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## **THE ARCHITECTURE OF ELT COURSEBOOKS: THE INTERNAL ORGANIZATION OF COURSEBOOK UNITS**

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

The importance of ELT textbooks cannot be overestimated. They will inevitably determine the major part of the classroom teaching, exerting considerable influence over *what* teachers teach and *how* they do it. It is therefore hardly surprising that “textbooks, traditionally, have acquired almost iconic value both as the visible ‘tools of the trade’ and as symbols of what is assumed to go on behind classroom doors in the name of education” (Bolitho 2008: 219).

Textbooks are also very public documents, and their users – teachers, learners, inspectors, administrators, and parents – usually have strong views about them. Teachers praise them or complain about them, learners love them or hate them and, in the wider community, inspectors and administrators examine them exhaustively, while parents often see them as the main means of helping their children at home with their studies (Bolitho 2008: 219). In other words, almost everyone connected with English language teaching (ELT), will be somehow examining and evaluating the materials. But the wealth of published ELT materials available on the market makes selecting the right coursebook a challenging task. An ever-increasing number of textbooks to support every type of teaching and learning situation are being published across more and more areas of ELT (Cunningsworth 1995: 1). These include multilevel textbook series, materials for specific age groups, materials for specific skills, materials for specific purposes, materials for exam preparation, reference materials, self-study materials, and readers (Richards 2015: 595). Since the textbook remains the main teaching-learning aid, the decision about which coursebook to use cannot be taken lightly, or in an arbitrary fashion. All too often teachers are impressed by an author’s or publisher’s reputation

and make a rash choice. Or as Grant (1987: 119) points out, “many of these books are beautifully presented, with jazzy covers and attractive artwork which distracts the eye and dulls the brain.” Faced with a *the-trickle-of-coursebooks-in-the-1970s-that-turned-into-a-flood* situation, the most secure basis for making informed and appropriate choices is to take a systematic approach to evaluating materials. But there is no single all-purpose approach to ELT coursebook assessment. In the literature, three basic approaches to textbook evaluation can be discerned: (a) the impressionistic method; (b) the checklist method, and (c) the in-depth method (McGrath 2002: 25). These methods of analysis and evaluation are all based on asking the right questions and then evaluating the answers which result from this process. But if evaluation is not to be a waste of time the evaluator must not only ask relevant questions, but also have access to an adequate amount of the sort of information and knowledge that can help to answer them (Low 1989: 136).

These three types of evaluation were, in the first place, developed to help *teachers* select coursebooks. The present paper, however, focuses on the position of *the materials designer* (i.e. the coursebook writer), who is in a rather different position from the teacher. Our assumption is that coursebook writers make use of a large and important body of theory, research and practice – the capital T *Theory*, which stands for the collective theoretical knowledge of the ELT profession. These ‘feeder packages of information’ on which the textbook (or its author, as it were) draws, and which form *inputs to ELT materials*, include syllabus design, teaching methods/approaches, findings of relevant scientific disciplines (especially those coming under the umbrella of applied linguistics, which has formed the primary academic reference for language pedagogy), etc. Following this line of reasoning, one could argue that the ELT textbook has always encoded the knowledge and discoveries of relevant language sciences and teaching practice in its time, and can be, therefore, seen as a kind of eclectic hologram reflecting and illuminating a broad spectrum of a history of language teaching and learning. Or, as Kelly (1969: 269) put it, “In the history of the language textbook, we can see a reflection of the history of language teaching, its changes of emphasis and method.” Therefore, coursebooks from past times are a much more genuine documentation of how languages were actually taught in a certain period than any language policy documents or scholarly anthologies/discussions presenting relevant theoretical concepts of the time. In fact, they act as time capsules which afford invaluable insights into what language teaching/learning looked like at a given time (Skela 2013: 103). If, then, ELT textbooks reflect developments in the theory of (language) teaching and learning, then how they look and what they contain goes hand-in-hand with the prevailing contemporary ideas about how languages are best taught and learned at the time they were published. Consequently, having access to an adequate amount of knowledge about the nature of language and language learning can help us see how these ideas have been realized at the level of textbook production. We argue that at least some insight into these major inputs to ELT materials informs

decision-making about textbooks and methodology, and significantly improves the evaluator's ability to examine textbooks more knowledgeably and objectively.

This paper is an attempt to develop a *design-oriented approach* to ELT coursebook evaluation, with a particular focus on the internal organization of coursebook units at both *intra-unit* (i.e. within a unit) and *inter-unit* (i.e. between the units) levels. In developing a design-oriented approach to ELT coursebook evaluation, a slightly shortened model of the design process proposed by Richards (2001: 145) will be used. His model comprises six different levels or stages: (1) developing a course rationale; (2) describing entry and exit levels; (3) choosing course content; (4) sequencing course content; (5) planning the course content (syllabus and instructional blocks), and (6) preparing the scope and sequence plan. Of these six stages, the present paper focuses on stages three, four and five only.

On this 'journey to the centre of ELT textbooks', we will try to highlight how language teaching materials have been resolving the conundrum of the dynamic combination of the *What* (content), and the *How* (pedagogy/methodology).

## 2 INPUTS TO ELT MATERIALS

Most (retrospective) accounts of foreign language teaching methodology acknowledge and note the ways in which findings from the fields of applied linguistics and second language (L2) acquisition feed into language learning approaches and hence language coursebooks. Consequently, it is taken for granted that commercial textbooks are based on sound, accepted pedagogical principles (Mishan 2021: 1). Although the assumption about the theory-laden nature of ELT materials should be valid and justified, it is not necessarily entirely true. Some researchers (Littlejohn 1992; Ellis 2010; Tomlinson 2013) have noted that a comparison between the nature of the materials and the applied linguistic ideas can and does show a degree of matching in some areas but also a significant degree of mismatch in others, suggesting that a more fruitful line of explanation may lie elsewhere – with the textbook writers themselves. This means that ELT materials represent the personal perceptions of authors to a much greater extent than we might suppose. And indeed, it is very revealing to look at how they actually go about designing materials. Some talk about applying theoretical principles to the development of their materials but many report “replicating previous materials and relying on creative inspiration” (Tomlinson 2013: 2–3). Therefore, the most significant ELT coursebook authors of the last five or six decades (e.g. Charles Ewart Eckersley, Robert O'Neill, Louis George Alexander, Bernard Hartley & Peter Viney, Brian Abbs & Ingrid Freebairn, Michael Vince, Norman Whitney, Michael Swan & Catherine Walter, John & Liz Soars, Clive Oxenden, etc.) can constitute a rich source of ideas and inspiration for today's authors.

