

Glossary of basic terms for materials development in language teaching

Brian Tomlinson

The following terms are used frequently in this book. Unless they are differently defined by the author(s) of the chapter, they are used with the meanings given below.

Authentic text

A text which is not written or spoken for language teaching purposes. A newspaper article, a rock song, a novel, a radio interview and a traditional fairy story are examples of authentic texts. A story written to exemplify the use of reported speech, a dialogue scripted to exemplify ways of inviting and a linguistically simplified version of a novel would not be authentic texts.

See **simplified texts; text**.

Authentic task (or real world task)

A task which involves learners in using language in a way that replicates its use in the 'real world' outside the language classroom. Filling in blanks, changing verbs from the simple past to the simple present and completing substitution tables are, therefore, not authentic tasks. Examples of authentic tasks would be answering a letter addressed to the learner, arguing a particular point of view and comparing various holiday brochures in order to decide where to go for a holiday.

See **pedagogic task**.

Communicative approaches

Approaches to language teaching which aim to help learners to develop communicative competence (i.e. the ability to use the language effectively for communication). A **weak communicative approach** includes overt teaching of language forms and functions in order to help learners to develop the ability to use them for communication. A **strong communicative approach** relies on providing learners with experience of using language as the main means of learning to use the language. In such an approach learners, for example, talk to learn rather than learn to talk.

Communicative competence

The ability to use the language effectively for communication. Gaining

✓ Learning styles

The way(s) that particular learners prefer to learn a language. Some have a preference for hearing the language (auditory learners), some for seeing it written down (visual learners), some for learning it in discrete bits (analytic learners), some for experiencing it in large chunks (global or holistic or experiential learners) and many prefer to do something physical whilst experiencing the language (kinaesthetic learners).

L2

A term used to refer to both foreign and second languages.

See **foreign language**; **second language**.

Materials

Anything which is used to help to teach language learners. Materials can be in the form of a textbook, a workbook, a cassette, a CD-Rom, a video, a photocopied handout, a newspaper, a paragraph written on a whiteboard: anything which presents or informs about the language being learned.

Materials adaptation

Making changes to materials in order to improve them or to make them more suitable for a particular type of learner. Adaptation can include reducing, adding, omitting, modifying and supplementing. Most teachers adapt materials every time they use a textbook in order to maximise the value of the book for their particular learners.

Materials evaluation

The systematic appraisal of the value of materials in relation to their objectives and to the objectives of the learners using them. Evaluation can be pre-use and therefore focused on predictions of potential value. It can be whilst-use and therefore focused on awareness and description of what the learners are actually doing whilst the materials are being used. And it can also be post-use and therefore focused on analysis of what happened as a result of using the materials.

Multi-media materials

Materials which make use of a number of different media. Often they are available on a CD-Rom which makes use of print, graphics, video and sound. Usually such materials are interactive and enable the learner to receive feedback on the written or spoken language which they produce.

Pedagogic task

A task which does not replicate a real world task but which is designed to facilitate the learning of language or skills which would be useful in a

real world task. Completing one half of a dialogue, filling in the blanks in a story and working out the meaning of ten nonsense words from clues in a text would be examples of pedagogic tasks.

PPP

An approach to teaching language items which follows a sequence of presentation of the item, practice of the item and then production (i.e. use) of the item. This is the approach currently followed by most commercially produced coursebooks and has the advantage of apparent systematicity and economy. However, many SLA researchers would argue that it is an inefficient approach which creates the illusion of learning. They would say that learning an item takes much longer than this approach suggests and that far more experience of the item in communication is necessary for any lasting learning to take place.

See **language practice**; **SLA**; **language use**.

Second language

The term is used to refer to a language which is not a mother tongue but which is used for certain communicative functions in a society. Thus English is a second language in Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Singapore, and French is a second language in Senegal, Cameroon and Tahiti.

See **foreign language**.

Self-access materials

Materials designed for learners to use independently (i.e. on their own without access to a teacher or a classroom). They are normally used by the learner at home, in a library or in a self-study centre.

Simplified texts

These are texts which have been made simpler so as to make it easier for learners to read them. The usual principles of simplification involve reduction in length of the text, shortening of sentences, omission or replacement of difficult words or structures, omission of qualifying clauses and omission of non-essential detail. It is arguable, however, that such simplification might make the words easier to understand but could make it more difficult for the learners to achieve global understanding of a text which is now dense with important information. It might be more profitable to simplify texts by adding examples, by using repetition and paraphrase and by increasing redundant information. In other words, by lengthening rather than shortening the text.

SLA

This is an abbreviation for Second Language Acquisition and is nor-

mally used to refer to research and theory related to the learning of second and foreign languages.

Supplementary materials

Materials designed to be used in addition to the core materials of a course. They are usually related to the development of skills of reading, writing, listening or speaking rather than to the learning of language items.

See **coursebook**.

Task based

This refers to materials or courses which are designed around a series of authentic tasks which give the learners experience of using the language in ways in which it is used in the 'real world' outside the classroom. They have no pre-determined language syllabus and the aim is for learners to learn from the tasks the language that they need to participate successfully in them. Examples of such tasks would be working out the itinerary of a journey from a timetable, completing a passport application form, ordering a product from a catalogue and giving directions to the post office.

See **authentic tasks**.

Text

Any scripted or recorded production of a language presented to learners of that language. A text can be written or spoken and could be, for example, a poem, a newspaper article, a passage about pollution, a song, a film, an extract from a novel or play, a passage written to exemplify the use of the past perfect, a recorded telephone conversation, a scripted dialogue or a speech by a politician.

Workbook

A book which contains extra practice activities for learners to work on in their own time. Usually the book is designed so that learners can write in it and often there is an answer key provided in the back of the book to give feedback to the learners.

For definitions of other terms frequently used in EFL and applied linguistics see:

Crystal, D. 1985. *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, 2nd edn. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Ellis, R. 1994. Glossary. In *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*, 692-729. Oxford: Oxford University Press.