

Evaluating Littlejohn's (2011) 3-Level Coursebook Analysis Framework

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Reference Data:

Pemberton, C. (2019). Evaluating Littlejohn's (2011) 3-level coursebook analysis framework. In P. Clements, A. Krause, & P. Bennett (Eds.), *Diversity and inclusion*. Tokyo: JALT.

In this study I evaluated Littlejohn's (2011) 3-level coursebook analysis framework. The goal of the framework is to provide an analysis that avoids implicit assumptions and impressionistic judgments. The three levels include a description of the contents, an analysis of tasks in one unit, and a description of the underlying principles of the materials. To evaluate the efficacy of the framework, I applied it to three longstanding EFL coursebooks. The results show that the framework successfully provides an impartial analysis, which is beneficial for teachers, program coordinators, and language school owners who must assess the suitability of new textbooks. The advantages and disadvantages of the framework are discussed and some suggestions are given to supplement or improve each level.

本研究では、Littlejohn (2011) の3段階教科書分析フレームワークについて評価する。フレームワークの目的は、暗黙の前提や印象に基づいた判断を回避した先入観のない分析を提供することである。3つのレベルには、内容の説明、ある章の課題の分析、およびテキストの基本原則の説明が含まれている。このフレームワークの有効性を評価するために、3つの長期に渡り使用されているEFLテキストに適用し考察した。結果、このフレームワークが先入観のない分析を提供することを示し、またそれは新しい教科書の適合性を評価する立場にいる教師、プログラムコーディネーター、および語学学校の運営者にとって有益であることが判明した。フレームワークの長所と短所について述べ、各レベルを補完または修正するための提案を示す。

Teaching materials have a considerable impact not only on what teachers teach but also on how they teach (Cunningsworth, 1995). Although there is no consensus on procedure, coursebook evaluation can help teachers recognize books that match their theoretical rationale and learn how to effectively use the books in classrooms (McDonough, Shaw, & Masuhara, 2013). Littlejohn (2011) proposed a 3-level framework

for the analysis of materials. In this paper I apply Littlejohn's framework to three EFL coursebooks to assess the efficacy of the framework and to make suggestions about how it may be improved.

Coursebook Evaluation

Many checklists and frameworks for the assessment of materials have been proposed (e.g., Breen & Candlin, 1987; Ellis, 1997; McDonough et al., 2013; Sheldon, 1988). There is some debate over whether bias can be avoided when appraising course materials. In the first version of his framework in 1998, Littlejohn criticized a number of evaluation checklists for relying too much on implicit assumptions and impressionistic judgments (as cited in McGrath, 2002). Responding to this criticism, McGrath asserted that the assessment process is inherently value laden but can be made more transparent through critical awareness. However, Littlejohn (2011) leveled further criticisms of the frameworks suggested by McGrath and others, emphasizing the importance of distinguishing between analysis and evaluation. According to Littlejohn, analysis is objective because it focuses only on the contents; evaluation is a subjective appraisal of the effectiveness of the materials when applied to a specific context. Making a similar distinction, Tomlinson (2003, 2012) further pointed out that even the selection of questions for analysis may have a hidden agenda. In order to overcome this issue of bias in coursebook evaluation, Littlejohn proposed a new framework that clearly separates objective analysis from subjective assessments.

Framework

Littlejohn's (2011) framework contains three levels that build on one another, from an objective description of the materials to a more subjective extrapolation. Level 1 is the *objective description* of what the materials contain. It includes the title and publication information, a description of what materials are provided, a description of

Pemberton: *Evaluating Littlejohn's (2011) 3-Level Coursebook Analysis Framework*

the subdivision of all units, and an overview of one unit of the student's book. Level 2 is the *subjective analysis*, where teachers can deduce what is required of learners for each *task*. Littlejohn defined tasks in the more traditional sense as "any proposal contained within the materials for action to be undertaken by the learners" (p. 188) and not as specified in task-based language teaching. The teacher can examine each task in one unit of the book by checking boxes in the following three prescribed categories: (a) what the learner is expected to do, (b) who with, and (c) what type of input and output are required. Level 3 is the *subjective inference* about the coursebook based on Levels 1 and 2. This level enables teachers to infer the aims, selection, and sequencing of content, subject matter, types of activities, participation expectations, roles of teachers and learners, and role of the material as a whole. The goal is to allow teachers to draw conclusions about the philosophy and underlying principles of the materials. The framework is summarized in Figure 1.