For present purposes, and with the caveats mentioned above, we shall assume that ELT materials *do* reflect ideas within Applied Linguistics and that their nature may be explained by reference to those ideas. The diagram in Figure 1 illustrates the theory-laden nature of ELT materials.

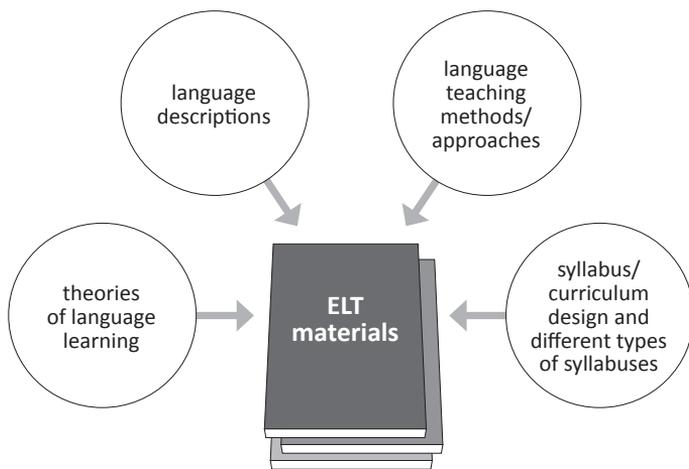


Figure 1: 'Feeder packages of information' or inputs to ELT materials

Rather than take up each of these four closely interrelated clusters of inputs to ELT materials in our discussion at this point and risk going beyond the scope of this paper, we shall briefly comment on how three of them get 'translated' into language coursebooks, whereas the syllabus types will be dealt with in the remainder of the paper. It should be noted, however, that the 'teaching methods' cluster spills over all the other 'feeder packages of information' shown in Figure 1 as different methodological approaches express an allegiance to various learning theories, language descriptions, and syllabus types.

*Method* has always significantly influenced the ways in which ELT coursebooks, and consequently classroom practice, have been conceptualized. The reason for this lies in the fact that language teaching theory over the decades since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up until the 1980s advanced mainly by conceptualizing teaching in terms of teaching *methods* (Stern 1983: 452). The search for the 'best method', which dominated thinking in ELT and applied linguistics for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has resulted in a range of approaches, the most common being Grammar-Translation, Direct Method, Audio-Lingual, and Communicative. As such, methods are, in fact, 'products of their times', that is, individual methods emerged at particular moments and in particular places as a result of the social and academic philosophies that were current in those contexts (Hall 2011: 102). For example, early language teaching materials (from the 1950s onwards) naturally reflected practices that were thought to promote language learning at that time – such as repetition, drills and sentence-level grammar exercises. As our understanding

of language learning developed, this Structural approach gave way to a Communicative one (Mishan 2021: 1). Although since the early 1990s the search for the ‘best’ method has receded in importance and some researchers have noted that we are now in a ‘*Post-method era*’ (Kumaravadivelu 1994), language teaching methods can still be examined as a source of well-used practices that became translated into teaching materials. Indeed, the very broad, eclectic nature of the Communicative approach, or of the ‘*Postmethod era*’, means that current textbooks reflect eclecticism, and that these past methodologies still have an influence on teaching and learning. If we study early language teaching materials that were based, for example, on a ‘pure’ Grammar-Translation method, or a ‘pure’ Audio-Lingual method, we can see that many of their (slightly modified) ingredients are still common in today’s ELT coursebooks – explicit/deductive grammatical explanation, translation, the use of short dialogues introducing and exemplifying structures and vocabulary in context, the emphasis on spoken language, the value attached to practice, the emphasis on the student speaking, the division into four skills, the importance of vocabulary control, the step-by-step progression, etc. Besides, virtually all current pronunciation teaching uses the audiolingual techniques of repetition and drill (Cook 2001: 210–11).

Current ELT coursebooks are definite improvements over the preceding Grammar-Translation and Audio-Lingual texts. The major difference between contemporary textbooks and previous Grammar-Translation and Audio-Lingual texts is that current texts do have more communication activities than previous ones, and they treat themes and include vocabulary that are of greater interest to students. But many are so eclectic that they lack any theoretical unity to hold them together, and fail to embody key tenets of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Or as Crewe (2011: 9) puts it, “having superseded the previous structural-behaviourist *paradigm* – academically speaking, Communicative Language Teaching is nevertheless, still influenced by it in problematic ways, in practice; coinciding, moreover, with commercial considerations that appear to maintain and engender it.” A typical modern ELT coursebook such as *Headway* (Soars and Soars 2006), for instance, has elements of the Grammar-Translation method in that it explains structures explicitly/deductively. It has elements of the Audio-Lingual method in that it is graded around structures and the four skills. And it has elements of the Communicative approach in pair work exercises. As such, it typifies the mainstream ELT teaching of the past 50 years, if not longer (Cook 2008: 265).

All in all, historically, the ELT textbook has served as the stage for several methodological approaches, and these distinctive methodologies have produced a variety of foreign language textbooks. Interestingly, numerous titles and/or subtitles of textbooks bear witness to this close relationship between *method* and teaching materials, e.g. *A Direct Method English Course* (Gatenby 1952), *Situational English* (Commonwealth Office of Education 1965), and *Target 1: An Audio-Visual English Course for Secondary Schools* (Alexander and Tadman 1972) to mention a few.

As teaching *methods*, or methodological approaches, are in fact ‘language teaching theories’, it is evident that there is a connecting relationship between the two concepts (Harlan 2000: 7). Indeed, many experts have related the methodological approaches to the learning theories underlying them (Bell 1981: 218–57; Cook 2001: 199–234). However, in relating the learning theories to the methodological approaches, it must be noted that not all language learning theories ‘translated’ into pedagogy, nor did they directly bring about a specific methodological approach (Harlan 2000: 7). But methodological approaches do not reflect their allegiance to different theories of learning alone, but also to various theories of language, i.e. *language descriptions*. Thus, the Audio-Lingual method, for example, clearly follows *behaviourism* (learning theory) and *structuralism* (theory of language). Cook (2001: 199–234) relates various teaching methods to their underlying theories of learning as follows: the Grammar-Translation method (→ acquisition of conscious grammatical knowledge and its conversion to use; analytical, academic); the Audio-Lingual method (→ behaviourism); the Communicative approach (→ learning by communicating: *laissez-faire*; some use of conscious understanding of grammar; noticing).

