Between the Keys

A Publication of the JALT Materials Writers SIG ©2014

Coordinator's Column
Nathaniel French

This issue of Between the Keys is the (long overdue) Pre-Conference issue. The JALT International Conference is less than three weeks away, and we have prepared this issue of Between the Keys to build a little momentum going into the conference!

Our featured speaker for the conference is Miles Craven, and he will be giving a workshop from just after lunchtime on Saturday, and our featured presentation just before dinner on Sunday. We also have a SIG forum with a number of big names in materials publishing, and they will be holding their conversations around lunchtime on Sunday. If you are attending the conference, all three of these presentations will be well worth your time!

In other news, I'd like to take this time to say that it seems as though I will be becoming a Director of JALT in the upcoming weeks, and because of this I will no longer be able to be the Coordinator of the MW SIG. However, Jim Smiley will be coming back to be our coordinator again after a small hiatus, so I know that our SIG will be in good hands!

Anyway, please enjoy this Pre-Conference issue, and I hope to see some of you at the International Conference!

Inside this issue
Jim Smiley

We have a bumper issue to whet your writing appetites in time for the JALT National Conference in Tsukuba later this month. Peppered through the newsletter, you'll see our main activities during the conference.

Inside these pages, Goodwin draws on his experience as a copywriter to describe how to utilise an existing framework for writing class materials. Holtzclaw revisits the concept of 'teaching to the test' by showing how communicative materials can be created that aid test preparation. Kawashima studies the use of pragmatic features in international EFL textbooks and argues for a more comprehensive approach to the presentation of speech acts in textbooks. Romney introduces a typeface that is suitable of EFL pedagogic materials based on visual aspects of typefaces and issues learners have with them. Our JALT 2014 Featured Speaker, Miles Craven invites us to consider "What Type of Writer are You?". His contention is that if we understand our particular purpose as writers, we can control our writing careers more concretely. Finally, Smiley makes the suggestion that word clouds may be a useful tool for writers during the rewriting process.

Producing a newsletter is a rewarding, challenging, yet time-consuming task for a team of people. To those interested in helping out, pop by our booth in Tsukuba.

Using copywriting training in an EFL writing course

Allan Goodwin

Material developers are constantly on the lookout for things to use in their classes. For most of us, rather than reinvent the wheel, we may take a textbook and the syllabus framework in it, and alter it either slightly or by a very large amount for our classes.

This is exactly what I did to make a discourse writing class syllabus for use with first through third year learners at an academic high school. The syllabus could easily be modified for the university level.

My school used the textbook, *Planet Blue*. This is a textbook that begins with sentential level grammar, then moves on to paragraph writing and finishes with essay writing. My school wanted to skip the sentence level part and concentrate on paragraph writing for most of the year.

Like many books on writing, this book introduced paragraph writing with a *topic sentence* (one main idea), *three support sentences* (give reasons or examples to support the topic) and a *conclusion sentence* (restate the topic sentence, in different words). Students then write paragraphs about different subjects, usually involving writing about their opinions. When it comes time to introduce essay writing, the book shows the topic sentence of a paragraph being expanded into an introductory paragraph, each support sentence being altered into supporting paragraphs, and the conclusion sentence being altered into a concluding paragraph.

Writing nothing but the paragraphs and finally the essays in *Planet Blue* would not cover the length of time required for the course. I felt that just adding more one-paragraph and five paragraph essays would be tedious for everyone. Luckily, I had freedom in what I did because the department allowed me to develop the course myself.

Before teaching English, I trained to be a copywriter. Connecting advertising writing to school writing wasn't difficult. Just as students learn to have three support sentences or paragraphs, copywriters are taught to make three ads in a campaign. The tag line (the line at the bottom of the ad, "Coke is it!", "I'm lovin' it!" or "Just do it") is the idea that ties the ads together, just like a topic sentence or thesis is the idea that ties support reasons together. While working at a radio station, my boss told me to use the CBC writing rules for all commercials. These are:

1. Tell them what you're going to tell them.

2. Tell them.

3. Tell them what you told them. (Tell them again).

The CBC is the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. It's like NHK for Canada. These rules are not just for writing commercials. Writers at the CBC use them to write anything (they are used in writing stories, etc. In print ads, the rule 1 from above is executed with a headline, rule 2 with an image and rule 3 with the tag line at the bottom of the ad).

Remembering a language-teaching seminar in which we were told that we don't just teach English, we teach communications, I put the following down on a sheet of paper:

	CBC	Paragraph	Essay
1	Tell them what you're going to tell them	One main idea	Introduction
2	Tell them	Support- Reasons or examples for the topic	Supporting paragraphs
3	Tell them what you told them	Conclusion sentence. Restates the topic	Concluding Paragraph

I was teaching a course on writing. Academic writing is important, but other than simple paragraphs and essays, the majority of the literature on academic writing—like Swain's "Create A Research Space" (CARS) or Golebiowski's "Framework for the Analysis or Rhetorical Structures" (FARS)—was beyond the students and most of the Japanese teachers, who had an unspoken veto power over anything in my course. By organizing the course around the CBC writing rules while emphasizing paragraph writing as an extremely important execution of those rules, I was free to teach other types of written communication within the course.

