

Title: Creativity and language play in ESL textbooks

Summary (50 words)

An investigation into the usage of play and creativity in textbooks. Each element (reading, activity, picture) from 19 ESL textbooks (N=5,894) was coded with low levels of creativity (27.15%), CLT (0.56%), and play (0.18%) found. Textbook proficiency level and task type did not have a significant impact on any feature coded.

Proposal (300 words)

Trends in language instruction have shifted away from grammar heavy courses to pedagogies that instead tend to focus on communication. However, Cook (1997) noted, nearly 25 years ago, that this trend towards communicative language had not resulted in more natural or authentic language in the classroom, especially language that uses creativity and play. Studies have shown that teachers regularly use language play in their instruction (Foreman, 2011), though it is often spontaneously produced by instructors (Sterling & Loewen, 2015). Textbooks and workbooks are still used as the principle material of instruction in many contexts despite their limitations, including a lack of instruction on pragmatic or oral fluency skills (Diepenbroek & Derwing, 2013). While playful language has been found to increase various language skills (Bell, Skalicky & Salsbury, 2014; Pomerantz & Bell, 2007), it is unclear to what level ESL textbooks make use of this form of natural and authentic language.

To better understand the state of creativity and play in ESL materials, we investigated 19 textbooks in six published ESL book series. Each element, such as activities, pictures or readings (N=5,894), was hand-coded for the presence of language play, creativity, or CLT. While 27.15% of all elements were identified as utilizing creativity, few elements in the set made use of language play (0.18%) or CLT (0.56 %). Contra to our expectations, the level of textbook did not change the amount of CLT, play, or creativity included. These findings align with previous research, showing language workbooks often lack naturalistic and authentic language, opting instead for a sanitized academic variety of English. This presentation will explore the current state of language play and creativity in textbooks and provide a roadmap for how future publications can include more engaging and authentic language material.