<p>Level 1: 'What is there'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> statements of description physical aspects of the materials main steps in the instructional sections 	'objective description'
<p>Level 2: 'What is required of users'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> subdivision into constituent tasks an analysis of tasks: What is the learner expected to do? Who with? With what content? 	'subjective analysis'
<p>Level 3: 'What is implied'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> deducing aims, principles of selection and sequence deducing teacher and learner roles deducing demands on learners' process competence 	'subjective inference'

Figure 1. Levels of analysis (Littlejohn, 2011, p. 185).

In order to test the efficacy of Littlejohn's framework, I applied it to three popular coursebooks used in Japan. Because Littlejohn suggested focusing on an extract from the materials, one unit from each coursebook was examined. The three books and units are:

- *Passport: English for International Communication Level 1* (2nd ed.), by Angela Buckingham and Lewis Lansford (Oxford University Press, 2012), Unit 3;
- *Active: Skills for Communication Intro*, by Chuck Sandy and Curtis Kelly (Heinle, Cengage Learning, 2011), Unit 5; and
- *Touchstone 1* (2nd ed.), by Michael McCarthy, Jeanne McCarten, and Helen Sandiford (Cambridge University Press, 2014), Unit 5.

Passport is intended for beginner-level Japanese learners who are adolescent or above and plan to travel abroad. *Active* is for beginner-level learners in any country who are adolescent or above. *Touchstone* is aimed at beginner-level adult and young adult learners in any country. These books were chosen because they are longstanding, established coursebooks in Japan with which many teachers may be familiar. Units were chosen because they all focus on the simple present tense and share thematic similarities regarding routines, habits, and traditions.

Discussion of Analysis

Following is a discussion of the results of Littlejohn's framework applied to all three coursebooks. See Appendix for the full analysis of *Passport*.

Level 1: Objective Analysis

Level 1 is an objective overview of the materials. It provides a sense of "how the various sections and means of access into the materials are distributed between teacher and learners" (Littlejohn, 2011, p. 186). It also outlines how materials are structured including the length, type, and number of activities as well as their subject matter.

Passport provides audio, audio scripts, and a syllabus overview to both teachers and learners. It provides answer keys, guidance on use of the material, methodology guidance, extra activities, and tests to teachers only, and it provides a wordlist to learners only. There is a suggested route through each unit to be followed by the teacher. *Passport* has 20 main units, each exploring a different travel situation, as well as four Destination activities that teach about a specific country. One unit is two pages long and includes an introduction, a listening activity, sentence drills, another listening activity, a scripted speaking activity, and a communicative exercise at the end.

The distribution of materials in *Active* for teachers and learners is nearly identical to *Passport*, but *Active* also provides some guidance to learners on the use of the material

Pemberton: *Evaluating Littlejohn's (2011) 3-Level Coursebook Analysis Framework*

so as to allow them to take an active role in learning. *Active* is divided into 12 main units with a variety of topics and a Challenge (an open-ended communicative activity such as creating a new holiday) at the end of each unit and four Projects after every three units. One unit is six pages and includes a listening activity to preview the Challenge, a writing (grammar-focused) activity, a speaking (vocabulary-focused) activity, a listening (conversation strategy-focused) activity, and lastly the Challenge. The route through each unit is predetermined with the goal of enabling students to complete the Challenge.

Touchstone provides audio, audio scripts, answer keys, guidance on use of the material, methodology guidance, extra activities, tests, a syllabus overview, and wordlists for teachers but provides only extra activities, a syllabus overview, and wordlists for learners. The teacher takes a suggested route through each unit. *Touchstone* has 12 main units about everyday life with a Checkpoint review section after every three units. One unit is 10 pages and is subdivided into Lessons A through D. Lesson A introduces grammar and vocabulary and also includes a pronunciation, discussion, or listening activity. Lesson B has similar elements to Lesson A and also has a Vocabulary Notebook for learners to keep track of new words. Lesson C teaches a conversation strategy, common expressions, and provides an optional Free Talk activity. Lesson D includes reading, writing, and additional listening and speaking activities.

