Materials Creation: A Whole Approach

Jim Smiley

Ohu University

Materials production, as a separate TESOL discipline, is relatively new. The relevant body of literature is limited both in scope and depth; most works deal with the larger view; forging out a path rather than dwelling on the detail. Within mainstream TESOL, there is a discernible and sizable literature on particular facets of how to deal with, or create, pedagogic materials. However, each writer discusses only a narrow range of aspects concerning materials production. The result is that there are many partial models of but no central theory of the process of materials production as relevant to the final stage of choosing actual words, activity types, deciding on methodological practices and so on. Drawing upon the writings of many authorities, who have provided partial models of aspects of the production process, this paper places them within a framework for understanding the more complex, overall picture.

教材作成は、TESOL の独立した研究分野としては、比較的新しい。文献はまとまったものとしては、範囲においても深さにおいても十分とはいえない。詳細を述べるというよりは、方針を打ち出しているというように、大部分の研究は、より広範囲な見方を呈している。TESOL の主流内には、教育的な教材をいかに扱うか、あるいは、いかに作成するかといった特定の局面についてはかなりの数の文献がある。しかし、どれも教材の作成に関する狭い範囲の局面しか論じていない。その結果、多くの部分的なモデルとなるものはあるが、実際に使う語や活動のタイプの選択や、指導方法論に沿った練習法の決定等の最終段階に関連した、教材作成の過程についての中心的な理論はない。本研究は、教材作成の過程の諸相の部分的なモデルを提供している多くの権威者の諸論を参考にしながら、それらをより複雑な全体像を理解するための枠組みの中で捉えるものである。

Part one: The background

Introduction

This paper grew out of a need for a more holistic, a more comprehensive, a more detailed yet open model for materials development. I try to organise some parts of the vast TESOL literature into a tentative framework to help create a base theory for materials development. As it might be argued

that as anything written in EFL is potentially valuable for pedagogic materials design, the range of literature available is vast. However, the number of specifically-written texts for materials writing is small, as the separate disciple of materials development is relatively new; McDonough and Shaw's seminal text, Materials and Methods in ELT (2003), had its first edition in 1993: Byrd edited a compilation work entitled Material Writer's Guide in 1995 (1995); and the Tomlinson-edited Materials Development in Language Teaching in 1998 (1998). Their coverage is reasonably wide, but typical content features topics such as how to deal with publishers, materials evaluation, language data collection, copyright and so on. More fundamental issues are not touched; Only McDonough and Shaw have a limited discussion on educational frameworks. They, however, decide to confine their content to how materials can be produced according to the communicative approach, using a definition created by them.

However, other kinds of approaches to the theory of learning do exist, and a broad model needs to accept and cater for them. Stern deals with these other approaches and the numerous other options in language teaching (Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching 1983 and Issues and Options in Language Teaching 1992), all of which have direct relevance to the materials creator but which must be gleaned from the text. Stern's is an example of how general ELT studies contain a lot of pertinent information. The argument in this paper is not whether or not materials development is a separate discipline within ELT but that writers working within that discipline have, so far, failed to address a comprehensive theory which reflects modern theory as well as presents practical information to material writers of all kinds. The situation is confused even more by individual authorities concentrating on more specific sub-areas (for example, Nunan's Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom 1989) on the back of existing, or assumed, knowledge without fully clarifying their own position. The result is that there is a lot of information about materials creation and development, yet no central theoretical depository to aid the materials developer, or to guide any beginner who wishes to begin thinking about the key issues underlying materials creation at the text level.

Overview

It would be impossible in a short paper to list every relevant topic, less still publish a fully-developed, complete theory. All I can hope to do is to outline some key areas which I believe a model should address. The first stage is to recognise the boundaries and the scope of materials development as a separate area within EFL. This entails reconsidering the traditional place of materials development as one stage of the curriculum process. Working backwards, we need to see the curriculum in light of societal educational values, from which all educational decisions are founded. A comprehensive theory would recognise and accommodate different cultural values and overcome particular criticisms of present theory; For example, Pacek (1996) states that, "little consideration seems to have been given in Japan to the possibility that Western methodologies might be incompatible with the Japanese educational tradition". Once the broad territory of materials theory is established, smaller provinces can be constructed. These might include detailing choices about how, for example, grammar is treated, how activities are regulated, how educational sub-aims are decided upon. The final stage presented in this paper outlines some questions for the future development of the whole theory.

