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Why TESOL Textbooks Are the Way they Are: The Constraints of Writing for a Global Audience

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Abstract

Materials development in TESOL has been gaining popularity as a field of study for the last few decades. TESOL materials research as an area of inquiry includes studies focusing on textbook content (e.g., grammar, cultural representation, and authenticity), consumption (use/adaptation of materials by learners and teachers), and production (design and publication) of materials (Harwood, 2014a,b). Materials production is the most neglected of these three areas of research, although it is considered vital to understand how materials are produced and shaped into textbooks that are used in almost every classroom around the world (Harwood, 2010, 2014b; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2017:145). The present research draws upon interviews with six authors working for different international publishing houses who spoke about the various constraints associated with authoring global textbooks, which are sold around the world. The authors described constraints associated with publishers' preference for international rather than regional or local materials, tight deadlines, publisher-led rather than author-led models of production, the constraining influence of teacher and market representative feedback on draft materials, and constraints associated with taboo topics debarred from the materials. These formidable constraints reduce the role of authors in decision-making, hindering attempts to create more carefully crafted products, and we suggest that textbook publishers need to reconsider their production processes as part of a drive to enhance the quality of the global textbook.
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INTRODUCTION

As an important practice within TESOL, materials development is gaining in popularity as a field of academic study. The area as a whole investigates the principles and procedures of the design, implementation, and evaluation of teaching materials (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2017). There is a body of work about topics such as materials design and development (e.g., Harwood, 2010, 2014b; Jolly & Bolitho, 2011; McGrath, 2002; Norton & Buchanan, 2022), materials evaluation and adaptation (Islam & Mares, 2003; Littlejohn, 2011; McDonough, Shaw & Masuhara, 2013; McGrath, 2002; Nation & Macalister, 2010), the process of materials writing (Atkinson, 2021, 2022; Bell & Gower, 2011; Mares, 2003; Timmis, 2014), and theoretical and practical frameworks to guide the composition and analysis of materials (Garton & Graves, 2014; Guerrettaz, Engman, & Matsumoto, 2021; Jolly & Bolitho, 2011; Timmis, 2014; Tomlinson, 2003).

The literature on the production process of textbooks focuses particularly on the concerns and strategies of publishers (Amrani, 2011; Clare & Wilson, 2022; Donovan, 1998; Gray, 2010; MacKenzie & Baker, 2022; Mares, 2003; Singapore Wala, 2003; Timmis, 2014). These insightful studies mainly consist of anecdotes and narratives by former authors and editors describing their previous experiences. There have been limited investigations into the textbook production process that focus in particular on the textbook as a cultural and commercial artifact (Kullman, 2013; Littlejohn, 1992). Investigations of this type are presumably few in number because of the difficulties of conducting research into the highly competitive, financially lucrative world of TESOL publishing, in which data security and confidentiality are important preoccupations.

Our focus in this article is on the production of "global" textbooks in particular – that is, "a coursebook which is not written for learners from a particular culture or country but which is intended for use by any class of learners in the specified level and age group anywhere in the world" (Tomlinson, 2011: x). Due to its nature, the global textbook tends to be constrained in several ways, as summarized in the next section. The present article sets out to investigate in what ways materials are currently constrained at different stages of production, and in what ways the industry has changed over the last few decades with regard to the compromises discussed in the literature and the concerns of publishing insiders that impact how materials are produced. These are critical concerns as textbooks are crucial elements of language teaching and classroom instruction, and it is vital to understand how materials are produced and shaped into publications that

are used in almost every classroom around the world (Harwood, 2010, 2014b; Tomlinson, 2001). Before focusing on our own study, we now look in more detail at accounts of how materials are produced, what issues writers confront in the production of textbooks, and how authors and publishers address these issues.

TEXTBOOK WRITING: THE ART OF COMPROMISE

Given that various stakeholders with different interests are involved in the production and content of textbooks and that textbook writing is, therefore, mediated (Timmis, 2014), it is unsurprising that this activity is associated with compromise; indeed, textbook writers commonly receive guidance from global publishing houses, which, in turn, receive guidance from ministries of education in their target markets. Bell and Gower (2011) describe the compromises global textbook writers make with specific reference to their own experiences of authoring the bestselling *Matters* textbook series. In line with Mares (2003:131), who notes that he initially wrote for "clones of [himself]" and had to change his approach to author global products, Bell and Gower (2011) state that rather than designing materials that they themselves would be comfortable using, writers "need to cater for a wide range of students, teachers and classroom contexts with which they have no personal acquaintance" (p.135). They need to anticipate what materials will be successful in different scenarios and learning environments across cultures and classes of various sizes, instructed by teachers subscribing to various pedagogies. According to Bell and Gower (2011), compromise in textbook production for the international market takes place on the levels of (i) overall structure, (ii) methodology, (iii) texts, in terms of authenticity and content, and (iv) piloting. For example, lack of space caused Bell and Gower (2011: 148) "great frustration," leading to the deletion of many practice activities from the final version of their book. On the level of methodology, although they were permitted to eschew a traditional presentation-practice-production (PPP) approach, they had to compromise in the manner in which the target language was presented: they wished to draw the target language out of authentic texts, but were unable to find authentic, sufficiently engaging texts that contained clear examples of this target language.

