

Materials Development and Research - Making the Connection

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Within applied linguistics the activities of those involved in developing instructional materials and those working in second language learning research and the more theoretical areas of applied linguistics are often seen to have little connection. Traditionally there has been relatively little cross over between those working in either domain, as seen in the very different issues written about in journals such as *TESOL Quarterly* as compared to journals such as *Applied Linguistics*. Practitioners in one domain seldom work in the other, (although people like myself, David Nunan, and Michael McCarthy might be considered exceptions). In this paper I want to explore some of the kinds of interaction that are possible between research/theory and materials design and illustrate such connections from my own experience as a materials' developer who is also interested in research and theory.

Effective instructional materials in language teaching are shaped by consideration of a number of factors, including teacher, learner, and contextual variables. Teacher factors include the teacher's language proficiency, training and experience, cultural background, and preferred teaching style. Learner factors include learners' learning style preferences, their language learning needs, interests, and motivations. Contextual factors include the school culture, classroom conditions, class size, and availability of teaching resources in situations where the materials will be used. In planning a new textbook or course book series the publisher will normally provide the writer with a profile of the target teachers, learners, and teaching context to enable the writer to tailor the materials to the target audience. In curriculum planning this phase is part of situational analysis. (See appendix 1 for an example of the sort of information that might be provided). Two other factors play a crucial role in determining what the materials will look like and how they will work. One is the theory of language and language use reflected in the materials, and the other is the theory of language learning on which the materials are based. These two sources of input provide the necessary links between theory and practice. But how does this actually work out in practice?

The theory of language and language use

In developing materials for any aspect of language learning, whether it be a skill-based course in listening, speaking, reading or writing or an integrated-skills basic series, the writer's understanding of language and language use will have a major impact on material's design, since it will play a role in determining the goals the writer sets for the materials, the focus of the materials themselves and the activities within them. I will refer to this level of conceptualization as the writer's theory of language and language use. In planning materials for the teaching of writing for example, the materials developer could start from any of a number of views of the nature of writing or of texts. He or she could start from a view of written language that focuses on *writing-modes*, i.e. the organizational modes underlying paragraphs and essays, such as definition, comparison-contrast, classification, or cause-effect. Alternatively the materials' developer might start from a genre or text-based view of written language in which texts such as news reports, business letters, or academic articles are seen to reflect their use in particular contexts. Or the writer could begin from a process perspective in which written texts are seen to reflect the cognitive and composing processes that go into their creation, such as prewriting, planning, drafting, composing, reviewing, revising, and editing. If on the other hand one were preparing a listening course the materials developer would need to clarify his or her understanding of the nature of listening. Is it viewed largely as a process of decoding input? Is it viewed in terms of the mastery of discrete listening skills and sub-skills? Or it is seen as a blend of top-down and bottom-up processing? For a speaking course likewise a starting point is selecting an appropriate theory or model of the nature of oral interaction. Will it be based on a model of communicative competence and seek to address grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence? Or is oral communication viewed more in terms of speech act theory focusing on utterances as functional units in communication and dependent upon the performance of speech acts?

While the preparation of instructional materials might appear to be an essentially practical activity, materials will inevitably reflect a theory of the nature of language, communication, or language use. And as my former colleague Ted Plaister used to remind me, "There's nothing so practical as a good theory"! Typically the writer will

be encouraged to adopt the theoretical flavor of the month, so to speak, whether that be genre theory, an interactionist view of second language learning, a systemic approach to grammar, an interactive model of reading, a task-based orientation to instruction, or whatever, in order that in the publisher's promotional literature the materials can claim to be "based on current theory and research".

The theory of language learning

In addition to selecting a theory of language and language use to support the approach the writer will take to his or her task, the writer will also need to consider the complementary question of the theory of language learning underlying the materials, since this will determine how the syllabus is implemented in the form of exercises, tasks, activities and learning experiences. Particular language models are often linked to particular views of learning. For example a text-based approach to the teaching of writing is often linked to a Vygotskian view of learning based on the notion of scaffolding. The teacher and the learners are viewed as engaged in collaborative problem-solving activity with the teacher providing demonstrations, support, guidance and input and gradually withdrawing these as the learner becomes increasingly independent. Models of good writing are shamelessly employed and writing (or more correctly, text construction) is taught through a process of deconstruction, modeling, and joint elaboration and reconstruction as students create their own texts. The theory of learning underlying approaches to the teaching of conversation might be based on a somewhat different view of learning. It could reflect an interactionist view of language acquisition based on the hypothesis that language acquisition requires or greatly benefits from interaction, communication, and especially negotiation of meaning, which happens when interlocutors attempt to overcome problems in conveying their meaning, resulting in both additional input and useful feedback on the learners' own production.