Interestingly, as Dörnyei (2009: 34) puts it, “Audiolingualism was associated with a specific learning theory [...], whereas the communicative reform in the 1970s was centred around the radical renewal of the *linguistic course content* (e.g. speech acts) without any systematic psychological conception of learning to accompany it.” That is, the underlying learning theory within CLT was confined to the widespread assumption that the learners’ communicative competence develops automatically through their active participation in meaningful communicative tasks (*ibid.*). Put simply, the Communicative approach seems to be based on some kind of a *laissez-faire* learning theory, leaving things to take their own course. The eclectic nature of today’s mainstream teaching materials means that “the versions of learning involved are a compromise, suggesting that students learn by conscious understanding, by sheer practice, and by attempting to talk to each other” (Cook 2001: 227).

As coursebooks in their promotional blurbs usually make no statement of allegiance to any particular learning theory, it is through an analysis of tasks that we can most effectively test the various claims made for materials. In other words, “Beliefs on the nature of learning can be inferred from an examination of teaching materials” (Nunan 1991: 210). If, for example, the materials claim to be ‘learner-centred’, yet we find that by far most of the tasks involve the learners in ‘responding’ to and working with content supplied by the materials, there would appear to be a serious mismatch. Similarly, we can examine the tasks to see whether they are drill-like and controlled, or fluency-oriented and open-ended, problem-solving, personalized, and the like.

None of the teaching methods is complete, just as none of the learning theories is complete, as Cook (2008: 265) concludes. So, if at the moment all teaching methods are partial, in language learning terms, and give an inadequate account of the totality of language learning, the only thing teachers can do is weigh them against their students’ needs in their teaching situation before deciding how seriously to take them.

### 3 DEVELOPING LANGUAGE LEARNING MATERIALS

Generally, textbooks are much more complex than most other publications. Not only do they need to cover a body of knowledge (i.e. the *What*) in a structured and logical way, but they also utilize design elements to help the learner better understand the subject (i.e. the *How*). Richards (2001: 145) proposes a systematic materials development process, a sequence of procedures in an idealized linear form, which are usually used recursively with each stage informing and interacting with other stages. The proposed stages are as follows: (1) developing a course rationale → (2) describing entry and exit levels → (3) choosing course content → (4) sequencing course content → (5) planning the course content (syllabus and instructional blocks) → (6) preparing the scope and sequence plan. Of these six stages, the present paper focuses on stages three, four and five only.

An insight into the process of developing language learning materials can help teachers understand ‘the architecture’ of published materials, and additionally, their evaluation can be carried out more effectively if it develops from an understanding of the possible design features of syllabuses and materials.

#### 3.1 Choosing course content

The question of course content is probably the most basic issue in course design. For example, a course could potentially be planned around any of the following types of content: grammar, functions, topics, skills, processes, texts, and so on (Richards 2001: 147–48). A list of possible topics, units, skills, and other units of course organization is then generated. Developing initial ideas for course content often takes place simultaneously with syllabus planning, because the content of a course will often depend on the type of syllabus framework that will be used as the basis for the course.

What makes the task of choosing content especially challenging is the fact that language learning is an odd school subject. You could say it is not a subject at all, in the sense that ‘content’ subjects like chemistry, history and physics are. Like music, language is a skill, a ‘how’. The problem has always been to fill the *how* with a *what*. What is meant by *content* can differ from author to author – some differentiate between the *linguistic* content (e.g. grammar, functions, skills, lexis, phonology, etc.), and the *topic* content (i.e. topics that texts are about, or that tasks relate to), others regard *content* as a mixture of both topics and linguistic features to be studied.

It should be noted that choosing course content is not the relatively simple process it once was. Decades ago, language teaching was still heavily influenced by a structural view of language, and there was not much question about content: It was grammatical structures and vocabulary. Of course, much has changed in approaches to language

teaching since those times. Graves (1996: 19–25) provides an interesting overview of how content has been cumulatively, and in a step-by-step fashion, conceptualized over time – from the traditional syllabus grid that included only grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, to the ‘completed’ one that includes functions, notions and topics, communicative situations, the four skills, culture, tasks and activities, learning strategies, and (topic) content. Language content is often taken from inventories or lists which include word frequency lists, inventories of functions or lists of specific topics – such as *The Threshold Level* (van Ek and Trim 1990), *Function in English* (Blundell *et al.* 1982), etc.

The topic content (topics the language talks about, as distinct from the language content itself) may be of various types (Ur 1996: 197–98; 2012: 216–17): zero or trivial content; the learners themselves; the local environment; moral, educational, political or social problems; cultural issues; another subject of study (CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning); culture associated with the target language; home/source culture; world or general knowledge; literature; the language (aspects of the target language treated as topics of study in themselves: its history, etymology, and other interesting linguistic phenomena). Why different courses tend to stress some types of content and not others depends very much, of course, on the objectives of the course (e.g. an ESP course or a course for young learners). The advent of ‘global’ ELT coursebooks conceived in the 1990s, attempting to capture international appeal, has unfortunately resulted in many coursebooks containing very bland, safe, ‘sanitized’, superficially interesting and neutral ‘zero-content’ topics. Or, as Medgyes (1999) ironically remarks, ELT coursebooks provide an endless source of knowledge and fun, but teach you nothing worthwhile. Ideally, topics for use in ELT should have the same interest-value as they would if exploited in the students’ own native language, as intrinsically worthy of consideration (Crewe 2011: 20).

### **3.2 Sequencing course content: Determining the scope and sequence**

Decisions about course content also need to address the distribution of content throughout the course. This is known as planning the scope and sequence of the course. By *scope*, we are referring to the depth and breadth of the content to be covered (Richards 2001: 149).

The *sequencing* of content in the course also needs to be determined. The sequence of the content is the order in which the content should be taught for the best learning outcomes. This involves deciding which content is needed early in the course and which provides a basis for things that will be learned later. In any given subject, including English, there are likely multiple theories about which sequence is best, but it is usually based on the following criteria: simplicity/complexity, learnability/teachability, chronology, (immediate and long-term) need, interest and affectivity, pedagogic merit, relevance, prerequisite learning, whole to part or part to whole, spiral sequencing, etc. (White 1988: 48; Richards 2001: 150–51).

### 3.3 Planning the course content (syllabus and instructional blocks)

The next stage in course development involves mapping the course structure into a form and sequence that provide a suitable basis for teaching. Two aspects of this process require more detailed planning: (1) selecting a syllabus framework, and (2) developing instructional blocks. These issues are closely related and sometimes inseparable, but also involve different kinds of decisions (Richards 2001: 151–52).

