

Between the Keys

A Publication of the JALT Materials Writers SIG ©2006

Winter 2006
Volume XIV, Number 3

Coordinator's Column

Jim Smiley

Tohoku Bunka Gakuen University, Sendai

Back Slapping

Let me begin my first coordinator's column by raising a glass to thank Ian Gledall for his sterling efforts over the past year. Last year, the administrative nature of the coordinator's task was much higher than in previous years. One of the demands arising from JALT's change to NPO status was the updating of the constitution. If you are anything like me, you'd hate wading through pages and pages of legalese and picking out inconsistencies. The creation of the new constitution was a heavy burden. Like that and the other tasks Ian performed, he did them without complaint and with a degree of professionalism that makes me proud to be a member of the MW SIG. I begin my service as coordinator of a well-oiled machine. Thanks, Ian.

Our thanks also go to Daniel Droukis who stepped down as our Membership Chair. Dan will still be around in the newly-created Records Chair. Another movement sees Greg Goodmacher step back into the Programmes Chair, a role he held a few years back. Greg is in charge of making sure that the 2007 National Conference's MW presence is memorable.

We have two new faces on the MW SIG Executive board: Cameron Romney will be looking after our membership, and Bob Long has graciously offered to help with distributing the newsletters. Welcome aboard, guys! Scott Petersen remains behind the scenes looking after

our money, and, wait for it . . . he's completely renewed and updated our website. Check out the new and improved version on:

<http://uk.geocities.com/materialswritersig/index.html>.

Thanks for that, Scott. Derek Di Matteo continues to find placeholders in a page for all of this text, and John Daly is keeping the Yahoo group mailing list active. Thanks, Derek and John. Yours truly is being a little stretched filling both the coordinator and the publicity (editor) positions. If anyone would like to be editor of this rag, please contact me. The new Officers List is, as always, printed inside the back cover.

Editorial

This issue sees a rather more academic stance. Gerry Lassche readdresses the issue of authenticity in materials and language practice, and describes four case studies showing the interaction of in/authentic language practice and simplified or genuine texts. In the previous issue of BTK, John Nevara explained how the cooperative approach helped him develop better materials. In this issue, he demystifies the process and issues behind making a CD for class use. The thread of collaboration continues in Simon Cole's article. Simon does two things. He describes his experiences of writing a solo textbook. Then he outlines his beliefs about the nature of collaborative writing and offers the proposition of working with him on a future project. If a textbook were to

2

be published after the introduction of the authors here, I'd feel a bit like Cilla Black on 'Blind Date' when couples got married. Marc Helgesen talks of PARSNIPS, a cute acronym that helps materials writers keep their topics out of trouble. Jim Smiley's article talks about semantic distancing as a method of predicting and creating linguistic difficulty levels. (As this is an article by the current Publications Chair, MW SIG Constitution, Bylaw #4, requires Editors to have their contributions accepted by other members of the MW SIG Executive Board. This was done.)

The Yahoo! Mailing List

Our membership numbers exceed the numbers registered for the list. Also, the list names reflect a lot of those who joined during the 'free SIG' campaign but who have not renewed since. The result is that the Yahoo! list may not reflect the true make up of our present membership. I'd like to see this addressed. If you are not registered with Yahoo, please contact John Daly <john-d@sano-c.ac.jp> and ask him how to become registered. This list is the main vehicle for our communications beyond this newsletter. Please use it.

A few things have been introduced via Yahoo! I'll reprint the original concept messages here for those who are not on the list. If you are interested in any of these ideas, please contact me.

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### **Message 535: Introducing the Buddy System**

Dear Group,

For some time, there has been a growing awareness of the need for more interaction between members of this group. Some members are already doing their utmost to bring their experience, knowledge and abilities to the group.

I feel that a lot more could be done to create an environment of mutual cooperation and development. To this end, I'm inviting members to join together in what might best be called a 'Buddy' system, a pairing off of like-minded members.

Here's the idea outlined:

1. Members send me their details: needs in materials development, areas of desired improvement, kinds of texts requiring editing, age groups and levels of materials targets and so on.
2. Members also include areas of strengths, knowledge and expertise, in other words, areas of confidence that they would be happy sharing.
3. I process the details and create pairs of 'buddies'. Each pair gets in contact and begin their fruitful exchanges.



*Between the Keys* is published by the JALT Materials Writers Special Interest Group (MW-SIG). The editors welcome contributions in the following areas: publishing issues, classroom activities, page layout or desktop publishing, experiences in publishing or materials design, announcements of materials-related meetings or newly published materials, or any other articles focusing on aspects of materials writing or publishing. For information about reprinting articles, please contact the editor. All articles contained in *Between the Keys* ©2006 by their respective authors. This newsletter ©2006 by Materials Writers SIG.

A few procedural details:

1. Send in your details \*off-line\* to me: jimsmiley@pm.tbgu.ac.jp
2. You can send in your details anonymously. That is, you don't need to say who you are if you don't want to. I can imagine that some members may feel awkward about having others criticise their work. Anonymity, if used, may alleviate this fear. If you want to make yourself known to your buddy, that's up to you.
3. Once every 1/4, I will ask buddy pairs to send a brief update of their situation. This monitoring will be used to a) feedback to the group about the success/failure of the system and b) motivate, repair and upkeep the existing pairs.

So, there you go. Send in your wishes, and let's see how we can work to help each other.

Jim Smiley

P.S. Thanks go to Bob Long, Ian Gledall and Greg Goodmacher for helping this idea to take a concrete shape.

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Message 536: Introducing the Tutor System

Dear Group,

A fair number of our members are experienced, published professionals who have years of experience and know-how. Likewise, we have members who wish to have that knowledge. The new 'Buddy' system may be a good way to help ourselves mutually, but there's no real substitute for knowledge.

To this end, I would like to invite those with a precise knowledge base to act as 'Tutors' to those less-experienced members who wish that knowledge.

In all probability, most members have strengths that are shareable. You don't have to be the world's greatest expert to be a tutor. All you need is a single point in which you have confidence in your abilities. Let me know what those areas are, and we can begin building networks of 'Tutor/ apprentice' support.

On the other hand, if you feel that you'd like to be an 'apprentice' in a particular area, the existence of an appropriate tutor would be just the ticket.

Here's what to do:

1. Send in your details to me off-line. You can remain anonymous if you like. These details should indicate if you want to be a tutor or an apprentice, which areas you can help/ need help in. Be as precise as you possibly can.
2. I'll match up appropriate tutors with apprentices.

There is the very real possibility that exact needs are not exactly matched. Please bear with the system. If we participate fully, it will become a very valuable resource.

So, there you go. Send in your wishes, and let's see how we can work to help each other.

Jim Smiley

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Update [December 19, 2006]: There have been a few volunteers to be tutors, and one 'Buddy' pair has been set up. This is just the beginning. Let's see how far we can go with this.

## **The Yahoo! Poll.**

A few year ago, the then coordinator, John Daly set up a Yahoo! poll to find out more about the needs and wishes of the membership. I felt that the dynamics have changed sufficiently to justify a re-issuing of that poll. Here are the results.

Question: *What were you looking for when you joined the Materials Writers SIG?*

Responses:

22% I was looking for help and information related to getting my materials published.

17% I was looking for help and information related to self-publishing my materials.

28% I was looking for instruction about how to go about writing my own materials.

13% I was looking for ideas for tasks/activities that I could base materials on.

17% I was looking for information about the theory underlying materials development.

Forty-three people voted, which accounts for just under half of the membership. From these figures, we can see how, for example, the newsletter could be structured to reflect the various wishes, or how the National Conference MW SIG slot's content could be decided. Thanks to all who participated.

## **The Language Teacher: Materials Writers Issue**

Every now and then, TLT has an entire issue devoted to a single SIG. There are a number of very talented and articulate MW SIG members who are eminently capable of producing quality articles for a special MW SIG issue of TLT. There is a process involved in realizing this dream, but basically, we can sum up the process in two words: quality counts.

As an MW SIG internal part of this process, abstracts are being accepted that propose articles that deal with academic aspects of materials creation. An MW SIG reading committee will be set up to vet these proposals. Once a sufficient number of quality abstracts have been received, we can approach National with our special issue. If you are interested in being a reader, please contact me as soon as possible. The rest of you? Get your pencils out from behind your ears and get a proposal into [mw@jalt.org](mailto:mw@jalt.org).

## **National Conference 2007: Individual SIG Conferences**

At the 2006 Conference, an important announcement came down from Head Office. The scheduling of the 2007 National Conference will be done by each individual SIG. (There is an opt-out clause for those SIGs that do not want the extra task.) The rationale behind this is that SIG members are far better placed to judge the content and quality of their subject. SIGs know more about which presentation is better followed by another, which kinds of presentations are best separated by time and place, or put together as they cover essentially the same topic and so on. In the middle of next year, the MW SIG will create a

reading committee that re-vets proposals for the National Conference and arranges the scheduling of accepted proposals. This is a very exciting move and promises to help make the National Conference a great success for each individual SIG.

### **The Pan-SIG Conference 2007**

There are still a few MW SIG slots available but not many. To make the conference a success from our point of view, we need to gather around 8 to 10 presentations, put on a colloquium, workshop and plenary speaker. Marc

Helgesen has kindly agreed to be our plenary speaker. Marc has put so much into this group, and it is my honour to have Marc speak for us this time. The rest of you? Get your abstracts in. The details are printed in this issue.

If you have an idea for a MW SIG-sponsored workshop or colloquium, please feel free to send your abstract to me or to the Yahoo! groups. An open exchange of ideas would be a wonderful thing.

IBK

## **Pan-SIG Conference Call for Papers**

### **The 6<sup>th</sup> Annual JALT Pan-SIG Conference 2007**

*Second Language Acquisition: Theory and Pedagogy*

This year's conference explores the relationship between second language acquisition and the mechanics of the second language classroom.

### ***Call for Papers Deadline: 9 February 2007***

Proposals are invited for:

papers (45 minutes), workshops (120 minutes), and poster sessions

**Contact:** [pansig2007@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:pansig2007@yahoo.co.uk)

**Dates:** 12–13 May 2007

**Place:** Tohoku Bunka Gakuen University, in Sendai.

**Hosts:** The Other Language Educators, Materials Writers, Pragmatics, Teacher Education, and Testing and Evaluation SIGs, as well as the Sendai JALT Chapter.

# Making your own Class CD

John Nevara, Seikei University  
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## Introduction

Self-publishing has allowed many teachers to create their own materials. Nonetheless, some obstacles still exist in the self-publishing market. This article examines one particular problem with self-publishing—the lack of any listening materials—and supplies a solution to the problem—recording your own listening CD at a music studio.

Self-publishing a reading or writing text is relatively straightforward, because these texts rely on the printed word. However, a listening text without a CD makes little sense. Furthermore, it is difficult but not impossible to imagine a speaking/conversation text without a tape or CD. Occasionally, speaking texts relying only on the printed word do get published, and some of the texts even have proven effective, but still the vast majority of broad-based, major-market publishers include a CD or cassette with their materials.

