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How Language is Practiced in ELT Course Books on Different Levels

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Abstract:

The study attempted to test Yalden's (1987) suggestion of a proportional approach in course designing by analyzing the activities in ELT course books on Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced levels, adopting the hypothetical classroom model proposed by Savignon (1997) to see how the components of the continuum are incorporated in these books and how priorities are established. A sample of 195 activities in each level, i.e., a total of 585, was randomly chosen to be categorized and frequencies were computed. The following findings were reached. First, all components of the continuum: Language for a Purpose, Language Arts, My language is Me and I'll be...You'll be reflected in the activities of the three levels, excluding Use of language beyond the classroom. However, while larger weight was given to Language Arts (accuracy-focused activities) in the Elementary level, priority was given to My language is me (personal voice activities) in the Intermediate and Advanced stages. Second, the study lent support to Yalden's proportional approach as it was found that accuracy-activities diminished with progress towards advanced levels. Lastly, integration of more than one component in the same activity took place in all three levels and frequency increased as proficiency increased.

Keywords: communicative competence, ELT books, competency levels, Savignon's hypothetical classroom model, Yalden's proportional approach

1. Introduction and Statement of the Problem

The aim of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), whether from the theoretical or empirical standpoint, is to try to reach a thorough understanding of the complex processes and mechanisms that bring about the acquisition of language. Instructed SLA is interested, in particular, in studying the classroom acquisition of a Second/foreign Language (L2), through considering the range of factors involved in language acquisition in the classroom, namely, the internal factors that the learner brings with him to the classroom such as, age, personality, intrinsic motivation, experiences, cognition and native language and external factors that characterize the particular language learner milieu such as method of instruction, culture, extrinsic motivation and language syllabuses and materials. A large-scale survey by Luukka et al. 2008 (cited in Pylviainen, 2013) showed that language books are the most important source for L2 learning and that they have an indirect impact on learning objectives. For the learners, they serve as the basis for much of the language input learners receive and the practice that takes place in the classroom. For the teachers, course books are ready-made material, which makes planning less time-consuming since the planning has already been made and the material has already been chosen (Johansson, 2006).

One problem faced by language teachers nowadays, is whether to focus on developing learner's ability to produce grammatically correct sentences or foster their ability to produce written and spoken sentences with ease, efficiency, without pauses or a breakdown of communication (Srivastava, 2014). On one hand, over-focus on accuracy may result in the lack of fluency, and on the other, too much emphasis on fluency may lead to the lack of accuracy (Skehan & Foster, 1999, cited in Wang, 2014). While there is no one syllabus model that has been universally accepted, different syllabus types within the communicative orientation to language teaching employ different routes to developing communicative competence (Prasad, 2013). Practitioners have come to realize that the two orientations, accuracy-based and fluency-based, have elements that balance each other and that, when pooled together, can give rise to an eclectic approach that is very resourceful to adult students (Savage, 2010).

2. Review of Literature

The *Behaviourist* theory which emerged in the early twentieth century tended to explain the learning of a habit by two different processes: *imitation* and *reinforcement*. Imitation refers to the learner's copying of the stimulus behaviour, whereas reinforcement refers to the rewarding or punishment of the learner's response depending on whether it is appropriate or not. If the stimulus occurred sufficiently frequently, the response would be practiced and, therefore, become automatic. The theory resulted in the emergence of a traditional presentation-practice-production (PPP) approach to grammar instruction, in which "parts of the language are taught separately and step by step so that acquisition is a process of gradual accumulation of parts until the whole structure of language has been built up" (Wilkins, 1976, p.2). The approach makes use of a set of classroom exercises and drills that depend on certain practices such as repetition and error correction. This traditional approach is often referred to as "forms-in-isolation grammar instruction"

(Doughty and Williams, 1998) as it presents the learners with disconnected grammar items in a decontextualized form, i.e., isolated from any meaningful context or communicative activity.

The advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the 1970s was a challenge to the teaching of a foreign language as it began to give way to communication. This can be attributed to the increasing recognition of the diminishing trustworthiness of the traditional PPP approach that tended to produce learners who could not develop target-like levels. The result was the emergence of a "non-interventionist position" that paid very little attention to grammar instruction in language teaching (e.g., Krashen, 1982). The essential claim was that the acquisition of an L2 is akin to the acquisition of the first language by young children, and therefore it should not take place by treating the target language (TL) as an object of study, but, rather, by experiencing it as a medium of communication.

In this way, based on Krashen's (1982) views, a *zeroapproach* to grammar instruction was adopted, where the communicative function of language was emphasized, while the role of grammar teaching was played down or even totally discarded (Ellis, 2002a). The Communicative Approach stressed the importance of fluency, and this "has led directly to a 'laissez-faire' attitude towards the development of learner accuracy" (Doughty and Williams, 1998, p.203). The result was producing learners whose ultimate levels of attainment usually fell short of native-like standards once more. In 1996, Long proposed his *Interaction Hypothesis* as an extension of Krashen's Input Hypothesis and drew on Vygotsky's (1978) *Social-Interactionist Theory*, whereby he advanced the argument that greater attention should be paid to the interactions in which L2 learners are often engaged to understand better the importance of input to L2 learning. These interactions should not be seen as a one-directional source of TL input, feeding into the learner's alleged internal acquisition device. To him, the more the input is queried, recycled, and paraphrased, in order to enhance its comprehensibility, the greater its effectiveness becomes. According to Shannon (2005), these arguments served as a strong basis from the interactionist perspective. Shannon considered that the major distinction between this interactionist view and Krashen's Input Hypothesis is that, while Krashen emphasized comprehensible TL input, which is one-way input, the interactionists acknowledged the value of two-way communication in TL learning.

