

# **A Retrospective Evaluation of a ELT Coursebook for a Korean University Conversation Course**

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SM/08/03 Make a detailed evaluation of a coursebook or set of materials that is used in your own working context. You should consider both the syllabus followed and the methodology employed.

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction .....	4
2. Coursebooks .....	4
2.1 Advantages .....	4
2.2 Limitations .....	5
3. Evaluation Methods .....	6
3.1 Frameworks.....	6
3.2 Subjectivity .....	7
4. My Context .....	7
4.1 Program Factors .....	7
4.2 Teacher Factors.....	8
4.3 Learner Factors.....	8
4.4 Adapted Framework .....	8
5. External Evaluation .....	8
5.1 The intended audience .....	9
5.2 The proficiency level .....	9
5.3 The context in which the materials are to be used .....	9
5.4 How the language has been presented and organized into teachable units / lessons.....	9
5.5 The author’s view on language and methodology.....	10
5.6 Are the materials to be used as the main ‘core’ course or to be supplementary to it?.....	11
5.6.1 Is a teacher’s book in print and locally available?.....	11
5.7 What visual material does the book contain and how is it integrated into the text? .....	11
5.7.1 Is the layout and presentation clear or cluttered? .....	12
5.8 Is the material too culturally biased or do they represent a ‘balanced’ picture of a particular country / society?.....	12
5.9 The inclusion of tests in the teaching materials; would they be useful for your particular learners? .....	13
6. Internal Evaluation.....	13
6.1 The presentation of the skills in the materials.....	13
6.2 The grading and sequencing of the materials.....	14
6.3 Where listening skills are involved, are recordings ‘authentic’ or artificial? ...	14
6.4 Do speaking materials incorporate what we know about the nature of real	

interaction or are artificial dialogues offered instead? .....	15
6.5 Do you feel that the material is suitable for different learning styles and sufficient to motivate both students and teachers?.....	16
7. Summary and Conclusion.....	16
8. References .....	18

## **1. Introduction**

Classroom materials are a component of language instruction that help or hinder the needs of teachers and learners. Thus coursebooks (and all their counterparts) become a key pedagogic classroom device and the decision of which coursebook to use is crucial. Evaluating a coursebook involves judging its 'fitness' to a particular group of learners. Scholars have provided various coursebook checklists and evaluation methods, yet teaching and learning needs are organic, causing coursebooks and coursebook evaluations to change.

In Section 2, I will briefly address the advantages and disadvantages of using a coursebook. Evaluation methods will be considered in Section 3 and then reflection on my working environment will be covered in Section 4. McDonough and Shaw's evaluation will be adapted for my particular teaching situation before retrospectively evaluating *Fifty-Fifty One* (Wilson and Barnard, 2007a) in Sections 5 and 6. The strengths and weaknesses of this coursebook's methodology and syllabus will be assessed to determine its suitability for my learners.

## **2. Coursebooks**

Coursebooks consider various learners and learning situations in an attempt to generalize current curriculum viewpoints. Coursebooks are biased; materials have a hidden curriculum. Thus to follow a coursebook means supporting the author's teaching/learning ideologies (Littlejohn and Windeatt, 1989, cited in Kitao and Kitao, 1997). Kitao and Kitao (1997) agree that the educational philosophy of the coursebook influences the learning process. Coursebooks have no operational value alone. Teachers give a coursebook life, using it to promote learning and fulfill goals (McDonough and Shaw, 2003; Rubdy, 2003). The dependency on a single coursebook has ramifications for both teacher and learners, some of which will briefly be highlighted below.

### **2.1 Advantages**

Various scholars have acknowledged the value of coursebooks (Harmer, 2001; Richards, 2001; Rubdy, 2003). Graves (2000, p.174) provides several advantages for the use of a coursebook:

- It provides a syllabus for the course because the authors have made decisions about what will be learned and in what order.
- It provides security for the students because they have a kind of road map of the course: they know what to expect, they know what is expected of them.
- It provides a set of visuals, activities, etc., and so saves the teacher time

finding or developing such materials.

