

An interpretive perspective on Canadian ESL materials

The present essay uses the perspective afforded by this bibliography to examine how Canadian ESL materials have recently developed, to identify major trends appearing in the materials, and to speculate on the concerns which future efforts to develop Canadian ESL materials might productively pursue. This task is necessarily interpretive, though these interpretations are grounded in categorizations of the materials collected for this volume. Throughout, references to specific publications are those in the foregoing, annotated bibliography.

How have Canadian ESL materials developed?

The production of Canadian ESL materials is, largely, a phenomenon of this past decade. Prior to 1975, only a handful of such materials were in print in this country. Since the late 1970s, they have showed a nearly exponential growth. This trend is associated with the increased professionalism of the field of ESL in Canada and internationally, following government and institutional policies for second language education and patterns in immigration and global migration (Bibeau 1982, Churchill 1986, Wardaugh 1983).

ESL programs in Canada have been formally implemented in most urban schools (Ashworth 1988), colleges (Kemp 1984) and universities (Kidd & Burnaby 1988), as well as settings such as workplaces (Belfiore & Burnaby 1984), community service centres (Bell, 1988), government agencies (Yalden 1986), and pre-schools (Chud, Fahlman, Baker & Wakefield 1985). Visible indicators of the emerging profession are the appearance of specialized teacher preparation programs (Mollica & Yalden 1984) and the formation of provincial associations of ESL teachers and a national TESL Canada Federation. ESL education has become a discipline in Canada, as in other English-dominant countries, as it has become a regular aspect of policies, services and programs in educational and other institutions.

ESL materials appear in order to support and inform instruction, curriculum and learning in this area. In Canada, these materials have generally emerged from three sources:

- in *grass roots* fashion from programs in particular institutions;
- to fulfill new educational or social policies; or
- to synthesize common educational experiences, related research findings, or innovative pedagogical trends

Where Canadian ESL materials have developed in “grass roots” fashion, from particular educational institutions, the process generally involves experienced teachers refining their pedagogical ideas into coherent collections of lessons and exercises to be used by others teaching in similar circumstances. Groups of individuals across Canada have generated many instructional materials in this way, originally to serve their own client groups and local program objectives, then later to market to others.

Classroom materials in this bibliography deriving from such sources include items from: university programs, such as Carleton University (Currie & Cray 1987, Pagurek 1984, Young & Fitzgerald 1982, see Yalden 1986); school boards, such as the Toronto Board of Education (1982, 1983, 1984, 1986, 1987, n.d., Bruce 1979, Reid et al. n.d.); college programs, such as Vancouver Community College (Bowers & Godfrey 1983, 1985, Chin et al. 1980, 1988, Cunningham et al. 1988, Dragman 1983, Froese 1983, Giacomelli 1981, Gray-Richards 1984, Hinkle 1983, House 1983, 1986, House & Rabinowitz 1986, Jibodh et al. 1983, Loughrey & Smith 1979, McIntosh et al. 1980, Pierce 1984, Pinton & Strong 1984, Pitton 1988, Rabinowitz 1983, 1986, Tennant & Yildiz 1980, Thompson 1981, Thompson et al. 1979, Thompson et al. 1984, Watson 1980, 1983, Watson et al. 1983, Williams 1988, Wong 1988, Yildiz et al. 1981); or individuals, such as Johnson (1977, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1987, 1988).

A second impetus for the development of Canadian ESL materials follows more directly from educational or social policies. For instance, the curriculum policies of provincial governments can determine the kinds of ESL materials used for instruction in public schools. In Quebec, the Ministry of Education’s formulation of specific ESL curriculum guidelines (1981, 1983, 1984, 1986) has prompted numerous experienced ESL teachers to develop, in conjunction with private publishers, materials for classroom instruction to implement these guidelines (Asselin et al. 1985, 1988, 1989, Audet & Tremblay 1987, Banko, Barlow & Bonkowski 1985, 1986, 1988, 1989, Bolduc & Sandblom 1986, Bosquet 1985, 1986, Johnson-Folco et al. 1984, 1985, 1986, 1988, Olynyk et al. 1987, 1988, 1989, Pagurek & Fitzgerald 1987, 1988, 1989, Tremblay, Massey & Massey 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987).

