

Ragnhild Lund:

A HUNDRED YEARS OF ENGLISH TEACHING A VIEW OF SOME TEXTBOOKS

Introduction

The teaching of English has been compulsory for all students in Norwegian schools since the end of the 1960s. From then on, the subject has undergone many changes, both in terms of its place and status in the educational system and in terms of the methods and the content of the teaching. The latest manifestation of the development can be seen in the description of English in the national curriculum from 1997 (*L-97*) and the textbooks based on these curricular demands. However, English has been taught in Norwegian schools since the early 1800s, and there is reason to believe that features of this tradition still have some influence on the teaching that goes on today. This article will present some aspects of the teaching of English in Norway before 1997, and focus primarily on the content of some of the textbooks used.

The teaching of English in Norway – a brief historical overview

English as a subject was first mentioned in the decree from 1809, which established Norwegian schools as separate from the church. Throughout the nineteenth century English could be chosen as an optional subject in the secondary school. However, the classical languages continued to dominate, and modern languages had, at best, a rather peripheral existence (Valvo 1978).

There was at this time little difference between the principles for the teaching of classical and modern languages. The main focus was on grammar and translation, although emphasis was also placed upon modern languages as an important means to gain access to the European cultural heritage – of which the great literature of the leading European nations was seen to constitute an essential part. Towards the end of the century, influence from the new developments in foreign language education in England, France and Germany had reached Norway. The highly influential Quosque Tandem movement argued that modern language curricula should be based on everyday spoken language. Scholars associated with this movement recommended that ‘elevated and antiquated language should be banished from the textbooks’ (Storm 1887: 172) and that the teaching materials should contain coherent sentences and texts rather than the artificial, isolated and incoherent bits of language traditionally used.

In the late 1800s, some coastal districts that depended heavily on shipping – and therefore on foreign language skills – introduced English in the upper classes of the primary school (‘folkeskolen’). This, naturally, influenced the discussion of whether or not to introduce English at lower levels in the rest of the country also. In 1920, a new compulsory seven year ‘folkeskole’ was established, and English was introduced as an optional subject in its upper classes. The notion of ‘one school for all’ was central in the reform, and the ‘folkeskole’ was supposed to function as a basis – accessible for everyone – for higher education. However, it soon turned out that those students who had studied English in the ‘folkeskole’ had much better chances of getting into a secondary school - a ‘gymnas’. Since English in this way acquired importance as an entrance ticket to higher education, it is understandable that the English taught in the ‘folkeskole’ primarily aimed to prepare students for further studies.

The new school law of 1936 left it up to the local authorities to decide whether the teaching of a foreign language should be optional or compulsory for the students in the district. In rural areas, the decision was most often determined by the lack of teachers to teach the subject, which meant that the teaching of English never came to be established at all. In 1952-53 all cities except one had established English as a subject in the 'folkeskole', while only between 140 and 170 of a total of 679 rural communities had done the same (Gundem 1989).

Over the years, the role of English as a basis for selection became increasingly clear. Therefore, when the era of widespread educational experimentation was launched in the 1950s, English was at the top of the agenda. The subject was seen to have played a role in the compulsory school system that was not worthy of a social democracy. During the reform era of the 1950s and 1960s, the main slogan concerning the teaching of English was 'English for everybody'. By the end of the 1960s, English was established throughout the nation as an obligatory subject from fifth grade.

When English became a subject for all learners in the Norwegian compulsory school system, it was justified in terms of the learners' needs for practical language skills (Gundem 1989). The national curricula from 1957 and onward focused on the need for students to be able to *use* the language in situations of contact with people from the rest of the world. However, the views of how foreign language proficiency should be brought about have varied greatly. While the 1974 national curriculum presented a grammar-based approach for the teaching of English, the curriculum from 1987 introduced the teaching of language functions and asserted that students needed to practice the foreign language in situations of 'real communication'.

The national curriculum from 1997 (*L-97*) describes for the first time cultural understanding as an essential element in the learning of a foreign language. In the teaching of English, students should learn about other cultures, they should

get increased insight into their own cultural background, and they should also develop an awareness of the cultural context of language use. On the whole, *L-97* attaches much greater importance to the cultural dimension of the teaching of English than any national curriculum before it. However, although the cultural content traditionally has not been focused on, cultural references and understandings have of course always been present both in textbooks and in the teaching itself. In order to cast light on this part of the English language teaching tradition, the cultural content of the textbooks will also be discussed in the presentation below.