Educational value systems

Core beliefs about the purpose of education affect every aspect of the educational system produced. Material writers need to be consciously aware of these ideological stances. To take the Japanese example, teachers and writers working daily face very real difficulties when adopting western modes of educational thought in the Japanese classroom (ed. Wadden 1992). Studies on learners reveal a consensus that "relaxed and self-confident learners learn faster" and "the less anxious the learner, the better acquisition proceeds" (Tomlinson 1998, citing Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982, p.8 and 9). Western-oriented materials may disquieten Japanese learners, whose educational background ill-equips them for western modes. Educational value systems is, therefore, a logical starting point for materials writing theory.

Clark (1987, p.91) lists three basic value systems, or ideologies; classical humanism, reconstructionism and progressivism He defines: the former as "elitist, concerned with generalisable intellectual capacities and with the transmission of knowledge, culture and standards from one generation to another"; Reconstructionism as being "concerned with bringing about social change through the educational system"; and Progressivism as dealing "with the development of the individual as a whole person, with personal and group responsibility". He continues to list numerous differences between how each of the three are realised in actual practice. Whereas, according to White (1988), in ELT terms, classical humanism is equated with the grammar-translation method, reconstructionism with audio-lingual and notional-functional syllabuses and progressivism with process and procedural syllabuses, the differences in the use of the term 'communicative' allow for interpretations covering both reconstructionist and progressivist ideologies (McDonough and Shaw 2003, p15).

Curriculum theory

Traditional curriculum theory deals with these issues comprehensively, but their impact has yet to filter into materials design theory. One reason for this is that, traditionally, materials design was one aspect within curriculum theory. Brown (1995, p29) offers a typical model where needs analysis was followed by deciding on objectives, then how to test the success of whether the objectives were met or not. After this stage, pedagogic materials would be designed to support decisions made earlier. Finally, the ground level, the teaching could begin. Each stage was evaluated in relation to their own merits and their relationship to the whole model.

The traditional model suffered a series of attacks from practical, ideological and theoretical positions. Stern's model shows undimensional or multi-dimensional choices, unplanned or planned events, organised or open curriculums and unstructured or structured choices rather than fixes order. The implausibility of the traditional model can be seen at the teaching level, where teachers can have a wide degree of margin in the interpretation of course materials. Peck describes just how differently the same textbook page may be treated by different teachers (Peck 1988). Taking the same product-grammar item, some teachers concentrated on form, others on meaning, some developed and expanded vocabulary with realia, while others hardly checked the meaning. The practical impossibility of ideology fixing methodology at a politically higher stage is evident. Teachers do what they feel is right for their individual situation, irrespective of controls from above. Prahbu talks of 'plausibility' and cautions that "the best [teaching] method varies from one teacher to another, but only in the sense that it is best for each teacher to operate with his or her own sense of plausibility at any given time" (Prabhu 1990, p.175). At the theoretical

level, White sums up a key problem in attitudes about the role of education, "training is concerned with the inculcation of fixed forms of behaviour, education with the development of unexpected outcomes" (p.32), hinting at the cognitivist stance that learning does not happen in an orderly, logical sequence. Discrete point teaching, or product teaching, the basis for both the classical humanist and reconstructionist position, comes under attack. Finally, there is the tension between a view of learning based on the subject matter and that based on the learner type. A fully-centralised curriculum cannot address the local concerns of a learner-centred curriculum (Nunan 1988a, p.21). The implications for materials creation are obvious in terms of both when they are produced and by whom.

Learning theory

Views on how language is learnt will affect materials production. Two broad method of organising learning can be discerned; behaviourist and cognitive, finding agency in EFL product and process syllabi. Although the behaviourist school, epitomised in the audio-lingual method, is no longer the dominant force in modern EFL, behaviourist, especially neo-behaviourist, methods abound, often in course materials otherwise labelled communicative. In a product syllabus, learning is believed to occur after language exposure to and practice on discrete points. These points may be language components, such as grammar, functions, or vocabulary items, general language skills, such as reading, writing and so on, more specific skills, or such as skimming, scanning, predicting and guessing. Language and performance aims for the syllabus are selected and graded before materials are prepared at the more global level, or after the first consultation with the learner group for learner-centred courses. Tests can be devised on the pre-selected points. The syllabus types include; structural, both grammatical and functional-

notional, situational, skill-based and topical (Brown 1995, p.7). Cognitive, or process syllabi see language learning as a very complicated process. Often learners become ready to learn after practicing a number of different kinds of task. In other words, discrete point practice does not equal learning but prepares a base for language development. Both Prabhu's procedural syllabus and Breen and Candlin's process syllabus are examples. Materials writers need to be aware of their environment and of options available within that environment. The finished product of any materials creation project will look very different depending on choices made at the very beginning.

