

Identifying Cultural Influences on Language Teaching-Learning Materials Through the 'Iceberg' Analogy

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Abstract

Materials for teaching English as a second or foreign language do not always 'work' and, at times, it is not clear why. This interdisciplinary paper suggests one potential source of conflict in teaching/learning materials could be culturally-based and can be explained using the 'iceberg' analogy, which is often used in intercultural studies. A literature review reveals an important but understated relationship between materials and culture, suggesting support for the idea of a cultural basis for clashes between such materials and their users. It then shows how the 'iceberg' analogy can be adapted to consider the deep reactions of 'producers' and 'clients' of language learning materials.

Key Words: language teaching/learning materials; cultural iceberg; misunderstanding

外国語教材へ文化が与える影響－「冰山モデル」による考察

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要旨

第二言語あるいは外国語としての英語教授に用いる教材は、いつもよく機能するわけではなく、また時にはそれが機能しない理由も明確ではない。本論では学際的立場をとり、英語教授・学習に用いる教材の問題の原因の一つが文化に根ざしている可能性があること、そしてそれはインターカルチュラル・スタディーズでよく用いられる「冰山」のたとえで説明できることを示す。文献リサーチによって、これまで強調されなかったものの、教材と文化の間に重要な関係があることを明らかにする。これは教材と使用者の不適合には文化に根ざした原因があるという考えを支持するものである。本論ではさらに、言語学習教材の「制作者」と「クライアント」の深い相互反応を考える際にも、この「冰山」のたとえが応用できることを示す。

キーワード：言語教育・言語学習、文化冰山モデル、誤解

Introduction

Materials are an integral part of formal language learning. Much has been written on their design, adaptation, appropriacy, innovation, and learner expectations - the list could go on. Harder to isolate, perhaps, is how and why language learning materials actually evolve out of the minds of ‘producers’ of materials as they do, and how and why they are perceived as they are by the eventual users, or ‘clients’. Producer and client often exist in isolation from one another: not only physically (often continents apart), but they may also be culturally distant. Being removed from the context in which their materials are used, most materials writers, even with some contact or client feedback, are unlikely to be aware of the full range of reactions to their materials.

Emerging from the author’s interest in culture and also materials writing, this paper will borrow an analogy often used in intercultural studies to explain the depth and potential difficulties of culture - the iceberg. After providing background to frame the paper, a literature review will draw on materials writers discussing what can be identified as cultural issues. A speculative “materials iceberg” will then be introduced and analysed in detail. A final section will address the validity of the “materials iceberg” described in the paper.

Background

During more than thirty years in Japan as a teacher, programme coordinator and materials writer, the author has seen his share of well-designed, if not well-intentioned, materials fail in the classroom. These were not limited to in-house, home-grown materials but also included texts (or parts thereof) by major international publishing houses. In short, no-one is immune to the possibility of failure. This raises two questions: why is it that materials sometimes don’t work, and, even if they are reasonably successful as teaching materials, why is their methodology resisted? As my interests moved into the teaching of intercultural communication it became clear that one of the main reasons was cultural.

There are, of course, culturally-inappropriate topics and even cultural biases and these are culture/material areas that have received attention. This paper will refer to deeper cultural issues. A clear example of this in Japan is the relative failure of the so-called “learner-centred learning” approach (cf. Nunan, 1988). Very simply, in this approach, students, with teachers as guides, decide what they need to learn in the language classroom, when they learn it, how they will be assessed - the result being a ‘negotiated syllabus.’ Born out of English as a Second Language (ESL) experiences in Australia and Europe, this

approach was seen by many Asian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students and local teachers as a sign that, respectively, their teachers, colleagues and the materials did not, in fact, know what they were doing (ibid.). Similar resistance is to be encountered in the more recent moves of autonomous learning. Granted, individual teachers or programmes or individual learners could boast success, however, in a broad sense, these approaches do not always work because they do not ‘feel right’ to the learners and also to many of the local, non-native speaker teachers. There is a culture clash at the approach and materials level.

