

## MASS MEDIA AND LANGUAGE TEACHING MATERIALS\*

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### INTRODUCTION

Mass Media reach everyone daily. As members of a modern society we find ourselves touched by one of them every day: the open magazine in the doctor's office lying on a table with its glaring advertisement: a gold-plated quartz watch guaranteed to last a lifetime; the news blurbs on the radio interrupting a program to tell of a recent hijacking; the prime time soap opera unfolding its suspenseful chapters; the political posters filling a university bulletin board or lining the halls of buildings; sports reviews and announcements of coming events; and, more recently, video-clips by musical artists, perhaps even more than their recordings. Even the modern cartoons on Saturday television. Each form can carry a general or a particular message. To sell a product, to inform, to entertain, to capture the audience's attention, to convince, to recount or announce, to promote sales, to teach and entertain. How successful they are, however, is another question.

Whatever form they take or whatever message they carry, they touch us at home, work, in the car, in the metro, on a bus, in almost any location. We need only be a receptor or receiver of the information. We listen, read and examine. When we do react actively it is in conversation or discussion about the information carried over one of the forms of the mass media. Sometimes our reaction appears in a written form as a criticism, but our usual means of voicing an opinion is oral.

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\* Presented with Jorge Zavaleta at the MEXTESOL Convention

## MASS MEDIA AS A SUBJECT

The media offer an appeal for materials designers. The fact that conversation can revolve around a shocking news story, an unbelievable twist of events in a soap opera, a triumph in soccer, or an incredible offer found in an advertisement--and keep the subject active for some time--is one reason we selected this area as a subject for developing materials. The range of mass media from television to books to types of music allows the designer to select what he or she as a teacher wants to use or concentrate on. There is a limitless variety of materials to bring into the classroom even though some of them might need to be recorded or videoed.

Therefore, in the context of a communicative methodology based on student interest, a variety of elements might be anticipated when these materials are used. One of which is the students' desire to react to the content (mass media), express an opinion, talk about likes and dislikes, draw conclusions about these likes and dislikes, agree and disagree and give reasons to support a point of view. Admittedly in this article it is impossible to draw precise guidelines for the particular class and its profile. Our aim is rather to select some and exploit them. These are just examples, as we will see, and are not intended as a final form. Even so they are activities which were tried out as part of a pilot project with new materials\* and which received feedback from the students who worked with them and the teachers who came to a presentation about the materials at the MEXTESOL Convention in Puebla.

In this article, therefore, we intend to present an example of activities based on a media survey questionnaire and magazine advertisements. The language objectives in terms of functions will be discussed as well as the feedback which we received from the students about the two activities, their ideas for revision, and our general conclusions.

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\* Pilot Project for the materials currently being written for the General English Program for University Students, Centro de Enseñanza de Lenguas Extranjeras, UNAM

## MATERIALS: Questionnaire/Survey

Let us look at the questionnaire which was written in order to survey student tastes. The questionnaire as an instrument can be difficult to design; it needs to be applied and revised until it achieves successful results. This questionnaire was intended to be short and written in a form the students could easily handle. We intended for it to be brief, not taking more than 10 or 15 minutes to be filled out by the interviewer. Below is a section of it with the instructions: "Fill in the following survey. Interview one of your classmates." One of the objectives here is to obtain information (i.e., opinions) about mass media. Another is to have students asking for information and giving information; their opinions; talking about their likes and dislikes.

## 1. How often do you

Watch TV?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Read the newspaper?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Listen to the radio?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Read books?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Listen to records?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)

(1) = every day, (2) = once or twice a week, (3) = occasionally, (4) = never

2. What types of TV programs do you prefer? Indicate your feelings about each type of program. Use the scale below. Mark the number with a X. The scale is from 1 to 5. 1 represents "I like this kind of program very much." and 5 represents "I hate this kind of program".

Documentaries	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
News	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Sports	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Comedies	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Video-clips	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Serials	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Movies	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Soap operas	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Cartoons	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Crime/detective	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

Music	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Others (specify)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

3. What is your favorite TV program?  
Why do you like it?
4. What channel do you prefer on the radio?  
Why do you like it?
5. Who's your favorite film star, male or female?  
Why do you like him/her?
6. Do you consider yourself a music lover? (Check)  yes  no
7. What type of music do you like? Indicate your feelings about each type of music. Use the scale from 1 to 5 again. 1 indicates "I like this kind of music very much." and 5 indicates "I hate this kind of music." The other numbers on the scale indicate degrees.