#### 3.3.1 Selecting a syllabus framework

A syllabus is essentially a list that specifies all the things that are to be taught in a course. One of the main purposes of syllabus is to break down the mass of knowledge to be learnt into manageable units. The actual components of the list may be content items (words, grammatical features, topics), or process ones (tasks) or communicative ‘can-dos’ (standards) (Ur 2012: 185). The items are ordered, usually with components that are considered easier or more essential earlier, and more difficult and less important ones later. The ordering, staging and sequencing of the selected contents for teaching purposes can be done in two basic ways – *linearly* or *spirally/cyclically*. In *spiral* syllabuses, the same things keep turning up in different combinations with different meanings, whereas in *linear* syllabuses new points are added to a line and each point is completely covered before moving on to the next (Berardo 2007: 48). While *spiral* syllabuses are pedagogically and psychologically more desirable, they are generally more difficult to organize. This could be one of the reasons why *linear* syllabuses are more readily adopted (*ibid.*). Figure 2 shows the general principle of a spiral arrangement of functions – they should be gradually increased and built up as the course proceeds.

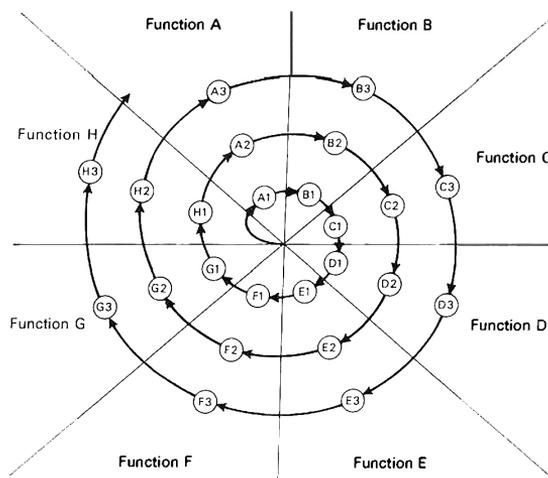


Figure 2: A spiral arrangement of functions (Hubbard et al. 1983: 246)

A number of different kinds of syllabuses are used in English language teaching. Ur (1996: 178–79; 2012: 186–90) and Richards (2001: 153–65) list the following main types: Structural/Grammatical, Lexical, Situational, Functional-Notional, Topic-based, Task-based, Content-based, Skills-based, Text-based, Standards-based, Mixed/integrated or multi-strand, Procedural, and Process.

Each of the different types of syllabuses represents a valid attempt to break down the mass of a particular area of knowledge into manageable units, and each carries certain assumptions about the nature of language and learning. But as the ultimate goal of language teaching and learning is communicative competence, then “Any syllabus which claims to teach people how to communicate should acknowledge the complexity of communication. A syllabus that is framed in only one aspect (be it structures, functions, content or whatever) will probably miss the opportunity to develop the unacknowledged elements effectively” (Hutchinson and Waters 1987: 89). As all syllabuses represent only a partial dimension of communicative competence, they can be seen as one stream of a multiskilled or integrated syllabus rather than as the sole basis for a syllabus. In other words, today most of them are included in multi-strand syllabuses. Although it is hard to imagine that today an ELT coursebook would be organized solely according to a generalized grammar syllabus, grammar remains a core component of most language courses. Many ELT coursebooks still place ‘*Grammar*’ most prominently in the first column of their list of ‘*Contents*’ for each unit, which to Tomlinson and Masuhara (2018: 189) “provides evidence of the predominance of grammar and of PPP pedagogy in global coursebooks.”

In modern ELT coursebooks, multi-strand or multi-dimensional syllabuses have become the norm of organizing content, and they are increasingly combining different aspects in order to be maximally comprehensive and helpful to teachers and learners. In most courses, there will generally be a number of different syllabus strands (or parallel syllabuses), such as *grammar* linked to *skills* and *texts*, *tasks* linked to *topics* and *functions*, or *skills* linked to *topics* and *texts*.

The contents page of a textbook provides the best overview of what is usually referred to as the *organizational syllabus* of the textbook (or the textbook syllabus), featuring and specifying, in several columns, the so-called *parallel syllabuses* contained, and which run throughout the book (Figure 3).

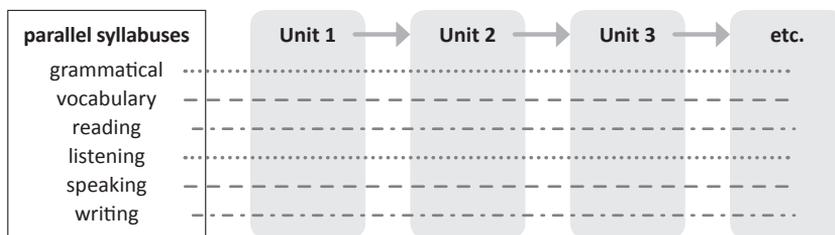


Figure 3: Parallel syllabuses as coherent strands/threads running through a coursebook

But the sequencing, juxtaposing, and/or intertwining of different parallel syllabuses is not an easy task because the grading of different syllabuses is often based on clashing and incompatible criteria. Figure 3, for example, illustrates the ordering of two syllabus types – grammatical and functional. The ordering is determined by a cross-fertilization between functional and grammatical categories, but the grammatical (i.e. generative) system is fundamental. We could thus conceive of the syllabus as a grammatical ladder with a functional-notional spiral around it.

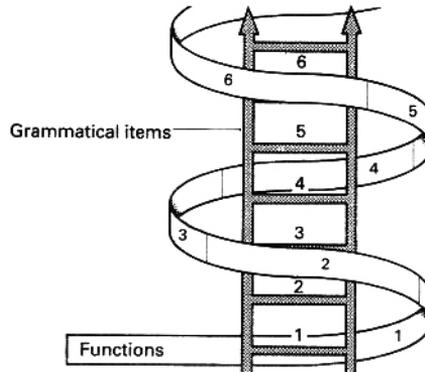


Figure 4: A 'snakes and ladders' syllabus combining functional and grammatical categories (Brumfit 1981: 50)

But this syllabus, however neat it may look, does not in itself overcome the problems of grading. The grammatical syllabus will usually be graded on the basis of *simplicity/complexity*, whereas the functional syllabus will be graded on the basis of *need/frequency*. This means that a very useful and frequent language function that requires a 'difficult' grammatical structure might have to be introduced early on, i.e. before the required structure has been taught.

Most present-day ELT coursebooks use the grammatical features as their central core. Surrounding the (syllabus) core, one finds a spiral (or spirals) which consists of all other parallel syllabuses, including all the non-systematizable features of the textbook. The spiral feeds into the core and depends on it. It should be noted that in a content-based syllabus (e.g. CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning) the core/spiral dependency is altered – the core is the content, and the spiral consists of the language-related ways of dealing with that content.

All functional-notional syllabuses have a strong situational element. Obviously, functions have to be presented in the language materials contextualized in situations or settings. The topic element will include provision for a suitable range of lexical items. The situation/setting chosen for presentation purposes will make clear the special reference or appropriacy of the forms chosen to express the functions in question. In this way,

a situational syllabus can successfully combine with functional, lexical and grammatical syllabuses. Figure 4 provides an example of a situational string.