Literature Review

That topics and content in teaching/learning materials can cross the lines of what is culturally appropriate is fairly well understood, and most materials producers take care in this respect. Generally, publishers have detailed screening processes that avoid sensitive topics, such as religion, politics, drug use, and right to life issues; however, seemingly innocent topics or practices can also be ‘cultural’. Even the choice of colouring used in the text can have cultural connotations. When the materials producer is working in isolation, however, as a self-publisher or classroom teacher, there may be no editorial-level check on such things. Cates (1993) showed that certain values, stereotypes and biases can be strongly reflected in the selection of examples used in textbooks. While important, these are largely visible, surface cultural content issues. The focus of this paper is more on the invisible and perhaps unstated deeper cultural values issues, not content.

This literature review will be in two parts. Firstly it will present observations and comments from established materials writers and researchers that are more implicit in support of my notion of the materials iceberg. The second half will summarize research, including materials analysis and surveys, the findings of which more explicitly support my notion of the materials iceberg.

The following researched observations and commentary in literature on materials support the potential of deep cultural difference in materials. Items throughout the Literature Review are emphasised in italics by the author to identify certain qualities, experiences, findings or aims of materials writers and researchers that coincide with what are also deep cultural values. In this way, the first part of this literature review aims to show that, when discussing the creation of learning materials, cultural issues will come to the fore, but will not necessary be recognised as such by materials writers or researchers. I have quoted at length to give fuller context to their admissions.

Bell and Gower (1998) wrote on compromises made in materials that, “In order to

work, the material up to a point has to be targeted...” (p. 119), and they list, along with type of student and teaching situation, a type of teacher “with a particular range of teaching skills and who has *assumptions about methodology* which he/her *shares with* his/her colleagues” (p. 119). There is then the potential that the assumptions of the teacher and students about learning or topics will not match those of the materials writer and materials. Furthermore, Masuhara (1998), on teacher variables, suggested “teachers often seem to be treated in both language learning and teaching studies as passive beings who are *expected to adapt* flexibly to the roles *determined by the objectives of the method and by the learning theory* on which the method is based” (p. 239). The fact that the method and theory, embodied in materials, may be ‘foreign’, teachers and students may be asked to bend in ways they do not appreciate or are unable. For example, a Japanese teacher of English might be unwilling, maybe even sub-consciously unable, to relinquish the classroom and curricular control required for materials using a ‘learner-centred’ methodology to work. Similarly, perhaps even more so, even if a teacher is totally convinced of the value of the approach, the students may doubt or be confused about their and the teacher’s role. The author has seen both cases first hand. Masuhara (1994) described that teacher responses to needs from materials may be *influenced by their perception of* administration and students’ needs but that these “do not necessarily represent the actual learners’ needs” or wants (cited in Masuhara, 1998, p. 241). Similarly, they may not also take in the cultural needs of the end users. Tomlinson (1998b) supports this in comments on materials in that:

all too often major decisions are made about the content, approach, procedures and design of learning materials *based on assumptions* of user needs and wants and *on impressions* of what ‘works’ in the classroom. Often these assumptions and impressions are misinformed or misrepresentative and mistakes are made which contribute to dissatisfaction and failure

(1998b, p. 261).

Tomlinson (2003b) further hinted at the deeper cultural pull on materials, since “all teachers *develop theories* of learning and teaching which they apply in their classroom (even though they are *often unaware* of doing so)” (p. 17). We are rarely aware of our beliefs and assumptions. Tomlinson (2003b) went on to identify the need to articulate the above through reflection because “what is *valid for me* from *my own experience* will not be valid for other evaluators and users of materials from their experience” (p. 19). More worryingly, he suggests that there exists, “a universal culture of education which focuses

on authority and control (regardless of the prevailing social culture)”, that sees foreign languages, “still taught by an all powerful teacher using grammar/translation or audio lingual materials which conform to a rigidly imposed syllabus” (B. Tomlinson, personal communication, September 5, 2012).

Various materials writers revealed that their writing is influenced by deep, “*unstated assumptions*” (Prowse, 1998, p. 137). Prowse surveyed materials writers on how they wrote their materials and suggested *intuition* plays a leading role. Commenting on this, Tomlinson (2003) suggested deeper, unconscious values at work when “they [materials writers] say very little about any principles of learning and teaching ... or about any frameworks which they use to facilitate coherence and consistency” (p. 107). Moreover, Cochingo-Ballesteros (1995, p. 54) and Maley (1995, p. 221) both cite their “*beliefs*” as guiding their creation of materials.