The study of French immersion education in Canada and the resulting French proficiency of immersion students seemed to have demonstrated that an input-rich, communicatively-oriented language classroom does not often provide all that is needed for the development of target-like proficiency. The result was the emergence of the Swain's *Output Hypothesis* (1995), which emphasized the importance of output as a necessary mechanism for the process of L2 acquisition and argued that L2 acquisition is promoted by encouraging the learners to produce language that is both accurate and precise. Thus, by providing practice opportunities that enhance the automatization of linguistic knowledge in producing the TL, the learners come to recognize the differences between what they want to say and what they can actually say and thus, focus on what they need to discover about the TL. In addition, Swain argued that a principal function of output is that it "provides the opportunity for meaningful use of one's linguistic resources" (p. 248) i.e., opportunities to test out learners' hypotheses about the TL, as they broaden their interlanguage in order to meet communicative needs. Drawing on and extending Swain's Output Hypothesis, Skehan (1998, cited in Ellis, 2003) suggested that producing the TL has six different roles: (a) serves to generate better input through the feedback that the learners' efforts at production bring forth; (b) forces syntactic processing, as it obliges the learners to pay attention to grammar; (c) allows the learners to test out their hypotheses about the TL; (d) helps to automatize the existing knowledge; (e) allows learners to develop discourse skills, e.g., by pushing them to produce long turns; and (f) helps them develop a *personal voice* by steering conversations onto topics they are interested in contributing to. Added to this, production provides the learners with *auto-input* in the sense that learners can attend to the input provided by their productions (Schmidt and Frota, 1986, cited in Ellis, 2003).

2.1. Studies on L2 course books

Reviewing the studies on textbooks in the literature showed that grammar activities attracted all the attention of researchers. They selected particular grammar points to systematically examine in L2 textbook, exploring how the grammar elements were presented and which kind of data and activities were provided. Surprisingly, however, the findings in most of the studies, old and recent, showed that explicit grammar explanation and controlled production practice were the two outstanding features in ELT books. Fortune (1998) conducted two reviews of EFL grammar practice books at the interval of ten years. The study confirmed that only the deductive approach to grammar teaching was present in these books from the 1980s. This technique meant that learners were provided with the grammar rule, details about how the given structure was formed and then was asked to apply it to new sentences. The study found that grammar was practiced using isolated, uncontextualised sentences; and there was excessive manipulation of the unmarked form of a lexical item in brackets; and gap filling.

Ellis (2002b) studied the methodological features of six grammar practice books and created a framework which could be used for describing and designing materials for L2 grammar teaching. Ellis chose the present continuous tense and studied it in each book making notes of the options used. The six grammar practice books studied gave confirmation that grammar instruction consisted of explicit explanation of the target grammar point and controlled production activities, although some of the books made use of more features. According to him, the core theory in these books was that grammar is knowledge that can be transferred to learners and skills that can be practiced with exercises originating from the grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods. Ellis proposed a number of options for authors of grammar practice materials to consider:

1. an approach for learners to discover the rules by themselves
2. data that promotes noticing the target grammar point to create a "condition for input to become intake" (p.166)
3. reception-based options to boost input processing in teaching materials following these steps:
 - a) attention to meaning,

- b) attention to noticing the form and
- c) attention to noticing the gap in learners' use of the structure and the target structure.

Cullen and Kuo (2007) studied 24 EFL textbooks for adult learners at five proficiency levels, which were published between 2000 and 2006, to find out which common features of spoken grammar could be found in the textbooks and what their purpose was. Their result showed that informal conversational English (colloquial style) was only accidentally found in EFL textbooks. Nonetheless, the authors assured that teaching spoken grammar is essential so that learners would sound natural in everyday conversation. Added to this, Tomlinson (2008) edited a book which included findings from 16 studies of EFL and ESL textbooks used for different purposes and in different parts of the world. The hypothesis was that many of these materials are designed for teaching rather than learning linguistic items. The criteria concentrated on evaluating the material mainly from the learner's point of view; vis a vis the extent of provision of exposure to English in authentic situations, the extent of feedback gain on the effectiveness of their use of English, and the extent to which the activities engaged the learners affectively and cognitively, and helped them operate effectively in English-speaking milieu outside the classroom. The results reported that first; the textbooks tended to overuse the PPP approach and thus shifted the focus from learning to teaching. Second, the materials often undervalued the learners' intellectual and emotional maturity by providing very basic texts. Third, they focused on preparing learners for examinations by providing activities that occur in tests, and finally, they failed to encourage learners to practice language outside the classroom.

In 2009, Kopsa and Loikkanen (cited in Pylvänäinen, 2013) examined the idea of constructivism which is associated with pedagogic approaches that promote active learning in three Swedish exercise books, i.e., the extent to which the learners focus on doing something during grammar activities. The results showed that 35 % of the grammar exercises were based on translating between the source and the target language. From 7-11 % of all the grammar exercises were based on mimicking after a given pattern and 6 % were listening exercises. The idea of constructivism was incorporated in 8 % only of all grammar exercises. Along similar lines, Ju (2010) investigated two textbooks published by Oxford University Press, which were *Fun with English* and *Oxford English*. The study focused on how the textbooks were structured, and how many kinds of grammar exercises there were in the textbooks and which approaches were used for the grammar teaching: inductive or deductive. The results showed that while *Oxford English* contained no grammatical explanation in the whole textbook, and offered practical chances for the students to communicate, in *Fun with English*, grammar was taught deductively in a separate section, working on the student's ability to write, and paying little attention to the oral ability and group work.