This information can be used when evaluating the appropriacy of the book for a course. For example, *Touchstone* may be suitable for courses with a focus on speaking and listening skills with some need for reading and writing practice and an emphasis on both vocabulary and grammar. The examination of how materials are distributed between teacher and learners provides information about their roles, which will be summarized at Level 3. Because most EFL coursebooks tend to present units in a set pattern, the overview of the structure of one unit is effective as a representation of the materials overall. For coursebooks with a more varied style of sequencing, a larger sample may be required.

Level 2: Subjective Analysis

Level 2 is a subjective description of the tasks in one unit of the coursebook examining what teachers and learners actually have to do. Activities are broken down into separate tasks, and each task is examined individually. The requirements of all tasks can be totaled at the end to determine which types of tasks are most prevalent.

There were some difficulties in applying the Level 2 analysis. One issue is that some of Littlejohn's subcategories are insufficient to describe certain tasks. Fortunately, the

framework is flexible enough to allow teachers to add new subcategories where needed. For example, it was unclear whether some speaking activities that include a partial script to learners in *Active* fell into the *initiate* or *scripted response* subcategory. I therefore added a *scripted response plus initiate* subcategory. Also, *output from learners* for some tasks does not fit into the *graphic*, *written*, or *oral* subcategories. For example, the first listening activity in *Touchstone* requires learners to check the correct answer. To accommodate this, I included a subcategory of *circle/check/letter/number*. Another issue was that Littlejohn did not clearly state whether optional tasks in the teacher's book or checking students' answers count as tasks. I opted not to count optional tasks due to the already time-consuming nature of the analysis and to only count checking learners' answers if it serves a communicative purpose (e.g., sharing the results of a discussion).

The results of task analysis allow for direct comparison of the requirements of each coursebook. For *Passport* Unit 3, most tasks require a scripted response and are form-focused, and many require repetition. Learners work in pairs about half of the time. Input is largely aural, based on materials, and based on hypothetical examples. Output is mostly oral, based on materials, and based on students' own information.

In *Active* Unit 5, many tasks require initiating, and most focus on meaning and require learners to express their own ideas. Learners often work individually. Written input is always provided, the source is often the materials, and the content is often personal information. Output is mostly written and oral, comes from the learners, and is often based on personal information.

As for *Touchstone* Unit 5, many tasks require a scripted response. About half of tasks focus on meaning, and many require learners to express their own ideas. Learners usually work alone or in pairs. Input is mainly written, comes from the materials, and is based on personal information. Output is mainly oral, comes from the materials, and is based on personal information.

One strength of Level 2 analysis is that breaking each activity down into individual tasks compels teachers to think carefully about what the book requires of learners. This allows teachers to see what a book actually does rather than just what it claims to do. *Passport*, for example, which claims to develop communicative competence, was found to require mainly scripted responses with a focus on form. This analysis requires teachers to think carefully about which mental operations learners are performing and what type of input and output are expected. They can more objectively decide whether it matches with the aims of a given course. Overall, it provides an in-depth understanding of the material and helps avoid bias in the selection process.

Level 3: Subjective Inference

Level 3 is an inference-based analysis of the principles of the coursebook based on findings at the previous two levels. The aims are determined based on the Level 1 material description. The basis for selection and sequencing of content is based on the Level 2 task analysis. The roles of teachers and learners are determined based on distribution of materials at Level 1 and parts of Level 2, including whether learners give a scripted response or initiate and whether the input and output come from the materials, teachers, or learners. The teacher can also add their impression of the role of the materials as a whole such as whether the book is intended to guide all classwork or just support learner creativity.

Passport's aims are to increase knowledge of language needed when traveling abroad, develop communicative competence, and provide a model of international English. Tasks focus mainly on reproducing the language provided in imagined travel situations. Each unit follows the sequence: listening, drilling, practice with a partner, listening, drilling, practice with a partner, communicative activity. There is little focus on language meaning with more focus on memorizing set phrases. Most tasks require a scripted response. The book's role is to provide structure for the lesson and to teach travel language as well as give some communication opportunities.