Combining situations/topics and structures/notions can be approached in two ways – we can start with the language or with a topic. In the first case, we decide which *language point* to focus on. Then we think of topics that use this kind of language. For example, if we are working on *there is, there are*, a suitable topic could be ‘our school’ or ‘our classroom’. In the second case, we decide which *topic* we want to work on, and then list the language points it suggests/generates (Phillips 1993: 143–45).

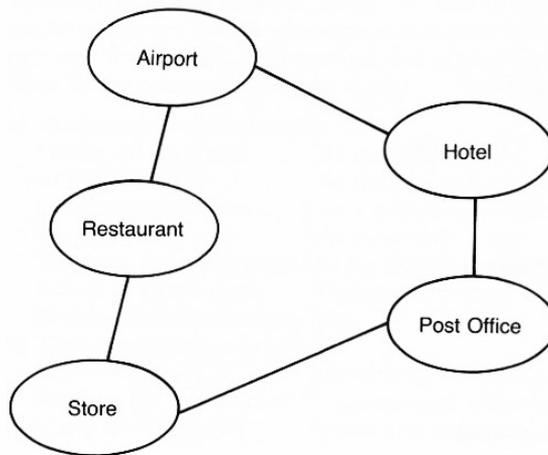


Figure 5: A situational string (Yalden 1987: 142)

### 3.3.2 Developing instructional blocks

Textbooks can be thought of as having content divided into *instructional blocks*. In organizing a course into teaching blocks, we create overall coherence and structure for the course. Instructional blocks could be different from textbook to textbook, but the two most common instructional blocks used for breaking down the body of knowledge are *modules* and *units*. Generally, *modules* are longer than *units*, and for both several *lessons* are needed to cover them. The term *lesson*, which denotes actual teaching and learning, and thus standing for *a teaching period*, is usually clearly distinguishable from both *module* and *unit*, but many coursebooks may explicitly use the term *lesson* as a coursebook instructional block. Although coursebook units are usually longer than a single lesson/period (i.e. several teaching lessons are needed to cover a unit), there have been coursebooks that are mapped out on the basis of *one-lesson units* (i.e. a unit equals an actual teaching lesson). For example, *Grapevine 1* (Viney and Viney 1989) features 40 two-page units (each to be covered in two lessons), whereas *Discoveries 2* (Abbs and Freebairn 1986) features 50 units (called *lessons*), of which some are one-page/one-lesson,

and some two-page/two-lesson learning units. Figure 6 illustrates an example of a common textbook structure.

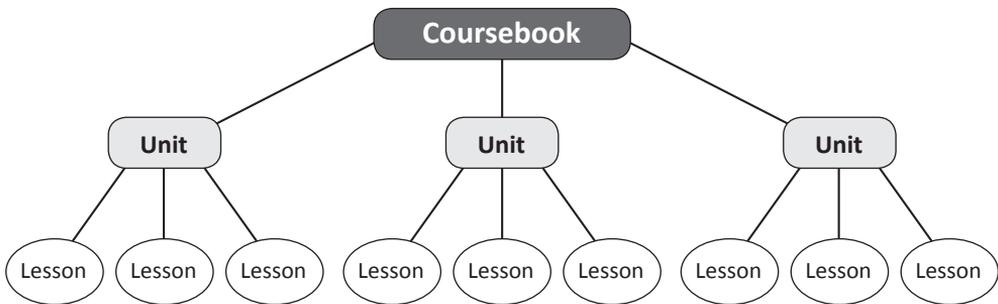


Figure 6: An example of a common textbook structure

In developing ELT materials, the issue of unit structure is of utmost importance. As a unit should provide a structured sequence of activities that lead toward learning, a lot of things need to be taken into account. As Richards (2001: 166) points out, we need to make sure that sufficient but not too much material is included, that one activity leads effectively into the next (as the unit is not a random and fragmented sequence of unintegrated activities), and that the unit has an overall sense of coherence. In short, “the goal is to develop a sequence of activities that leads teachers and learners through a learning route that is at an appropriate level of difficulty, is engaging, that provides both motivating and useful practice” (Richards 2001: 262–63).

In designing the unit structure, the textbook writer will have to juggle several unit components, such as topic, text and task elements. The most common way of organizing unit components is probably around topics, because topics provide internal coherence to the units and can usually reflect the needs of the learners well. In planning, for example, a unit with a *topical organization* and a *multi-strand syllabus*, the writer might begin, perhaps, with a topic, collecting ‘raw’ (listening/reading) texts relating to the topic, and then creating activities which reflect the communicative needs of the learners in relation to the topic (Nunan 1991: 216). The procedure resembles puzzle blocks, or a jigsaw puzzle – each individual piece has a portion of a picture, and when assembled, they produce a complete picture. Similarly, the author will juggle a number of unit components or ‘building blocks’, trying to sequence them into a learning route (see Figure 7).

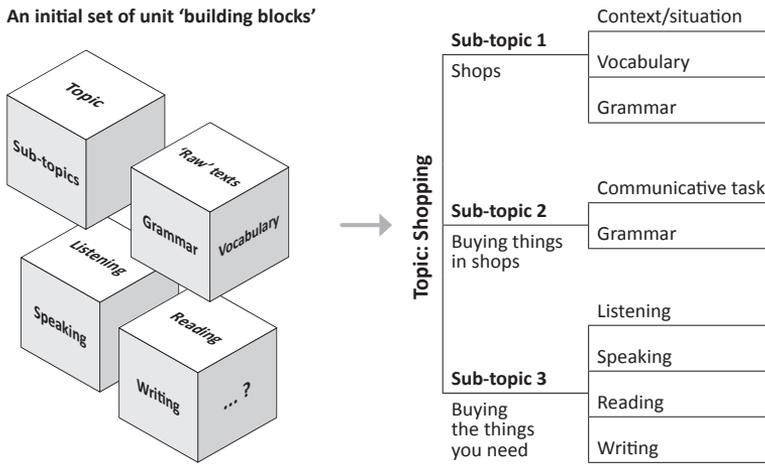


Figure 7: A procedure of developing a unit from a set of draft materials or 'building blocks'

An amplified example of developing a unit from a set of draft materials based on topic, text and task could look like this (Hopkins 1996: 16):

<b>Topic: Shopping</b>	
<b>Sub-topic 1</b>	Shops
Context/situation	Preparing to go on a trip
Vocabulary	Types of shops Objects to buy for the trip
Grammar	Irregular plurals; genitive 's for types of shops; <i>some, any</i>
<b>Sub-topic 2</b>	Buying things in shops
Communicative task	Carrying out a transaction in a shop (e.g. asking for something, asking about prices, etc.).
Grammar	Pronouns: <i>one, ones</i> ; questions with <i>how many</i> and <i>how much</i>
<b>Sub-topic 3</b>	Buying the things you need
listening	Buying things in shops
speaking	Discussing what you would like to take on a trip
reading	Understanding advertisements for shops
writing	Writing a packing list of things to take on holiday