- It provides teachers with a basis for assessing students' learning.
- It may include supporting material (teacher's guide, worksheets, CDs).
- It provides consistency within a program across a given level, if all teachers use the same textbook.

These points and others, demonstrate the appeal that coursebooks hold. The professional and practical benefits of using a coursebook overshadow the necessity to develop all one's own materials. There are many roles a coursebook can fill; summarily, a coursebook acts as a learning tool to help meet learner needs (Cunningsworth, 1995). Teachers and learners value coursebooks for their guidance, accessibility, flexibility, and motivation potential. Teacher time constraints make the use of a coursebook appealing yet no commercial coursebook can fit perfectly to a language program (Richards, 2001). The advantages of using a particular coursebook should be weighted against possible disadvantages.

## **2.2 Limitations**

Richards mentions five potential negative effects of coursebooks (2001, p.255-256):

- They may contain inauthentic language.
- They may distort content.
- They may not reflect students' needs.
- They can deskill teachers.
- They are expensive.

Nunan (1989) claims authentic language in the classroom best prepares learners for coping with real world interactions. Though authentic materials are preferred over created materials, Richards (2001) recognizes the teaching value of both. He believes coursebooks present an ideal world, often a white middle-class view, and fail to portray real issues. He states coursebooks are generated for a mass market and may not meet learner needs or interests. Coursebook opponents worry that coursebooks take teaching out of the teacher's control, causing over-dependency issues (Richards, 1993; Tomlinson, 1998). Concerns regarding teachers' roles being reduced to overseer or manager have been raised (Littlejohn, 1998, cited in Tomlinson, 1998; Richards, 2001). Lastly, coursebooks present a financial burden to learners in many parts of the world (Richards, 2001). After considering the various viewpoints on using coursebooks in the classroom, evaluation methods will now be considered to determine which framework will be adapted and applied to *Fifty-Fifty One*.

### **3. Evaluation Methods**

Evaluating a coursebook is an important endeavor for matching materials to both teacher and student. Just as there is no universal coursebook for learners, there is not one model for evaluation (Tomlinson, 1999, cited in McDonough and Shaw, 2003). The process is not static, as the success or failure of that match cannot be determined until after the book has been implemented (McDonough and Shaw, 2003). Material evaluation critically judges book planning, design, and implementation processes (White, 1988). According to Rea-Dickins and Germaine (2001), the criteria should focus on language learning aims and content as well as teaching methods and procedures for the activities. Rubdy (2003) claims that a good evaluation framework helps match flexibility, adaptability, and relevance of a coursebook with learners and their changing needs. To find a suitable evaluation method, past frameworks and their subjectivity will be explored.

#### **3.1 Frameworks**

Coursebook evaluation has been created by many in the teaching field: Williams (1983); Sheldon (1988); Tomlinson (1998, 1999, 2003); Nunan (1989); Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1992); Cunningsworth (1995); Ellis (1997); McDonough and Shaw (2003); Rubdy (2003). These checklists and coursebook evaluation discussions vary in the extent to which they address priorities of ELT teaching and material selection. In an effort for efficiency, only a small sample will be considered.

Typically, the evaluation process consists of two to three levels of evaluation. Cunningsworth (1995) labels these stages as being first, an impressionistic overview and second, an in-depth evaluation. Composed of 45 questions, his first level consists of a broad evaluation while the second level, or stage, takes a more detailed look into the material. Rubdy (2003) calls Cunningsworth's framework thorough and comprehensive, spotlighting its learner context and learning principles. Cunningsworth (1995) states that coursebooks should correspond to learners' needs, help students to use the language effectively, facilitate their learning process, and show a support for learning.

McDonough and Shaw (2003) also demonstrate a comprehensive framework with an "external" and "internal" evaluation consisting of 24 criteria. The external evaluation relates to the organization of the coursebook and promises made by the author. The internal evaluation involves an in-depth look at a minimum of two units to reflect on factors such as skill presentation, sequencing, and text appropriacy, among others.

McDonough and Shaw's evaluation can be predictive, meant to be administered before the use of the coursebook, or retrospective, processed after the use of a book.