The textbooks used

The textbook has always played a central role in determining the content and the methods worked with in all subjects in the Norwegian compulsory school. Vestre (1980) and Johnsen (1989) claim that this is the case to an even greater degree for English than for other subjects. The textbooks used for the teaching of English in Norway have been presented in a separate bibliography (Lund 1997), and the titles here give good indications of the development of the subject.

The first known textbook for the teaching of English in Norway is Hanson, *Engelsk Læsebog til Skolebrug og Selvundervisning*¹. It was published in 1820 and indicates in a subtitle that it contains a short grammar, 65 texts for reading and ‘an alphabetically ordered vocabulary list’. Until the end of the century, the titles reflect the tradition of teaching grammar and short texts for reading and translation, either in separate grammar books and readers, or in textbooks where the two elements are combined. Many books were anthologies of literary texts (‘Læsebog’), that also included commentaries and explanations of the texts as well as references to an accompanying grammar book.

¹‘English Reader for School and Self Study’, my translation.

The typical textbook ('lærebok'), containing both texts, tasks, grammar points and vocabulary lists, seems to have positioned itself on the market in the 1880s. Brekke's *Lærebog i engelsk for begyndere* was first published in 1887 and represents a new era in modern language teaching. The book reflects the Quosque Tandem movement's recommendations that everyday oral language should be focused on, that grammar should be taught deductively, and that less emphasis should be given to translation. The book seems to have been used extensively, as it was published in several new editions throughout more than seventy years. The author also made an anthology of texts, *Engelsk Læsebog*, which was reprinted 32 times in a series of new adaptations between 1885 and 1965. The other textbooks that seem to have been used most extensively in the first half of the 20th century were Knap, *Lærebok i engelsk for begynnere* and an anthology by the same author. Both books were published in numerous new editions during the period 1925 – 1965 (Lund 1997).

In the 1950s and 1960s, the new focus on practical English for language use in the real world is reflected in titles like *Over to England* and *Modern English for Children*. Later titles like *English for Everybody* and *English for You* clearly reflect the development of English as a compulsory subject for all students. Titles such as *Say it in English*, *Contact* and *English Now* from the 1970s and 1980s also indicate an awareness of the students' needs for practical language skills in a world characterized by increased international communication. In the nineties, titles such as *Catch*, *Scoop* and *Kick Off* seem to link up with the kind of English the students meet in their everyday lives.

In the following discussion, three textbook series will be presented in detail. Because of its long record of publication, Brekke's *Lærebog i engelsk for begyndere* has been chosen to represent the period of English teaching before the subject became compulsory for all Norwegian children. In the 1970s and the early 1980s, the textbook series *This Way* (Mellgren, Walker, Backe-Hansen &

Nilsen 1972) was the one that was most widely used.² *This Way* was used from the beginners' level to year nine. However, in this article only the books for the three last years ('ungdomsskolen') will be presented. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the most popular textbook on the market for this level was *People and Places* (Amland, Liseth, Odeldahl, Odeldahl & Hodell 1985), which will be the third work I examine.

A closer look at some of the textbooks

Brekke; *Lærebog i engelsk for begyndere*

As already mentioned, Knud Brekke's *Lærebog i engelsk for begyndere* (originally published in 1887) was reprinted a number of times, and the 21st and last edition came in 1959. No other Norwegian textbook of English has been reprinted over such a long period of time. A 'version B', adapted to the use of the direct method, was first published in 1933 and reprinted until 1961.³ Version B was also revised into yet another textbook, *Engelsk for folkeskolen*, which came in 1945. According to Henriksen (1995), Brekke's *Lærebog i engelsk* was very popular and extensively used in Norway, and it was also exported to the other Nordic countries.

The recommendations from the Quosque Tandem movement to focus on everyday spoken language are reflected especially in the initial texts in the 1887 edition:

Fred where are you?
Come here – be quick!
Here he is.
Here I am!

² Information obtained from the publishers.

³ The book was listed in the Norwegian catalogue of school textbooks, *Alt for skolen*, as late as in 1974.

Good morning, uncle!
Good morning, my boy!
Here is an apple for you.
How big it is!
But look here! There is a hole in it!
There are two holes in it.
In each hole there is a little worm.
The apple is worm-eaten (Brekke 1887: 12).

The texts refer to the family, trips and everyday events and chores and consist of a series of short sentences. Henriksen (1995) claims that they ‘mime conversations from everyday life’, but it should be noted that as dialogues, the texts are quite incoherent. The speakers of the utterances are rarely identifiable, and even the topic of the texts is sometimes difficult to determine. In the 1887 edition, the sentences are grouped under 27 headings according to which grammatical structure they illustrate, and it is clear that the illustration of grammatical phenomena is a main objective.

