

清泉女子大学言語教育研究所 言語教育研究 第6号 平成26年

Creating Language: A Learning Curve in Material Development

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要旨:

Creating Language: 教材開発の習熟過程

本文は、新たな教授法の導入に関する情報を提供する。著者は、言語学習教材の質および焦点に物足りなさを感じた経緯から、試行錯誤を重ね、ハリデーの機能文法ならびに一連のスキヤフォールディング（足場づくり）による支援された’guided writing（予め方向付けされたライティング練習）’を取り込んだコースを開始した。このコースは、大学での言語教育に必要とされるスキルを習得し使うこと、過去の言語学習を発展させること、ならびに自律学習に向けた十分な指導をすることを3年の間にさまざまなバージョンが作成されたが、ここではどのような段階を経て、どのような問題に遭遇したかを取り上げる。学生からのフィードバックの反映、アクティビティの数および多様性の増加、’guided writing’の導入、学生への教材の提示方法の変更、ならびに文章のジャンルによる違いなど、時間の経過とともに変更・調整を重ねた。この結果としてできたコースをCreating Languageと呼ぶ。本コースの学生は、常時、特定のリサーチトピックへと方向づけられ、クラスメートや講師との振り返りおよびディスカッションを通じて、深いレベルで教材に関わるよう奨励される。コース終了時には、今後もこの手法を継続して使用、発展させていくための十分な手ごたえがあった。

Abstract:

This paper examines the development of new academic teaching materials in a university context. The materials include explicit reference to Hallidayan functional grammar and make strong use of the Vygotskian concept of scaffolding. Several versions of the course illustrate the problems encountered and the modifications made over a period of three years. During this time, adjustments to the course, with reference to feedback from students, included the number and

variety of activities, the introduction of scaffolded guided writing paragraphs, material presentation methods, and the utilisation of selected text types. The resulting course was named ‘*Creating Language*’. Throughout the course, students were guided towards specific research topics and encouraged to engage material at a deeper level through the use of taxonomies, reflection, and discussion with peers. By the end of the study period, it was strongly believed that the course had the potential to encourage a significant improvement in student language competence.

Key words: Functional grammar, scaffolding, material development

Introduction

The debate over what constitutes a good course book is arguably at the centre of every teachers’ room where languages are formally taught. Areas of education previously unpracticed in EFL have more recently begun to influence the activities found in language textbooks. In fields such as self-directed learning, the use of advanced technology, or project learning. Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010, p.3) show the influence of sociocultural, constructivist perspectives on learning in education from Bruner (b.1915), Piaget (1896-1980), and Vygotsky (1896-1934), and have led to the introduction of previously under-utilised activities in learner autonomy, language learning strategies, and multiple intelligences. The effect of these activities has been to drive teacher innovation and provide a stronger vehicle for student language learning. This paper is a limited attempt to consider and examine the modifications made to a text named *Creating Language* that aligned traditional aspects of grammar with the Hallidayan method of grammar. Moreover, this paper charts the progress made over a period of time by students in a university writing and speaking course that endeavoured to provide more control to

students, and to make content more relevant. The course arose through a general dissatisfaction with the seemingly arbitrary nature of textbooks available for first and second year university students in Japan, and sought to focus the content in a progressive and more productive manner. In addition, it arose through a desire by the instructors to move towards a program that contained the necessary steps to allow students to independently continue their language education at the conclusion of the course. This further included the necessity for an enacted curriculum, that is to say, one that followed a specified path to comply with the requirements of the university in parallel with the aims of the instructors. It would involve students in their own learning, oblige them to evaluate the usefulness of classroom activities, and would feasibly introduce them to a fresh and more manageable approach to how English language is constructed. In addition, they would be shown how to apply the approach in future writing and speaking activities without requiring further instruction. As the instructors were familiar with systemic functional linguistics, a decision was taken in the developmental stages to create the course around four focal points of functional grammar; the Nominal group, the Verb group, Circumstances, and Theme and Rheme. These would underpin the course itself, but in addition, would necessitate effort on the part of the students to acquire a knowledge of specific language used for learning. Moreover, it would require a considerable effort on the part of the instructors to balance the proportion of language analysis being included against actual language being improvements being made in both written and spoken forms. This paper will outline the ways that the *Creating Language* text has developed from version to version and the initial reasons, processes, and methodology underlying those changes.