## Details of Making CDs in Local Music Studios

It is possible to self-publish a text and include listening materials that were dubbed at a local music studio. The materials can either be solely class CDs or, as is popular with many major publishers now, inserted in the text for student use out of class. The finished product is only limited by 1) the quality of the studio and its manager/technician, 2) the ability of the voice actors, and 3) the material creator's own creativity and ability.

I have made CDs for three self-published conversation textbooks, although technically the texts and CDs were not self-published because materials creation was initially paid for by a school source. While there are many fine conversation texts on the market, the self-published texts were created 1) to provide a unique learning experience catering to a specific audience's needs, and 2) more importantly, to keep the textbook costs low for students. The textbooks and accompanying CDs fulfilled their criteria, especially considering that once author royalties were waived, the cost to students was approximately 800 yen per text.

## Studios

Professional recording companies provide a high quality CD, but also require substantial amounts of money, which would make the text much less affordable. Companies in the self-publishing market—at least ones which I am familiar with—have contacts which will get a CD made at a slightly lower price, but perhaps there is a small loss in quality. Handling the whole affair by oneself—recording the CD in a music studio—significantly reduces costs, but of course there is an inevitable decrease in quality. With a little forethought, however, the use of a local music studio is a reasonable cost-effective alternative.

The cheapest music studio is obviously one which accepts no money. Unfortunately,

the only studios which are completely free tend to be those which are attached to your school of employment; it may be that your school has recording facilities that you can use. In my case, a language lab with basic recording facilities was offered, but a technician to operate the machines was not available for free, so the next option—a local music studio frequented by amateur bands—was chosen. A look in the phone book provided a good list of studios, and a call to the studio informed me of their availability and cost.

In creating three CDs, I have employed two different studios. The price differential was minimal, and two or three hours of studio space plus the

### **The Voice Actors**

Nonetheless, besides the technician and the studio, it is important to find talented voice actors. Some skilled voice actors, working at large recording studios, can make excellent salaries, so recording on a budget does not permit using such persons. The remaining choices are 1) friends or colleagues, and 2) hired amateurs. I have used both types. Friends and colleagues require less money, and can make the whole recording experience much more pleasant, but unless you have friends with recording experience, the quality is uneven. There is a reason why professionals have good salaries—talented voice acting is not as easy as it looks.

Overall, therefore, hiring amateurs by

*“In searching for a studio, the quality of the equipment and the ability of the manager in running the equipment are paramount...”*

manager's equipment and expertise can be acquired for approximately 20,000 yen. There may be regional or studio-to-studio differences, but the most I have ever paid was 20,000 yen.

In searching for a studio, the quality of the equipment and the ability of the manager in running the equipment are paramount, but to an amateur it is difficult to judge these based on one visit to the studio. I switched studios because I felt that the technician at the first studio did not put forth sufficient effort during the recording and also in the post-recording stage. I used the next studio twice because I was pleased with the manager's professional attitude.

posting an ad either on the internet at sites frequented by foreign residents or in free magazines aimed at an English-speaking audience can provide a more experienced alternative to the use of colleagues. The cost is more expensive, but the amateurs will often have previous experience as actors, radio disc jockeys, musicians, or even studio technicians. My experience in selecting such people is limited, but trained actors do seem to have resonant voices and the ability to affect different accents. Furthermore, studio technicians know the recording process particularly well. As a former disc jockey myself, I recognize the importance that such an experience held in familiarizing me with studio



recording, but I was perhaps not as well prepared as an actor or studio technician for the process awaiting.

I have had no significant problems with hiring voice actors, but in this age of copyright protection it would be wise to clearly explain to each and every voice actor your intended use of the CD. Also, it is suggested that you give each participant a receipt for services as well as a contract which releases their voices for future use.

### **Your Responsibility**

Even with a good studio and talented voice actors, authority for the final product rests with the material creator as the supervisor of the project. In some cases, only your creativity limits what you can do in a good studio with talented voice actors. Background noise, music, a car horn, a door slamming—all of these fundamental sounds can be introduced into the CD with just a little planning. Also, if you are not satisfied with the quality of a conversation, it is obviously possible to record the part again and again. This simply requires determination to create a good CD. The voice actors and studio technician would prefer a nice result, but they also would prefer to finish quickly, get their money, and go home.

As the supervisor for all three of my CDs, I have discovered that the role of employer to all other parties makes me the natural, accepted leader. Because I am the leader, I found that it was better to limit my part in the conversations. Being simultaneously one of the voice actors and the supervisor is a difficult task, so I

limited my participation to 1) supervisor, and 2) stand-in in case a member does not arrive on time. A low budget production can not obtain perfection, but it can come close enough, if the supervisor is constructively engaged in the process.

### **Conclusion**

Recording a CD in a local music studio for a self-published text is a possibility. The quality of the finished product is most likely not as high as would be with an expensive recording company using top-rate facilities, professional voice actors, and experienced technicians. Nonetheless, the quality is acceptable, and with a little planning can be remarkably good. The costs are minimal, so large out-of-pocket expenses do not have to be passed on to the students.

The recording experience itself is quite pleasant. If done with friends, it can acquire a party-like atmosphere. Even with strangers involved, the process is convivial. Time-wise, the recording takes approximately two hours, depending on the length of the material, and an additional hour or two for the technician to clean up the recording. This will provide you with a normal-length textbook CD which, for example, could include twelve 100-word conversations and twelve accompanying 300-word essays recorded for classroom use. Usually, the technician/studio manager will hand over the finished product a week after the recording. Therefore, making your own CD in a local music studio is a relatively trouble-free, limited-expense affair worth considering if the situation fits.

BK

# Conceptualizing Authenticity: Discussion of 4 Case Studies

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[Editor's note: This paper is a modified version of a more extensive article published earlier under the following reference:

Lassche, G. (2006). Dimensions of authenticity and use of materials for language teaching: Issues surrounding text, text-makers and users, and context. *Miyagi Gakuin Department Journal*, 34 (1), 115 - 150.]

## Abstract

Authenticity is derived from the interaction between the text and its user. Usage defines authenticity, and as such is not an intrinsic quality conferred upon the text itself. This usage is realized through the engagement of communicative competence in real-life contexts and social purposes. By presenting texts, genuine or otherwise, to students in ways that correspond to these real-world situations, teachers demonstrate authentic practice. Four case studies are provided which illustrate how these interact: using pedagogic and genuine texts authentically and not. Key concepts discussed include contextualized practice, learner centeredness and communicative competence. In essence, graded texts tailored for student consumption used in a contextually-appropriate manner is pedagogically sound practice.

Teachers designing classroom materials are often advised to use authentic ones, i.e. materials culled from the native-speaker's world without editing or modification. In this paper, my argument

against this approach, that such an approach towards authenticity fails pedagogically, assumes three principles: first, it is more important to be concerned with the process of using materials, than the product, per se; that is, language learning should prioritize contextualized practice, with language form following on; second, that the communicative acts of non-native language users has intrinsic value, whose language use is certainly authentic for them; and third, it makes more sense to use simplified materials and texts tailored toward an  $i+1$  challenge level, rather than demoralizing students with the  $i+1$  requirements present in real-world materials.

Table 1. Case study conditions

|                                  | Simplified text (scaffolded) | Genuine text (non-scaffolded) |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Inauthentic practice (exercises) | Case study 1                 | Case study 2                  |
| Authentic practice (tasks)       | Case study 3                 | Case study 4                  |

Instead, I believe that using simplified and so-called pedagogically-contrived texts is preferable and justifiable in many cases, as long as the construction adheres to two principles: has a justifiable classroom learning purpose, and shows contextual integrity. That is, such texts are ones that have been modified or constructed in some way to make them

more accessible to student populations (classroom purpose), while retaining critical generic features that identify a passage as a particular kind of text (contextual integrity). This is an approach that I think fits with Long's idea of a task-based approach: using texts that are tailored to a particular level, but which

are used for authentic purposes and in real-world contexts.

Thus, I think that this issue can be summarized with a 2 X 2 grid which shows 4 possible uses of text, broken down by type of text, and type of use as factors (see table 1, above).

*Case study 1. Simplified (contrived) text used pedagogically*

Case 1

***Listening text taken from textbook***

Korean high school, newspaper article topic (Lee et al, 2001, p125)  
Scripted, simplified conversation provided as a handout to the students.  
The underlined words are deleted in the text.  
Length: 45 words  
Activity: Students listen to the text, and write it in the missing words.

W: I want to find the score of the soccer game.

M: Korea won.

W: Really? Where did you hear that?

M: From an on-line newspaper. It's faster that print newspapers.

W: Really? I've never tried that.

M: You should give it a try.

M: Shall we check out my favorite site now?

W: Sounds like fun!

**Case 1.** The exercise in case 1 presents a purpose-built pedagogic text, in a context that is highly irregular. Brown (1994, 239ff) notes that negotiation and clarification of meanings, and management of turn-taking, in contrast to written texts, spoken texts of casual conversation genre in the real world are characterized by such things as redundancy of spoken information, presence of reduced forms (i.e. "where did you" becomes "wher'jou" etc), rate of delivery (such that learners find native speakers speak too quickly), and interactive elements, such as checking the meaning, and managing turn-taking.

The text shown in case 1 is characterized by precise pronunciation of words and phrases obtained through the elimination of reduced forms. Instead of the hesitancy and interruptions characteristic of genuine spoken texts of this genre, or imprecise pronunciation of words and phrases characteristic of NESB speakers, clear stoppages with predictable sharing of the conversational floor occur in all of the turns taken by the interlocutors. The turns are short, of sentence length at most. Although the text gives no indication of a prior context, the female speaker uses a definite article to describe the game, and the male speaker identifies the correct answer without any

clarification, such as “Which game?” Taken together, these characteristics define a simplified listening text. Such texts could conceivably occur in a much more complex form in the real-world, however. The issue, then, is whether the exercise students were required to fulfill corresponded to demands in real-world contexts.

In fact, this text presents a very unfamiliar setting. Listeners are cast in the role of an eavesdropper, listening in on the private conversation between two people who are unaware of any interlopers as discussed by Nunan (2000:25ff). Further, listeners as eavesdroppers are provided the complete text of the conversation before it even takes place (which is impossible in the real world), and are required to take notes on what transpires. Instead of taking notes on meaningful elements of the conversation, however, students are required to obtain information of a highly discrete nature: to write in dictation fashion missing words chosen arbitrarily from the text. This kind of information is meant to elicit a highly codified response from the teacher: the degree of similarity between the word written by the student and the complete text owned by the teacher. The setting, the role, the purpose of the exercise, and the nature of the exercise do not draw attention to the context of the text, or to its purpose, if indeed it has one.

A learner-centered (LC) approach would allow learners some choice in task assignment and process. For example, presumably students would prefer options that suit most closely their self-perceived needs and wants, and adopt a learner-as-producer orientation (Hedberg et al, 1997). In contrast, when these

processes are controlled by teachers and educators (the practice of instructivist learning domains, described in Hedberg et al, 1997), such that input is limited or otherwise modified for pedagogical purposes, the learner is reduced to consumer status, and a corresponding loss of authenticity results.

