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**Taiwanese textbooks for young learners of English:  
A criterion-referenced analysis**

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**Abstract**

This article focuses on one of the problems faced by one Pacific rim country, Taiwan, in coming to terms with the increasing globalization of English, that is, the production of textbooks that are appropriate for young learners. Increasing pressure to ensure that its citizens achieve a high level of proficiency in English has led Taiwan, in common with many other countries, to reduce the age at which children are introduced to English in schools. This has led to the proliferation of English textbooks for young learners. The Taiwan national English curriculum guidelines recommend that teaching materials should cultivate communicative ability and should include varied activities, a range of different types of text, and interesting, practical and lively topics and themes. Three textbook series produced in Taiwan are analyzed and discussed here in terms of a range of effectiveness criteria. It is concluded that the textbook writers have not yet come to terms with the recommendations in the English curriculum guidelines. In that these recommendations are similar to recommendations included in national curriculum guidelines for the teaching of languages in many other parts of the world, it is suggested that language teaching materials produced elsewhere might usefully be analyzed in a similar way.

**Introduction**

Increasing pressure to ensure that its citizens achieve a high level of proficiency in English has led Taiwan, in common with many other countries in Asia and in other parts of the world, to reduce the age at which children are introduced to English in schools. Since 2005, children have officially begun English in school in Form 3 (aged 9) and many actually begin much earlier. This has led to pressure to increase the number of primary teachers who are able to teach English and to the proliferation of English textbooks for young learners. The English curriculum guidelines that form part of the new *Grade 1-9 Integrated Coordinated Curriculum* (Ministry of Education (Taiwan), 2004) recommend that teaching materials should promote understanding, cultivate communicative ability, include varied activities, a range of different types of text (e.g., jazz chants, greeting cards, notes, letters, simple stories, short plays, riddles, jokes, cartoons, and comics), and interesting, practical and lively topics and themes. Structures should be introduced in meaningful contexts and attention should be paid to the recycling of language. In order to determine whether textbook writers are currently meeting these expectations, I analyzed three textbook series produced in Taiwan for young learners of English in terms of a range of effectiveness criteria. The series analyzed are *Power up English*, published by Kaosiung City Education Bureau (Kaohsiung Elementary English Resource Center) in 2002, *Darbie, Teach Me*, published by Kang-xuan publishing company in 2001, and *English*, published by Nan-yi publishing company in 2001. *Power up English* is widely used in Kaohsiung. The other two (*Darbie, Teach Me* and *English*) are widely used throughout Taiwan and have been officially approved by the Taiwan Ministry of Education. The criteria used, the analyses and the findings are reported below.

**Critical review of selected literature on the role of textbooks in the teaching of languages**

Hutchinson and Torres (1994, p. 315) note that:

The textbook is an almost universal element of [English language] teaching. Millions of copies are sold every year, and numerous aid projects have been set up to produce them in [various] countries. . . . No teaching-learning situation, it seems, is complete until it has its relevant textbook.

As Skierso (1991, pp. 432-453) observes, very few teachers manage to teach without textbooks. Indeed, most teachers rely heavily on them in seeking to ensure that students attain prescribed teaching goals and objectives. With specific reference to language teaching, Harmer (2000, p. 117) notes that textbooks not only give teachers ideas about what to teach, but also about how to teach, often functioning as a basic syllabus for a class. Thus, textbooks can reduce a teacher's workload and can also provide a link between school and home (Brewster & Ellis, 2002, p. 152). Furthermore, students often have strong expectations about using a textbook in the language classroom and believe that published materials have more credibility than teacher-generated materials (Sheldon, 1988, p. 237).

Cunningsworth (1995, p. 7) identifies a number of roles that textbooks can serve in the curriculum, including providing (a) a syllabus based on pre-determined learning objectives, (b) an effective resource for self-directed learning, (c) an effective medium for the presentation of new material, (d) a source of ideas and activities, (e) a reference source for students, and (f) support for less experienced teachers who need to gain confidence. Although some educationalists believe that there is a danger that inexperienced teachers may become over-reliant on textbooks, others argue that textbooks can actually save students from a teacher's deficiencies (Kitao, 1997; O'Neill, 1982; Williams, 1983). Furthermore, it has been argued that textbooks can provide an important source of innovation and can support teachers through potentially disturbing and threatening change processes by introducing change gradually, creating scaffolding upon which teachers can build, and demonstrating new and/or untried methodologies (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994, p. 323). While there are many educationalists who point out the benefits of using textbooks in teaching additional languages, there are others who take a more negative view of textbooks. Sheldon (1998, p. 239) sees them as the "tainted end-product of an author's or a publisher's desire for quick profit", with many of them making false claims and being marked by serious theoretical problems, design flaws, and practical shortcomings. Fullan (1991, p. 70) notes that approved textbooks may easily become the curriculum in the classroom whilst failing to incorporate significant features of the policy or goals that they are supposed to address, the result being that a textbook may actually distract attention from behaviors and educational beliefs that are crucial to the achievement of desired outcomes. Allwright (1981, pp. 6-8), argues that textbooks are not only inflexible, but also generally reflect the pedagogic, psychological, and linguistic preferences and biases of their authors, and Levis (1999, p. 37) maintains that textbooks are culturally and socially biased and contain inauthentic language. So far as Cathcart (1989, p. 105) and Yule et al. (1992, p. 250) are concerned, textbooks do not present an adequate reflection of the language structures, grammar, idioms, vocabulary and conversational rules, routines and strategies that learners will need to use in the real-world. However, as Widdowson (1998, p. 331) observes:

Learners of a foreign language should be made aware of . . . cultural conditions on real communication. . . . But the explicit teaching of communicative abilities which measure up to those of the communities whose language they are learning is quite a different matter.

I believe that an attempt to do so is to set an impossible and pointless goal whose only outcome is likely to be frustration. . . . It is the business of pedagogy to decide on what can be feasibly and effectively taught . . . so as to activate a learning investment for future use. Talk of real world communication is all too often a distraction.

In Taiwan, many researches have investigated teachers' perceptions of English textbooks at junior high school level (see, for example, Hsu, 2001; Kang, 2003; Li, 2003; Liu, 2002; Wang, 2004). There are also some studies of English textbooks at senior high school level (Chen, 2002, 2006; Cho, 2002; Yeh, 2003). These studies examine textbooks from different perspectives. Some researchers have focused on how textbooks are actually used in primary schools (Huang, 2004; Sun, 2000); at least one focuses on how the concept of multiple intelligences is reflected (Dai, 2002; Ma, 2003); the focus of another study is the extent to which textbooks used at primary level comply with the five goals for English learning (Five Cs) listed in the American National Standards for Foreign Language Learning, namely *Communication, Connections, Cultures, Comparisons and Communities* (Ma, 2003). One study compares the five textbooks that are most popular in Taichung and Miao-li County in terms of vocabulary, sentence patterns and themes (Chang, 2004); another, Lin (1997), focuses on vocabulary, noting that certain textbook series include much more vocabulary than is required in terms of the curriculum and that many of the words introduced are infrequently used. The majority of Taiwan-based studies of textbooks used in primary schools focus on teacher-related issues. Thus, for example, Huang (2004) reports that although samples of teachers who have majored in English perform better as teachers of English than do those who have not majored in English, there is no significant difference between the two groups in terms of choice of textbooks. He did not, however, take any account of the nature of the training in English teaching that participants in the study had had. In analysing the interaction between teaching and phonics-based children's textbooks, Sun (2000) notes that teachers' expertise does play a key role in both selection and use.

