

# **ELT coursebooks in the age of corpus linguistics: constraints and possibilities**

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## **Module Six Assessment Task**

### **CL/02/04**

How might corpus research be expected to influence coursebooks for language teaching in the future? You should consider what corpus research has told us about what language is like, and how this knowledge might be exploited in coursebooks. You may if you wish refer to existing coursebooks to illustrate how future books might be different. If so, you should include some material from the books as an appendix in your essay.

# 1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to relate some of the findings of corpus linguistics (CL) to the field of English language teaching (ELT) and specifically to discuss the effects these findings might have on the development of ELT coursebooks. The following structure will be adopted. First, I will provide some general background about corpus linguistics and also discuss the role and nature of coursebooks in contemporary ELT. After that, I will divide the main part of the paper into three sections: CL's potential effects on the syllabus, methodology and format of coursebooks. I will then conclude with a summary and some general observations. The basic argument will be that, although some CL findings suggest dramatic changes to the status quo, a revolution in coursebook design is unlikely any time soon. Instead, developments will probably occur gradually over time, since new ways of thinking – about both language and teaching materials – must first take root among coursebook writers, publishers, teachers and learners. However, coursebooks will play a pivotal role in disseminating these new ways of thinking.

## 2 Background

### 2.1 The impact of corpus linguistics

The word *corpus* today usually refers to a database of language stored in a computer, which is thereby available for analysis by linguists and other researchers. Computer corpora have been around in some form or other since the 1960s (Kennedy 1998:23) but only in the last 20 years or so have advances in storage capacity and software brought out their potential more fully. The two largest corpora, the British National Corpus and the Bank of English, run into the hundreds of millions of words.

The impact of corpora on linguistics has been compared to that of the telescope on astronomy. Corpus research has called into question long-held beliefs about language, in particular the traditional breakdown into vocabulary and grammar upon which much of language teaching is based. Sinclair (1991) and others (e.g. Sinclair and Renouf 1988, Willis 1994, Barlow 1996 and Hunston and Francis 1998) propose instead a mutually dependent

relationship between the meanings of words and the syntactical patterns and collocations in which they typically occur. This insight has led to calls for a radical rethinking of the descriptive apparatus used to talk about language (Hunston and Francis *ibid*:56). It has also occasioned some soul-searching about the distinction between pure and applied linguistics (Widdowson 2000) and even cast doubt on the use of introspection as a valid source of information about how we use language (Sinclair 1991:39).

In many subfields of applied linguistics, corpora have made their presence uniquely felt. They are now common in, if not integral to, lexicography, translation studies, forensic linguistics and even critical literary appreciation (Hunston and Laviosa 2000). Krishnamurthy asserts that corpora have even brought about a “revolution” in the field of EFL lexicography such that “all of the current EFL dictionaries make some claim to the use of corpora in their compilation”(2002:4).

In language teaching, however, CL has been less influential. Perhaps its most notable product so far has been a lively debate, begun 10 years ago and continuing today, over what role corpora should play in ELT. On the one hand, proponents such as Carter (1998), Sinclair and Renouf (1988), Willis (1990, 1993, 1994), and Francis and Sinclair (1994) argue that corpora offer a potential goldmine of insights relevant to both syllabus design and methodology. On the other hand, Widdowson (2000), Owen (1993 and 1996) and Cook (1998), have raised questions about how far corpus-based descriptions represent reality, and how useful such descriptions might actually be to learners. Meanwhile, changes arising from CL appear to be creeping into ELT slowly over time, in contrast to the “revolution” which overtook EFL lexicography. The nature of these changes, past and future, will be the focus of this paper.