As well as the media copywriting program, I had also taken courses in creative writing and non-fiction writing during my undergraduate degree (mainly journalism, but also what may be referred to as 'creative-non-fiction' today). A lot of the research done for qualitative studies in identity done in sociolinguistics is similar in method and writing to creative non-fiction work like being a magazine journalist. For teachers interested in writing, there are a lot of books and websites aimed at teaching native speakers how to write. I used a book on writing science fiction and fantasy to do a large unit on story writing in which learners made a character (using a simplified character sheet like in the writing science fiction book, and similar to a simplified version used in role-playing games. Students picked from "past", "present" or "future" to indicate fantasy, contemporary or science fiction, for example). Students then described the character in another class and finally wrote a story with the character in it.

Not everyone has a writing background, but there are two resources that could help people looking to try this themselves. One is to do an Internet search for the term 'story mountain' (you could also look up '7 basic plots'). This is a common way of teaching story writing to elementary students, and by adding details, degrees of complexity can be established that satisfy writing courses all the way through to the university level. The second is to get a copy of a book like "Public Relations Writing The Essentials of Style and Format" by Thomas H. Bivins. This type of book has examples of many different types of writing that go under the heading of 'professional writing'.

One other extremely important change I made from the "Planet Blue" textbook was with the method of making a mind map (referred to as a 'web diagram' in "Planet Blue"). Students think of topics around a specific theme and then draw branches from these topics and write

examples. After doing so, learners look at what they have thought of, and pick the best topic to write their paragraph.

This seems to be particularly difficult for many students. When I was studying copywriting, we were not taught to do this. The reason is because most people do not usually think in this way. Most people think of examples, not topics, when asked to think about a theme. For example, instead of thinking *Free time -> music -> buy CDs -> play guitar*, most people probably think *Free time -> play guitar -> buy CDs* and then later will put that together with 'music'. Sometimes, people may think of unrelated topics and examples.

I taught the students to work on the mind map, and then to step back and try to find other ways to group their examples. This was one way that I was taught how to generate ideas. Students used different colored highlighters to group their examples into different topics.

Later, I added in another stage when I was asked to teach this to high level third year senior high students. When students were looking at their mind map, or after grouping the mind map (possibly even having rewritten it into different topics), I taught students how to change the focus of their ideas. Ideas can be improved by moving into a closer focus. For example, if a student had the following chain of thought: T*hings I like -> music -> 19th Century -> opera -> Verdi*, they might write something about an opera by Verdi. Ideas can also be improved by moving into a broader perspective. For example if a student had the following chain of thought: *Things I like -> music -> art -> literature*, they might look at that, see 'the Arts' as a topic, and then write something about liking the arts. Finally, ideas could be improved by moving to a broader perspective and then back into a closer focus. For example if a student

had the following chain of thought: *Things I like -> music -> art -> literature-> 19th Century*, they might decide to write something comparing different arts within the nineteenth century. With practice, doing this enables students to come up with strong ideas and trains them to step back from what they have thought of and look at their output more objectively. This can be useful for any writing project, speech, discussion or debate and also for understanding different cultures. It is also what I had done in changing the writing curriculum when I moved to a broader set of rules from topic, support, conclusion, and then I used the broader rules to teach stories, travel pamphlets and advertising campaigns.

In conclusion, material development for a course does not have to be either reinventing the wheel or just adding a few extra exercises to an existing textbook. An existing (and fairly standard) framework can be used as a jumping of point.

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BK

Using Eiken vocabulary lists to ensure socially relevant materials

Travis Holtzclaw, Meiho Junior & Senior High School, Tokyo

"No classroom is an island unto itself. Every classroom is influenced by and is a reflection of the larger society of which it is a part.

—Kumarawadivelu, 2003, p. 239

It is not uncommon to hear both Japanese and non-Japanese English teachers (but mostly non-Japanese) voice concerns about the test oriented atmosphere of Japan, and these concerns are often echoed by the students, parents, and even by Japanese English teachers themselves, although perhaps to a different degree. Although I continue to have reservations about gearing so much of an English program toward standardized exams, over the years I have become more and more open-minded in regards to them as I become more familiar with both the tests themselves and the culture that regards them so highly.

In this paper, I will not make a case for or against studying for standardized tests. Instead, I will briefly make a case for and also give some examples of how the Eiken vocabulary lists can be used to make your own original and supplementary materials socially relevant, and in doing so, help motivate students, and make their parents and your institution's English department happy.