Bell and Gower's (2011) account of decision-making around textbook content and piloting is also valuable for understanding how production works. Although they initially intended to resist publisher demands to exclude taboo topics, Bell and Gower had to change their approach in response to writing guidelines and verbal feedback, which

inform authors about the scope and sequencing of the materials (see also Aitchison, 2013; Clare & Wilson, 2022; Gray, 2010; MacKenzie & Baker, 2022). Bell and Gower (2011: 149) note that, similar to Amrani's (2011) account of piloting, the results of teacher feedback and piloting were not "as helpful as they had hoped" and were "often contradictory." Crucially, very limited piloting was done for the final version because of constraints such as their publisher's budget and production schedule. Therefore, they had to rely on their "own experience and the experience of advisors" (p.149) instead of empirical trialing and user feedback.

The main reasons for the kind of compromises described above are claimed to be (i) time, (ii) decision-making driven by publisher demands, (iii) market sensitivities, and (iv) commodification of the English Language (Bell & Gower, 2011; Gray, 2010; Mares, 2003; Singapore Wala, 2003). These constraints require materials to be produced as commercial products (Gray, 2010) written in "shorter development cycles" than previously and in a "much more tightly controlled and planned environment" (Amrani, 2011: 273), where the author works to prescriptive guidelines provided by the publisher or ministries of education.

Prowse (2011) summarizes the steps of materials production from beginning (research on a new level of textbook) to end (post-production) that were typically implemented in the 1990s. In contrast with other accounts, which do not include detailed information on the phases and steps followed (e.g., Amrani, 2011; Donovan, 1998; Mares, 2003; Singapore Wala, 2003), the following quote indicates the use of extensive market research, including school visits, classroom observation, focus group discussions with students and teachers, methodologists, and teacher trainers in the target market:

> Coursebook projects I have been involved in have been researched in great depth with repeated visits to the market by authors and editors whilst a project is under development and during the writing process. These visits take many forms, always including a lot of **classroom observation** of lessons in a range of schools and locations, **discussions with students** about their interests, individual and focus group **discussions with teachers**, **meetings with educational advisers and planners**, and **discussions with methodologists and teacher trainers** working in the market. When syllabuses and sample materials are drafted, they are discussed with and reported on by **focus groups of classroom teachers**, sometimes remotely but often face to face with the authors. Then as further materials are produced, the reporting and **feedback meetings continue with further visits to the market**. Finally, when the course is published, market visits continue for promotion but also to **see the**

> **materials in action and gather feedback** for further editions. (Prowse, 2011: 166–7) (bolding added).

Prowse's description of extensive market research and preparation is similar to Richards' (1995) account, which states that piloting and user feedback used to have a much more prominent role in materials production: Richards speaks of teacher and student data, gathered by convening groups of teacher consultants and through classroom observations while the units were being piloted. This process was said to be repeated for all unit drafts. However, such extensive surveying and trialing are far removed from other reports in the literature (cf. Harwood, 2010, 2014b; Timmis, 2014, 2022; Tomlinson, 1998, 2003, 2011; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2017; Zemach, 2018), which include claims that such piloting and feedback stages are now usually impoverished or non-existent.

Various accounts of materials production include references to publisher guidelines constraining authors. For instance, Richards (2014) claims that recently produced textbooks are more culturally sensitive than previous volumes. Publishers produce these guidelines to try to ensure their textbooks reflect progressive and politically acceptable values by avoiding social bias and ethnocentrism, and reflecting universal human concerns, needs, and values. Gray (2010) concludes that publishers provide authors with guidelines for two main areas regarding content: "inclusive language and inappropriate topics" (p.112). They firstly want the textbooks to have a non-sexist approach. Secondly, they want the authors to avoid some topics that might "offend the sensibilities of potential buyers" (p.112).