## 2.2 The evolution of coursebooks

Paralleling the developments in corpus linguistics over the last two decades have been important changes in the field of materials development. Littlejohn writes that published teaching materials have lately become significantly more pervasive and more complex (1998:190). ELT publishing has developed into a multi-million dollar, international industry, with UK and US publishers represented in many countries around the world. The need to cater to international markets has given rise to the concept of the “global coursebook,” which can be used by students at a particular level and age group anywhere in the world, regardless

of culture. And just as the new coursebooks reach farther across the globe, they also reach deeper into the classroom in terms of the way they influence instruction. Littlejohn notes how in previous years coursebooks

contained mainly readings, perhaps with some questions and sentences to translate. Now materials frequently offer complete ‘packages’ for language learning and teaching, with precise indications of the work that teachers and students are to do together. The extent to which materials now effectively structure classroom time has thus increased considerably (ibid).

And yet at the same time there persists a widespread dissatisfaction with published materials. Tomlinson says they are often regarded as suspect both in terms of their language models and their methodology (1998:265). Sheldon notes that teachers often regard them as “the tainted end-product of an author’s or a publisher’s desire for a quick profit” (1988:239). Edge and Wharton assert that on teacher training courses, coursebooks are often treated as artifacts which need to be deconstructed and debunked (1998:298).

To understand the problem, one should be acquainted with the long-running debate over the role and value of published teaching materials. Critics like Allwright (1982) have pointed out the risks of imposing a one-size-fits-all solution, as coursebooks attempt to do, on problems that are by nature very local and very complex. Swan (1992), quoted in Hutchinson and Torres (1994:33), has noted how books sometimes take important decisions regarding the whats and hows of teaching out of the hands of teachers who, having been absolved of responsibility, then sit back and simply “operate the system.”

And yet coursebooks survive because they remain the most convenient basis “on which to mould the unpredictable interaction which is necessary to classroom language learning” (O’Neill 1982:104). At their best they provide structure and raw material for the educational process, rather than direct it – Littlejohn’s idea of materials as “pedagogic device” (1998:192). While the type of book that currently dominates the market is seen as too inflexible, Maley (1998) points out that alternatives do exist, and he and many others have called for materials which give teachers choices and options. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) have pointed out the teacher-development potential of coursebooks and asserted that they are often a significant, if not primary, agent of change in ELT. In sum, coursebooks are a major source of both frustration and hope in ELT.

### 3 Syllabus

We have so far discussed corpus linguistics and materials development separately. Now we can consider how the former has influenced the latter up to the present, and may be likely to do so in the future. We shall first consider changes to coursebook syllabuses. [Note: While some would argue against equating the language content of a coursebook with a syllabus (see Sinclair and Renouf 1988:145), for simplicity's sake I shall use the terms interchangeably. Also, *coursebook* as used here shall refer to the type of commercially produced “global coursebook” described earlier.]

#### 3.1 The “modeling” approach

In the literature, one can find two broad schools of thought about how far CL can and should influence the content of language teaching. The weaker version has been called the “modeling” approach and the stronger version the “corpus-driven” approach. The term modeling comes from Carter, who suggests that syllabus designers might be able to devise new syllabus components using raw corpus data mediated by principles of good language teaching, such as simplification. Carter writes that:

...a middle ground between authentic and concocted data might be occupied which involves modeling data on authentic patterns ... the attempt here by the materials developer is to achieve clarity, tidiness, and organization for purposes of learning, but at the same time to ensure that the dialog is structured more authentically and naturalistically by modeling on real corpus based English. It remains to be seen whether this is a weak compromise or a viable strategy (1998:52).

Under the banner of modeling we might also include the practice of using corpus data to inform and validate the language found in existing coursebooks, in particular, the grammatical content, which according to Chalker is generally structure-based (1994:41). CL can help verify whether and to what degree this content corresponds to “real-life” language. If there are wide gaps found between the data and the coursebook models, the writer should be able to account for them on pedagogic principles. If no such case can be made, we can argue that the syllabus should be edited appropriately.

Table 1 below provides a sample of findings from corpus-based studies that might be used in such a modeling approach.

