventions of the text
 - -Background knowledge necessary to understand the text
 - -Relationship between the text and other genres

The genre approach can help students understand all these aspects as well as the language, structure, organization, grammar, and vocabulary associated with spoken or written genres

The power of genre pedagogy: genre-based materials are data-driven

Hyland (2004) lists a number of strengths of the genre approach...

 Genre-based teaching systematically addresses texts and contexts

'...teaching materials are based on the ways language is actually used in particular writing contexts rather than on our general impressions of what happens. **Teaching, in other words, is data-driven rather than intuition-driven**' (Hyland, 2004: 12)

The power of genre pedagogy: 'If you don't tell me, how can I know?'

- Genre-based teaching is empowering
 - 'L2 learners commonly lack knowledge of the typical patterns and possibilities of variation within the texts that possess "cultural capital" in particular social groups. Genre approaches...help learners to gain admission to particular discourse communities' (Hyland, 2004: 14)
- Hyland's argument brings to mind the title of an article about writing,
 - 'If you don't tell me, how can I know?' A case study of four international students learning to write the U.S. way

(Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999)

The power of genre pedagogy: a tool of teacher development

Hyland (2004) argues that because the genre approach requires teachers to systematically analyse texts for grammatical, lexical, and organizational features, this will make them <u>better teachers</u>:

Genre-based teaching assists teacher development 'Coming to terms with these issues makes teachers better discourse analysts, and this in turn helps make them better teachers.... A reflective teacher is therefore also a more effective teacher. A person who understands how texts are typically structured, understood, and used is in a better position...to provide more informed feedback on writing, to make reasoned decisions about the teaching practices and materials to use...'. (Hyland, 2004: 16)



- Some moves of the target genre may be omitted
- Different kinds of steps can be used within a single move
- Moves can be in different orders in the text
- Some moves and steps may be repeated

Learning how to write a genre is NOT simply copying a model.

Texts vary within the same genre. Tardy & Swales (2014) conclude that even within the very brief academic bio, 'our analysis reveals that authors do find ways to individualize the genre, despite its very short length' (p.182).



 Given the variation within genres, local materials designers can tailor their guidance on appropriate language/steps/moves/rhetorical functions/ organization of target genres to align with local conditions

e.g., Professor X's idea of the [legal report] genre may be somewhat idiosyncratic and at odds with published analyses of the same genre

Local materials writers can ensure the local versions of the genre are accurately described for their learners

Challenge/Tension 2: Critical pedagogy and EAP materials design

What challenges and tensions do we associate with writing critical pedagogy into EAP materials?

Being clear what critical pedagogy means, and the form it would take in an EAP curriculum and materials

Consider the balance to be struck between the views of two well-known critical pedagogy scholars:

What is critical pedagogy?

- Critical language pedagogy involves "teaching languages for social justice," and teachers who use critical pedagogy in class espouse "values associated with democracy (e.g., liberty, equality, and solidarity)" (Crookes, 2021: 247).
- '...I have heard everything from "Critical teaching is getting students to march in the streets" to "Critical teaching is the imposition of the teacher's political agenda", to "Critical teaching is letting students choose their own topics" [...] critical teaching takes on a variety of forms depending on the local context and political climate. That is, it is situated in the particular needs and rights of students in the setting in which it is carried out.' (Benesch, 2001: 137-8)

What are critical pedagogy materials?

Drawing on Crookes and Benesch, then, critical pedagogy materials:

Address issues connected to social justice

 But they MUST be locally relevant and relevant to the learners' own lives, to their rights and needs



 Perceived relevance of CP in the eyes of students ('Just tell me how to write/speak the genre instead!')

 Perceived relevance of CP in the eyes of content lecturers and line managers ('Just help students with their English!')

Some critical pedagogy materials studies

- Benesch's (2010) account of her creation of materials to discuss the ethics of military recruitment on US campuses; and the various examples of materials creation in Benesch (2001)
- Chun's (2016) account of how a teacher in Canada 'read against' her textbook's messages about immigrants having outsider status—and had her students do the same. See also Chun's account of reading against textbook messages about anorexia (Chun, 2020).
- Harwood & Hadley's (2004) account of designing corpus-based 'critical pragmatic' materials centring on personal pronoun use in academic writing

Challenge/Tension 3: In-house materials writing vs. relying upon commercially available EAP textbooks

What challenges and tensions do we associate with in-house materials writing vs. relying upon commercially available EAP textbooks?

- The appeal of the labour-saving textbook and ready-made teaching materials vs. labour-intensive in-house materials writing (albeit textbooks are not unproblematic in terms of their content!)
- Cooperation from content lecturers; access to data to inform the materials writing process (e.g., exemplars of written genres, assessment rubrics, permission to observe content classes);
 agreement regarding pedagogical aims of materials
- Support from EAP directors/line managers
- Lack of confidence on the part of EAP writers regarding their role as materials writers?



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Thank you!

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