Creating Language

Creating Language is a series of texts intended to teach learners how to create written or spoken academic language. This was to be achieved through activities at the word group and paragraph level. Activities were to be based around four areas of grammar: the nominal group, verb group, circumstances, and Theme/Rheme. In addition, learners would be led through specific assignments designed to give guidance and purpose to their paragraph writing.

Version 1 of *Creating Language* was rather more explicit in its use of functional grammar and language specific to Hallidayan (2004) systemic functional linguistics. The metalanguage used to discuss the analysis of language and the construction of clauses was taught without any modification to the language itself. Noting the difficulty that students had with this however, the instructors therefore took steps to minimise or modify the grammatical vocabulary being presented and the stages within which it would be introduced during the course. This resulted in several areas being adapted multiple times since the first version of *Creating Language* was introduced. For the purpose of this paper, four areas have been selected for comparison across three versions of the course, Version 1 (Feb. 2010), Version 6.1 (Jan. 2011), and Version 10 (Jan. 2013). The four areas compared are the changes to type and number of activities, the explicitness of functional grammar, the utilisation of text types, and the section introductions.

Activities

Creating Language has seen a significant transformation in the number and variety of activities with each new version. In Version 1, the majority of activities concerned filling in tables, similar to Table 1 below, and

in addition, the separation of text analysis into one or more areas of functional grammar. This was believed to be an advantageous method for the construction of simple clauses at the most basic level, and was largely confirmed by the ease with which the majority of students were able to comprehend the instructions given and complete the allotted tasks.

	A. Determiner	B. Number	C. Adjective	D. Classifier	E. Subject
1	The	---	---	---	boys
2	The	two	---	---	boys
3	The	two	small	---	boys
4	The	two	small	Japanese	boys
5	The	two	small, thin	Japanese	boys
6	The	two	small, thin	Japanese school	boys

Table 1: The Nominal Group, Creating Language Version 1, February 2010.

The total number of activities in Version 1 was 47 and the number with direct relevance to functional grammar was 23. The desire to give learners more practice in writing meant that by Version 6.1, the total number of activities had risen to 96, with those directly dealing with functional grammar rising at a slower pace to 32. Other activities introduced in this version included learning different text types such as recounting past events and narrative storytelling. The inclusion of these text types was to make the textbook more meaningful to students as according to Eggins and Slade (1997),

these text types are the most commonly used in the workplace. In addition, whole class speaking activities were included to increase the likelihood of putting learning into practice. A third inclusion was the creation of writing portfolios for students to demonstrate their retention of material. Version 10, which now contained 183 activities, also saw a marked increase in the diversity of activities used. This was a specific attempt to integrate Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1993). Ninety-nine of the activities in version 10 were from Guided Writes (GW). GWs are a set of activities centred around one topic that guide students towards writing a final paragraph. These included scaffolded activities for individual students, pair, and group work. The total number of activities excludes those associated with the portfolios. The inclusion of the portfolio would eventually increase the total activities to in excess of 200. Approximately ten more activities were relocated to the appendix and intended to be used as supplementary practice. The number of activities directly associated with functional grammar content however, remained relatively low at just 37.

