



## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MATERIAL DESIGNING IN COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

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### Abstract

This paper discusses how teaching material design can contribute to educate CLT teachers to consider their prospective students' profiles. This professional activity requires the student teachers to take a set of decisions, make choices and explain the reasons for them. The author describes three different contexts of practice and presents student teacher considerations about the experiences. There are challenges and gains in the process of teaching/learning how to design ELT materials, but as has been pointed out by the activities involved in this practice the gains are worth the challenges.

**Keywords:** CLT, ELT, material design, syllabus, context, communicative approaches.

### Introduction

Discussions of the nature of the syllabus have been central in Communicative Language Teaching. We have seen that one of the first syllabus models to be proposed was described as a notional syllabus [2], which specified the semantic-grammatical categories (e.g., frequency, motion, location) and the categories of communicative function that learners need to express. The Council of Europe expanded and developed this into a syllabus that included descriptions of the objectives of foreign language courses for European adults, the situations in which they might typically need to use a foreign language (e.g., travel, business), the topics they might need to talk about (e.g., personal identification, education, shopping), the functions they needed language for (e.g., describing something, requesting information, expressing agreement and disagreement), the notions made use of in communication (e.g., time, frequency, duration), as well as the vocabulary and grammar needed. The result was published as *Threshold Level English* and was an attempt to specify what was needed in order to be able to achieve a reasonable degree of communicative proficiency in a foreign language, including the language items needed to realize this "threshold level." [4]

### Literature Review

A wide variety of materials have been used to support communicative approaches to language teaching. Unlike some contemporary methodologies, such as Community Language Learning, practitioners of Communicative Language Teaching view materials as a way of influencing the quality of classroom interaction and language use. Materials thus have the primary role of promoting communicative language use. We will consider three kinds of materials currently used in CLT and label these text-based, task-based, and realia. [1]



### **TEXT-BASED MATERIALS**

There are numerous textbooks designed to direct and support Communicative Language Teaching. Their tables of contents sometimes suggest a kind of grading and sequencing of language practice not unlike those found in structurally organized texts. Some of these are in fact written around a largely structural syllabus, with slight reformatting to justify their claims to be based on a communicative approach. Others, however, look very different from previous language teaching texts. Morrow and Johnson's *Communicate* (1979), for example, has none of the usual dialogues, drills, or sentence patterns and uses visual cues, taped cues, pictures, and sentence fragments to initiate conversation. Watcyn-Jones's *Pair Work* (1981) consists of two different texts for pair work, each containing different information needed to enact role plays and carry out other pair activities. Texts written to support the Malay-sian *English Language Syllabus* (1975) likewise represent a departure from traditional textbook modes. A typical lesson consists of a theme (e.g., relaying information), a task analysis for thematic development (e.g., understanding the message, asking questions to obtain clarification, asking for more information, taking notes, ordering and presenting information), a practice situation description (e.g., "A caller asks to see your manager. He does not have an appointment. Gather the necessary information from him and relay the message to your manager."), a stimulus presentation (in the preceding case, the beginning of an office conversation scripted and on tape), comprehension questions (e.g., "Why is the caller in the office?"), and paraphrase exercises.

### **TASK-BASED MATERIALS**

A variety of games, role plays, simulations, and task-based communication activities have been prepared to support Communicative Language Teaching classes. These typically are in the form of one-of-a-kind items: exercise handbooks, cue cards, activity cards, pair-communication practice materials, and student-interaction practice booklets [6]. In pair-communication materials, there are typically two sets of material for a pair of students, each set containing different kinds of information. Sometimes the information is complementary, and partners must fit their respective parts of the "jigsaw" into a composite whole. Others assume different role relationships for the partners (e.g., an interviewer and an interviewee). Still others provide drills and practice material in interactional formats.

### **REALIA**

Many proponents of Communicative Language Teaching have advocated the use of "authentic," "from-life" materials in the classroom. These might include language-based realia, such as signs, magazines, advertisements, and newspapers, or graphic and visual sources around which communicative activities can be built, such as maps, pictures, symbols, graphs, and charts. Different kinds of objects can be used to support communicative exercises, such as a plastic model to assemble from directions[2].



### Methodology

Material designing is a complicated process that demands a great competence, high-level of intelligence or knowledge, mastery of language skills and passion of one's work. Today the teachers should be aware of the importance of creating their own materials and acquiring the skills of adapting or selecting the necessary materials from different sources. "Material development is anything which is used by teachers or learners to facilitate the learning of a language"[1, 2]. "Is any systematic description of the techniques and exercises to be used in classroom teaching"[3, 135] According to Brown's opinion, lesson plan offers the system of different classroom activities used by teachers and learners in the learning process. While designing a lesson plan every teacher should know how to teach, what to teach, whom to teach and why to teach any activity included in the material. An effective lesson plan should include all language skills (Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking), interaction patterns (whole class activities, pair work, group work and individual), set clear goals and objectives to each step (what's the purpose of completing of an each task or an activity), certain time limit to every task or activity carefully according to the level of the learners', the procedure of the activities (teacher should describe distinctly what to do in each step). Moreover, in designing process it is important for the teachers to take into account the level of their learners, their interests, attentions and background knowledge. Another important point is to plan their lessons from easy to more complex. In addition to this we should avoid of much identity, for instance, a lot of writing or reading tasks may seem boring for the students. For this reason, the teachers should integrate some audio-visual components, speaking activities or any role-plays in their material design.

If the participants are interested in developing materials for a specific skill area, criteria for activities in that skill area can be used. For example, Thornbury (2005) lists six criteria for a speaking activity, summarized as follows:

- Productivity: it provides conditions for autonomous language use
- Purposefulness: it has a clear outcome, especially one which requires learners to work together to achieve a common purpose
- Interactivity: it requires learners to take into account the effect they are having on their audience
- Challenge: it stretches their available communicative resources
- Safety: it does not involve too much risk or likelihood of failure
- Authenticity: it bears some relation to real-life language use

In the case of reading skills I found two resources useful in considering the design of reading activities. The first is Grellet's classic *Developing Reading Skills* [5], which contains a useful and very extensive classification of reading activities and exercises, many of which are very creative. I select examples from her classification and ask the participants to try to identify what their purpose is. Here is an example: This activity practices bottom-up processing, that is, using syntactic cues to identify the meaning of a complex sentence.



Read the sentence and complete the task that follows: Magazine writers, or the authors of books about current affairs, often find themselves gratefully surprised by how much remains unexplored and untold about major events that the day press and television once swarmed all over, then abandoned. Find the subjects in the first column that match the verbs in the second column

a) Magazine writers b) books c) current d) how much f) the day press and television e) major events

A) find B) remains affairs C) swarmed D) abandoned

### Conclusion

It is possible to say that the design of teaching materials in the teacher education process is not a solution for all challenges that teacher educators have, but it can certainly bring some inspiring contribution, as this study has shown, because it grants (student) teachers opportunities to have an active role in the planning, designing and redesigning of their own practice, considering situated contexts.

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