#### The Taiwan national curriculum guidelines for English

The Taiwan national curriculum guidelines have been translated and discussed in detail by Her (2007, *Chapter 2*). She notes that the overall emphasis is on communicative language teaching. These guidelines are critical to the establishment of criteria for the assessment of textbooks and teachers' guides because they are explicit about the types of materials that are considered appropriate.

Within the Taiwan national curriculum guidelines themselves, there is a section headed *Teaching and materials guidelines* (Ministry of Education (Taiwan), 2004). In this section, readers are advised that local teaching materials should be used and that topics and themes should be interesting, practical and lively, with topics being relevant to learners' daily lives and including reference to family, school, food, animals and plants, holidays and costumes, occupations, travel, and sport and leisure activities. Activities should be varied and should include, for example, jazz chants,

greeting cards, notes, letters, simple stories, short plays, riddles, jokes, cartoons, and comics. The communicative functions should include those associated with everyday conversation and social interaction such as *greeting, thanking, apologizing, agreeing, requesting, and asking for directions*. A section in the curriculum on language components refers to the alphabet and to pronunciation (where it is recommended that good use should be made of phonics at junior high level). The vocabulary list in an appendix to the curriculum guidelines is made up of 2,000 words of which 1,200 (to be given priority) are frequently used words. However, so far as primary school students are concerned, the expectation is that they should cover 300 words only. It is also noted that the vocabulary included in each unit should be divided into words for recognition and words for production. In a section on sentence structure it is noted that the sentence structures that are introduced should be essential and frequently used and that there should be a move from simple to complex constructions, these constructions being introduced in meaningful contexts and with an emphasis on fun and understanding. It is also noted that attention should be paid to repetition and recycling.

Under the heading of *principles of materials compilation*, it is noted that both print and audio-visual materials are required, that all materials should be interesting, practical, simple and active with an emphasis on varied communicative activities. It is also noted that each unit should include topics, sentence structures and communication functions in lifelike situations. Vocabulary, phrases and sentence patterns should be introduced gradually (moving from simple to complex) and there should be adequate opportunities for practice and review. The content should be easily understood and should include songs, dialogues, rhymes, letters, stories, plays, etc. as much as possible. Materials should be varied and should include videotapes, audiotapes, multi-media resources and books and pictures. English should be the medium of instruction as much as possible and learners should be given opportunities to listen and to speak in the context of both teacher-student and student-student interactions. Overall comprehension and expression should precede more detailed language practice.

A varied approach to assessment is recommended, with assessment being linked to the teaching objectives and including the work students do in class. At the elementary stage, formative assessment (including student portfolios) should be prioritized. The focus should not be on pencil and paper tests and scores.

#### Deriving criteria for the evaluation of the textbooks and teachers' guides

According to Yeh (2005, p. 6), some of the problems with existing textbooks relate to the misuse, inappropriate use and inconsistent use of language, a focus on grammar rather than communication, and an avoidance of lexical and grammatical complexity that leads to unnatural dialogue, and artificial and unhelpful pronunciation practice.

A number of evaluation checklists that are intended to be generalizable (i.e., applicable irrespective of context) across language textbooks have been developed (see, for example, Byrd, 2001; Chambers, 1997; Cunningsworth, 1984, 1995; Ellis, 1997; Harmer, 1998, 2001; Miekley, 2005; Sheldon, 1988; Skierso, 1991; Tsai, 1999; Ur, 1996; Williams, 1983). These generally include factors such as physical characteristics, methodology, consistency with the overall curriculum, and extent to which teacher needs are met, as well as linguistic and cultural content, skills, topics,

and gender representation. Cunningsworth (1995) divides evaluation criteria into eight categories: aims and approaches, design and organization, language content, skills, topics, methodology, teacher's books, and practical considerations. A series of questions is associated with each section.

Cunningsworth and Kusel (1991, p. 128) note that teachers' guides are also important in that they can contribute greatly to achieving a good standard of teaching, through the provision of an explicit rationale, information about the language, and teaching procedures. Teachers' guides can "take the teacher step by step through every stage of every unit" (Cunningsworth, 1984, p. 52) and should, according to Cunningsworth and Kusel (1991, p. 134), provide guidance not only on what to do, but also on how to do it. In order to meet the needs of more experienced teachers as well as less experienced teachers, teachers' guides need to include a range of optional activities and interesting raw materials (Hitomi, 1997, p. 244). Furthermore, good teachers' guides can support non-native speaking teachers and boost their confidence (Coleman, 1985, p. 84). It is therefore important also to evaluate the teachers' guides that accompany textbooks as well as the textbooks themselves.

In Taiwan, Shih (1999) provides a set of criteria for textbook evaluation which includes seven headings: *textbook overview*, *language components*, *language skills*, *physical features*, *instructors' manuals*, *students' assignments* and *supplementary materials*. Another list of criteria, prepared by the National Institute for Compilation and Translation (2001) is more specific, including a range of questions relating, for example, to whether a textbook complies with overall educational concerns, whether it conforms to the national curriculum guidelines, whether the framework of the units is clear, and whether topics and functions of language are well presented (Yeh, 2005, p. 6). The specific areas for evaluation are outlined below:

- Consistency with the content and spirit of the primary education grade 1-9 curriculum guidelines;
- Consistency with the fundamental concepts, competence indicators, teaching materials guidelines and editing principles of the English curriculum guidelines;
- Consistency with developing trends in teaching methodologies;
- Consistency with the procedures for materials development (planning, editing, testing and revising);
- Inclusion of accurate, natural and fluent language;
- Including appropriate progression from simple to complex, that is, involving an upwardly spiralling model with adequate review units which offer students opportunities to practice;
- Inclusion of multi-layered topics and genres, interactive practice activities, and a focus on students' needs and interests;
- Involving an appropriate level of difficulty and including a range of teaching activities to accommodate students at different levels of proficiency;
- Including materials and activities that have a genuine communicative intent and provide authentic language in a real context;
- Including an appropriate balance of skills, with listening, speaking, reading and writing being developed equally at Junior High School level;

- Prioritizing vocabulary from the 1,000 word list in the curriculum guidelines;
- Including pronunciation teaching (with relevant tapes or CDs), a focus at primary school level on the relationship between letters and sounds, and a focus on phonics at Junior High level;
- Having clear print and good and relevant illustrations and photographs.

There are many possible sources of evaluation criteria for textbooks and teachers' guides. However, some of those that are available are too general for my current purposes, while others are too specific. As Sheldon (1988, p. 242) observes: "any culturally restricted, global list of criteria can never really apply in most local environments, without considerable modification", therefore "[we] can be committed only to checklists or scoring systems that we have had a hand in developing, and which have evolved from specific selection priorities". A number of different sources have contributed towards the development of criteria for textbook evaluation developed here. So far as the evaluation of teachers' guides is concerned, the criteria developed draw upon those proposed by Coleman (1985), Cunningsworth and Kusel (1991), Donoghue (1992), Gearing (1999), and Miekley (2005).