In the B-edition from 1933 the initial texts are reorganized according to topic and there are headings like ‘The Stranger’, ‘Mr. Parker and his Dog’ and ‘Going by Train’. However, since the texts on the whole have been kept the way they were in the original version of the book, they still appear as rather contrived - primarily aimed at describing grammar points. Both the topics and the characters involved are dealt with very superficially.

There are also prose texts, in increasing amounts in the later editions of the book. Many prose texts tell a story with a moral point, and there are also many anecdotes. The messages conveyed deal with the bravery of dogs and the wit and wisdom – but also the shrewdness and folly – of human beings. In addition to providing the students with some knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary, then, there seems to be an intention to contribute to the students’ moral upbringing.

In all editions of Brekke's book, the references to the English-speaking world are kept at a minimum and consist largely of the use of English names. In the 1887 edition, there is only one text that provides some information about English-speaking countries. The primary focus of the text is the exemplification of the of-genitive:

Do you know which is the largest town in England next to London?

Yes – the town of Liverpool.

Victoria is Queen of England.

She is also Empress of India.

There is no king in the kingdom of England now.

The empire of Russia is governed by an emperor (Brekke 1887: 24).

The B-edition provides more information about England, for example in two texts about living quarters in England and differences between sports activities in Norway and England. We also get some information about the main tourist attractions in London, and the United States is touched upon in a text about 'the American War' and General Washington's moral superiority.

Although the cultural content of the B-edition is scarce, there are many examples of oversimplifications and stereotypes. Ordinary people in the foreign culture are presented as simple-minded and naïve, and the Irish are described as especially foolish. Wealthy noblemen, on the other hand, show great intellect, wealth and moral integrity. Great deeds are described, and they are all carried out by noblemen, kings – and General Washington.

In the introduction to the 1887 edition, the author states that the norm for the presentation of English pronunciation is the 'unrestrained, cultivated everyday

language of Southern England'.⁴ When it comes to the phrases and verbal behavior taught, however, it is questionable whether 'cultivated everyday language' is an adequate term to use.

Only a few texts touch upon conventions of appropriacy and variations of language according to context. In the dialogues in the classroom in the B-edition, the learners are taught to address the teacher as 'sir' or 'miss'(name), and they are told to say 'please', because 'it is more polite' (Brekke 1933: 11). In the 1887 edition, however, learners are taught language used between a master and a servant: 'John, give us a bottle of ale and some clean glasses. John, give me a knife and fork' (Brekke 1887: 26). On another occasion, where the addressee is unidentifiable, the learners are taught to say 'Give me a cake! Give my brother a cake, too! ...Bring me the book! Bring it me!' (Brekke 1887: 31). The fact that these direct phrases would be very impolite and totally unacceptable in most communication situations, is not pointed out to the learners.

In a joke, the learners get some impression of the way in which different linguistic approaches may be used in different social strata in England, but the impact of the linguistic behavior shown is not commented upon:

Here's a story that was told in England, as a joke, some time ago, about a guard on an English railway line. It was said that when he entered a first class carriage, he would say, 'Show your tickets, ladies and gentlemen, if you please.' Coming into a second class carriage he said simply, 'Tickets, please.' But opening the door of a third class carriage, he would call out in a loud voice, 'T I C K E-E-E T S!' (Brekke 1933: 55).

⁴ The introduction is written in Norwegian, and the phrase used is 'den utvungne, dannede dagligtale i det sydengelske'.

In the B-edition, many topics are presented that reflect the topic areas suggested in the national curriculum of 1925. However, it is difficult to determine whether texts like 'Food', 'Time' and 'My Room' refer to a British or a Norwegian setting. As in the national curriculum, there is in Brekke's book no indication that these topics might be presented differently in different cultural contexts. The impression given, then, is that learning English is only a matter of learning grammatical structures and new words, and that both items of English vocabulary and situations of language use correspond to their Norwegian equivalents on a one-to-one basis.

Henriksen (1995) has pointed out how the universe suggested in Brekke's book is a culturally neutral one. However, it could also be argued that the book reinforces the students' own cultural frames of reference and that it perpetuates a notion of cultural universality based on the students' own understanding of the world.⁵ Some texts clearly present an English setting, while others seem to indicate a Norwegian one:

Tea is the leaf of a plant that grows in the far East. The leaves are dried over the fire and then sent to us in ships. English people drink more tea than we do (Brekke 1887: 29).

The references to a Norwegian context are not pointed out. However, when texts use the pronoun 'we' to refer to the body of students - or to Norwegians in general, the impression may be given that the students' own position is the only 'natural' one to occupy:

Tell me what country you live in, Peter.
I live in Norway.
Yes, we all live in Norway (Brekke 1933: 12).