With regard to LC then, the exercise does not involve any element of learner choice with regard to their answers, the nature of the feedback, or how the required exercise is supposed to relate to their comprehension of the text. The students are not given any opportunity to practice the conversation they have just heard at this point in the textbook, or reviewed later.

Case study 1 exemplifies a simplified text being used in an inauthentic way. The frequency of such listening exercises in this particular high school textbook is quite high. In fact, the tendency of this textbook seems to be a deliberate effort at providing the student with as many model listening texts as possible, coupled with exercises that focus on accuracy-based assessments of student comprehension with regard to discrete bits of the conversation. The result is a rubric that would strictly limit the amount of flexibility and creativity teachers could apply to this text to make the exercise more authentic. This pattern of teaching is reinforced by a testing paradigm in Korea which is characterized by similar approaches in text design. The washback effect of test items that pay little attention to meaning-based learner interactions and discussion of context in any social semiotic sense is clearly evident in the inauthentic practices of this textbook's design.

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Case 2                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <i>Text taken from local newspaper</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| News article about local tourism event (The Korea Times, p 3, October 29, 2001)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| The teacher changed the spelling of roughly every 12 <sup>th</sup> word. These mistakes are italicized in the text to highlight their location.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Length: 180 words                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Activity: Students are to find each misspelled word and provide the correct spelling.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <h2>World's Highest Fountain<br/>to Be Unveiled in Seoul</h2>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| By Lee Chi-dong<br>Staff reporter                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <p>As part of its efforts to enhance the image of the nation's capital for the upcoming World Cup, the Seoul city will hold a ceremony tomorrow to unveil the highest fountain in the world.</p> <p>The Seoul Metropolitan Government said yesterday that it would hold a trial operation of the fountain, wrapping up one year of construction. The fountain will shoot water up to 202 meters, equivalent to the height of a 60-story building.</p> <p>Located near the World Cup Stadium and the Songsan Grand Bridge in western</p> | <p>Seoul, the gigantic fountain, built on a soccer-ball-shaped barge, has 21 surrounding subsidiary fountains, each with a height of 30 meters, along with lightning to provide special effects at night.</p> <p>The 7.7-billion-won fountain was built to celebrate the World Cup finals, which are to be co-hosted by South Korea and Japan from next May to June.</p> <p>"It is also meant to express the hope for world peace and prosperity," said a city spokesman.</p> <p>Seoul officials also expect the fountain, as a new landmark, will serve as an added attraction for the city capital.</p> |

**Case Study 2.** With regard to the engagement of communicative competence, students are not asked to consider any contextual features in the exercise shown above. Rather than a fluency exercise, students are guided to pay specific attention to spelling accuracy. While reading is a solitary activity, critical literacy approaches encourage the student to analyze the text from the point of view of the writer, in a sense interacting with the author to understand the text and its context (Martin, 2000). The question being asked of the students does not require them to do any analyses of this kind. Although

the text itself is a complete version of what appeared in the newspaper, the activity requires the student only to consider at most sentence length units of language (ie identify "bilt" as a verb by looking at the sentence, and rendering its corrected form "built" as a response). The knowledge areas required of the student are lexico-semantic, but pragmatics and strategic competences are not being tapped by this exercise.

Although the text does indeed possess a context, since all genuine texts have a context (Eggins, 1994), students are not led to perceive those contextual features.

Questions, suggested by Lassche (2004), might include: Why was this article written? Who wrote it? Where would one find articles of this kind written? Why was this topic chosen by the newspaper? Who is the intended audience? What kind of language is used? How do the language choices made by the writer position the reader with respect to the text? To understand the context, and to develop an ability to reproduce a text suitable for this context, students need to perceive and practice the language associated with these kinds of issues. (Feez, 1998).

In terms of LC, the teacher has chosen this text. In the Korean EFL situation, such a topic may indeed be familiar and thus appreciated by Korean students. In another country, such a choice might not reflect the interests of the students (ie in North Korea, some students might react quite negatively to the text's propagandist leanings). In any case, the choice of the activity being required of the students was not made with regard to their solicited input. Accuracy-based exercises provide dichotomous feedback (ie spelling is correct or not) – which is clearly a pedagogical practice. In this respect, the students have little choice in determining how they want to approach the text, or might like to talk about it. Generally, real users of a text such as this would not concern themselves with the spelling accuracy of a newspaper text. Although a proofreader would have such a role, the question needs to be asked: does the teacher want to develop a skill such as proof-reading newspapers, or understanding newspapers as sources of information? Which skill would students more likely have need of in the future?

Finally, if this activity were the only item given to the students, and this measure was the only one being used to determine if students comprehended the text, students might validly complain of the administrative use of that measure. The impact of that decision would not reflect their global comprehension of text, since the measure itself was concerned with such a narrow domain. (Bachman and Palmer, 1996).

What is seen in Case 2, then, is an example of a genuine text being used in an inauthentic way. All is not lost however. For example, if the teacher were to continue with questions and activities that encouraged students to make choices about the text and how they felt about it (for example, by using such questions as those mentioned above), progress would be made toward more authentic practice. Instead of choosing random words to miss-spell, teachers might choose to render every verb in the simple present, and ask students to change the tense. Such an activity would highlight the transition of time frame in the text, a valuable grammar feature of the text that students would need to know in order to fully comprehend the text.

In general, texts should be exploited fully, in order to give students as much expertise with the genre as possible, before moving on to another model text (Cross, 1999, 77ff; Callaghan et al, 1993). Texts could also be recycled later on in the syllabus. The heightened familiarity can speed up the text analysis, and provide students with deeper understandings that were inaccessible due to comprehension or time restraints before (Januleviciene, 2003).

Case study 3. Simplified text used authentically

|                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                           |                                                                                          |                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Case 3                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                           |                                                                                          |                                                                                                        |
| <b>Text taken from textbook</b>                                                                                                           |                                                                                           |                                                                                          |                                                                                                        |
| Job advertisement from Interchange textbook (Richards, 1990)                                                                              |                                                                                           |                                                                                          |                                                                                                        |
| Ads are pedagogically contrived, but based on principles extracted from a real-world genre                                                |                                                                                           |                                                                                          |                                                                                                        |
| Length: approx. 15 words each                                                                                                             |                                                                                           |                                                                                          |                                                                                                        |
| Activity: In groups, students are to choose which job they would (1) most prefer, (2) most likely qualify for, and explain their choices. |                                                                                           |                                                                                          |                                                                                                        |
| Vacancy in law office. Lawyer needed to work for an export company. Must know international law.                                          | International tour guide. Immediate opening with large tour agency. Good salary/benefits. | Looking for private detective. Agency needs sharp, young trainee for full-time position. | Spanish teacher needed for private language school. Native speaker with 2 years' experience preferred. |

**Case 3.** The task shown in Case 3 would exemplify an output-to-input (ie fluency-based) structure (described in Chin and Zaorob, 2001). Such an approach is encouraged because it may raise students' awareness about language features they do not yet possess and motivate them to find out more, perhaps by deferring to the teacher as resource, recalling the Interaction Hypothesis of Long and Robinson (1996). The fluency orientation of the task may encourage students to collaborate with each other in determining more efficient uses of language. As such, this task engages the communicative competence of students, in terms of interaction (as they work together collaboratively), full-length discourse, use of context rules, and attention to cultural factors associated with job applications and qualifications.

Although the text is not genuine, having been created by the authors of the textbook, the genre of job advertisement has been clearly simplified to highlight several generic features. For example, the content includes the location of

work (e.g. language school), the job title (i.e. tour guide), and required qualifications in brief (e.g. must know international law). The repetition of these content features serves to highlight the importance this information has on the real-world readers' decision to apply or not. Textual features demonstrate a general lack of sentential structure, and omission of certain grammatical particles (ie prepositions, subject nouns, articles) due to real-world space constraints in newspapers. To prepare this kind of text would require the textbook writer to first investigate the genre under study, isolate target genre features, and present them in a simplified text, (in Lassche (2005), a systematic procedure for doing this is provided). As a result, the role of the reader (as applicant), and the purpose of the activity (evaluate one's own job skills and attributes and how they correspond to job requirements), are clearly related to the purposes such texts have in real world contexts.

Finally, although the topic has been pre-set by the textbook and the teacher, the task still involves elements of LC:

students are free to choose which job they prefer. The task can only be completed with reference to their own experience (they must position their own skills against the job requirements), of which they are free to explore and explain as they wish. If the teacher were to use this exercise as a measure of their ability to use the text, it would represent a valid measurement of global comprehension, the impact of which would probably not engender a negative reaction among students. Additionally, since the task is clearly related to future real-world needs, the students may in fact be very eager to receive such feedback, since it would help them to fine-tune their job-hunting skills in order to procure an interview.

Thus, case 3 uses a simplified text in an authentic fashion. This case demonstrates the essential point: that “non-genuine” texts which are culled from classroom textbooks, pedagogically contrived though they may be, are acceptable to use in the classroom, as long as they are used authentically. In EFL situations, where resources are difficult to come by, and where NESB teachers manage classrooms, such news should come as a welcome relief.

And yet, some teachers may have misgivings about the quality of the learning process in such an exercise. What if collaboration provides students with inaccurate models of language, and reinforces fossilized language features? What if teachers are not familiar with identifying aspects of genre, and thus are not able to simplify texts in ways that reflect real-world characteristics? Both questions highlight (a) the responsibility of teachers to view themselves as essential contributors

to the learning process (Nunan, 1999), as well as emphasizing (b) the need for teachers to see themselves as learners, and in need of continuous professional development (Nunan, 1995).

Teachers help the learning process during text exploration. As the text is explored and as students express themselves in meaning-based activities, the teacher needs to be vigilantly monitoring and providing explicit negative feedback when necessary (after Long and Robinson, 1996). It is important to consider also that input-to-output lessons, with the teacher guiding student analyses, are strongly recommended as pre-cursors to such independent, fluency-oriented activities by genre-based approaches. In this way, the danger of reinforcing inaccurate models of language can be minimized. As well, Chin and Zaorob (2001) suggest there is nothing to prevent the teacher from providing accuracy-based feedback on student performance after a fluency-oriented learning event (i.e. the “input” part of the output-to-input approach)!

Teachers are also continuous learners when they find themselves in situations they are unprepared to meet, as can happen during “output to input” lessons described earlier. Instead of avoiding such situations, teachers should capitalize upon them as opportunities to model good “learner” attitudes, such as a willingness to admit ignorance, and work together with students in exploring language together. In such a process, learners can become teachers, with teachers enabling their efforts towards independence along the way (Nunan, 1995).