Though often evaluations occur before a language course begins (see: Sheldon, 1988; Cunningsworth, 1995), in-use and post-use evaluations are also insightful. Ellis (1996, 1997) supports a post-use, or retrospective, coursebook evaluation based on tasks within the book. He endorses a judgment of the actual success of the coursebook, which could include what learners have learned.

### **3.2 Subjectivity**

Sheldon states that coursebook assessment is “a subjective, rule-of-thumb activity” (1988, p.245). The subjective aspect of evaluations has been recognized by Cunningsworth (1995); Ellis (1996, 1997); and Littlejohn (1998). Tomlinson (2003) claims a criterion-referenced evaluation can help reduce subjectivity by making it more principled and systematic, therefore, more reliable. He also asserts that no two evaluations can be the same as each context and participant is different. Studies on oral evaluation discussion and action research papers have noted how evaluation answers vary from teacher to teacher (see Chambers, 1997; Johnson et al., 2008). To put an evaluation in context, a look at my teaching situation is necessary before selecting and adapting a coursebook evaluation method.

## **4. My Context**

Local considerations greatly impact the success of a coursebook for a particular group of learners. A failure to acknowledge one’s specific teaching situation makes exploiting an already created evaluation unsuccessful (Anasary and Babaai, 2002). The role of the coursebook in the program, as well as teachers and learners, must be considered in context for a successful evaluation (Rea-Dikins and Germaine, 1992; Richards, 2001; McDonough and Shaw, 2003). The following factors affect my selected evaluation framework.

### **4.1 Program Factors**

Dongguk University (DGU) requires all students to pass one year of English Conversation with native-English instructors. Our English conversation program focuses on speaking and listening skills, while Korean instructors teach courses in English reading, writing, and grammar. Though these 20 year old students hold background knowledge of reading and grammar they lack sufficient practice in English speaking. Students are placed into levels through a level placement test. Coursebooks are selected by committee and re-evaluated annually. I have taught *Fifty-Fifty One* (Wilson and Barnard, 2007a) to freshman level two students for four semesters. In our

situation, *Fifty-Fifty One* determines the curriculum for this course level. We are required to teach five units per semester, selecting those units from half of the book.

#### **4.2 Teacher Factors**

Teachers have class autonomy in teaching method following the department syllabus requirements. The department syllabus serves as a guide, suggesting a methodology and grading system. In truth, our course focuses on only two of the four skills mentioned in the department methodology and individual instructors assess their students' grades at their discretion. Consequently, instructors make their own syllabus.

#### **4.3 Learner Factors**

Learner needs have taken an important role in coursebook evaluation. Sheldon (1988) as well as Cunningsworth (1995) consider the learner context as key to an appropriate coursebook match. Kitao and Kitao (1997) argue that appropriate materials for a particular set of learners should have a methodology which suits their needs. English learners at DGU are exposed to the target language for 100 minutes weekly in a classroom setting. The class size is capped at 26 students. No correlation exists between the content of this conversation course and other English courses.

#### **4.4 Adapted Framework**

Teaching and learning situations are unique and evaluation frameworks need to be edited and adapted to each situation. As priorities in language teaching have evolved, so have the teacher and learner needs, and classroom materials. Williams (1983, p.251) calls it a "question of relevance." Using someone else's checklist without adapting it means we accept another's view for our own situation.

For the purposes of this evaluation and my teaching context, I will adopt McDonough and Shaw's framework. Their evaluation is comprehensive, organized, and appears easy to follow. McDonough and Shaw's evaluation framework will be adapted by omitting some irrelevant criteria. Having taught *Fifty-Fifty One* for four semesters, this framework will allow for both a theoretical and practical retrospective evaluation.

### **5. External Evaluation**

The aim of an external evaluation is to examine the organization of materials as stated by the author (McDonough and Shaw, 2003). A look at the 'blurb' on the cover as well as the introduction and table of contents shows "what the books say about themselves" (Cunningsworth, 1984, cited in McDonough and Shaw, 2003, p.62). The

external evaluation looks at claims and promises made by the author/publisher to better understand the objectives of the coursebook. McDonough and Shaw (2003) assert that the table of contents often serves as a link between the external claims and the materials presented within the book. Having taught *Fifty-Fifty One* for several semesters, I will be able to assess it retrospectively and exploit my previous experience to strengthen my evaluation.