With respect to unit structure, certain solutions can be reached at this point, such as the number of components per unit, component headings, balance of skills, and so on. For example, Ván (2015: 8–9), giving an account of the developing of a textbook series, reports that before the writing process began, the solution was reached with respect to unit structure as to the number of headings per unit. In terms of the number of components,

each unit in primary textbooks would contain three simple headings, each unit in lower secondary textbooks would contain seven headings, and each unit in upper secondary textbooks would consist of eight headings – *Getting Started, A Closer Look 1, A Closer Look 2, Communication & Culture, Skills 1 (Reading & Speaking), Skills 2 (Listening & Writing), Looking Back, and Project.*

In designing unit structure, most authors probably follow, consciously or subconsciously, a materials design model in which four elements combine – *input, content, language* and *task* (Hutchinson and Waters 1987: 108–9). *Input* may be a text, dialogue, video-recording, diagram or any piece of communication data; *content* stands for non-linguistic content (as language is not an end in itself, but a means of conveying information and feelings about something); *language* stands for language focus (i.e. studying and practising language); *task* stands for a communicative task in which learners use the content and language knowledge they have built up through the unit (Figure 8).

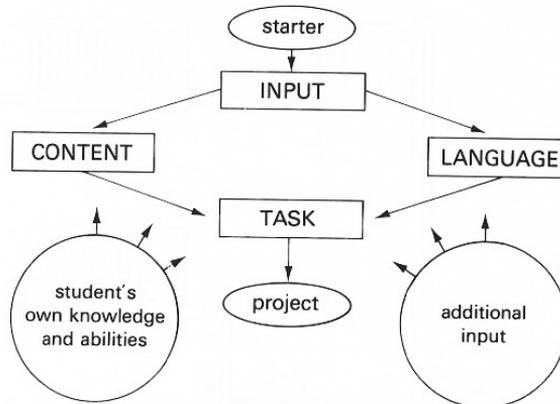


Figure 8: A materials design model (Hutchinson and Waters 1987: 118)

Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 109) emphasize that “the primary focus of the unit is the *task*, and that the model acts as a vehicle which leads the learners to the point where they are able to carry out the task.” The *language* and *content* are drawn from the *input* and are selected according to what the learners will need in order to do the task. It follows that an important feature of the model is to “create coherence in terms of both language and content throughout the unit” (*ibid.*). This provides the support for more complex activities by building up a fund of knowledge and skills. In other words, the model can be refined, enriched and expanded as students’ own knowledge or additional input can be added to the model.

Concerning the *input* component of the model, it should be noted that there are two possible types of unit structure – the *single presentation* solution, and the *multiple presentation* solution (Low 1989: 140–44). The former means that there is a single input

text (at the beginning of the unit), whereas the latter means that amounts of presentation material are spread throughout the unit. The single-presentation unit structure was more common with grammar-translation textbooks (i.e. a long literary text), and audiolingual coursebooks, with a longish presentation dialogue as a unit starter. If the unit is based on one single input text, then, from a design point of view, it follows that this text will have to be rather long to contextualize all the new language. However, most current textbooks opt for the multiple-presentation unit structure. The main advantages of doing this are first, that new language density can be controlled and distributed across the unit, and second, that the content, style and length of input texts can be more varied and matched to the learners' needs (Low 1989: 143). Of course, with this unit structure we need to make sure that 'multiple inputs' spread across the unit cohere with each other, topic-wise, or otherwise.

As stated earlier, the materials design model, illustrated in Figure 8, can be enriched and expanded with 'structural elements' that are designed to aid in learning and motivate learners. Schneider (2008) provides three types of elements that are useful for learning and can be integrated into a unit – *Openers*, *Closers*, and *Integrated Pedagogical Devices* (Figure 9).

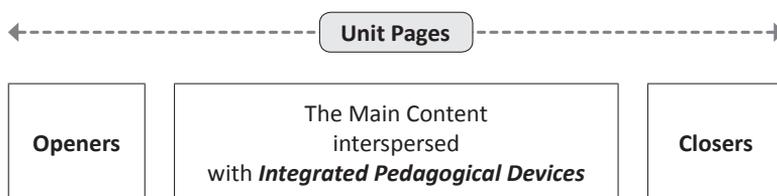


Figure 9: *Integrated Pedagogical Devices to aid in learning (based on Schneider 2008)*

*Openers* or *starters* are some sort of warm-up activities that can perform several different roles. They can review skills/knowledge students need in the upcoming chapter, and usually have a positive effect on students' attention and engagement. A list of common openers includes overviews (previews), introductions, outlines (text, bullets or graphics), focus questions (knowledge and comprehension questions), learning goals, (personalized) discussion, vignettes, photos, quotations, etc. (Schneider 2008).

*Integrated Pedagogical Devices* are some sort of 'scaffolding strategies' (or a safety net, or a parachute) that are designed and used consistently throughout the coursebook to aid in learning. These may include: emphasis (bold face) of words; marginalia that summarize paragraphs; mini glossaries accompanying reading texts; lists that highlight main points; summary tables and graphics; cross-references; study and review questions; pedagogical illustrations (concepts rendered graphically); tips (to insure that the learner doesn't get caught in misconceptions); reminders (e.g. make sure that something that was previously introduced is remembered); problem descriptions; debates and reflections; model texts, etc. (Schneider 2008). On a closer look, the *Integrated Pedagogical Devices*

are simply many of the things that a teacher would normally do as part of his or her teaching: arouse the learners' interest, remind them of earlier learning, tell them what they will be learning next, explain new learning content to them, relate these ideas to learners' previous learning, get learners to think about new content, help them get feedback on their learning, encourage them to practise, enable them to check their progress, and help them to do better (Richards 2001: 263).

A list of common *closers* includes conclusions and summaries, list of definitions, reference boxes, review questions/exercises, self-assessment, a real-world task, ideas for projects, online links, and so on (Schneider 2008).

The textbook has to cohere both internally and externally. As to the *internal* coherence, there are two main ways in which coherent lines of development can be put through teaching material: at the *intra-unit* level (i.e. within a coursebook unit), and at the *inter-unit* level (i.e. between the coursebook units) (Figure 10). But in the case of a textbook series, each textbook has to cohere *externally* too, i.e. with other books in a series. This external cohesion is usually achieved through coherent macro themes and topics which are, when appropriate and possible, revisited throughout different proficiency levels to enable learning to be consolidated and to ensure the spiral nature of the textbook series.

