A Formative Evaluation of Pedagogic Materials Developed for the English Communication 1a Course by the English Communication Team

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This paper reports on an initial investigation into the pedagogic material developed by teachers to facilitate the fulfillment of the main aim of the English 1 Communication Course syllabus: i.e. 'to develop the English skills necessary for effective communication' through 'work in pairs and small groups and . . . class discussions' (Kansai University English Communication Team 2008). Section 2 explicates the design of an instrument to extract empirical, quantitative data from a representative sample of materials for a preliminary formative evaluation. The findings presented in section 4 show (i) a preponderance of oral information gap and opinion gap activities to the virtual exclusion of reasoning gap activities, and (ii) a high degree of homogeneity in activity design (i.e. a bias towards one-way interaction relationships, required interaction, divergent goal orientation, and open outcome). From these findings, section 5 draws the conclusion that while the materials do fulfill their remit, a range of design modifications may be considered by teachers desiring to enhance their overall effectiveness. Section 6 outlines the limitations of the current investigation and proposes areas for further research which arise out of it: specifically, replication studies and investigations into (i) the topic foci of materials, (ii) the felicity of materials in promoting complex language output and facilitating the negotiation of meaning, (iii) the structure of activities when executed in class and (iv) teacher-developers' beliefs.

It is hoped that the investigation presented here is of practical benefit to English 1 Communication teachers engaged in materials development, and that it constitutes a useful starting point for an ongoing process of formative evaluation.

1. Introduction

The English Communication Team comprises eleven teachers of English under the auspices of the Faculty of Foreign Language Studies. The team's primary responsibility is the delivery of the year long English 1a/b Communication Course syllabus to first year undergraduates at Kansai University. In the spring semester the 1a syllabus addresses topics such as social issues, business and employment, education, future trends, the role of technology in society, and news and current affairs. Autumn semester (1b) topics include intercultural communication, global

trends, gender issues and relationships, the modern workplace, environmental issues, and international relations (Kansai University English Communication Team 2008). The aim of the English 1a/b Communication Course as stated in the syllabus document is 'to develop the English skills necessary for effective communication in academic, business and personal situations', to which end '[s]tudents are expected to use English only as they work in pairs and small groups and contribute to class discussions' in lessons that are 'conducted entirely in English' (*ibid.*). As this course is intended by the University to be an *oral* communication course, lessons are heavily weighted toward the development of speaking and listening skills. Reading and writing skills are the foci of their own, discrete courses.

To facilitate the efficient and effective delivery of the English 1 (Oral) Communication syllabus, it is a responsibility of each teacher in the English Communication Team to develop a body of pedagogic material for classroom use. Specifically, each teacher is asked to produce one academic year's worth of material (i.e. enough for twenty-six 1.5 hour lessons) within two years of commencing employment at the University. The material produced by each teacher is either bound into a resource book or filed in a resource pack, then added to the resource bank located in the teachers' room. This is accessible to all English 1 Communication Course teachers as and when required.

In the manner outlined above, a small library of teacher-developed materials has been established for teachers' exploitation. However, to date these materials have not been subjected to a principled evaluation of their efficacy and efficiency in facilitating the aims of the syllabus. This omission is of consequence for two reasons:

1. Teachers and other interested parties have no empirical evidence that the materials in question do in fact facilitate the fulfillment of the syllabus aim; and
2. This absence of data pertaining to the efficacy/efficiency of current materials impedes the development of improved materials.

In these circumstances, a materials evaluation addressing the following questions would be of value:

1. Do current teacher-developed materials facilitate the fulfillment of the aim of the English 1 Communication Course syllabus?
2. What specific design features may be modified to effect improvement in the materials' fulfillment of this aim?

To conduct a full-scale evaluation which comprehensively attacks all aspects of these multifaceted questions would certainly breach the constraints of time and space available here, for as Chambers (1997: 29~30) rightly observes, 'Evaluating materials is a complex process . . .

factors to be considered include suitability for age group, cultural appropriateness, methodology, level, quality, number and type of exercises, skills, teacher's book, variety, pace, personal involvement and problem solving.' This said, it is feasible within current strictures to execute a preliminary evaluation that takes an initial step towards addressing the questions above in a principled, empirical manner. This paper reports on the design, execution, findings and implications of such an evaluation.

2. Evaluation Design

This section explicates the design of the evaluation as follows:

- Section 2.1 defines it temporally and functionally as a mid-use formative procedure;
- Section 2.2 describes its grounding in the Interaction Hypothesis (Long 1983) and attendant tenet that language is acquired through the negotiation of meaning; and
- Sections 2.3~2.5 detail the design of instruments of analysis based on (a) cognitive, (b) psycholinguistic, and (c) pedagogic classifications of activities respectively.

2.1

Depending upon its function, a materials evaluation is conducted pre-, mid- or post-use of the material under investigation. A typical example of a pre-use materials evaluation would be one applied by a teacher or educational institution to a range of course-books in order to ascertain which one best suits the specific needs of learners prior to purchase. Concern with this type of evaluation is the focus of Allwright's 'twenty-seven point management analysis' (1981: 17), Chambers' 'joint evaluation' procedure (1990: 32), and Littlejohn's 'general framework for analysing materials', which is designed to assist teachers in the detailed analyse of course-books as pedagogic devices 'before coming to their *own* conclusions about the desirability or otherwise of the materials' (1998: 192). In contrast, post-use evaluations are typically summative in nature; they assess how effective and/or efficient the material *was* as opposed to how effective and/or efficient it *is going to be*. Ellis' (1997; 1998) procedure for the 'careful [micro-] evaluation of language teaching materials after they have been used' (*ibid.*: 222) is an example of this type.

