Relating SLA Research to Language Teaching Materials

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This article discusses applications of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research to the preparation of language coursebooks. The author suggests a number of ways in which SLA research findings can help improve coursebooks and thereby enhance the learning of large numbers of students. Research leads us to consider learners as genuine speakers of the L2, as bilinguals who still have an L1 present in their minds and who do not all go about learning the L2 in the same way. Few coursebooks take into account these and other findings of SLA research, for example: that the acquisition of basic syntax precedes the acquisition of inflectional morphology, that most of the syntax to be learned is really part of the lexicon, or that vocabulary needs to be encountered in a structural and semantic context in order to be effectively acquired. Coursebook authors also need to bear in mind that pronunciation is necessary not only for communication but also for the actual learning of L2 forms, and that some aspects of the L2 writing system need to be explicitly taught. The author provides two sample lessons to illustrate how these research findings might be applied to the writing of a coursebook.

Cet article présente une discussion des applications de la recherche sur l'acquisition d'une langue seconde à la préparation des manuels pour les cours de langue. L'auteur avance un certain nombre de suggestions, inspirées des résultats de la recherche, visant à l'améliorer les manuels et faciliter ainsi l'apprentissage d'un grand nombre d'étudiants. Les recherches dans le domaine nous mènent à considérer les apprenants comme de véritables locuteurs de la langue seconde, comme des bilingues qui ont à tout moment une L1 présente à l'esprit et qui n'apprennent pas tous de la même façon. Peu de manuels tiennent compte de ces résultats et d'autres résultats de la recherche sur l'acquisition d'une L2, comme par exemple : que l'acquisition de la syntaxe de base précède l'acquisition de la morphologie flexionnelle, que la majeure partie de la syntaxe à apprendre relève en réalité du lexique, ou que l'apprenant doit rencontrer les éléments de vocabulaire dans un contexte structural et sémantique pour les acquérir convenablement. Les auteurs de manuels devraient également se rappeler que la prononciation est indispensable non seulement pour la communication mais aussi pour l'acquisition même des formes de la L2, et que certains aspects du système d'écriture de la L2 doivent faire l'objet d'un enseignement explicite. L'auteur présente deux échantillons de leçons qui permettent d'illustrer les applications possibles de ces résultats de recherche aux manuels de cours.

One of the obvious uses of SLA research is to help language teaching. Early SLA research saw itself within the field of applied linguistics as contributing language insights to the solution of problems of language teaching (Corder, 1973). The route for applying research to language teaching has been mostly thought to be through the language teacher: if teachers understand the process of learning then they can teach more efficiently; SLA research is "a resource for changing teachers' professional cultures" (Markee, 1997). However useful this route may be, teaching involves many roles other than the teacher's. Teaching can indeed take place via independent learning through broadcasts or CD-ROMs without a teacher being directly involved. Other routes for the application of SLA research include:

1) making SLA research directly available to the students so that they are better informed of the choices they can make and the processes through which they are progressing;

2) using SLA research in the design and construction of language examinations and tests so that the measurement of students can reflect what they can really achieve in a second language;

3) using SLA research in the construction of syllabuses and curriculums to be taught within a whole educational system or within a single school or class so that the content of teaching can fit the students better;

4) using SLA information in the design and writing of SLA teaching materials, whether for one-off classes or for mass-production coursebooks.

Very few examples of any of these applications can be found as yet. A handful of books have tried to communicate with the student, such as Doyle and Meara (1991) and Rubin and Thompson (1982). But the vast bulk of examinations, syllabuses and coursebooks around the globe show little overt influence from SLA research. In part this may be because of the lack of influence of language teachers within the language teaching profession. The goals of education, the methods of assessment and the design of coursebooks are in many countries in the hands of ministries of education, school inspectors or publishers rather than the teachers themselves. At best only a handful of teachers can be coursebook writers or national examiners. It may be more effective to try to influence language teaching through these other areas and professional teaching roles than through the teacher. The argument about the application of SLA research in general is developed at greater length in Cook (1999a). The present paper tries to explore one of the less well-beaten routes by seeing how SLA might be used in coursebook design, as always, with the caveat that actual teaching needs input from many other sources than SLA research, in particular from the practical experience of language teachers.