Kumaravadivelu (2003), under the heading *The Use of Appropriate Teaching Materials*, states that "textbooks, to be relevant, must be sensitive to the aims and objectives, needs and wants of learners from a particular pedagogic setting." Here in Japan, that pedagogic setting includes test taking and students who are under constant pressure to attain higher scores or, in the case of the Eiken, the next grade. Thus, our learners often do have "aims and objectives" and also "needs and wants" that are related to passing exams. Additionally, we must consider that these 'learners' have parents with similar (and perhaps even higher) aims and that the learning itself takes place in a school that, at least in the case of private schools, needs to have students pass tests for recruitment purposes. If a teacher were insensitive to these cultural aspects, it would be unprofessional and arguably unethical.

The good news is that a good part of these test-based needs can be addressed without having to teach to the test. At my school, a private junior and senior high, where I have been referring to Eiken vocabulary lists for the past two years, this comes in two forms: looking up words that are already on my materials to see if they are in fact Eiken words, and using the wordlists as sources for vocabulary for my new materials. In both cases, I mark these items in a way that students know that they are from the Eiken lists and also encourage the students to use them often in classroom activities.

My Program

I teach English Conversation (EC) to the junior high school classes (J1, J2, and J3) and the first year of high school (H1). Additionally, I teach a 'current events' elective class for the second and third year (H2 and H3) high school students.

Grade	Eiken Vocab Lists	Subject	Materials
J1	Eiken Grades, 4, 3	EC	original handouts, worksheets, homework, PPTs
J2	Eiken Grade 3	EC	original textbook, handouts, worksheets, homework, PPTs
J3	Eiken Grades 3, pre-2	EC	supplementary materials, homework
H1	Eiken Grade pre-2	EC	handouts, worksheets, homework
H2 H3	Eiken Grades 2, pre-1, 1	Current Events	CNN Student News worksheets, PPTs

Examples

For the J2 EC textbook, in which we use comics, we have highlighted the words and expressions that are found on the Eiken Grade 3 vocabulary lists (I use Obunsha's
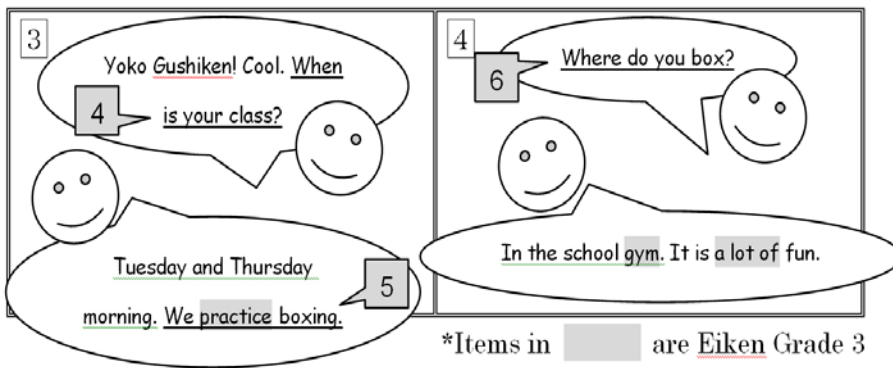
word lists). For example:

For the H1 homework, we use the word list as a source for about half of the

items (usually five or six of ten) in the matching exercise. For example:

And in H2/H3, after selecting a portion of the CNN Student News transcript,, we find which of our key words are Eiken Grade 2, pre-1, and 1 and mark them accordingly. The convenient thing at this level is that many current event

Key Vocabulary, Collocations, and Expressions	
❑ (have) issues (with) <e2>	❑ crisis <eP1>
❑ oppose <e2>	❑ diplomatic <eP1>
❑ (find) solutions <e2>	❑ (have) disputes (with) <eP1>
❑ territorial <e2>	❑ side with

related key words can be found on the Eiken word lists.

Note that the lists are generally made of head words, so if you find, for example, *object* on the list, there is a chance that *objection* and *objective(ly)* will also be on the actual tests.

Benefits

Shortly after linking my materials with the Eiken word lists, there was a modest yet noticeable rise in student motivation. In fact, I even had students coming in early and telling me about their recent Eiken exploits. Also, during trial lessons on student recruitment days, I see smiles of reassurance on parents' faces when they hear that we provide Eiken support in our EC classes. Plus, the English department also seems encouraged knowing that students are receiving some extra support in EC.

Conclusion

Without "teaching to the test," you can incorporate Eiken vocabulary and expressions into your materials, and in doing so, ensure the social relevance of your practice, and meet the social needs of your students, their parents, and your institution. They all will benefit from it and thank you for your attention to their needs. And as a language educator, you can feel some pride as you have satisfied both your "pedagogic" and "social obligations" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) as a teacher.

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BK

Writing for ELT: Nuts and bolts
Miles Craven—Churchill College, University of Cambridge

Exactly what does it take to turn an idea for a book into a finished product? This practical workshop will look at the process of ELT textbook writing, giving an overview of all the stages involved in taking an initial concept through to a handover manuscript, and then on to final proofs. From piloting, reviewing, content and copy editing, to design and permissions constraints, participants will gain a better understanding of the key issues involved. This talk is useful having their work published.