Second language learning theory has been a ripe field for speculation in the last 20 or so years, and consequently the writer has a rich source of theories to draw from in deciding on a learning model to adopt. The changing state of theory and

understanding in relation to language and language use is responsible for paradigm shifts in language teaching and for the ongoing need to review what our assumptions are and sometimes to rethink how we go about developing materials. Let me give an example from materials development for second language listening, an area in which I have written several classroom texts and in which I am currently engaged.

The traditional approach to the teaching of listening sees *listening comprehension* as the focus of listening materials. The assumptions underlying this approach are:

- Listening serves the goal of extracting meaning from messages.
- In order to do this learners have to be taught how to use both bottom up and top down processes to arrive at an understanding of messages
- The language of utterances, i.e. the precise words, syntax, and expressions used by speakers, represents temporary carriers of meaning. Once meaning has been identified there is no further need to attend to the form of messages.

In classroom materials a variety of techniques have been employed to practice listening as comprehension. These include:

- Predicting the meaning of messages
- Identifying key words and ignoring others while listening
- Using background knowledge to facilitate selective listening

These assumptions and practices have served me well in developing successful listening texts. But as a result of changing theoretical perspectives on the nature of listening in language learning I have recently been exploring the implications of a different but complementary view of listening, one that looks at the role of listening in facilitating language acquisition. Schmidt (1990) and others have drawn attention to the role of consciousness in language learning, and in particular to the role of *noticing* in learning. His argument is that we won't learn anything from input we hear and understand unless we notice something about the input. Consciousness of features of the input can serve as a trigger which activates the first stage in the process of incorporating new linguistic features into ones language competence. Schmidt distinguishes between input (what the learner hears) and intake (that part of the input that the learner notices). In order for listening to lead to *language acquisition* and not simply to *comprehension*, it is argued that learners need to both *notice* features of the input as well as have opportunities to try to incorporate new language items in their linguistic repertoire. This involves processes variously referred to as restructuring, complexification, and producing stretched output.

This view of the role of listening has important implications for teaching listening and for materials development. We can distinguish between situations where comprehension only is an appropriate instructional goal in teaching listening and those where comprehension plus acquisition is the focus. Examples of the former would be situations where listening in order to extract information is the primary focus of listening, such as listening to lectures, listening to announcements, listening to sales presentations and service encounters such as checking into a hotel. In other cases, however, a listening course may be part of a general English course or linked to a speaking course, and in these situations both listening as comprehension and listening as acquisition should be the focus. Listening texts and materials can then be exploited first as the basis for comprehension, and second as the basis for acquisition. This suggests to me a two-part cycle of activities in listening lessons and materials: a comprehension phase and an acquisition phase. The comprehension phase would focus on extracting meaning as described above. The acquisition phase would include noticing activities and restructuring activities. Noticing activities involve returning to a listening text that has served as the basis for comprehension and using them as the basis for language awareness. For example students could listen to a recording again in order to:

- Identify differences between what they hear and a printed version of the text
- Complete a cloze version of the text
- Complete sentence stems taken from the text
- Check off from a list, expressions that occurred in the text.

Restructuring activities are oral or written tasks that involve productive use of selected items from the listening text. Such activities could include:

- In the case of conversational texts, pair reading of the tape scripts
- Written sentence-completion tasks requiring use of expressions and other linguistic items that occurred in the text
- Dialog practice based on dialogs that incorporate items from the text
- Role-plays in which students are required to use key language from the text

Anyone who sets out to write instructional materials for language teaching will start out with either some implicit or better still, explicit understanding of the issues discussed above, namely the theory of language and of language learning the materials will be based on. Here the writer's familiarity with current trends and theory in language teaching, applied linguistics, second language learning or whatever, will be helpful. But in order to make use of this knowledge, a) it has to be operationalized in the form of *a syllabus* and b) a set of *instructional principles* has to be extrapolated which will inform the pedagogical strategies used in the materials.