#### **The criteria used for evaluating students' books and associated materials**

So far as student's textbooks and associated materials are concerned, the criteria used here are divided here into eight categories: appearance, durability and organization; language content; text-types and genres; cultural content; tasks and activities; quality and relevance of illustrations; interest level (including imagination and humour); and quality and quantity of supplementary resources. Associated with each of these categories is one or more questions.

#### *Appearance, durability and organization*

- Is the book attractive, robust and easy to follow?
- Can the material be divided into sections that are appropriate in terms of the time available for each lesson?
- Is there an appropriate amount of material overall to provide for between one lesson and three lessons each week

#### *Language content*

- Is the language content consistent with the curriculum guidelines (i.e., with that section of the Grade 1-9 curriculum guidelines that applies to elementary schooling)?
- Is the language content accurate?
- Is the language content situationally appropriate?
- Is the language content adequately contextualized?
- Is revision and integration incorporated into the planning cycle?

#### *Text-types and genres*

- Is there a variety of genres (e.g., instructing, recounting) and text-types (e.g., songs, stories) and is that variety consistent with specification in the curriculum guidelines?
- Are both written and spoken texts included?

- Are the texts coherent and appropriately structured?
- Is the language of the texts appropriate in terms of overall level and lesson objectives?

**Cultural content**

- Is the material culturally appropriate, particularly in terms of the age of the learners?

**Tasks and activities**

- Are the tasks and activities directly relevant to the main teaching points?
- Are the tasks and activities consistent with the curriculum guidelines (i.e., interesting, varied, age-appropriate, appropriate in relation to different learning styles and appropriate in terms of skills balance and the differing proficiency levels typical of the composition of a Taiwanese primary class)?

**Quality and relevance of illustrations**

- Do the illustrations genuinely support the language?
- Are the illustrations appropriate in terms of the age of the learners?
- Is there an appropriate gender balance?
- Are the illustrations static or active?

**Interest level**

- Are the materials likely to interest the learners (e.g., is the material relevant to the lives of the learners and is imagination and humour used in ways that are likely to appeal to the learners?)

**Quality and quantity of supplementary resources**

- Are homework and supplementary practice materials provided?
- Are audio-visual materials, cue cards, posters, charts, and other teaching aids provided?
- Are the supplementary materials adequate to support the learning objectives?
- Do the supplementary resources accommodate the varying needs of learners?

So far as teachers' guides are concerned, the criteria are divided here into five categories: *appearance, durability, organization and user-friendliness; aims and objectives; procedural and methodological information; assessment of learning; ideas for review and extension activities.*

**Appearance, durability, organization and user-friendliness**

- Is the guide attractive and durable?
- Is the layout clear and easy to follow?
- Is the language used in the guide easy to understand?
- Is there an exercise answer key?
- Are potential areas of difficulty identified and is advice on coping with them provided?

- Is there appropriate rationale and explanation for the inclusion of particular approaches, techniques, activities, exercises, tasks, activities, and cultural aspects?
- Is there useful linguistic information about the language focus points?
- Is there useful information about learning strategies and learning styles?

**Aims and objectives**

- Is there a clear statement of overall aims?
- Are the learning objectives clearly stated and consistent with the curriculum guidelines?

**Procedural and methodological information**

- Is there clear and appropriate guidance on each of the following:

lesson staging and sequencing; teaching methodologies (including concept introduction, concept checking, response to learner errors); use of the resources provided (e.g., videotapes, cue cards, posters); setting up, timing and running activities; ensuring that all learners have an opportunity to contribute; providing encouragement and support for learners of different types and with different proficiency levels;

- Is the advice provided suitable for both experienced teachers and less experienced teachers?

**Assessment of learning**

- Is there clear and appropriate guidance on ongoing and cumulative assessment of learning?

**Ideas for review and extension activities**

- Are there adequate review and extension exercises (with an answer key)?

**The textbook series analyzed**

The criteria listed above are applied here to three textbook series: *Power up English* (Kaohsiung Elementary English Resource Center, 2002, 2003, 2004), *Darbie, Teach me* (Chen, 2004) and *English* (Chen & Chiu, 2003, 2004).

The *Power up English* series has 8 volumes, which are intended for primary school students from grade 3 to grade 6. It includes students' books, teachers' books, workbooks, CDs, posters, flashcards and sentence cards.

Each of **Volumes 1 - 4** contains 7 units, 2 reviews and 1 'holiday' unit, the holiday units focusing on national celebrations such as Christmas and New Year. Each unit has two lessons, each of which has five lesson segments: *Talk with me; Key words; Practice with me; Chant with me; Work with me.*

The lesson stages (as indicated in the teachers' guides) are:



**Level 1:** Warm up; See the pictures and listen to the story; Introduce the new words; Introduce the sentence structures; Practice the dialogue

**Level 2:** Warm up; Song (Chant) teaching; Listening and speaking practice; Review the homework; Supplementary vocabulary teaching

Each of **Volumes 5 - 8**, contains 10 units, 2 reviews and 1 'holiday' unit. Each unit is divided into 4 lessons, with 6 activities in the students' books as follows: *Talk with me; Key words; Practice with me; Chant (Sing) with me; Work with me; Read with me* (short paragraph). The lesson stages are:

**Level 1:** Warm up; See the pictures and listen to the story; Introduce the new words; Practice the dialogue

**Level 2:** Warm up; Introduce the sentence structures; Practice the sentence structures; Song (Chant) teaching

**Level 3:** Warm up; Introduce the short article; Reading activity

**Level 4:** Warm up; Listening and speaking practice; Reading and writing practice; Review

**Darbie, Teach me** has 8 volumes, which are intended for primary school students from grade 3 to grade 6. Each volume has a students' book, a teachers' book, a workbook, paper dolls, CDs, classroom video cassettes, posters (main texts, songs and chants), and flashcards (vocabulary and sentence patterns). The main character in each series is a bird called *Darbie*. Each volume contains 6 main units and 3 review units. Each unit is divided into 4 lessons with 5 lesson segments as follows: *Let's listen; Let's learn; Let's repeat; Let's read; Let's sing*

The lesson stages as indicated in the teachers' guide are as follows:

**Level 1:** Warm up; Let's learn: words for production; Let's learn: pattern A; Assignment

**Level 2:** Warm up & review; Let's learn: words for recognition; Let's Learn: pattern B; Let's Chant; Assignment

**Level 3:** Warm up & review; Let's listen; Let's repeat; Let's read; Assignment/ Workbook sections 1 - 2

**Level 4:** Warm up & review; Let's listen & role play; Workbook: section 3-5; Let's sing; Assignment

**Level 1 (review):** Review chants; Let's talk; Let's say; Assignment

**Level 2 (review):** Review vocabulary and patterns; Let's play; Workbook; Review songs; Assignment

**English** has 4 volumes, which are intended for the primary school students from grade 5 to grade 6. Each volume has students' books, teachers' books, workbooks, puppets, CDs, classroom video cassettes, posters (situational pictures, songs and chants), and flashcards. Each volume contains 9 units. Each unit is divided into 4 lessons with 5 segments as follows: *Look and Listen; Listen and Speak; Learn Useful Expressions; Learn and Practice; Learn and Chant/ Sing/Rhyme*