Similarly, certain government agencies have taken on the production of classroom materials themselves. Two distinct examples of this are publications for the teaching of Francophone learners of English in the Public

Service Commission of Canada (Baeyer 1980, 1983, Beaty 1978, Donegan & Fox 1977, Fox, Woods & Deeble 1980, Keller & Warner 1976, 1979, Larocque, McLean & Marshall 1988, McLay 1980, Sutton & Jones 1984, Woods 1983, 1987, Woods & Pahlke 1976-79) and for teaching adult immigrants to Ontario, sponsored by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship (1987, 1988, Bell & Pratt 1986, 1987, Butovsky & Podoliak 1984, 1985, Crean & Unda 1987, Freedman 1987, Reid 1985, Zuern 1987). Materials production in these situations organizes the "grass roots" approach (described above) to achieve specific policy objectives—experienced teachers are hired to apply their pedagogical expertise to create materials to be used in common teaching situations.

A third source of Canadian ESL materials synthesizes common educational experiences, related research findings, or innovative pedagogical trends. This applies to many of the teacher guides, theoretically-oriented monographs, and edited collections of articles produced to inform Canadian ESL education. For instance, teacher guides may consolidate information on specific teaching techniques, like photostories (Barndt, Cristall & Marino 1982) or puzzles (Danesi 1985, Mollica 1988) or more general situations, such as adult literacy (Bell & Burnaby 1984), or general approaches to instruction, such as communicative language teaching (Yalden 1981). Alternatively, information from other disciplines may be synthesized to advocate particular approaches to ESL instruction, as in Heald-Taylor's (1986) outline of *whole language* approaches.

In a similar way, academic monographs have consolidated research, practices, and theory to inform aspects of ESL education authoritatively in Canada and elsewhere (Ashworth 1985, Bibeau 1982, Cummins 1984, Churchill 1986, Gardner 1985, Genessee 1987, Mohan 1986, Stern 1983, Wardaugh 1983, Yalden 1983). Numerous individuals have also edited collections of papers in order to synthesize and represent Canadian perspectives on specific issues such as multicultural education (Esling 1989, Samuda, Berry & Laferriere 1984, Shapson & D'Oyley 1984, Young 1987), pronunciation (Avery & Ehrlich 1987), the design and evaluation of *special purpose* programs (Mackay & Palmer 1981), citizenship preparation (Crean 1989), performance testing (Hauptman, LeBlanc & Wesche 1985), teaching techniques (Elson 1983, Mollica 1988), or applied research programs (Allen & Swain 1984).

Various other observations can be made about trends in the development of ESL materials in Canada. For instance, ESL materials are not simply made *by* teachers or other educators *for* students. Students themselves have recently taken a major role in displaying their written stories for use by other ESL learners (Au et al. 1982, Buthuru 1982, Davies et al. 1987, Kamikura 1982, Marino & Barndt 1983, Warren 1986, Wong 1987). It is also noticeable that there has been very little Canadian adaptation of classroom materials produced in other countries (as in Bartlett 1985), although ideas from international contexts feature largely in materials for teacher

reference. The vast majority of Canadian ESL materials have developed in urban settings, reflecting the concentration of populations, institutions, and educational services.

What concerns do the materials address?

Empirical summaries of trends in Canadian ESL materials can be derived from the categorization scheme appearing in Tables 1, 2, and 3 in the introduction to this volume (see operational definitions of the categories and terms outlined there). These provide revealing overviews of the proportions of materials, relative to one another, which share particular features. These overviews provide glimpses at the collective substance of Canadian ESL materials; albeit the reduction to a few descriptive categories fails to capture the complexity of the individual materials.