Developing a syllabus for the materials

One of the first applications of the theory of language the instructional designer has selected is the deciding on the type of syllabus the materials will be based on. Thus to continue with some of the examples already cited, a writing course might be built around a functional syllabus, a text-based syllabus or a process syllabus. A listening course might be built around a skills syllabus, a text-based syllabus, or a topical syllabus. And a conversation course might be built around a functional, a task, or a skills syllabus. The different syllabus types may also be combined in different ways. Syllabus design is an activity that can draw on a considerable body of relevant research. Since the field of *language description* (e.g. as seen in register analysis, discourse analysis, corpus studies) is well established there is a substantial research base a materials' developer can consult in order to make decisions about the linguistic content of instructional materials etc. In the case of reading materials there are a large number of corpus studies that can provide relevant information. In developing the series – *Strategic Reading* for example(a three-level reading series) - one issue was the vocabulary level of the reading texts. Here, particularly for the advanced level in the series, my co-author and I were able to consult not only standard word lists but also research on the most frequently occurring words in academic reading (see Coxhead 2000). Likewise the syllabuses I have developed for my listening comprehension texts have been based to a large extent on my own and others research on listening skills and the sub-skills that are assumed to contribute to fluent listening. In a listening-skills project I am currently working on one of the first tasks my co-author and I did at the planning stage was to develop an updated taxonomy of listening skills, which we are referring to as we develop the scope and sequence plan for the materials as well as the activity types (See Appendix 2). In the area of conversation texts, in my first classroom texts in the area of oral skills I drew on sources such as Threshold Level (Van Ek and Alexander, 1980) to identify a syllabus of basic functions. Whether Threshold Level can be regarded as research based, of course, is a matter of opinion. In *Person to Person* (Richards and Bycina 1984), for example, the functional syllabus underlying the syllabus is based largely on Threshold Level, supplemented by other sources on essential functions and speech acts. In another series, *Springboard*, (Richards 1999), a topical syllabus is used, the topics being derived from research on students' interests and preferences.

The grammatical syllabi found in my course books (such as *Interchange* and *Passages*) likewise used the Cobuild corpus-based grammar as a source for items to include in the syllabus, though other factors also played a role in determining the syllabus. These were the kinds of factors referred to earlier: *contextual factors* (the kinds of grammatical items specified in national syllabuses in countries where the courses were to be marketed), as well as *teacher factors* (information from teachers and consultants on grammatical items they would expect to see included at different levels).

Today corpus research is providing invaluable information that can serve as a source for items in course syllabi, although corpus data based on native speaker usage is not necessarily the only relevant source in many cases. Why is this the case? Perhaps an example from the field of lexicography will serve to clarify here. If you look at one of the many learner dictionaries on the market, such as the Longman, Oxford, or Cambridge learner dictionaries, you will see that the definitions in these dictionaries are not based on native-speaker usage. The definitions are written within a specially determined defining vocabulary, a 2000 word corpus of words that have been selected according to what Michael West called "definition power". Take a word such as "container". Although this might not be a high frequency word, it is a word that can be used to define many other words. A *vase* is a *container* for holding flowers; a *bucket* is a *container* for carrying water, and so on. The definition vocabularies used in learner dictionaries have been developed pragmatically by lexicographers who have tried to find the minimum number of words with the maximum capacity for definition. The syllabus underlying a basic series (such as *Interchange*) can likewise be constructed according to similar principles.

This principle was well stated by Jeffery, who in the preface to West's General Service List (1953 v) stated:

To find the minimum number of words that could operate together in constructions capable of entering into the greatest variety of contexts has therefore been the chief aim of those trying to simplify English for the learner.

A similar principle has recently been proposed by Jennifer Jenkins in her book *The Phonology of English as an International Language*, in which she argues that in teaching English in Europe, the traditional native-speaker based RP-referenced phonological syllabus is not necessarily a suitable target for foreign language instruction. She proposes a simplified phonological syllabus as a basis for EFL instruction.