In sum, then, a number of constraints on global textbook authors have been identified, although accounts focusing on textbook production rather than on other aspects of materials remain relatively uncommon in the literature. Focusing on the constraints faced by authors working for international publishers, the present study contributes to our understanding of textbook production by examining the following research question:

What are the constraints associated with international textbook publishing?

METHODOLOGY

Drawing upon a constructivist approach, textbooks are seen as commercial, cultural, and social artifacts that are shaped by an interwoven network of people, sometimes in accord, at other times less so in their vision for the eventual product. The task of the constructivist

researcher interested in textbooks is to understand multiple ways of looking at the textbook under these circumstances. Soliciting the views of insiders – in this case, the textbook authors themselves – was of primary importance. Participants were approached during the 53rd IATEFL International Annual Conference and Exhibition in Liverpool, UK, in April 2019. This conference attracts many publishing insiders, as it features over 50 ELT-related exhibitors and advertises itself as "your one-stop shop to see all the latest ELT publications" (www.iatefl.org/conference/home). The first author visited all the publishers' stands, talked to authors, editors, marketing and promotion staff, handed out leaflets to provide them with brief information about the study, and asked them to contact us if they were interested in participating or to share the information with other potentially interested parties. Twenty nine potential participants expressed interest, 19 contacted us or responded to our emails, and 12 agreed to take part and gave their consent to participate, although three later withdrew. As a result, nine participants were interviewed, and here we focus on the views of a subset of the six most experienced textbook authors (identified as GA [global author] 1–6, see Table 1), who had the most to say about publishing constraints. All of the participants held degrees in disciplines related to the English language (e.g., English/American Literature or English Language Teaching). However, profile information is given only in general terms, and details like specific qualifications are omitted to protect identities.

We developed a semi-structured interview guide as part of a larger textbook research project to determine why global and locally produced textbooks are the way they are. We gathered accounts from authors and editors for (i) local or (ii) global contexts. The interviews in this research were conducted in two phases. Firstly, textbook authors writing for a local, Middle Eastern market were interviewed. Secondly, authors working for different publishers that produce materials for the international market were interviewed to understand and compare local and global contexts and circumstances. While the interview schedule included other questions on topics such as textbook writing as a profession, and authors' beliefs with regard to content, users, and the place of research in materials writing, in this article we

TABLE 1
Participants' Profiles.

Participant	GA1	GA2	GA3	GA4	GA5	GA6
Years of textbook writing experience	20+	20+	8	20+	15	20+
Level of education	PhD	MA	BA	PhD	BA	BA

focus more narrowly on production constraints associated with global materials, and we draw particularly upon constraints identified by Bell and Gower (2011) and Prowse (2011) in the design of this part of the instrument.

Those questions which elicited data relating to constraints included a question asking authors to describe five strengths and weaknesses of the textbook industry as a whole, a question asking whether authors were routinely provided with guidelines by publishers as they worked on a textbook, and a question inviting authors to describe any experiences they had had of violating these guidelines. Interviewees were asked what other problems they had confronted in the production of textbooks and how the quality of their materials could have been enhanced. In order to elicit the authors' opinions, we also used quotes from the literature on textbook writing as prompt cards. For instance, with the purpose of inviting participants to talk about the influence of marketing teams and commercial concerns on the production of materials, the claim below from Bell and Gower (2011:136) was presented for discussion:

> 'Marketing teams and distributors want to make sure their products get into as many schools as possible, no matter how suitable they are for the context'.

Other questions and prompt cards were also based on the existing literature, such as Gray's (2010) list of textbook taboo topics (e.g., alcohol, religion, sexuality, narcotics, and politics). Finally, in order to invite the participants to comment further on the production of textbooks, a prompt card was designed based on Prowse's (2011) description of the process.

Data Analysis

The interviews were audio-recorded, totaling some 26.7 h (1604 min) in duration (1115 min for the global context), and were later transcribed in their entirety verbatim. The interviews were then transferred to NVivo for coding and analysis.

The first phase of coding resulted in a total of sixty-four inductive nodes, under fifteen thematic categories, and four macro-themes: textbook writing as a profession, textbook as a socially constructed and commercial product, current state of the industry, and authors' beliefs. Once the categorization was completed, we studied the list of existing descriptive and in-vivo codes to identify links between them. Charmaz (2006:60) refers to this process as axial coding, which she defines

as an application that "relates categories to subcategories, specifies the properties and dimensions of a category, and reassembles the data the researcher has fractured to give coherence to emerging categories". That is, redundancies and similarities were identified by comparing each piece of data coded under a category with other codes under the same category and other categories. During this comparative process, a coding manual consisting of 59 codes was generated. Once we reviewed the whole data corpus again with the alphabetized codes at hand, we finalized the themes, described them and created a map of interrelations. With all codes clearly defined and categorized, we applied our codebook to the data one last time, to finalize the coding process.