### **5.1 The intended audience**

McDonough and Shaw (2003) claim that materials target a specific group and some topics are more suitable than others for any particular audience. *Fifty-Fifty One* (Wilson and Barnard, 2007a) fails to mention its intended audience, but the topics include: abilities, personal information, daily routine, directions, describing people, and others that appeal to a wide range of learners. These topics are presented with a Western focus and my Asian students relate to them better with slight adaptation toward their culture (see Section 5.6). My alterations to the topics strengthen my students' connection with this coursebook.

### **5.2 The proficiency level**

*Fifty-Fifty* is a three-level series speaking and listening course for elementary through intermediate learners. *Fifty-Fifty One* is the second in the course, targeted for high elementary/low intermediate learners. At DGU, this coursebook was chosen for our level two students, whom we consider to have a high-elementary proficiency.

### **5.3 The context in which the materials are to be used**

The book is used for a required one year English conversation course. The use of pair work and group work demonstrates that the coursebook was designed for use in large classes (Wilson and Barnard, 2007a). The coursebook does not appear to have a particular English learner focus and thus seems appropriate for general learners.

### **5.4 How the language has been presented and organized into teachable units / lessons**

*Fifty-Fifty One* consists of an introductory unit, twelve main units, and three review units. Each unit follows an outline:

- Warm-up Exercises- provide a sketch to introduce the theme and language to be practiced; a dialogue to be followed; and freer conversation practice of the dialogue model.

- Listening Task- presents a focus on particular language points both for gist and detail comprehension to complete tasks.
- Speaking Task One- provides communicative practice to maximize “student talking” time through information sharing and feedback. The student roles are separated; student B pages are located in the Appendix.
- Speaking Task Two- offers freer conversation practice through group interaction activities.
- Homework Review- contains a brief writing assignment that can later be followed-up with in-class review.
- Language Focus- provides an overview of the structures presented in the unit.

(Wilson and Barnard, 2007a, p.vi-vii).

Depending on the class time allowed and the amount of book covered, various lessons are proposed in the Teacher’s Edition (Wilson and Barnard, 2007b). For my context of roughly 90-minutes of teaching for half the book a semester (16 weeks), two lessons per unit are suggested. The book provides a total of 24 to 48 hours of material depending on use of provided supplementals or omission of exercises within the lessons.

### **5.5 The author’s view on language and methodology**

McDonough and Shaw (2003) suggest considering the relationship between the learners, the language, and the learning process to better understand the author’s views toward methodology. The authors of *Fifty-Fifty* address difficulties with large class sizes and “student talking” time by promising *meaningful* exchanges during pair work and group work as well as “*realistic and manageable* listening tasks” (Wilson and Barnard, 2007a, p.vi). The coursebook authors claim their listening and speaking tasks are “designed to reduce learner anxiety and promote language acquisition via student participation in *purposeful* interaction” (ibid, p.vi).

This coursebook demonstrates a communicative approach to language. A dominate focus on communication is found, while grammar appears as Language Focus at the end of each unit. Aspects of task-based and functional activities are used to create a more complete communicative syllabus. Tasks are defined as activities that use the target language to achieve an outcome (Skehan, 1996, cited in Richards, 2001; Willis and Willis, 1996; Richards, 2001). Skehan (1996, cited in Richards, 2001) claims tasks resemble real-life language use and *Fifty-Fifty* incorporates purposeful exchange into Speaking Tasks by separating Student A and Student B; Student B being located in the Appendix. This layout, as well as having students facing each other, helps authenticate student exchange to complete tasks. A functional view of language also has tasks of

exchange, with a focus on meaningful communication. Functional communication activities, such as comparing differences in pictures or giving directions, can be found in *Fifty-Fifty*. Focusing on communication skills, this coursebook uses Listening Tasks to help learners recognize target language points in semi-authentic input. All unit tasks focus on a variety of listening and speaking activities meant to offer learners comprehensive input and engage them in meaning negotiation.