Chang (2011) as well examined three Malaysian and Taiwanese English Textbooks and the findings revealed that the implementation of CLT in both Malaysian and Taiwanese settings had only a slight influence on the teaching of grammar. The traditional teaching practice was reflected in the design of the grammar activities and that they were structure-based, with emphasis on accuracy rather than fluency. Karaata and Soruç (2012) evaluated English textbooks used in Turkish primary and high schools from a spoken grammar perspective. Eighteen textbooks were examined intensively using a checklist of spoken grammar features, both qualitatively and quantitatively. The study indicated that spoken grammar features were generally not encountered in the textbooks adequately enough, except for ellipsis and lexico-grammatical units. In the same year, a study on English L2 textbooks by Alemi and Sadehvandi reported some insufficiencies, pointing out for example, that practice for developing speaking skills was not as much as necessary and that even when used, it represented the European culture which was not suitable for the Iranian context. The results also showed that the textbooks available in Iran did not meet the teachers' expectations either from the pedagogical or cultural standpoint.

Nonetheless, the competence of the PPP method was challenged by more novel perspectives on L2 teaching which emphasized language tasks that are designed for rules discovery, in addition to communicative activities. A fewer number of studies examined ESL grammar books that adopted a perspective where the attention to grammatical forms "take(s) place within a meaningful, communicative context, making it an extension of communicative language teaching, not a departure from it" (Rodriguez, 2009, p. 2). Millard (2000) for example examined 13 ESL grammar books for adults, namely, the present progressive aspect was studied in each book and each question was assessed in terms of four categories: the use of context in activities and examples; the communicative focus of the activities; dimensions of grammatical explanations; and the teacher-friendliness of the book. The results showed that some books scored high on all four categories and some had low scores in every category. A general impression was that grammar instruction concentrated mainly on sentence level and discarded the pragmatic use of grammar elements.

Later, Macias (2010) studied the presentation of the passive voice in two English L2 textbook to describe how the form, meaning and use were illustrated in the two textbooks. The aim was to discuss the quality and adequacy of grammar description. It was found that while one of the books focused on form more than use and meaning and had a deductive approach, the other focused more on use and meaning and employed an inductive approach with consciousness-raising and discovery activities. The latter also had activities in which learners were expected to use linguistic metalanguage in answering questions. Added to this, Fernandez (2011) studied approaches to grammar instruction in six L2 beginning-level Spanish textbooks, published in 2006-2009. Four out of the six books under investigation had contextualised, input-based activities for the purpose of exposing the learners to comprehensible, meaningful input, which is essential to L2 acquisition. The remaining two books, however, included explicit grammar explanation and controlled production practice.

Zawahreh (2012) aimed at analyzing the grammar activities in the six modules of the Students' book of Action Pack Seven used as a textbook for teaching English in Jordan to find out to what extent these activities meet the criterion proposed by it. The results of the study showed the following: first, the number of the grammar activities was appropriate and distributed in a balanced way between the six modules of the textbook. Second, all of the linguistic data were accurate and correct in details. Third, fifty-five out of the sixty grammar activities met the criteria *clarity* and *completeness*. Fourth, fifty out of sixty grammar activities were presented in meaningful context. In a similar way, Pylvänäinen (2013) studied commonly used teaching materials for Grades 7 to 9 in basic education in

Finland with a focus on how grammar and structures were presented, how their use was illustrated and how they were practiced. The study reached the conclusion that all the series studied had very infrequent use of interaction-based and corrective feedback options. They took into account that it is hard for learners to focus on meaning and form simultaneously and therefore provided text comprehension and only subsequently form-focused grammar description and production activities. Some of the series also put forward activities with continuous text or mini-context to simulate authentic discourse, which gave the learners some opportunities to enlarge their pragmatic competence.

From this review it is clear that though English language teaching material has been evaluated in light of the communicative approach, research has been directed mainly towards investigating grammar activities in particular and not language activities in general which is the concern of this study. In addition, to the researcher knowledge, hardly any attempted a comparison among course books on different levels to see how and to what extent the various components of communicative competence are integrated in each and how priorities are established; a gap which this paper tried to fill up.

2.2. Communicative Competence

The term communicative competence was first developed by Hymes (1971) to mean “what a speaker needs to know to communicate effectively in culturally significant setting” (p.12). In the Savignon research, an experiment was conducted for eighteen-week instructional period. At the end of the period, the learners who had practiced communication in addition to pattern drills in a laboratory were tested and it was found that their communicative competence, measured in terms of fluency, comprehensibility, effort, and amount of communication in unrehearsed communicative tasks, significantly outperformed that of learners who had had no such practice. The researcher reached the conclusion that learner’s reactions to the test formats supported the view that even beginners responded better to activities that helped them focus on meaning as opposed to formal features. After that, a collection of role-playing exercises, games, and other communicative classroom activities were developed for inclusion in the adaptation of the French CREDIF materials (Centre de Recherché et d’Etude pour la Diffusion du Français). From that time on, the use of games, role playing, and activities done in pairs or in groups has gained approval and is now widely recommended for insertion in language-teaching programs. CLT proposed programs that promote the development of functional language capability by engaging learners all the way through in communicative dealings using the target language in fictional situations or news related to pop culture (Savignon, 1997).

2.3. Components of Communicative Competence

Grammatical competence (Structure) refers to sentence-level grammatical forms, the ability to identify the lexical, morphological, syntactical and phonological features of a language and to make use of those features to understand and formulate words and sentences.

Discourse competence (Function) is concerned with the interconnectedness of a series of utterances or written words or phrases to form a text, a meaningful whole. The text might be a novel, an e-mail message, a telephone conversation, or a poem. Two kinds of processing are essential for discourse competence. *Bottom-up processing* includes the identification of isolated sounds or words that contribute to interpretation of the overall meaning of the text. In contrast, *top-down processing* involves understanding of the theme or purpose of the text, which in turn helps in the interpretation of isolated sounds or words.