The coursebook is a central feature of much teaching, controlling at least some of the language that is presented and the activities that are used. Apart from a handful of teachers with the time or the flair to develop their own materials and indeed eventually to become coursebook writers themselves, the coursebook is outside the teacher's control. On the one hand the content has been chosen by writers and publishers; short of changing coursebook the teacher can only adapt it or fight against it within limits. On the other hand the choice between coursebooks is often dictated by the institution, by a committee of teachers, by a ministry of education or by selection from a list of ministry-approved books. For our purposes the coursebook represents a way of influencing large amounts of language teaching without going through individual teachers. Rather than training or forming thousands of teachers individually, a single coursebook can influence thousands of classrooms, indeed in some cases millions of students. It seems surprising that SLA research has not so far been used in coursebooks on any scale. A beginners' book *People and Places* (Cook, 1980) attempted on a small scale to incorporate the view of conversational analysis being then developed by Hatch (1978) into a teaching exercise called "conversational exchanges". But other SLA influences on coursebooks are hard to find, perhaps because they are not readily visible, perhaps because they are not there. Even such an apparently applicable model as Krashen's Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985) seems to have left few traces in coursebooks, except perhaps for *Conrad and Company* (Ballinger, *et al*., 1993) and the *Deux Mondes* series (Terrell, *et al*., 1997).

This paper starts building a bridge from SLA to teaching by putting forward eight suggestions. A single paper cannot hope to do justice to the richness of the SLA field today; the scope here will stay within the more traditional linguistics-oriented areas rather than psychological, sociological or educational approaches, all of which could lead to similar sets of suggestions. The suggestions represent a controversial selection with a particular bias; given the lack of consensus among SLA researchers, doubtless any other selection would be just as controversial. But application has to start somewhere. Hopefully disagreement with particular points will not weaken the main contention that SLA research has practical applications for concrete aspects of teaching. In order to give a reasonably sized picture, detailed arguments will not be presented for each point. The argument is illustrated by comparisons with nine current beginners' or pre-intermediate coursebooks for classroom teaching of English as a Foreign Language produced in England, chosen as good examples of their kind.

L2 users are speakers in their own right, not imitation native speakers

SLA research is often held to have started with the interlanguage assumption that L2 learners have grammars of their own (Selinker, 1972). Yet mostly

SLA research techniques categorise mistakes in "Error Analysis" whenever the learner deviates from the native speaker, count the morphemes "missing" from obligatory sentence contexts defined with reference to monolinguals, compare grammaticality judgements with those of native speakers, and so on (Cook, 1997a). Hence researchers commonly lament that "Very few L2 learners appear to be fully successful in the way that native speakers are" (Towell and Hawkins, 1994). Birdsong (1992, p. 717) describes "ultimate attainment in L2A in terms of whether non-natives can display evidence of processing native linguistic norms". Language teaching has almost invariably shared the assumption that the native speaker is king, as indeed have many L2 students.

Yet L2 users are speakers in their own right, not imitation native speakers, as a range of writers have proclaimed (Grosjean, 1989; Romaine, 1994; Cook, 1997a). They are not native speakers and will never be, virtually by definition. The native speaker has no right to be considered the only possessor of the language; Labov's argument that class and race lead to language differences, not language deficits (Labov, 1969), should be extended to the L2 situation. It may be as discriminatory to consider an L2 user a failed native speaker as it is to consider a man a failed woman. L2 users use the language for their own purposes and in their own ways. Their knowledge of the L2 may differ appreciably from the L1 knowledge of monolinguals whether in terms of pronunciation or vocabulary or syntax. But such differences do not constitute failure unless the paramountcy of the native speaker is assumed. Even if a handful of L2 users can manage to pass for natives, SLA research and language teaching has to concern the overwhelming majority of learners who do not manage this feat. L2 users need to be measured against successful L2 users, not monolingual native speakers. Indeed such multicompetent users, far from being unusual, probably outnumber the monolinguals in the world. If you measure apples by pears, you will undoubtedly conclude that apples have the wrong shape, colour and flavour.