Case study 4. Genuine text used authentically

| Case 4                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Text: video footage of "Travel Now" program; Aired May 12, 2001 - 06:30 (ET)</p> <p>Activity: Part of a unit on descriptive genre. This lesson is a fluency-oriented listening class. Teacher solicited favorite travel destination from students (Hawaii). Students are given a task: watch a videotaped travel show (CNN's Travel Now). Take note of features of Hawaii that would be of interest to tourists. Then, in groups, discuss what they saw, and collaborate on their answers. Portions of the video may be replayed to review some of the features. This information will be used in the next class (writing focus) when students create post cards outlining their vacation plans for Hawaii.</p> <p>Length: 15 minute video with audio</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <p>&lt;snip&gt;</p> <p>Hi, I'm Gail O'Neill. Welcome to CNN TRAVEL NOW and the Big Island of Hawaii. Long known for its sand and surf, today, visitors are also finding there are a host of adventures off the beach.</p> <p>(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)</p> <p>O'NEILL. (voice-over): Blue water, black lava, the colors make a striking first impression. But it's green that draws duffers like these to the Big Island.</p> <p>STEVEN HOOKANO, HEAD GOLF PRO, MAUNA LANI RESORT: When you come and play golf here, look at it. I mean it's beautiful. It's gorgeous. The aesthetics is unbelievable and people just love to be here.</p> <p>O'NEILL: And with near perfect weather conditions year round, the western or Kona side of the big island, has become a golfing mecca. What started as an adult playground had evolved over the past decade.</p> <p>HOOKANO: I would say they're catering more to families. Why it makes it easier for them is they can come on and golf and do their things and at the same time their families can do other things that would take their time and not stay at the hotel room.</p> <p>O'NEILL: The hard part is choosing what to do.</p> <p>&lt;snip&gt; available URL: <a href="http://www1.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0105/12/tg.00.html">http://www1.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0105/12/tg.00.html</a></p> |

**Case 4.** Students in the task shown in case 4 work with a text in full-length discourse – an entire episode of the "Travel Now" show. To analyse this text for various features, students must be able to determine use a wide range of language competences (cf. Bachman and Palmer, 1996), including:

- linguistic competence, by identifying discrete names of places and types of activities;
- pragmatic competence, by choosing travel destination features that correspond to their personal preferences;
- strategic competence, by exchanging information they missed while taking notes during collaborative exercises;
- socio-cultural competence, by identifying and creating appropriate responses to various cultural events, such as required with hula skirts. That is, would it be appropriate for students-as-would-be-travelers to wear one? Will they stare at such clothing, or ask unintentionally insensitive questions, out of curiosity?

The method students use to note features of interest, and the negotiated context of the collaborative exchange of information, would probably guarantee a high proportion of context rules (after Widdowson, 1979). Students are not required to provide accuracy-oriented feedback on discrete elements of spelling, grammar, and pronunciation, although this may occur spontaneously among students, and consciously by the teacher when providing process feedback.

The text is genuine, in the sense that it was culled from a non-pedagogical source (ie CNN). The text was created

topic was arrived at through the choice of the students, and thus represents an area of intrinsic motivational interest. The process of the task (watching a travel show) and the product phase of the task (writing a post card) develop communicative skills that students would need in the real world. The chance to collaborate with their peers on missing information is a fluency-based attempt to scaffold performance demands: by working with their peers, students can all make contributions toward a fuller understanding of the text, and can help and teach other elements that were missed.

*“Students are not required to provide accuracy-oriented feedback on discrete elements of spelling, grammar, and pronunciation...”*

for the purpose of informing “real” travelers about Hawaii, probably aiming at (advanced+) speakers of English who can understand a stream of speech spoken at a naturally-occurring speed. The students are cast into a similar role, as the kind of information they are asked to extract is the same kind of information that highly proficient speakers would try to obtain in that particular context. The collaborative exercise would also correspond to a real-world event: when travelers plan a trip, they often discuss their schedule with their friends and colleagues. Such conversations may well provide the traveler with additional commentary on the destination. Finally, the postcard phase is also a predictable consequence of such traveling decisions, since the traveler may wish to inform her friends about the event.

The task is also learner-centered. The

While the task demonstrates the use of a genuine text with authentic practice, some nagging concerns remain: first, with some aspects of the text itself; second, with the applicability of such a task to real-world classrooms and testing contexts. With regard to the text, upon closer inspection it will be noticed that the interviewee (i.e. Hookano) is characterized by language features that Nunan (1989, 23ff) and Brown (1994, 238ff) identify as belonging to spoken text:

- reduced speech (ie “they’re”), fillers (“I mean”)
- clustering (“...they can come on/and golf/and do their things/and at the same time their families can do other things/that would take their time/and not stay at the hotel room”)
- broken speech (“When you come and play golf here – look at it”)
- spontaneous speech: presence of

grammatical error (“the aesthetics is ...”)

Yet, O’Neill’s language displays none of these. In the video, O’Neill’s text is actually a voice-over of scripted speech. How, then, should the transcript of her speech be characterized? Is it not genuine in this regard?

This raises a critical issue, and one that suggests that Nunan, Brown and others tend to characterize spoken text too narrowly: not all spoken language occurs in the context of conversations! Such black and white distinctions unnecessarily dichotomize texts into “conversational”

***“black and white distinctions unnecessarily dichotomize texts into ‘conversational’ versus ‘non-conversational’...”***

versus “non-conversational”, a practice that limits the range of texts when, in fact, the real world has a much larger variety of genres available.

Spoken language can occur in many different contexts and purposes. Take for example the business presentation texts and oral reports discussed in Lassche (unpublished document). Such texts are presented only in oral form, yet have been crafted and revised in ways conversations cannot be. The rhetorical stages of these genres are emphatically non-interactive in the initial stages (ie introduction, body, and conclusion), although the question period is. Yet, these same texts are interactive in the sense that the text-developer carefully considers the needs and wants of her audience before presenting. Spoken texts similar in kind to these are speeches made by politicians, lectures delivered by professors, sermons

delivered by preachers, and TV shows scripted for a viewing audience (as shown here case 4). This particular text is a scripted, spoken, persuasive genre, with embedded descriptive genre and casual conversation. As mentioned earlier, such combinations of genres and modes render texts more complicated. One means of simplifying this text would be re-writing Hookano’s remarks to resemble the scripted comments of O’Neill (i.e. edit the characteristics of conversational mode).

The genres mentioned above are all genuine oral texts that have been created

for purposes dissimilar to what motivates the structure of casual conversations. This case study, then, highlights the crucial necessity of the task authenticator to accurately identify the task context: who wrote this text, for whom and for what reason. Such issues determine what type of genre is the most appropriate in any given context, and by implication what language choices are being made by the text developer in such contexts.

With regard to applicability, many teachers might feel that the fluency-oriented activity described above would be too challenging for their learners. The level of their students’ proficiency renders such texts inaccessible and de-motivating (cf. Locke and Latham, 1990:218ff). These concerns are valid, often voiced in the sink-or-swim mentality of strict “authentic materialists”. The issue highlights the need for scaffolding

outlined in the previous cases for such student needs. That is, for lower-level students to perceive authentic texts, they may require some help “getting into” the texts, a process referred to as the Teaching-Learning Cycle and described in detail by Callaghan et al (1993) and Feez (1998). Such practices can still be authentic depending on the way teachers guide the analysis of such texts. In other words, having beginner students does not automatically result in non-genuine, inauthentic practice. It just means that teachers must be a little more creative in simplifying texts, while maintaining LC contexts that engage whatever communicative resources students have available.

### Conclusion

The essential concept of this paper has been that authenticity is derived from the interaction between the text and its user. Usage defines authenticity, and as such is not an intrinsic quality conferred upon the text itself. This paper suggests that this usage is realized through the engagement of communicative competence in real-life contexts and social purposes. By presenting texts, genuine or otherwise, to students in ways that correspond to these real-world situations, teachers demonstrate authentic practice. The idea that providing simplified activities and texts to students minimizes LC, and is *ipso facto* pedagogically unjustifiable, has been disputed. Nunan’s (1995, 1999) view that LC exists along a continuum of gradual independence, with the teacher scaffolding performance along the way, as described in Lassche (2004, 2005), is the position adopted here.

Such a position is of great importance to teachers in their often-times resource-

poor EFL learning contexts. Teachers need not feel guilty or irresponsible for using pedagogically-contrived texts, as long as they present them in ways that promote communicative, interactive, meaning-based exchanges of information between students as text-consumers towards the goal of students becoming text-producers. Instead, teachers should feel challenged to explore language in new ways, and if necessary, re-tool their approaches from traditionally-instructionist modes to more learner-centered, constructivist ones.

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IBK

## Semantic Distance as a Predictor of Linguistic Difficulty

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### Introduction

Linguistic grading is central to much of the materials writers output. Concepts surrounding such grading fall into four main categories, those of selection, simplification, teachability and learnability. This article examines simplification and presents choices materials writers need to consider along with a methodology for fine-tuning decisions in context.

Simplification comes in various types, but two main threads are discernible: additive simplification, where hidden contexts are revealed, advanced lexis is defined, discourse relationships are clarified and so on; and subtractive

simplification, where complex syntactic structures are replaced with shorter ones, difficult lexis with more common terms, overall textual length is reduced and so on. Even if there is no advanced native speaker baseline text from which to base a simplification on, these types of simplification still emanate from a concept of native speaker usage.

Theorists have criticised simplification on various grounds. Honeyfield claimed that “simplification of syntax may reduce cohesion and readability” (1977). Going further, Susser and Robb (1990, cited in Merhpour & Riazi 2004) conclude that “the process of simplification . . . leaves writing that is more difficult to

21

Winter 2006 Vol. XIV, No. 3

understand than the original". These attacks on subtractive simplification led to theorists developing the position that elaboration, or additive simplification, allowed better comprehension in learners (Long, Ross & Yano 1994, Ko 2001).

Against these theoretical positions lies the reality that very many modern skills coursebooks are structured around idealised situations, core vocabulary lists and graded grammar syllabuses. The question of why this is so might lead to the uncovering of a publisher-driven expectation, which in turn is heavily based on their beliefs about general teacher needs, that requires materials writers to display a control

native speakers. Davies (1987, cited in Alderson) measures simplicity according to readability formulae. Tweissi (1998) is typical of many writers on simplification. He finds statistically significant results after simplification. He even provides one or two examples, but he fails to give anything beyond the briefest suggestion of what simplification actually is. Rather than consider syntactic simplification a naïve concept, I maintain that no study exists that examines this issue for the elementary learner by defining categorically the precise methodology of simplification. Even at the intermediate and higher levels, there are no prescriptive texts. Partly this lack is explainable due to the nature of what can reasonably be

*“what are the mechanics of linguistic simplification?”*

of situations, vocabulary and grammar in their coursebook proposals. No theorist argues that simplification is not helpful for elementary learners. Although its essentialness is clear, the deeper pedagogic question has remained unasked, untested and unknown: what are the mechanics of linguistic simplification?