Guided Writes

The deliberate introduction of GW in Version 10 was to provide students with easily accessible scaffolded material for writing activities. As the classroom was limited in resources, these would take the place of research material and move students beyond the recounting of personal experiences and provide them with generalised subject matter for subsequent writing tasks. Furthermore, Martin (1989, p.11) states that learning occurs when students are allowed to investigate the world around them and gain access to more information than is possible through their own experiences. In this way, asking students to explain answers to questions in the GW established a need to justify

themselves and by doing so, give themselves enough language and background knowledge in order to begin forming arguments. This itself would constitute an important step in the writing of exposition and the paragraph structure that had become a major focus of Version 10. Activities from GW included vocabulary activities, interviewing and questionnaire tasks, note-taking, surveying, and in the latter GW, small research projects. An additional benefit of GW was that students approach the majority of activities in pairs which enabled them to accomplish more together than alone. This form of working together on language problems, what Swain (2000) refers to as *Languaging*, has been shown to be extremely beneficial for language development. It is firmly based in Vygotsky's (Thorne, 2000) sociocultural theory of development, or more specifically the expansion of the *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)*. Mercer (2000, pp.140-141) expands on this concept by arguing that the teacher and learner 'must use talk and joint activity to create a shared communicative space' or what he calls an *Intermental Development Zone (IDZ)*. The IDZ allows the teacher, rather than another student, to build on 'common knowledge and aims' and to 'operate just beyond their established capabilities'. The GWs were, and continue to be, an attempt to build a ZPD and through materials and resources, an IDZ within the classroom, that result in, as Mercer indicates, 'new ability and understanding'.

Explicitness of Functional Grammar

The foundation of *Creating Language (Part One)* is functional grammar, of which four focal areas were introduced with reference to Butt et al (2001), Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), Martin and Rose (2008). The areas and the changes made can be observed in all three versions. These are:

- The Nominal Group, which serve to introduce people, places, things, or ideas
- The Verb Group, which add expressions of happening, doing, being, saying, or thinking
- Circumstances, which expand on a process by adding information such as why, when, or how
- Theme/Rheme patterns, which indicate the writer or speaker's point of departure

The principal change in the activities was the way in which students were asked to reflect on one or more of these areas before, during, or after they speak or write. In Version 1, each area is covered separately and, with the exception of one section where the Nominal group, the Verb group and Circumstances are combined, there was no reference to them once the unit had been completed. It was assumed that the student would review the sections in their own time. Moreover, it was left to the student to link work across the units and make the connections between them. In Version 6.1, much is identical. There is a sporadic inclusion of text types that make it easier to refer to previously learned material and a token review section, but no comprehensive reviews incorporated to help the learner consolidate functional grammar previously taught in the unit. With the inclusion of GWs in Version 10, students were asked to review their paragraph writing to monitor their use of functional grammar taught earlier in the course. For example, the GW after the Nominal Group had been covered contained a section in which students were asked to notice Nominal groups within their paragraphs to determine whether they should be expanded or reduced. This highlights a benefit of teaching functional grammar; it enables students to better communicate those

things they wish to convey with as much detail as they choose to employ. An additional benefit is that it concretely addresses an area in the course syllabus; that students learn how to write a sentence effectively. A further change was later applied by asking students to write a paragraph before they undertook any new learning. This paragraph could then be employed as a learning tool and comparison for subsequent texts.

Utilization of text types

Another advantage of using systemic functional linguistic theory is its facility to illustrate to students the language they need to realise different text types, or ‘staged, goal oriented social processes (Martin and Rose, 2008). Within the course, there were several shifts in thinking in this area that led to radical alterations in the activities students undertake. In Version 1, students were expected to learn three text types – Recount, Procedure, and Narrative and the schematic structure - stages of the genre. The rationale for including these particular genres was that they would be the easiest for students to incorporate their own experiences and evaluate and comment on them in some way (Brown and Yule, 1983). According to Martin and Rose (2008), Recounts ask the student to talk about specific past events using the following structure: an orientation (who, what, when, where the events took place) followed by a record of events, followed by a reorientation of some kind. Students also have the option to include their thoughts and feelings at any point in the text, referred to as coda. This simple text type is relatively straightforward with the majority of students able to use their language knowledge, to whatever standard they possessed, in order to complete tasks with minimal preparation time. Version 6.1, duplicated this with the addition of the Instruction text type. By Version 10, the focus on spoken text types had been replaced with a five

part scaffolding structure for writing. The structure was:

- Outline of the topic
- Background to the topic
- Information from research gathered (mainly from tasks within the GWs)
- Analysis (based on consideration of research and personal experience)
- Conclusion

The main reason for the shift was the university requirement that students should, after their first year, be able to write competent paragraphs in a number of styles. Given the precise nature of what students were required to do when writing, this change resulted in the instructors introducing three styles of paragraph: time order, for and against, and comparison. These three styles were chosen to give students the opportunity to experience and develop diverse forms of writing, but more importantly, to acquire the actual writing skills they would need for future assignments.