Between pre-use and post-use evaluations come mid-use evaluations. These are typically undertaken for formative purposes, and as such aim to facilitate improvements in design through the identification of strengths and weaknesses in currently employed materials. Instruments designed to assist with this kind of evaluation include Nunn's (2000) 'rating scales

for small group interaction' which may be employed to help 'guide the teaching process, defining the principles for the construction of . . . classroom tasks' (*ibid.*: 169).

It is a preliminary evaluation of the formative type which is appropriate to current needs. The design of such an evaluation is explicated in sections 2.2~2.5 below.

2.2

In order to design an evaluation instrument capable of dissecting the materials in question in a manner which exposes their efficacy/efficiency in facilitating the syllabus aim, it is necessary first to understand clearly the theoretical underpinnings of the syllabus the materials seek to support. To wit, it is reasonable to claim that English 1 is a communicative syllabus predicated on the Interaction Hypothesis (*op. cit.*), the central tenet of which is that language skills develop through a process of meaning negotiation. That is to say, a fundamental assumption of the English 1 Communication syllabus is that oral communication skills improve when learners are required (or at least afforded opportunities) to participate in interactions that necessitate (or at least permit) negotiation of meaning with the limited linguistic resources available to them in the target language. This is arguably evidenced in the syllabus document by the statement that students are required to 'use English only' and 'work in pairs and small groups and contribute to class discussions' in order 'to develop the English skills necessary for effective communication' (*op. cit.*).

An effective instrument of preliminary evaluation in this instance, then, would be one which reveals the extent to which the materials in question require (or at least allow) learners to negotiate meaning orally, for it is arguably materials containing a preponderance of activities which do so that directly serve the aim of the syllabus. The operationalisation of such an instrument of analysis is explicated in sections 2.3~2.5.

2.3

In the communicative language classroom, pedagogic materials typically seek to create the conditions necessary for meaning negotiation through the employment of 'gap activities'. Prabhu (1987) identifies three classes of such activity: information gap, reasoning gap, and opinion gap. To illustrate, an activity in which one student asks another for personal details (e.g. name, address, and telephone number) in order to fill out a hotel registration form would be classified as an information gap; an activity in which learners assume roles as detectives sharing information about the whereabouts of a dozen suspects at the time of a murder in order to deduce which one had the opportunity to commit the crime would be classified as a

reasoning gap; and an activity in which learners debate the relative merits and drawbacks of different means of energy production (wind, nuclear, coal, etc.) would be classified as an opinion gap.[1]

One way to operationalise the measurement of the materials' efficacy at facilitating the oral negotiation of meaning required by the syllabus, then, is to classify cognitively all the activities found in a representative sample by gap activity type, as shown in figure 1.[2]

Cognitive Classification
information gap (interpersonal, oral) ☐
reasoning gap (interpersonal, oral) ☐
opinion gap (interpersonal, oral) ☐
other activity types (non-interpersonal, non-oral, non-gap) ☐

Figure 1   cognitive classification of activities found in the teacher-developed materials sample

One would expect to find effective material to contain a high number of oral interpersonal (i.e. spoken, person-to-person(s)) gap activities relative to the number of 'other activity types' (e.g. reading and writing tasks, grammatical substitution and pronunciation drills).

Preliminary insights into the efficacy of the material may also be gathered from the relative amounts of information gap, reasoning gap and opinion gap activity types found, although conclusions based on these findings will necessarily be cautious and subject to interpretation by teachers. For instance, while some teachers may consider material containing a relatively large number of opinion gap activities to be more effective at 'develop[ing] the English skills necessary for effective communication' (*op. cit.*) than material containing a relatively large number of information gap activities, others might argue the converse. Clearly, caution is required as the appropriacy of a given body of material is in part context dependent. Hence, it is beyond the remit of a preliminary evaluation such as this to make definitive declamations upon the balance of gap activity types appropriate for English 1 Communication students. However, what the analysis proposed in this section can usefully do is furnish teachers with empirical data upon which to make informed, considered and principled improvements in the design of materials as

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perceived desirable or necessary.

2.4

 Having classified each activity cognitively as 'information gap', 'reasoning gap', 'opinion gap' or 'other activity type', it is possible to subject the activities to psycholinguistic analyses that dissect their structure in a manner which casts more light on the question of how effectively they promote negotiation of meaning. Specifically, psycholinguistic analyses spotlight such features of activity design as interactant relationship, interaction requirement, goal orientation and outcome options. Accordingly, these four categories are added to the analysis of gap activities, as shown in figure 2. The remainder of this section comprises an explication of this analysis, with each design feature addressed in turn.

Cognitive Classification	Interactant Relationship	Interaction Requirement	Goal Orientation	Outcome Option
information gap (interpersonal, ☐ oral)	one-way ☐ two-way ☐	required ☐ non-required ☐	divergent ☐ convergent ☐	open ☐ closed ☐
reasoning gap (interpersonal, ☐ oral)	one-way ☐ two-way ☐	required ☐ non-required ☐	divergent ☐ convergent ☐	open ☐ closed ☐
opinion gap (interpersonal, ☐ oral)	one-way ☐ two-way ☐	required ☐ non-required ☐	divergent ☐ convergent ☐	open ☐ closed ☐
other activity type ☐				

Figure 2 analysis of gap activities found in a sample of teacher-developed materials by (i) interaction relationship, (ii) interaction requirement, (iii) goal orientation, and (iv) outcome option combined with the cognitive classification of activities presented in figure 1

 As figure 2 shows, the interactant relationship between learners engaged in a gap activity may be one-way or two-way (Long 1981). That is to say, the transfer of information[3] or opinion may be either unidirectional or reciprocal. For example, an activity in which a learner gives a presentation to a class on the life of a historical figure is one-way; an activity in which students debate the moral complexities of euthanasia is two-way.

