

Identifying Language Functions as Course Objectives and Materials Adaptation for Effective Teaching of 'Reading': A Case of *Tapestry Series 1 - 3* in an EFL Context

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Abstract

Teaching Reading in EFL and ESL contexts has been challenging not only for the non-native factors but also for various inherent systemic issues. Significant among these issues are the ineffective use of existing materials, lack of material adaptation and obliviousness of the teaching process towards aims and objectives of the course and lessons because teaching is often mistaken as the completion of the course texts. The Present paper seeks to analyse and reach on some suggestions in the light of aforesaid aspects of the teaching of *Tapestry Series (Reading) 1-3* in Department of English, King Khalid University, Abha, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: Language Functions, Course Objectives, Reading Skill, Material Adaptation, Re-sequencing of Lessons, Fluency and Proficiency.

Background

Teaching in EFL and ESL contexts is often confined to a practice of completing the prescribed books of the syllabi from cover to cover. Undoubtedly, the hard work and dedication that goes in this practice is

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immense, nevertheless, there is a little association of this input with the output in terms of linguistic/communicative proficiency of learners. Possibly there is a lack of realisation, on the part of the practitioners in this case, that the fluency in language skills cannot be attained by merely exhausting books, chapters and pages, rather by training of learners through practice, involvement and appropriate exposure to the language use in order to achieve fluency and proficiency in the English language.

Under various said and unsaid pressures teachers while handling textbooks in the classrooms loose track of the fact that the foremost need is to adapt materials to suit the learner's contexts because usually these textbooks are produced by writers in a certain context for certain set of learners notwithstanding the tall claims of the publishing houses that they have been producing ELT materials for all international users, suiting all varieties of learners. It is easy to find ELT materials with titles like: Materials for International students, Arab students, Chinese students, but they generally lack to fulfill such claims. The situation is that even centrally generated materials such as produced by teams of experts from National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) for all CBSE Schools, in India and abroad, to help learners improve their proficiency in English fail to bring out the desired results because of reasons like:

- lack of clearly stated lesson-wise course objectives
- difficulty levels of the textbooks for students in rural, tribal or small towns and cities,
- lack of trained teachers, insufficient tasks and activities in the textbooks,
- improper time management,
- undue importance given to summative assessments, etc.

Stevick 1972, Lee 1975, Buckingham 1978, Cunningsworth 1979, Davis 1980, Allwright 1981, Grant 1987, Sheldon 1988b, Clarke 1989, Nunan 1989 & 1991, Oxford 1990, McDonough and Shaw 1993, Celce-Murcia 2001, Paltridge 2001, Johns 2002, and Tomlinson 2011 have foregrounded, analysed and discussed the issues and problems of EFL teaching

and learning scenario. Various propositions offered by these related to materials adaptations, identifying aims and objectives, lesson planning, signifying behaviours and other related issues have facilitated a deeper and clear understanding of the challenges in EFL and ESL contexts.

The limited or no attention being given to the aims and objectives of a course and lessons and absence of identification of the proposed behaviours and the corresponding assessments are major reasons of the failure and the ineffective use of textbooks by teachers. This means that teaching of English, in general, ends up being the teaching of the content of a prescribed textbook, rather than the use of available content for fulfilling the course objectives.

In a similar EFL context in the Department of English, King Khalid University, Abha in Saudi Arabia *The Tapestry Series* consists of various interesting communicative and interactive tasks and activities. But since teachers' efforts are targeted to make all sincere efforts to cover the course by finishing with all the pages and units of the volume within stipulated time-schedule (semester), without targeting the inherent aims and objectives to be achieved, this series fails to produce desired results. Following table lists the results of the 897 students in the year 2007 in the Department of English which supplicate the above-mentioned argument:

Table 1: Students' Performance in 2007

S. No.	GPA's	Grades	Frequency	Percent	Commutative
1.	1 - 1.99	F & Below	202	22.5	22.5
2.	2 – 2.74	D	369	41.1	63.7
3.	2.75 – 3.74	C	243	27.1	90.7
4.	3.75 – 4.49	B	69	7.7	98.4
5.	4.5 & Above	A	14	1.6	100
Total Enrolled Students:			897		