The lesson stages as indicated in the teachers' guide are as follows:

**Level 1:** Warm up; Presentation; Introduction of characters; Wrap-up; Assignment

**Level 2:** Warm up; Presentation (Look and Listen) (Listen and Speak); Learn and Sing; Wrap-up; Assignment

**Level 3:** Warm up; Presentation; Wrap-up; Assignment

**Level 4:** Warm up & Review; Presentation; Wrap-up; Listening Practice; Assignment

#### Evaluating the students' books for each series as a whole

##### *Appearance, durability and organization*

None of the textbooks in the three series is made of high-grade, durable paper. The covers are made of light cardboard and are easily torn. The layout is not easy to follow, with different sections often lacking clear headings. So far as the amount of material included is concerned, there are problems in each case. Although each unit has a number of different sections (making it possible to cover one or more sections in each lesson), the books vary widely in terms of the amount of material included and in terms of the length of each unit, although the assumption is that each textbook is appropriate for one teaching semester.<sup>1</sup> Given the fact that learners progress at different rates and in different ways and given the fact that learners in different schools may have a different number of teaching sessions each week, it is to be expected that textbook writers would clearly indicate how the necessary flexibility is to be managed.<sup>2</sup> None of these books does this.

So far as appearance is concerned, the textbooks are, from my perspective, unattractive, including cartoon characters rather than representations of real children. Although the books are colourful, the colours do not appear to be functional in that they are not distributed in a way that contributes to the overall meaning of the text, something that, for example, Doonan (1993, p. 7) considers to be of importance. Although the words are printed in a size that should make them easy to read, the actual print is light and does not stand out against the background, tending to be swamped by the colour pictures against which they are set. Because the attractiveness of books may be assessed very differently by adults and children, I asked 6 nine-year old Taiwanese students who are familiar with the books for their response to them. They all agreed that the textbooks were not particularly attractive to them. They found the illustrations sometimes funny but generally boring. All of them added, however, that they did not expect textbooks to be particularly attractive. In fact, they were more anxious to express their views about the content of the books in relation to

the teaching and learning function. They were all extremely critical of the artificiality of some of the situations portrayed.<sup>3</sup>

#### Language content

The language content of the three series is generally consistent with the Grade 1-9 curriculum guidelines in an overall sense. There are, however, a number of instances of inaccurate language and many instances of inappropriate language in each of the three series. Thus, for example, in *Do you like fried chicken?* (Volume 1, Unit 6, *Power up English*), *Do you like . . . ?* is used in a context in which *Would you like...?* would be more appropriate given that a mother is likely to know the food likes and dislikes of her child and given the nature of the response (see *Figure 1*)

**Figure 1: Example of inappropriate language selection from *Power up English*, Volume 1, Unit 6**



In the case of all three series, the primary focus is on decontextualized dialogue snippets that have no obvious function other than that of including the language points that are in focus. Here is an example:

*Good afternoon.*

*Good afternoon.*

*Is it a marker?*

*No, it isn't. It's an eraser.*

*Is it a ruler?*

*Yes, it is. Darbie Teach Me, Volume 1, Unit 3, pp. 28-29*

Although all of the textbooks include revision/ review sections, there is no genuine integration of new and familiar language. In general, each new unit introduces the language in focus, including aspects of the language introduced earlier only where this is unavoidable. Thus, there is no overall sense of cumulative progression<sup>4</sup>

#### Text-types and genres

There is no real range or balance of genres and text-types in any of the textbooks. In addition to dialogue snippets (almost always extremely artificial), the texts are generally songs and chants, which are usually made up of segments of language

introduced in earlier dialogue snippets. In general, communication is confined to a series of questions and answers with occasional comments or suggestions:

*Barbie, I'm hungry.*

*What time is it?*

*It's twelve o'clock.*

*Yeah! It's time to go home.*

*See you tomorrow. Power Up English, Volume 2, Unit 4, p.13*

*What time do you usually get up?*

*I get up at six o'clock.*

*What time do you usually eat breakfast?*

*I eat breakfast at six-fifteen.*

*That's early, too. Thee, why are you often late for school?*

*Well, I...I don't know. Power up English, Volume 5. Unit 1, p.2*

Even in the later volumes, this type of presentation is the dominant one in *Darbie, Teach Me* and *English*.

*How much is this, please?*

*Let me see. It's very cheap. It's only sixty dollars.*

*How much are they? They're one hundred dollars each.*

*One hundred dollars? That's pretty expensive.*

*Can I get one?*

*Sorry, we don't have money. I'm sorry.*

*It's all right. English, Volume 4, Unit 2, pp. 18-19*

In *Darbie, Teach Me*, there are several comic-strip narratives. In the case of the comic-strip narrative paragraph, the overall aim is clearly to teach past continuous/ progressive. Although some attempt has been made to provide an overall narrative structure, the dénouement is unlikely to be of any particular interest to the learners:

*There was an earthquake last night. Darbie and Andy were mopping the floor at that time. Betty and her father were doing the dishes. David was taking a shower. They were all scared, but Judy was not. What was she doing? She was sleeping! Darbie, Teach Me, Volume 8, Unit 4, pp. 36-37*

In *English*, one instruction paragraph occurs. The overall aim is clearly to teach imperative sentences.

*Come on in. Let's make a jack-o'-lantern! This is a pumpkin. Cut a hole around the top. Take out the seeds. Cut two eyes, a nose, and a mouth. Put a candle in it. Now we have a jack-o'-lantern! English, Volume 4, Unit 3, pp. 34-35.*

In volumes 5-8 of *Power Up English*, there is a reading section in each unit (example below):

#### **Harry Was Hurt**

*Harry likes to play basketball very much. One day when he was playing basketball in P.E. class, he fell down and broke his leg. His mom took him to the hospital. "Uh-oh! You broke your leg. Now you have to stay in the hospital*

until you get well", said the doctor. Harry feels very sad now because he can't watch TV and play basketball for awhile. *Power Up English*, Volume 7, Unit 3, p. 23.

**Cultural content**

In each of the three textbook series, there are some references to Taiwanese cultural activities that are likely to be of interest to learners. Thus, for example in *Power up English*, there are descriptions of a dragon boat race and the moon festival as well as references to typical Taiwanese foods and some of the tourist attractions of Kaohsiung. There are very few references to activities associated with the culture/s of native speakers of the target language. In *Darbie, Teach me*, reference is made to the moon festival (Taiwanese culture) and April Fool's Day (target culture). In *English*, reference is made to Christmas and Mother's Day. Overall, these textbooks confine themselves, so far as culture is concerned, largely to festivities. They do not, for example, introduce the learners to the fact that different cultures may treat different types of animals as pets or include characters from the target culture/s. Culture is treated largely as something that relates to festivals rather than as something that is expressed in a range of every-day activities.