### ***5.6 Are the materials to be used as the main 'core' course or to be supplementary to it?***

The book provides up to 48 hours of teaching material. Supplements are offered, signifying the coursebook itself is sufficient. Supplements include activities and self-study audio options from the *Fifty-Fifty* website, which could function as in-class or homework activities. The coursebook allows for easy adaptation to listening, exercise omission, or additional materials to be used. The amount of teaching material available with this coursebook allows me to rely heavily on its content or be selective with its activities. This coursebook serves as a framework for learning content and sequencing but is often supplemented by other material (Cunningsworth, 1995).

I use it as the 'core' of my teaching, but make constant adaptations to increase its relevance with my learners. For example, I will teach giving directions (Unit 7) using the book's map so students can understand Western vocabulary, then compliment this activity with an additional Korean map exercise to personalize the topic. The lack of a workbook requires me to create my own homework book. However, this allows me to tailor the out-of-class practice to focus on my students' specific needs. The \$20 (US) coursebook is reasonable for a year long course.

#### **5.6.1 Is a teacher's book in print and locally available?**

The Teacher's Edition for *Fifty-Fifty* is easily accessible through publisher representatives or local stores. The intention of the Teacher's Edition is as a general guide for teachers, giving suggestions and hints within each unit. Rather than provide a strict lesson plan, each activity is addressed individually with suggestions of different teaching approaches. These methods would be helpful in providing new ideas for experienced teachers as well as new or non-native English teachers.

### ***5.7 What visual material does the book contain and how is it integrated into the text?***

Sketches, color cartoon drawings of people, objects, and places, serve as a teaching

aid by introducing topics, vocabulary, or setting a conversation scene. Each chapter's Warm-up Exercise has a sketch with a question or answer to be provided by the student. Some listening and speaking activities have charts incorporated into the exercises for interviews and easy note-taking. Some sketches are used to clarify potentially difficult vocabulary and activities are often centered on a sketch. In my class, visuals help trigger students' background knowledge on the topic, preparing them for the listening or speaking task.

### **5.7.1 Is the layout and presentation clear or cluttered?**

The general page layout of the book is clear and logical in its presentation of exercises. Some activities seem to have limited space for writing, but "memos" attached remind students to only make notes. The Speaking Task activities involve Student A and Student B, with Student B's page located in the Appendix. After initial confusion with this style of pair and group work, the layout seems clear. McDonough and Shaw (2003) mention page presentation balance as significant to book usability. *Fifty-Fifty One* shows a clear balance between text, exercises, directions, examples, and pictures with sufficient white space on each page. Instructions and examples are clearly presented for each task. The quality of the book in regards to the paper and binding seems durable.

### **5.8 Is the material too culturally biased or do they represent a 'balanced' picture of a particular country / society?**

This Third Edition of *Fifty-Fifty*, revised in Tokyo and New York, seems tailored to an Asian audience wanting American English. The book has no photos, only sketches of personalities predominately from: Canada, America, England, Europe, Asia, and Australia (among others). A lack of dark-skinned people as well as African and Indian representation is evident. The names of these sketched people in the dialogues and tasks are also culturally Western: Seth, Bernice, Helen, Marty, and Ronnie. Characters from China, Japan, and Korea can be found in almost every chapter, while no character is from Senegal, New Delhi, or South Africa. The exercises use Western models of houses, family structure, and lifestyle information. Unit 7 Giving Directions uses an American map, evident from the street names.

Tomlinson (2003) believes materials should be multi-cultural as learners will likely speak to other English learners. The text and visual materials in *Fifty-Fifty One* show a middle-income class of characters with a range of ages and jobs. Though the information is worldly, it is biased. No offensive visuals or text is evident of women, smoking, or drinking. But there are too few dark-skinned people and non-Western

accents. A bias toward Asian learners who desire to have a Western accent is clearly evident in this coursebook.

