

Materials and Methods

CHAPTER = II

MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Introduction:

The object of this investigation is to assess the naturalness of fabricated ELT materials. As we have stated in the introduction it was decided to use the cloze technique as an instrument for this purpose. The justification for choosing the cloze procedure has been stated in the previous chapter. We believe that this is the first time that the cloze procedure is being used for this purpose. So this study is no more than a first step in this direction.

2.2 Choice of text:

The Maharashtra State Board's textbooks for the teaching of English as a second language are based on the structural approach. All the textbooks in current use from Std V to X are made up of fabricated texts to illustrate certain points of grammar, and certain vocabulary items. These items are listed as teaching points in the syllabus. Every lesson in the textbook attempts to illustrate certain teaching points. The 'lessons' are made up or fabricated by writers specially appointed for the purpose.

There has been a feeling that fabricated materials tend to be dull, uninteresting and therefore not conducive to teaching and learning the language (Shastri, 1972). More recently the advantages of authentic materials over fabricated ones for ESL

has been enumerated by Mathur (1991). Therefore it was decided to choose one fabricated 'lesson' from the textbook prescribed for Std IX for our investigation.

There are eighteen fabricated prose lessons in the textbook of which ten are 'stories' and the remaining narrative and expository prose. It was decided to use one of the stories, that is, "The Judgement Seat of Vikramaditya".

A story was chosen in preference to the other passages for various reasons. A story is generally self-contained and likely to represent, important linguistic features like discourse structure requiring proper connections. It was also felt that a story is likely to evoke interest in the reader. If it is true that the story is well-written the teaching items would not strike as the main object of the lesson. In other words, telling the story would be the main object rather than illustrating the linguistic items prescribed for teaching.

2.3 Preparation of cloze form:

The story runs into about eleven hundred words. In preparing a cloze form of the text, we started by deleting every 7th word keeping the first para intact (see Appendix A). In this form one hundred and twenty four words were deleted. Of these fifty-six were content words and sixty eight structure words. This gives a ratio of 55:45 of structure to content words. We felt that there would be an undue emphasis on structure words. Therefore, we discarded this form and prepared another with every 5th word deleted. In this form there were one hundred and

seventy-four blanks of which eighty-five fell on content words and eighty-nine on structure words. Moreover, the ratio between structure and content words worked out to 52:48 which gives nearly equal emphasis on both. We also satisfied ourselves that no blank fell on any word, proper noun or definite number for which there were no clues in the text. So we decided to use this form for our investigation. (See Appendix B)

2.4 Piloting the test:

Before asking native speaker experts to complete the cloze form, it was decided to do a piloting of the form on a few Indian experts to find out how the form works. Three Indian informants -- two from our own Department and one from CIEFL, Hyderabad -- were requested to complete the form. These informants were told about the purpose of the investigation. They were assured that it was not a test of their "English language ability, but a test of the soundness of the text as such" and they were allowed to put a in a gap or otherwise comment on any difficult situation.

2.4.1 Analysis of pilot test:

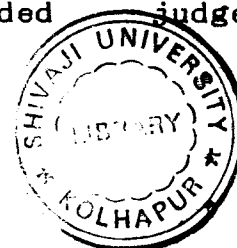
The responses were analysed and it was found that all the three informants responded with exact-replacement of the original item in the case of eighty-nine blanks representing twenty-nine content words and sixty-one structure words. In the case of the remaining eighty-four blanks representing fifty-six content words and twenty-eight structure words, at least one informant had supplied different but acceptable items. In the case of one informant, we found alternative items for the same blank. These were limited in number. They were person/one; went/got;

mound/pasture; cow-boy/boy; marbles/quarrel; surprised/happy; can/could; marble/black; hall/room; anger/fear; moment/minute. The alternative responses given by informants have been analysed and shown in Table No.2.4.1 A and B.

Table No.2.4.1A

Table showing alternative responses to certain blanks given by informants: (Content words)

Sr. No.	Blank No.	The exact word in the text	Informants		
			X	Y	Z
1	2	ruler	man/ruler	king	monarch
2	9	judgement	decision	judgement	judgement
3	10	man	one/person	man	man
4	14	palace	palace/own	palace	palace
5	15	fell	got/went	turned	turned
6	16	jungle	mound/pasture	jungle	mound
7	21	boy	cow-boy/one	one	cow-boy
8	23	cow-boys	boys	boys	cow-boys
9	25	still	just/only	still	still
10	28	stop	you	you	stop
11	29	dispute	marbles/quarrel	quarrel	dispute
12	30	decide	settle	settle	judge
13	42	took	took	brought	took
14	43	cow-boy	boy	boy	cow-boy
15	44	green	the	green	green
16	45	disputes	quarrels	quarrels	disputes
17	51	surprised	surprised/happy	surprised	satisfied
18	52	spoke	was	decided	judged