Sociocultural competence (Situation) (Canale and Swain, 1980) extends well beyond linguistic forms and is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry having to do with the social rules of language use. Sociocultural competence requires an understanding of the social context in which language is used, that is,

- the roles of the participants,
- the information they share, and
- the function of the interaction and a willingness to engage in the active negotiation of meaning taking into account the possibility of cultural differences in conventions of use (Savignon, 1997).

Strategic competence (Skill) is what we do to cope with unfamiliar contexts, with constraints arising from imperfect knowledge of rules, or any obstacles to their application, such as fatigue or distraction.

2.4. The Purpose of the Study

The best amalgamation of language activities in any given instructional setting will always depend on factors such as the diversity of learners, the nature and time-span of instructional sequence, the proficiency level, among others (Savignon, 1997). CLT does not entail complete rejection of materials used as aids to memorization, repetition, and translation, or for grammar exercises (Savignon). A complete syllabus specification will include all aspects of communicative competence: structure, function, situation, skills and the difference between syllabuses will lie in the priority given to each of these aspects. Yalden (1987) suggested a proportional approach in course designing. In this design, students learn more form than meaning at an early stage and as students’ language proficiency improves, the intervention of communicative functions increases. Accordingly, the weight given to grammatical competence would be more in early stages of development and would gradually trim down at later stages. In the present study, the language activities in three series of ELT course books were analysed adopting the hypothetical classroom model proposed by Savignon. The purpose was not to see whether the course books under investigation comply with either the structural or the communicative syllabus but to find out how the different communicative components are incorporated in different competency levels and how priorities are established.

2.5. Research Questions

This paper attempted to answer the following main question: How are the different communicative components of Savignon's continuum blended in ETL courses books on different proficiency levels? This question was broken into a number of sub-questions:

- i. Which components of the communicative continuum are given priority in elementary, intermediate and advanced levels?
- ii. Do the priorities comply with Yalden's proportional approach in course designing?
- iii. To what extent are these components integrated in the levels studied?

2.6. Research Method

In this section, I outline the research method of this study; the material chosen for analysis, describe the analytical tool and provide an explanation of the procedures used to categorize and analyze the data.

2.7. Material and Sampling

The present paper drew on data from three series of ELT course books designed for adult English language learners from beginners to advanced levels. The series under investigation are *Face2face* and *Interchange* Third edition and *Passages* which is the advanced level of *Interchange*. The criteria for choosing these series is that they are relatively new; published during 2005-2013, so they should have the latest and most advanced approaches available on the teaching material market. As stated in the description of the series, the editions reflect the current approaches to language teaching and learning. They feature a systematic focus on spoken accuracy and fluency, which gives students ample opportunities to practice new language in both free and controlled contexts. The 3 series are published by a notable teaching material publisher which is Cambridge University Press and are used by many language teaching institutes all over Egypt. *Interchange* has 4 levels: beginners, elementary, intermediate and upper intermediate. Each level provides approximately 80 hours of core teaching material. Each teaching series consists of several items: a student book, an accompanying work book, and aural material in the form of CD for each learner. Only the student books of each series were used as primary sources of the present study. *Face2face* has 5 levels: beginners, elementary, intermediate and upper intermediate and advanced while *Interchange* has four levels: beginner, elementary, intermediate and upper intermediate and the advanced is offered in *Passages* which is in two parts. Each level of the three series has 16 units divided into sections each with a different focus: vocabulary, conversation, grammar, pronunciation, etc. Each unit is composed of a range of 11 to 13 activities.

The selected levels for investigation in this study were Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced. A sample of the activities in each level was chosen to be analyzed. Numbers from one to 16 (representing the 16 units) were written on slips of papers and pulled at random out of a hat, i.e., every slip of paper had an equal chance of being plucked out. From the Elementary level of *Interchange*: Units 1, 4, 5 and 8, 9 and 12 and from *Face2face*: Units 1, 3, 8 and 11 were chosen. From the Intermediate level of *Interchange*: Units 1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 15, 16 and *Face2face*: Units 4, 7, and 10 were selected. From *Passages* (the advanced level of *Interchange*): Units 3, 5, 6, 10, 12 and from the advanced level of *Face2face*: Units 1, 3, 6, 8 and 10 were selected. This made a total of 585 activities; 195 from each level.

2.8. Model Adopted for Analysis of Data

The study categorised the activities used in the students' books of *Face2face* and *Interchange* and *Passages*, adopting the Savignon (1997) classroom model of communicative competence. The model included the three components identified by Canale and Swain (1980) plus a fourth component, discourse competence, added by Canale (1983). Each of the 4 components of competence is vital at different levels of communicative competence and all the components are interconnected, that is, they cannot be developed or measured in isolation. Savignon's classroom model shows a hypothetical integration of four components of communicative competence into a communicative curriculum of five degrees (Savignon, 1997). These components can be regarded as thematic clusters of activities or experiences related to language use and can be blended at all stages of instruction.

1. Language Arts (Grammatical competence)

This component provides an appropriate context for attention to a targeted structure in the input to enable the learner to understand the regularities and rules connected to this target structure and identify the gap between his own use of the feature and the way it works in the input. Language Arts activities include games used in language programs to help learners focus on syntax, morphology and phonology and opportunities to use these grammatical or linguistic points communicatively.

2. Language for a Purpose (Discourse competence)

This component is the use of language for real and immediate communicative goals, i.e., opportunities to focus on the message being conveyed. For instance, task-based curricula are designed to allow learners to use language to accomplish a specific task.

3. My language is me, personal second language use (Discourse & Strategic competence)

This component implies allowing the learners opportunities to use their new language for expression of their personal feelings and experiences.

4. You Be . . . , I'll Be . . . : Theatre Arts (Sociocultural & Strategic competence)

This is the fourth component of a communicative curriculum. Learners play roles for which they improvise scripts from the models they observe around them, i.e., allowing them to interpret, express and negotiate meaning in different situations.