Part two: Nuts and bolts

In this section, I outline just four of the many aspects of crucial importance to material creators at the actual pen-to-paper stage of writing. Beginning with educational aims, discussing more precisely what we set out to teach, moving on to how the content of the materials is designed interactively, through a more detailed treatment of how grammar instruction might be realised, I finish with some thoughts about how activities can be regulated through various devices.

Educational aims

In this paper, educational aims does not refer to the 'aims and objectives' distinction found in curriculum theory, simply to what materials writers want to focus on in any produced activity. Aims may or may not be described in precise detail, leaving some explicit and some implicit. A basic teacher's manual, such as Harmer (1991) or Nunan (1998b), will furnish the writer with many possible aims. These might include the notation, phonological and phonetic systems. Every piece

of written material can make any of these, or any sub-aspect of these, an explicit aim; the promotion of interaction. This aim may take many forms, from producing simple pair work activities to more complex tasks requiring the exchange of both transactional and interactional information; Grammar development is still a major issue, which is dealt with in more detail later in this paper, and will probably continue to be a major aim; Vocabulary development: Lewis's claims that "[l]anguage consists of grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar..." and "[t]he grammar/ vocabulary dichotomy is invalid; much language consists of multi-word 'chunks' forces us to reconsider how we treat vocabulary, either in context within situational or topical activities, or as rigorously and routinely as is grammar" (Lewis 1993, p.vi); Other aims, such as functional language, 4-skills fluency, or other skills.

Interactive design

Reversing Littlejohn's intention in his study designed to show how to analyse existing textbooks, writers can learn how to consider the interactive nature of textbooks in their own production (ed. Tomlinson 1998, p.210). Materials designed for a self-study text will look very different from those designed for a larger communicative class. Questions about how the content of materials can be considered; who provides the actual content? The textbook, the teacher, the learners? How can materials be set up so that learners have more input? How are learners required to interact with the materials? Some texts have sections which simply give information and non-response from learners is possible. Other sections require learners to respond to textbook driven questions. Still lacking, even in so-called communicative texts, are questions which require learners to provide personalised responses to questions beyond filling in charts and personalising target sentences. What level of processing is required of learners?

Bloom's famous taxonomy provides six levels, and Hammerly (1982) adds seven more; signal learning, stimulus-response, motor-chaining, verbal association, multiple discrimination, concept learning and principle learning (p.46), giving the material writer a fuller palate to work with. Littlejohn limits his discussion to information finding, information manipulation and deeper-level processing. A final question relates to whom activities require for their completion: other students, the teacher, or just the textbook.

Grammar treatment

Until SLA decides unconditionally about the role of formalised grammar instruction, the question of how to treat grammar will remain a central issue for all involved in language education. Materials writers need to be aware of the various choices available in grammar instruction. Some of these choices relate to how grammar information is presented. Nunan (1998b) describes the inductive method, where grammar rules are either discovered by learners after exposure, and the deductive one, where rules are given to learners before. Inductive training stems from the desire to encourage learners to 'notice' grammar usage in order to raise their conscious awareness of grammar, "activities [which] are meant to facilitate the learning process by providing data through which learners may form and text hypotheses, and also by helping learners link the new with what they already know" (p.149). Language presentation might also promote language knowledge, descriptive knowledge, or language use, grammatical competence. Other choices relate to what learners do with grammar. When faced with an activity, learners may produce unexpected language and fail to use any target structures at all. Rob Ellis outlines three broad categories of language response to a task: language essential, where only the target language can be used; language useful, where the target language is one of a few possibilities; and language

natural, where the target language is only one option (Ellis 2001). These different types may be used for various activities: for example, language natural for a pre-structure introduction testing exercise to see how much instruction learners need, or for a post-instruction task to see how much has been retained. Ur describes seven intervals on the grammar practice scale: Awareness drills, controlled drills, meaningful drills, guided and meaningful practice, structure-based free sentence composition, discourse composition and free discourse. (Ur 1996).

As with any skill, the primary learning stages of awareness, structuring, proceduralising and restructuring new information need to be addressed in any grammar materials produced. Batstone urges teachers, and by association, materials designers to present grammar information many times, allowing learners to proceduralise their grammar skills and to restructure their interlanguage (Batstone 1992). He also recommends an approach to grammar training rarely used in textbooks today, grammaticization. This is where grammar forms have been left out, and different meanings can be constructed using learner-inserted grammar and lexical items (p.104). For example, with these four words, John - postcard - post office - yesterday, my students produced 'John bought that postcard at this post office yesterday'. And 'It wasn't John who bought this postcard at that post office yesterday.' Learners create their own meanings and question a partner about the meanings. This form of grammar instruction focuses on the meaning of grammar and helps prevent fossilisation from occurring.