The table shows that while 22.5% students (202 out of 897 students) failed and 41.1% (369 out of 897) got a 'D' grade, which is just pass. This means that the majority of students i.e. 63.6% students either failed or just passed the course. 27.1% (243) students got a 'C' grade, 7.7% (69) students got a 'B' grade and very small 1.6% (14) students got an 'A' grade. This figure shows that only a small number have attained an acceptable level of proficiency, while the Exit Test hardly differs from the Class test. Certainly a range of factors (such as learners' initiatives, learning strategies, teaching methodologies, effectiveness of materials and others) would have been responsible for the success and failure in achieving a certain level of proficiency in the English language by the above-mentioned students. It goes without saying that the teaching and learning of a language depends on innumerable small and sensitive variables besides the major aspects of English Language Teaching. In the light of the above results, it becomes obligatory to at least take a cursory view of the situation under which the teachers and students operate.

Generally, the actual stakeholders (i.e. teachers and students) do not have much of a say in such significant decisions as group formation, time-tabling, selection of materials/text-books, allocation of student groups, and others. Normally, such decisions are made on the basis of convenience of non-academic factors. Teachers, on the other hand, are expected to give their best in order to help students achieve better results. As a result, despite various remarkable researches that shaped and reshaped the theories and practice for the effectiveness of English language teaching programs the world over, its stake-holders (mainly parents, students and administrators) fix the responsibility for learners' underachievement on teachers, and the teachers consider the learners, materials and lack of infrastructural support as responsible factors for the ineffectiveness of an ELT program.

In the given situation, teachers' responsibilities escalate and they need to innovate for producing effective and positive learning outcomes. They need to go beyond the allegation-counter allegation game and make efforts for the better.

Aims and Objectives

In the light of the above background, the present paper, therefore, intends to:

- i. foreground that teachers can perform far better if they identify language functions (inherent within the tasks and activities of the prescribed textbook) as course objectives and try to train the learners in performing these language functions in the classroom.
- ii. propose that before the teachers start a certain unit of a textbook, they need to identify language functions inherent in the lessons in order to achieve course objectives.
- iii. list unit-wise course content of the prescribed textbook
- iv. facilitate the making of a separate list of objectives based on language functions available within the units (for Reading Comprehension);
- v. investigate the difference between the two in terms of effectiveness of teaching and learning;
- vi. suggest ways in which such an activity of identifying aims and objectives based on language functions help in material adaptation techniques such as re-sequencing;
- vii. propose how this helps in de-stressing and motivating teachers and learners;

Research Questions

This paper will try to answer the following research questions:

- a. whether *Tapestry Series* (Reading) consists of course content arranged in units that is sufficient enough to suggest aims and objectives for the book in general and for the units in particular;
- b. whether a clearly defined set of aims and objectives based on language functions can be gauged;

- c. whether such investigations as mentioned above will facilitate teachers in applying the suggested ways and make their teaching more result-oriented and effective;
- d. whether such investigations will directly lead to decreased levels of stress and increased motivation levels for the learners;
- e. whether this will help in providing the teachers with enhanced opportunities in terms of availability of time, learners' participation and practice;

Method

In order to achieve the aforesaid aims and objectives, the researchers analyse *The Tapestry Series 1–3* (Reading), prescribed for the students of BA, Levels 1 – 4, in the Department of English, College of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia. However, separate volumes of this series are prescribed for the students of BA English (from levels 1–4) for teaching 'Writing', 'Reading' and 'Listening Comprehension and Speaking'. It was found that each unit of the book consists of interesting exercises and activities, both written and recorded, which can produce effective results, if handled appropriately by the teachers with the intention of training the learners in becoming proficient in listening and speaking skills. Researchers are of the view that teachers need to water the roots and not the leaves. The researchers' belief is reflected in the Chinese saying: "If you give a fish to a man, you feed him for a day. But if you train him how to fish, you feed him for the whole life." (*Tapestry 1*, Reading)

This means that teachers need to train the students in language skills in order to attain an acceptable level of fluency and proficiency in the English language, so that they could appropriately perform language functions in different situations.