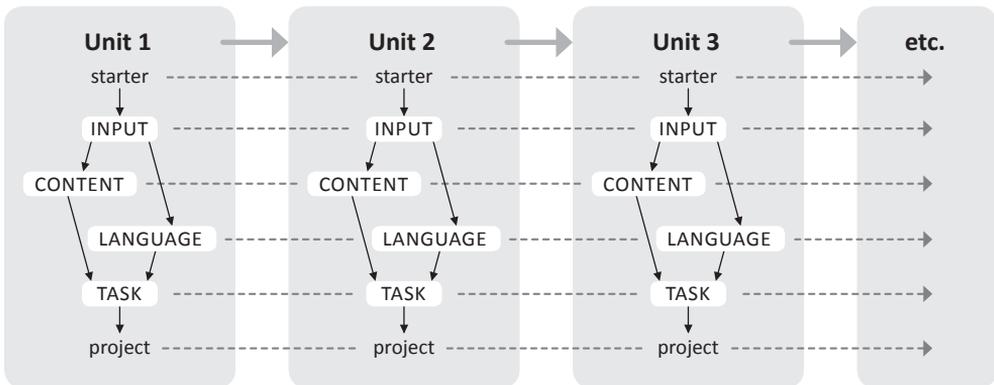


Figure 10: The internal coherence of a coursebook at the intra-unit and inter-unit levels (based on Hutchinson and Waters 1987: 119)

Richards (2001: 167) stands up for the idea that the coherence of the unit should ultimately be both *horizontal* and *vertical*, meaning that there should be front to back coherence throughout the unit, but also top to bottom coherence on each page. Modern ELT coursebooks pay close attention to appealing vertical design for a sense of 'closure' on each page (Murphy 2018: 7). However, there are still coursebooks that "simply ignore this maxim pragmatically; sometimes content characteristics must override design

protocols” (*ibid.*). ELT textbook design is often regarded, with magazine layout, as one of the most challenging and complex of all book designs. But this push for ‘closure’ on each page can sometimes have very negative consequences. Coursebooks often feature tiny type fonts and crammed content in multiple columns (a double- or even three-column grid), turning coursebooks into ‘pillars of distraction’ (Renshaw 2011). As a learner, you need literal as well as metaphorical space to think, and giving both students and teachers a less cluttered book (i.e. a bit more blank space) would quite possibly allow more ideas to flow in the classroom.

At the *inter-unit* level, there are several other possibilities as to how to make the coursebook coherent across units. One fairly commonly adopted device, especially in materials for young learners and teenagers, is *the storyline solution* (Low 1989: 149), i.e. a story which runs the length of the materials, with one episode per unit. These stories are often in strip-cartoon form, with plots focussing on detectives or aliens. Other possibilities include the initial introduction of (factual and fantasy) *characters* who then continue to appear throughout the book, thereby giving students a sense of continuity as they progress through the course; or the use of a certain *setting* (e.g. a school, a street, a neighbourhood, a festival, etc.), which, again, runs throughout all units.

There is one more thing that can be inferred from an examination of the unit structure – its beliefs on the nature of learning, or its underlying *methodology/pedagogy*. Since the introduction of the ‘new’ communicative approach in the late 1970s, the promotional blurbs have claimed to be following natural, topic-based, communicative, theme-based or task-based approaches. But according to Tomlinson and Masuhara (2018: 35), there has been very little change in the pedagogy that ELT textbooks actually use. In fact, since the mid-1970s most coursebooks have been and are still using a *Presentation-Practice-Production* (PPP) approach and featuring low-level and closed-practice exercises (*ibid.*; Cook 2008: 265). So, what happened is that “methodologies, like the ‘name’ Methods that preceded the communicative approach, were dismissed for being ‘limited and restricted’, yet coursebook designers seem to persist in striving for ‘best case’ ‘surface methodologies’ with the widest potential appeal” (Crewe 2011: 49). The ability of ELT coursebooks to facilitate meaningful, effective teaching-learning experiences, and the challenges of realizing a communicative approach, still remain in question some four decades since the introduction of this approach (*ibid.*: 9).

The lag between theory and practice coincides with the difference between two broad approaches to teaching a language – the ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ versions of CLT. The former moves *from communication to language*, and the latter *from language to communication* (Edge and Garton 2009: 17–19). The most clearly recognizable manifestation of the ‘weak’ version of CLT is the PPP model, and that of the ‘strong’ version of CLT, the task-based approach (TBA). Both approaches enshrine somewhat contrasting views of learning. In a language-to-communication approach (PPP), students ‘*learn a language to use it*’, whereas in a communication-to-language approach (TBA), students ‘*use a*

*language to learn it*'. Clearly, the former is based on the belief that out of accuracy develops fluency, whereas the latter assumes that out of fluency develops accuracy.

However, numerous more open-ended and flexible approaches to developing language-learning materials have been proposed. Tomlinson and Masuhara (2018: 35) mention some of them: a language awareness approach; a text-driven approach, a task-based approach; a multi-dimensional approach (e.g. use of sensory imaging); discovery approaches; a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach; a project-based approach; humanistic and experience-based approaches (i.e. humanizing materials); the Multiple Intelligence Approach; learning to learn approach, etc. What all these approaches have in common is a move away from discrete teaching points driving instructional materials to a focus on language in use.

It seems, however, that incorporating these 'alternative' approaches into ELT coursebooks is not easy. Market appeal is clearly a primary consideration over and above those of pedagogical or theoretical worth. As a result, publishers dare not risk losing vast sums of money on a radically different type of textbook, and they opt for safe, middle-of-the-road, global ELT coursebooks which clone the features of such best-selling coursebooks as *Headway*. Alongside other features of textbooks, the PPP framework which underlies most of today's ELT materials, might be a sign that we are witnessing the impact of *McDonaldization* on the design of language teaching materials (Littlejohn 2012). If *McDonaldization* is increasingly 'colonizing' ELT materials (*ibid.*), then applied linguistic or educational arguments that discussions in language teaching have traditionally emphasized to explain innovation in teaching materials, are bygone. It seems that the changes taking place in the ELT world are no longer prompted so much by research evidence, but by the important aspects of social context – notably globalization and the global pre-eminence of English (Skela 2019: 22).

## 4 CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have attempted to set out a number of perspectives on materials design, with a particular focus on the internal organization of ELT coursebook units at both intra- and inter-unit levels. We believe that looking at coursebooks from the position of the materials designer sheds some additional light on ELT coursebook evaluation. The design-oriented approach to coursebook assessment proposed in the paper goes well beyond the immediate, and often superficial, 'check-list' methods commonly used to help teachers select coursebooks. In other words, the design-oriented approach to ELT coursebook assessment enables teachers to gain an insight into 'the architecture' of textbooks. In doing so, the approach could also be useful to potential coursebook writers, especially in vocational or ESP contexts, where teachers are often forced to produce their own (in-house) teaching materials.