Sunday, 23 November 2014
4:30—6:00
Room 101

Pragmatic features in ELT textbooks for beginners

Chie Kawashima, Tochigi Prefectural Sano Shou-ou High School

Introduction

Pragmatic competence is required for successful communication in a foreign language. Pragmatic competence, which Kasper (1997) defines as "knowledge of communicative action and ability to use language appropriately according to context," is one of the most important skills for successful communication in language education. Pragmatic competence is difficult to acquire especially in an EFL context, where grammatical errors can be seen as more severe than pragmatic errors (Kasper 2001). Even advanced learners can make pragmatic mistakes, which may lead to serious communication failure (Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei 1998). Improving learners' pragmatic competence is important.

Ishihara and Cohen (2010) point out that one of the causes of learners' divergence from pragmatic norms is the effect of instruction or instructional material. This is an area where change may be effected to improve learners' pragmatic abilities. Textbooks are the primary source of input and practice. This study looks at speech acts presented in beginner-level commercial ELT textbooks used internationally. Analysis of the textbooks reveals that a range of communicative functions and linguistic forms are featured, and identifies whether pragmatic features are introduced with contextual information. The results suggest there are some common shortcomings of presenting speech acts in the textbooks.

Research Questions

Q1. What kind of speech acts are introduced in each textbook?
Q2. How many linguistic forms are used for these speech acts?
Q3. Are these speech acts presented with contextual information and descriptions of their communicative function?

Methods

Textbook selection

I made enquiries about the most popular integrated skills beginner-level ELT textbooks by sending emails to five different major publishers. Five popular ELT textbooks internationally used have been selected based on their replies (table 1).

(TB1)	Interchange Intro Cambridge University Press
(TB2)	American Headway Starter Oxford University Press
(TB3)	Cutting Edge Starter Pearson Education
(TB4)	Global Beginner Course book Macmillan
(TB5)	Time Zones 1 Cengage Learning

Textbooks used for analysis (Table 1)

Textbook analysis

Analysis was made unit-by-unit as there are 12-17 sections (including 'Classroom language' section) in each textbook and each unit has different grammatical points and language functions, and the same speech acts are frequently recycled in the same unit. First of all, speech acts appearing in each textbook were counted. Second, linguistic forms, which are based on the level of directness or politeness,

used for each speech act were counted. Third, each speech act was analysed to see whether or not it was accompanied by contextual information such as interlocutors' information as well as for the use of metalanguage. Contextual information is mostly concerned with the relationship between interlocutors.

Outcomes

Speech act types were looked at based on the previous studies of Nguyen (2001), Shimizu (2007) and Vellenga (2004). The total number of 37 speech acts presented in the five textbooks selected for this study were as follows:

accepting advice, accepting offers, accepting proposals, agreeing, agreeing and disagreeing, apologizing, asking for advice, asking directions, asking for opinions, asking for permissions, assessing, celebrating, complaining, complimenting, disagreeing, encouraging, exclaiming, expressing opinions, expressing sympathy, giving advice, giving directions, giving offers, giving orders, giving permissions, greeting, leave-taking, prohibiting, refusing offers, refusing proposals, refusing requests, requesting, responding to apology ,responding to compliments, responding to good news, responding to thanks, suggesting proposals and thanking.

However, there are speech acts that do not appear in any of these textbooks such as *making excuses, promising, expressing regrets, threatening and persuading.*

TB1 and TB2 present more than half of the 37 speech acts, while TB3, TB4 and TB5 present less than half. *Giving offers, greeting, requesting* and *thanking* are presented in all the textbooks, while ten of these 37 speech acts appear in only single textbooks. In TB3, TB4 and TB5, some frequently appearing speech acts are missing. Only in TB3 is *giving advice* not presented. *Accepting proposals, apologizing, giving orders* and *suggesting proposals* are missing in TB4, while

agreeing, disagreeing, expressing opinions and *leave-takings* do not appear in TB5. Thus, the distribution of speech acts across textbooks seems to be uneven.

| TB1 | 25/37 | TB3 | 18/37 | TB5 | 10/37 |
| TB2 | 33/37 | TB4 | 13/37 | | |

(Table 2) Range of speech acts presented across the textbooks

In Table 3, the average number of speech acts appearing in each unit and the average number of linguistic forms of each speech act are shown. TB2 includes the largest number of speech acts on average in each unit. In Unit 11 of TB2, 18 different speech acts are presented:

1) accepting offers, 2) agreeing, 3) apologizing, 4) asking for opinions, 5) complimenting, 6) disagreeing, 7) expressing opinions, 8) expressing sympathy, 9) giving advice, 10) giving directions, 11) giving offers, 12) refusing proposals, 13) refusing requests 14) requesting, 15) responding to apologies, 16) responding to compliments, 17)s uggesting proposals and 18) thanking.

In this textbook, learners seem to have an opportunity to learn many speech acts.

