Language Learning Materials Development: Getting to the heart of language pedagogy

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Materials Development: Getting to the heart of language pedagogy

- In language learning, materials ARE the learning
- Materials the portal to TL/TLC learning
- Materials development at HEART of language teaching & learning
- \textit{Principled} development of materials
- Grounded in SLA research & theory
- \textit{But what about the course book?}
- The processes of materials development
- Technology and language learning
- Localisation
Materials development informs practice & provides a ‘place’ for application of LT theory.
What are materials?

Anything which is *used* by teachers and learners to facilitate the learning of a language. *Tomlinson 2011, p2*

The defining characteristic of materials is that the materials designer builds in a pedagogic purpose. *Timmis, forthcoming.*

Texts vs Materials

What is materials development?

Materials development refers to all the processes made use of by practitioners who produce and/or use materials for language learning, including materials evaluation, their adaptation, design, production, exploitation and research. *Tomlinson 2012, p143-4.*
http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/
**Materials Development: Getting to the heart of language pedagogy**

Materials design is a special case of the application of the sophisticated kind of thinking that expert teachers possess. Includes

- Analysing potential lesson content (e.g. realia, text) and identifying how to transform into teaching resource
- Identifying linguistic goals
- Developing instructional tasks as basis for the lesson

= ‘TRANSFORMATION’

This is also one of the core skills of an expert materials writer

*Richards 2010, px*
Substantial differences exist between the acts of writing whole books and other materials intended for publication and the more common activity of creating materials intended for use in a specific class. *Byrd 1995, p7*
History of Materials Development

mid-90s onwards e.g.
Cunningsworth 1995 *Choosing Your Coursebook*
Tomlinson 1998a, 2011 *Materials Development in Language Teaching*
---2003a *Developing Materials for Language Teaching*
---2008a *English Language Learning Materials: A Critical Review*
McGrath 2002 *Materials Evaluation and Design for Language Teaching*
Harwood 2010 *Materials in ELT: Theory and Practice*
Materials Development: Getting to the heart of language pedagogy

Why develop **materials** when we have **course books**?

The global coursebook ‘all-singing all-dancing glitzy multimedia package’

*Bell & Gower 2011, p137*

- the double bind - All things to all men?

Sex ‘n’ drugs ‘n’ rock ‘n’ roll?

‘PARSNIP’

PG-rated nature of the ELT coursebook *Wanjryb, 1996, p291*

soft, fudgey, sub-journalistic, woman's magaziney

*Rinvolutri 1999, 14*

*A course book is what it is because of what it has to do* *Wala 2003*
Course books still stand at centre of pedagogy

‘Washback effect’ Process whereby:

New coursebooks are based on previous successful* models (* = ‘best sellers’??)

There may be a closed circle at work here, wherein textbooks merely grow from and imitate other textbooks and do not admit the winds of change from research, methodological experimentation, or classroom feedback. *Sheldon, 1988, p. 239*
Washback cont./.

Teachers’ own-designed materials follow coursebook unit structures
→→ ‘Coursebook-defined pedagogy’?

What the majority of teachers teach and how they teach […] are now determined by textbooks.

Akbari 2008 p. 647

= Washback…
A three-pronged effect
Tail wagging the dog?
Basis for language learning materials?

Principles drawn from what we know of SLA

Washback results in ‘Chinese whispers’ effect?

→ → Dilution of SLA principles
Materials Development: ‘Back to basics’

SLA-based principles for language learning materials development

Are findings of SLA ‘sufficiently robust…to warrant applications to language pedagogy’? Ellis 2010, p34

‘We should not expect definitive answers from SLA research, nor should we expect one research-based model of language acquisition to triumph over others’ Tomlinson 2011, p.6

But this shouldn’t stop us applying what we DO know
What Materials Development draws from SLA Research and Theory

Affect

- **Motivation**
  
  99% of teaching is making the students feel interested in the material. Chomsky 1988, p181

- **Engagement**
  
  We know that affective engagement is vital for long-term learning. Tomlinson 2003, p.234

- **Anxiety**

Laughter, joy, excitement, sorrow and anger can promote learning. Neutrality, numbness and nullity cannot. Tomlinson 2003, p18

Grim determination and struggle are not part of the language development process. Krashen 2009, p.184
What Materials Development draws from SLA Research and Theory

Principle 1: Affective challenge: Materials need to engage the learner affectively – HOW?
INTERESTING, MOTIVATING, CHALLENGING, RELEVANT

Principle 2: Materials need to help learners feel at ease – HOW?
HUMANISE – ENGAGE ALL INTELLIGENCES AND LEARNING STYLES
New Boy


You are Joseph. How do you feel…?