 The 'interactant relationship' of material is of interest to teachers-as-materials-developers because second language acquisition (SLA) research suggests that one-way and two-way designs

may have differing effects on the generation of meaning negotiation. As Ellis' (2003: 88~89) review of the literature shows, data from some investigations suggest that two-way activities promote negotiation of meaning which is quantitatively and qualitatively superior to that of one-way activities. The evidence is inconclusive, however, and other investigations have found one-way activities generate as much, if not more, negotiation of meaning. Notwithstanding individual teachers' views on this issue, an investigation into interaction relationships may be of value to the English 1 Communication team as a whole in that it may inform decisions concerning the principled design of future materials.

With respect to 'interaction requirement', a gap activity may be designed in a manner that either obliges or does not compel learners to negotiate meaning. For example, interaction is *required* by participants engaged in a formal debate on the moral complexities of euthanasia; however, it is *non-required* in an activity in which one learner gives another directions from a station to an unknown location over the telephone, and in which the latter traces the route given on a map. In this second example, while the latter student has the *option* of negotiating meaning (e.g. through comprehension checks, clarification requests, confirmation checks, re-confirmations and recasts), the task does not by design *compel* the student to do so.

Again, there are implications for materials design here, as some SLA research suggests that gap activities which *require* learners to interact (e.g. jigsaw activities) lead to more of the kind of negotiation of meaning desired on the English 1 Communication Course than activities in which interaction is *non-required* (*ibid.*: 86~88).

'Goal orientation' refers to whether an activity by design demands learners reach agreement in order to complete it, or allows them to agree to disagree (see Duff 1986). In the case of the debate on euthanasia mentioned above, for instance, despite the most persuasive efforts of others, a learner may ultimately disagree with the proposition; hence, the activity is *divergent*. By contrast, a simulation in which learners take on roles as members of a jury charged with reaching a unanimous verdict on the guilt or innocence of a defendant who assisted a sick spouse to commit suicide is by design *convergent*, as here a commonly agreed decision is a prerequisite for the successful completion of the activity.

As there is some evidence to support the claim that convergent activities lead to more negotiation of meaning than divergent ones (see Ellis 2003: 90), implications for teachers engaged in materials design emerge yet again. Concomitantly, the usefulness of a materials evaluation that casts light upon the goal orientation of activities also becomes apparent.

Finally, 'outcome option' refers to the ways in which an activity may end. In the case of the jury simulation above, for example, there is clearly a very limited range of options as to how

the simulation could finish — the defendant is found either innocent or guilty. In other words, the outcome is *closed* (although not entirely: an activity with only *one* possible outcome would be more closed). An *open* activity, by contrast, allows for a range of possible outcomes, as in the case of an activity in which learners use a set of authentic tourist information leaflets to plan a day's sightseeing in London. In this activity is it not possible to predict the outcome because what students will choose to do, where they will go, how they will travel, etc. is not predetermined.

With respect to outcome options, some SLA findings indicate that closed activities generate more negotiation of meaning than open ones (Long 1989). Once more, there are possible implications for materials development here.

2.5

In sections 2.2~2.4 above, cognitive and psycholinguistic analyses are explicated. Before these are applied to the materials under discussion, it would be helpful to append:

1. Identifiers of origin (i.e. material 'source', 'page', and 'reference'); and
2. A pedagogic classification that helps the evaluator keep track of what is happening in the classroom during each activity in terms commonly employed by teachers: i.e. 'jigsaw', 'problem-solving', 'matching', 'ordering', 'dialogue', 'role-plays' and 'simulation' (see, for example, Pattison's (1987) list of seven pedagogic activity types summarised

Source:	Page:	Reference:		
Cognitive Classification	**Interactant Relationship**	**Interaction Requirement**	**Goal Orientation**	**Outcome Option**
information gap (interpersonal, oral) ☐	one-way ☐ two-way ☐	required ☐ non-required ☐	divergent ☐ convergent ☐	open ☐ closed ☐
reasoning gap (interpersonal, oral) ☐	one-way ☐ two-way ☐	required ☐ non-required ☐	divergent ☐ convergent ☐	open ☐ closed ☐
opinion gap (interpersonal, oral) ☐	one-way ☐ two-way ☐	required ☐ non-required ☐	divergent ☐ convergent ☐	open ☐ closed ☐
other activity type ☐				
Pedagogic Classification:				

Figure 3　evaluation scheme

in Nunan (1989: 68), and Willis' detailing of six (1996: 149~154)).

With these in place as shown in figure 3, data gathering may proceed.

3. Materials Sample

A sample of teacher-developed materials was gathered for analysis from five of the eleven teachers in the English 1 Communication Team (i.e. just under half of all members) and given the designations *material sets A*, *B*, *C*, *D*, and *E*. Each set, containing material intended to be sufficient for 13 weeks'-worth of lessons, was developed by teachers for use in the spring semester of the 2009~2010 academic year (i.e. for Communication 1a lessons). From this sample it is possible to get a snapshot of the type of activities engaged in by the students of these particular teachers at this time. There are, however, limitations upon the generalisablity of any findings which must be recognised as incurred by the method of data gathering employed. Specifically, as the materials gathered do not constitute a truly random sample of all teacher-developed material in use (i.e. the sample comprises material developed by five specific teachers, not material chosen at random from the entire body produced by all eleven teachers), it is not possible for this evaluation to claim that its findings elucidate predilections in materials design by the English Communication team as a whole. Findings only speak with authority with respect to predilections in materials design by the five teachers whose work is sampled; accordingly, caution must be exercised in extrapolating generalisations about the wider body from which they are drawn.