More recent views of the reading process see comprehension as a build up of various elements: including schematic knowledge, context, lexical complexity, psychological factors readers bring to texts, and syntactic complexity. A pure view of simplification based on one of these factors is seen as naïve (Alderson 2000). Even so, a number of researchers have studied textual simplification. Strother and Ulijin (1987, cited in Alderson 2000) compared native speaker comprehension scores with non-

studied. If a study contains too many variables, internal and external validity is seriously undermined. Studies are limited to analysing comprehensibility either at a global level or at the discrete point level. Partly too, the number of competing theories regarding textual externals are too numerous. Researchers, possibly, do not feel inclined to spend time on what may seem a pointless activity. If, as Fulcher explains, “a range of reader factors such as motivation, background knowledge and previous reading experience affect the reading process to a considerable extent” (1997, cited in Merhpour & Riazi 2004), a precise and locally operationalised definition of linguistic simplification may be impossible. For example, it is possible that the very same text contains semantic features that one reader can relate to easily but is psychologically very distant to another reader. What then

can we make of the concept of linguistic simplification?

Yet, the answer may be seen in coursebooks continually, especially those that come in a graded series. Even if theory refuses to deal with the issue, the answer is readily apparent in the coursebooks we use and write daily. This reality begs the question: might there be some other methodology that informs writers of what we know practically but cannot see at present theoretically?

### **Semantic Distancing**

A methodological attempt at answering this question would need to consider

*“Might there be some other methodology that informs writers of what we know practically but cannot see at present theoretically?”*

vital elements such as learners’ previous language education, the interplay of semantic, social, psychological and other factors, the role of memory and repetition, types of skills and strategies and so on. All of these would need to be considered in terms of teachability and learnability. Each variable would need to be controlled, or monitored, for while the target variables were being examined. Before any of this, though, certain assumptions about the nature of linguistic simplification need to be addressed.

In this article, a single assumption is examined. Research into first language development has forwarded the notion of ‘motherese’, the type of language parents use towards very young children (up to 5-years-old). The relationship between this notion and ‘teacher talk’ has been

seen in second language application. Early motherese centres on the ‘here-and-now’. It is assumed that a system of simplification may be based on the departure from the ‘here-and-now’ towards more distant concepts. A five-level movement may be described. Table 1 shows the five levels. It must be remembered that these levels comprise an untested assumption of simplicity levels.

Syntactic structures need to be ordered according to their semantic purpose. Operationalising these levels purely syntactically fails to comprehend the primarily semantic nature of the levels.

Table 1. *Semantic Distance*

| <b>Semantic Distance</b> |                                                 |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Level 1                  | Visibly determinable or contextually verifiable |
| Level 2                  | Custom, or 1-step removed from now              |
| Level 3                  | The past or the future                          |
| Level 4                  | Secondary level connectors                      |
| Level 5                  | Clauses and narratives                          |

For example, the present simple is a single structure but has at least seven different pragmatic uses (actually, a lot more). Each of these uses needs to be categorised separately. Table 2 presents two kinds of data that exemplify the conceptual levels: syntactic structures and their associated pragmatic uses.

Table 2. Syntax organised by semantic/ pragmatic properties

| <b>Level 1: Visibly determinable or contextually verifiable</b> |                           |                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Structure</i>                                                | <i>Meaning/ Category</i>  | <i>Sample Sentence</i>                         |
| present continuous                                              | temporary action          | I am studying English.                         |
| present simple                                                  | truth, habit              | I live in Sendai.                              |
|                                                                 | command                   | Open your books.                               |
|                                                                 | feelings                  | I feel happy.                                  |
|                                                                 | equals '='                | I am Tom.                                      |
| past simple                                                     | single past action        | I walked here.                                 |
| passive (adjectival)                                            | stative                   | She's tired.                                   |
| 7 senses                                                        |                           |                                                |
| <b>Level 2: Custom, or 1-step removed from now.</b>             |                           |                                                |
| <i>Structure</i>                                                | <i>Meaning/ Category</i>  | <i>Sample Sentence</i>                         |
| present simple                                                  | timetable                 | The train leaves at 5 o'clock.                 |
| general condition                                               | causal relationship       | If you push the button, the light comes on.    |
|                                                                 |                           |                                                |
| simple passive                                                  | custom                    | Sushi is eaten in Japan.                       |
| 'will' future                                                   | instant decision          | (phone rings) I'll get it.                     |
| present simple                                                  | present 'when' clause     | When it rains, I take the bus to work.         |
|                                                                 |                           |                                                |
| present perfect                                                 | experience                | I've been to Hong Kong.                        |
| 6 senses (total 14)                                             |                           |                                                |
| <b>Level 3: The past or the future</b>                          |                           |                                                |
| <i>Structure</i>                                                | <i>Meaning/ Category</i>  | <i>Sample Sentence</i>                         |
| used to                                                         | stopped habit             | I used to smoke (but don't now).               |
| present perfect                                                 | present result            | I've (already) seen that movie.                |
| present continuous                                              | fixed (diary) future plan | I'm going on a trip tomorrow.                  |
|                                                                 |                           |                                                |
| 'will'                                                          | volition                  | I <b>will</b> pass that exam (I will, I will). |
| past passive                                                    | past stative              | She was tired.                                 |
| present continuous                                              | temporary course          | I'm living in Sendai (for the moment).         |
|                                                                 |                           |                                                |
| past perfect                                                    | 'past of past'            | By 1, she had cooked lunch.                    |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> condition                                       | expressing dreams         | If I had \1,000,000,000, I'd +past participle. |
|                                                                 |                           |                                                |
| going to                                                        | prediction                | It's going to rain.                            |
| 9 senses (22 total)                                             |                           |                                                |



| <b>Level 4: Secondary level connectors</b> |                                   |                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Structure</i>                           | <i>Meaning/ Category</i>          | <i>Sample Sentence</i>                                                      |
| present perfect<br>used to                 | uncompleted time<br>stopped state | I've lived in Sendai for 2 years.<br>There used to be a bank on the corner. |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> condition                  | prediction<br>deduction           | If it rains, I'll get wet.<br>If he's late, he'll miss the meeting.         |
| past continuous                            | period filler                     | He was watching TV from 8 to 10 last night.                                 |
|                                            | simultaneous action               | She talked while her mother was cooking.                                    |
| future continuous                          | future prediction                 | This time next year, I'll be working in a bank.                             |
| was going to                               | past plan changed                 | I was going to study last night, but I was too tired.                       |
| future perfect                             | by + future                       | He will have arrived by 8 tonight.                                          |
| 9 senses (31 total)                        |                                   |                                                                             |
| <b>Level 5: Clauses and narratives</b>     |                                   |                                                                             |
| <i>Structure</i>                           | <i>Meaning/ Category</i>          | <i>Sample Sentence</i>                                                      |
| while                                      | simultaneous action               | He listened to music while she studied.                                     |
| past continuous                            | past action interrupted           | I was having a bath when the phone rang.                                    |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> condition                  | advice/ criticism                 | If I were you, I'd work harder.                                             |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> condition                  | cause-effect                      | If this hadn't happened, that wouldn't have either.                         |
| past perfect                               | narrative                         | It had been a good year. (Story beginning)                                  |
| past passive                               | narrative                         | He was hit by his wife.                                                     |
| present simple                             | narrative                         | Beckham loses the ball, and McDuff scores.                                  |
| 7 senses (38 total)                        |                                   |                                                                             |

A few issues may be outlined. Some of the above categorisations will undoubtedly seem arbitrary to individual readers. Furthermore, the syntactic complexity is not considered, only the relationship of the semantic meaning and its level. Additionally, teachability is ignored in this table. For example, even though the present perfect continuous is contextually very easy to teach, the assumed prior learning background of Japanese 1<sup>st</sup>-year university students places this structure outside this elementary table. A teacher may present sentences like, "I've been playing piano for 10 years" and, simultaneously show the meaning using a timeline. For the purposes of deciding linguistic simplicity based on comprehension ability, teachability issues must remain outside the paradigm.

The next stage is to create texts that exemplify these levels, except for the first, which is combined in this study with the second. As each text will be used with the same student group to examine the assumption against the reality, the lexical level used for each text must be controlled and each text must be roughly the same length. This is done using JACET's Level 1 word list. Words not on

the list are glossed, but students have access to dictionaries. Finally, the subject matter of the texts needs to be similar in order to avoid problems of psychological distance between the reader and the texts affecting the comprehension rates of the texts. This methodology is designed to ensure that that it is the semantics that was being tested, not the prior knowledge or not of lexical items. Sentence lengths and overall word lengths must also be similar. For the present tests, structures may not be joined to create extended clauses although adverbial and prepositional clauses may be added. Table 3 shows the numerical data for each text.

A few points may be drawn from this data. Although the word length is roughly the same, the number of words per sentence in texts 3 and 4 is longer than in texts 1 and 2. A probable reason for this is that more clause joiners, such as "if" and "when" were used in texts 3 and 4. Sentence length has not been seen as a predictor of text difficulty (Merhpour & Riazi 2004). The Flesch Reading Ease indicates that text 1 is simpler than text 2, and that 3 is easier than 4. Very little empirical research has been done regar-

Table 3. Statistics per text

|                                 | Text 1 | Text 2 | Text 3 | Text 4 |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Words.....                      | 178    | 177    | 173    | 182    |
| Characters.....                 | 810    | 752    | 744    | 846    |
| Paragraphs.....                 | 3      | 3      | 3      | 3      |
| Sentences.....                  | 21     | 18     | 16     | 17     |
| Sentences per paragraph.....    | 7.0    | 6.0    | 5.3    | 5.6    |
| Words per sentence.....         | 8.4    | 9.8    | 10.8   | 10.7   |
| Characters per word.....        | 4.3    | 4.1    | 4.1    | 4.4    |
| Passives.....                   | 0%     | 5%     | 0%     | 0%     |
| Flesch Reading Ease.....        | 73.7   | 76.4   | 65.2   | 63.0   |
| Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level..... | 5.0    | 5.0    | 6.8    | 7.1    |

ding the value of such scales in EFL. A common attitude is reflected by Carrell whose work dismisses readability formulas in EFL (1987). She bases her opinion on theoretical work and empirical studies in first-language readers, not on empirical studies in EFL. Greenfield (2004) showed that there was an empirical basis for using readability scales in EFL.

### Method

The study was conducted on first-year

Occupational and Physical Therapy majors at Tohoku Bunka Gakuen University in Sendai (n=51; male = 32, female = 19). Four test booklets that had different ordering of the texts were prepared. This was to minimise the chances of certain texts being prioritised due to test taker fatigue or lack of time. Booklets were distributed randomly. Each text had eight comprehension questions, which were to be answered by writing in a provided space. (See the appendix for the texts and questions.)

Table 4. Test scores

| Test   | N  | Mean  | StDev | Min | Med | Max | Range |
|--------|----|-------|-------|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Text 1 | 51 | 50.43 | 21.76 | 0   | 50  | 100 | 100   |
| Text 2 | 51 | 75.76 | 25.70 | 13  | 88  | 100 | 87    |
| Text 3 | 51 | 70.20 | 20.75 | 13  | 75  | 100 | 87    |
| Text 4 | 51 | 66.39 | 18.50 | 25  | 63  | 100 | 75    |

### Results

The statistics software package Minitab v.14 was used for the statistical operations. Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics for each of the texts. Text 1 was answered the most poorly. Both its mean and median scores are on or below the 50% mark. It's minimum score was zero. From text 2, 3 and 4, however, a pattern may be seen. The means fall from 75% to 70% to 66%, and the medians' fall is even more dramatic. Median figures tell us more about the central tendencies in a group than means do. Text 2's median was 88%, text 3's 75% and text 4's 63%. Clearly, there is some effect of structure on comprehension.