At the end of the coding process, another independent coder was asked to code two randomly selected interview transcripts from local and global settings, and we reached agreement on 95.6% (89 out of 93) of the codes. We either made the changes recommended by the second coder or explained the rationale behind the changes that we did not make, and we agreed that all other codes were correct and accurate. Finally, we checked all other interviews for instances that would have elicited similar disagreements of the type flagged up by the second rater, but detected no other instances.

We now turn to our findings, briefly describing the process of publishing the global textbook, before focusing our analysis upon the constraints the authors identified.

FINDINGS

The International Context

The global textbook is written by authors who are current or former EFL/ESL teachers who are paid in royalties or – more commonly nowadays – a pre-specified fee for the project. Publishers conduct market research on existing "successful" (i.e., bestselling) textbooks of their competitors, and on the demands and sensitivities of different markets. In accordance with this market research, they prepare guidelines for their own authors, where authors are introduced to the rationale and pedagogical approach of the textbook they are to write, and given requirements concerning the book's scope and sequence, target market and level, such as the number of pages, units, learning objectives, methodology, and types of tasks to include, as well as guidelines about topics to avoid. Authors are expected to write draft sections and units according to the given guidelines, which are read by the series editor and revised accordingly at least twice before they are sent out to

readers for feedback. Following the final revision and completion of design elements such as rubrics and small details such as color, font, and page layout, books are distributed to target markets and made available online.

The following sections include the accounts of the participants regarding the nature of the constraints they face and their impact on global textbooks. These constraints are classified as (i) the commercially driven approach by publishers, (ii) time, (iii) the intervention of publishers regarding content, (iv) the quality of feedback received, (v) diversity of the target audience, and (vi) taboo topics that authors need to avoid.

Market-Led Approach

While formerly TESOL publishing was less about profits, it later reportedly became considerably more competitive as the market grew. Because of the growing market for textbooks, many publishers were taken over or merged with companies that had a much more business-like approach. This approach is said to have resulted in the production of much more defined, market-driven, cautious and anodyne materials, in contrast to the last decades before the millennium, when publishers were able to take risks in both content and approach. As GA 4 describes it, this earlier era was a "golden period" not only in terms of income for authors, but also in terms of freedom and creativity, in contrast to the present:

> **GA 4**: Publishing, certainly in the UK [. . .] was not run as a business as such. And you got [university presses]. For them it was very much prestige . . . It was very much publicity for the universities. They were not necessarily in it to make a lot of money. That was good in some ways. They took risks, they were innovative. [Publishing house] was very innovative in the 70s as they wanted to get in the market [. . .] A lot of the really interesting new communicative materials were published by [publishing house] in the 70s. [. . .] So, they took risks but then things changed. It became a lot more competitive, as the market grew and there was more and more demand, therefore more and more money . . . , a lot more business-like.

With this new business-like approach, TESOL textbooks supposedly became more market-led rather than methodology-led. That is, publishers' first priority is now selling books, rather than trying to produce materials featuring innovative methodology. Publishers are said to be intent upon providing teachers with the kind of product they expect, in the belief that such a product will lead to good sales figures. As GA

3 states in the following quote, commercial decisions are predominant in today's climate, reportedly leading to conservative products:

> **GA 3**: . . . coursebooks are market-led generally, not methodology-led. So, they're not trying to be the most up-to-date methodology, they're trying to sell books. And there's a lot of inertia about change in coursebooks, and that stems from the fear of falling sales, trying to capture that market, and wanting to give teachers what they expect, not necessarily what they need or what they feel they need.

This market-led approach justifies an emphasis on global rather than local products. As GA 1 explains, a publisher could aim to sell in a particular market and produce materials for that particular context only, enabling production of more focused, culturally appropriate materials for the context. However, the publisher would not make much money by taking this approach; producing more global products for multiple markets is a far more profitable alternative. The market-led approach can be considered the reason behind other constraints related to lack of time, feedback, payment policies, publisher intervention, and taboo topics. All these constraints are discussed below.