Classical	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Blues	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Mexican folk	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Jazz	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Latin American	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Punk	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Hard rock	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Country	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Other (specify)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

8. Have you been to a concert recently?    yes    no  
If you answered "no" to question 8, go on to question 9. If you answered "yes", answer these questions.

What group/singer performed?  
When was this concert?

9. Do you object to sex in movies?     yes  no  
Have you ever seen a pornographic film?     yes  no  
Have you ever walked out of a movie because of explicit sex scenes?     yes  no

10. Do you object to violence on TV?  yes  no
11. Have you even complained to a network about a violent program?  yes  no

The questionnaires were filled out by the interviewers rather rapidly. The scales provided a form that could reveal the opinions of the class efficiently especially if a student had a pocket calculator. Percentages could then be assigned to each category (for example, the classical, jazz or blues category.) Or the extremes could be used. The teacher listed on the board the categories which were most often answered. For example, in one class the type of program hated the most (a number 5) were cartoons, soap operas, and sports.

From the feedback we discovered that several categories could be added to number 2, preference about TV programs. "Mini-series" and "Weekly series" as well as "Sitcom" (situation comedy) should be included. "Serials" and "Soap Operas" definitely needed to be changed to represent programs like Dallas and Falcon Crest which seemed to fit the soap opera category but which were viewed weekly. (However, as was pointed out by one of the teachers at the Convention, this lack of a clearly defined category prompted very real discussion and argument. The revision of the questionnaire for the next class using these materials would make it more representative, but also not allow for the discussion which it might prompt. Certainly, the functions of agreeing and disagreeing would be utilized. A decision would have to be made as to which would be more valuable in terms of the objectives; that of a revised questionnaire or the same one.)

Another change which was suggested occurred in number 7, the type of music item. In the Latin American category three sub-sections were defined --(1) folk, (2) pop, and (3) ballad--and should be added to the list. Romantic as another category was also an addition. It was asked where the Beatles would fit, for example, since they represent classical rock. Obviously the list has several categories which could be further refined.

#### MATERIALS: Advertisements

The second type of material we selected from our pilot

unit was advertisements from magazines. Attention was directed immediately to the appeal of each selected ad. First, the students were introduced to the types of appeal through an explanation orienting them to three appeals ads might have:

People who make products spend a lot of money trying to convince us to buy. Advertisements try to convince us in different ways. A simple classification of types of ads refers to the way the ad tried to attract us to the produce. Ads with "sex appeal" try to convince us that the product will make us feel loved. Ads with "snob appeal" try to tell us that we will feel richer, better, more "with it", if we buy the product. Ads with "intellectual appeal" try to convince us that the product is objectively good. They want us to think that the smart thing to do is to buy the product.

After they read this they were asked to examine 6 ads and try to classify them according to these categories. As the activity proceeded some students agreed and disagreed about which category to put each ad in. "It's not an example of snob appeal! It's kind of a mixture of snob and intellectual." (A snobby intellectual?) Or, "It's probably intellectual, but it would be a better example if medical research were cited." Again, we might mention as with the questionnaire that the language being used and the functions it was serving were those in the objectives, that is to say, agreeing and disagreeing in this case. The ads which were included were ones for Excedrin, Blair slacks, Volvo, Brown Jordan Chairs, Original Print Collectors Group, Inc., and Estee Lauder. Three of these ads are included in the appendices: Excedrin, Volvo, and Blair slacks. Further on in the activity, the students were directed to return to the ads and answer three questions:

- (1) Imagine you could buy one of these products. Which one would you buy?
- (2) Why would you buy that product? Check your reason.
  - I need one.
  - I want one.
  - The ad convinced me.
  - Other:

The Blair ad brought out cultural aspects about career, the age of the students, their preferences based on their image of handsome and well dressed. To some this image would hardly be "classic" they would not buy even if the price were right.