Since the target of identity with the native speaker is unachievable in the vast majority of cases, if not all, it has inevitably produced dissatisfaction among researchers, teachers and students. The main issue of SLA research is often seen as explaining why L2 users are less efficient than native speakers. A sub-field indeed attempts to test whether the "ultimate attainment" for a small number of L2 learners is distinguishable from native speakers (Birdsong, 1992). The view taken here is that L2 users are not to be judged by the standards of another group from which they are excluded; this is developed further in Cook (1999b). The target of L2 learners ought to be people who can use two languages effectively, perhaps in some areas like natives, perhaps not. The native speaker comparison may be interesting and convenient but is useful only up to the point at which it starts to deny the special nature of people who know more than one language. This native speaker bias is being questioned in SLA

research, as it has been for some time in bilingualism studies (Romaine, 1994; Grosjean, 1989).

The coursebook has then to be constructed around an L2 rather than an L1 target, easier to say than to carry out since defining such a target is problematic. At present it may be unachievable in a general sense since we do not have accounts of proficient L2 users in their own terms. In a practical sense, though, it may be possible to apply it, say, to a beginners level and to incorporate in the coursebook examples of L2 users using the language appropriately as well as situations based on native use. This is quite different from current practice in coursebooks. The beginners' course *Collins COBUILD English Course 1* (Willis and Willis, 1988) for instance relies not only on the *COBUILD* database of native speaker English but has situations and activities based on native-to-native speech. Some courses nevertheless have exercises in which students compare different cultures. *Reward* (Greenall, 1994) uses some cross-language exercises where students talk about their cultures or compare them with an English-speaking country; *Hotline* (Hutchinson, 1992) gets students to give "useful expressions" in their own languages. But there are no examples of conversations involving L2 users or multilingual situations, other than the native as tourist. While it is noticeable that most of the coursebooks use England as a backcloth, none of them present any multilingual English people. Though there is the occasional admission that England is multicultural, as in the discussion of Asian marriages in *The Beginners' Choice* (Mohamed and Acklam, 1992), there is hardly any sign that anybody in England speaks another language or indeed uses English as a Second Language, except perhaps for the exercise in *Hotline* (Hutchinson, 1992) in which students write a guide for English-speaking visitors to their countries. At the end of a language course, students may hardly have encountered an example of a scene in which L2 users talk to native speakers, let alone L2 users to L2 users. Yet this is the situation most students confront as soon as they pass out of the classroom to use the language actively.

The L1 is always present in the students' minds at some level

Paradoxically it has become increasingly obvious that L2 users know two languages. In other words L2 users are not speakers of an L1 or an L2 but of both; they have two or more language systems in their minds, related in many ways at different levels. Bilinguals have continual access to the meaning of a word such as *coin* (English: piece of money; French: corner) in both languages rather than just the language being used (Beauvillain and Grainger, 1987). Some orthography such as the spelling of French *vieux* or English *month* is language-specific, but other orthography is shared by both languages such as *brain* or *sapin* (Grainger and Beauvillain, 1987). As Neufeld (1978) put

it, "there is ample reason to question the popular concept that an individual who knows two languages possesses a separate internalised dictionary for each language."

Research with experimental phonetics reached a similar conclusion. In terms of the VOT (Voice Onset Time) for stop consonants — the amount of time between the release of the closure and the start of voicing by the vocal cords — bilinguals had about the same VOT whether they were speaking English or Spanish despite the differences between monolingual speakers of these two languages (Williams, 1977); English learners of Portuguese adapt their L1 VOTs as they acquire the L2 (Major, 1990). Research into reading also shows that Greeks who know English read Greek differently from monolinguals (Chitiri and Willows, 1997). Either the languages have a very close relationship in the mind or at some level they indeed link into one system.