⁵ Kramsch (1988) has focused on the way in which foreign language textbooks traditionally have had a tendency to present the students' own cultural frames of reference rather than exposing the students for cultural expressions and understandings different from their own.

All editions of the book contain some fables and fairy-tales. The fairy tales can also be used as an example of the way in which the students' own cultural background is referred to in the book. No information is given about the origin of the fairy tales, but they can easily be recognized as direct translations from Asbjørnsen & Moe's collections. Whether or not the fairy tales would be known also in the English-speaking world is not discussed, and nothing is made of the fact that the fox in *The Fox and the Herdsman* sings 'DIL-DAL-HOLOM'.

Mellgren, Walker, Backe-Hansen & Nielsen; *This Way*

This Way is one of the many textbook series that were imported from Sweden in the 1970s and adapted for use in Norwegian schools. The Norwegian version has four authors, the two original Swedish ones and two Norwegian co-authors. The books referred to below are the textbooks for the 'ungdomsskole' level (grades seven – nine): *This Way 7*, *This Way 8* and *This Way 9*, and the teacher's guide and the workbook for each year.⁶

This Way reflects the tradition described in connection with Brekke's book of trying to bring together the teaching of grammar and the teaching of everyday conversational skills. In the teacher's guide for seventh grade, readers are informed that

⁶ Quotes from the books are identified like this: Textbook = TB, workbook (in two volumes for each year) = WBI and WBII, teacher's guide = TG.

As far as possible, the texts are tailor-made for practising a particular language item. However, there is a limit to how many times a language point can be worked into a text without making it appear artificial. The aim is normal conversational English in everyday situations (TG7:7).

There is a primary focus on grammar also in the exercise material in the workbooks. The great majority of tasks are grammar drills or ‘structural exercises’, which is the term used in the teacher’s guides. Work with the exercises should be led and controlled by the teacher, and errors should be avoided. A lot of practice is needed in order to learn the structures presented, and the authors admit that the structural exercises may appear monotonous. However, they claim that ‘the pupils will usually accept them, particularly if you keep up the speed and do them with a twinkle in your eye’ (TG 7: 17).

The theoretical basis in structural linguistics and behaviorist psychology for the methodological approach in *This Way* seems clear. Still, the authors point to the limitations of drill exercises. It is a regrettable fact, they say,

[t]hat the mastery of one particular type of exercise does not necessarily imply the mastery of the particular language item that has been practiced. It very often only means that the pupils master that particular type of exercise. They go on making mistakes, probably because they have not practiced the language point enough in different ways in different situations (TG 7: 7).

However, the notion of ‘different situations’ remains unclear both in the teacher’s guide and the rest of the series. Grammatical structures are practiced in connection with different topics in *This Way*, but there is never a focus on different situational contexts. In fact, most of the sentences for practice are completely de-contextualized:

She isn’t stealing apples, is she? No, she isn’t. She never does.
The dog isn’t barking, is it? _____
It isn’t snowing, is it? _____
They aren’t fighting, are they? _____

(WB 7I: 30)

If we can talk about a situational context for most of the tasks in the workbook, it must be that of doing grammar drills in an English classroom. Even the texts that present interesting factual information or that evoke strong personal involvement are primarily utilized for purposes of drilling grammar, as in this task connected to the excerpts from Anne Frank's diary:

Did Dorothy really buy the record player? Yes, she bought it herself.
_____ Fred hide the money? _____ hid it himself.
_____ Jack and Dennis drink all the lemonade? _____ drank it
themselves (WB 9II: 39).

Most of the texts in *This Way 7* center around four children and their activities. A few texts are set in a school situation, but the great majority of them deal with leisure activities during the children's summer vacation. In *This Way 8*, many of the texts are set in a bookshop where two youngsters, Bill and Wendy, work. There is a clear intention in the textbook series to contribute to the students' moral upbringing, as both proper and improper behaviors are presented. It is especially one boy who exemplifies the latter, and his actions seem to be exaggerated to the point that the learners necessarily have to distance themselves from them. At the same time, the incredible folly of the boy is an obvious attempt to bring an element of humor and fun into the English classroom.

Many of the texts demonstrate *model dialogues*, which the students are asked to practice and sometimes learn by heart. The intention is clearly to prepare the learners for situations in which they might be likely to find themselves in the future. The role of the tourist seems to be central, as many situations center around buying things in a shop, ordering food in a restaurant or buying tickets or stamps.