19	54	cow-boy	cow-boy	cow-boy	wise
20	56	disputes	quarrels	quarrels	disputes
21	60	reached	in	to	reached
22	62	wonderstruck	happy/surpised	surprised	surpised
23	64	area	-	indeed	mound
24	67	court	kingdom	council	court
25	68	sits	sitting	sitting	sits
26	73	wise	strange	very	wise
27	74	court	village	council	court
28	75	great	King	great	great
29	86	longed	was	wanted	wanted
30	90	see	see	find	find
31	92	workmen	people	men	diggers
32	95	black	the	white	white
33	96	black	the	white	white
34	97	angels	pillars	angels	angels
35	98	same	marble/black	marble	white
36	99	spread	carved	spread	flying
37	100	seat	throne	seat	seat
38	101	dug	took	took	dug
39	103	people	people	men	boys
40	107	Hall	hall/room	hall	hall
41	108	throbbing	full	filled	beating
42	114	throne	throne	hall	slab
43	115	spirit	stone	seat	seat
44	116	touched	saw	touched	touched
45	124	fear	anger/fear	fear	fear
46	129	angel	angel	angel	and

47	143	said	said	said	and
48	150	answered	said	said	said
49	152	seat	throne	seat	seat
50	154	thought	said	thought	thought
51	182	while	moment/minute	moment	while
52	167	slab	throne	slab	slab
53	168	head	wings	wings	wings
54	169	sad	sad	unhappy	upset
55	171	tried	in order	came	spoke
56	174	certain	sure	sure	sure

Table No.2.4.1B

2.4.1B Table showing alternative responses to certain blanks given by informants: (Structure words)

Sr. No.	Blank No.	The exact word in the text	Informants		
			X	Y	Z
1	7	of	in	of	in
2	8	a	a	his	a
3	11	and	was	and	and
4	12	it	it	case	it
5	17	from	and	from	from
6	19	two	the/two	two	two
7	22	a	the	a	the
8	48	the	the	green	the
9	49	One	One	One	Every
10	55	the	the	green	the
11	57	of	of	about	about

12	65	his	the/his	his	his
13	66	the	the	some	the
14	69	and	who	-	and
15	70	the	the	the	many
16	72	may	can/could	can	could
17	88	Let's	Please	Please	Please
18	104	while	when	while	as
19	127	not	not	not	guilty
20	133	But	Then	Then	Then
21	137	Someone	anybody	someone	someone
22	140	not	am	not	not
23	145	in	in	away	like
24	148	this	this	that	that
25	155	would	to	would	would
26	156	on	in	on	on
27	164	I'm	am	I'm	I'm
28	172	and	just	and	and



2.4.2 Interpretation of result:

The responses from these informants showed that except for one blank which two of the informants failed to fill, all the informants filled all the blanks with acceptable items. Therefore, the form was considered to be feasible. Secondly, the different alternatives suggested by different informants indicated some of the directions in which the original was perhaps faulty. The alternative responses could also be interpreted as the individual informant's subjective preferences or personal style. While we had expected this in the case of content words, it was surprising to find that even in the case of structure words unexpected responses turned up.

The object of piloting the form was however served. The form seemed to work.

2.5 Administration of the form:

Thanks to my supervisor's contacts with native speaker experts I was able to send the cloze form to twelve native speaker experts with a covering letter by my supervisor (See Appendix C). Thanks also to these experts I received responses from nine of them within the deadline. Needless to say most of these were collected through mail.

One of the forms was excluded from analysis as it proved to be impossible for processing. This informant had suggested several alternatives to fill almost every blank. However, the comments were enlightening and they have been used for interpreting the results of our investigation.

1.6 Experiment-before-theory approach:

So far we have said nothing about what are the possible features of a natural or authentic text as compared to a fabricated one. Some points were perhaps implied in the discussion of the rationale behind the cloze procedure and certain marking practices. For example, the most important property of natural language that is creativity and redundancy suggests one possible feature -- acceptability of synonymous items. However, there seems to be no known theory of the features of authentic text as compared to fabricated ones. In such a situation experiment-before-theory approach is adopted.

Accordingly, we did this experiment of inviting native speaker responses on a cloze form. In the next chapter we shall analyse the data and the conclusions we shall arrive at may suggest certain possible features of naturalness of material.