Time

Time is one of the biggest constraints in the production of a global textbook. Participants agreed that lack of time/tight deadlines significantly influence the quality of the textbooks they write. This is because the time constraint prevents authors from paying sufficiently close attention to the materials, following relevant discussions in the TESOL/SLA (Second Language Acquisition) literature, negotiating with editors which material can be retained and which discarded, piloting, and ultimately producing better planned and more effective materials. As GA 3 states below, while a few decades ago a textbook series would be completed in around 6 years, authors now need to complete all components of the series, including online materials, teachers' book and workbook for all levels in the series, within 2 years, which gives them less than 6 months for each book:

> **GA 3**: In the past, 20–30 years ago, they brought out [name of book: pre-intermediate] and then they brought out [name of book] intermediate a year later and then another year later the next level came out and after six years the whole course was there written by the same people, whereas now they want to do the whole course and publish at same time and so we've got two years to write seven books, plus the teachers' [book], workbook, all the crucial parts, the online stuff, the video

assets . . . , that's all going to be published at the same time. And so how and where the piloting fits in there, I'm not sure. I think time constraints [are] perhaps more of a reason why piloting might not happen or not so much.

According to some interviewees, these time pressures mean they are unable to keep up to speed with SLA and TESOL materials research although they would like to do so.

GA 4: Ideally, writers should have read [the research], should have thought about it and should be aware of it. It then comes down to one simple thing. [. . .] They haven't got time to find out.

Publisher-Led Production Model

According to the participants, there has been a movement away from an author-led to a publisher-led model in textbook publishing, which has increased the degree of intervention and control by publishers on textbook content. While formerly publishers would approach author (s) with a proposal along with requirements such as the target level and market, and leave the outline and planning to authors, now authors are expected to write "a book that is completely defined by the publisher in a much shorter period of time than previously was the case" as GA 5 states below. Instead of waiting for years for one or two authors to complete the books, publishers typically hire six to eight project-based writers with the purpose of minimizing the writing period:

GA 5: And in the past . . . , typically publishers would approach authors and say, 'We need a book for this market, these are the requirements, go away and think about what you think would work and then we will start talking about the book'. In other words, it was quite author-led- . . . , but I think increasingly, big international projects are publisher-led. A team of authors, maybe six or eight, is required to write a book that is completely defined by the publisher in a much shorter period of time than previously was the case. I am not entirely sure why the need to get to market has changed so much . . . . For example, with the second edition of the course that I'm about to write . . . , lots of other authors will be brought in as well to help write parts of it. Because they need it in six months' time. Whereas five years ago, we would probably have two years to produce this book and we would have done all the other work ourselves. So, it's becoming accelerated, atomised . . .

In the publisher-led model, detailed guidelines regarding the content, structure and aims of projects are provided, and publishers keep

close control of the content. In addition to the requirements for revisions as a result of rounds of comments and feedback from the editor and readers, editors may request changes such as addition of new content or exclusion of some items during the very last steps of production as GA 1 states below, or "some editor may go in and make changes without sending the work to authors," as GA 2 puts it:

> **GA 1**: [. . .] We get to the very very end, we decide something else, I write a unit . . . , they lay it out and they say 'We need an extra exercise, so can you write?' I say, 'Of course' and I need to do that really quickly.

Feedback

Authors also noted that the feedback they received on content may sometimes act as a constraint due to those individuals publishers consult for feedback and its quality and usefulness.

Quality of feedback. The quality of the feedback is strongly linked to the qualities of the readers. GA 1 reported that, although some of the readers consulted by publishers have the necessary expertise in the use and production of materials to make considered judgments, other readers are consulted not because they are in possession of this expertise, but because they have influence in their schools' textbook adoption decisions:

> **GA 1**: you have to really consider where the expertise is coming from and weigh it and see if it's practical.[. . .] [Publishers] also tend to work with teachers, they think their institutions might adopt the programme, so that's a big part of it.

Although one would imagine that feedback can be very useful in pinpointing errors, mistakes, and problems with the materials that authors simply are not aware of, feedback received from editors, readers, consultants, teachers and market representatives in the target context was not always considered helpful. Indeed, according to GA 1, feedback from readers could take the form of "stupid comments that are made for the sake of making them and feeling that they have done their job." GA 1 describes a case where the authorial team received feedback from a reader that she deemed unsatisfactory as she noticed the feedback appeared to have been written quickly, and it was sent only after repeated requests on the part of the publisher:

GA 1: . . . I was working with [name of country] publisher and we sent a book to this consultant in [name of country] and she was late late late giving the feedback . . . . All her comments were on a Word doc and . . . she had a lot of things that she didn't like. So, my publisher called me up and we started talking about it and I said, 'I don't buy any of it. I think she's an idiot,' and she said 'Why do you say that?' I said, 'Look at the timestamps.' So, every time you put a new comment, it says what time you put it in. And I could tell she went through the whole chapter and all the other materials in half an hour and she did it at midnight [laughs]. It was 00:01, 00:06, it was like 00:30. That was it. She did it after midnight because we kept asking for it. So, she wasn't really thinking about it.