The average number of linguistic forms per speech act, on the other hand, does not show great variation across textbooks and all remain low. In TB2, as many as 10 units present requesting with 8 linguistic forms such as:

1) Noun + please, 2) Please don't + Verb, 3) Don't + Verb, 4) I want to…, 5) I'd like to…, 6) We'd like to.., 7) Can you…? and 8) Can I…?

Learners have more opportunities to learn different requesting forms in TB2 in comparison with any other textbook. All these linguistic forms, however, can be used only in casual situations. There are no highly modalised polite forms such as "could you…?" or "would it be possible to…?"

	TB1	TB2	TB3	TB4	TB5
Total number of units presenting speech acts	17	14	11	15	9
Average number of speech acts	3.90	7.29	4.08	7.07	2.15
Average number of linguistic forms	1.60	1.81	1.64	1.82	1.63

(Table 3)

Table 4 shows the percentage of speech acts accompanied with contextual information or are explicitly introduced using linguistic metalanguage. Most of the contextual information, especially interlocutors' relationship, is presented with photos or illustrations, while only a few are explicitly described. Although TB5 presents the lowest number of speech acts in Table 3, more than half of them are presented with contextual information.

In TB2, which has the highest number of speech acts, only 9 percent of speech acts are presented with the use of metalanguage, while over 20 percent of speech acts in TB4 and TB 5 are presented with linguistic metalanguage. Both of these textbooks present the least number of speech acts.

	TB1	TB2	TB3	TB4	TB5
Total number of units presenting speech acts	39%	38%	28%	18%	57%
Average number of speech acts	13%	9%	2%	23%	21%

(Table 4)

Discussion

First of all, an uneven distribution of speech acts across the textbooks has been found. The variation of speech acts available to learners differs depending on which textbook they select.

Second, the average number of linguistic forms introduced for each speech act remains as small as 1.60 to 1.82 across the textbooks (Table 3). Presentation of insufficient amounts of linguistic forms might be more problematic than not introducing a wide range of speech acts in textbooks. For example, TB1 presents the expression of *refusing requests* with a single linguistic form like "I'm sorry, I can't". Learners studying with this textbook might always use this form to refuse someone's requests in any situation. As Shimizu et al. (2007) points out, students have no opportunity to learn different ways of expressing their intentions, or they may keep using a single form in many situations. Therefore, linguistic forms should be introduced with contextual information. Contextual factors such as the interlocutors' relationship or the degree of imposition should be taken into consideration in relation with the linguistic forms of each speech act. Although TB2 presents a larger number of speech acts, the number of linguistic forms introduced for each speech act remains as low as in any other textbook. TB2 introduces only one linguistic form for *refusing proposals* such as "Sorry, I can't. I'm working late again." There could be five ways of *making a refusal*: A) Positive opinion ("That sounds wonderful, but…", "I'd like/love to, but…" and "I wish I could, but…"), B) Thanking ("Thank you for the invitation" and "Thanks, but…), C) Apology ("I'm sorry, but…), D) Alternative ("Maybe some other time" and "Perhaps next time"), E) Direct Refusal ("I can't go" and "I can't make it"), and all these expressions can be used with expressions of stating the reasons for refusal (Yoshida 2000). TB5, on the other hand, introduces the least number of speech acts, and more than half of them are presented with supporting contextual information.

Third, a lack of metalanguage use in materials is also problematic especially for EFL learners. In EFL contexts, learners have few opportunities, if any, to use their target language outside the

classroom and tend to rely mostly on textbooks. Meta-pragmatic information shows the learners the appropriate or inappropriate language use in specific situations depending on when, where and to whom they speak (Nguyen 2011). TB 2, where learners may have more opportunity to learn many different speech acts, presents most speech acts without using metalanguage. Most EFL learners have few opportunities to use the target language outside their classroom, and therefore the use of linguistic metalanguage helps learners to be aware of extralinguistic information. With explicit teaching, learners can pay more attention to specific linguistic features and to understand the relationship between these features and contextual factors (Ishihara and Cohen 2007).

Conclusion

Textbooks that present a wide range of speech acts seem to provide learners with more opportunities to improve their pragmatic competence. However, without sufficient linguistic forms, contextual information and the use of linguistic metalanguage, learners may have difficulties in developing their intercultural communication skills. Linguistic forms of each speech act could be introduced according to contextual information as linguistic forms vary depending on when, where and to whom he or she is speaking. Metalanguage could help learners to decide which

expression to use in a specific situation. As Nguyen states (2011), providing contextual clues and meta-pragmatic information on politeness or norms of appropriateness is a vital factor where learners can understand different socio-cultural constraints.

References

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BK

MW-SIG AGM

This is your chance to have a say in what happens behind the scenes. This year in particular, we need new blood.

Officer Nominations

Co-ordinator: Jim Smiley
Treasurer: Scott Peterson
Membership: Travis Holtzclaw
Publications: James Essex

We still need bodies for the following: Publicity, Website editor, Pan-SIG2015 liaison, and co-chairs for all of the above. We can only prosper if members rally together. Come along and be a part of our vibrant, progressive community.