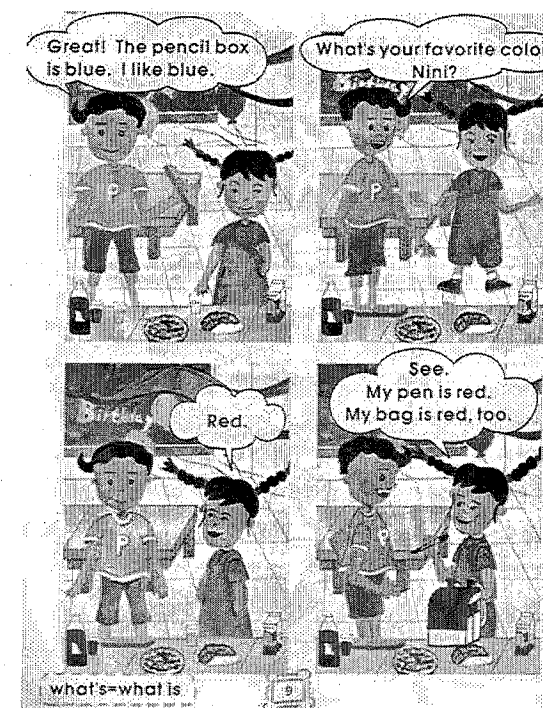
**Tasks and activities**

Most of the tasks and activities in the three textbook series are directly relevant to the main teaching points. They are, however, extremely limited in type, generally involving little more than routine, repetitive verbal drilling, often thinly concealed as games. There is little variety in the activities and almost no account is taken of different learning styles or proficiency levels. Very few activities involve pair-work or group work. Overall, the tasks and activities are unlikely to be of any real interest to the learners and the fact that they are so similar from one unit to the next is likely to lead to boredom and frustration. Although each of the textbooks claims to include an integrated skills focus, most of the tasks and activities involve listening and speaking, copying letters or filling in missing sections in sentences. There are very few activities that involve reading more than isolated sentences. In fact, as indicated above, only once in any of the series is there a reading paragraph in the narrative genre.

**Quality and relevance of illustrations**

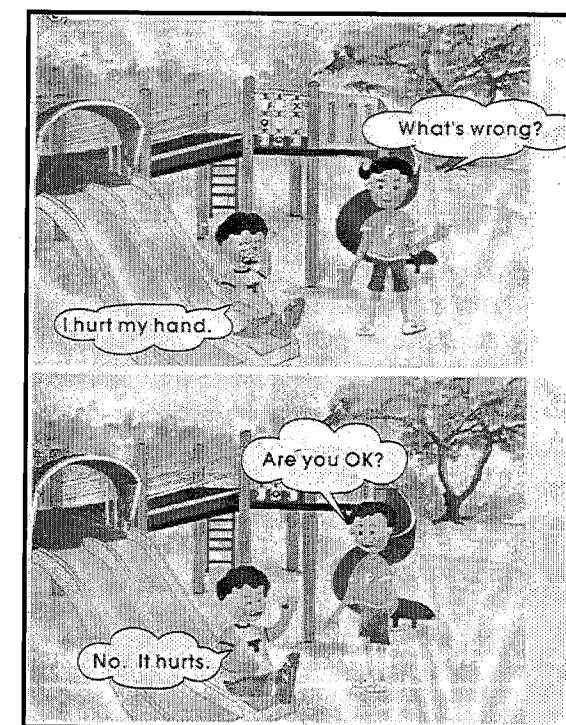
As Newton (1985, p. 21) observes: "While pictures in textbooks can aid comprehension of the text and encourage reading, pictures themselves have to be 'read'. The use of an inappropriate illustrative style may neither facilitate comprehension nor encourage textbook use." So far as all of these textbooks are concerned, the illustrations often do little to reinforce meaning. One of the critical problems is the fact that the authors often use a single illustration rather than a series of illustrations in association with a dialogue snippet involving several turns in which each turn involves a different language point. Where several illustrations are used, they do not necessarily contribute to the primary language focus. Thus, for example, although there are several illustrations in the extract in *Figure 2* from *Power up English*, they do not contribute in any effective way to conveying the meaning of 'favorite' (the main focus of the lesson).

**Figure 2: Example of a picture sequence from *Power up English*, Volume 2, Unit 3, p. 9**



In the following example, see *Figure 3*, the illustrations are more likely to be confusing than enlightening:<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 3: An example of unclear relationship between words and illustrations from *Power Up English*, Volume, 2, p.27**



Many of the illustrations cannot be said to support meaning in any direct way. Furthermore, the illustrations are all of cartoon characters who appear in almost all cases to be considerably younger than the students who are likely to use the books.



Where the illustrations involve activities, it is generally boys who are involved in these activities, with girls as observers. Even though activities are sometimes involved, the illustrations are static rather than dynamic.

#### *Interest level*

In each of the three textbooks series, there are songs, chants and games. However, most of them are little more than vehicles for formulaic, repetitive language practice. In each case, an attempt has been made to create a character that is likely to be of interest to the learners – Darbie, a talking bird in *Darbie, Teach Me*; Little Ben, a spaceman and Bobbie, a chubby boy in *English*. In the case of the character, Bobbie, the attempt at humour is misplaced and inappropriate. Bobbie is short and overweight and is constantly in trouble, arriving at school late or being unable to succeed at games. This type of characterization is both insensitive and inappropriate and is highly unlikely to encourage the development of empathy. This attempt at humour, while it may appeal to some learners, is certainly misguided and heavy-handed. Much of the material is dull, largely irrelevant to the lives of the learners, and almost wholly lacking in imagination and humour (as indicated in the following extract from *Darbie, Teach Me*, Volume 7, Unit 1, pp. 8-9):

Taiwan is a nice place. It has four seasons. It is warm in spring. We can see many flowers, bees and butterflies. It is very hot in summer. We can eat watermelon and mangoes. It is cool in fall. We can go bird-watching. It is not very cold in winter. We cannot go hiking. But...we can eat hot pot.

#### *Quality and quantity of supplementary resources*

Each of the three textbook series provides audio-visual materials, cue cards, posters, and charts. These are generally useful and well presented, with the exception of tapes and CDs which, although they provide opportunities for the learners to listen to the dialogue snippets, are (necessarily) no more interesting than the dialogue snippets themselves.

Each of the series includes homework activities. However, in *Power Up English*, these activities are unvaried, consisting in almost all cases of a request that learners should read sentences and dialogues to their parents and ask their parents to sign their names to signal that activities have been completed.<sup>6</sup> In *Darbie, Teach Me* and *English*, the activities are more varied. Although they often involve little more than reviewing or previewing lesson materials, there are some more interesting activities, such as preparing stage props for a role-play. In *English*, students are assigned to know classmates' English name or record students' own reading voice and keep it as one file of his/her own portfolios.

The supplementary materials are not designed in such a way as to accommodate the differing needs of learners who have different learning styles of different proficiency levels. The assumption is that all of the learners will, irrespective of differences, take part in the same activities.