With the above caveat in mind, the activities found in the sample (323 in total) were subjected to analysis with the instrument presented in figure 3 (section 2.5) above. The findings of the investigation are presented in section 4.

4. Findings

This section presents the findings of the analysis outlined above as follows:

- Section 4.1 presents findings pertaining to activity type; while
- Section 4.2 presents findings pertaining to the psycholinguistic design features of inter-actant relationship, interaction requirement, goal orientation and outcome options.

4.1

The tally of activity types found in each set of material (A, B, C, D, and E) yielded the data

Table 1　tally of activity types found in the materials sample

Material Set	Oral Interpersonal Gap Activities				Other Activity Types	Total Tally of Activities
	Information	Reasoning	Opinion	Sub-total		
A	17	1	26	44	44	88
B	15	1	13	29	47	76
C	15	1	12	28	36	64
D	16	0	11	27	30	57
E	10	0	5	15	23	38
A~E total	73	3	67	143	180	323

presented in table 1.

A scan of the table reveals that although the total tally of activities found in each set of materials varies substantially (from 88 in material set A to 38 in material set E), when measured as a proportion of the total number of all activities recorded, the amount of oral, interpersonal gap activities found in each set shows a degree of consistency. Specifically:

1. In Set A 44 of 88 activities are oral interpersonal gap activities;

2. In Set B 29 of 76 activities are oral interpersonal gap activities;

3. In Set C 28 of 64 activities are oral interpersonal gap activities;

4. In Set D 27 of 57 activities are oral interpersonal gap activities; and

5. In Set E 15 of 38 activities are oral interpersonal gap activities.

Overall, then, 143 of the 323 activities found in Sets A~E are oral interpersonal gap activities, or alternatively expressed, the percentage of activities that are oral interactional gap activities typically approaches 50％. (44％ on average across all five sets of material.) This is illustrated in the following graph, where 38~50% of the activities in each set of materials can
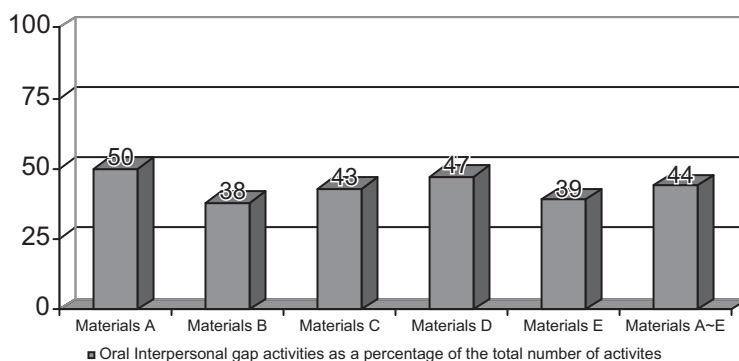

Graph 1　tallies of oral interpersonal gap activities in teacher-developed materials rendered as percentages of the total number of activities found in each set and the whole sample

be seen to be oral interpersonal gap activities.

There is in this respect, then, a notable degree of homogeneity in the five sets of materials examined.

Also revealed by the data in table 1 is an imbalance in the proportions of information and opinion gap activities to reasoning gap activities, as illustrated by graph 2.
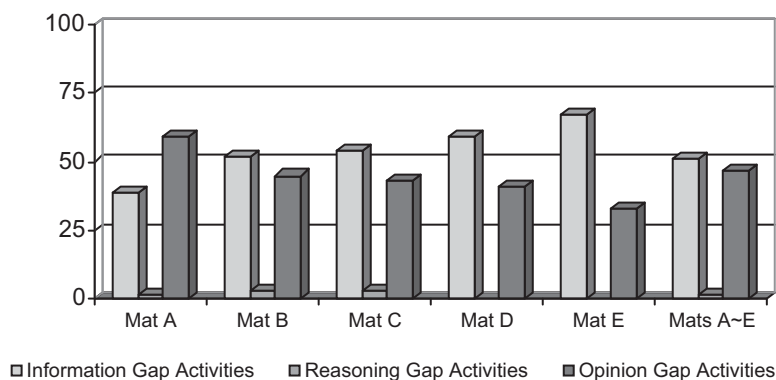
Graph 2　relative proportions of information gap, reasoning gap and opinion gap activities in the materials sample rendered as percentages

Immediately apparent from graph 2 is the negligible number of reasoning gap activities present in the sample. Again, a remarkable degree of homogeneity within the five sets of materials is apparent.

With respect to information gap and opinion gap activities, although variability in the balance of activity types between sets is revealed by the data, a general tendency to favour information gap activities remains discernible. Specifically, a noticeable if slight preference for information gap activities over opinion gap activities is apparent in three of the five sets, as explicated below:

1. In material set B 15 activities (i.e. 52%) are information gap and 13 (45%) are opinion gap;

2. In material set C 15 activities (i.e. 54%) are information gap and 12 (43%) are opinion gap; and

3. In material set D 16 activities (i.e. 59%) are information gap and 11 (41%) are opinion gap.

This tendency is notable for its strength in material set E, where a clear preference for information gap activities over opinion gap activities is displayed. Here, 10 activities (i.e. 67%) are of the former type, while 5 (33%) are of the latter. Only material set A, where 26 activities

(i.e. 59%) are opinion gap and 17 (39%) are information gap, bucks this trend. In the sample as a whole, though, near parity of information gap and opinion gap activities is found: 73 gap activities in material sets A~E (i.e. 51%) are information gap and 67 (47%) are opinion gap.