In presenting the materials design process, we started off with the assumption that there has always been a broad basis of theoretical and pedagogical notions that can inform the content and organization of ELT coursebooks, and upon which coursebook writers can build when designing instructional materials. As periodic, historic shifts in the theory and practice of ELT have taken place, coursebooks have come to incorporate corresponding changes (Crewe 2011: 11–12). This means that these influencing factors, or inputs to coursebooks, have always significantly shaped the design of coursebooks.

The article then discusses three stages of a six-stage design process, offering a more detailed analysis of the complex issue of unit structure at intra- and inter-unit levels. We explore different formats of unit structure, its components, ways of creating coherence throughout the unit, and its underlying methodology/pedagogy. The last point prompts the conclusion that present-day ELT materials are produced in response to a perceived market demand that is often at variance with the latest theoretical developments in ELT. It is argued that it is mainly commercial considerations and pressures that appear to be shaping present-day ELT materials design, thus maintaining and engendering a ‘surface methodology’, most clearly manifested in the PPP approach, and failing to “exemplify the communicative principles they purport to embody” (Chastain 1988: 132). It is sad to observe how the commercial context of the (global) ELT coursebook has diminished the role of coursebooks as ‘carriers of innovation’.

But then, coursebooks don’t teach classes, teachers do. Ultimately, a coursebook is only one of the tools in the toolbox, only a base, a core or a jumping-off point. As O’Neill (1982: 110) put it, “A great deal of work in a class may start with the textbook but end outside it, in improvisation and adaptation, in spontaneous interaction in the class, and development from that interaction.” Imperfect coursebooks can in fact stimulate teachers’ creativity, and their ‘interventions’ might enable appropriate methodology to emerge naturally. By introducing their own ideas or approach best suited to the students, teachers can avoid the need to simply ‘navigate’ a surface methodology.

In other words: “*Nikoli dopustiti, da bi pedagogika zmagala nad fantazijo.*” / “*Never let pedagogy overpower fantasy.*” (Lojze Kovačič, Pet fragmentov)

**Note:** This paper is dedicated to Gregor Perko – *a Jolly Good Fellow!*

[...] Je vais où le vent me mène.  
Sans me plaindre ou m’effrayer,  
Je vais où va toute chose,  
Où va la feuille de rose  
Et la feuille de laurier.

(Antoine-Vincent Arnault)

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#### POVZETEK

### ARHITEKTURA UČBENIKOV ANGLEŠČINE: NOTRANJA ORGANIZIRANOST UČBENIŠKIH ENOT

Pričujoči članek poskuša izoblikovati na procesu snovanja učbenikov temelječ pristop k vrednotenju učbenikov s posebnim poudarkom na notranji organiziranosti učnih enot, in sicer na dveh ravneh – v okviru posamezne učne enote in med njimi. Prepričani smo, da proučevanje učbenikov z vidika snovalca gradiv dodatno osvetljuje proces vrednotenja učbenikov. Na procesu snovanja učbenikov temelječ pristop k vrednotenju učbenikov, predlagan v članku, močno presega hitre in pogosto površne metode vrednotenja, ki temeljijo na spisku kriterijev in s katerimi si učitelji navadno pomagajo pri izbiri učbenikov. Povedano drugače, na procesu snovanja učbenikov temelječ pristop k vrednotenju učbenikov učiteljem omogoča vpogled v ‘arhitekturo’ učbenikov. Na tem ‘potovanju v središče učbenikov angleščine’ poskušamo osvetliti, kako so tujejezikovna učna gradiva reševala enigmo razgibanega in spremenljivega združevanja vsebine (*Kaj*) in pedagogike/načina poučevanja (*Kako*).

Pri predstavitvi procesa snovanja učbenikov izhajamo iz predpostavke, da je vedno obstajala široka teoretična in pedagoška podlaga, ki lahko zaznamuje vsebino in ustroj učbenikov angleščine in na katero se avtorji učbenikov lahko sklicujejo. Prispevek v nadaljevanju obravnava tri stopnje procesa ustvarjanja učbenikov, pri čemer je posebna pozornost posvečena podrobni analizi kompleksnega vprašanja zgradbe učne enote na dveh ravneh – znotraj enote in med njimi. Posvečamo se različnim formatom zgradbe učne enote, njenim sestavnim delom, načinom zagotavljanja koherence skozi enoto in didaktičnim pristopom, na katerih enota temelji. Zadnja postavka vodi k

zaključku, da današnja gradiva za pouk angleščine nastajajo kot odziv na ocenjene tržne potrebe, ki so pogosto v neskladju z najnovejšimi spoznanji na področju poučevanja angleščine.

**Ključne besede:** učna gradiva za pouk angleščine, vrednotenje učbenikov, proces ustvarjanja učbenikov, formati učnih enot, didaktični pristopi v učbenikih

## ABSTRACT

### THE ARCHITECTURE OF ELT COURSEBOOKS: THE INTERNAL ORGANIZATION OF COURSEBOOK UNITS

This paper is an attempt to develop a design-oriented approach to ELT coursebook evaluation, with a particular focus on the internal organization of coursebook units at both intra-unit and inter-unit levels. We believe that looking at coursebooks from the position of the materials designer sheds some additional light on ELT coursebook evaluation. The design-oriented approach to ELT coursebook assessment proposed in the paper goes well beyond the immediate, and often superficial, 'check-list' methods commonly used to help teachers select coursebooks. In other words, the design-oriented approach to ELT coursebook assessment enables teachers an insight into 'the architecture' of textbooks. On this 'journey to the centre of ELT textbooks', we try to highlight how language teaching materials have been resolving the conundrum of the dynamic combination of the *What* (content), and the *How* (pedagogy/methodology).

In presenting a materials design process, we start off with the assumption that there has always been a broad basis of theoretical and pedagogical notions that can inform the content and organization of ELT coursebooks, and upon which coursebook writers can build when designing instructional materials. The article then discusses three stages of the design process, offering a more detailed analysis of the complex issue of unit structure at intra- and inter-unit levels. We explore different formats of unit structure, its components, ways of creating coherence throughout the unit, and its underlying methodology/pedagogy. The last point prompts the conclusion that today's ELT materials are produced in response to a perceived market demand that is often at variance with the latest theoretical developments in ELT.

**Keywords:** ELT materials, coursebook evaluation, materials design process, formats of coursebook units, coursebook methodologies