Activity regulation

Activity regulation enables materials creators to emphasise particular factors. Anderson and Lynch (1988) ask what makes listening easy or difficult. Their findings provide a valuable regulatory source for designers: "type of language... our task or purpose... the context"

(p.46). Familiarity with the topic makes the activity easier (p.49), and this can be extended to familiarity or not of grammar or vocabulary, or of different combinations. Familiarity with and the number, and kind, of participants will impact on the difficulty of the activity, as will including, or not, different time references. Batstone adds time regulation, "[language] planning time reduces pressure and so allows learners time to collect their thoughts" (Batstone, p.80). Placing a time limit on the activity, likewise, affects output and pressure. Finally, learners might be asked to focus on certain language or skill features, or given advice on how to complete an activity. Conversely, an activity might be left naked and usable as a testing item to see what language or skills learners produce.

Future developments

Again, this short paper cannot possibly account for every possibility. However, I try to briefly discuss the issues which I feel merit a longer discourse. To a very large extent, materials theory overlaps with other EFL subjects. Indeed, all research findings could be expressed as some choice for materials development. For example, learner theory informs us that no two learners are the same; Degrees, and kinds of motivation differ, as do aptitudes, attitudes and raw abilities (Skehan 1989). Intelligence types (Gardner 1993) also need realisation in pedagogic materials. Design and typology questions, such as how page layout, graphics use, font size and type and so on, affect various aspects of learner development need to be addressed. Related to this is the huge area of CALL and the role of computers, or even other media, in language education as it affects materials. Finally, as EFL theory is often criticised as being written for and about western progressive ideological positions, there is a need to investigate materials development in Japan, this archetypal classical humanist environment.

References

Anderson, A. & Lynch, T. (1988). *Listening*. Oxford: OUP.

Batstone, R. (1994). *Grammar*. Oxford: OUP.

Byrd, P. (1995). *Material Writer's Guide*. Boston: Heinle&Heinle.

Tomlinson, B. ed. (1998). *Materials Development in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: CUP.

Johnson, R. K. ed. (1989). *The Second Language Curriculum*. Cambridge: CUP.

Brown, J. D. (1995). *The Elements of Language Curriculum*. Boston: Heinle&Heinle.

Clark, J. (1987). *Curriculum Renewal in Foreign Language Teaching*. Oxford: OUP.

Ellis, R. (2001). Untitled. Paper presented at the British Council.

Gardner, H. (1993). *Multiple Intelligences*. Basic Books.

Hammerly, H. (1982). Synthesis in Second Language Teaching. Blaine: *Second Language Publications*.

Harmer, J. (1991). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. New Edition. Harlow: Longman.

McDonough, J, & Shaw, C. (2003). *2nd Ed. Materials and Methods in ELT: A Teacher's Guide*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Lewis, M. (1993). *The Lexical Approach*. Hove: Language Teaching Publications

Littlejohn, A. (1998). The analysis of language teaching materials: inside the Trojan Horse. In. B. Tomlinson (ed.) *Materials Development in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: CUP.

Nunan, D. (1988a). *The Learner-Centred Curriculum*. Cambridge: CUP.

Nunan, D. (1988b). *Language Teaching Methodology*. Harlow: Longman.

Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*. Cambridge: CUP.

Pacek, D. (1996). Lessons to be learnt from negative evaluation. *ELT Journal, 50*(4), 335-43.

Peck, A. (1988). *Language Teachers at Work*. New York: Prentice Hall.

Prahbu, N.S. (1990). There is no best method - why? *TESOL Quarterly, 24*. 161-76.

Skehan, P. (1989). *Individual Differences in Second-Language Learning*. London: Edward Arnold.

Stern, H.H. (1989). Seeing the wood AND the trees. In. R. Johnson (ed.) *The Second Language Curriculum*.

Stern, H.H. (1983). *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching*. Oxford: OUP.

Stern, H.H. (1992). *Issues and Options in Language Teaching*. Oxford: OUP.

Ur, P. (1996). *A Course in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: CUP.

Wadden, P. (1993). *A Handbook for Teaching English at Japanese Colleges and Universities*. Oxford: OUP.

White, R. V. (1988*). The ELT Curriculum*. Oxford: Blackwell.