Identifying instructional principles to support the materials

The relevance of research and applied linguistics theory to syllabus design is fairly easy to establish, however its relevance to the notion of *instructional principles* is less straightforward. Before the writer can make decisions on the kinds of exercises, tasks and activities to be employed in materials, an overall instructional framework has to be agreed on. What is the rationale for the kinds of activities employed and their sequencing within the materials? What does research have to offer here? A naïve view of the role of research would be to assume that researchers agree on what the implications of research are for the language teaching and that one can lift from research, validated exercise types for use in teaching materials. This view has sometimes been supported by researchers, themselves. If you read some of the literature on task-based instruction for example, you get the impression that the role of teachers' and materials' developers' is to apply the findings of SLA research (e.g. Beglar and Hunt 2004). Indeed there is a fairly long tradition in our field of researchers or theoreticians offering prescriptions to teachers and materials writers on what to teach and how to teach it. After all, now discredited methodologies such as audiolingualism or the cognitive code approach in their day had widespread support from researchers and theoreticians at that time.

Today however researchers are much more cautious about the kinds of advice they give. The most one can extrapolate from research are sets of principles that can be used to support particular pedagogical approaches. Kanda and Beglar (2004, 107) for example observe:

Because second language acquisition pedagogy cannot yet be based on a well-accepted, detailed theory, and many current proposals for task-based instruction are still in an early stage of development, we believe that one fruitful alternative is for researchers and teachers to utilize instructional principles to guide their work.

This has always been my own approach in materials development. The first task I have to solve in planning a set of materials is to identify an acceptable set of principles to support the instructional design process. In some cases these principles can be derived from the methodology of the day. The overarching principles of communicative language teaching as it was elaborated in the 1980s for example can be summarized as follows.

- make real communication the focus of language learning
- provide opportunities for learners to experiment and try out what they know
- be tolerant of learners' errors as they indicate that the learner is building up his or her communicative competence
- provide opportunities for learners to develop both accuracy, and fluency
- link the different skills such as speaking, reading and listening, together, since they usually occur together in the real world
- let students induce or discover grammar rules

These are the principles underlying many of the mainstream communicative course books that were published in the 1980s and 1990s, including my own. The difficulty with principles, however, is that they mean different things to different people. That great philosopher Groucho Marx summed up this existential dilemma in the following words:

“Of course I have principles. And if you don't like these ones, I have others.”

Current interpretation of the underlying principles of contemporary versions of communicative language teaching might lead to the following specifications of underlying principles:

1. Second language learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in interaction and meaningful communication
2. Effective classroom learning tasks and exercises provide opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, expand their language resources, notice how language is used, and take part in meaningful intrapersonal exchange
3. Meaningful communication results from students processing content that is relevant, purposeful, interesting and engaging
4. Communication is a holistic process that often calls upon the use of several language skills or modalities
5. Language learning is facilitated both by activities that involve inductive or discovery learning of underlying rules of language use and organization, as well as by those involving language analysis and reflection
6. Language learning is a gradual process that involves creative use of language and trial and error. Although errors are a normal product of learning the ultimate goal of learning is to be able to use the new language both accurately and fluently
7. Learners develop their own routes to language learning, progress at different rates, and have different needs and motivations for language learning

8. Successful language learning involves the use of effective learning and communication strategies
9. The role of the teacher in the language classroom is that of a facilitator, who creates a classroom climate conducive to language learning and provides opportunities for students to use and practice the language and to reflect on language use and language learning
10. The classroom is a community where learners learn through collaboration and sharing

The challenge for materials writers is to turn these principles into lesson plans and teaching materials. In a recent secondary school series I co-authored, *Connect*, (Richards 2004), we spell out the principles underlying the course in the teacher's book. These are stated in the following way:

Course principles

Connect is based on the notion that generating and maintaining motivation is essential for successful learning. This is incorporated in the series in the following ways:

Motivational strategies	Features
1. Generate and maintain interest	<i>Connect</i> units are built around current, contemporary topics <i>Connect</i> students can relate all task to their own interests and experiences
2. Promote success	<i>Connect</i> students are provided with adequate preparation and support for tasks throughout the learning process <i>Connect</i> tests assess only language that students know and do not assume that students know more
3. Promote fun in learning	<i>Connect</i> tasks are varied <i>Connect</i> games and game-like activities make learning fun
4. Provide opportunities for students to speak about themselves	<i>Connect</i> personalization tasks offer opportunities for students to use target language to speak about themselves.