#### *Evaluating the teachers' guides for each series as a whole*

In each case, the teachers' guides are very similar in content and do little more than guide teachers through the resources without providing them with any rationale for their design, organization and presentation.

#### *Appearance, durability, organization and user-friendliness*

The teachers' guides are, in general, reasonably robust and the layout is easy to follow. All of them are written in Mandarin and are, from this perspective, easy to understand. All of them include an exercise answer key. None of them clearly identifies potential areas of learning difficulty or provides advice on coping with particular learning difficulties. Thus, for example, although Taiwanese learners generally have difficulty in distinguishing between /m/ and /n/, no reference is made to this in any of the teachers' guides.

There is an almost total absence of any rationale for, or explanation of, the inclusion of particular approaches, techniques, activities, exercises, tasks, activities, or cultural aspects. None of the teachers' guides provides useful information about the main teaching points or any indication about how teachers can accommodate learners with different learning styles or differing proficiency levels. None of them provides useful information about concept introduction or concept checking, about typical errors or about error correction. None of them includes a section dealing with communicative language teaching (something that is central to the curriculum guidelines). None of them is sufficiently flexible to accommodate the differing needs of experienced and less experienced teachers.

#### *Aims and objectives*

In each unit of each of the teachers' guides, there are a clear statement of overall aims and learning objectives and these are generally consistent with the curriculum guidelines. It is, however, important to stress that it does not follow from this that the learning objectives are well organized and integrated or that the materials adequately support the aims and objectives

#### *Procedural and methodological information*

Although each of the teachers' guides includes information on lesson staging, this takes the form of little more than a reinforcement of the order in which materials are presented in the textbook. There is no discussion of why the materials are organized as they are, no discussion of different ways of presenting materials (e.g., pre-teaching some of the vocabulary), no discussion of the distinction between controlled practice and freer practice. There is no discussion in any of the teachers' guides of ways in which new language can be introduced and the meaning clarified, no discussion of ways of checking on understanding, no discussion of potential areas of difficulty for learners, typical learner errors, or of when it is appropriate to correct learner errors and how error correction can be approached. There is no clear indication of how to set up, run and time activities or of how to attempt to ensure that all learners are given an opportunity to contribute (without putting them under inappropriate pressure), no indication of how to modulate praise and avoid negative criticism, no discussion of the ways in which activities can be adapted to accommodate the differing needs and interests of learners, no inbuilt flexibility that allows for teachers with differing levels of experience and expertise to deal with the materials in different ways. There is, however, a clear indication in each of the teachers' guides of when it may be useful to introduce each of the supplementary resources.

In none of the teachers' guides is there any specific guidance on ways of activating students' background knowledge before the introduction of a text or mini-dialogue. Nor is there any discussion of previewing, skimming, scanning, summarizing, or any

other approaches to reading. So far as dialogues are concerned, the only advice is that teachers should play the relevant CD two to three times, and ask the questions included in the students' textbooks. So far as vocabulary is concerned, teachers are advised to make use of supplementary materials, such as posters and flash cards, but are not provided with examples of useful concept introduction or concept checking questions. In the case of new structures, there is generally very little supporting material, the expectation appearing to be that simply including these structures in dialogues will somehow guarantee that they are understood. The type of language practice that is promoted is almost wholly non-communicative, with the emphasis being on repetitive, decontextualized question and answer practice.

Only in the case of the teachers' guide for English are teachers provided with some useful classroom language. However, many of the instructions (e.g., *I'll play the tape three times. Listen to it carefully the first time, and then clap your hands the second time. I hope you can sing with me the third time.*) are given in groups rather than individually (making them much too difficult for learners to follow) and include language to which learners have not yet been introduced.

#### Assessment of learning

Each of the teachers' guides includes some discussion of assessment. In the teachers' guide for *Darbie, Teach Me*, there are some examples of assessment activities, such as role play, song competitions, association of words and pictures, and cartoon dialogue creation. However, there is no discussion of concept checking, a critical part of ongoing assessment of learning. In the case of *Power Up English*, the teachers' guide discusses activity-style assessment using, for example, competitions involving songs and chants. It also discusses classroom-based observation and refers to evaluation by parents (something that is very different from classroom-based assessment). In the teachers' guide for *English*, there are a number of assessment checklists – an activity-style evaluation checklist, a classroom observation assessment checklist, a self-evaluation checklist, an individual portfolio assessment checklist, and a progressive assessment checklist. All of these are based on assessment guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education (see <http://www.taps.tyc.edu.tw/english/education/information/01.htm>)

#### Ideas for review and extension activities

There are no adequate review and extension exercises, most of the exercises simply involving copying or drilling practice and review being largely confined to separate units rather than being integrated. There is, however, an answer key in the case of all of the teachers' guides.

#### Detailed evaluation of one textbook in relation to language content

In order to provide a clearer picture of exactly what is included in these textbooks, I provide here a more detailed analysis of the language content of one of them – *Darbie, Teach Me*, Volume 1, beginning with an outline of the content (see *Tables 1 and 2*).

Table 1: *Darbie, Teach Me*, Volume 1 – Content overview

Unit/ Title	Main Text	Additional Teaching Point/s	Chant/Song
Unit 1 <i>My name's Darbie</i>	Two girls A, B and one boy: <i>Hi, Judy! How are you?</i> Girl C: <i>I'm fine, thank you.</i> Boy: <i>Hi, my name's Andy. What's your name?</i> Darbie: <i>My name is Darbie. What's your name?</i> Girl B: <i>My name's Betty.</i> Girl C: <i>My name's Cindy.</i> Darbie: <i>Andy, Betty, Cindy! Cool, ABC.</i>	Letters Aa, Dd, Ii, Jj and associated nouns and the pronoun 'I'.	<i>How are you</i> (Chant) How are you? Fine, thank you. How are you? I am fine, too.
Unit 2 <i>Nice to meet you</i>	Darbie: <i>Good morning, Judy.</i> Girl: <i>Good morning, Darbie, this is my mother.</i> Darbie: <i>Nice to meet you!</i> Mother: <i>Nice to meet you, too!</i> Girl: <i>This is my father.</i> Darbie: <i>Nice to meet you!</i> Father: <i>Nice to meet you, too.</i> Darbie: <i>Judy, look!</i> Girl: <i>Darbie this is you!</i>	Letters Ff, Ll, Mm, Ss and associated nouns and the verb 'look'.	<i>This is my mother</i> (Chant) This is my mother. Hello! Hi! This is my father. Hello! Hi! This is my sister. Hello! Hi! This is my brother. Hello! Hi!  <i>Nice to meet you!</i> (Song) This is my mother. Nice to meet you! Nice to meet you, too! This is my father. Nice to meet you! Nice to meet you, too!
Review 1	What's your name? My name's ____. How are you? I'm fine, thank you. This is my ____. Nice to meet you! Nice to meet you, too!	Letters Aa, Dd, Ii, Jj, Ff, Ll, Mm and associated nouns plus the verb 'look' and the pronoun 'I'	
Unit 3 <i>What's that?</i>	Girl: <i>Good afternoon.</i> Shopkeeper: <i>Good afternoon.</i> Girl: <i>Is this a marker?</i> Darbie: <i>No, it isn't. It's an eraser.</i> Girl: <i>Is this a ruler?</i> Darbie: <i>Yes, it is.</i> Girl: <i>What's that?</i> Darbie: <i>It's a ...</i> A cat: <i>Meow!!</i> Girl: <i>Oh, no! Zack!</i>	Letters Bb, Ee, Pp, Rr, and Zz associated nouns.	<i>What's that, Darbie?</i> (Song) What's that, Darbie? Do you know? Marker, marker, it's a marker. What's this, Darbie? Do you know? Pencil, pencil, it's a pencil. Is this a pen? Yes, it is. It's a pen. Is this a pen? No, it's not. It's a book.
Unit 4 <i>I'm eight</i>	Two girls and one boy: <i>Happy birthday, Judy.</i> Darbie: <i>How old are you, Judy?</i> Judy: <i>I'm eight.</i> Darbie: <i>Are you eight too, Andy?</i> Boy: <i>No, I'm nine.</i> Girl A: <i>I'm nine, too. How about you, Betty?</i> Girl B: <i>I'm nine, too.</i> Judy: <i>Nine, nine, nine! Hmm... I'm only eight.</i>	How old are you? I'm ____.  Are you ____? Yes, I am./ No, I'm ... / No, I'm not.  Numbers from one to ten.  Letters Nn, Oo, Vv, Xx and associated number words and the adverb 'not'.	<i>How old are you?</i> (Song) How old are you? I'm seven. Are you seven? Yes, I am. Are you eight? No, no, no, no. No, I'm not.