## CONCLUSIONS

From these two types of material it is possible to make a list of the appeals of the advertisements as well as the results of the discussion after working with the questionnaire. What can we say is the appeal of mass media? Sex, acquired sophistication or some form of snobbery, the uniqueness of the product (dependability, quality, reasonable price, ingenuity, etc.) or the ability to become a member of a group. The discussion with our intermediate students in the pilot class resulted in the selection of the topic: Violence in films and on TV (while with the teachers at the MEXTESOL Convention their discussion focussed on the difference between soap operas, mini-series, and series as a possible subject for group work.) One of the aims of the unit was to elicit discussion which could lead to this selection of a topic, one the group would like to pursue. It would be up to the group how they would handle their discussion and tailor their activities. We kept this activity rather open or flexible in order to determine the extent of their interest and the direction in which they wanted to go.

Finally, we summarized the value of the two materials we selected:

1. A variety of language functions will appear in a natural spontaneous way.
2. Revision of the material is optional. Without it it offers the possibility of making suggestions, agreeing and disagreeing, for example. With it the form improves.
3. Selection of topics for an extension activity depends on individual and group interest. Interest level, however, is high.
4. The way in which the topic will be handled (i.e., research topics, interviews, roundtable discussions, etc.) will be different with each group.

# BIG RELIEF FOR BIG HEADACHES



**IT'S BIG HEADACHE MEDICINE.**


Nothing you can buy is stronger.  
Nothing you can buy works harder.  
Nothing gives you bigger relief.

Use only as directed.  
© 1983 Brantel-Mercks Co.

## APPENDIX A and B:

**FREE TRIAL ORDER FORM**

**CLASSIC MEN'S SLACKS**  
ONLY \$9.97 1/2 EACH (when you buy two pairs)



**BLAIR**  
Men's Slacks

**TRY US ON FOR SIZE FREE!** • handsomely tailored, neatly finished to length • 100% Celanese Fortrel® polyester for ultimate comfort • Ban-Flo® no-curl waistband • dependable slash no-sag zipper • four man-sized pockets • machine wash and dry—always stay crease-perfect • 8 classic colors

**YES!** Please save me time and money. Rush my Classic Men's Slacks right to my door for a week's FREE TRIAL. After one week I'll send only \$19.95 for BOTH PAIRS, plus postage and handling, or return them at my expense and owe you nothing.

If I send payment with this order, Blair pays ALL postage and handling costs. My money instantly refunded if I'm not pleased.

**TO ORDER, CHECK COLORS AND FILL IN YOUR SIZE**

DESCRIPTION	QTY	PRICE
Slacks	2	\$19.95
<input type="checkbox"/> Navy <input type="checkbox"/> Lobster <input type="checkbox"/> Rust <input type="checkbox"/> Gray <input type="checkbox"/> Blue <input type="checkbox"/> Camel <input type="checkbox"/> Brown <input type="checkbox"/> Black		

**WHAT SIZE? Over-Waist measure** \_\_\_\_\_ in (20" inv. #1)  
 Shorts \_\_\_\_\_    Trousers \_\_\_\_\_    XL Long \_\_\_\_\_  
 (27-30)                      (30-34)                      (35-36)

Form Inv-AM, please check

TEL orders available in east sizes 32 thru 42 only. **8BP-A**

Mr.  Mrs.  Miss    Address \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. # \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone No. ( ) \_\_\_\_\_  
Client Order Subject to Approval

Mail your order form today to: **BLAIR, NPC MEN'SWEAR, WARREN, PA 15369**

(Other Good Only in Continental U.S.)



## APPENDIX C:

# "13 YEARS AGO I BOUGHT THIS VOLVO BECAUSE IT WAS ADVERTISED AS THE 11 YEAR CAR."

— William Stiles, Bronx, New York



13 years ago, William Stiles, an expert in American Indian history and artifacts, discovered the treasure you see here: a 1966 Volvo.

He bought it because ads of the time said Volvos were so durable they lasted an average of 11 years in Sweden.

As Mr. Stiles recalls: "One ad said that a Volvo was so tough, you could 'Drive it like you hate it.' I did exactly that. In my field work I've driven this car 295,000 hard miles, - much of it through former Indian territory. It's held up even better than promised. Driving it like I hated it made me love it."

Expressions of love are not uncommon among Volvo owners. In fact, 9 out of 10 people who have bought new Volvos are happy.

So if you're unhappy with your current car, do what Mr. Stiles once did after reading one of our ads. Buy one of our cars. **VOLVO** A car you can believe in.



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## References

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