Procedure

In order to minimize the above problematic situation, an attempt is made here to approach the prescribed textbook, the *Tapestry Series 1 - 3* (Reading), with a fresh and convenient outlook by identifying language

functions (inherent in each unit/lesson) as the course objectives of each unit. For this purpose following steps have been adopted:

1. each unit of each volume is scrutinized at length,
2. language functions are identified and listed, and
3. finally, a fresh list of contents is made, based on these functions, which includes a certain number of units together.

The Tapestry Series (Readings) consists of four volumes for the BA students of levels 1 – 3. For each volume (consisting of 9 units), first a common table is made that includes number of units, a list of language activities, and two separate columns of identified language functions for Reading Comprehension. Then this common table is converted into another table, which consists of the language functions as Course Objective in the first column and the re-sequenced list of unit/lesson numbers, time schedule and language activities in the rest of columns. It is important to mention here that the language activities and functions listed in the common table mainly represent the dominant features.

Identifying Language Functions as Course Objectives of *Tapestry I*:

This volume consists of series of linguistic input in the form of stories and articles. A close study of activities and tasks in *Tapestry I* (Reading) prescribed for the BA students of Level 1, for instance, shows that each unit consists of the following language functions with regard to the teaching of Reading skill under question in the present study:

Table 2: *Tapestry I*: Listening Comprehension and Speaking

Units	Language Activities	Language Functions (Reading Comprehension)
1.	A Story / An Article	Previewing
2.	A Chart / An Article	Scanning
3.	Articles	Skimming
4.	Articles ... about	Making notes / Identifying topic and supporting sentence
5.	Articles ... about	Comprehension: Local and Global
6.	Articles ... about	Scanning

7.	Articles ... about	Making notes
8.	Articles ... about	Making notes
9.	Articles ... about	Making outlines of a text

This volume consists of nine (09) units having series of stories, charts, and articles for the purpose of improving learners' level of reading comprehension. An identification of the language functions in these lessons show that teachers, in general, teach these nine units to finish the course within the stipulated time of a semester without evaluating the effectiveness of these materials on learners. But, a close look at these units shows that they are actually trying to train learners in performing certain functions by familiarising them to these stories and articles.

If these nine units are re-sequenced, as a part of material adaptation on the basis of language functions as their course objective, they will look different, as represented in Table 3 and 4 below.

Table 3: Tapestry 1: Reading Comprehension

Language Functions: Course Objectives	Units	Time Schedule	Language Activities
1. Previewing	1	2 Weeks	A Story / An Article
2. Scanning	2 & 6	2 Weeks	A Chart / An Article
3. Skimming	3	3 Weeks	Articles
4. Making notes / Identifying topic and supporting sentence	4, 7, 8, & 9	4 weeks	Articles ... about
5. Comprehension: Local & Global	5	4 weeks	Articles ... about

Table 3 speaks of the following advantages:

- a. Now both teachers and learners need to focus and complete only on five items in place of nine units of this volume.
- b. This certainly promises to de-stress both teachers and learners at least in terms of work-load and time management.
- c. The time schedule shown in the above table is remarkable, because a semester generally has 12 – 14 weeks, which includes classroom

teaching, holidays, besides formative and summative tests. So if the teacher takes up the nine units of the book in its original form, one cannot give more than one week for each unit. But as we see in the above table, since the teacher has to train learners in the three language functions, as identified in this volume, one has sufficient time to use the appropriate materials from each unit, rather than using the units in totality.

- d. Individual language functions (as listed in tables 2 & 3), are identified on the basis of activities and tasks that are designed along with the given stories and articles given in this volume.
- e. If desired by teachers, same materials can be used for more than one language function.
- f. In addition to this, the re-sequencing of units helps in concentrating on the language functions that learners need to achieve and perform in their actual life.

What is significant here is that the nine units of the textbook becomes a total of five (05) course objective, which are to be achieved by teachers by training learners in the given language functions.

In nut shell, one can claim that the nine (09) volumes of *Tapestry Reading 1* to be taught generally in 12 – 14 weeks of a semester turns out to be five (05) language functions for teaching ‘Reading Comprehension’ within the same period of time.