Saturday, 22 November 2014
3:35—4:35
Room 303

Typeface recommendation: Cambridge

Cameron Romney, Kyoto Sangyo University

I have long argued that when creating materials for L2 learners, writers cannot ignore the visual elements. I am not alone in saying this, nor am I the only one who has discussed this here in Between the Keys (see Kelly's article from 1998 for example), but it bears repeating. Just last week I found a stack of abandoned handouts under the teacher's desk in one of the classrooms I was using. The lexical content of the materials—a review exercise for vocabulary from the textbook—was fine, if not generic, but the visual elements were atrocious. I really wondered how the students performed reading such a difficult document. I don't want to discuss that document in particular as I am not here to embarrass my colleagues, but I would like to revisit what I feel is the most basic design element of any text—the typeface, i.e. the font.

I've presented on this topic in five countries and all up and down the archipelago in the last few years, and I'm often asked to recommend a typeface for language learning materials. Unfortunately, it isn't as simple as 'use this font or that font'; there are a number of things to consider.
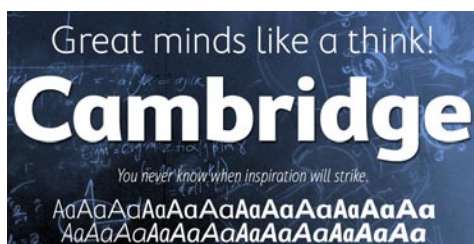
It is my contention that the primary consideration for choosing a typeface should be familiarity. The idea is that the typeface that readers are most familiar with will be the typeface they can most easily read (Licko, 1990, Felici 2003, Herrmann, 2011), and I would argue that when writing supplemental materials for use with commercially available coursebooks, the best typeface to use is the typeface found in the textbook. For example, for the last two years I have been using the English Firsthand series of coursebooks and creating handouts with Myriad Pro, the typeface used in English Firsthand (Smiley, 2012).

But what about for materials used on their own, materials that aren't supplementary to a textbook? As I noted in an earlier article on the subject in Between the Keys (Romney, 2005), it seems that there isn't a particular style of type, let alone a single typeface, that Japanese students are familiar with. So for me, the most important consideration when choosing a typeface for stand alone materials moves from familiarity to legibility.

In the most basic definition, legibility is how easily letter shapes are recognized, specifically their distinctiveness from each other. There is compelling research that shows that letter identification is critical for reading (Sanocki and Dyson, 2011), and exactly which letters are more difficult to read than others has been the subject of considerable research (see Nedeljkovic, Puškarević, Banjanin & Pinćjer, 2013, for a summary).

In my experience, contrast between forms like the lowercase 'l' and the uppercase 'I' can be of paramount importance for L2 learners: the uppercase 'I' in particular because so many language-

learning materials ask students to read, write and speak about themselves using the single letter word 'I'. This can be problematic when 'I' is set off by itself. In a geometric san-serif typeface, so-called because they were built from geometric shapes such as perfectly straight lines and circles (Lupton, 2004), for example in Helvetica, the lowercase 'l' and the uppercase 'I' are simple vertical lines that are indistinguishable from each other, and when found by themselves they don't particularly look like a letter or word, but the shape that they were created from.

In my presentations, I discuss a number of letter pairs that are difficult for L2 learners in the hope that once aware of these difficulties, materials writers can choose an appropriate typeface, but perhaps what is important for ELT materials writers is not to get bogged down in which particular letters, or combinations of letters, have low legibility, but to choose a typeface that has been designed with good legibility in the first place: specifically, a typeface designed for novice readers.

Most typefaces designed for novice readers are serif typefaces. This may have been because of the widespread belief that serif typefaces were easier to read. These typefaces can be a problem because many of them strike the reader as old-fashioned, especially in our contemporary world of device-oriented reading. However, with the recent refocusing of typeface research on legibility that has been challenging the assumption that serif typefaces are better, there has been a resurgence in new typeface designs. They are up-to-date, modern-looking, san-serif typefaces with high legibility, some even designed for novice readers. These sans-serif typefaces project an image of text that has "a uniform, clean, modern appearance" (Schriver, 1997: 256) and are most likely what our students are used to seeing on their smartphones.

One typeface that I have come across recently that looks quite exciting is Cambridge, by Nicholas Garner of Aviation Partners. This typeface was specifically designed for educational materials, stemming from a project for children with lower reading ability. The project team received feedback from a number of users resulting in a typeface with distinct letter shapes and no "ambiguities between similar letter forms" (Aviation Partners, 2012). In other words, it has good legibility and it's a san-serif typeface.