The dialogues are kept at a minimum, illustrating only the bare linguistic necessities in such a situation. Nothing is said about the possibility that two situations even in the same post office may not be completely identical, or about the need to adapt both one's verbal and non-verbal behavior to different contexts. The impression is conveyed, then, that situations are basically the same in all cultures, and that linguistic skills are all one needs in order to be able to communicate with people from other countries.

Sometimes the students are encouraged to voice their own opinion about topics that probably seem relevant in their present situation, they are for example asked to present their views of fashions and clothes, friends, advertisements, hobbies and sex roles. However, there are relatively clear signals that the content of the texts and the students' reactions to it are of secondary importance. The main focus is always on the practice of grammatical structures and vocabulary and all activities are geared at reaching the superior goal: to speak and write grammatically correct English.

The majority of the texts in *This Way* indicate a culture-neutral or 'universal' cultural setting, but there is in *This Way* also a clear intention of providing the learners with varied encounters with the target countries. A little less than half of the texts for reading refer to some aspect of a specific foreign culture. In *This Way 7*, the culture-specific material is presented under the heading 'For your information' at the end of the book. The section consists of 16 short texts providing information about British institutions (eg schools, newspapers, the post office, the health service and the police) and conventions of behavior (eg queuing and tipping). Both in *This Way 8* and *This Way 9* the culture-specific material has been incorporated to a larger degree into the main part of the book. There are dialogues from culture-specific situations, texts that provide specific cultural information, fictional texts by well-known authors, songs and poetry.

A large majority of the texts with culture-specific reference in *This Way* focus on the presentation of information and not on showing people in real life situations. These texts seem to have been written for the textbook, with the dual purpose of illustrating some grammatical structure and of providing information about the foreign culture. There are both informational texts about certain cultural characteristics, narratives about historical events and presentations of famous people.

This Way 9 has a main focus on the United States, and this country gets in fact more coverage than the United Kingdom in the textbook series as a whole. Most of the texts relate an aspect of American history, and especially the Native Americans are presented thoroughly. Many texts present the great achievements of heroic individuals. In addition to stories about celebrities like Henry Ford, Helen Keller and Charles Lindbergh, we learn about many of the legendary personalities who helped open up the American West. The selection of texts about US history in *This Way*, then, supports the stereotype image of the country as having been built by courageous and strong individuals who were able to overcome all kinds of hardships.

Most of the texts about the United Kingdom in *This Way* present ‘facts’ and information related to the nation as a whole, as in the examples mentioned above from *This Way 7*. Several texts deal with British history, but the selection of topics is very limited and seems to have been done at random. Four out of a total of ten texts deal with ‘the Great Train Robbery’ in the 1960s and its aftermath. The conflict in Northern Ireland is presented, in addition to the development of the postal system, the history of pop music and the story of the first man to be killed by a train. When considering the scope of British history and all the exciting stories that could have been told, the selection certainly seems less than successful.

Apart from the texts in *This Way 9* about Northern Ireland, no attempt is made to show any of the great regional, ethnic and social diversity in the United Kingdom. On the contrary, there are numerous references to places that seem to exist only in the *This Way* textbook series. The four children in *This Way 7*, for example, travel to 'Brightsea', and there are both texts and illustrations related to fictitious places called 'Seanness', 'Tarcaster', 'Newtown' and 'High Green'. The intention might have been to present 'average' English people in 'average' English settings, but the cultural settings indicated in these sections represent in fact few – if any – characteristics that would differ from those of the students' own.

A few texts take us to other parts of the world, for example the excerpt mentioned above from Anne Frank's diary. The texts selected from countries other than the United Kingdom and the United States provide glimpses into the lives and experiences of some individuals, but they do not focus on the presentation of information about foreign cultures.

Some of the texts in *This Way* may certainly contribute to the learners' increased knowledge about the United Kingdom and the United States. However, the seemingly random selection of items to teach and the rather simplistic and stereotype pictures of the countries presented indicate that cultural information has only been a secondary concern for the textbook authors. Questions and tasks in *This Way* focus only sporadically on the cultural information provided, and signal throughout the books that primary importance is attached to linguistic forms and the development of mastery of the language.