Identifying Language Functions as Course Objectives of *Tapestry 2*:

Tapestry Reading 2 is found to be a repetition of same type of language activities (as volume 1), like reading articles, with different contents. That means same language functions are repeated for practice by learners at level 2 of the BA program. It is made clear in the following table:

Table 4: *Tapestry 2*: Reading

Units	Language Activities	Language Functions (Reading Comprehension)
1.	Articles about ...	Scanning photos, illustration, graphics, etc.
2.	Articles about ...	Skimming
3.	Articles about ...	Comprehension: Local and Global
4.	Articles about ...	Taking notes
5.	Articles about ...	Taking pictographic notes
6.	Articles about ...	Comprehending and analyzing a text
7.	Articles about ...	Previewing Comprehension
8.	Articles about ...	Comprehension: Local and Global
9.	Articles about ...	Scanning

Even *Tapestry 2*, like the first volume, consists of nine units. When it is re-sequenced on the basis of identified language functions as course objectives, the table looks as follows:

Table 5: Tapestry 2: Reading

Language Functions: Course Objectives	Units	Time Schedule	Language Activities
1. Previewing	7	2 Weeks	Articles about ...
2. Scanning	1 & 9	2 Weeks	Articles about ...
3. Skimming	2	3 Weeks	Articles about ...
4. Making notes / Identifying topic and supporting sentence	4 & 5	4 weeks	Articles about ...
5. Comprehension: Local & Global	3, 6 & 8	4 weeks	Articles about ...

Learners through this volume (having nine units) are, once again at level 2, supposed to be trained in only five (05) language functions with regard to Reading Comprehension as course objectives to be achieved with ease of time, training, participation and practice in the classroom. Such a repetition of language functions as course objectives allows spiral use of units, felicity of time and abundant opportunity for learners' participation and practice.

Identifying Language Functions as Course Objectives of *Tapestry 3*:

This textbook is prescribed at Level 3 of BA program. It is interesting to note that even this series consists of nine (09) units with same type of language items with higher difficulty level in the name of language activities and tasks. This means that even this course intends to train learners in the same language function / course objectives. Such a repetition of language items, activities, tasks and language functions with different content also suggests that learners basically need to be exposed to various types of texts and trained in the strategies of Reading Comprehension with speed and felicity. The language activities that are included here in Table 6, below, therefore, is no different:

Table 6: *Tapestry 3*: Reading

Units	Language Activities	Language Functions (Reading Comprehension)
1.	A Story / An Article	Previewing
2.	A Chart / An Article	Scanning
3.	Articles	Skimming
4.	Articles ... about	Making notes / Identifying topic and supporting sentence
5.	Articles ... about	Comprehension: Local and Global
6.	Articles ... about	Scanning
7.	Articles ... about	Making notes
8.	Articles ... about	Making notes
9.	Articles ... about	Making outlines of a text

Table 7, below, is a representation of identified language functions (for ‘Reading’ skill) as course objectives on the basis of findings displayed in Table 6 above. In place of nine (09) units of this volume, the teachers have to focus on only five (05) language functions.

Table 7: Tapestry 3: Speaking

Language Functions: Course Objectives	Units	Time Schedule	Language Activities
6. Previewing	1 & 4	2 Weeks	A Story / An Article
7. Scanning	1 & 5	2 Weeks	A Chart / An Article
8. Skimming	4 & 8	3 Weeks	Articles ... about
9. Making notes / Identifying topic and supporting sentence	1, 2, 4 & 7	4 weeks	Articles ... about
10. Comprehension: Local & Global	3 & 6	4 weeks	Articles ... about

Conclusion

In the present paper, an attempt has been made to suggest that teachers work in a given situation where neither they nor the learners, as actual stakeholders, have much of a say with regard to various issues, pertaining to language learning and teaching, like the selection of a textbook, quality of content, activities and tasks of a textbook, allocation of class/group of students, time-tabling, infrastructural facilities and many others.