5. Language use beyond the classroom (Discourse & Sociocultural & Strategic)

This is the fifth and final component of the communicative curriculum. In an L2 environment, it provides opportunities to use the foreign language outside the classroom and to interact on a variety of topics with other language users in the surroundings and around the world.

3. Classification of Data

The selected activities were classified into the five components of communicative competence mentioned above. Table 1 shows the components, their focus and the type of activities that exemplified each. Thus, activities with a focus on language structures and forms such as asking learners to translate or repeat patterns for memorization would be classified as belonging to the *Language Arts*. Activities demanding the learner to speak himself out or take the role of someone else would be classified as *My language is me* or *I'll be...You'll be*, respectively. Inter-rater agreement for rating activities as belonging to one component or the other was determined by two linguists in addition to the researcher, who were asked to rate 200 activities (including only the activities that the researcher had difficulty putting into a type) and then comparing their ratings with the researcher's. To prepare the material for the raters, the researcher copied every head of an activity on coloured cards to distinguish activities of different levels. Cards having activities with similar wording were removed to lessen the number of cards handed in to each rater. Each component of the communicative continuum was given an alphabet code and raters were asked to categorize the activities on cards into the five components using a rubric that clearly defined what each component of the scale included (see Table 1). The precision of these definitions and the activities incorporating each helped the coders apply the rubric in a straightforward and consistent manner. The code given for each activity was that which at least two of the raters agreed upon.

Alphabet code	Communicative continuum component	Focus	Sample activities incorporating the component
A	Language Arts	Attention on language structures, i.e., syntax, morphology, phonology-Metalinguistic awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spelling • translation • dictation • repetition after a given model • memorized chunks • vocabulary definition • synonyms and antonyms • cognates and false cognates
P	Language for a purpose	Attention on message being conveyed through interpretation and negotiation of meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describing a picture • Completing a table • Spotting differences • jigsaw • Information cards • Interview grids
M	My language is me	Attention on use - personal voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of factual info about self • formulating arguments to justify one's opinion
R	You'll be ...I'll be...	Attention on function -playing a role in a context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • scripted and unscripted role playing • simulations
B	Language use beyond the classroom	Attention on function through use of language outside the classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom visits to a public place • Radio and television programs, videos, and feature-length films, newspapers and magazines • World Wide Web sites E-mail, chat rooms, on-line teaching materials, and video-conferencing-internet- computer-mediated communication

Table 1: Savignon's communicative continuum components, focus and activities exemplifying each component

4. Results

The frequency of occurrence of the five components of the communicative continuum was calculated to answer the first research sub-question: Which components of the communicative continuum were given priority in the Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced levels?

Comparing the reflection of the different components within each level in Table 2 and Figures 1, 2 and 3 show the following important findings:

- i. In all levels, the highest priority was given to P.
- ii. In the Elementary, A occupied a much larger space compared to M and R.
- iii. In the Intermediate, there is roughly a fair distribution between A and M.
- iv. In the Advanced level, M slightly exceeded A.
- v. R was hardly reflected in all levels and weakened further with higher levels.
- vi. B did not roll up in all levels.

Component/level	Elementary	Intermediate	Advanced
P	126	134	151
A	83	65	45
M	10	58	50
R	9	10	4
B	0	0	0

Table 2: The Frequency of Reflection of the five Components in the Three Levels

Therefore, P (*Language for a Purpose*) was the component widely reflected in all the levels. P-activities are designed to make the learner handle language with a clear focus on accomplishing a task such as comparing or contrasting people of things, supporting or refuting an argument, saluting a friend, describing locations, explaining an issue, etc. Examples of Category P, where the learners' attention is focused on meaning, are:

- Read the article. For each statement check true, false or not given. Find the phrases in italics in the text. Choose the meaning of each phrase. (Intermediate)
- Ask and answer questions about the people in the photo. (Elementary)
- Match the first half of sayings 1-8 to endings a-h. Compare answers. What do the sayings mean? (Advanced)

The category A, i.e., activities which are designed around a key language structure, came in second position after P, in Elementary and Intermediate levels, while it lagged a step behind (coming in third place) in the advanced levels. It provides practice of words or small chunks of language, such as relative clauses, gerund, perfect tenses, etc. This helps build confidence and automatize the use of structures and expressions. Examples of this category are:

- Find the verbs in these sentences. They are in the present. Is the present Simple the same or different after I, you, we and they? (Elementary)
- Match the info in column A and B. Then rewrite each pair to form one sentence. Use relative pronouns if necessary. (Intermediate)

The category M, representing opportunities to use the language for expression of personal feelings and experiences, was reflected much more in Intermediate and Advanced level activities than in the Elementary stage activities. Examples of this category are:

- Have you ever had any of these complaints? Which ones? What would you do in each of these situations? What other complaints have you had? (Intermediate)
- Have you had a problem similar to these? Do you agree or disagree with these comments? (Advanced)

The component R, representing opportunities that places the learner in an imaginary situation and then asks him/her to act out the situation in pairs or groups was the least reflected in all levels. Examples of this category are:

- Act out a health problem. Your partner guesses the problem. (Elementary)
- Interview a classmate to find out about his personality. (Intermediate)
- Imagine that you bought something that was damaged. You took it back but the clerk refused to exchange it. What would you say? (Intermediate)

The analysis also answered the second sub-question: Do the priorities comply with Yalden's proportional approach in course designing? Yalden (1987) suggested a proportional approach in course designing where the weight given to grammatical competence would be more in early stages of development and gradually trim down at later stages. First, as Table 2 and Figures 1, 2, and 3 show, the category A diminished and the gap between A and P frequencies largely widened with progress towards more advanced levels.