Amland, Liseth, Odeldahl, Odeldahl & Hodell, *People and Places*

People and Places is, like *This Way*, based on a Swedish textbook series. It was adapted for use in Norwegian schools and the first book was published in Norway in 1985. *People and Places* consists of one textbook for each year

throughout the 'ungdomsskole', containing both texts and tasks. In other words, there is no separate workbook. However, the teacher's guides contain a lot of extra material that can be photocopied and handed out to the students. There is also an extra *Star Book* with texts for extensive reading. The following presentation is based on an analysis of the texts and tasks in the textbooks, the teacher's guides and *Star Book*.⁷

In a preface to *People & Places 1*, the main ideas behind the textbook series are presented. The primary goal, it is said, is to build up the students' communicative skills, and the importance of the language functions presented and practiced in the sections called 'How to Say It' is underlined. Language functions are explained as 'words and expressions to be used when talking about what one wants, thinks or feels in different situations' (TB 1: 5).⁸

The teacher's guide follows up the description of goals and states that the main aim of the tasks in the book is to provide the students with a simple, but functional language for daily life situations.

The inclusion in *People and Places* of language functions reflects the work done on foreign language teaching in the Council of Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. Based on an analysis of the average European learner's needs, the Council of Europe publication *The Threshold Level* from 1975 describes the objectives for the teaching of English in the form of a list of situations in which the learners should be prepared to use the foreign language. The situations are related to communication about everyday matters when traveling or in encounters with

⁷ Quotes from the books are identified like this: Textbooks = TB, teacher's guides = TG, *Star Book* = SB. It should be noted that *People and Places 1* is for seventh grade, *People and Places 2* for eighth grade and *People and Places 3* for ninth grade in the Norwegian 'ungdomsskole' of the 1980s.

⁸ My translation.

visitors to one's own country (van Ek & Trim 1991).⁹ Linked to these situations is a series of language functions and vocabulary.

Although *The Threshold Level* was highly influential, the Council of Europe recommendations to focus on situations and language functions did not result in a break with previous traditions in Norwegian foreign language education. The 1987 national curriculum describes an eclectic approach for the teaching of English that seems to combine old and new ideas of how foreign language proficiency should be brought about.¹⁰ Work with language functions is described as important for the development of practical language skills, yet the students should also learn traditional grammatical categories. The teaching material should be centered around topics that the students find interesting and relevant, and students should even be allowed to determine certain topics themselves. It is worth noticing, then, that while *The Threshold Level* was organized strictly according to the learners' envisaged *needs* for language skills in specific situations, the 1987 national curriculum appeals also to the students' *interests*. At the same time, however, the English course should also make room for information about the English-speaking world and make sure that the students are presented for a wide variety of texts.

People and Places tries to combine all the considerations described in the national curriculum, a fact that becomes evident just from looking at the tables of contents in the textbooks. Many chapter headings signal that the books aim to appeal to young people, for example 'Being young' (TB 3) and 'Inter-rail' (TB 2). Several chapters are devoted to the presentation of foreign cultures, and a great variety of different text types are included. The tables of contents also list

⁹ The Threshold Level soon came in a new edition, meant for use in schools (van Ek 1976) and it came in yet another edition in 1991 (van Ek & Trim 1991).

¹⁰ *People and Places* was certified for use in Norwegian schools during the period 1985 – 1987. A preliminary version of *M-87* was published in 1985.

the linguistic content of each chapter, and both language functions, grammar points and areas of vocabulary are presented. The maintained focus on grammar can be seen in the fact that there are more references to the grammar points dealt with than there are references to language functions. The traditional teaching approach can also be seen in the tasks in the textbooks, where there are five times as many tasks that focus on grammatical structures and vocabulary than there are tasks that practice language functions.

The students are presented for language related both to typical tourist situations and to everyday situations, but the textbook series also contains a large number of information-focused texts that describe topics rather than situations. In *People and Places 1*, for example, we hear about monsters, animals, collectors and records, while the other two textbooks take up topics like ‘incredible cats’, movie-making, shopping and fear.

Most of the topics that seem to have been chosen in order to appeal to the students’ interests are dealt with in texts that have few or no references to a culture-specific setting. Apart from the use of English personal names and (fictitious) place names, the reference is to a ‘universal’- albeit clearly Western – cultural context. These texts, then, seem to represent a missed opportunity when it comes to discussing issues of interest to the students and providing information about or experiences with foreign cultures at the same time. As mentioned in connection with *Lærebog i engelsk* and *This Way*, it can also be argued that ‘culture-neutral’ texts may in fact reinforce the students’ own cultural understandings and lead them to think that their own frames of reference are universally valid - and even the only ones possible.

The tasks that focus on language use in situations also signal that situations are basically the same all over the world, and that no great challenges are attached to the choice of appropriate verbal behavior. A great majority of the tasks for ‘role

play/conversation' in the teacher's guides, for example, present obligatory moves for speaker A and speaker B in a conversation that focuses in its entirety on one language function, such as 'expressing uncertainty or doubt' or 'agreeing and disagreeing' (TG 1: 95 – 96). Apart from a few references to the necessity of saying 'please' and 'thank you', nothing is said about different conventions of linguistic behavior and the need to consider different contexts for the language used.