### **5.9 The inclusion of tests in the teaching materials; would they be useful for your particular learners?**

The Teacher's Edition includes a Test Master CD which allows teachers to use ready-made quizzes and tests or edit and organize tests to individual class needs. Both the quizzes and tests are easy to download and adapt. The quizzes consist of three sections: true/false listening, multiple choice listening, and multiple choice grammar. The review tests are not as useful as they lack a speaking component and all the material must be covered. Answer keys as well as rubrics are provided on the Test Master CD. A test audio CD is also included for the listening section of these tests or quizzes. Both CDs aid in a teacher's assessment of learners' command of the course content. The listening components of these unit tests are very valuable in assessing my students. However, I never use multiple choice to check their grammar understanding. The Test Master CD allows me to easily make changes to unit tests, but beyond the listening test sections, I do not find the testing aids helpful.

## **6. Internal Evaluation**

An internal evaluation occurs after a coursebook has experienced an external evaluation and is deemed potentially appropriate and worthy for a particular group of learners thus far (McDonough and Shaw, 2003). This type of evaluation is valuable in establishing the extent to which external factors and the internal organization of the material match (ibid.). An investigation into two units or more is recommended to determine the validity of the authors' claims.

### **6.1 The presentation of the skills in the materials**

This is explicitly a speaking and listening coursebook. The presentation includes an integrated and discrete focus on these skills. In an integrated lesson, aspects such as "authentic listening, task continuity, real-world focus, and language practice," are evident (Nunan, 1989, p.130-131). Nunan (1989) proposes incorporating several factors to enrich language learning potential. In *Fifty-Fifty One*, Warm-up Exercise 2 has a conversation students listen to and follow. Warm-up Exercise 3 then alters some content or vocabulary, or allows for learners' own ideas, within the same conversation. After the Warm-up page, listening and speaking are then given discrete consideration. Speaking Tasks One and Two require information sharing in a controlled, semi-authentic manner.

Speaking Task Two uses freer group work. The layout of the skills allows me to easily adapt and vary my approach to each unit.

### **6.2 The grading and sequencing of the materials**

Both grading and sequencing are evident through topic progression. The first unit, Getting Started, focuses on introductions, and some unit topics are sequential. Units may not be interchangeable, but omission of a unit in the sequence is plausible. The two review units also affect topic sequencing. Some exercises in review units may be addressed separately while other exercises consolidated the units. Grammar points are presented at the end of each unit as Language Focus and progress from simple present to simple present progressive in the first two units. The simple present verb predominates until the end of the book when the future and the past are introduced.

In my teaching context, grading and sequencing in the coursebook effects my curriculum. For example, to cover five units in a semester, I chronologically teach Units 1-7 by skipping the review unit and combining the last two units. I cannot teach Unit 4 Daily Routine without first building vocabulary on time, covered in Unit 3. Likewise, I must address Unit 6 Giving Locations, before explaining Unit 7 Giving Directions.

### **6.3 Where listening skills are involved, are recordings ‘authentic’ or artificial?**

Being a speaking and listening course, teachers and learners would expect authentic recordings to compliment the coursebook. Authentic language is language that would naturally occur outside the classroom. Nunan (1989) claims any samples of spoken language written for teaching purposes are artificial. Audio recordings in *Fifty-Fifty* cannot meet Nunan’s definition of authentic language; however, the pauses, tone, and speed of the conversations are realistic. Cunningsworth (1995) notes that natural conversation contains openers, ‘readiness’ words, to signal the beginning of information, pauses, or fillers. Many listening scripts in *Fifty-Fifty One* demonstrate an artificial focus of the target language with aspects of natural conversation that I feel are sufficient for my learners:

(Unit 1 Abilities)

Dick: I don’t know how to do this!

Dad: What’s that, Dick?

Dick: This math problem. I just *cannot* do math.

Dad: Maybe I can help you.

Dick: You can’t do math either, dad. You *know* that.

Dad: Let me see. Oh. That *is* difficult.  
Dick: I'll ask Mom, She can do math.  
Dad: Yeah, she's good at it.  
Dick: Mom's good at a lot of things.  
Dad: Yeah, I know, I know.  
Dick: Mom knows how to play the piano...  
Dad: Yeah, right. I can't do *that* either.