4.2

Regarding psycholinguistic features, the data reveal similar predilections in the design of both information and opinion gap activities across all five sets of material. [4] This finding is shown in graphs 3 and 4, in which data drawn from appendix 1 are rendered as percentages.
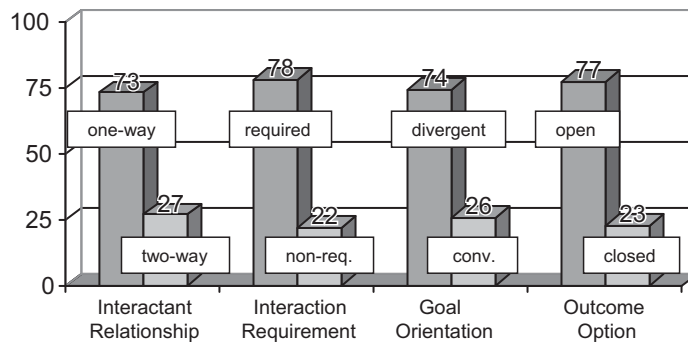
Graph 3　analysis of design features examined in information gap activities
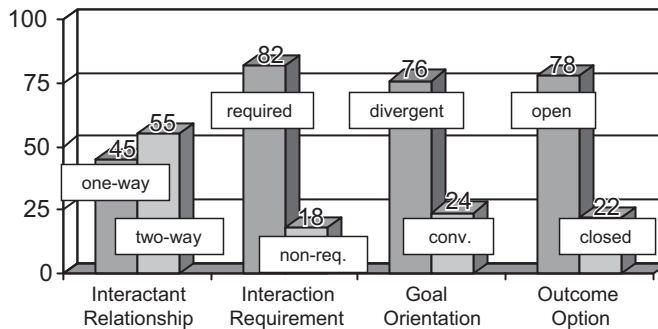
Graph 4　analysis of design features examined in opinion gap activities

The graphs are constructed from the following data, reproduced below for reference.

Table 2　extract from appendix 1 showing tallies of psycholinguistic features found in information and opinion gap activities

	Cognitive Classification	Interactant Relationship	Interaction Requirement	Goal Orientation	Outcome Option	Tally
A~E TOTAL	info gap: 73	one-way: 53 (73%)	required: 57 (78%)	divergent: 54 (74%)	open: 56 (77%)	220 (75%)
		two-way: 20 (27%)	non-required: 16 (22%)	convergent: 19 (26%)	closed: 17 (23%)	72 (25%)
	opinion gap: 67	one-way: 30 (45%)	required: 55 (82%)	divergent: 51 (76%)	open: 52 (78%)	153 (57%)
		two-way: 37 (55%)	non-required: 12 (18%)	convergent: 16 (24%)	closed: 15 (22%)	115 (43%)

To summarise:

1. Graph 3 shows that, with respect to information gap activities, overall the materials exhibit a heavy weighting in favour of:

    a) One-way interaction relationships;

    b) Required interaction;

    c) Divergence in goal orientation; and

    d) Openness of outcome.

2. Graph 4 also shows that, with respect to opinion gap activities, overall the materials exhibit a similarly heavy weighting in favour of:

    a) Required interaction;

    b) Divergence in goal orientation; and

    c) Openness of outcome.

The one exception to this symmetry lies with interactant relationships, with respect to which opinion gap activities display a far more equitable ratio of one-way to two-way activities than information gap activities. Indeed, there is near parity overall in the number of one-way and two-way activities found here: 30 opinion gap activities (i.e. 45%) are one-way while 37 (55%) are two-way. (A possible explanation for this apparent anomaly is suggested at the close of the discussion in section 5.2.)

Although such an overview as that presented in the preceding graphs may be useful for elucidating overall tendencies in materials design, it is important that variations in individual sets are not glossed over without due attention. Indeed, reference to appendix 1 shows six notable deviations from the pattern observed in graphs 3 and 4. These are found in materials sets C and D, and may be summarized as follows:

1. With respect to information gap activities:

a) In material set D parity in the number of activities with one- and two-way interactant relationships exists, whereas in all other sets there is a weighting in favour of one-way interactant relationships.

b) In material set C interaction is non-required in 10 out of 15 oral interaction gap activities (i.e. 66%); conversely, all other sets display a weighting in favour of required interaction.

c) Also in material set C there is near parity in the number of divergent and convergent activities (8 activities (i.e. 53%) are divergent, while 7 (47%) are convergent). By contrast, all other sets display a clear preference for divergence in goal orientation.

d) Again in materials set C there is near parity in the number of open and closed outcome activities (8 activities (53%) are open and 7 (47%) are closed), whereas in all other sets there is a clear weighting in favour of activities with open outcomes.

2. With respect to opinion gap activities:

a) In material set D 9 out of 11 oral interpersonal activities are two-way (i.e. 82%), while near parity of one-way and two-way interactant relationships exists in all other sets.

b) In material set C there is parity in the number of activities requiring and not requiring interaction, whereas all other sets exhibit a significant weighting in favour of required interaction.

In summary, the findings show six significant individual variations to exist within general predilections in the design of the materials sampled. Set C in particular, and to a lesser extent set D, display non-conformist features possibly indicative of a diversity of opinion between materials developers that deserves attention. Hence it is with both the aforementioned similarities and differences between material sets borne in mind that the ensuing discussion is conducted.