Compared to *This Way, People and Places* contains a lower percentage of texts that deal with foreign cultures (32 percent of the total amount of prose texts). However, the range of countries covered is much broader. More than half the texts with culture-specific reference deal with the United Kingdom, while the United States is presented only in a limited number of texts. A whole chapter is devoted to Australia, and we also get brief glimpses of Gambia, Ireland and India, as well as some countries where English is not used as an official language.

Throughout the textbooks there is a number of sections called 'Norwegian corner', which include short texts, tasks and pictures aimed at making the students able to speak English about themselves and their own cultural background. The texts take up rather stereotype characteristics of Norwegian culture, such as the Norwegian fairy tales and the native costumes. Also, Norwegian customs related for example to the National Day, Midsummer Night's Eve and the confirmation for fifteen-year-olds are presented. Very few texts are included in *People and Places* that present matters of equal importance to members of other cultures. Again, it can be argued that the books convey the understanding that the students' own culture is the 'normal' one.

Quite different approaches have been used in the selection of cultural material. The country that gets the most adequate coverage is Australia. In four short texts

and a number of pictures in *People and Places 1* we get to hear about Australian history, geography and climate, leisure activities and cultural symbols in quite a coherent and elucidating way. There is also extra material about Australia in *Star Book*, and the total picture of the country presented is quite systematic and varied. Although the encounters with Australian people are brief, we get some understanding of the diversity of the population.

The selection of texts in *People and Places* about the United Kingdom and the United States seems to have been based on a different principle. Here, the aim has not been to give a broad overview of the country and the people, but rather to let certain topic areas get more in-depth treatment. For the United Kingdom, the result is not very successful. Only isolated – and seemingly randomly chosen - glimpses of the country are provided, and the information value of many of the texts is low. For example, several texts refer to a British school setting, but they leave the reader with only a vague feeling of what going to a British school really is like. The most informative texts about the United Kingdom deal with tourist attractions, and we learn for example about the Loch Ness monster, the Castle museum in York, the Tower of London and Big Ben.

Although *People and Places* devotes little space to the description of the United States, the picture given of this country is a much more interesting and coherent one. One chapter is devoted to the presentation of New York City, as it is seen through the eyes of a visitor. In addition, *Star Book* provides several encounters with young people who live in New York, and the diversity of both people and neighborhoods is underlined. There are also many good color photographs from the city. The material about New York seems to work well as an example that can cast light on the culture of the whole country.

The presentation of Gambia, India and Ireland follows yet a different approach. All three countries are presented in terms of lists of facts and figures, and a wide

variety of information is covered in just a few lines. Although some narrative texts are included, the picture we get of each country is only a very limited and superficial one. The approach of presenting countries as a summary of facts and figures is followed up in suggested tasks and activities, and in lists of facts about a number of countries in the ninth grade teacher's guide. The set-up is very neat and clear, and one gets the impression that such surveys count as knowledge about foreign countries. Nothing is said about the need to supplement and go beyond lists of names and statistics in order to get a more insightful view of the country.

Two sections in *People and Places* represent new and interesting approaches to the presentation of foreign cultures. One is the interview in *People and Places 2* with Daniel Heile Selassie, an Eritrean boy who fled from the war and eventually ended up at Linderud secondary school in Oslo. He compares life in Eritrea and Norway and provides interesting information about both countries. Most important, however, is the opportunity given in the text for the students to see themselves from an outsider's perspective.

The other section is a two-page collage of photographs and captions in *Star Book*. Information is presented from very different sectors of American society, but the heading asks: 'What is America to you?' (SB: 92 - 93) Students are asked to list and discuss the things they associate with the United States and the task seems to be an excellent opportunity to address and challenge the students' different perceptions of the country.

People and Places contain a great variety of texts that link up with the students' everyday experience. There are for example dialogues, narratives, cartoons, letters and diary entries. Both traditional and contemporary songs have been included, and there are poems and proverbs. Twenty-nine texts have been taken from novels for teen-agers, magazines or anthologies. The authors' efforts to

present varied texts and interesting and relevant topics are obvious. The chief principle behind the selection of texts in *People and Places*, however, seems to have been linked to this objective: to illustrate specific items of grammar, language functions and vocabulary.