While not directly referring to materials writers, Berwick (1989), nonetheless warns that when considering the assessment of learner needs, there is, “*conceptual baggage* planners inevitably bring to the planning situation – often *unclarified beliefs* and *positions* about learning and teaching”, and that these will manifest themselves in later decisions (p. 48). Since most personnel on the materials producer side would share a cultural background, the ‘baggage’ may pass along unchecked and eventually be loaded into the materials.

Addressing the “clients”, or actual users of materials, Johnson (1989), suggested the potential breadth of conflicts when identifying the different roles in decision-making on materials, which would include policy makers, needs analysts, methodologists, materials writers, teacher trainers, teachers and learners (p. 3). We would also have to add to this mix publishers, sponsors, parents, researchers and interested authorities (for instance, religious groups or leaders).

While not mentioning culture by name, the proceeding authors, who are researchers and in most cases established and widely-published material writers, have all indirectly supported my supposition that there are deep cultural issues involved in the creation of materials. Some, such as Tomlinson (2003b), even acknowledge the pitfalls of this. Cortazzi and Jin (1999), however, do directly address this issue, describing culture learning as comprising of, on one hand, explicit teaching of cultural issues, and on the other, a “culture of learning” in a “three-party dialogue” (p. 210) of students, teacher and textbook. Cortazzi and Jin’s description is both so detailed and so central to this paper that I will quote it at length. The “culture of learning” is,

...a taken-for-granted *framework of expectations, attitudes, values, and beliefs* about what constitutes good learning...acquired in early socialization patterns and through the internalization of roles and expectations that students learn at school. It influences teachers through the imprint of years of being a student, prior to teacher training, and years of apprenticeship observing others teaching...

(212)

It is,

a *framework for cultural interpretation* that is *unconsciously employed* in later teaching...an *invisible yardstick for judgments* about how to teach or learn, about whether and how to ask questions, and about what textbooks are for. When textbooks are written, they are also predicated on a culture of learning.

(Cortazzi & Jin, 1999: 212)

Moving on to the second part of this literature review, research which directly examines attitudes to materials, Jiangqiong and Tin (2010) took up the concept of ‘culture of learning’ as described by Cortazzi and Jin to investigate “how language teaching materials themselves may promote different cultures of learning” (p. 274). Given that materials do not write themselves any confirmation that they do ‘promote different cultures of learning’ means that the materials writer, consciously or unconsciously, does also.

Jiangqiong and Tin looked for evidence of cultures of learning in three textbooks used in China. One was locally-produced to teach Chinese (henceforth Text A). Another was an adapted version of a foreign-produced English language series (Text B). The third was an unadapted foreign-produced text to teach English (Text C). Jiangqiong and Tin examined not only the coursebooks but also student workbooks and teacher manuals. They focused on “external features” (Jiangqiong and Tin p. 278) that included stated aims and objectives, tables of contents, textbook layout, visual images and content. More relevant to the focus of this paper, Jiangqiong and Tin also examined the task instructions in the coursebooks for students and the guidance instructions and information in the teacher manuals. In the former they found Text A instructions emphasized “the important role spiritual beauty and moral value have in learning” (p. 278), repetition, imitation and reading aloud, and that these take time and effort to master. Text B and Text C, on the other hand, emphasized the “goal-directed aspect of learning” (p. 281) in exchanging information, practicing language structures and achieving an outcome communicatively. Teacher manuals for Text A and Text B, both of which included local involvement, and Text C differed in the expectation of the role of the teacher. Jiangqiong and Tin suggest the former texts, “equip teachers with

extra information so that teachers will not lose face if asked by students” (p. 287) whereas Text C “hold[s] the view that teachers do not necessarily need to know everything” (ob. cit.). Jiangqiong and Tin suggest that Text A and to some extent the teacher books of Text A and Text B promotes a Chinese/Confucian learning tradition whereas Text B and Text C are based on Western/second language theory. They caution that other influences may be at work and that what happens with the textbook in the actual classroom requires more research involving teachers and students (p. 289).