Source	Language area	Findings
Carter and McCarthy 1995a, 1995b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ellipsis</li> <li>• Tails used for reinforcement (e.g. <i>You're stupid, you are.</i>)</li> <li>• Left dislocation and topical information (e.g. <i>This friend of mine, her son was in hospital ...</i>)</li> <li>• Indirect reporting with <i>say</i> and <i>tell</i> in past continuous</li> </ul>	A sampling of the items from a longer list of recurring features of spoken English found in the CANCODE corpus, which offers "great potential for new and revised description and pedagogy" (145).
Conrad 2000; Conrad and Biber 2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Register-specific descriptions</li> <li>▪ Adverbial marking of stance</li> </ul>	"Corpus-based research has consistently shown that grammatical patterns differ systematically across" registers, for example, in the way adverbials are used as stance markers in conversation, journalism and academic writing (549).
Fox 1998	Vague language	Expressions such as <i>something, something like that, things like that,</i> etc. which are common features of unplanned discourse and yet noticeably absent from most classroom language (29).
Sinclair and Renouf 1988	"Delexicalized" verbs	(e.g. <i>make, do, put, take,</i> etc.) "A major feature of language which is not currently taught in textbooks" (153).
Willis 1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The complex noun phrase</li> <li>• Discourse-structuring language</li> </ul>	These areas are found to be common in corpora but underrepresented in the conventional grammar syllabus, and thus deserve more attention.
Willis 1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Second conditional</li> <li>• The passive</li> <li>• Reported speech</li> </ul>	Corpus research suggests that the attention given to these conventional syllabus components may be unwarranted. Willis suggests a more lexical approach to bring them in line with the data: for example, teaching <i>would</i> with hypothetical meaning by itself, teaching the passive adjectivally, or presenting specific verbs used to report speech or thought.

**Table 1: Sampling of corpus linguistics research findings which could be used for 'modeling' the conventional ELT syllabuses found in coursebooks**

One can already find evidence of corpus-influenced modeling in recent coursebooks. The popular *Headway* series, for example, successful in part because of its familiar grammatical

syllabus and straightforward presentation-style approach, has in its newer editions included exercises on delexicalized verbs. The upper-intermediate book in the best-selling Longman course *Cutting Edge* contains traditional reported speech but also a set of reporting verbs used to summarize what someone has said (Cunningham and Moore 1999:136). [Such summarizing, according to Willis (1994), is a much more frequent phenomenon than exact-word reporting.] And *Innovations*, which claims to be based on a lexical syllabus, presents students with vague language such as *things like that* and *that sort of thing* (Dellar and Hocking 2000).

The modeling approach would seem to take into account the position adopted by Cook, Owen and Widdowson in their warnings against an excessive dependence on corpus data. Modeling recognizes the potential of CL's findings but would attempt to "refer these ... to applied linguistic principles by subjecting them to critical appraisal, so as to establish criteria of relevance" (Widdowson 2000:8). In this view, frequency data, upon which corpus linguistics depends crucially for the power of its pronouncements, is seen as an important but not sufficient organizing principle of syllabus design. The modeling approach can be summed up in Widdowson's memorable contrast, made at a recent lecture in Korea, between *authentic* language versus *appropriate* language.

### 3.2 The corpus-driven approach and the lexical syllabus

In contrast to modeling, the corpus-driven approach goes much farther, advocating an entirely new way of looking at syllabus design. In this view, CL findings are not simply a contributor or arbiter of syllabus content but the primary source. As noted earlier, one of the major findings of corpus linguistics is the intimate relationship between the syntactical patterning of words and their meanings. Increasingly, writers are pointing out the difficulty of maintaining a distinction between the grammar of English and its vocabulary. Sinclair is blunt on the matter: "There is ultimately no distinction between form and meaning" (1991:7).

Necessarily, such a view will have implications for language teaching. Francis and Sinclair assert that:

There is little point in presenting learners with syntactic structures – how groups and clauses are built up – and then presenting lexis separately and haphazardly as a resource for slotting into

these structures ... we should not burden learners with vast amounts of syntactic information on the one hand and lexical ('vocabulary') information on the other, which they have to match according to principles which are not naturally available to them as non-native speakers. Instead teachers can present the structures and their lexis at the same time (1994:200).

