The Presentation of Animals in
English as an Additional Language Coursebooks

George M. Jacobs
george.jacobs@jcu.edu.au

Teh Jiexin

Michael J. Joyce

All of James Cook University Singapore

Abstract

Education materials can be analysed in many ways. The current study analysed EAL (English as an Additional Language) coursebooks as to the presentation of nonhuman animals in the books. The study examined 22 EAL coursebooks. The research looked at the percentage of activities that contained animals in the coursebooks, what types of animals were present, and whether animals were the focus of the activity. Animals that appeared were categorized as wild animals, animals for human consumption, animals used in research (e.g. rabbits for cosmetic products), companion animals, work animals, animals viewed as pests (e.g. rats), animals in entertainment and extinct animals. The Discussion section offers suggestions as to what teachers can do if they are dissatisfied with the content of their coursebooks in regard to presentation of nonhuman animals.

Keywords: Anthropocene, linguistic analysis of educational materials, humane education, critical pedagogy

Introduction

English is the most widely used language of international communication (Graddol 2006). Thus, it is not surprising that hundreds of millions of people around the world study EAL (English as an Additional Language) (Graddol 2006), i.e., a language in addition to the language(s) they acquired earlier in their lives. To serve this large number of EAL students, many courses and accompanying coursebooks and other materials have been developed, and a great deal of research has been done on the teaching of EAL, including on the instructional materials used in this widespread endeavour. The current study looked at the presentation of nonhuman animals in EAL coursebooks. The study drew inspiration from work in critical pedagogy, in particular, work on the protection of nonhuman animals, sometimes known as humane education or education that fosters human compassion towards other animals.

Background

Education materials can be analysed in many different ways, e.g., as to the content included (Juan 2010) and the pedagogy used (Author, Crookall, and Thiyaragarajali 1997). Crookes (2013) argued that in addition to learning the English language, users of EAL coursebooks may also be learning other types of knowledge, as well as attitudes and values. Previous researchers have investigated these non-language elements. For instance, Ansary and Babaii (2003) examined EAL coursebooks for the presence of sexism, and Author and Goatly (2000) looked at EAL coursebooks as to the presentation of environmental topics and issues, such as the topic of pollution and the issue of how to reduce pollution. Stibbe (2004) also examined environmental topics in EAL coursebooks and found that these topics were mostly presented in terms of technological solutions to environmental problems. He suggested more of a values based approach in which students examine humans' relationship to the planet and the planet's other inhabitants.

Studies of the depiction of animals in education materials may be timely, as many species of animals have disappeared or are under threat of disappearing from the planet due to human actions, such as habitat destruction and climate change. At the same time, a relatively small number of animal species, such as those whom humans use for food, are becoming more common as consumption of meat and other animal based foods increases (Worldwatch Institute, 2016). However, the growing numbers of such animals may be cause for sadness, as the meat industry warps these animals' lives, removing them from natural habitats and slaughtering them at just a small fraction of their potential lifespans (Compassion in World Farming, 2016). Even those animals whom humans seem to love – companion animals – face maltreatment and abuses, such as abandonment and unnatural breeding practices.

Stibbe (2012) argued that not only are many animal species disappearing from the planet, but they are also disappearing from humans' lives and from human consciousness. Indeed, as human control of nature has increased, humans have become more separate from animals and other elements of nature. As Burt (2005: 203) stated, "[H]umans and animals are increasingly alienated in modernity". Banks (2001) discussed invisibility as a form of bias. Stibbe (2012) urged humans for their own sake and for the benefit of other animals to reconnect with nonhuman animals in order to promote social practices that are more environmentally sustainable and humane

towards nonhuman and human animals.

Evidence supports Stibbe's assertion that a more benevolent approach in regard to other animals might also benefit humans. For example, some scientists have suggested that the Earth recently entered a new geological age, which they have labeled the Anthropocene, with the prefix *anthro* referring to humans, specifically the scientists' contention that humans have become a prime factor affecting, often for the worse, the planet and its inhabitants. The global spread of factory farming is a key element of human practices that imperil the Earth's ecosystems (Harvey, 2016). Thus, moving away from meat production would benefit the planet and its nonhuman and human inhabitants.