You are one of the children in the class. How do you feel…?

You are the teacher. How do you feel…?
New Boy

behaviours (including classroom conventions)
culture-specific references
culture-specific language

teacher: dealing with ‘new boy’
consider how you might use this story with an ESOL class, including ‘culture’ factors (see above)
language focus

Sociological commentary
Language (style etc.)
What Materials Development draws from SLA Research and Theory

**Input**
- Rich meaningful, comprehensible input consisting of Authentic language in authentic use
- Cognitive challenge

Input serves not just to *teach* language but to *release* it

*Tomalin*

**Input ➔ Output continuum**

Output: both a *product* and *process* of language acquisition

*Swain 2005*
Based on the email:

_We acquire language by understanding, by input, by listening and reading: The ability to speak a language is the result of language acquisition not the cause. If this is true, the path to spoken fluency and accuracy is increasing input ... so increasing speaking practice does not result in increased speaking fluency and accuracy’_

[Krashen 2008, email on Krashen discussion list]
~ Untitled ~

What a wonderful bird the frog are.
When he sit he stand almost.
When he hop he fly almost.
He ain’t got no sense hardly.
He ain’t got no tail hardly neither
When he sit, he sit on what he ain’t got almost.
Hardly!
~ Poem ~ Untitled ~

Draw the ‘frog’ from the poem (where is it, what colour is it, how big is it etc?).

Describe the ‘frog’ from the poem (where is it, what colour is it, how big is it, etc?).
~ Poem ~

- Paraphrase the poem in your own words.
- When you paraphrase the poem, do you change any of the words (vocabulary, grammar)?
- Analyse what you change and why.
- Compare the ‘paraphrase’ with the original poem. Which do you prefer and why?
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INTERESTING, MOTIVATING, CHALLENGING, RELEVANT

Principle 2: materials need to help learners feel at ease – HOW?

HUMANISE – ENGAGE ALL INTELLIGENCES AND LEARNING STYLES

Principle 3: Cognitive challenge: Input needs to engage the learner cognitively - HOW?

Principle 4: Materials need to provide opportunities for meaningful, purposeful language use

RICH MEANINGFUL INPUT/STIMULUS – AUTHENTIC LANGUAGE IN USE
What Materials Development draws from SLA Research and Theory

Language acquisition order

- Teachability hypothesis (Pienemann 1985) – ‘readiness’
- Teaching ≠ Learning
- Language acquisition metaphors:
  - *a growing garden*
  - *a spiral*  NB Repetition … over time (delayed effect of instruction)
  - *building a wall*
- Learning stems from perceived need
- *Implications for the syllabus?*

- Organic, text-driven syllabus (retroactive ‘checklist’)

Students learn what they need to use, rather than what they are told to learn  Tomlinson et al 2001
What Materials Development draws from SLA Research and Theory

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RICH MEANINGFUL INPUT/STIMULUS – AUTHENTIC LANGUAGE IN USE

Principle 5: Articulate syllabus retrospectively: materials generate organic, text-driven syllabus
What Materials Development draws from SLA Research and Theory

The Noticing Hypothesis \[ Schmidt 1990 \text{ onwards} \]

Input does not become intake for language learning unless it is noticed, i.e. consciously registered \[ Schmidt 2010 \]

People learn about the things that they pay attention to and do not learn much about the things they do not attend to \[ ibid \]

Subliminal language learning is impossible […] noticing is the necessary and sufficient condition for converting input to intake \[ Schmidt 1990 \]