Authors also questioned the seriousness publishers attached to readers' feedback. GA 2 recounted giving feedback on another author's materials, but the changes he requested were ignored. And authors spoke of how they felt publishers expected readers and focus groups to simply endorse the approach and content of the materials rather than critically evaluate them, as noted by GA 4 below, since publishing is a business and making substantial revisions in response to reader reports would increase costs:

GA 4: They will have invested a hell of a lot of money and if the focus group says 'We really don't like your approach, what would work much better is if you did this', [laughs], so, really this is rather controversial but in my view the objective in most focus groups is to endorse what has been done. Maybe a few small changes. We've got to accept that publishing is a business.

Source of Feedback. Participants also noted that the people from whom publishers solicit help may explain its unsatisfactory nature. We noted earlier that the feedback on drafts may be solicited from less qualified, experienced teachers whose primary qualification is that they work at a school which is a potential adopter of the textbook package instead of possessing expertise in utilizing and evaluating materials. Hence authors consider such uninformed market feedback on content to be a constraint associated with textbook production as this feedback may cause substantial changes, regardless of how ill-informed it is. For instance, interviewees also described ill-informed feedback from market representatives, whose comments publishers reportedly attached greater significance to than those of teachers, at times resulting in substantial and overly cautious changes. Hence GA 2 explained how his author team built the scope and sequence of their book as a storyline and needed to change the structure and flow of the whole book based on a comment of "one sales representative" in

one of the target markets who said the people in that market "did not like stories":

> **GA 2**: . . . the publisher said that the markets said that we couldn't have that story connecting the units because "[name of a region] do not like stories". I was like, 'What do you mean . . . ?' And I kept asking and it turned out that this is a comment made by one sales representative in [country], that was it. And I asked if I could even talk to that person and explain how the book worked. 'No'.

The authors were, therefore, obliged to change the structure, but it was "certainly not as good" as the original. Therefore, instead of making substantial changes to materials based on the idea of "one guy who may have never taught in his life," GA 2 would be happier to consider changes to materials if the feedback was based on the opinions of "60 teachers who have been rigorously polled."

The participants reported many other examples of this kind, such as a case in which another market representative asked the editorial team to remove all role-play exercises from a textbook series that included Eastern Asia among target markets on the grounds that "[East Asian nationality] did not like role-plays."

Diversity of Audience

One of the most salient constraints in production of the global textbook is diversity of the target markets. First of all, as GA 3 explains, the same textbook may be distributed to various countries in Middle Eastern, Far Eastern, and Latin American markets. This circumstance makes the materials cheaper to produce, but significantly limits the topics and representations authors can include in textbooks:

> **GA 3**: . . . there are all sorts of things that we should be including in the coursebook for Brazilians, but we can't because of the market needs of Saudi Arabia. The only sense it makes is that it's cheaper and it makes more money, and that's the bottom line.

In the quote below, GA 2 describes his experience when his team were asked to write a unit on films for a series aimed at the international market. However, they were not allowed to mention any film titles, types or actors because they were told that people in Saudi Arabia "are against movies." GA 2 argued that whether the advice the textbook writing team had been given about the Saudi audience was accurate or not, this should not determine what students in other countries encounter in their textbooks:

GA 2: All these restrictions because they said, 'Saudi Arabia is against movies.' [. . .] If that's true then I think what you ought to do is take out the film unit . . . and put it in a different [textbook series, which isn't sold in Saudi Arabia]. And that in the end is what happened. But it also means that Brazil, Mexico, Canada, France, China, all those countries, are not doing a unit on film because somebody thought Saudi Arabia wouldn't like it. And I'm not entirely comfortable with that. . . . I don't know why that should also determine what people in Sweden and Thailand study.

As it is commercially more effective to produce materials targeting a bigger market, instead of producing separate materials for all target markets, several global publishers produce textbooks deemed to be acceptable in as many countries and contexts as possible. Therefore, they expect authors to respect the many sensitivities associated with all these markets, thereby avoiding any controversy. However, GA 6 argued that textbooks taking this approach may feel bland, "neutral and anodyne" as a consequence:

GA 6: [International publishers] make a lot of money, they are big business, and they are interested in producing textbooks which can be sold on the market anywhere. Of course, this means that they expect—this is a weakness in my view—the writers to write a kind of neutral textbook which will not offend anybody, which will not provide any controversy in any of the contexts which they are going to sell it.

In summary, two of the writers in particular argued that the publishers' preoccupation with selling textbooks in highly diverse markets makes materials that could be more exciting and engaging for learners in a particular context into dreary and boring materials.