(Wilson and Barnard, 2007a, p.121)

This conversation has semi-authentic expressions that enrich the naturalness of the language and could take place in the real-world. It displays some natural pauses and filler words (oh, yeah). Some listening scripts include hesitations, pauses, or a repeat of the information which mimics real-world interactions. These aspects of authentic language satisfy my objectives for my learners. Though my students' listening skills are fairly strong, accents and the rate of natural speech are problematic. The audio scripts are American-based, predominately with a neutral Pacific Northwest accent. This is an unfair representation of cultures that use English and perhaps even could hinder my learners who will most likely encounter and interact with other L2 English learners. Nonetheless, the audio creates a comfort for my learners and helps build confidence in their listening abilities.

#### ***6.4 Do speaking materials incorporate what we know about the nature of real interaction or are artificial dialogues offered instead?***

There are multiple opportunities for oral exchange with this coursebook: Warm-up Exercises, Speaking Tasks One and Two, and Homework Review. There are a variety of exercises in the two speaking tasks per unit, but the speaking tasks are presented as information exchanges rather than dialogues. Speaking Task One in Unit 1 focuses on questions and answers about people's abilities but provides natural responses beyond the standard 'yes' or 'no.' This helps students recognize such answer possibilities in the real-world. 'Yes' alternates include "yeah" and "uh huh" while 'no' can also be "nah" and "uh-uh." This is an artificial interaction of an information exchange but the activity incorporates aspects of real interaction by allowing personal information to be shared.

Speaking Task Two offers freer practice in the form of group interviews, "find someone who" activities, and various language games. According to the *Fifty-Fifty* authors, task-based speaking exercises provide genuine communication through information sharing and feedback (Wilson and Barnard, 1997a). However, this coursebook was designed for larger classes and the mingling involved in speaking tasks

is not possible if the classroom has limited space. In my context, these activities are successful for my learners to engage in real language exchange. Speaking Task One is never omitted from my lesson; though I often skip Speaking Task Two activities which involve students to move around since my class space is limited.

### **6.5 Do you feel that the material is suitable for different learning styles and sufficient to motivate both students and teachers?**

In high school, Korean students are taught in a lecture style for all subjects. The *Fifty-Fifty One* coursebook approach is learner-centered, where the teacher's role becomes guide and monitor. Students adapted to a teacher-centered learning style may be discouraged. However, the coursebook is for a conversation course and thus, active student interaction is central to the class methodology and individual assessment. This factor may encourage learners to complete tasks. The material seeks to motivate students using a variety of exercises within each listening and speaking task which revolve around pair work and group work. The Teacher's Edition suggests alternative procedures in the warm-ups and other sections to keep the exercises fresh for the students and teacher (Wilson and Barnard, 2007b). My learners find the topics motivating and I find expanding on the coursebook topics with supplements to be effortless.

## **7. Summary and Conclusion**

Teachers make numerous decisions in their profession; an important one being the coursebook. This paper has sought to investigate the appropriacy of *Fifty-Fifty One* for a compulsory university freshman conversation course. The benefits and limitations of coursebooks as well as differing evaluation methods have been explored. McDonough and Shaw's evaluation model was selected and adapted after a consideration of my teaching context. Through an external and internal retrospective evaluation I have been able to assess various aspects of this coursebook, particularly the syllabus and methodology.

Though syllabuses should not be dependent on a coursebook, our university department increases the usability of the coursebook by doing so. This speaking and listening coursebook is relatively suitable to my learners, though for a conversation course adaptations and supplementals are necessary to sharpen their skills. *Fifty-Fifty One* has a communicative syllabus that generates opportunities for genuine language exchange among my students. Even if the sequencing is not very flexible, the overall content motivates and offers versatility for both learners and teacher. In evaluating this

coursebook for suitability within my teaching context, I feel it satisfies the needs of my students. My learners have low speaking confidence and minimal opportunities to practice outside of my class. This coursebook helps students feel comfortable and confident in their speaking and listening abilities. In evaluating *Fifty-Fifty One*, I have realized its methodology and syllabus strengths and deficits that I had not previously considered. This process has also empowered me to take a more active approach to future department coursebook evaluation and selection.

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