Looking through the character set, the typeface has addressed a number of problem characters for L2 learners, the uppercase 'I' and lowercase 'l' for example. The uppercase 'I' is actually serifed, and the lowercase 'l' has a tail, or slight bend to the right. Also of note, this is one of the few san-serif typefaces that I have come across that both the lowercase 'a' and 'g' are single story; meaning the

Cambridge seeks to build on the popularity of Fiendstar amongst educational publishers and advertisers who need easy-to-read text in a classic sans serif format. Cambridge is an elegant typestyle that is equally at home in a schoolbook or an annual report. Feedback from users has resulted in a handful of changed letterforms which remove any ambiguities between similar letter forms. The family contains four weights in three widths and now benefits from matching italic form for all variants. Cambridge Round provides a rounded version of all styles, useful for headings and more informal texts.

example of Cambridge

lowercase 'a' and 'g' are more like the typical handwritten lowercase letters students have been taught.

Is Cambridge the right typeface for your materials? I don't know. It might be, but so much depends on what kind of document you are creating; how it will be used; how it will be printed and reproduced; and what kind of students you have. But all things being equal, Cambridge is a beautiful typeface, designed for novice readers that both you and your students should find easy to use.

Ultimately, good design is about increasing the usability of a document. That is to say, good design enables, in the case of language learning materials, the students and the teacher to focus on what's important: the message, the language, the learning, and that starts with the typeface.

http://cameronromney.com/category/materials/

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BK

What type of writer are you?

Miles Craven, Churchill College, University of Cambridge

Check [✓] your answer.

- I want to create fun materials for my students to use in my class.
- I need to supplement the textbook with additional materials.
- I have to create course materials for students in my school/college.
- I want to write online materials for everyone to use.
- I would like to work on Teacher Resource Guides and Workbooks.
- I want to write a textbook of my own and have it published.
- I want to be part of a team of authors working on a big project.

    Other: _____.

Motivation

Teachers turn to writing materials for many different reasons. The important thing is to identify your reasons, and recognize which 'type' you are. You have to be honest about your motivation. This will help you keep focused and make sure your goals are attainable. For example, ask yourself if you are doing this mainly for the money—in which case, do you want this to be your main source of income, or simply to provide a little extra spending money? Also ask yourself how you want to work: Do you want to work alone, or with other writers? Do you want to self-publish, or be published? If you are looking for a publisher, are you looking for a small local company, or a big international publisher? Try to pin down as precisely as you can what you want to get out of the project before you begin; money, prestige, career advancement … . Take a little time to determine why you are taking this path, and you stand a greater chance of achieving your goals.

Dedication

Whatever your goals, and whichever 'type' you are, you have to accept from the very beginning that writing involves sacrifice. It is a sad fact, but nonetheless true, that to write well is a constant struggle. Are you really prepared to invest the amount of time and effort required? How do you feel about working through evenings and weekends? Are you able to sometimes put work above family and friends? You will find there are times when you struggle to make any progress at all, and other times when the material seems to write itself. You need to accept that much of what you write may not be used. In fact, hardly anything you write will be exactly right first time. Don't see this as 'wasted'—rather, it is all part of the process. You need to keep chipping away at it, and persist. It can be tempting to give up along the way. It takes dedication and determination to keep going.

Of all the different 'types' of writer, the most common is the type that is not listed above: the 'wanted to but life got in the way' type. You need to be sure of why you are doing this and what you want to achieve, and never start a project unless you are sure you can finish it.

So, which type of ELT writer are you? Whether you want to start your writing career, or have already set out on this journey, it is always good to have friends to help you along the way. The MW SIG is here to help current and would-be writers get in touch with one another, and provide help and guidance where needed. I am happy to be part of this group, and I look forward to meeting you – whatever your motivation!

If you are interested in attending a materials writing clinic, where we gather to discuss each other's work and suggest ways forward, please contact any MW officer at the MW-SIG booth to register your interest. Oh, and if you are at JALT 2014, please come and say hi. I will look forward to seeing you there!

BTK

MW-SIG FORUM TSUKUBA 2014

Digital Technologies' Impact on Materials Writers

Presenters: Miles Craven, Miles—Churchill College, University of Cambridge; Dave Dolan—DECP; Hugh Graham-Marr—ABAX; Darren Halliday—Macmillian; Paul Lewis—Perceptia Press

Sunday, 23 November 2014
12:25—1:55
Room 301

Word Clouds and Text Revision

Jim Smiley, Tohoku Bunka Gakuen University

Introduction

Word clouds are visual representations of data content based on the frequency of items in the data. As appealing visual tools, teachers have utilised them in classrooms to interest students in new subjects, to encourage interaction by having students discuss their reaction to word cloud images, and to stimulate creativity by word clouds being the end product of a writing assignment (Gorman 2012). Others have focussed on word cloud's role in developing students' vocabularies and increasing their engagement with modern technology (Bromley 2013). In this article, the tables are turned, and I demonstrate how word clouds can be of service to materials writers as a tool that provides compelling visual feedback into the potential efficacy of writing passages.

Word clouds—or tag clouds—have been used since the early 1990s, and were first brought to prominence on the internet when Flickr used them in 2004 to indicate the relative popularity of photographs on their site (Wikipedia).