Taboo Topics

As part of a global authoring team, authors and editors receive lists of cultural sensitivities and taboo topics. Publishers update these lists on the basis of their experience from previous projects, information gathered from sales and marketing staff, from teachers in target markets, or analysis of competitors' materials. The lists of taboos and sensitivities are generally provided to authors as part of project guidelines at the beginning.

PARSNIP Taboo Topics. The acronym PARSNIP stands for pork, alcohol, religion, sexuality, narcotics, −isms, and politics, all of which are said to be generally avoided in TESOL textbooks (Gray, 2010). When the participants were asked to comment on a prompt card that

listed the PARSNIP topics and widely accepted taboos (also including death, violence, wars), they all agreed that they are indeed requested to avoid these topics when authoring materials. However, the authors argued that a rethink was needed and that at least some supposedly taboo topics should in fact be included in materials as they believe that learners need to talk about these topics in real life and that these topics can be useful and engaging in the TESOL classroom:

> **GA 2**: If something is culturally or ideologically inappropriate, I can't promise that students will never encounter that. But I would hope that they would have the tools to talk about it or to avoid a conversation about it.

Certain topics, such as narcotics, alcohol, death, violence, and guns, are described as "big no's," while other taboos that are based on religion and culture must also be avoided because of market sensitivities. However, other topics such as crime may at times be permissible; GA 1 claims his authoring team will mention crime as long as they are careful about the message and if it is presented in such a way that learners will not associate the content with their own lives:

> **GA 1**: You have to be careful though. [. . .] You have to be sensitive about things like murder, suicide, robbery, bombing. If it affects the students personally, you really don't want to deal with it. So, it has to be pretty abstract or removed from them so that they don't have to think about it in their own contexts.

Publisher Guidelines on Taboos. Authors described various experiences relating to when they had been asked to delete or edit what their editors believed to be taboo content. As Table 2 indicates, the taboo/sensitive topics authors are required to avoid or use very carefully arise because of marketing the textbook in different parts of the world: while owls could be appropriate for a classroom in Latin America, they may be excluded from the global textbook because they are seen as a bad omen in parts of the Middle East. In addition to the taboo topics listed in the guidelines, participants reported that they receive written and verbal feedback on other materials/topics asking for content to be removed. Again, this feedback suggests a very cautious approach on the part of the industry. For instance, "hamburger" is avoided because it contains the word "ham," the use of a halo is avoided as it is considered a religious symbol, and celebrities are avoided on the grounds that they "age the books," as indicated in Table 2 below.

In addition, due to the pressure of deadlines and schedules, writers reported a reluctance to argue with editors and publishers regarding

TABLE 2
Taboo Topics Based on Editors' Comments.

Content	Editor's comment
Brand names	"California public schools don't take textbooks that mention brand names. So, you could say cell phone, but you can't say iPhone"
The word "cross"	"We can't mention the word cross because of Islam even if it's not a religious word"
Hamburger	"It includes the word 'ham' although there is no ham in it. Replace with beefburger."
Role-play activities	"Asians don't like role-plays. We need to take all of the role plays out of the book"
Smartphones	"The word smart implies that the phone can think. And that's against Islam"
Poverty	"The only time you see a poor person was if they start poor and get wealthy"
Characters touching each other	[A task aiming to teach parts of the body] "We don't want to suggest having students touch one another"
Halo	Considered a religious symbol.
Iranian/Israeli Names	"Marzia too Iranian, could upset Saudis," "David is too Israeli"
Celebrities	"They age books really quickly" since they may die, get involved in crime or scandals. Mark Zuckerberg: Used to be a role model until the Facebook personal information scandal. Oscar Pistorius: "Amazing running career, murdered his girlfriend."

the appropriacy of supposedly taboo textbook content. For instance, GA 2 was asked to remove the word "birthday party" from a textbook aimed at the Middle Eastern market because the editor thought it was inappropriate for the context as parties were not considered acceptable in Islam. GA 2 considered the editor's proposed change as excessive and overly cautious; however, instead of resisting, he decided to compromise to save time and made the requested change:

> **GA 2**: You can be Muslim and have a birthday and the editor said, 'Well, you could do that, birthday is OK, but the word *party* is not OK,' and birthday goes with party, 'then that's not okay'. And you're under the time pressure of the schedule. It is easier to just take out the word birthday than it is to fight for it.