Figure 1 displays the proportions of the materials in relation to their intended, general functions. Almost one-half of the materials are for teacher guidance, reference, or development. Among the materials for classroom use, a considerably larger proportion have been created for use by adults (42%), as opposed to school-age children (11%). Though these differences are distinct, these figures may be distorted somewhat. The majority of materials for school-age students are series of 4 to 6 books to be used in consecutive grades in school; our tallies have treated these as single items. Similarly, many classroom materials designed for college-age adults may also be suitable for study in high school (e.g. Allen & Widdowson 1978), and thus are not exclusive to the one category. Further, the difference in proportions may arise because, as Figure 3 also suggests, materials for adult learners tend to focus on specific skills or knowledge, to be studied as modular units, whereas materials for children tend to take a more comprehensive form as self-contained programs of study.

Figure 1
FUNCTIONS

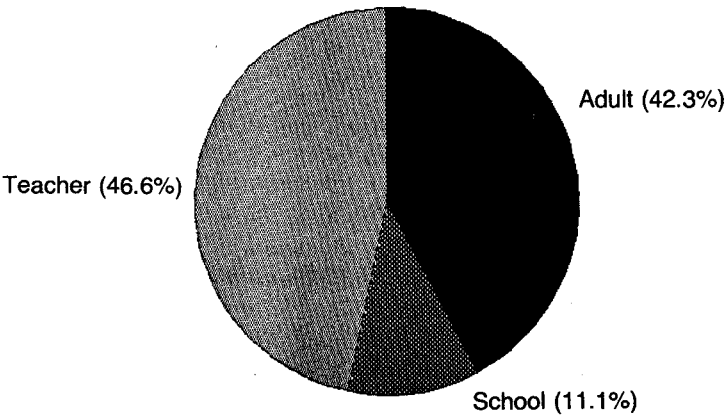


Figure 2
GEOGRAPHIC AUDIENCES

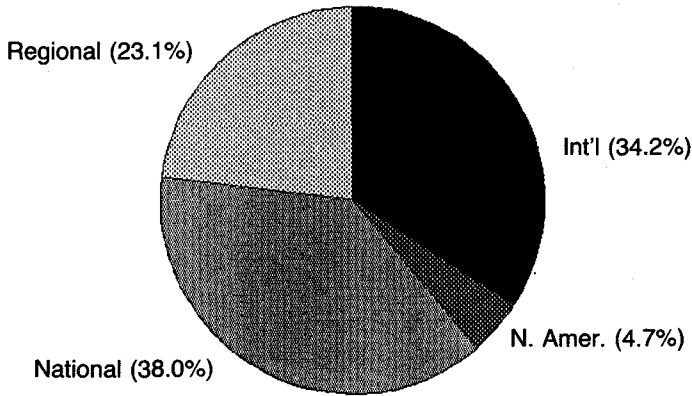
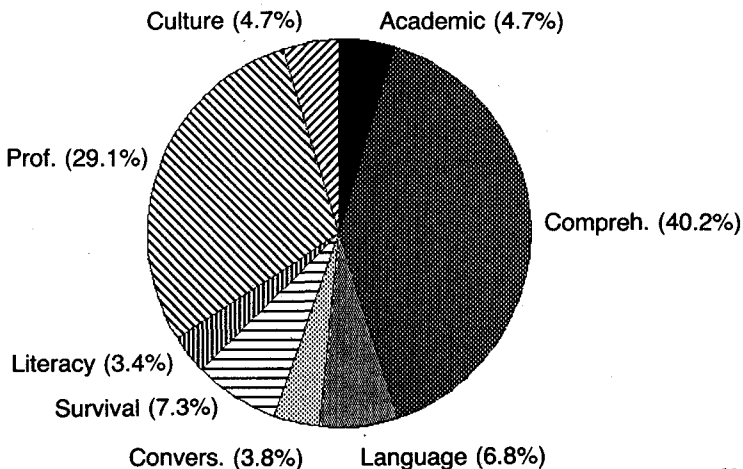


Figure 2 shows the intended geographic audiences for the materials. The majority appear relevant either to educators across Canada (38%) or internationally (34%). About 23% appear relevant only to specific regions of Canada. A small proportion (5%) would be suitable for Canadian and U.S. audiences. These figures indicate that Canadian ESL materials may be less exclusively concerned with Canada than might be expected. However, distinctions within this category are difficult to determine precisely. For instance, Canadian-produced materials for international audiences may implicitly be more sensitive to Canadian issues than materials produced in other countries are.