Setting Up

This won't be a primer on how to create word clouds. For that, see the list of word cloud generators at the end. The steps to create diagramme 1 were: open Tagul; import the words; edit the generated word list to take out UTF-8 errors; select the design and colour space of the word cloud; let the software generate the output. The actual graphic potential is highly dependent on the software, so I would encourage you to try out a number of sites. I choose Tagul because it allows

Diagramme 1: No Room for Gran

the words to be placed inside a shape.

Output

What we see immediately is the relative size of the frequently used words in a house shape. Visually, the connected meanings of 'family', 'home', 'house' come together, and we can see details of nuance within the story, such as 'Gran', 'room', 'lose', 'sad' and so on.

Writing and Rewriting

The text is from the unit on Family in my pre-intermediate discussion book, Taking Issue (Smiley, 2013). As Japan faces the challenges of an aging society, I felt that many students would benefit from firstly reading about issues that develop when

a student has moved away from their home to study and during that period, the parents decide that it is in the best interest of all the family for that vacated space to be used by an elderly relative. The issues are complex, yet the language available to students is limited. So too is the word count limit. The text needed to be around the 160-word mark.

Some technical considerations were that the target vocabulary should be presented often, and the surrounding context needs to allow the meaning to be clear. Also, the average sentence length should be under 8 words, and there should be very few multi-clause sentences. This text was aimed at students who understand Step 3 grammar but who need age-specific topics and vocabulary development.

The text was written and put into Tagul. The resultant word cloud brings up a few points. The biggest single item is 'room'. With six occurrences in the short text, this may be appropriate as the central issue relates to the speaker's sense of belonging to their physical family house in particular, the loss of his old room. 'Gran' appears four times and is the second biggest visual item in the word cloud. Other acceptable results are 'good', 'sad', 'family', and 'live'. These are all important to the central issue.

However, 'job' and 'dad' seem out of place in this short passage, yet their relative visual strength is high. A look at those instances where 'dad' appears is necessary. The first time is innocuous: it sets the stage for the story, "My dad just called me." The second occurrence, though, is problematic. "Now I'm living away from home, dad says my room will become gran's room." A double-clause, 14-word monster! The occasional long sentence is not necessarily bad, per se, but this one is unbalanced and needs revision.

A revision might be; "I'm living away

from home now. Gran will have my room." At 6 and 5 words and in single clauses, this version is well within the remit. It may well have been luck that an offending sentence was brought to my notice by the word cloud. Nevertheless, I was reprimanded, and then scoured the text for other similar monstrosities.

The context surrounding the two occurrences of 'job' is:

Martin: "I may need the room. I may not get a job after college.
June: You're good. You'll get a job easily.

Diagramme 2: Revised

I judge these to be acceptable and will not change them.

After a few other minor textual revisions and a new output template, the result is a word cloud that fits the mandate much more tightly. I also limited the number of items in the word cloud to those that occur more than once. The graphic itself may be useful to introduce students to the topic at the beginning of a class. Gone are the superfluous terms and the loose writing.

It is, of course, an empirical question whether or not word clouds can be considered a scientific addition to the writer's toolbox. This would be an interesting area for research. I can say that for me, seeing the images helps get that

feeling for the whole instantly that pure black & white textual analysis holds back.

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Appendix: Word Cloud generators

Here are some generators. All of them are free to use, but some offer premium functionality. In terms of standard word cloud images, Wordle is hard to beat, but for graphic control, I recommend Tagul and Word Mosaic. I include others because the differences between them are significant, and you may find the others to be of more use to you.

Wordle: http://www.wordle.net/

Wordle is the best known generator, but there are some compatibility issues when using Chrome and Java.

Word It Out: http://worditout.com/

ABCYA: http://www.abcya.com/word_clouds.htm

Word Mosaic: http://www.imagechef.com/ic/word_mosaic/

Word Sift: http://www.wordsift.com/

Vocab Grabber: https://www.visualthesaurus.com/vocabgrabber/

Tag Crowd: http://tagcrowd.com/

These last three limit the graphic output to lines, but they offer more in terms of word analysis.

BK

Skills and Strategies in EFL Materials
Miles Craven. MW-SIG Sponsored Speaker

Miles will begin by outlining the reasons for the strong emphasis on skills and strategies in ELT materials today, arguing this comes from the ever-growing need for assessment that, where not exam-based, is championed by the CEFR. Participants will then be asked to consider the differences between skills and strategies and share their ideas. After reaching a definition for each term, Miles will first focus on skills; showing examples of exercises and activities that promote reading and listening skills, and how these can work in a class context. Miles will argue that for skills work, a single approach is best, summarized by the formula Explain-Show-Practice-Test. Next, Miles will cover strategies (defined as coping mechanisms) and will give practical examples of various strategies to promote fluency and communication. Here, he will argue that several approaches are possible when tackling strategies in class. Participants will be put into groups and asked to think of strategies they teach their students and to think about the learning process behind the activities they use.

Saturday, 22 November 2014:
1:20—2:20
Room 102

On the Inside

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.