5. Discussion

This evaluation set out to address two questions, reproduced here from section 1 for reference:

1. Do current teacher-developed materials facilitate the fulfillment of the explicit aims of the English 1 Communication Course syllabus?

2. What specific design features may be modified to effect improvement in the materials' fulfillment of this aim?

Sections 5.1~5.2 below draw on relevant findings in a discussion of each question in turn.

5.1

The data presented in figures 4 and 5 (section 4.1) provide empirical grounds upon which to reach a preliminary conclusion on the question of whether or not the materials sampled do in fact facilitate the fulfillment of the explicit aim of the English 1 Communication Course syllabus (i.e. 'to develop the English skills necessary for effective communication' by way of the negotiation of meaning engaged in by learners 'as they work in pairs and small groups and contribute to class discussions" (*op. cit.*)). The pertinent finding upon which this conclusion is based pertains to the ratio of oral interpersonal gap activities to 'other' activity types found. That is, 143 of the 323 activities recorded in the sample (i.e. 44%) are oral interpersonal gap activities (proportions for individual sets ranging from 29 out of 76 (38%) in set B to 44 out of 88 (50%) in set A).

In short, nearly half the activities found in the material in the sample are oral interpersonal gap activities. The remaining half comprise other pedagogic activity types, such as intrapersonal reading, writing and listening skills activities, non-oral grammar and vocabulary learning exercises, and non-interactive pronunciation and intonation drills). This weighting arguably evidences a bias in the design of the materials in favour of oral interpersonal activities (specifically, information and opinion gap activities). The number of activities of this type found is much greater than the number of any single 'other' activity type, although collectively the latter comprise a little over half of the total tally of all activities. This last may be explained by the apparent appending of explicitly language-focused activities to oral interactive gap activities. Add to this the unit review activities found and the overall average of 44% oral interpersonal gap activities to 56% 'others' can be explained as reflecting a body of material which aims to introduce language- and learner-focused activities into lessons in conjunction with meaning-focused oral communication activities.

It may then be concluded that, in answer to question (i) above, this sample of teacher-developed material exhibits a bias by design to fulfilling the main syllabus aim through the exploitation of oral interpersonal gap activities, but not to the exclusion of other activity types. Rather, oral interpersonal gap activities appear to provide the skeletal structure of the materials to which a wide range of other activity types adhere.

5.2

It is now possible to examine specific design features in terms of perceived strengths and weaknesses. When doing so, however, it should be remembered that it is outside the remit of a preliminary evaluation such as this to declaim upon the appropriacy of particular cognitive or psycholinguistic features to the needs of English 1 Communication students (see also section 2.3). This said, what this investigation can and does seek to do in this section is present findings that may inform principled improvements in materials design as perceived desirable or necessary by teachers. It is from this position that the ensuing discussion is conducted.

Apparent from the pedagogic classification of materials is the range of oral, interpersonal activity types designed by teachers to engage English 1 Communication students. These include a variety of discussions, games, presentations, surveys/questionnaires, story-telling activities, role-plays, and quizzes. What is revealed by the analyses undertaken in sections 4.1~4.2, however, is that this wide range of pedagogic activity obscures limits in the range of cognitive activity provided for, and a notable degree of conformity in task design. Specifically:

1. Information gap and opinion gap activities predominate to the virtual or complete exclusion of reasoning gap activities;

2. Interaction is required by 112 out of the 140 information/opinion gap activities found (i.e. 80%);

3. Goal orientation is divergent in 105 of the aforementioned information/opinion gap activities (i.e. 75%); and

4. Outcome option is open in 108 of the information/opinion gap activities (i.e. 77%);

5. The interactant relationship in 53 of the 73 information gap activities recorded (i.e. 73%) is one-way.

Each of these points is examined in greater detail in turn below:

1. Predomination of information and opinion gap activities over reasoning gap activities
Such homogeneity and omission in material design may be perceived as a weakness by some teachers concerned with developing improved materials, as it is within uniformity and pretermission of this kind that inefficacy in fulfilling the syllabus aims is arguably most likely to reside. The negligible presence of reasoning gap activities in the sample is a case in point. In the context of the Bangalore Communicational Teaching Project, Prabhu (*op cit.*) found reasoning gap activities to be the most effective facilitator of negotiation, and opinion gap activities the least effective. Whether or not this may also hold true for students on the English 1 Communication Course may be a potentially fruitful point for discussion amongst teachers and an area for further

research.

With respect to information gap and opinion gap activities, near parity exists overall. However, as cautioned in section 4.1, this average should not be read as signifying a consensus between teacher-developers as to what constitutes an appropriate ratio of these activity types, for as graph 2 shows, the writer of material set A heavily favours opinion gap activities, while the writer of materials E heavily favours information gap activities. Between these extremes sit materials B, C and D which, with just a narrow preference for information gap activities, display a comparatively balanced weighting of the two activity types.

The reasons for these differences deserve to be the subject of an investigation of their own into teachers' underlying beliefs and motivations. Suffice to speculate here, the various weightings observed may reflect differences in teacher perceptions of the following:

a) The level of the students;

b) The specific needs and/or motivations of the students;

c) The precise requirements of the syllabus;

d) The methodological appropriacy and efficacy of specific activity designs in particular, and the role of oral interpersonal gap activities in language learning in general.

To illustrate, it is for instance possible that the preference for opinion gap activities displayed by the designer of set A reflects a belief that material containing a large number of discussion activities is appropriate to the level, needs and motivations of the university students in question. Reference to the pedagogic classification of materials section of the evaluation certainly seems to lend support to this supposition. By contrast, the designer of material set E, who favours information gap activities, may consider these to be a more appropriate vehicle for the clear and explicit focusing of learners' attention upon given language items through meaning-focused activities that is characteristic of this developer's material.

