

## A Final Word

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### Introduction

The University of Malaya Spoken English Project has been described fully in the earlier papers in this volume. The aspects of the work in the project that have been discussed range from the rationale for the project, the research conducted and its role in the shaping of course design and materials development, the course design principles, the rationale for a multi-media package, and the implications of the UMSEP approach for testing and for teacher training.

One of the main reasons for devoting a volume of this journal to these different aspects of the project work is so that we may put on record the issues, problems, solutions, discussions and all the practical considerations that had to be dealt with in an ESP project of this scale. We believe this will be useful to colleagues in other institutions and other parts of the world who are similarly engaged in, or about to embark on, projects of their own, who may use the information as input for consideration. UMSEP, of course, is but one team's attempt to solve a particular set of needs, and the solutions proposed though relevant to others, are likely to be most workable for the particular situation for which they are offered. Nevertheless, we believe that the types of concerns and problems we encountered throughout the various stages of the project are probably common to other situations, and the attempts we made to overcome them should therefore be of interest.

It should be pointed out that UMSEP is the second international project undertaken by the Language Centre at the University of Malaya. In many ways UMSEP, being occupational in orientation, may be regarded as a logical 'sequel' to the first project: the University of Malaya English for Special Purposes Project (UMESPP) 1975-1978, which focused on English for academic purposes and produced materials primarily for teaching reading skills. These two projects indicate the extent to which the Language Centre and the University are committed to producing students who will function effectively in academic as well as occupational settings. Put another way, these two projects constitute the commitment made by the Language Centre and the University to meet the needs created by language planning policy of the nation.

With the completion of the projects and the use of the materials come several questions which are important. How successful can such materials be? In the case of UMSEP, what are its positive features and strengths? What other factors could determine its success or failure?

The discussion in the rest of this paper will address itself to these questions.

### Positive Features and Strengths

Firstly, because UMSEP was conceived in the highest official sanction and full support allowed the project access to the expertise not only of specialists from abroad, but also of local key personnel. The inputs

from these two sources have ensured that expertise from related fields and a sound knowledge of the local situation were combined in creating the materials. Because of official support the project was also able to carry out research into various important areas described, in particular in Julia Lee's paper. In this respect, UMSEP has been more fortunate indeed than most ESP projects.

Secondly, official sanction has also meant that UMSEP was able to count on the cooperation not only of key members in target professions but also of subject specialists in various faculties whose students form the target population of the project. Furthermore, the materials in their various pilot forms were tested on target-type students and revised accordingly. This access to target samples has been a definite plus factor. Moreover, opportunities to pilot the materials have resulted in the involvement of the teachers in the Language Centre. This direct involvement has provided the teachers with a deeper understanding of the principles and rationale upon which the materials are based, and will certainly enhance the chances of success of these materials when they are used.

From the foregoing discussion it can be seen that UMSEP could count, among its strengths, the fact that it was carefully based on an understanding of the needs of a specific situation, and has been designed with the help of a cross-section of people including those in the educational process of the university and members of various professions. The discussion below will next turn to the pedagogical design of the materials in order to highlight the positive features that UMSEP was able to incorporate.

In focusing attention on the skills needed for oral performance in professional situations, UMSEP is able to build upon the students' pre-UMSEP experiences vis-a-vis English. Coming from a secondary school system with its Communicational Syllabus for English, students have been exposed to a methodology that encourages the use of language to convey meaning. In addition, as final year undergraduates of the university, the UMSEP students (in particular those taking the POSM course), would have undergone the UMESPP course. The UMESPP materials are based on the principle that reading, like speaking, is an interactive process, and a wide range of interactive activities have been incorporated in the methodology. Furthermore, research has shown that a large proportion of the university's students, though recognizing the importance of reading, are keen to learn to speak. From the experience thus far it is apparent that motivation is fairly high.

Given the relatively low entry levels of the students, the temptation to incorporate a rapid review of the grammatical system of English was strong in the early design stages of the project. The rejection of the idea in favour of refining accuracy while developing fluency and effectiveness has seen positive effects. Although there is still some concern over the inability to eliminate inaccuracies, it has been demonstrated to a large extent that adult students are highly motivated by, and are benefitting from, an approach which encourages them to try to encode their own thoughts from the outset, that allows them to obtain immediate and perceptible indications of success (or failure) through a wide range of interactions with others, and which provides opportunities to build up formal resources found to be lacking through actual performance.

UMSEP regards its multi-media approach (described in Julia Lee's paper) as a definite asset and strength. The audio and video components have been found to be highly motivating. Apart from creating opportunities for active listening, these components have been effective in exposing students to living examples of language use and providing models for future performance. The cost in producing these components was high indeed and UMSEP is again fortunate to have official sanction in incorporating them. The UMSEP team has taken other steps to ensure that the materials have maximum chances for success. It was mentioned earlier that the involvement of the teachers in the various stages of piloting has created a better understanding of the materials. However, with changes in staff and the likelihood that many others will in the future be involved in teaching the materials, the decision was made to develop a comprehensive UMSEP teacher-training/orientation programme which will help to ensure that the teacher understands fully not only the aims of the course but possible problems and solutions as well. Few ESP courses have made such provisions for teacher training. The programme described in Carmel Heath's paper will cover many aspects of communicative methodology.

Another factor which we believe would contribute towards the success of the UMSEP materials is a viable testing programme. In order to ascertain that the skills taught are indeed learnt, reliable testing procedures are needed to provide accurate feedback. The paper by Khong Chooi Peng and Subramaniam Rajagopal discusses the testing work that has been done and points out areas that future work will cover.

These efforts represent what is within the purview of the project designers. However, whether materials such as those in UMSEP fail or succeed (and succeed to what extent) depends considerably on extraneous factors within the environment in which it is conceived and implemented.

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