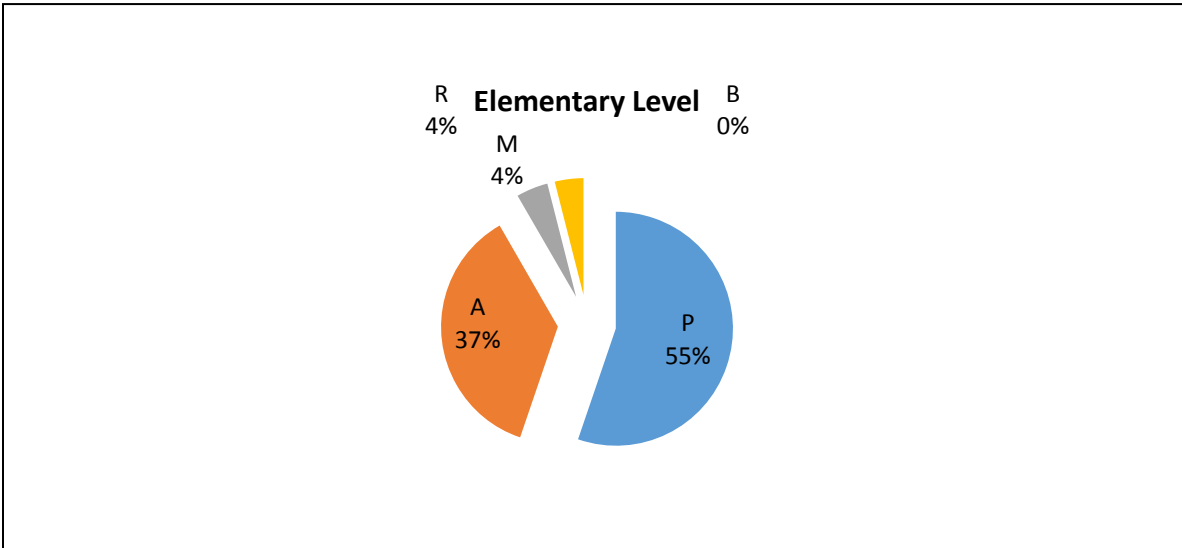


Figure 1: Percentage of P, A, M & R in Elementary level

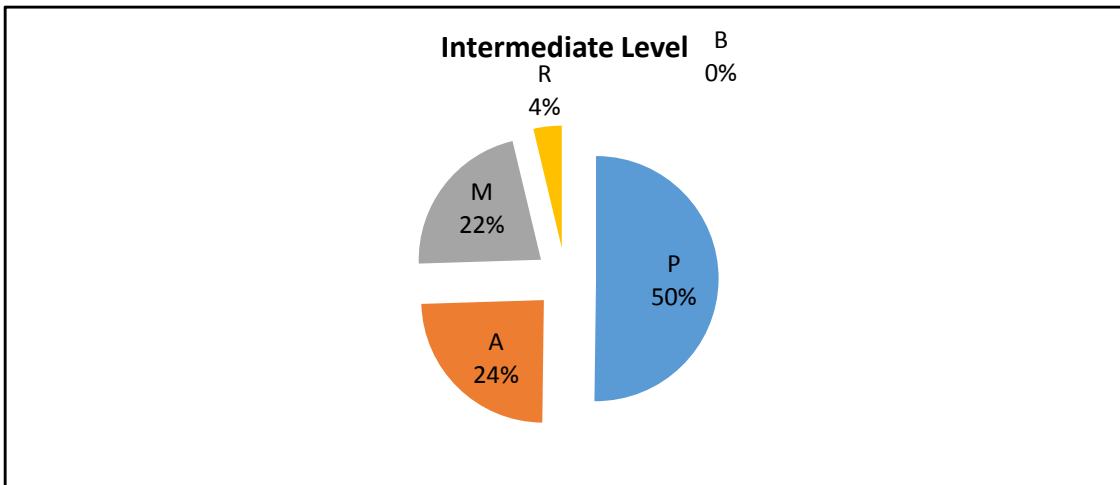


Figure 2: Percentage of P, A, M & R in Intermediate level

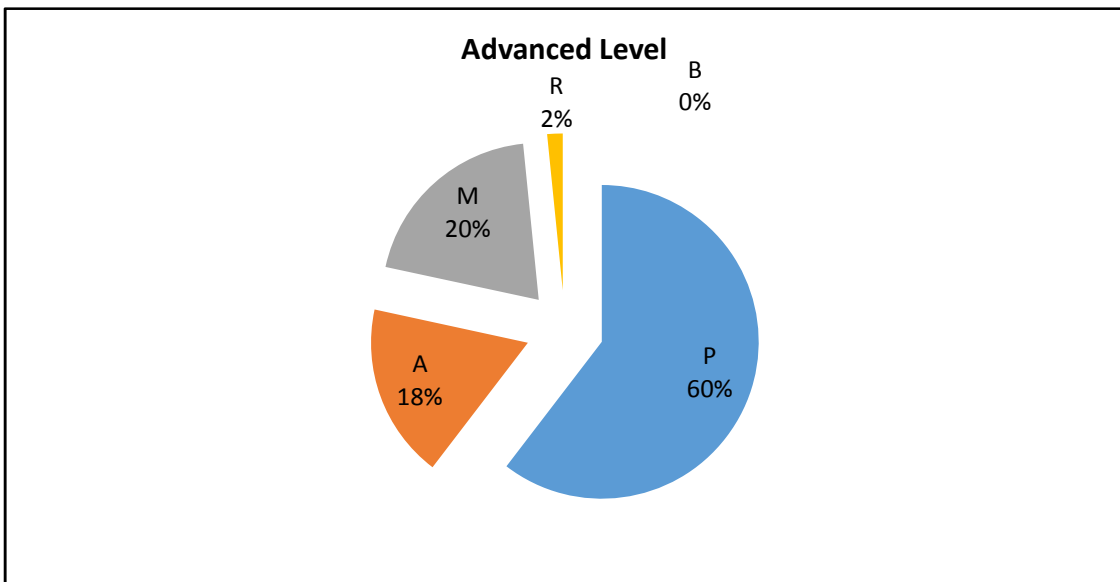


Figure 3: Percentage of P, A, M & R in Advanced level

The frequency of use of activities that integrated more than one component in the three levels was tallied in order to answer the third question: To what extent are these components integrated in the levels studied?