Besides Cortazzi and Jin, Jiangqiong and Tin’s inspiration for their study came from Hu, who describes ‘culture of learning’ as:

a whole set of *expectations, attitudes, beliefs, values, perceptions, preferences, experiences, and behaviours* that are characteristic of [a] society with regard to teaching and learning

(p. 96)

Hu accounts for the lack of success of communicative language teaching (CLT) in the early 1980s in China in terms of a clash of cultures of learning. Hu describes how the Chinese culture of learning that was a hierarchical, Confucian-based and knowledge-accumulation process was at odds with the humanistic, multi-competencies, student-centred CLT. These “embody different, even opposing, *philosophies* about the nature of teaching and learning” (Hu, p. 102).

Nunan (1988) describes a number of studies that compare the perceptions of teachers and learners in regard to pedagogic tasks based on a methodology. Given that such tasks are often contained in materials devised and written by materials writers, these pieces of research are, in effect, comparing perceptions of cultures of learning. Three survey-based studies by Eltis and Low (1985, cited in Nunan, 1988), Alcorso and Kalantizis (1985, cited in Nunan, 1988) and Nunan, gave teachers and students lists of activities, such as grammar exercises, listening using audio devices, role-plays, cloze gaps, and songs, and asked them to rank them for usefulness or importance (Nunan 1988). In all there was a wide difference in their perceptions. Nunan further cited interviews of teachers and students by Brindley (1984, cited in Nunan, 1988) as revealing that there may be “two mutually incompatible *sets of beliefs* about the nature of language and language learning” (pp. 93-94). Among a list of conflicting quotes by learners and teachers Brindley writes:

It is clear that many learners do have rather fixed ideas (in some cases *culturally determined*) about what it is to be a learner and what it is to learn language. These ideas [are] *not always at a conscious level*...

(quoted in Nunan, 1988, p.94)

In his conclusion Nunan states:

It would seem that differences between learners and teachers are to be accounted for in terms of sociocultural background and previous learning experiences of the learners, and the influence on teachers of recent directions in communicative language learning and teaching. Such differences are likely to influence the effectiveness of teaching strategies and need to be taken into consideration in the development and application of teaching methodologies.

(1988, pp. 95)

Before moving on I would add that teachers may also be influenced by their sociocultural background and previous learning experiences as learners. I will also point out that materials writers were both students and I can say almost for certain teachers, and many still are the latter. Furthermore, what Nunan calls the ‘teaching strategies’ and ‘teaching methodologies’ will be encapsulated as tasks in materials.

It would seem that there is a case to be made that there are deep cultural influences on materials production as well as on client expectation. Drawing on what I have emphasized above, materials writers have “approaches”, “assumptions”, “methodologies”, “expectations”, “theories”, “perceptions”, “impressions”, “preferences”, “positions” and “beliefs”. These are synonymous with implicit cultural values and could be catalysts for conflict. A number of researchers also suggested that these are not necessarily revealed, known by material writers, or even appropriate for the context. Also, there are many, many material-related roles (cf. Johnson), which are filled by people, each potentially with their own sets of the proceeding list and their own “icebergs”. Most telling of all, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) describe the “culture of learning” that will be of account “when textbooks are written” (p. 212).

We will next move to the “materials iceberg”.

The Materials Iceberg

Culture permeates our decision-making and it is largely unconscious. Considering this we could well expect culture to play a central role in the making of materials, the artefacts of education. For materials writers, their products are a physical-external expression of their psychological-internal beliefs about, and attitudes to, language teaching/learning specifically and teaching/learning in general. On the other hand, for the clients, those same materials are also of similar concern. In one sense, materials are the point where the beliefs and attitudes of producer and client meet – a convergence of cultures in many ways. By virtue of the fact that those clients are concerned with (1) English as a foreign or second language and (2) learning, there is a strong potential that cultural differences, perhaps even conflict, will arise.

As in many cultural and intercultural situations, awareness is a key ingredient of success. If materials writers, as well as all the other decision-makers listed by Johnson above, were more aware of their own “cultural programming”, they may be able to make a more objective, cultural analysis of their own products. This is particularly important due to two recent, but opposing trends: the one-size-fits-all, almost globalization of learners materials promoted by large international publishing houses, and a rejection of this trend by experienced, local teachers, both native and non-native, in favour of materials tailored to the target students and culture. In either case, however, culture-specific awareness would be essential. Where a decision on materials is in the hands of locals (i.e. Koreans in Korea) the potential for cultural conflict between producers and clients may be lessened as clients could screen accordingly. On the other hand, purely local approaches to materials production and selection for foreign language study may perpetuate arguably ineffective policies and methodologies.