Table 1 (continued): Darbie, Teach Me, Volume 1 – Content overview

Unit/ Title	Main Text	Additional Teaching Point/s	Chant/Song
Review 2	Is this/ that ____? Yes, it is./ No, it isn't. What's this/ that? It's ____. How old are you? I'm ____. Are you ____? Yes, I am./ No, I am not. Letters Bb, Ee, Pp, Rr, Zz Nn, Oo, Vv, Xx associated nouns, number words and the adverb 'not'.		
Unit 5 <i>Who's he?</i>	<b>Darbie and a boy:</b> <i>Merry Christmas, Judy.</i> <b>Judy:</b> <i>Merry Christmas!</i> <b>Darbie:</b> <i>Is he your father?</i> <b>Judy:</b> <i>Yes, he is.</i> <b>Boy:</b> <i>Is she your mother?</i> <b>Judy:</b> <i>No, she isn't. She's my grandma.</i> <b>Grandma:</b> <i>Who's he, Judy?</i> <b>Judy:</b> <i>He's my friend David.</i> <b>Grandma:</b> <i>Good boy!</i>	Letters Gg, Hh, Tt, Uu and associated nouns and the pronoun 'he'.	<i>Is she your grandma?</i> (Chant) Is she your grandma? Yes, yes, she is. Is he your grandpa? No, no, he's not. Is she your teacher? Yes, yes, she is. Is he your friend? No, no, he's not.  <i>Who's he?</i> (Song) Who is she? She is my grandma, my grandma. Is she your grandma? Yes, she is. Who is she? She is my grandma, my grandma. Who is he? He is my grandpa, grandpa. Is he your friend? No, he's not. Who is he? He is my uncle, my uncle.
Unit 6 <i>What color is it?</i>	<b>Girl and boy A:</b> <i>Oh, no, my marker!</i> <b>Teacher:</b> <i>Quiet, please.</i> <b>Boy B:</b> <i>What color is it?</i> <b>Boy A:</b> <i>It's green.</i> <b>Darbie:</b> <i>Is it red, Judy?</i> <b>Girl:</b> <i>Yes it is.</i> <b>Boy B and Darbie:</b> <i>Look! This is your marker.</i> <b>Girl:</b> <i>Wow!</i> <b>Girl and Boy A:</b> <i>Thank you.</i>	Letters Cc, Kk, Qq, Ww, and Yy associated nouns, adjectives and the interjection 'wow'.	<i>What color is it?</i> (Chant) What color is it? It is red. It's red. Red, red, red! What color is it? It is green. It's green. Green, green, green!  <i>Is it red?</i> (Chant) Is it red, hmm? Is it red, huh? Uh-huh, uh-huh, yes, it is. Is it green, hmm? Is it green, huh? Uh-unh, uh-unh, no, it's not.  <i>What color is it?</i> (Song) What color is it? It is red. Is it red, Darbie? Yes, it is. What color is it? It is red. Is it green, Darbie? No, it's not.
Review 3	Is he/ she your ____? Yes, he/she is./ No, he/she isn't. Who's he/she? He's/She's my ____. What color is it? It's ____. Is it ____? Yes, it is./ No, it isn't. Letters Gg, Hh, Tt, Uu, Cc, Kk, Qq, Ww and Yy with associated nouns, adjectives, the pronoun 'he', and the interjection 'wow'.		

Table 2: Darbie, Teach Me, Volume 1 – Overview of vocabulary

Unit	Vocabulary	Vocabulary from previous lessons
Unit 1 <i>My name's Darbie</i>	<b>Nouns:</b> name <b>Pronouns (subject):</b> you, I <b>Interrogative words:</b> what, how <b>Formulaic politeness marker:</b> thank you <b>Verb:</b> BE (is, am, are) <b>Possessive adjectives:</b> your, my <b>Adjectives:</b> fine, cool <b>Greeting:</b> hi	
Unit 2 <i>Nice to meet you</i>	<b>Nouns:</b> morning, mother, brother, sister <b>Pronoun:</b> this (deictic) <b>Verbs:</b> look, meet <b>Adjectives:</b> nice, good <b>Adverb:</b> too <b>Greeting:</b> hello	you, my, is
Review 1	As for <i>Units 1 &amp; 2</i>	--
Unit 3 <i>What's that?</i>	<b>Nouns:</b> afternoon, marker, eraser, pencil, book, ruler, pen, marker <b>Pronouns:</b> it (subject), that (deictic) <b>Adverbs:</b> yes, no, not <b>Interjection:</b> oh <b>Article:</b> a (an)	good, this, what, is
Unit 4 <i>I'm eight</i>	<b>Noun:</b> birthday <b>Adjectives (number):</b> one – ten; birthday <b>Adjective (emotion):</b> happy <b>Pronoun:</b> old <b>Preposition:</b> about	how, are, you, I, am, not, no, yes
Review 2	As for <i>Units 3 &amp; 4</i>	--
Unit 5 <i>Who's he?</i>	<b>Nouns:</b> grandpa, grandma, teacher, friend, uncle, aunt, Christmas, boy <b>Interrogative:</b> who <b>Pronoun (subject):</b> she <b>Adjective:</b> merry	he, is, yes, no, my, your, good
Unit 6 <i>What color is it?</i>	<b>Noun:</b> color <b>Formulaic politeness marker:</b> please <b>Adjectives (color):</b> red, green, yellow, blue, black, white <b>Interjection:</b> wow	marker, thank, you, what, is, it, yes, no, not
Review 3	As for <i>Units 5 &amp; 6</i>	--