At the same time it must be recognized that any set of working principles so derived must be compatible with the local context. Principles derived entirely from research and theory might not always fit well with the school teaching and learning culture. Here situation analysis (see Richards 2001) is needed to identify constraining factors that might hinder the application of theory-driven principles. Both top down and bottom source of information are needed, or in publishing terms what can be called product-driven as well as market-driven factors.

A useful exercise for teachers doing courses on materials' development involves examining classroom texts and teacher's manuals to try to identify assumptions about language and language learning underlying materials and how these lead to particular decisions about syllabuses and exercise types in classroom materials.

The myth of authenticity

One issue in materials design that has aroused substantial debate over time is the role of authentic materials. Some have argued that classroom materials should as far as possible mirror the real world and use real world or “authentic sources” as the basis for classroom learning. Clarke and Silbertstein (1977:51) thus argued:

Classroom activities should parallel the ‘real world’ as closely as possible. Since language is a tool of communication, methods and materials should concentrate on the message and not the medium. The purposes of reading should be the same in class as they are in real life.

But is this always the case? In the real world, people have already learned to read and may read for a variety of purposes – to get information, to relax, be entertained, aroused, or whatever. In a second language learning context students may be reading in order to develop their reading and language skills, as well as for more general purposes. The two situations are not really compatible except in the case of advanced readers. An extreme example of the authenticity fallacy is cited by Allwright (1981, 173), who described a language course at a British university in which one of the guiding principles was “Use no materials, published or unpublished, actually conceived or designed as materials for language teaching”. One wonders if a similar principle could apply to music education. Learning the piano would no longer require learners to practice scales and other finger exercises and to begin playing using specially written pieces for beginners. Perhaps instead they would plunge straight into Bach or Beethoven!

In many cases I would argue, the use of authentic materials (or more accurately, authentic source materials, since some degree of selection and arrangement of such materials is always required) in designing teaching materials is not always either necessary, or realistic. In some cases (e.g. designing reading materials), authentic source texts are relatively easy to locate and likely to have more interesting content than specially written author-generated texts. (This is the case with the series *Strategic Reading*, where all texts are taken from authentic sources). Generally such texts still require modification to remove low frequency lexical items and obscure syntax or idioms and to accommodate the length of the text to the requirements of a lesson or page format. It is very difficult however to find authentic texts appropriate for use in material for beginner or low proficiency college age readers. Authentic texts at an appropriate level of difficulty would typically be found in magazines or on the internet but intended for very young learners, hence the content would not

generally appropriate for older learners. In addition since in the real world readers are assumed to have a reasonably high level of reading ability and a fairly substantial recognition vocabulary, authentic texts even for college age learners will generally be too complex for use in materials without substantial adaptation.

In the case of speaking materials, other issues arise. For example in providing oral texts that can serve to present new language, model speaking tasks, or provide content to initiate discussion, texts have to meet several design criteria. There may be constraints in terms of sentence length, exchange length, grammar etc that are essential to the design of a task chain within a unit. Chunks of authentic discourse, however obtained, would not meet these criteria, and as anyone who has examined samples of authentic conversational discourse can attest, such data has virtually no value pedagogically. Brown and Yule (1983,11) point out that in the real world, informal conversation often serves the purpose of maintaining social relationships and that the primary purpose of "chat" is not to convey information but to nice to the person one is speaking too. Typically in such discourse the speakers: ...

... will tend to conduct a type of talk where one person offers a topic for comment by the other person, responds to the other person in his [sic] topic is successful, and, if it is not, proffers another topic of conversation. Such primarily interactional chats are frequently characterized by constantly shifting topics and a great deal of agreement on them.

Brown and Yule 1983, 11

Brown and Yule (p. 12) give the following example of typical authentic chat, an extract in which some people are discussing a couple who used to visit the area each summer.