The principal content of the materials is categorized in Figure 3, according to topics conventionally designated for ESL teaching. The majority (40%) of the materials deal comprehensively with a variety of integrated

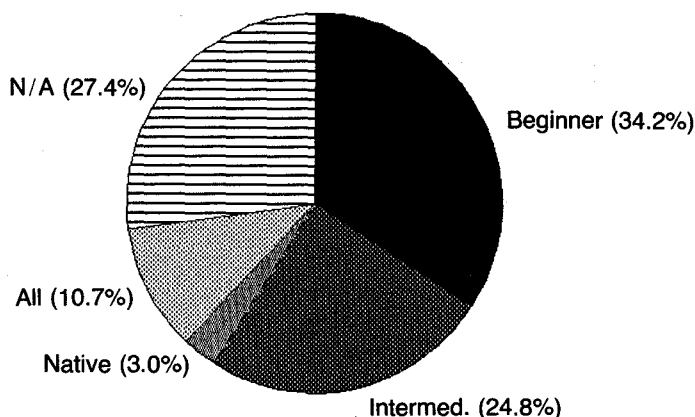
Figure 3
CONTENT



language skills and knowledge. Small proportions (less than 10% each) of the materials address specific topics, such as culture, academic preparation, conversational skills, literacy, features of the language, or community survival skills. About 30% of the materials deal with professionally-oriented issues, such as research and theory, in second language education. In sum, the content of Canadian ESL materials divide almost equally into materials focussing on (1) comprehensive skills, (2) specific aspects of language learning, or (3) professionally-oriented issues.

Figure 4 displays the level of ESL proficiency for which the materials are designed. The greatest emphasis appears to be on ESL students who are beginning to learn the language (34%), with a slightly smaller proportion for those with an "intermediate" proficiency (25%). Very few materials (3%) are for students with an advanced, native-like proficiency in English. However, about 11% of the materials appear applicable to any of these proficiency levels. Designations of ESL proficiency are, however, not applicable for 27% of the materials.

Figure 4
ESL PROFICIENCY

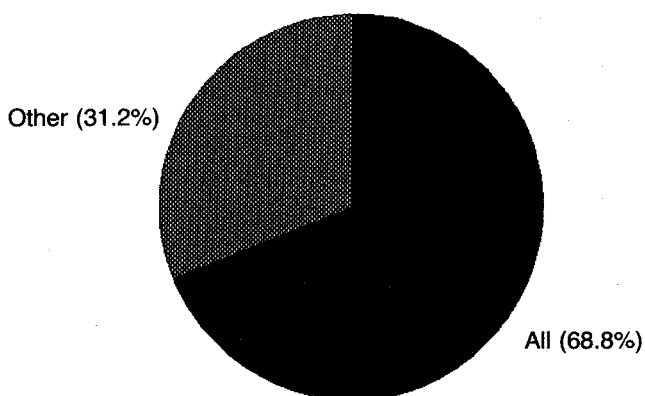


The Canadian content of the materials is shown in Figure 5 as a simple proportion of (1) the materials which are entirely Canadian authored and produced with references to Canadian situations (69%), compared to (2) those which have been published or edited in other countries and do not contain many specific references to Canada (31%). This suggests that the majority of Canadian ESL materials have, indeed, been developed for use in this country by Canadians.

What might we hope to see in the future?

Two views can be taken to suggest future developments for Canadian ESL materials. One is to identify the characteristic strengths of the most

Figure 5
CANADIAN CONTENT



exemplary, existing materials, and to propose that more materials be developed along similar lines. The other perspective is to point out gaps in the existing range of materials, and to propose that work be done to fulfill the needs for materials in these areas.