This difference between the relative weightings of information and opinion gaps in materials A and E may indicate, then:

a) A difference in interpretation of the precise requirements of the syllabus by their developers (e.g. as requiring a primary emphasis on communicative fluency, or a primary emphasis on grammatical and lexical development); and

b) A difference of opinion by their developers as to the best way in which to deliver

the syllabus to the students (e.g. though discussion-type activities from which language-focused activities may follow, or through information transfer activities into which a focus on form is integrated.)

Clearly, where the evaluation findings show heterogeneity as well as homogeneity, they open up possibilities for discussion between teachers-as-materials-developers on a range of issues at a variety of levels.

2. Predomination of activities requiring participant interaction

The findings may also stimulate discussion concerning the appropriacy of a 4:1 ratio in favour of required interaction activities in the sample. Specifically, while the writers of sets A, B, D and E may consider this heavy weighting in favour of required interaction to be a strength of the material (as noted in section 2.4, some SLA research suggests that activities which *require* interaction promote more negotiation of meaning than activities in which interaction is *optional*), the developer of set C may argue against requiring so much interaction. As observed in section 2.4 (points 1b and 2b), material C does not display the clear preference for required interaction found in all other sets of material, from which it is possible to conjecture a greater concern with the potential negative affective consequences of placing too great a required interaction 'burden' upon low proficiency learners by this material's developer. As Tomlinson (1998: 19) observes with respect to low proficiency learners, 'most researchers would agree that forcing immediate production in the new language can damage the reluctant speaker affectively and linguistically'. Tomlinson goes on to cite Dulay, Burt and Krashen's (1982: 25~26) view that 'communication situations in which students are permitted to remain silent or respond in their first language may be the most effective approach. . . . This approach . . . appears to be more effective than forcing full two-way communication from the very beginning'. It may be, then, that the presence in material C of a greater number of activities which do not require interaction reflects a difference of opinion as to the level of the target learners coupled with a greater concern for affective issues. Whatever the case, the findings again provide grounds for discussion.

3. Predomination of divergence in goal orientation

With respect to goal orientation, the findings may afford grounds for discussion upon the ratio of convergent and divergent activities appropriate for English Communication 1 students. As noted in section 4.1 (point 1c), there is a clear predominance of divergent activities in the materials sample, with only set C offering

approximate parity with the convergent type. In the light of this finding, teachers-as-materials-developers may wish to debate the potential merits (i.e. possible increases in comprehensible input, number of turns, and negotiation of meaning) and demerits (i.e. possible reductions in word count and utterance complexity) (Duff 1986) that could result from an increase in the relative number of activities requiring convergence offered to students.

4. Predomination of activities allowing openness in outcome

The finding relating to outcome option (i.e. that open materials predominate) may also provide grounds for discussion. Only in material set C is approximate parity with closed outcome activities present. In the light of this finding, teacher-developers may want to consider (re)designing activities so that they demand more negotiation of meaning, as is arguably achieved by activities convergent in orientation and closed in outcome (see section 2.4).

5. Predomination of one-way interaction in information gap activities

The finding that 53 out of 73 information gap activities (i.e. nearly 3/4) are one-way may also provide grounds for discussion in the light of some SLA research suggesting that two-way activities generate more and better negotiation of meaning (see section 2.4). Prior to undertaking such a discussion, however, it would be prudent to address the question of how accurately this finding reflects actual interaction relationships in the classroom. This is because the strong bias in favour of one-way relationships apparent in the material *as it appears on paper* might not accurately reflect actual interactant relationship patterns generated between learners *when it is deployed*. Indeed, although many of the information gap activities present in the materials (e.g. presentations, and many of the questionnaires and quizzes) are by design one-way (i.e. the transfer of information is not mutual) it is easy to visualize teachers executing many of these activities in such a manner that in practice they are effectively two-way. As Ellis (2003: 216) observes (citing Pica, Kanagy & Falodon 1993), 'if the participants reverse roles from one task to another, i.e. participant A holds the information in the first task and participant B in the second, the overall effect is the same [as a two-way task such as a jigsaw]'. It may well be, then, that the *de facto* ratio of one-way to two-way information gap activities is closer to the 1:1 ratio found in set D alone, and for opinion gap activities overall.

Regarding interactant relationships in opinion gap activities, the approximately equal amount of one-way and two-way interactions found may in part reflect a concern in the mate-

rials with preparing students to communicate in a variety of 'academic, business and personal situations' (*op. cit.*) such as presentations, seminars, job interviews, meetings, negotiations, reservations and small talk. Clearly, some of these entail one-way and others two-way interactant relationships. However, it should be noted in closing that once again material D departs from the norm in this respect: 9 out of 11 opinion gap activities (i.e. over 4/5) in this set are two-way. Whether a compelling case exists for this weighting, or whether equal provision to both features strikes a suitably pragmatic balance in the absence of compelling SLA evidence in favour of one over the other, provides further grounds for discussion.

6. Limitations and Areas for Further Investigation

This evaluation sets out to gather quantitative empirical data from which preliminary conclusions can be drawn concerning the efficiency and effectiveness of materials deployed in the delivery of the English 1 Communication syllabus. As such, it constitutes an initial step in an evaluative process, the limitations of which may act as a spur to further investigation. Questions pertaining to the following six areas of research, for instance, arise directly from the current study:

1. The topic foci of activities

   The current investigation addresses the question of whether or not teacher-developed materials help 'develop the English skills necessary for effective communication' (*op. cit.*), but stops short of examining the questions of whether, to what extent, and in what proportions the materials 'develop the English skills necessary for effective communication *in academic, business and personal situations*' (*op. cit.*, emphasis added). An investigation into these questions would be a natural extension of the current one.