Methodology

The current study examined a convenience sample of 22 EAL coursebooks. Only books at intermediate level and above were included. The copyright dates of the books ranged from 1998 to 2014. The examination focused on the presence of nonhuman animals in these books. Research questions were:

1 What percentage of activities in the coursebooks contain animals?
2 For those activities that contain animals, in what percentage of those activities are animals the focus?
3 What types of animals are present? (Animals were counted whether they were alive or dead, e.g., the bones of an elephant.)

The types of appearances by animals were as:

1. wild animals
2. animals who are used to produce products for human consumption, e.g., food and clothing
3. animals who are used in research, e.g., rabbits used to test cosmetics
4. companion animals, e.g., pet cats
5. work animals, e.g., elephants used to carry logs or tourists
6. animals who are viewed as pests, e.g., rats and cockroaches
7. animals in entertainment, e.g., dolphins who perform at aquariums or bears in circuses
8. extinct animals, e.g., dinosaurs
9. animals generally, e.g., in the sentence "humans should seek to coexist with the other animals on the planet"
10. animals whom humans attempt to protect, e.g., mention of the efforts of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

The study looked only at real animals; it did not include representations of animals. Thus, the researchers did not count animals appearing on t-shirts, in songs (e.g., "hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle, the cow jumped over the moon"), in proverbs, e.g., "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth", in metaphors, e.g., "as dead as a dodo", or as dolls, e.g., teddy bears. Imaginary animals, such as unicorns and dragons, were not counted either. Furthermore, the researchers did not count mentions of works in which animals appear, such as films and children's stories.

Only the main parts of the coursebooks were included in the study. Review activities and other supplementary activities in the textbooks were not analysed. Thus, appendices were not examined unless they were an integral part of the activities. For example, in the *Outcomes* series (e.g., Dellar and Walkley 2012), the appendices include Information Files, which are short readings, and students are directed to read those as part of the activities in the main part of the textbook. In contrast, *Outcomes* also contains a Grammar Reference section among the appendices. In the main part of the text, after some of the grammar activities, the following appears in red, "Need help? Read the grammar reference on page _____ ." The Grammar Reference sections were not analysed.

Interrater agreement was 90% or above for the various categories. This was established by first two authors coding two coursebooks together while engaging in extensive discussion. A separate rater training session was held with the third author. Then, the authors divided the rest of the coursebooks among themselves and coded them alone. While coding, any instances for which coding is questionable were noted for later discussion. As to the issue of researcher bias, the first author has long been involved in animal welfare efforts. The two other authors have not, and have what could be characterized as mainstream views on animal issues.

Results

The first research question asked about the percentage of coursebook activities in which animals were present. The researchers found a total of 4418 activities of all types in the 22 EAL coursebooks, an average of 201 activities per book. Of those 4418 activities, 351 contained presentations (in words or images) of animals, which means 7.94% of the activities contained animals. The lowest percentage of animal-present activities in one coursebook was 0.76%, while the highest was 29.6%.

The second research question asked about the percentage of activities in which animals were the focus. Out of the 351 activities in which animals appeared, in 79 activities (22.51%), animals were judged to be the focus of the activity. In seven of the 22 coursebooks used in the present study, the percentage was greater than 25%. These books contributed to the high average percentage of activities where animals are the focus (18.63%). If these seven coursebooks are excluded from the analysis, the percentage falls to 6.20%.

The third research question asked the types of appearances of animals. Table 1 categorises those 920 animal appearances by type.

Type of Appearance	Number of Appearances	Percent of Total Appearances
Wild animals	331	35.98%
Animals used for human consumption	259	28.15%
Animals used in research	45	4.89%
Companion animals	84	9.13%
Animals used for work	39	4.24%
Animals viewed as pests	18	1.96%
Animals used for entertainment	17	1.85%

Extinct animals	6	0.65%
Animals in general	53	5.76%
Attempts by humans to protect animals	68	7.39%
Total	920	100%

Table 1. Appearances of animals in EAL coursebooks categorized by type

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to collect data on the presence of animals in EAL coursebooks. Future research might involve the collection of data on other types of educational materials, materials from years outside the 1998-2014 range of the materials in the present study, and materials from learning contexts other than EAL coursebooks. For instance, it might be interesting to compare the materials in this study with other materials on such areas as coverage of attempts by humans to protect animals.