Take the continuing strength of the grammar-translation method in Japan, for example. Whereas grammar-translation will not equip most learners for a communicative use of English globally, it will enable them to pass the non-communicative English examinations required for entry into the Japanese high schools and

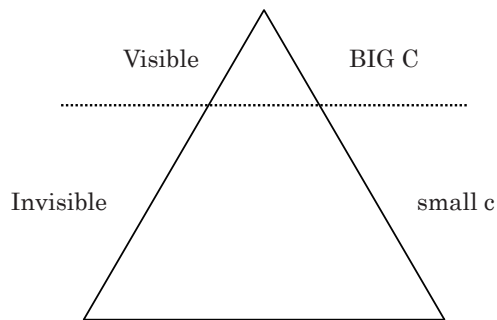


Diagram One: 'The Cultural Iceberg'

universities locally.

I would like to suggest that we could go some way to understanding the potential for conflict by looking at language materials as cultural artefacts. For this, the well-known analogy of culture as an iceberg is very apt (Appendix One). The ‘cultural iceberg’ is the most popular among the various analogies and models to describe culture (see Katan, 1999; Ting-Toomey, 1999; Peterson, 2004; Culture at Work, 2009; Appendix One for examples). Due to its simplicity and visual representation it remains a very effective and memorable introduction to the complexity of culture and intercultural communication. Many dichotomies or levels can be used to label the cultural iceberg, ‘visible-invisible’ and ‘BIG C-small c’ culture being perhaps the most common (Diagram One). There are many others, however (Table One).

<i>Above the water line</i>	Objective culture	Explicit culture	External culture	Easy to change	Culture primarily in awareness	Surface culture	Low emotional load	Evident cultural rules
<i>At or just below the waterline</i>	Subjective culture	Implicit culture	Internal culture	Difficult to change	Culture primarily out of awareness	Folk culture	High emotional load	Unspoken cultural rules
<i>Well below the waterline</i>						Deep culture	Intense emotional load	Unconscious cultural rules

Table One: Possible ‘Iceberg’ dichotomies and levels

Iceberg analogies also include examples of culture for the respective levels. These may be general areas or very specific.

The ‘materials iceberg’ (Diagram Three), created for this paper, describes the foundation on which producers (especially materials writers) create materials and on

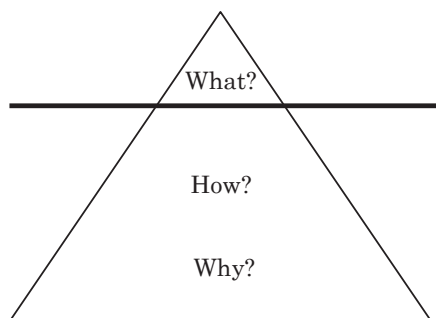


Diagram Two: Simplified Materials Iceberg'

which clients (especially learners) may view the materials. In a very simplified taxonomy (Diagram Two), we could imagine three stages of the materials iceberg as questions about materials used in a teaching/learning context: what; how; and why.

While the materials iceberg is self-explanatory, let us look briefly at each level. In explaining each

level, I will deal mostly with the producers of materials and materials writers, but at all stages I would urge the reader to consider the possible cultural influences and similarities for the clients, in particular teachers and learners.