The most exemplary of Canadian ESL materials appear to have the characteristics of being (1) comprehensive in scope, synthesizing and presenting multi-faceted information related coherently to one well-defined area; (2) the result of several years of work by very knowledgeable individuals; and (3) flexible in their applications to diverse situations. These characteristics apply equally to materials aimed at classroom instruction, curriculum resources, as well as research and theory. These characteristics suggest that efforts to develop ESL materials in Canada might best be thought of as major undertakings by people with high levels of expertise, aiming to be comprehensive in scope within specific domains, yet flexible in their applications. Conversely, it can be inferred that a piece-meal, ad-hoc approach, involving limited resources and scope, devoted to very specific, local concerns tends to yield results which may not be generally useful.

Among such materials for classroom instruction, noteworthy examples appear in materials for use in Quebec schools (Banko, Barlow & Bonkowski 1985-89, Tremblay, Massey & Massey 1984-87), Ontario (Allen & Howard 1982), or nationally (Pagurek, Fitzgerald & Gagne 1987-89); adult workplace settings (Barndt, Belfiore & Handscombe 1985); and the Public Service Commission's programs (Fox, Woods & Deeble 1980, Keller & Warner 1976, 1979, Larocque, McLean & Marshall 1988, Sutton & Jones 1984, Woods 1983, 1987, Woods & Pahlke 1976-79). Among curriculum resources, exemplary materials have been produced to guide school curricula in Quebec (Ministère de l'Éducation 1981-86) and B.C. (Early & Hooper 1990), to foster multicultural principles in education (Chud, Fahlman, Baker & Wakefield 1985, Kehoe 1984), and to inform

general teaching practices (OISE Press' language and literacy series: Burnaby 1982, Cummins 1981, Danesi 1985, Heald-Taylor 1986, Yalden 1981). Among theory and research, one can point toward monographs by Ashworth (1985), Bibeau (1982), Cummins (1984), Churchill (1986), Gardner (1985), Genesee (1987), Gunderson (1990), Mohan (1986), Stern (1983), Wardaugh (1983), and Yalden (1983).

It is obvious, however, that the limited range of materials identified in the present bibliography is hardly sufficient to serve the diverse needs of Canadian ESL students, teachers, or other professionals. Much more instructional, curriculum, research, or theoretical material could profitably be developed in any one of the areas already represented by existing materials. In this sense, current and future needs are evident at virtually every level in every area. Four general gaps can, nonetheless, be identified in the current resources. Future efforts to address these needs will relate to issues which exceed the scope of the present analysis—such as book marketing and sales, expertise in production and editing, policies within government programs and educational institutions, knowledge development within the ESL field, as well as individual initiative.

First, the existing, published base of applied research and theory remains very slight.¹ Surprisingly little research has been conducted on ESL learning, instruction, or curriculum in Canada. Several descriptive surveys of Canadian ESL programs have been produced (Canadian School Trustees 1989, Council of Ministers of Education 1983, Kemp 1984, Kidd & Burnaby 1988, Newsham & Acheson n.d., Mollica & Yalden 1984). But theories available to inform ESL education tend to draw largely on other areas of educational research in Canada, such as French Immersion or Bilingual Education (Bibeau 1982, Churchill 1986, Cummins 1981, Cummins & Swain 1986, Gardner 1985, Genessee 1987, Harley 1986, Shapson & D'Oyley 1984, Stern 1983, Wardaugh 1983), Special Education (Cummins 1984), Native Education (Burnaby 1982), Language Arts (Gunderson 1990, Heald-Taylor 1986), or Critical Pedagogy (McLaren 1986, Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins 1988, Young 1987).