There was a need to test these data at the significance level. An Anderson-Darling Normality test was conducted initially to ascertain which kinds of testing would be suitable. The p-values for the

Total data and for each subsections' data indicated that they did not follow a normal distribution. Accordingly, non-parametric tests were considered suitable. In these tests, text 1 was not included. Individual texts' data were compared using the Mann-Whitney test, a non-parametric type of T-test.

Table 5. Mann-Whitney test

| Mann-Whitney : @ 'greater than' |        |        |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------|
|                                 | Text 3 | Text 4 |
| Text 2                          | 0.0190 | 0.0015 |
| Text 3                          | n/a    | 0.0988 |

p at < 0.05

Significant values are found between text 2 and text 3, and text 2 and text 4. The text 3 / text 4 relationship is not significant at p < 0.05.

### Discussion

Text 1 presents an interesting case. Even

though the readability ease, grade levels were low, the lexical range as limited as in the other texts and the syntactic structures limited, the resulting text was deemed highly complex by student test scores. A fuller discourse analysis of the text's features may reveal further levels of complexity. The role and type of questions used in each text was not fully considered. Indeed, it can hardly be overstated that, for whatever level of text in hand, the accompanying questions may reduce the transparency of comprehension scores to the test taker and the researcher.

Texts 2 to 4 did reveal a pattern. However, with a trial size of only fifty-one test takers using texts whose total length was around 180 words, the pattern did not reach statistically significant levels at all relationships. Further research is needed with larger numbers and longer, or more, texts. The null hypothesis was rejected in two cases, which offers support to the notion that semantic distancing may be a factor in deciding textual complexity.

Textual complexity must comprise a number of inter-related factors, of which syntax is only one. The interplay of syntax and semantics offers materials writers a method of linguistic grading, a method that is found in many current course books. This study aimed to investigate a potential reason materials writers make the choices they do: to put into the conscious what is frequently left in the unconscious, as a 'gut feeling' about language difficulty. Far more needs to be done in order to clarify this. Yet, in this paper, we can see a start. The moderator variables of lexis, word and sentence length, and psychological distance were controlled for. The student

population was deemed to be sufficiently homogeneous, their background and present study similar. This factor helps counteract the claim that the difference in readership affected the comprehension scores.

Against this, a few problems were observed. The questions may not have been the most appropriate to test comprehension. They were a mixture of recall and comprehension. Students were required to write the answer to each question. This format favours those students who are comfortable with writing. Multiple choice options favour the majority but are problematic in that they offer hints to test takers. Perhaps a different testing vehicle would have produced more accurate results of real comprehension.

### **Conclusion**

This article set out to examine a theoretical basis for linguistic grading. It offered the idea of semantic distance as a means of discovering levels of simplicity and complexity. A test was created to analyse the possibility that semantic distance played a key role in how materials writers decide on grading. The conclusion here is that theory cannot be divorced from the art of writing and the sense of what determines difficult writers hold. The very text that should have been the easiest was, by far, the most complex in reality. Yet, the hoped-for trend did appear, albeit not evident enough to satisfy statistical requirements of significance in all occasions.

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## Appendix: The Texts and their Questions

### *Designing Texts for Level 1 to 4*

Two basic considerations affected the choice of subject matter for each text. The core theme needed to be similar and still allow for the different levels of semantic meaning to be realisable through different syntax. The theme chosen was the computer and computer-based technologies.

#### Text 1

##### Computers that feel

Each night, you come home from university. Your mother sees you, and she says, "Welcome home". This makes you feel very nice. Sometimes, you feel very upset, worried, or just tired. It is very comforting to hear your mother's voice. Your mother says, "I'm making dinner right now. Sit down and wait for a minute or two." You feel even more relaxed.

Some students live by themselves, and there is no one to say nice things to them. Scientists are making a computer that can understand your feelings. Imagine this: You come home. Your day was tough, and you feel bad. Then your computer says things like, "Have a warm cup of tea. You look worried. Tell me about your day". You tell the computer about your day. It replies, "I know the feeling", and you feel better.

This computer is a thing of the future. Scientists say that the problem is not making the computer. They believe that they can make such a computer soon. The problem is that people may not like computers acting like humans.

- Q1. What is the problem humans may have with the new, feeling computers?
- Q2. Who says nice things to students who live by themselves?
- Q3. Does the student in the text feel tired every night?
- Q4. What are scientists making?
- Q5. How was your day in the imagined situation?
- Q6. Is making a feeling computer difficult?
- Q7. How does the student in the text feel when the mother speaks?
- Q8. What does the feeling computer say when you tell it you've had a hard day?

## Text 2

## Evil robots

Have you ever seen a movie where there was an evil robot? In the movies, the hero fights with a robot. But even when robots are broken they come back again. They re-build themselves. It seems impossible to destroy them. This is frightening and it makes the movie fun to watch.

If a computer part breaks down, very often the whole computer stops working. This is because computers do not know how use other parts to do the same thing. Computers do not know how to work when their shape is changed. Humans are different. When humans lose an arm, we know that we must use our other arm. Scientists are making a new robot that can understand its shape. It has sensors inside that tell the robot if all the parts are working properly. It can move its parts around. If one part breaks down, the robot will use another part. This robot is for people who have lost an arm or a leg. It may even be used for real wars. Now, that is scary.

- Q1. What did heroes do with robots in movies?
- Q2. What happens when humans lose an arm?
- Q3. What do new robots have inside them?
- Q4. What do new robots use if one part breaks down?
- Q5. What happens to old robots when one part breaks down?
- Q6. What do robots in movies do when they break down?
- Q7. What do new robots do when one part breaks down?
- Q8. What might the new robots be used for?

## Text 3

## Electronic paper

Imagine only carrying one book to university every day! When I was a student I used to carry ten. I used to tell myself, "If I had a lot of money, I'd buy two sets of books: I'd leave one set at home and the other set at university". But now, scientists have developed electronic paper. We have electronic books now, but electronic paper is different. It will feel more like paper. It is like a computer screen that you can read like a book.

Computer screens have lights. These lights make your eyes tired if you look at a screen for a long time. Electronic paper uses the natural light around the screen. It is much easier to read. It is a computer. One page will be able to hold a lot of information, to play movies and music.

Eventually, students will not need to carry more than one book. Electronic paper is going to replace paper books. They will be able to put all of their textbooks into one electronic page.

- Q1. What would I have done if I had had a lot of money?
- Q2. What is the new paper like?
- Q3. What do computer screens do if you look at them for too long?

- Q4. What will one page be able to hold?
- Q5. What have scientists made?
- Q6. What will students be able to do with their textbooks?
- Q7. Do all students need to carry just the one book now?
- Q8. Do we have electronic books now?

#### Text 4

##### Computer animation

It used to be very difficult to make animation. You had to draw every picture, one-by-one. Then you put all of the pictures, called frames, together to make the animation. This used to take a lot of time. With computer animation, you can make animations very easily.

John, a computer animator, says, "If they are shown animation in art class, many students will dislike animation. But if students are shown simple programming, many more students will become interested." John talks about the difference between his college life and now. "When I was studying, it took me hours to make just a few seconds. Tonight, I will be making a whole simple animation in just a few hours."

With a computer you draw a frame just once. Then you can save it and re-use it later. With simple mouse clicks, you can change the animation very easily. If you make a mistake, simply undo the problem. John tells us, "I've worked in animation for 30 years. Things are changing fast. Soon, students will be making whole movies in a day."

- Q1. How do you change computer animations?
- Q2. What used to take a lot of time?
- Q3. How will students feel if they are taught animation in art class?
- Q4. How quickly is John able to make a whole animation now?
- Q5. What is another name for an animation picture?
- Q6. What do you do if you make a mistake in computer animation?
- Q7. What is changing?
- Q8. How long has John worked in making animation?

# Reflections on Producing a Writing Textbook

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## Introduction

Over the years I have developed a hybrid product-process approach which gives university students of English the opportunity to write in context to an audience (Casanave, 1998), in volume and with the measured degree of support and revision they need to improve their writing skills. The abiding concern underlying my pedagogic approach is the issue of finding the right balance between creating opportunities to produce text without the inhibiting effect of censorship and error correction (Casanave, 1998)

## Looking back ~ review

My first experience teaching writing came 7 years after my career in TESOL began. This was my first taste of the difficulty of finding and selecting appropriate materials and giving correction as feedback. It was a general writing class of sophomores from an English Literature department whose only future needs that I knew of were to write an abstract of their 4<sup>th</sup> year thesis in English and eventually, for some of them, to become English teachers. There was no brief or syllabus and I had a lot

*“I would like collaborate with a similarly-minded author in a new writing textbook project.”*

and creating opportunities for students to monitor and improve the accuracy of their output (Swales, 1994, McDonough, 1995).

In this paper, I review my experiences teaching writing and how they have shaped and informed my current approach. It includes the development, publication and evaluation of a textbook. I use this to outline some ideas for developing better materials. Finally, I offer a proposition: I would like collaborate with a similarly-minded author in a new writing textbook project. I outline my core beliefs about the nature of collaborative writing and offer this opportunity to anyone who is dedicated and interested.

of autonomy. Looking back, I wonder at my response: I held expectations that were too high; I suffered from stress and dissatisfaction—qualities I now recognize, qualities that have become more and more alien to me as I mature as a writer. Looking back at the positive side, I learnt a lot and, almost single-handedly, produced a textbook to meet these students’ needs.

This period was followed by several years using this and other text books in similar 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year classes at an International Studies faculty and in 3<sup>rd</sup> year academic writing classes in an English department.

When I was a novice teacher, I struggled



with very limited experience, knowledge and skills as a writing teacher to deliver courses to students with similarly limited experience, knowledge and skills as writers. I learned from the textbooks I used, the response of my students, commonsense and intuition and from professional studies. I read ELT literature and research both in my spare time and, eventually, I completed a TESOL master's program.

Initially, I had not heard of such things as needs analyses. Consequently, one of the early problems I had was matching the students' level. I was very ambitious, and this tended to lead to goals and materials that were too difficult. One of the characteristics of my textbook is that it attempts to achieve too much. It also attempts to serve too wide a range

*"...one of the early problems I had was matching the students' level. I was very ambitious..."*

of abilities. I illustrate this in more detail later in this paper.

Japanese high school students come to university English Composition classes with various levels of ability: script, spelling, punctuation and paragraphing problems; grammar, lexis and syntax problems. At higher levels, they often lack, organization, planning (outlining), persuasion skills, as well as knowledge of genre, interpretation, analysis and paraphrasing skills (that are central to summarizing) and research skills. The Japanese education system emphasizes passively acquiring knowledge such as memorizing Kanji (and three other alphabets). Intensive reading and the grammar-translation method still persists

despite ministerial attempts to move instruction to a more communicative pedagogy. After 6 years or more of study; students have had very little practice in production and very little guidance in production; cursive script, performance/achievement checks, revision, discourse analysis of example passages, etc. are relatively novel to them.