Active's aims are to develop listening skills, increase spoken fluency, provide opportunities for meaningful communication, engage critical thinking, and increase confidence. Tasks allow learners to express their own ideas, apply language rules, and reproduce provided language. Units are sequenced as: Challenge Preview with listening and speaking, introduction and practice of grammar or vocabulary, a communication activity, introduction and practice of a communication strategy, and a large communicative Challenge. Tasks are based mainly on meaning or the meaning/form relationship. Learners mostly express their own ideas or give a scripted response. The book's role is to provide structure for the lesson, provide language and opportunities to use the language, and help increase learners' confidence and critical thinking.

Touchstone's aims are to develop listening and speaking skills, encourage learner autonomy, increase knowledge of the most commonly used language, and increase motivation. Tasks include reproducing provided language, expressing one's own ideas, and applying language rules. The sequence of a unit is: Lesson A: grammar, pronunciation, and speaking; Lesson B: vocabulary, grammar, vocabulary notebook, and speaking; Lesson C: conversation strategies, listening, speaking, free talk; Lesson D: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Tasks focus mainly on meaning with some focus on form and the meaning/form relationship. Learners mainly express their own

ideas, select information, apply language rules, or repeat information with expansion. There is a general focus on speaking and listening but slightly more explicit focus on reading and writing than in *Passport* and *Active*. The teacher is mainly the one directing activities; learners are expected to complete tasks, share ideas when prompted, accumulate knowledge, and also learn independently in some areas. The role of the book is to provide lesson structure and objectives, introduce the most common vocabulary and grammar, give opportunities for meaningful conversation, and help learners become more independent.

This analysis level has some advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is that it is easy to determine each aspect of Level 3 after Levels 1 and 2 have been completed because each element is extrapolated from specific parts of the previous levels. Level 3 also preserves the objective quality that is fundamental to the framework because it is based on factual information rather than impressionistic judgments of the material. One main issue is whether Level 3 actually determines the underlying principles of the materials as Littlejohn claims. Based on this analysis, I would argue that Level 3 acts mainly as a summary of the previous two levels. It synthesizes information about what the materials contain and the roles of the learner, teacher, and coursebook, which are important, but it does not describe the materials' underlying philosophy of language teaching. However, it may make it easier to conduct such an analysis for those who want to pursue it.

Discussion of Framework

This analysis provided an opportunity to examine the strengths and weaknesses of Littlejohn's framework. Level 1 analysis is a description of the materials whose biggest strength is that it is purely descriptive and highly objective. It provides necessary information about the content and sequencing of the coursebook, which can help teachers determine how it would fit with a given course. I would suggest supplementing Level 1 with an objective description of teaching points. These can generally be found at the beginning of most ESL coursebooks and can easily be listed alongside the description of the contents.

Level 2 is an analysis of each task, and the strengths of this are its ability to test the claims of textbook authors and determine exactly what is required with each task. Teachers, program coordinators, and language school owners will find this useful when selecting a new coursebook. It can help evaluators understand which tasks are easy and which are potentially difficult as well as determine if the coursebook matches the proficiency level of a group of students and the aims of a course. To supplement this level, I suggest also conducting a more comprehensive analysis of the overall

methodology and syllabus of the book. Methodology can be analyzed by examining which types of tasks are most prevalent in the task analysis. For example, books with tasks that mostly focus on meaning and require learners to express their own ideas would indicate a communicative language teaching approach rather than one rooted in principles of grammar-translation. The way teaching points are presented (e.g., inductively or deductively and in what order) may also be examined. The syllabus of the book can be analyzed by checking what types of teaching points (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) are included and whether one “strand” takes precedence over the others or they form an integrated whole.