A: you know but erm + they used to go out in erm August +they used to come +you know the lovely sunsets you get +at that time and

B: oh yes

C: there's a nice new postcard a nice _ well I don't know how new it is + it's been a while since I've been here + of a sunset + a new one +

A: oh, that's a lovely one isn't it

D: yes yes it was in one of the + calendars

A: yes that was last year's calendar it was on

D: was it last year's it was on + it was John Forgan who took that one

A: yes, it's really lovely + this year's erm + the Anderson's house at Lenimore's in it + at

em Thunderguy I should say +

D: they've sold their house

A: yes + the Andersons

B: oh have they

A: yes yes + erm + they weren't down last year at all

Brown and Yule point out that in authentic exchanges of this kind there is a large amount of unclarity and non-specificity and the listeners seem to skim the message for gist rather than detail. The discourse has an immediate function in terms of the speakers present at the time – it functions as interactional bonding - but little relevance to anyone else.

Such discourse does of course differ substantially from textbook language since it serves a very different function from a dialog in a textbook. This is not necessarily a justification for textbook dialogs such as the following from Saslow, n.d):

A: When did you learn **to sing**?

B: Well, I started **singing** when I was ten years old, and I've been singing every day since then.

A: I wish I could **sing** like you. I've never sung well.

B: Don't worry. If you start **singing** today, you'll be able **to sing** in no time.

A: Thank you. But isn't **singing** very hard?

B: I don't think so. After you learn **to sing**, you'll be a great singer,

This textbook dialog represents one extreme. In attempting to illustrate the use of the gerund and the infinitive it presents a parody of an authentic conversational exchange, modeling a conversation that no-one would have in real life thus wasting an opportunity to prepare students for real English. Sadlow contrasts the dialog above with the following, which provides "an opportunity to contextualize the same grammar point while preparing the EFL students to understand real English as well as to prepare them to use real English naturally when the time comes".

A: I've got an extra ticket for the game on Friday. Do you know anyone who might like **to go**?

B: Not offhand. But I'll ask around.

A: Thanks.

B: Hey, come to think of it, I'm free. I'd love **to go**?

A: Great. Do you mind **driving**?

B: Not at all. Pick you up at seven?

The difficulties (and ultimately, futility) in attempting to use authentic spoken discourse as the basis for teaching materials are illustrated in the series *Listening and Speaking Out* (James, Whitley, and Bode 1980), a listening/speaking course from the 1980s. The authors started out with the laudable goal of using authentic discourse as the basis for the listenings. They obtained the listenings by having a group of teachers chat and discuss topics in a recording studio. The teachers knew each other well and so generated examples of reasonably authentic interactional chat. But as with Brown and Yule's data, the texts that resulted from these

interactions have little classroom value. The “information” that arose from the discussions has no relevance or interest to those who were not present, the recordings are punctuated with irritating giggles and laughter (a natural feature of interactional chat among friends), and the materials quickly become boring and unusable.

Textbook dialogs in conversational materials are not there to serve as models of authentic oral interaction but are pedagogical artifacts. Often, a requirement of such dialogs is that they serve to generate student interaction, through simple adaptation or personalization. Sadlow points out that a dialog such as the following, fails on these counts since the content of the dialog is so particular that “it would be difficult for students to do anything except memorize it”.

A: Did you know that next week is Thanksgiving?

B: really? What’s Thanksgiving?

A: Well, Thanksgiving commemorates the harvest of the early settlers. It was celebrated with Native Americans. Would you like to come to a Thanksgiving dinner?

B: I’d love to. What do people eat at Thanksgiving?

A: Turkey, cranberry sauce, and pumpkin pie.

B: That sounds interesting.

Sadlow comments that if students wanted to use the dialog above as the basis for practice they would have to personalize it some way:

“(for instance, to change Thanksgiving to another holiday), they would have to learn a lot of additional language to do it. They would need to research another holiday and learn the language they would need to tell someone about it. But most importantly, since not all holidays have specific foods associated with them, the dialog can’t serve as a model to be applied to other holidays.

On the other hand a dialog such as the following has much more value pedagogically, since it can easily be personalized and adapted.

A: How’s that new Indian restaurant?