In such a situation, teachers, being government employees and also due to the moral and societal obligations, cannot refuse to go beyond what is considered the norm. Rather, it becomes their bounden duty to make innovations to make their teaching effective. One step in this direction, as advised here, is not to run through the pages and units of a textbook. Rather, the fluency and proficiency for the success in life while using English can be attained by trying to:

- identify language functions from within the textbook
- train the learners in these functions.

This exercise of identification of language functions as course objectives of a textbook can be attempted if the prescribed textbook does not have well-defined aims and objectives, and also if the given aims and objectives are not clear enough or do not suit the needs of the given set of students.

In order to display this innovation / initiative, researchers in the present paper explored *The Tapestry Series 1 – 4* for ‘Listening Comprehension’ and ‘Speaking’ skills for the BA students of levels 1 – 4 in the Department of English, College of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia. The study shows that:

- a. The aim of teaching English should mean to be training learners in language functions, identified from each unit / text book, as course objectives and not finishing or completing the prescribed book/s in the syllabi. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to suggest teachers one way to train learners in language functions with better comprehension, fluency and ease and comfort.
- b. The shift of focus, while teaching, from lessons to language functions promises to minimize the strain of numbers. The number of language functions for both ‘Listening Comprehension’ and ‘Speaking’ (identified as course objectives) for each of the four volumes is less than the total number of units of each volume in each semester. This effort unburdens teachers of the lessons and volumes of the prescribed textbook.
- c. Such an initiative by teachers enables them to give maximum exposure and practice to the learners in language use.
- d. Once the language functions are identified as course objectives, it becomes easy for both teachers and learners to stay focussed on the learning outcomes. Units of a textbook are generally a collection of a spectrum of materials – including authentic ones – with varieties of tasks and activities in language items, where there is a big probability of losing sight of the learning outcomes / course objectives on the part of teachers as well as learners.
- e. In addition to this, the re-sequencing of units, besides the material adaptation, helps in concentrating on the language functions that learners need to achieve and perform in their actual life. This re-sequencing also means that teachers need not strictly follow the sequence of chapters and units arranged in the book/s. Depending on the interests, preferences, likes/dislikes, language requirements and the competences of the learners the sequence of teaching the chapters and units in the book can be altered/re-sequenced.

- f. This certainly also promises to de-stress both teachers and learners at least in terms of work-load and time management. The stress is often related to assessments and eventually the teaching of the course ends up getting guided by preparing for assessments. Thus the time constraints need to be minimised as suggested in the discussions here.
- g. The time schedule shown in the tables based on language functions as course objectives for both listening and speaking skills is significant because a semester generally has 12 – 14 weeks, which includes classroom teaching, holidays, besides formative and summative tests. So if the teacher takes up the nine units of the book in its original form, one cannot give more than one week for each unit. But as we see, since the teacher has to train learners in the lower number of language functions (identified as course objectives, in comparison to total number of units of each volume), one has sufficient time to use the appropriate materials from each unit, thereby creating the possibility of more participation and practice on the part of the learners.
- h. Teachers need to be able to identify general and dominant language functions according to the learners needs from the language items given in the form of tasks and activities in each unit of a textbook. Individual language functions (as listed in table 2, for instance), such as comprehending information about introductions, greetings, about daily schedule, about weather, about health, descriptions, narrations, stories, and imaginative talks, are listed as one language function – i.e. General Comprehension – in Tables 3, 6, 9 and 12.
- i. Couple of units are repeated in each table. This shows that same materials from these units can be used for more than one language function. This saves the teaching and even the handling of materials from being liner in use and sequencing.
- j. Identifying language functions facilitates spelling out of the learners' behaviours which are observable as well as measurable and are clearly connected to assessment. (Graves, 2000: 75-79).
- k. This exercise in identifying language functions as course objectives ensures to save the classroom from becoming hackneyed because of practicing the monotonous process of running through the pages

and units; and makes it a better place due to renewed enthusiasm and challenge among teachers, converting the learners into a motivated participating lot.

The present study is not a conclusive research rather it is one step in a direction that presents an example for the teachers to make initiatives for making the whole act of teaching and learning more effective, motivating and interesting. The analysis of *Tapestry Series 1 – 4* (Listening Comprehension and Speaking) therefore, is a point in case for such initiatives.

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