Level 3 is an inference-based analysis of the materials. The first strength is it provides an overview of the aims of the book, sequencing and selection of content, roles of teachers and learners, and role of the materials as a whole. Another strength is that teachers can easily extrapolate information based on the previous two levels while avoiding impressionistic judgments. However, as I mentioned above, Level 3 has a primarily summative function rather than providing insight about the principles of the materials as intended. Therefore, I think some parts are redundant and could instead be altered to play a more evaluative role. The information already gained at Levels 1 and 2 could be compared to the personal needs of the teacher and teaching situation. For example, for a course that aims to develop spoken fluency, teachers could examine how often learners have a chance to initiate and focus on meaning over form at Level 2. According to this analysis, either *Active* or *Touchstone* would be more suitable than *Passport* for such a course because they are much more meaning-focused. This change would allow the framework to encapsulate the whole process from analysis to evaluation yet still distinguish them as separate procedures. The teacher would be able to take a final critical evaluative stance toward the material.

Overall, Littlejohn's framework is a principled and informative process with some shortcomings. The largest advantage over other existing frameworks is the clear delineation between analysis and evaluation. Analysis at each level allows materials to “speak for themselves” (Littlejohn, 2011, p. 182) before being evaluated. It enables teachers to see exactly what materials contain, what they ask of learners and teachers, and the role of the materials in the classroom. The precise nature of this process enables evaluators to make better choices on material selections. The main shortcoming is the time required to conduct the analysis, especially considering that the charts are not available online and need to be duplicated manually. Certain other relevant elements could be added. I suggest that the time required is worth it but also that some adjustments could be made to each level.

Conclusion

This paper has presented an evaluation of Littlejohn's 3-level framework by applying it to the coursebooks *Passport*, *Active*, and *Touchstone*. The framework starts with objective description at Level 1, builds into subjective analysis at Level 2, and ends with subjective inference at Level 3. Despite some disadvantages, this process allows a principled approach to coursebook analysis and stays true to its claim to avoid unexamined bias and assumptions. It provides a practical means of determining whether a coursebook meets the needs of a given course or group of students. I suggest that a description of teaching points could be added at Level 1 and an analysis of methodology and syllabus could be added at Level 2. Because Level 3 plays mostly a summative role, I suggest giving it a more evaluative role by assessing the coursebook's appropriacy to the teaching situation. The most limiting aspect of the framework is its time-consuming nature, which is always a practical concern for educators. Still, evaluators, such as teachers, program coordinators, language school owners, and even textbook writers may consider using this framework to help select coursebooks, better utilize coursebooks in classrooms, and design more effective lessons. The process of applying this framework has illustrated the continued challenge that evaluators face when trying to effectively and efficiently analyze and appraise coursebooks.

Bio Data

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Pemberton: *Evaluating Littlejohn's (2011) 3-Level Coursebook Analysis Framework*

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methodology guidance	[X]	[...]
extra practice	[X]	[X]
tests	[X]	[...]

b) Access

syllabus overview	[X]	[X]
wordlists	[...]	[X]

1.6 Route through the material

Specified	[X]	
User-determined	[...]	

1.7 Subdivision

- Four pages that introduce the characters and the countries they are from
- 20 units, each unit following the same standardized procedure:
 - Introduction: A colorful image sets the scene.
 - Listening: A true/false or check the answer listening section introduces the topic.
 - Look and Learn: A list of example sentences is shown.
 - Conversation: A second listening requires students to fill in the blanks.
 - Over to You: Other language that students can use to fill in the blanks in the Conversation section is provided.
 - Activity: Students apply the language they have learned in a communicative activity.
- Four Destination units featured after every 5 regular units, which teach about a specific country, each following the same standardized procedure:
 - Listening: Two listening sections introduce something about the country.
 - Things to See and Do: Images of famous places in the country are shown with a short dialogue that students are meant to emulate.
 - Facts and Figures: Students quiz each other about the country.
 - Mini Quiz: Students work together to complete a second quiz about the country.

Appendix

Analysis of Passport

Level 1: Objective Analysis of Passport

Title: *Passport: English for International Communication Level 1* (2nd edition)

Author: Angela Buckingham, Lewis Lansford

Publisher: Oxford University Press

Year: 2010

1. Course package as a whole

1.1 Type: General purpose class use

1.2 Intended audience: Japanese students

1.3 Extent:

- a) Components: student's book, audio CD, workbook, teacher's guide, teacher's resource disc
- b) Total estimated time: one school year

1.4 Design and layout: full color SB, two color TB, two color WB

1.5 Distribution:

a) <u>Material</u>	teacher	learners
audio	[X]	[X]
audio script	[X]	[X]
video	[...]	[...]
answer keys	[X]	[...]
guidance on use of the material	[X]	[...]