Several writers have promoted similar ideas using different terminology. Barlow, for example, talks about the importance of "schemas," his term for the "form-meaning pairings" which constitute language. Language learning, he asserts, can be boiled down to "the acquisition of a set of form-meaning links within a discourse context" (1996:23). Hunston and Francis promote the idea of a "pattern grammar" which can be fully integrated into a more complete lexical syllabus, presumably also containing frequent phrases and collocations (1998:45). Sinclair and Renouf talk about a lexical syllabus in which "the main focus of study should be on: a) the commonest word forms in the language; b) their central patterns of usage, c) the combinations which they typically form" (1988:148).

### 3.3 Pros and cons of lexical syllabuses

Such a syllabus is seen by proponents to have many advantages. First and foremost it will better reflect English as corpus linguistics tells us it is actually used. Secondly, it will be more efficient in terms of teaching, according to Willis, who is perhaps the most prolific and outspoken champion of the lexical syllabus. The word-pattern approach, he says, would not only provide good coverage but "would provide that coverage economically" (1990:91). And yet nothing would be sacrificed: Willis and Sinclair both assert that the grammatical and functional areas covered in conventional ELT syllabuses could, as a matter of course, be fully represented in a lexical syllabus in their "proper proportion" (Sinclair and Renouf 1988:155).

Several challenges remain, however, before such a syllabus can be widely adopted. Assuming for the moment that models derived from authentic use are even appropriate for language learning, we immediately run into the question of how to organize and prioritize them. CL puts great stock in frequency counts, but selection and grading for a syllabus must take into account other factors as well, such as range, learnability and usefulness. Cook notes that "an item may be frequent but limited in range, or infrequent but useful in a wide range of contexts" (1998:62). Many proponents of the lexical syllabus concede that frequency cannot be the sole criterion.

There are also ingrained attitudes that will have to be overcome. Some coursebook writers report that publishers, when commissioning textbooks, have strict guidelines about which grammatical areas must be included (Bell and Gower 1998). Learners and teachers may also be suspicious of a textbook organized on lexical principles. Dave Willis, who with his wife Jane Willis authored perhaps the only coursebook yet based on a lexical syllabus, the *Collins Cobuild English Course*, noted how that syllabus primed users to see it as a course which neglected grammar. This despite the fact that “there is actually more grammar in the COBUILD course at each level than in any other coursebook” (Willis 2003).

Finally, and perhaps most problematic, there is the issue of complexity. Adopting a lexical syllabus runs the risk of making both teaching and learning overwhelmingly difficult. Willis acknowledges how the data sheets used to create the elementary-level Cobuild coursebook alone ran to “many hundreds of pages” (1994:52). The average coursebook writer may not have the level of expertise needed to translate this data into teaching material. And what about learners? Owen and others warn that such a lexical approach can create the perception of an “insurmountable barrier” to language learning (1996:174).

In sum, although there is empirical evidence and a powerful logic to support the lexical view of language arising from CL research, the jury is still out on its potential applications for language instruction. And regardless of whether one adopts a modeling or a corpus-driven approach, other questions also need to be answered: in particular, how such a view of language will influence methodology. It is to this question that we now turn.

## **4 Methodology**

Just as there is concern these days over the gap between real-life language and the language of coursebooks, Tomlinson (1998:265) says there is also a “mismatch” perceived between the methodology found in current coursebooks and what second language acquisition research has discovered about the language-learning process. To be sure a great deal remains unknown but the available evidence suggests that the presentation methodology still employed in many books is not particularly effective. The arguments against such a methodology are many and diverse and it is beyond the scope of this paper to summarize them. Suffice to say that many relate to observations about the view of language that traditionally accompanies it. This view

attempts to break down language into grammatical rules which can be presented to learners through deductive explanations. The rules become the basis from which learners can generate original written or spoken text. Among many other criticisms he makes, Willis points out the woefully incomplete picture that results.

There is little point in learners undertaking a detailed study of language which has been carefully constructed to illustrate starkly a limited number of generalizations determined by the course writer and which, as a result, effectively conceals other important aspects of the language (1993:92).