2. Other (non-oral interpersonal gap) activities

   The focus of the current evaluation is on oral interpersonal gap activities, and as such it has very little to say about the 180 activities (i.e. 56% of the all those found) that do not fall into this category. Clearly, though, these activities also deserve attention, as an investigation into their pedagogic objectives, structure and preponderance may yield useful data upon which informed decisions about future materials design may be made.

3. The execution of one-way information gap activities

   The current evaluation found a heavy weighting in favour of one-way information gap

activities, but suggested that this might mask a *de facto* parity, or even a bias in favour of, two-way activities in practice (see section 5.2). An investigation into the execution of this type of activity in the classroom would confirm or disprove this contention.

4. Further interaction analysis

The current investigation may act as a springboard into more detailed interaction analyses, such as:

- Investigations into the complexity of language output prompted by the materials (measured, for example, by the number, length, and grammatical/lexical complexity of turns found in a sample of interactions); and
- Investigations into the efficacy of materials at facilitating negotiation of meaning (measured, for example, by the number of clarification requests, comprehension checks, confirmation checks, re-confirmations and recasts found in a sample of interactions).

5. Replication studies

Two replication studies are immediately suggested by the current investigation. Firstly, there is the option of repeating the evaluation in a year or two if, having (re)written materials in the light of the findings presented in section 4, teachers wanted to evaluate the impact of design modifications on the structure of the body of materials as a whole. Secondly, there is the possibility of subjecting material developed for exploitation in the autumn semester to an analysis identical to that conducted here on materials produced for the spring semester. If conducted with a random sample drawn from all teachers in the English Communication Team, such an investigation could confirm or disprove any assumption that the findings pertaining to specific Communication 1a materials here are generalisable across the academic year to Communication 1b materials also.

6. Investigations into teacher-developers' beliefs

Finally, there is the question of what motivates teachers to make the design choices they do when developing materials. This interesting question, upon which it has only been possible to touch here, would certainly benefit from a thorough, dedicated treatment. Indeed, it is perhaps an investigation of this kind into the factors in play during the materials development process that is most likely to lead to improvements in design.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1） In this paper the term 'task' is generally avoided in preference of 'activity' in order to sidestep the thorny question of exactly what constitutes a communicative 'task' (see Nunan 1989: 5~6 and Ellis (2003: 4~5) for surveys of definitions). The understanding of 'gap activities' outlined above in section 2.3 is sufficient to current needs.

2） It is recognised that Prabhu's (1987) definition of 'negotiation' is narrower than that outlined in section 2.3 (see Ellis 2003: 213). However, for the purposes of this evaluation, the term 'negotiation of meaning' as presented in section 2.2 may usefully be applied to Prabhu's classification of gap activities.

3） Both information gap and reasoning gap activities entail the transfer of information. The important difference between the two lies with what a learner is expected to do with the information received.

4） Reasoning gap activities are omitted from the analysis as the number found in the material (only three) was far too small to yield sufficient data from which useful, generalizable observations could be drawn.

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Appendix 1

Appendix 1　tallies of psycholinguistic features found in the material under the headings of interactant relationship, interaction requirement, goal orientation and outcome option

Mats Ref.	Cognitive Classification	Interactant Relationship	Interaction Requirement	Goal Orientation	Outcome Option	Tally
A	info gap: 17	one-way: 12	required: 17	divergent: 15	open: 15	
		two-way: 5	non-required: 0	convergent: 2	closed: 2	
	opinion gap: 26	one-way: 12	required: 26	divergent: 17	open: 17	
		two-way: 14	non-required: 0	convergent: 9	closed: 9	
B	info gap: 15	one-way: 12	required: 12	divergent: 10	open: 11	
		two-way: 3	non-required: 3	convergent: 5	closed: 4	
	opinion gap: 13	one-way: 7	required: 10	divergent: 12	open: 13	
		two-way: 6	non-required: 3	convergent: 1	closed: 0	
C	info gap: 15	one-way: 14	required: 5	divergent: 8	open: 8	
		two-way: 1	non-required: 10	convergent: 7	closed: 7	
	opinion gap: 12	one-way: 7	required: 6	divergent: 8	open: 8	
		two-way: 5	non-required: 6	convergent: 4	closed: 4	
D	info gap: 16	one-way: 8	required: 14	divergent: 13	open: 14	
		two-way: 8	non-required: 2	convergent: 3	closed: 2	
	opinion gap: 11	one-way: 2	required: 8	divergent: 10	open: 10	
		two-way: 9	non-required: 3	convergent: 1	closed: 1	
E	info gap: 10	one-way: 7	required: 9	divergent: 8	open: 8	
		two-way: 3	non-required: 1	convergent: 2	closed: 2	
	opinion gap: 5	one-way: 2	required: 5	divergent: 4	open: 4	
		two-way: 3	non-required: 0	convergent: 1	closed: 1	
TOTAL	info gap: 73	one-way: 53 (73%)	required: 57 (78%)	divergent: 54 (74%)	open: 56 (77%)	220 (75%)
		two-way: 20 (27%)	non-required: 16 (22%)	convergent: 19 (26%)	closed: 17 (23%)	72 (25%)
	opinion gap: 67	one-way: 30 (45%)	required: 55 (82%)	divergent: 51 (76%)	open: 52 (78%)	188 (70%)
		two-way: 37 (55%)	non-required: 12 (18%)	convergent: 16 (24%)	closed: 15 (22%)	80 (30%)