B: So-so. The food’s OK, but the service is lousy. If you like Indian food, why don’t you try Delhi Gardens? It’s a lot better.

A: That’s next to the movie theater, isn’t it?

B: Yes, you can’t miss it.

The important point about textbook dialogs is not that they model “authentic” conversational interaction but rather that they provide a springboard for follow-up activities. This does not mean that they need be contrived or unnatural. Here is where the art and craft of the writer comes into play.

Does this mean that the vast body of research generated by practitioners in the field of discourse analysis and conversational analysis is not relevant to those developing language teaching materials? Sadly, much of it is not, or at least not in preparing materials for EFL contexts. However if materials are being prepared for a very specific situation and involve learners interacting intensively with native speakers in very specific situations, (e.g. doctor-patient interviews), data on the nature of such interactions in the real world is obviously relevant and usable. For most EFL learners, however, interaction is with their teachers and with other students in the classroom and what is important is that they acquire the tools needed to make such interaction possible – i.e. a repertoire of essential vocabulary, grammar, functions, and communication strategies.

Hence when an earnest young graduate student writes to me and objects that the conversational texts in a series such as *Interchange* have different features from those found in the student's MA research on some aspect of conversational discourse found among café workers in coffee shops in Boise, Idaho, my answer is, of course they do! They are designed to serve a very different function.

Similar issues arise with the development of listening materials. While in the real world we are surrounded by authentic examples of listening texts such as overheard conversations, announcements, radio broadcast etc, these are usually largely unusable for a variety of reasons. These include a) logistical problems involved in recording genuine interactions; b) copyright and ethical issues that arise when one wants to use data obtained from such sources. In addition, few texts so obtained can be used in materials design anyway without substantial modification. The alternative is to use simulated texts as a source for listening activities. In a series such as *Passages* (Richards and Sandy, 1998), for example, the listening texts were based on recordings of people improvising from cue cards, or in the case of interviews, recorded interviews with people. Scripts were then adapted from these sources, adjusted for length, difficulty, interest level, redundancy etc, and then recorded by professional actors.

Others (e.g. Widdowson 1987) have argued that it is not important for classroom materials to be derived from authentic texts and sources as long as the learning processes they activate are authentic. In other words, authenticity of process is

more important than authenticity of product. However since the advent of communicative language teaching, textbooks and other teaching materials have taken on a much more “authentic” look: reading passages are designed to look like magazine articles (if they are not in fact adapted from magazine articles) and textbooks are designed to similar standard of production as real world sources such as popular magazines.

The myth of native speaker usage

An assumption that is often made in language teaching is that the goal of language learning is to acquire a native-like mastery of the language, even if this is not a practical reality for most learners. Learner language is evaluated in terms of how closely it approximates native speaker norms, and native speaker usage as evidenced in corpus studies of native speaker discourse is used as a source for syllabus items. However it needs to be recognized that for many learners native-speaker usage is not necessarily the target for learning and is not necessarily relevant as the source for learning items. The concept of English as an international language recognizes the fact that localized norms for language use are becoming increasingly recognized as legitimate targets for language learning, and that foreign language varieties of English such as *Mexican English* or *Japanese English* marked both by phonological features from the mother tongue as well as characteristic patterns of lexical and syntactic choice are perfectly acceptable targets for many learners. As I observed above, Jenkins proposes a non-native phonological syllabus as a target for EFL learners in Europe.

In determining learning varieties for classroom use it is worth considering again the implications of the quote cited earlier from Jeffrey, in which the goal of syllabus design is “to find the minimum number of words that could operate together in constructions capable of entering into the greatest variety of contexts”. If this principle still holds true, and I would argue strongly that it does, then what is important in writing materials for EFL learners is not necessarily native speaker usage, but rather, what will provide the means of successful communication both within and outside the classroom. This means providing learners with a repertoire of well selected vocabulary, sentence patterns and grammar, as well as a stock of communication strategies. This is the rationale for the syllabus in the secondary series *Connect* (Richards and Barbesan, 2004), an EFL secondary school series for