As can be seen from *Tables 1* and *2*, the language content is limited to a total of approximately 70 lexical items, including 3 verbs (look, meet, be), 23 nouns, the 4 singular subject pronouns, 2 possessive adjectives (1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> person), 2 deictic pronouns (singular), the indefinite article, adjectives of number (*one – ten*) and colour (*red, green, yellow, blue, white* and *black*), 3 interrogative words (*who, what, how*), 7 adjectives (*fine, cool, nice, good, happy, old, merry*), 4 adverbs (*too, yes, no, not*), 1 preposition (*about*), a number of formulaic words and phrases (*please, thank you, hello, hi*) and two interjections (*oh, wow*). The language is presented formulaically, the mini-dialogues that begin units generally involving little more than a single example of a teaching point (see *How old are you?* in *Unit 4*) or repetition of the main teaching point (see, for example, *My name is . . .* and *My name's . . .* in *Unit 1*). Some of the language seems inappropriate in relation to the age of the learners (see *I am fine* in *Unit 1* and *Nice to meet you!* in *Unit 2*) or largely unmotivated in terms of the context (see, for example, *Darbie this is you!* in *Unit 2* and *Wow!* as a response to

*Look! This is your marker.* in Unit 6). Overall, although the language selection is not inconsistent with the recommendations in the curriculum guidelines, the organization and presentation of the language is unoriginal, with, for example, Unit 1 focusing on naming and formulaic enquiry and response relating to well-being (but without the introductory greeting that normally precedes it). The language is not adequately contextualized and there is an overall absence of any genuine communicative interaction (see, for example, *Is this a marker?/ No, it isn't. It's an eraser.* in Unit 3). Furthermore, different sections of units vary in relation to the presence of absence of contractions (e.g., *I'm fine* in the main text in Unit 1 and *I am fine* in the chant in the same unit) as do different utterances within the same mini-dialogue (e.g., *My name's . . . and My name is . . .* in Unit 1.). There is no attempt to include useful classroom language such as instructions. Although the 'songs' and 'chants' occur at the end of units and are clearly intended as a way of reinforcing the language content of the unit, *Do you know?*, which occurs nowhere else in the unit is included in a song that ends Unit 3, and *No it's not* is included in a song that ends Unit 4 although the form introduced in that unit is *No, it isn't*. Every 'text' is a mini-dialogue (or dialogue snippet). This is true even in the case of what are labelled 'songs' and 'chants' even though it is perfectly possible at beginners' level to include, for example, shopping lists, instruction sheets, catalogue segments, simple advertisements, forms, and greeting cards. With the exception of the greeting *Merry Christmas!*, which occurs in a unit otherwise absent of any reference to Christmas, there are no references, to anything specific to the culture/s of the target language and none to Taiwanese culture.

There is very little in this textbook that is likely to be of any genuine interest to 9-year old Taiwanese children. The mini-dialogues are dull, non-communicative vehicles for language points, the interactions are formulaic and stereotypical, and there is no thematic development.

#### Final comment

Hynds (1989) claims that textbooks, by definition, contain texts that are designed for study rather than enjoyment. So far as the textbooks examined here are concerned, although the intention was almost certainly to produce textbooks that are enjoyable as well as instructive, and although there are clear signs of that intention (in, for example, the use of cartoon characters in the illustrations and the inclusion of songs), the textbooks fall far short of that ideal. They certainly cannot be described as fulfilling the expectations built into the Taiwan national curriculum guidelines. It is very likely that similar observations could be made about at least some of the language textbooks that are produced for young learners in other countries.

#### Endnotes

1. Thus, for example, in volumes 1 – 4 of *Power up English*, there are 7 units with 4 'lessons' per unit in each volume, in addition to two review units and one 'holiday' unit. Even if all of the material in a single 'lesson' (with the exception of homework) could be covered in one 40 minute class period (which would be almost impossible), it would take 31 weeks to cover the material. On the other hand, in volumes 1 – 4 of *Darbie, Teach Me*, there are, in each volume, 6 units, with four 'lessons' per unit, plus 3 review units. If each 'lesson' could be covered in one forty minute teaching session (which, once again, would be almost impossible), it would take 27 sessions to cover the material.

2. In fact, however, according to the curriculum guidelines (Ministry of Education) and the Kaohsiung local government, students in grades 3 and 4 should have one session each week in each of the two semesters (a total of 40, 40 minute sessions) and students in grades 5 and 6 should have 2 or 3 sessions (of 40 minutes each) (<http://www.csps.kh.edu.tw>, January, 2007).
3. All of the children drew attention to the fact that some situations portrayed would be very unlikely to happen. For example, one of the children observed that they would not introduce their school teachers to parents or friends (as happens in Volume 1 of *Darbie, Teach Me* and *Power Up English*). Another noted that a waitress would never serve whole apples to customers in Taiwan (as happens in Volume 1 of *Power up English*). They also found many of the dialogues to be 'silly'.
4. Thus, for example, in the series, *English*, only a few words (generally nouns and verbs) are carried over from one unit to the next and this practice is inconsistent, with some units showing very little evidence of any sense of the need for cyclic progression.
5. *Hurt* is more difficult to illustrate/demonstrate than, for example, *cut*. Introducing a general term such as 'hurt' is not a straightforward matter. There is in nothing in the illustrations that helps make a distinction between the two questions *What's wrong?* and *Are you okay?*. Also the actual sequence of the dialogue is illogical. The girl asks if the boy is OK after he says that he has hurt his hand.
6. Quite apart from the fact that these activities are so unvaried, there are issues relating to the fact that some of the learners will not have parents and some will have parents who are unwilling or unable to participate in these activities. Once again, a surprising lack of sensitivity is exhibited here.

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**English language learning in New Caledonia: A report on the proficiency achievements and motivation of students at or near the point of entry to tertiary study**

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**Abstract**

In the context of an introduction to New Caledonia and its languages, this paper reports on a research project whose aims were to provide a snapshot of the English language proficiency achievements of New Caledonian students at the point of entry to tertiary study and to investigate possible relationships between proficiency achievements, learning context and motivation. In 2006, a sample of students (274) took a C-test (one that was initially used in a major European language proficiency survey) and completed a questionnaire relating to motivation and attitudes towards the English language. The overall mean C-test score was considerably lower than that of students who did the same C-test at a similar educational stage in the European study. Some schooling contexts appear to have had a positive impact on proficiency development, as did some factors relating to motivation. On the basis of this study, it is suggested that educational authorities in New Caledonia should consider looking carefully at the factors that affect to the teaching and learning of English in schools.

**Overview of the research project**

The primary aim of the research project reported here was to provide a snapshot profile of the English language proficiency (based on a C-test) of a sample of 274 New Caledonian students at or near the point of entry to tertiary study and to identify (on the basis of an analysis of some aspects of learning context and responses to a self-completion questionnaire) factors that appeared to have an effect impact on proficiency achievement.

**An introduction to New Caledonia and its languages**

New Caledonia is a small country with 2,254 km of coastline, situated in the South Pacific Ocean to the east of Australia and north east of New Zealand.

*Figure 1: Location of New Caledonia within the Pacific (Leclerc, 2006)*