What approaches, then, should coursebook writers consider as an alternative to the conventional presentation model?

#### 4.1 Consciousness-raising

Many writers focusing on the links between CL and language learning promote the idea of consciousness raising. C-R as defined by Ellis is an inductive approach in which learners are given examples of language and then go on to draw their own conclusions about form and meaning, thereby constructing “their own explicit grammar” (1993:10). As such it resembles what is sometimes referred to as discovery learning.

C-R is seen to have many advantages. Fox says that it has the appeal of every type of inductive learning insofar as “most people enjoy finding things out for themselves; and the majority believe that learning is enhanced by so doing” (1998:42). C-R also does away with the need to restrict learners’ exposure to language in order to avoid counter-examples to deductive rules. This results, says Willis, in classroom language which is richer and more authentic, and capable of providing sufficient contexts for illustrating meaning and use (Willis unpublished). C-R also forms the basis of “data-driven learning” and other methodologies which incorporate the techniques of corpus linguistics into language pedagogy. Johns has asserted memorably that C-R can help teachers and learners become “research workers” (1991:2), developing their powers of observation and analysis and thereby obtaining the tools needed to continue learning beyond the coursebook and the classroom.

Consciousness raising has attracted criticism, however. Some research suggests that learners generally prefer deductive approaches, although they can be swayed to inductive learning with exposure and practice (Sheldon 1988). C-R would seem to appeal to students with an analytical style of learning, and yet some studies have found that most learners are in fact experiential rather than analytic, and that the preferred mode for most learners is the kinesthetic (Oxford and Anderson 1995, quoted in Tomlinson 1998:337). C-R may also alienate teachers who are not native English speakers, for example in Asian cultures where they are said to derive much of their authority and professional self-image from their knowledge of deductive grammar rules. Fox, who enthusiastically promotes C-R via classroom concordancing, acknowledges that the practice is still “in its infancy as a language teaching technique” and will take time for both teachers and learners to get used to (1998:43).

Another constraint is the uncertain status of language practice activities in the C-R approach. Many of its proponents are skeptical about the drills, information gaps and other forms of “controlled” and “free” practice activities associated with presentation-style teaching. These are seen as ineffective and potentially distracting from the task of language acquisition. (See (Ellis 1988, and Willis and Willis 1996) Learners, however, usually expect such practice and will be unhappy if it is not included in the lesson (Hopkins and Nettle 1994). C-R therefore faces several challenges in overcoming the expectations and prejudices of students, teachers and others in the field.

#### 4.2 Potential insights from vocabulary instruction research

It must be remembered that C-R originally arose from observations about grammar instruction; indeed, Rutherford, one of C-R’s main proponents, refers to it as “grammatical consciousness raising” (1987). Much of the rationale for C-R is based on interlanguage research like that of Corder (1981) and developmental studies such as Pienemann (1984), which considered the effects of instruction on more generalized morphosyntactic features of language. Bearing in mind corpus linguistics’s main finding that language is more lexically organized than previously thought, we would do well to inquire what researchers have to say about vocabulary acquisition in a second or foreign language. Considering CL’s call for an increased focus on words and their patterns, clearly there may be instructive parallels here.

A very useful reference to consult in this regard is Nation's recent survey (2001). The main findings are summarized in the form of a set of principles for designing the vocabulary content of a language course, reproduced in Table 2 below.

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### **Content and sequencing**

- Use frequency and range of occurrence as ways of deciding what vocabulary to learn and the order in which to learn it.
- Give adequate training in essential vocabulary learning strategies.
- Give attention to each vocabulary item according to the learning burden of that item.
- Provide opportunities to learn the various aspects of what is involved in knowing a word.
- Avoid interference by presenting vocabulary in normal use rather than in groupings of synonyms, opposites, free associates or lexical sets.
- Deal with high-frequency vocabulary by focusing on the words themselves, and deal with low-frequency vocabulary by focusing on the control of [vocabulary learning] strategies.