Only a small number of books have developed theoretical frameworks principally from studies of ESL populations in Canada. These focus on only a few issues, such as curriculum organization (Brinton, Snow & Wesche 1989, Mackay & Palmer 1981, Mohan 1986, Yalden 1983, 1986), multicultural policy in schools (Ashworth 1988, Esling 1989, Samuda, Berry & Laferriere 1984), language policy (Ashworth 1985, McArthur 1983, Wardaugh 1983), reading instruction (Gunderson 1990, Mackay, Barkman & Jordan 1979), or student assessment (Cummins 1984, Hauptman, Leblanc & Wesche 1985, Samuda & Woods 1983, Wesche et al. 1987). This knowledge-base needs to expand considerably before it can be claimed that Canada has developed a substantive foundation to inform its practices in ESL education, the development of its ESL teachers, or its social policies in this area.

Second, very few instructional materials are available for school-age ESL students in Canada. Quebec has, in recent years, made a notable exception, producing numerous, comprehensive series of instructional materials for use by Francophone students in schools in that province. This trend follows from the provincial ministry of education's formulation of very specific curriculum guidelines for ESL instruction and materials (Ministère de l'Éducation 1981, 1983, 1984, 1986). For the English-dominant provinces and territories, however, only a handful of materials appropriate for young ESL learners exist (see Table 3 above). Among these, certain innovations are notable (e.g. Allen & Howard 1982, Burnaby et al. 1986, 1987, 1988, Coelho 1989, Early & Hooper 1990, Howard & Carver 1983), and some general materials do exist (e.g. Caruthers 1982, Sampson 1978, 1980). But, overall, it is difficult to see how school-age ESL students in most parts of Canada could now be offered many instructional materials relevant to their learning situations, unless these are produced individually by their teachers.²

Third, considerably more instructional and curriculum materials are needed to serve the many specific purposes for which adult populations learn English in Canada. Diversity and specialization characterize the development of materials for adult learners over the past decade, but many areas still remain underdeveloped. Conspicuous issues include materials to support immigrants' accessibility to social services (Beiser et al. 1989, St. Lawrence et al. 1989); policies in universities and colleges (CBIE 1981); language assessment (Hauptman & Wesche 1985); and curriculum and instruction for community-based programs (Bell 1988, Izatt 1986), workplace situations (Belfiore & Burnaby 1984, Pratt 1982, Reid 1985), academic preparation (Mohan 1986, Brinton, Snow & Wesche 1989), and adult literacy (Bell & Burnaby 1984). Ontario's Ministry of Citizenship has sponsored materials production in some of these areas, but little has emerged from other provinces to address adult ESL learners' specific situations.

A fourth gap is that there are almost no instructional or curriculum materials available to prepare ESL learners in other countries to study, work, travel, or live in Canada. Virtually all existing materials presume that Canadian ESL learners are already in this country, not preparing to enter it. (A notable exception is publicity on Canadian college and university ESL programs produced by the Council of Second Language Programs in Canada). In this respect, Canada's production of materials differs dramatically from that of Britain or the U.S., where ESL and EFL materials assume more proactive roles in promoting language preparation for people coming to those nations. The economic and social disadvantages of this for Canada may be significant. EFL students preparing to study, travel or immigrate to Canada can receive little specific language or cultural orientation prior to their arrival. Few of those who have studied English in their home countries may, in fact, choose to come to Canada

(rather than other English-speaking destinations), because their EFL studies have not informed them adequately about this choice. Canadian teachers assigned to development projects or other teaching positions overseas have few Canadian EFL resources to work from (e.g. Barlas 1985), a situation which their counterparts *within* Canada have, as the present bibliography testifies, achieved in recent years.

NOTES

1. Of course, not all knowledge about Canadian ESL is represented in the form of the materials gathered here. Considerable information is published in articles in professional and academic journals; some exists in the form of graduate theses and conference papers; much knowledge appears implicitly in the routine practices of teachers and others in ESL education, though little of this has been documented and assessed (Stern 1983).
2. Numerous educators, in fact, argue that teacher-prepared materials are preferable, since they are sensitive to ESL students' individual experiences and development (Early & Hooper 1990, Cummins 1984, Heald-Taylor 1986), though it is also evident that teachers benefit from the guidance which curriculum materials provide, the time or resources seldom being available to permit the creation of entirely original curricula for each student group (Mohan 1986, Yalden 1986).