Introduction sections

A further area of the *Creating Language* text development was how each section was begun. In Version 1, each section began without preamble; no overview was given nor a rationale provided as to why students should be studying the course material. By Version 6.1, each section began with an activity reproduced from the writing task. The writing task was the first activity that students completed when starting *Creating Language*, and enabled students to better understand what they would be learning in the course. All areas within the writing task corresponded to an area covered in *Creating Language*. By including the area from the writing task at the beginning of the

section, it was hoped that students would see that they were progressively learning new items that could be exploited in their work. Version 10 saw new changes to the opening page of each section. For example, in addition to the activity from the writing task, an explanation of each section was included and a simple overview was provided. By doing this the instructors hoped to make clear to students what they would be learning, the reasons for it, and how it could be made use of in their own work. Future changes will likely include more space on the page, a relocation of the writing task to the end of the section to be used as a review exercise, and simplified explanations of the section.

The Future

There have been numerous changes to *Creating Language* other than the four areas discussed above. For example, over the last year, the copyright for all images and effectively all of the text have been licensed by the authors. Greater attention to the language of instruction for activities has translated into a significant decrease in text. And, where possible, images have been used in lieu of text. The overall aim is to create space and simplify the flow of learning for the student and thereby increase the chance they will be able to process the material being presented to them. In the near future an ibook version of *Creating Language* will be created that can run on a tablet, such as an iPad. In addition, there is a vocabulary research project scheduled for the 2014-2015 school year that will look at vocabulary problems that students encounter when doing GW and the vocabulary needed to accomplish tasks satisfactorily. Both of these areas will dramatically change new versions of the course. *Creating Language* will continue to be adapted as new ideas are considered and assessed in class.

Teaching Implications

This paper has been about four areas of development in creating materials based on functional grammar. The first area regarding changes to activities, the introduction of tables, and the increase in the number and variety of activities was, in general, a beneficial addition to the course. There was a marked increase in student awareness of language in terms of the rank scale, that is, the patterns of language at different levels from word to clause. This was seen in the level of student experimentation with forms and vocabulary not seen in initial writing tasks, but subsequently clear in writing tasks and activities undertaken. The expansion of language was most apparent in Nominal groups as students were more proficient in the use of pre and post modifying the noun. In addition, it clearly involved the students in looking, in a more critical manner, at the detail of clauses produced, if only to a basic standard.

The second area covered was the explicitness of functional grammar. In later versions, activities for practicing functional grammar were included at a significantly slower rate than other activities as it was felt they posed a considerably higher challenge to students in only their first year of study. The range and varieties available from Nominal Groups, Verb Groups, and Circumstances - the experiential function of language - were seen as sufficient at this stage of learning. Including further activities, was judged to risk overburdening students at the expense of allowing them to gain a much higher level of competence in fewer areas.

The utilisation of text types was the third area of investigation. Though a later addition to the course, there were many changes that were made, from the use of explicit, well known text types like Recount and Narrative to the creation of one text type that could be easily modified to suit

the curricular goal of students writing a clear, well organised paragraph.

The last section examined was the evolution of how each unit was introduced. Each subsequent version saw greater explanation, not just in writing but also through the use of visual images. Through better explanation at the beginning of each unit, it is hoped that students will have a better understanding of what the focus of learning is.

In closing, it should be noted that the authors hope to help students enter into areas of language use that they presently find difficulty in accessing. Like many proponents of systemic functional theory, it is the belief of the authors that by systematically learning the variety of ways that there are to make meaning through the four areas discussed, students will have a better understanding of how language is constructed. They will therefore be in a better position to engage with those language communities they wish to be a part of.

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