A few years ago, I did my first needs and error analysis of some students. Table 1 gives some idea of the kind of problems they had. The task was to write a paragraph of feedback on the class syllabus early in the course. A list of categories was formulated after an initial perusal of over 40 paragraphs of about 100 words each (therefore a total of about 4,000 words). Then I read more systematically and counted each error as

it occurred, at the same time categorizing the errors more specifically into sub-categories (e.g. tense – past).

**Table 1 – Needs Analysis Task and Error Analysis Results**

Syllabus Feedback Request Task:

Write a paragraph giving me your opinion of the syllabus as a whole. Give me your opinion of parts of the syllabus. For example: compare the importance of grammar versus free writing practice. Tell me about other English study you have done and/or will do this year that relates to this syllabus. Tell me how much time you have outside class for this course.

Table 1. *Error Analysis Results:  
Category of error and total number of occurrences*

| Category and sub-category             |    | Total     | Category and sub-category    | Total     |
|---------------------------------------|----|-----------|------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Tense</b>                          |    | <b>22</b> | <b>Verb structures</b>       | <b>26</b> |
| present simple/cont                   | 1  |           | modals                       | 1         |
| past/past perfect                     | 3  |           | verb structures              | 3         |
| present perfect                       | 4  |           | 3 <sup>rd</sup> person verbs | 3         |
| past                                  | 3  |           | ing as nouns                 |           |
| passive                               | 1  |           | /to + infinitive             | 16        |
| future                                | 3  |           | of                           | 1         |
| future 'will'                         | 7  |           | phrasal verbs                | 2         |
| <b>Articles</b>                       | 10 | <b>37</b> | <b>Relative pronouns</b>     | <b>12</b> |
| definite                              | 16 |           | repeated noun                | 7         |
| indefinite                            | 8  |           | possessive                   | 1         |
| a/an                                  | 3  |           | derivatives                  | 2         |
| <b>Conjunctions</b>                   |    | <b>69</b> | <b>Determiners</b>           | <b>28</b> |
| meaning                               | 5  |           | non/count nouns              | 4         |
| position                              | 64 |           | plural/singular              | 11        |
|                                       |    |           | numerals                     | 1         |
| <b>Vocabulary</b>                     |    | <b>11</b> | <b>Sentence structure</b>    | <b>4</b>  |
|                                       |    |           | word order                   | 2         |
| <b>Punctuation</b>                    |    | <b>3</b>  | adjectives                   | 1         |
|                                       |    |           | <b>Prepositions</b>          | <b>14</b> |
| <b>Paragraphing</b>                   |    | <b>2</b>  | <b>Formal/informal style</b> | <b>2</b>  |
|                                       |    |           |                              |           |
| <b>Spelling</b>                       |    | <b>3</b>  |                              |           |
|                                       |    |           |                              |           |
| <b>Comparatives/<br/>Superlatives</b> |    | <b>3</b>  |                              |           |

The results indicate that the position of conjunctions, definite articles, plural/singular determiners, tense and verb forms (gerund/infinitive) are problem areas. The first of these is textual while the others are grammar. While this may at first seem to be somewhat damning of their high school education, many of the

problems are typically challenging aspects of the English language, especially to Asian learners. What the results do show is that students come to first year university classes with rudimentary composition skills. Some even make basic paragraphing, spelling and punctuation errors.

Ten years ago, I found commercially available materials very inadequate. The Kitao series published by Eichosha and Ikubundo proved most promising to me. Although they are thick with L1 explanations, they are strong on the presentation of textual organization. However, they did not meet my ambitious aim to cover low-level beginners and abstract writing.

### **Learning Curve ~ response/ textbook/syllabus development**

I set about devising a course book that covered what I saw as three areas of need; grammar, paragraphing and précis, or summary writing. The first 7 chapters cover general grammatical points, and some textual issues, such as cohesive devices, and reference and linking words. Chapters 8 -11 cover topic sentences, paragraphing, higher-level cohesion words and outlining. The remainder of the text covers summarizing using a range of issues and genres that students are likely to come across. These include cultural writing norms and patterns of organization (e.g. persuasion versus exposition), documenting sources, fiction and non-fiction, and translating. Students are encouraged to find their own material and summarize it. Paraphrasing is absent deliberately.

The concept was that the course would begin at Chapter 9 depending on the level of the class, and that the grammar section would be used for student reference or as a resource as needed. At the time, I took little heed of publishers' call for consistent chapter formatting for user-friendliness.

As I wrote, I began to appreciate the

complexity of the task. I enjoyed the creative act of writing as well as the organizational aspects, such as requesting copyright permission for authentic material. However, I found it very difficult to design activities because I had little knowledge of how topic, genre, grammar and textual organization interrelate. I learnt this to some extent as I went along. For example, time order words and imperatives are important to instructions. I incorporated Hallidayan functional grammar in as much as I had learnt the basics of it; hence the emphasis on understanding what a clause is and its importance conveying a message.

I also found it very difficult to decide which functions (i.e. comparing and contrasting, description, telling a past story) to include and which to leave out because there are so many and I had little knowledge of how to sequence them. In fact, I avoided most of the problems by separating the grammar and reading passages. At the time, I thought I could write a book almost single-handedly. I had a translator and an assistant. I did not even pilot the materials in any classes. I know now that text and discourse analysis provides many of the answers to these questions.

### **Reflecting ~ evaluation**

*Write it Right!* (Cole, 2000) aims to develop writing skills through précis writing for thesis abstracts and content courses. It can be used as such and I use it in my academic writing classes. It can also be used in a content course in which students follow their own interests by reading books or watching movies of their own choice and summarizing them. Table 2 is an analysis of the book.

I used Sheldon's (1988) checklist approach for a general analysis because it is comprehensive, quick and convenient. My findings suggest the book is adaptable but lacks the coherence a writing syllabus needs and suggests that extra materials would be needed.

## Table 2 – Analysis of my Skills Book

Based on Leslie Sheldon's checklist (1988).

### FACTUAL DETAILS

|                                                                                                                              |                                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Title: Write It Right! Abstracts and Summaries                                                                               | Author: Simon Cole                  |
| Publisher: Seido Language Institute                                                                                          | ISBN:4-7915-0349-X C3382            |
| 115 pages B5 size                                                                                                            | Price: 1,900 yen                    |
| Elementary/Pre-intermediate                                                                                                  | 17 Chapters in 3 sections, 26 hours |
| Target learners: Japanese university students                                                                                | Teacher's answer key                |
| Target teachers: Japanese university teachers                                                                                |                                     |
| Target skills: Grammar (sentence structure), Paragraphing (text structure), Summarizing and citing sources (elementary EAP). |                                     |

### ASSESSMENT (\* Poor \*\* Fair \*\*\* Good \*\*\*\* Excellent)

| <i>Factor</i>            | <i>Ratings and comments</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Rationale                | ** Aims are stated ('to strengthen paragraph skills and learn how to summarize other authors' material'), but purpose is ill-defined (to equip students with the skills needed to translate an abstract of their final year thesis; e.g. chapter on citing sources not needed to write an abstract). |
| Availability             | * Although marketing is extremely limited, sample copies are readily available. Further support is limited to a Teacher's answer booklet.                                                                                                                                                            |
| User definition          | * Almost no definition of users. A major flaw is the book is that it attempts to accommodate too wide a range of student levels and needs.                                                                                                                                                           |
| Layout/graphics          | ** Although not cluttered, there are few graphics. Although colorless and dull, typefaces are very functional. Occasionally (Chapter 8), layout is confusing, or example paragraphs are an inappropriate length.                                                                                     |
| Accessibility            | ** Although clearly labeled and indexed, irregular chapter format and length makes it difficult to use. Clear and comprehensive instructions and advice to both student and teacher on use.                                                                                                          |
| Linkage                  | ** There is some evidence of grammatical sequencing, but the connection with skill development is ad hoc. Paragraphs and Précis sections make obvious connections. Poor internal coherence, reflecting ill-defined purpose.                                                                          |
| Selection/grading        | * Introduction of new linguistic items too steep and dependent on translation. A grading list is provided, but no tests or 'self-checks'.                                                                                                                                                            |
| Physical characteristics | *** Adequate space provided for writing, size is convenient, spine labeled.                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

|                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Appropriacy                | ** Content, topics and issues suit university level. Level begins too low and ends too high. Level of language of instruction erratic.                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Authenticity               | *** Content is often authentic. Interesting and topical content. Texts often employed in analytical and 'real-world' tasks.                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Sufficiency                | ** Few extensive productive activities for general paragraph writing.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Cultural bias              | **** Topics have an international flavor, possibly over-reaching student expectations, otherwise even-handed without shying away from difficult topics.                                                                                                                                                          |
| Educational validity       | ** Broader educational concerns and treatment of sensitive issues are apparent. In terms of writing skill acquisition, the book's effectiveness is questionable.                                                                                                                                                 |
| Stimulus/practice/revision | ** Immediate practice activities provide opportunities to employ skills. However, there are inadequate opportunities later for consolidation of basic skills. Many opportunities for summarizing practice exists. No recycling of vocabulary and little recycling of skills. No tests or 'self-checks' provided. |
| Flexibility                | ** The book takes considerable time for the teacher to become familiar with each chapter. Its lack of linkage allows chopping, changing and picking out chapters in any order.                                                                                                                                   |
| Guidance                   | ** The lack of coherence and consistent format leaves the teacher with a lot to figure out for themselves and place a high demand on the reasonably good instructions. The appendices and index provide some useful support.                                                                                     |
| Overall value for money    | * Reasonable, if exploited as a resource book.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

It is clear to me now that working in isolation as I did, cannot result in a thoroughly well prepared text. A variety of perspectives and input from different interested parties can be a great help, but this has to be balanced and not excessive. Participating authors need to have some common agreed goals at the outset. Also, the materials most definitely need to be piloted and revised based on feedback from a number of different teachers.

### **The way ahead ~ outline/proposals**

There are now many excellent textbooks on the market to choose from. Nonetheless, there is always a need for new books. I would like to see a coming together of interested teachers

to collaborate on a textbook with realistic goals for first and second year general writing students at university. Such a book would probably be of interest to a large number of students, teachers and publishers. Working in collaboration, I hope for a variety of expertise and experience, as well as creative input, to avoid previous mistakes. The materials could be piloted thoroughly in their classes and developed.

Some research would need to be done on genre and discourse analysis and sequencing to match Topic, Writing Skill and Grammar Point. It would introduce the most common genres. It would combine product and process through awareness of audience via peer review.

Grammar would be explained in functional, Hallidayan terms, the fundamental basis of which is described in Table 3.