Curriculum is a contentious area, with many topics, perspectives and pedagogies vying for space in coursebooks and time in instructional schedules. For instance, many nongovernmental organisations on various sides of many issues want their topics and their perspectives on those topics included in the curriculum. Thus, it is likely that some teachers, students and other stakeholders in education would find the presence of animals in EAL coursebooks as reported in the present study to be too high, too low or about right. The following discussion provides ideas for those who feel that the presentation of animals, or of whatever topic concerns them, does not match with their view of reality and their hopes for what they see as a better reality.

Many aspects of teaching materials can be modified (Tomlinson 2011). Ndura (2004) made a number of suggestions for teachers who may find they disagree with the treatment afforded to particular issues by their coursebooks or other teaching materials. These suggestions included (1) the teachers themselves becoming more knowledgeable on the issue, (2) critically examining instructional materials, (3) preparing supplementary materials and (4) listening to and engaging students. Each of these suggestions is explained and considered below with specific regard to the issue of the presentation of animals in educational materials.

First, teachers can learn more about issues which concern them. As to the issue of human interaction with other animals, a great deal of information is currently available, e.g., ongoing research on the intelligence and emotions of non-human animals, the role of animal agriculture in climate change and other forms of environmental destruction, and the possible health benefits of plant based, rather than animal based foods. Many animal welfare groups have come into being, and these groups produce a wide range of educational materials. Furthermore, a new academic field, Human-Animal Studies, has arisen.

Another aspect of teachers becoming more knowledgeable on issues of concern involves Ndura's (2004: 150) suggestion that, "As both curriculum mediators and agents of social change, [teachers] must approach their task and the materials they use from a multicultural perspective". In the case of animals, this could involve

understanding the views and practices regarding animals of the various cultures that make up the communities from which teachers' students come. In addition to students' cultural roots, individual students will have their own experiences and thoughts. Teachers will want to understand these.

Second, teachers can examine the treatment of their issues of interest in existing teaching materials. For example, one aspect of the presentation of non-human animals not covered in the present study is whether farmed animals are presented in a manner consistent with the traditional image portrayed in the children's song 'Old MacDonald Had a Farm', i.e., roaming freely in small family groups in natural settings, or are students exposed to the modern reality in which the large majority of farmed animals are found on CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations), i.e., isolated from family units, living in crowded, unnatural conditions? Some other contentious issues regarding animals were represented in some of the coursebooks examined in this study, e.g., the use of animals in research and in entertainment.

Third, teachers may wish to prepare supplementary materials if they feel that deficiencies exist in their present materials. Fortunately, advocacy organisations on various sides of contemporary issues prepare materials, with some prepared especially for students. If necessary, EAL teachers can adapt these materials to language levels appropriate for their students. Adaptation is made easier as more videos, such as TED talks and NutritionFacts videos come with transcripts, and translation software continues to improve.

Adapting materials for EAL student use links to a fourth of Ndura's suggestions, i.e., listening to and engaging students. As an initial step, teachers need to gauge students' interest in the issues teachers wish to highlight. For example, students may want to continue to enjoy their fast food burger and chickens' legs; they may not want to hear about the origins of these foods. However, perhaps some facts, such as that chickens raised for meat typically live only six weeks before being slaughtered (ASPCA 2014) or videos of conditions in CAFOs may awaken students' interest. If some students show interest in the topic, they can be engaged in finding and adapting materials for themselves and others. Students interested in animal related topics can pursue them in such ways as projects, writing practice and extensive reading, while those students interested in other topics, can read, write, view, etc. on those topics. Furthermore, alternative views should be encouraged as a means of promoting thinking and developing a community of learners in which diverse views are respected and even sought.

Conclusion

The study reported here investigated the presentation of animals in EAL coursebooks. Of the 4418 activities in 22 coursebooks examined, animals appeared in 7.94% of the activities in a wide variety of circumstances. Of those 351 activities, animals were the focus in 22.51%.

Some educators and other education stakeholders might wonder whether language educators should devote attention to social issues, such as the interaction between humans and other animals, rather than focusing solely on how best to accelerate students' learning of the target language. Indeed, some organisations of language

educators, such as the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language, include interest groups devoted to social issues, e.g., http://gisig.iatefl.org. Perhaps, the main rationale for such educators' groups lies in a belief in a broader role for educators and, indeed, all people as citizens of the world. With that citizenship comes the responsibility to know about and, perhaps, take action on various social issues of the day. Teachers can model such engaged citizenship by bringing social issues into their teaching as a form of content based language learning. Students, of course, will be free to decide whether or not to follow their teachers' models by engaging in social issues of their own choice.

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