Level	No. of activities that integrated components
Elementary	26
Intermediate	62
Advanced	71

Table 3: Frequency of use of activities with more than one component integrated

Table 3 shows that incorporating more than one component into the same activity took place in all three levels and that it increased as the level of proficiency increased. Thus, for instance, the learner would be asked to fix jumbled sentences, then ask his or her partner questions and finally say his opinion about something. Examples of integrating components in the Elementary level are:

- Which opinion do you agree with? Add your opinion to the chart. (M&P)
- Tick the sentences that are true for you. Make the other sentences negative. Write the correct sentences. Work in pair. Compare your sentences. (P&M&A)
- It's now 6.30 p.m. Frank is talking to his wife. Make questions in the present continuous. Listen and check. (P&A)

Examples of integrating components in the Intermediate level are:

- Match the words with the definitions, then decide which words are positive qualities and which are negative. Can you remember the definitions? Take turns talking about the adjectives. (P&A)
- Think of a free-time activity you've done. Choose one of these ideas or your own. Then make notes on what happened that day. Take turns to tell each other about your free time activity. Which was the most interesting story, do you think? (M&P)
- Use the words in brackets to soften these opinions about children. Work in pairs. Compare sentences. Do you agree with the sentences you have written? (P&M&A)
- Complete the paragraph with because, since, because of, for of ...etc. then compare with a partner. What reason explains the success of each situation? Compare ideas with a partner. Suggest two more reasons for each success. (P&M&A)

Examples of integration in the Advanced level activities are:

- Write a summary of the article. Work in pairs, read your summaries and check for subject/verb agreement. Which summary gives a clearer idea of the article? (P&A)
- Complete these sentences about yourself. Say your sentences. Ask follow-up questions. (P&M)
- Look at the cartoons on p, 35 and read situations a-d. In which of these situations might you complain, refuse an invitation or disagree". Think of a way in which you could respond in a direct way and in a less direct way. (P&M)
- You are going to do a class survey using these questions, choose two questions to ask other students. Interview as many students as you can. Make notes on the answers you get. (R&P)
- Use the language in the box to create polite complaints for each situation. Take turns acting out your complaints for the class. (R&P)
- Which of the cities on page 18 would you like to visit? Write 3 sentences explaining your reasons. Use relative clauses where appropriate. (A&M)
- Read two more ways to stay healthy. Find and correct 5 mistakes with inversion. Work in pairs. Student A, read out your corrected version of paragraph 1. Student B, read out your corrected version. Do you agree with each other? (A&M)

5. Discussion

The present study revealed several key findings. First, all components of the communicative continuum: *Language for a purpose*, *Language Arts*, *my language is me* and *I'll be...you'll be*(i.e., Grammatical & Discourse & Strategic competence) were reflected in the activities of the three levels, excluding *Use of language beyond the classroom* which did not show up in any of the three levels. That is, none of the activities asked the learners to go beyond the classroom, for instance, listen to the radio or watch television programs, videos, and feature movies (other than those used in the course), or read newspapers and magazine articles or browse the World Wide Web sites and chat rooms. It is likely that this was done understanding that most learners would not find the idea of having to do assignments related to the foreign language outside the classroom very appealing (Pylvänäinen, 2012, cited in Pylvänäinen, 2013). It is also possible that the sample of the activities under investigation happened to include no incorporation of this type. Second, the study found that the component *Language for a Purpose* was the one abundantly used on all the levels, that is, activities highlighting the generation of the target language in an unconscious way through the use of tasks that laid emphasis on the message conveyed, where the learners develop skill at the language by guessing, searching, matching, substituting, assembling, arranging linguistic structures and patterns that frequently occur in the situations they meet in real life.

Another noteworthy finding was that the activities progressed from accentuation of form (i.e., grammatical competence) in lower levels to self-expression in higher levels. Activities utilized to enhance learners' knowledge of grammatical rules diminished with progress towards advanced levels, lending credence to Yalden's (1987) proportional approach in course designing. The aim of language learners' practice in classroom is to pave the learners' way to fluent and accurate L2 acquisition. And since grammar is the

groundwork upon which all the other skills are built, the need to merge form-activities and communication-activities at the lower levels is mandatory. To Swain (1995), the use of communicatively-geared practice which is unaided by grammar practice cannot provide all that is needed for the development of target-like proficiency. To Savage (2010), “(w)ithout a balance between grammar and communication, many students are not able to transition from ESL to higher education” (p. 9). Chung (2005) explained that for societies whose first (and second) language is not English, there is still a need for structural practices so that the foundation of linguistic knowledge can be built up before further communicative tasks are given. Likewise, Ellis (2005) suggested that learning has to initiate with an explicit representation of linguistic forms, which are then developed through implicit learning. In the advanced level, learners are regarded as linguistically mature enough to swerve from patterned communicative tasks involving activities that are poor in unpredictability or risk-taking to free-expression tasks which are loaded with creativity and irregularity. Moreover, establishing positive relationships among the learners by sharing each other’s views and attitudes was more appropriate to the now autonomous responsible learners into whom they have developed.