**Table 3 - An introduction to Systemic Functional Grammar: Meaning, message and clause**

- The primary function of language is to convey a message. SFG is concerned with the way meaning is carried and the clause is seen as the primary vehicle of meaning.
- Most of the messages we receive or convey can be found in the form of a clause, or string of clauses. Of course, there are single word messages such as 'Hi!', 'Yes.', 'Help!' or even nonverbal messages such as a sigh - body language conveys many messages. However, the vast bulk of meaning for fluent speakers of English is in a string of clauses.
- Clauses are made up of one or more groups.
- Groups are made up of one or more words. How can we call one word a 'group'? Think of a group as a boat that, to be functional, must have at least one person, a captain. (Bloor & Bloor, 1995; 45).
- One feature anyone with traditional grammar background notices about SFG is the plethora of terms available. However, the power of SFG is its ability to usefully label bits of language in more than one way, reflecting co-existing dimensions.

Table 4 shows how a typical chapter in the book may look.

**Table 4 - Example Chapter outline of proposed textbook**

Unit 1 - Exposition (non-fiction)

- Reading: One paragraph model

Glossary of low frequency words, idioms & phrases

Global/Writing skill Exercises

- o Analysis
- o Topic sentences

Micro/Grammar skill Exercises

- o Punctuation
- o Sentence structure
  - Subject + Verb identification (simple sentence)
- o Present Simple tense

Composition Exercise

- One paragraph, indented, margins, word limited, introduction/topic sentence & concluding sentence.

There is ample evidence that reading makes for better writers. Model passages serve as a goal for learners. Each chapter would begin with a carefully selected reading passage that models the aims of the chapter. This would be followed by a glossary of low frequency words; all the words in the passage that are not among the most frequent 2 or 3,000 words of English, as well as idioms and potentially unfamiliar phrases and nouns. A global analysis of the passage would draw out macro writing skills. This would be followed by micro language skills such as grammar and punctuation. Lastly, a composition task is set for the student.

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BK

## Notes from the Apocrypha

Mark Helgesen, Miyagi Gakuin Women's University

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Author: *English Firsthand* and other series

A few years ago, I was at materials writers conference in the UK. Some of us were discussing things we could and couldn't include in our textbooks. A British ELT author, someone older and wiser than I, said she had been told early on to "avoid PARSNIPS" in any textbook.

"Parsnips? Is there some kind of a vegetable rights thing that I don't know about?"

No, PARSNIPS stood for:

**P**olitics

**A**lcohol

**R**eligion

**S**ex

**N**udity

**I**srael

**P**ork

**S**moking

I don't know if the Parsnips story is literally true or if it is something of a joke that reflects the conservatism that often come up in publishing.

A couple stories that I know are literally true, because they happened to me or close friends:

In a project I was working, we had a multi-cultural unit that included holidays around the world. Two that got edited

39

Winter 2006 Vol. XIV, No. 3



**P**olitics  
**A**lcohol  
**R**eligion  
**S**ex  
**N**udity  
**I**srael  
**P**ork  
**S**moking

out were “Christmas in Australia” and “Ramadan.” Both got the boot because “you can’t include religion in a textbook.” Never mind that nearly every culture has holidays that are somehow connected to belief systems. The “Christmas in Australia” piece I had written was mostly about Santa Claus on Bondi Beach, a religious icon only to Surfers.

Ramadan being bounced was a shame. Most of us know next to nothing about Islam—this in a time we really should find out more. What little we do know is often based on partial knowledge. (“They don’t eat during Ramadan. No wonder they are so crabby”—not realizing Ramadan is actually a time of feasting. It is just those feasts happen at night). My co-authors and I thought it was a chance to inform and share something interesting. We lost. (When finally published, the book did include Bob Marley Day, a holiday in Jamaica. No mention of Rastafarian sacraments.)

A friend is a respected author. In a textbook project that was strongly informed by corpus linguistics, my friend’s team wanted to include the word “smoking.” But, of course, they weren’t stupid. The included it in the context

of talking about rules, in this case, “No smoking.” But even that fell awry of the PC police: “No smoking” here, implies that smoking is OK somewhere else. So out it goes.

Of course, authors and publishers have to use common sense. And different publishers have different views. I’ve included most of the “parsnips” topics in commercially viable textbooks. My main point in writing this short piece is to share some stories most of us can enjoy.

But I do believe that, as publishing becomes more international and more commercial, there is a danger of being dominated by rules. That is so much easier than thinking.

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Part of the above previously appeared in a column on eltnews.com.

I’ve written for several publishers and they all have good points. My main publisher is Longman Asia. I want to point out that I have not run into these problems there, which is ironic since it is one of the biggest, most commercial publishers. BK



# Open Source Freebies

Jim Smiley, Tohoku Bunka Gakuen University

Materials writers find themselves having to deal with all kinds of software, from graphics to video and audio editing. Not only do writers need to be a graphic artist, proficient photographer, sound engineer and movie director, they need the finances to buy the associated software. The most well-known software programs (e.g., Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, Adobe Premiere, Adobe Audition), are linked by a common thread: their high cost. Materials writers need, it seems, also to be rich.

Luckily, for virtually every need, the world of open source and free software <<http://www.opensource.org>; <http://www.fsf.org>> offers a free alternative to costly proprietary software. Most open source applications are developed by small groups of individuals in their spare time, so while they usually offer similar core functionality and a good subset of the bells and whistles of the proprietary software you might be used to using, they are often a little rough around the edges. At the very least, open source software may be used as a trial of your need for that kind of software before you decide to splash out on costly proprietary software. At the very best, open source programs offer fully-functional and viable alternatives to their expensive counterparts.

## Graphics and Photography

Inkscape <<http://www.inkscape.org/>> is a vector graphics software application similar to Adobe Illustrator. The Gimp <<http://www.gimp.org/>> is a pixel-

based photo editor similar to Adobe Photoshop. Like Photoshop, The Gimp has a useable vector graphic functionality (Bezier curves), and may offer a better introduction to the more complex concepts that underpin Inkscape. Both output standard file types, including GIF and JPEG, which make them ideal for web-based materials, too. If you are used to Photoshop's interface, then you might want to install GimpShop <<http://www.gimpshop.net/>>, a frontend that mimics the menus, toolbars, and palettes of Photoshop.

## Audio and Video

Audacity <<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>> is a fully-equipped audio recording and editing program. Track numbers are unlimited and can be stereo or mono. Various audio effects give users full control over audio. These effects include amplification of weak signals, echoes and noise reduction. Output to MP3 and other compressed file types allows materials writers to create low bandwidth audio for on-line study. As for video, Jahshaka <<http://www.jahshaka.org/>> has a very transparent user interface, and even inexperienced users can make complex-looking video very quickly.

Cost is no longer a factor in the design of high-quality materials. The issue now becomes one of software learning time, graphic design skills and imagination. But we had all of those already, didn't we?

BK

# NPO JALT Materials Writers Special Interest Group Annual General Meeting

Friday 3rd November, 2006

Kitakyushu International Conference Centre, Room 31

## Minutes

12 eligible voting members present.

1. Jim Smiley was appointed Recording Secretary for the meeting.
2. Cameron Romney was appointed At-Large Co-ordinator for Elections.
3. Amendments to the MWSIG Constitution:
  - 1 The possessive 's' will be dropped from the official name as printed on the constitution, i.e. from Materials Writers' Special Interest Group to Materials Writers Special Interest Group. No vote taken. No objections to what was viewed as simply the correction of an error.
  - 2 The Japanese name for the MWSIG will be that as printed in the JALT National records.
  - 3 Article 6.d Official Language. The final sentence in the amended constitution will read as: Minutes are to be kept in the language of the meeting with translation if required. Vote: 4 for the change, 1 against, 7 abstentions.
4. Officers' reports.
5. Appointment of Officers for 2007 (see note\*). All Officers voted in unanimously.
  - 1 Programmes Chair: Greg Goodmacher
  - 2 Membership Chair: Cameron Romney
  - 3 Publications Chair: Jim Smiley
  - 4 Records Chair: Daniel Droukis
  - 5 Treasurer: Scot Petersen
  - 6 Co-ordinator: Jim Smiley
6. Any other business
  - 1 The MWSIG will be a full co-host of the 2007 Pan-SIG Conference to be held in Sendai on May 12-13<sup>th</sup> 2007.
  - 2 To aid the JALT National Splash fund, MWSIG donated 30,000 yen.

Note\*

JALT National Policy dictates that officers assume their position as of the OGM. MWSIG Constitution places that assumption on January 1. As such, MWSIG Constitution needs to be amended next November to fall into line with JALT National. MWSIG Officers are as stated above.

# MW-SIG Committee

## Executive Officer Positions

|                 |              |                          |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| Jim Smiley      | Coordinator  | jimsmiley@pm.tbgu.ac.jp  |
| Greg Goodmacher | Programmes   | ggoodmacher@hotmail.com  |
| Scott Petersen  | Treasurer    | petersen@ma.medias.ne.jp |
| Cameron Romney  | Membership   | wcromney@andrew.ac.jp    |
| Jim Smiley      | Publications | jimsmiley@pm.tbgu.ac.jp  |
| Daniel Droukis  | Records      | droukis@kyukyo-u.ac.jp   |

## Non-Executive Officer Positions

|                 |                         |                        |
|-----------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Derek Di Matteo | Newsletter layout       | derek@blueturnip.com   |
| Bob Long        | Newsletter distribution | long@dhs.kyutech.ac.jp |
| John Daly       | Yahoo group webmaster   | john-d@sano-c.ac.jp    |

### **Note:**

'Executive Officer Position' refers to the names we supply to JALT Central Office (JCO) and are put on the web. We need to have these positions filled. 'Non-Executive Officer Positions' are positions that are non-JCO registered names, but are, none-the-less extremely valuable to the group. These people are, of course, recognised at the group level as committee members.

# MW-SIG Resources

**MW-SIG Web Site** <http://uk.geocities.com/materialwritersig/index.html>

The site contains articles on topics ranging from copyright to desktop publishing techniques, an extensive list of publishers including contact information, tutorials and software recommendations, and information on submission requirements for *Between the Keys*.

**MW-SIG Yahoo! Group** <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/jaltmwsig/>

The Yahoo! Groups site houses our discussion list, a database of members' publications, a file repository for sharing work and ideas, a space for photos, and the ability to conduct polls, create a calendar, and have a live chat session.

## On the Inside

|                                                                                             |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| The Coordinator's Column .....                                                              | 2  |
| Making your own Class CD<br><i>John Nevara</i> .....                                        | 7  |
| Conceptualizing Authenticity: Discussion<br>of 4 Case Studies<br><i>Gerry Lassche</i> ..... | 10 |
| Semantic Distance as a Predictor of Linguistic<br>Difficulty<br><i>Jim Smiley</i> .....     | 21 |
| Reflection on Producing a Writing Textbook<br><i>Simon Cole</i> .....                       | 32 |
| Notes from the Apocrypha<br><i>Marc Helgesen</i> .....                                      | 39 |
| Open Source Freebies<br><i>Jim Smiley</i> .....                                             | 41 |
| MW-SIG AGM Minutes .....                                                                    | 42 |

**The Materials Writers SIG** is dedicated to continually raising the standards in the creation of language teaching materials, in all languages and in all media, whether for general consumption or for individual classroom use. The editors encourage participation from colleagues using new media or teaching languages other than English.

**Winter 2006      Volume XIV, Number 3**