2. Overview of an extract from the student's book

2.1 Length: One unit (Unit 3) p. 12-13

2.2 Sequence of activity:

- Introduction: Look at the picture. Make a prediction about the scene.
- Listening: Listen and circle T or F.
- Look and Learn: Drill the sentences with books closed. Practice in pairs with books open. Practice in pairs with books closed.
- Conversation: Listen and fill in the blanks. Drill the sentences with books closed. Practice the conversation in pairs with books open.
- Over to You: Use the new language in this section to fill in the blanks of the previous section, and practice again with a partner.
- Activity: Draw a picture. Tell your partner about your picture. Ask questions about your partner's picture.

Level 2: Subjective Analysis of Passport Unit 3

Textbook section*	Unit 3												Freq.	%
	W	W	L	LL	LL	LL	C	C	C	O	A	A		
Task Number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		
1 What is the learner expected to do?														
1.1 Turn take														
Initiate	x	x									x	x	4	33.33
Scripted response			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			8	66.67
Scripted response plus initiate													0	0
Not required													0	0
1.2 Focus														
Language system (rules or form)				x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	8	66.67
Meaning	x	x	x								x		4	33.33

Meaning/system/form relationship																					0	0			
1.3 Mental operation																									
Repeat identically							x	x	x					x	x							5	41.67		
Repeat selectively														x						x			2	16.67	
Repeat with expansion																					x		1	8.33	
Retrieve from STM/working memory														x									1	8.33	
Formulate items into larger unit																					x		1	8.33	
Decode semantic meaning							x																1	8.33	
Select information															x								1	8.33	
Categorize selected information																							0	0	
Hypothesize	x	x																					2	16.67	
Formulate language rule																							0	0	
Apply stated language rule																						x	1	8.33	
Attend to example/explanation																						x	1	8.33	
Express own ideas/information	x	x																				x	x	4	33.33
2 Who with?																									
Teacher and learner(s), class observing																								1	8.33

2. Principles of selection
 - Types of tasks: reproductive language practice, speculation and hypothesizing, expressing own ideas
 - Content: topics relating to traveling abroad, learners' own knowledge/ideas
 - Language: situations, functions, grammar, vocabulary
3. Principles of sequencing
 - Tasks: Each unit follows the same sequencing of tasks: listening, drilling, practice with a partner, listening, drilling, practice with a partner, communicative activity.
 - Content: Topics of initial units relate to starting a travel experience, and topics of final units relate to reflecting back on a trip. Topics in between appear in no obvious order.
 - Language: No clear reasoning for the sequencing of language
4. Subject matter and focus of subject matter
 - General topics include: airplanes/the airport, self-introductions, travel information, restaurants, travel problems
 - Fictional dialogues of characters who are traveling abroad
 - No metalinguistic comments about form
 - Occasional distinction between British and American English
5. Types of teaching/learning activities
 - Activities mostly based on form with some focus on meaning/form relationship
 - Most tasks require a scripted response, with some opportunities to initiate using learners' own ideas.
 - Predominant operation required: repeat (identically, selectively, or with expansion)
 - L1 not used
 - More emphasis on speaking and listening than reading and writing
6. Participation: who does what with whom
 - Learners mostly work individually simultaneously or in pairs simultaneously.
7. Classroom roles of teachers and learners
 - The materials are meant to be followed in order while the teacher gives instructions as provided in the teacher's book.
 - Teachers (not learners) control the direction of activities.
8. Learner roles in learning
 - Complete tasks as directed by teacher and textbook
 - Share own ideas when prompted
 - Accumulate knowledge as presented in textbook
9. Role of the materials as a whole
 - To provide structure for lessons
 - To provide vocabulary, grammar, and functions needed for travel
 - To provide opportunities for learners to express their own ideas
- Teacher's role: to give instructions, model pronunciation, elicit ideas, monitor, and check answers
- Learners' role: to follow task directions and offer own ideas when prompted