While the publishers' attitudes to potentially taboo content seem extreme, the stakes are high, in that textbooks deemed to contain inappropriate or offensive material may be proscribed by schools or even removed from approved ministry of education lists, meaning sales will be adversely affected. In the excerpt below, GA 2 describes a scenario when his writing team were asked to remove references to dogs, which the team wanted to resist. However, the editor spoke of the potential effects of retaining what could be perceived as unsuitable material:

GA 2: [. . .] the editor said, 'Yeah, I don't care about the teacher in the classroom, what I care about is the import inspector who has a list and he's going to count how many banned topics you have and if you had too many that book is not going in'.

As GA 2 explains, then, textbooks can even be banned from certain markets.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Although textbook content analyses tend to criticize textbook authors as being the responsible party for why materials are the way they are (e.g., Keles & Yazan, 2020), our data rather foreground the part played by global textbook publishers, who reduce the role of authors in decision-making. Therefore, textbooks in the global context are the way they are largely because of various constraints associated with their design, as listed in Table 3.

The pervasiveness of the constraints we have described leads us to argue that a principal reason for the shortcomings of textbooks identified in many previous studies (see Harwood, 2014a for an overview) concerns the conditions under which materials are produced rather than the failings of the authors and their inherent inability to write high-quality products; these conditions dictate the books' structure, content and design based on market or political sensitivities.

Publishers invest huge amounts of money, and hundreds of people work on a single project; publishers are, therefore, "very very market driven" (Gray, 2010:123). However, this market-driven approach appears to come at a price as far as the quality of materials is

TABLE 3
Constraints and Consequences Associated with the Global Textbook.

Constraints and consequences
Market-led approach: Textbooks are written with commercial rather than pedagogical concerns in mind and success is measured by the number of sales
Lack of time: Time allocated for a project reduced from six to 2 years, which decreases quality of content and makes trialing much harder
Publisher-led production model: Shift from author-led approach to publisher-led approach has resulted in detailed guidelines, editorial feedback and lists of taboos that stymie the creativity of authors and require exclusion of engaging content
Feedback quality: Most feedback from readers is said to be unhelpful, wasting time and effort. Ill-informed feedback from market representatives is prioritized as part of the overall rationale, requiring an overly cautious approach
Diversity of audience: The same textbooks are sold in very different markets ranging from Brazil and Japan to Saudi Arabia, requiring extreme caution as to textbook content

concerned. In addition to causing constraints such as lack of time and diversity of audience, authors were left insufficient time for trialing and user feedback, and questioned the suitability of some of the readers employed to offer what little feedback they were permitted. Within this highly controlled environment, authors write to a formula, but would prefer to have the freedom to write with fewer constraints, placing a greater reliance on teachers to protect learners from exposure to any culturally or ideologically inappropriate content.

This article describes the constraints associated with global textbook production, but a useful point of comparison would be to examine production constraints associated with the authoring of locally produced textbooks. We have seen how the production of textbooks for multiple, diverse markets means that textbook writers are highly constrained in their choice of topics and their manner of presentation, but perhaps in contrast, textbook writers producing materials for a much narrower range of local or regional markets benefit from more freedom. Because of space constraints, we chose to focus only on the global textbook context here, but we will explore local textbook production in a separate publication.

Harwood (2014a) categorizes textbook research into three kinds: studies of content, consumption, and production. Of the three, studies of textbook production are by far the least common, and future researchers could usefully extend production research into a number of areas. For instance, longitudinal ethnographic studies focusing on the entire cycle of the production process, from conceptualization to product launch, as per the suggestion by Harwood (2010), would be insightful. Future studies that not only analyze the materials from a production perspective, but also include content analysis and the perspectives of teachers and students towards the materials could help us understand the effects of textbook production processes on users. The roles of different industry insiders, such as visual designers, freelance and in-house editors, readers, market representatives, and the influence they wield over design decisions could also be usefully investigated, to enable us to more fully comprehend the dynamics of the industry and the production moment. One obvious limitation of the current article is that we were unable to include the perspectives of the editors our textbook writers worked with. Soliciting the views of such figures would enable us to gain a better sense of industry practices that can appear puzzling to outsiders: why, for instance, have TESOL textbook publishers scaled back piloting when there is evidence that mainstream science and mathematics textbooks may go through many stages of rigorous trialing, which can last for years (see Ziebarth et al., 2009)?

From a methodological point of view, different methods could be adopted to obtain a deeper understanding of the processes and dynamics included in textbook production. For instance, Atkinson (2021, 2022), following Johnson (2003), has used think-aloud to systematically analyze textbook writers' design behavior, and Hadfield (2014) has used the diary method to describe her own materials writing process. Follow-up studies of this nature that build upon and extend these research designs will enhance our understanding of the "why and how' of publishing at different levels: of decision-making processes, priorities, and reasons for compromises and conflict in textbook production.

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