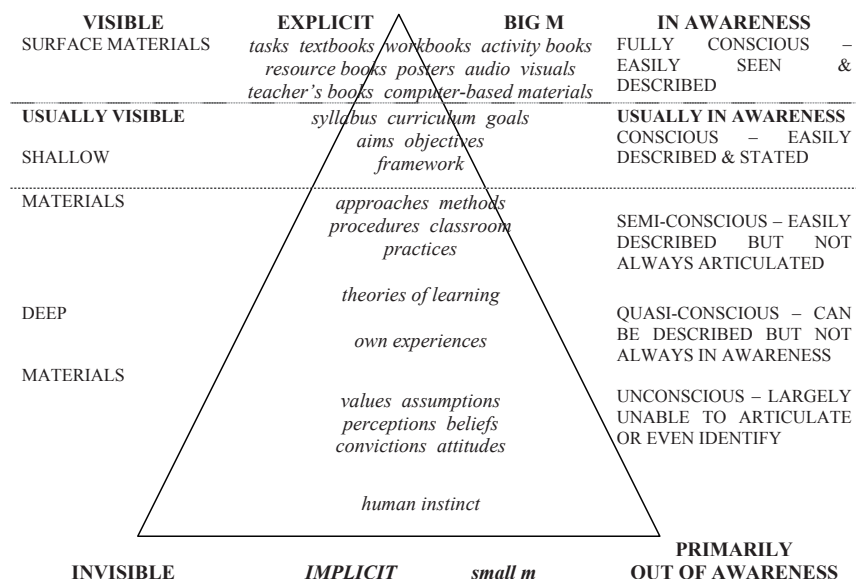


Diagram Three: The Materials Iceberg

Surface Materials

The above-the-water-line tip of the iceberg contains the physical artefacts of materials, such as books, audio/visual materials and more recently computer-based materials. These are what we use in a teaching/learning context. With varying degrees of accuracy and understanding they are easily described by anyone involved in the teaching-learning process and would be regarded as essential and representative of learning by most participants (not all do, however). These visible, 'surface materials' could be seen as 'Big M' materials in the same way 'Big C' culture is often cited as 'culture'. We might imagine that textbooks, tapes and tests are to teaching methodologies, theories, experience and values what a wedding dress, rings and spoken vows are to Western concepts of purity, marriage and fidelity. Materials are supported from below in the same way that visible culture is supported by concepts.

Shallow materials

Next, at and just below the waterline are “shallow materials”. They are shallow in that while they are usually concrete and visible (as documents or written descriptions, for example), they are not always in awareness in the same way as surface materials. A materials writer or publisher will have a framework in mind (e.g. as a detailed Table of Contents), as a teacher or programme will have a syllabus or curriculum, but they are not the actual tools for classroom use. Largely they describe how we use materials. Teachers and learners at the ‘chalkface’ will open books and listen to audio sources, not referring on a daily basis to the curriculum document. Pressed, both producers and clients would be able to describe shallow materials with some ease. Statements indicative of this level might be set out as a written and distributed mission statement (“The goal of this course/book is ...”) with bulleted items (“By the end of the year/unit students should be able to 1. 2.”).

In the shallow materials are the beginnings of the invisible, deep materials. Approaches, methodologies, procedures and classroom practices are articulated in publishing careers, academic works and teacher training programmes. We can often associate certain names to them – such as David Nunan’s connection to the learner-based curriculum. Those on the producer side are much more familiar with these elements of materials than many of the clients. Also, one does not necessary have to know the name of a methodology or its academic champion to apply it. Many language teachers undertake formal, higher learning after they have entered in the field, already knowing and doing a ‘way’ of teaching before they learn it has a label. It is unlikely, however, that a materials writer, teacher and most definitely learner would consider approaches (and any of the other ideas and values identified in the Literature Review) as immediately as obvious and as important to them as the materials they are writing or using on any given day. They may be semi-conscious of them. A material writer may not be thinking ‘communicative approach’ as they create a pair-work/information exchange task, and a teacher would likewise not be intoning ‘communicative approach’ as she organised the groups to do it. In a sense such terms are the meta-language of language teaching-learning, invoked occasionally but rarely consciously considered on a day-to-day basis. Statements indicative of this level might be, from a teacher, “I like to get my students to work in groups, talk in English, and not worry too much about mistakes”, or, from a writer, “I would say my text is ‘communicative’”.

Deep materials

Deeper still we move into the realm of ideas and experiences of which materials writers are increasingly less and less conscious. This is the question of why these materials. Initially, in the materials iceberg there is an area interrelated with the more concrete materials artefacts such as curricula and textbooks. In many ways ‘approaches’, ‘methods’, ‘classroom practices’ and such systematize and articulate fairly practical, culturally accepted ideas. If pushed, materials writers could quite easily describe them. In fact, in ‘To The Teacher’ or sometimes ‘To The Student’ forewords, textbooks may explicitly state the approach intended or at least suggest it in other words or descriptions. In another sense these items are also the ‘how to’ stuff of MA courses: names and labels attached to concepts and ideas that we were exposed to as learners and that teachers may divine for themselves over time.

Slightly deeper we would find the theories of learning on which approaches would be based. This is perhaps best seen as a more ‘academic’ level. As is true for an understanding of culture in general, materials writers would vary in their ability to explain such influences on their work depending on both academic (formal or otherwise) and practical levels of experience.