### **Format and presentation**

- Make sure that high-frequency target vocabulary occurs in all the four strands of meaning-focused input, language-focused learning, meaning-focused output, and fluency development.
- Provide opportunity for spaced, repeated, generative retrieval of words to ensure cumulative growth.
- Use depth-of-processing.

### **Monitoring and assessment**

- Test learners to see what vocabulary they need to focus on.
  - Use monitoring and assessment to keep learners motivated.
  - Encourage and help learners to reflect on their learning.
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**Table 2: Nation's principles of vocabulary teaching (2001:385)**

Assuming for the moment that learning words in their typical patterns and combinations will resemble conventional vocabulary learning to some degree, which elements here are of note? The question of the role of memory immediately arises. A lexical approach to language learning will logically entail a greater burden on memory. Activities and processes that lead to memorization should receive a great deal of attention, such as the recording of new words and patterns in vocabulary notebooks or the proper spacing of reviews in order to maximize retention.

Another notable item is Nation's injunction against teaching lexical sets, which can cause interference. This will be an important concern in deciding how to organize and group language items for instruction. Nation has noted that lexical items grouped by grammatical category may be more difficult to learn (2000:8), so presenting sets of verbs, nouns or adjectives that have similar patterns – the approach taken in several Cobuild practice and reference books – may not be an effective strategy, except perhaps later after at least some of the items already have a foundation in memory.

Finally, the question of practice again arises. Vocabulary research clearly shows the benefits of using words productively – in so-called “depth of processing” and “generative retrieval” activities – to help establish them in long-term memory. This appears to conflict with the doubts cast on productive practice by some advocates C-R, as mentioned earlier. A compromise would seem in order of the type suggested by Hopkins and Nettle, where C-R in a lesson is later linked with practice activities of a productive nature (1994:159). More generally, however, there is a clear need for research to determine how much overlap there is between general vocabulary learning and the learning of words together with their typical patterns.

#### **4.3 Needed: research and a framework for experimentation**

Methodology presents serious challenges to coursebook writers who are interested in the findings of CL. It will take time for research to establish which teaching and learning activities best suit a more lexical approach to language, but in the meantime there will still be a need for teaching materials. Coursebook writers would do well to follow the advice mentioned earlier about employing flexible frameworks and encouraging teachers and learners to take a more research-oriented approach. It is difficult but not impossible to conceive of materials which can provide the structure and raw materials needed for classroom learning, while also allowing options and choices and creating space for the unexpected to occur. This will require creativity and ingenuity. Fortunately there is no shortage of these qualities in the field of ELT materials development. One remaining question, however, is how to make it all fit between the covers of a book? This is the question addressed in the final section.

## 5 Format

### 5.1 Size matters

People who write coursebooks undertake a tremendous balancing act. They must somehow bring together 1) the various linguistic elements of the syllabus, matched with 2) appropriate themes and topics, plus 3) spoken and written texts to illustrate and contextualize the target language, and 4) the necessary exercises and activities – all within a structure that makes sense and presented in an attractive and user-friendly way. The final product should manage to seem, at the same time, both comfortably familiar but also innovative enough to set it apart from the competition. In such a context, a coursebook's format – in which we could include factors such as physical layout, design, structure and length – will be a key concern “both for motivation and for classroom effectiveness,” according to Jolly and Bolitho (1998: 95).

As it relates to the present discussion, the most immediately relevant component is length. Bell and Gower assert that among coursebook writers a “major, often overlooked consideration is that your material has to fit on the page so that students can actually see it” (1998:121). Donovan notes that this seems especially true with “materials which are attempting to be consciously innovative, where the authors' ideas may be running away with them”(1998:186). This suggests a major worry for those CL proponents advocating a more lexical approach. As has been noted, such an approach entails specifying more things to learn, which in turn will require more texts to illustrate them and more exercises to address them. The question becomes how to accomplish this without overwhelming the format of the basic coursebook and scaring off teachers and learners.