– ‘Noticing-the-gap’
– Directing learners’ attention (awareness-raising)
– Inductive process (OHE)

c.f. Data-driven learning (DDL)
There weren’t many ______ villages in Kent
    She’s ______, right, and really skinny
She showed me the ______ room
    It’s only a ______ piece of carpet
Well, I just wanted a ______ box
Oh! But the hole’s too ______
Now that number is ______ and decreasing it seems to me
    They are very ______ sums, about 10 thousand or
You silly ______ thing
    She’s a ______ angel
I forgot those ______ green men
You gonna eat that ______ bit of cake?
    She’s just a ______ bit older than David
D’you want the same as Mum or a ______ bit of each
    They’re out in that ______ cupboard
They’re moving into this beautiful ______ cottage
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RICH MEANINGFUL INPUT – AUTHENTIC LANGUAGE IN USE

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Principle 6: Learners need to be encouraged to notice linguistic features of input – HOW?
LANGUAGE AWARENESS RAISING ACTIVITIES

C.T. TOMLINSON 2011, 6-23
The Materials Development process

Coursebook writing is a creative rather than a mechanical process *Prowse 2011, p172*

Johnson 2003 *Designing Language Teaching Tasks*
Materials development ‘templates’

http://www.ouowebsite.com/materialstemplate.aspx

http://www.ouowebsite.com/

See also: Tomlinson 2003 Developing Materials for Language Teaching, pp112-7
Technology-based language learning

tasks

Task: free-standing, goal-focused, learner-driven

Task based learning

Web 2.0 – collaborative web
Technology-based language learning tasks

Web 2.0 Participatory web culture

Wikipedia: the poster child for the collaborative construction of knowledge [...] that the new interactive Web facilitates Richardson 2006 p.61

Social constructivism: ‘learning’ as a process of constructing knowledge in social environments

The emphasis on community and social networks in Web 2.0 has a strong connection to theories of social constructivism Sturm et al., 2009, p. 371

→ → ‘philosophy in action’?
Technology-based language learning tasks

TBL and CALL* share a series of theoretical antecedents, including [...] constructivist and social constructivist thought  *Thomas & Reinders, 2010 p.5*
Technology-based language learning tasks

*Illustration of the TBL/CALL/Constructivist synergie: Webquest*

A scaffolded learning structure that uses links to essential resources on the Web and an authentic task to motivate students’ investigation of a central, open-ended question, development of individual expertise and participation in a final group process that attempts to transform newly acquired information into a more sophisticated understanding.

*March 2008*

*An inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information that the learners interact with comes from resources on the Internet.*

*Dodge 1997*

= WebQuests emerge as an example of a powerful means for supporting the principles of constructivism [...] in language teaching.

*Zlatkovska 2010, p19*
Technology-based language learning tasks

*Illustration of the TBL/CALL/Constructivist synergie: Webquest*

**Webquest sample: Culture Shock**

**Webquest portal**
Localisation

Ongoing shift towards *localisation*:

Local versions of global course books (e.g. *Essential Grammar in Use, 2009*, review Romero 2012)

Local course books e.g. Ates 2012 (Turkey), Bacha et al 2008 (Middle East), Bolitho 2008 (Eastern Europe)

…Demonstrating the boundless creativity of practitioners who look to the field of *Materials Development* for principled practice and inspiration

*Ref: Tomlinson 2008, review of ELL materials from around the world*
Task design – some top tips!

- Text responsiveness: let text inspire task: ‘this text would be great for...’ (c.f. organic, text-driven syllabus)
- Start task design from the premise of giving learners a genuine reason to act (to listen, to read, to speak, to write, to solve a problem, to create something…) = ask yourself ‘why?’ NB ‘to enjoy’ is a reason!
- Garner Response (‘Affect’ principle)
- Derive language focus from text (not vice versa)
- Grade the task not the text
- ‘The thrill of the first time’ - design discovery into tasks
Invited speakers:
Kathleen Bailey
Anne Burns
Michael Byram
Andrew Cohen
David A. Hill
Annie Hughes
Chris Kennedy
Ben Fenton-Smith
Irma Ghosh
Alan Maley

Thank you!

Principles and Procedures of Materials Development

Interaction Between Applied Linguistics and Materials Development

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