As a result, many of the texts appear as hybrid genres. Dialogues emerge as a mixture of real everyday talk and grammar drills or demonstrations of language functions. Narrative texts are so short and basic that the characters never come to life and the content fails to trigger the readers' interest. Informational texts appear as cross-breeds between entries in an encyclopedia and lists of vocabulary. Many of the 'authentic' texts are quite difficult to understand, as they have been shortened and abridged to a degree that makes them lose many of their original qualities.¹¹

Because of the primary focus on the linguistic content, then, many of the texts in *People and Places* lose credibility as the type of text they are presented as being. Rather than a real letter, diary entry, dialogue or newspaper article readers simply recognize a textbook text, constructed in order to present certain linguistic items. One consequence of this is that the cultural value of the language and the situation presented is reduced. Another possible consequence might be that learners recognize the texts as artificial constructions and examples of language that are only valid within the context of the textbook and the classroom.

¹¹ I use 'authentic text' here to refer to the texts that have been taken from books and magazines where they originally served a purpose different from the one they are given in the English textbook.

Conclusion

Three textbooks have been chosen to exemplify the teaching of English in Norway during the century that preceded the 1997 national curriculum. The textbooks demonstrate the development of the subject in Norwegian schools, and show both ongoing traditions and new advancements in teaching materials and approaches.

All three textbooks aim at providing the students with skills related to 'everyday English'. However, the books differ greatly both in their presentation of the linguistic material and the underlying ideas of how foreign language skills should be acquired. Despite its presentation of sentences for everyday conversational use, *Lærebog i engelsk for begyndere* maintains the strong position of grammar that was part of the tradition inherited from the teaching of classical languages. It is evident that with this book, English could be taught with a primary emphasis on theoretical knowledge rather than practical skills, and thus fulfill the subject's function as a basis for selection for further education.

This Way exemplifies very clearly the audio-lingual method and its focus on useful structures in the learning of a foreign language. The texts are 'tailor-made' to demonstrate particular language items, and the workbooks provide large amounts of structure drills for language practice. While *People and Places* maintains the emphasis on grammar and vocabulary training, it also reflects the entry of language functions on the scene of foreign language learning. A variety of text types are presented, but because of the heavy adaptation to the textbook format, many of the texts appear as hybrid genres.

In focusing on virtuous deeds and laudable behavior, *Lærebog i engelsk for begyndere* clearly aims to contribute to the students' moral upbringing. The prose texts also indicate that a main objective of the book is to prepare the students for further reading. Little or no information about English speaking

countries is included in *Lærebog i engelsk for begyndere*, but the books for the following years - the anthologies of fictional texts, provide many encounters with foreign cultures.

There is also in *This Way* an inclination to focus on virtuous deeds and to give clear messages about desired behaviors. However, the main objective in *This Way* is to present useful, everyday language. The use of young people as textbook characters and the choice of situations described indicate a desire to appeal to the readers' interests and to their sense of humor. There is also a considerable amount of informative texts in *This Way* about the United Kingdom and the United States, but the cultural material is not focused on in the practice material and it is clearly of secondary importance in the book.

In *People and Places*, there is a clear intention to build the teaching of English around topics that the students will find interesting and relevant, and many texts and tasks take up issues related to Norwegian culture and society. The exemplification of good behavior is no longer a main concern. Although the textbook contains only a small amount of material about foreign countries, the brief visits take us to a variety of places in the English speaking world. However, a plan for the selection of cultural material seems to be lacking, and no clear objectives related to the students' knowledge about other countries are discernible. Both in the case of *This Way* and *People and Places*, it is tempting to use a phrase from Risager: 'the socio-cultural domain is characterized by a widespread amateurism' (1991: 182).

Apart from occasional reminders to 'be polite' - which seem to refer only to the use of words like 'thank you' and 'please', conventions of verbal behavior in different contexts are hardly mentioned in any of the books. The impression is given that situations of foreign language use present linguistic challenges only, and that there is no need for the students to adjust their understandings and

behaviors. A majority of the texts take place in a culture-neutral or seemingly 'universal' setting. It can be argued that these texts in fact reinforce the students' own culture and obscure rather than reveal possible differences in cultural contexts. The notion of cultural universality can also be criticized for having imperialistic overtones (Phillipson 1992).

Johnsen, Lorentzen, Selander & Skyum-Nielsen (1997) compare the teaching of English to a very long train. As national curricula introduce new elements to the subject, new cars are attached to the railroad engine. However, the old cars are rarely uncoupled. An example of this can be seen in the discussion of the textbooks above, especially in the way in which grammar seems to keep its prominent position despite the new emphasis on language functions and the use of text types that the students will recognize from their everyday lives. When trying to implement new developments in the teaching of English, then, - notably those introduced in the 1997 national curriculum - there seems to be good reason to examine past traditions critically. This article has been an attempt to present the contents of some of the railroad cars.

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