Willis's idea of a “pedagogic” or “learners corpus” (Willis unpublished) might provide a solution. Using the collection of texts which learners will be exposed to on a course as a corpus from which to draw samples for language study would appear to make a great deal of sense. But Willis's own attempt at implementing this idea was problematic. The *Collins Cobuild English Course*, written around a learners corpus, struggled commercially in large part because of amount and density of the material. “Teachers commented that the pages

were too crowded,” Willis noted in a personal communication. “Some of them said that this made the course look difficult” (2003).

## 5.2 A possible source of help: computers

Help may come from the same source that made modern corpus linguistics possible. Computers could help to reduce some of the burden on coursebooks by means of electronic storage and access. Clearly, in a lexical approach teachers will not be able to teach everything, and are going to have to select from the available options according to their learners’ needs. Materials writers could reduce coursebook length while allowing for flexibility if they were to provide a bank of related language-focus exercises in digital format.

One possibility is to use the world wide web for this purpose. Reagan and Murray note that many EFL coursebooks nowadays have “companion sites” to assist in marketing and promotion. Every publisher wants a web presence but “at present ... the content and design of far too many companion sites are less professional than the text they accompany” (2002:52). Why not take the overflow material from the book and make it available on the companion site?

Another possibility, perhaps more suitable in places where computer use is prevalent but Internet access is not, is the CD-ROM. Coursebooks could include accompanying CD-ROMs for teachers and learners in the same way that many current EFL dictionaries do. For example, *Longman English Express* by Rost and Thewlis (2002), though not a lexically based course, follows this practice.

Yet another possibility is for publishers to provide not only banks of supplementary exercises but the entire coursebook text in digital form, so it can be used as an electronic corpus – similar to Willis’s pedagogic corpus but one which is actually searchable with a concordancing program. Again, the material could be stored online or on a CD-ROM that accompanies the coursebook. [Prowse notes that it is already standard practice for materials writers to deliver their work to publishers in this unformatted manner (1998:141)]. The text could be stored in such a way as to protect copyright and yet be annotated so that concordance searches provided page or section numbers to allow students to refer back to the original context. This could help to make corpus use more widespread among teachers and

learners at very little additional cost to publishers, while creating “stickiness” to help boost sales of their products.

Granted, such technological solutions may not be relevant to learners in every part of the world at this stage, but the digital revolution is taking hold and computers are likely to be found in more remote areas as time goes on. Without a doubt, the computer has great potential to help solve traditional problems of space while at the same time disseminating the findings and insights of corpus linguistics and increasing the autonomy of teachers and learners.

## **6 Summary and conclusion**

To sum up, insights from corpus linguistics seem likely to effect coursebooks in fundamental ways in the future. The increasing prevalence and awareness of CL among teachers and learners means there will be a “growing expectation” that the language chosen for future coursebooks will be corpus-influenced, if not corpus-based (Hunston and Francis 1998:45). Such developments will likely be slow in coming, however, because of the manifold changes they entail for the way teachers teach, learners learn, and coursebook writers organize and write their books.

Assuming that these changes are inevitable, we might ask how to best guide the process so that it goes smoothly with a minimum of wasted time, effort and money. As has been noted, coursebooks themselves have great potential for instigating and guiding change in ELT. They are the nexus of many areas of endeavor: researchers, writers, teachers, learners and publishers all meet at the crossroads of a coursebook. The danger is that one interest group has too much power. How, for example, to control the excessive enthusiasm of some of CL’s proponents, or the excessive conservatism of publishers and teachers?

Here the efforts of a group like the Materials Development Association (MATSDA) could be very helpful. Tomlinson says MATSDA (1998) can try to involve all the players in a reciprocal dialogue that addresses their various needs. It can, for example, involve teachers and learners in the trialing and development of new books through piloting projects. It can encourage researchers to investigate the relationships between materials and learning outcomes, and also to study how to make materials more effective. It can try to help

publishers take advantage of innovations in syllabus design and methodology while still producing commercially viable products.

In short, a pooling of resources like that proposed by MATSDA could help guarantee that the bottom line in the equation will remain, as it should, neither publishers' profits nor the promotion of particular school of linguistic thought, but the progress of ELT.

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