As we go deeper into the depths we encounter the much less systematic but more personal influences on the materials writer as described by Cortazzi and Jin (1999). Personal experiences of materials writers would influence decisions for materials produced. These may be ‘early’ experiences as a learner or later as a teacher, or perhaps even as a parent. In the case of the former, it could be formal, passive learning experiences (e.g. as a learner in a language classroom) or as an active learner in general (e.g. whether the materials writer was an autonomous learner). It could also be the quality of formal experiences (we all may remember ‘good’ teachers or ‘bad’ teachers and model our own approaches accordingly). Teaching experiences can have a great influence. Obviously these include experiences at the chalkface (in the classroom), but they can also include experiences with preparing and organising materials. This is not necessarily inclusive of the classroom experience. Rarely are materials used in the classroom exactly as originally intended by the producer. Varying degrees of adaptation take place for myriad reasons and just because teachers adapt materials it does not mean they are poor materials. Based on my own experience, however, not only as a teacher but also as a materials writer, one of the most common motivating factors for writing materials is dissatisfaction with materials teachers are required to use. We need to remind ourselves at this point that all the

experiences mentioned above are cultural. Whether a fondly remembered teacher or a not-so-fondly-remembered textbook, “the culture of learning”, as described by Cortazzi and Jin (1999), plays a decisive role. The memories may not even be conscious ones. A materials writer may have experienced activities in their high school German class in New Zealand that allowed much in the way of productive experimenting with the language and this may indirectly influence tasks they produce. Or, they may deem a locally produced textbook in Korea as boring for its drill exercises and accordingly avoid these in their own materials. But what worked in a New Zealand classroom is dependent on many cultural factors that may not be replicable elsewhere. And a Korean-produced textbook of drills may make a lot of sense to the Korean learners who use it. Asking materials writers and producers to articulate these influences may be like asking an adult to explain their love of X or fear of Y. Often events in the distant past help establish attitudes we may have great difficulty explaining. This is the realm of the deepest, more ‘intuitive’ deep level of the materials iceberg. Indeed, perhaps the most basic level is that of human instinct where we have the almost biologically-driven need to pass on our learning and legacy to the next generation.

As the iceberg analogy illustrates, we are normally unconscious of many of our values, beliefs and assumptions, but we live and breathe them everyday. Only conflict may bring them into consciousness. When it does, we do not generally analyse why, we just ‘know’ or ‘feel’ they are right or wrong. Our intuitions are, of course, based on our variety of experiences living in society of a number of years and it is unlikely we could or even need to explain this. Materials writers are much the same. In fact, it might be the case that those newer to teaching could make a better fist of explaining why they think certain kinds of tasks ‘work’ or not. Of course, just as culture is dynamic, attitudes, beliefs and so on can change in response to new information and new contexts. Materials writers should be informed by experiences, new theories (or old ones reassessed as it happens), feedback on methodology, and higher up, sales. ‘Big C’ culture will reflect what is happening in the ‘small c’ depths – it is no different in the materials iceberg.

Issues with the Materials Iceberg

Much of what I have described in this paper could be judged as speculation or unsubstantiated opinion on my behalf. As it is an original idea drawing on two disciplines, materials writing and intercultural communication, connections must be made in some way. Initial reviews of this paper raised two issues that I feel are necessary to address.

Firstly, no materials have been analysed in this paper. It is perhaps true that it would

be difficult to fully and conclusively prove that the model I propose is relevant in all cases without this. I believe that this would be an entirely new undertaking and a difficult, but not impossible, one. As the materials iceberg shows, any task or complete book is the final, physical product of deeper cultural issues. An analysis of materials could easily reveal the Surface and Shallow aspects. Materials that have a 'To The Teacher' section will usually clearly state some of the intentions of the creators. As for identifying the deeper aspects that the Literature Review has highlighted, it is the nature of the 'iceberg' analogy that the influences that dwell here are even unconscious to the owner. An analysis to satisfy the complete materials iceberg would mean a psycho-analysis of the materials writer. It would be an interesting work. At this stage of my research, however, I believe that the writers in the Literature Review above have, however, substantiated my claims for a materials iceberg.