It was also found that role playing was not frequently reflected in all stages and that it diminished at higher competency levels. Learners were rarely asked to participate in role play. Role playing and self-expression are techniques for learning that can be highly involving for learners and promote the development of functional language abilities. However, it differs from self-expression in the peculiarity of the experience. In role-play, one suddenly finds oneself placed in another person’s shoes or taking another person’s perspective on an issue, unlike self-expression where one articulates one’s own feelings and beliefs. This is likely to provoke anxiety and fear of failure to get what one wanted in playing one’s role. Lastly, it was found that the integration of more than one component into the same activity took place in all three levels and that frequency of integration differed as proficiency increased. This reflected an understanding that the advanced learner is more competent to maintain focus and adapt to the quick alternation between focus on form, meaning and self-expression /role-playing within the same activity; above and beyond adding variety and creating a dynamic climate for learning.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

The general impression, therefore, was that first, the ELT books under investigation had a heavily communicative orientation, incorporating more stress on grammatical, discourse and strategic competence throughout the three levels. Thus, three components, those representing *Language for a Purpose*, *Language Arts*, *My language is Me* were reflected adequately in all the levels though with diverse degrees. The display of different types of activities added variety and enlarged the chances for involving all types of learners. The ELT course books under investigation are designed for adult English language learners from beginners to advanced levels. In such classes, learners are very diverse in age, educational and employment background. They may be as young as 16 or as old as 70. Some may have had no more than their basic education; others may have multiple college degrees and speak a number of languages. Some have never worked before; others may have had professional posts. ELT course books designers must keep in mind the diversity of learners in these classes by integrating different types of text and tasks that challenge each and every one. Second, the activities in the books were adapted to address the precise learners’ needs at each stage: an overall emphasis on attending to meaning all the way through, with the pendulum swinging towards attention to language forms in the context of communicative activities at lower levels, then towards language use for personal voice at higher levels (see Figure 4). The relative frequency of each component depended on the learner’s competency level and any increase in one of the components at the expense of others at one stage aimed at the ultimate realization of a corresponding increase in the overall language competence of the learner.

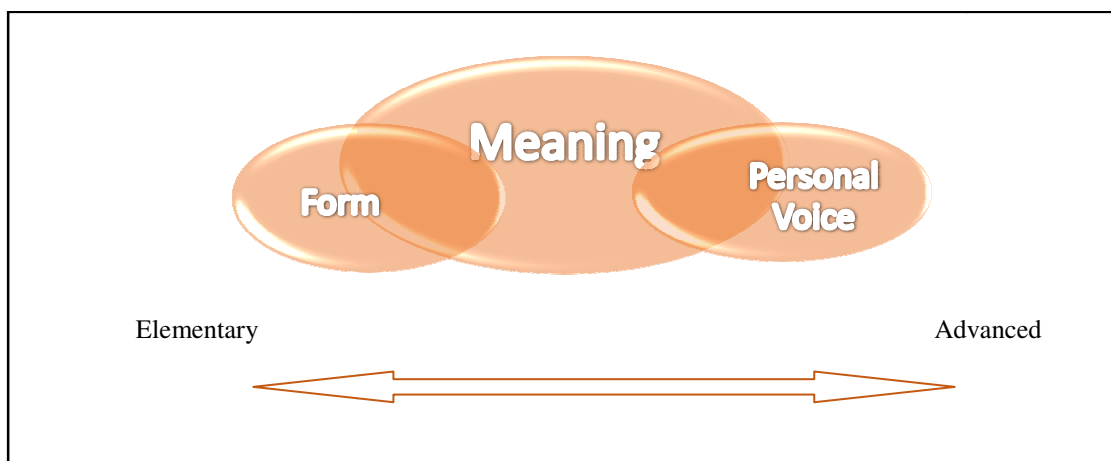


Figure 4: Focus of activities from Elementary to Advanced levels

Third, two components were not adequately reflected in the activities: *You’ll be ...I’ll be* and *Language use beyond the classroom*, i.e., both of which aim to achieve socio-cultural adaptability. Role playing, varying from highly structured, context-determined, short exchanges to long open-ended conversations, fosters the understanding of social conventions concerning language use, such as “taking turns, appropriateness of content, nonverbal language, and tone” (Savignon, 1997, p. 10). It offers the learners opportunities to take the place of people other than themselves, thus making them more confident and help liberate intimidated learners from their

embarrassments. It is also “a way of bringing situations from real life into the classroom” (Doff, 1990, p. 232). In addition, simulation activities that set up a replicated environment, such as unscripted mini-plays structured around a problem or series of problems help build a vivid connection between the classroom experience and the target culture. Added to this, extending activities outside the classroom enables learners to see a connection between the classroom and the real world, which, when barely established, increases the risk that learners only relate language to what turns out in the English classroom and what is experienced in tests and assignments (Johansson, 2006).

It is clear therefore from what has been said that it is not necessary and seems almost unfeasible for language syllabuses to incorporate each and every type of task. What the syllabus designers must have to decide on is which classroom activities should be used at which level of development to ensure maximum transfer of knowledge. Course books may sometimes include deliberate focus on specific learning skills and strategies using practice that is structured in a way that the author considers best for teaching and learning these skills and strategies. This necessitates that instructors be equipped to complement classroom books, whenever needed, with activities and assignments that integrate missing learning practices and align its use with the textbook they are using (Reinders & Balçikanlı, 2011) to produce a learner who has fluent and accurate skills in communication.

7. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The present study was rather limited in a number of respects. First, it only analysed three series of ELT course books although numerous L2 books are in use. Second, it only analysed a sample of the activities in the books taken from the student’s books and did not take into account the activities in the work book that accompanies each student book. The study assesses the course books during use where they are judged as materials in process, and does not attempt any retrospective evaluation which considers outcomes from materials use as it is beyond the scope of this study. These limitations are possible areas that could be addressed in further research. It would be also interesting to investigate other language textbooks and see what kind of adaptation is made, and how priorities are set up and compare results to see differences and similarities in the way languages are practiced in classrooms via textbooks.

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