contexts where a) input consists of as little as three hours of instruction per week b) there is no opportunity for using English outside of the classroom. I contrast this with an example I found in the literature recently of a course designed for basic level Korean. In order to teach the language of asking for directions, the writing team first collected samples of native speaker usage (English, rather than Korean,) to find out how native speakers give directions. They then used this information to develop a module of giving directions. The results looked remarkably similar to how direction-giving is typically presented in EFL textbooks. However my point is that how native-speakers ask for and give directions is largely irrelevant. What is more important is providing learners with sufficient vocabulary, grammar, and communication strategies to enable them to make themselves understood when they ask for directions. Similarly in the case of low-level EFL learners my goal is to give them the resources to have successful experiences using English for simple classroom activities. Whether or not they employ native-speaker-like language to do so is irrelevant.

Conclusion

I have argued here that the primary relevance of language and language learning research to materials development is through its application to syllabus design issues and as a source for instructional principles that can inform the design of instructional materials. The route from research to application however is by no means direct, since language teaching materials are also shaped by many other factors and constraints and the success of teaching materials is not dependent upon the extent to which they are informed by research. It is not difficult to find examples of widely used teaching materials that succeed despite their archaic methodology because they suit the contexts in which they are used. Perhaps teachers and student like them because they are easy to use, they match the exam requirements, or they reflect teachers and learners' intuitions about language learning. On the other hand research-based teaching materials have sometimes been spectacular failures in the marketplace because they failed to consider the role of situational constraints. Hopefully however, publishers and materials writers generally seek to produce materials that are educationally sound and which also appeal to teachers and learners. Educational publication is after all, a business, and the challenge for materials writers is to meet educational objectives and standards while at the same time meeting market requirements.

APPENDIX 1

Example of a project specification profile of a conversation series.

Market:	50% Universities 30% Private language schools and vocational colleges 20% Junior colleges
Levels:	2
Extent:	96 pp.
Colors:	4
Trim:	8.5 X 11
Starting point:	false beginner
Ending point:	intermediate
Components:	text CDs Audiocassettes Placement and achievement tests; unit quizzes; Video (tentative)

Distinguishing learner-centered syllabus based on student questionnaires;

features:	student questionnaires within the text; student-centered Activities with extensive cognitive skill development; Conversation management strategies
Other features:	task-based; extensive graphic organizers; easy to use
Art:	mix of illustrations and photos; sophisticated look for universities
Balance of Skills:	75% speaking; 25% listening
Syllabus:	topical
Length of units:	4 pp.; two 2-pp lessons
Activities per page:	2
Listenings per unit:	2
Number of units:	20
Time per lesson:	50 minutes
Teacher profile:	80% foreign with varied levels of training
Piloting:	Yes

APPENDIX 2

Skills Taxonomy For Developing Listening Comprehension Materials

- Predict
- Recognize different purposes of texts
- Recognize topics
- Identify the beginning, middle, and ending of e.g. stories
- Recognize discourse boundaries
- Understand that audio cues (volume, tone) convey meaning
- Identify key sounds
- Recognize word boundaries
- Recognize reduced forms
- Identify stressed/unstressed words
- Recognize changes in pitch, tone, and speed of delivery
- Recognize intonation on tag questions
- Recognize question/statement intonation
- Recognize sentence/clause boundaries
- Recognize the vocabulary used
- Recognize numbers
- Recognize spellings
- Recognize conjunctions
- Guess meanings from context
- Recognize agreement/disagreement
- Recognize comparisons
- Recognize questions
- Recognize reasons
- Recognize sequence markers
- Recognize time references
- Recognize attitude
- Follow a set of procedures
- Identify gist/main ideas
- Identify information focus
- Identify positive/negative opinions
- Infer and draw conclusions.
- Make predictions about storyline/ content, characters using contextual clues and prior knowledge
- Infer/draw conclusions about meaning, intention, feeling and attitude communicated by the speaker, using contextual clues, prior knowledge, and knowledge of familiar cultures
- Recall details at the literal level: who, what, when, where, why, how
- Recall information/details: descriptions, examples, explanations, visuals, opinions that support a main idea/point of view, recall details about characters, events, setting, plot. Recall details in messages.
- Evaluate for exaggeration
- Identify facts versus opinions
- Identify different varieties of English (American, British, etc)

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