Secondly, the model is not intended to be used as a tool for adapting or selecting materials. Checklists and other means exist for this and one would hope care is taken by clients. However, since its intention is to raise awareness of the potential for cultural conflict and thus failure (or success), the model would of course be of use to clients to consider both materials and their own reactions to materials. I feel it would be of most value to producers.

Conclusion

This paper has raised the issue that learning materials can sometimes fail due to cultural differences between producers and clients. Culture guides our thinking and expectations, both consciously and unconsciously, so, given that learning materials are created by people to be used by others, cultural clashes are not unexpected. The paper proposed that the idea of a 'culture iceberg' can be applicable to this situation as a 'materials iceberg'.

Looking at materials in this way can inform both producers and clients alike. As in culture, we need to know ourselves. From the producer/materials writer perspective, what do we really believe about the materials we create and why do we believe that? It may help in making clearer connections. Are these valid beliefs – can we justify them? Articulate them? Can we couch them in language for teachers, learners and other clients? It may help us to think more deeply about our Surface and Shallow Materials. Are they compatible with the beliefs and values of the people who will be using our materials? Can they ever be? It is given that teachers will adapt materials, but how teachers adapt will vary. They

may need to play a wider role, as Pulverness (2003) suggests:

ELT at large continues to be dominated by the mass market, ‘international’ coursebook. But here the teacher has a vital role to play in acting as an intercultural mediator and providing some of the cultural coordinates missing from the coursebook.
(p. 434)

While Pulverness is referring here to culturally specific *content* of materials, it could be said that teachers who are familiar with the cultural context in which a book is used also have a ‘gate-keeper’ role in identifying potential cultural conflicts at the deeper methodological level and adapt or omit appropriately. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) concur, stating that this is one of the paradoxes of the “culture of learning”. Interestingly, Tomlinson (2003a) is of the opinion that with even “a little training, experience and support” teachers can produce good materials of “relevance and appeal” to their students (p. 4). He believes this based on his very wide experience working directly with local teachers in many countries throughout the world (Tomlinson, 2003a). I might suggest the reason is that such teachers possess icebergs much closer to those of the target of the materials, the learners and other clients. This is supported by Cortazzi and Jin (1999) who infer that the closer the “culture of learning” between teacher, student and textbook, the less probability there is of cultural clash. Of course, the opposite can be true when students do appreciate different approaches to learning espoused in materials. Many students of foreign languages in Japan are drawn to native-speaker teachers because they teach differently compared to their Japanese teachers. The materials iceberg I have proposed could even be used to identify what elements of their teaching either motivates or demotivates.

Considering the cultural influences on materials may raise awareness of why problems (or success) happen. Should we include a wider rationale with our materials, with regard to our deeper beliefs? We often say things about the BIG M or Surface Materials and perhaps the Shallow materials, but we rarely explain the Deep materials. By doing so we may bring to awareness this level and encourage teachers and learners to do likewise. It would likely help in the stages of materials adaptation. It might help material writers/producers and teachers deal with material rejection, explaining why materials thought to be ‘the best thing since sliced bread’ were indigestible to others.

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Appendices

Appendix One: Online Sources for the ‘Cultural Iceberg’

At the time of writing, the following Internet sites included iceberg diagrams and explanations in various detail. Key word searches using combinations of ‘iceberg’, ‘culture’, ‘metaphor’, ‘model’, ‘theory’ may also yield other sources or links.

<http://www.doe.state.in.us/lmmp/pdf/iceburgofculture.pdf>

<http://www.hsp.org/files/culturaliceberg2.pdf>

<http://www.culture-at-work.com/iceberg.html>

<http://www.efc.be/ftp/public/cpi/TCFF%20Intercultural%20Learning.pdf>

http://www.genderandpeacekeeping.org/resources/Chart_-_Iceberg_slides.pdf

<http://www.indoindians.com/lifestyle/culture.htm>

http://www.trinity.edu/reensen/cultures/culture_files/images005.gif

http://www.pacific.edu/sis/culture/pub/1.1.1_Activity_The_Iceberg.htm

<http://www.swyaa.org/handbook/index/image7.jpg>

<http://uedo100.uni-graz.at/magazine/culture.html>

<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/cultural-services/articles/intercultural-iceberg-model.html>

<http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/IKS/images/Iceberg2.gif>

http://www.languageandculture.com/en_us/about_culture/cultural_iceberg.html