Much SLA research has nevertheless behaved as if the two languages were in watertight compartments and L2 competence were an interlanguage system independent of the knowledge of the L1. Partly this was a reaction against the Contrastive Analysis view that the essential aspect of L2 learning is differences between the L1 and the L2 (Lado, 1964), partly the discovery of the large amount of L2 learning that all learners have in common. But the idea that learners had much in common only denied the crude form of transfer, not the active presence of two languages in one mind. The L2 user has a mind that is distinctively different from a monolingual, in many ways other than language (Cook, 1997b).

The coursebook should not in any sense cut the students off from their L1 nor imply that they should not be relating the L1 to the L2. In appropriate contexts even code-switching might be utilised as in the New Concurrent Method, activities that require the students to use more than one language by, say, relaying messages between speakers of two languages (Jacobsen and Faltis, 1990). EFL coursebooks at best make occasional comparisons between languages: *The Beginners' Choice* (Mohamed and Acklam, 1992) asks students to decide whether their languages are similar to Arabic or English for example. Otherwise it is impossible to find exercises that allow for any links to the L1. Oddly enough few situations outside the classroom are as resolutely oriented to the monolingual native speaker as those envisaged in the typical coursebook.

Learners tackle some aspects of L2 learning in different ways

A branch of SLA research has concerned itself with the differences between L2 learners. It is obvious in a way that L2 learners differ from each other in how far they manage to progress in a second language, unlike L1 acquisition where virtually all children achieve the same level of spoken language. In a classroom particularly some students are better than others. The questions are what the

factors are in the learner or the situation which make this happen and why there should be differences between first and second language acquisition.

Mostly research has looked at differences by borrowing constructs from mainstream psychology. So learners differ in the type of motivations they have, whether the integrative/instrumental motivations (Gardner, 1985) or the need for achievement and the attribution of past failures (Dörnyei, 1990). They differ in terms of whether they use field-dependent or field-independent cognitive styles (Stansfield and Hansen, 1983; Hansen, 1984). They differ in their choice of strategies, whether learning strategies such as metacognitive versus cognitive (O'Malley and Chamot, 1989), or compensatory strategies such as morphological creativity (Poulisse, 1990). Controversy reigns in all of these areas and subsequent research tends to pile one variation on another; moreover, the answers may be comparatively unexpected, as in the case of age differences where it seems that adults in fact have an advantage at second language acquisition over the short term (Singleton, 1989). Nevertheless, whatever the precise import of the study of variation, it suggests that L2 learners vary in many dimensions. Some differences are unchangeable in the gross sense; if indeed sex or age per se makes a difference, nothing can be done and the learners will simply learn differently. If the differences are under the learners' control or are products of the situations they have encountered, something can be done about them. But the broad assumption must be that there is a substantial amount of variation between learners for a variety of demographic features and for many psychological traits and propensities.

The coursebook must then be adapted to the average characteristics of a particular group in terms of motivation, age, sex and so on. It should ideally cater to the traits that still vary between individuals even in a single group, such as learning style and personality variables. The coursebook should therefore allow some alternative paths for the student to follow at their own choice. While all of the beginners' courses looked at included group and pair work, none had alternative paths that students could choose for themselves, even if the teacher could clearly allow some selection in practice.

The aspects of syntax that need to be acquired mostly concern vocabulary

Many different aspects of syntax have been investigated in SLA research primarily within the American structuralist tradition. L2 syntax has been looked at within the Universal Grammar (UG) theory of language acquisition over the past thirty years in its various manifestations (Cook and Newson, 1996). Currently, the version called the Minimalist Program claims that knowledge of a language consists of a computational system and a lexicon (Chomsky, 1995). The central system does not need to be acquired by human beings as its apparatus is part of the human mind and so incorporated into all languages. What needs to be

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acquired is entries in the mental lexicon. These entries partly encode general parameter-settings that say whether sentences have to have subjects, how elements may move within the sentence, and so on. All the language-specific aspects of language are in the lexicon, whose scope has expanded to include much that had previously been covered by syntax: "there is only one human language apart from the lexicon, and language acquisition is in essence a matter of determining lexical idiosyncrasies" (Chomsky, 1992, p. 419).

The implication from such research is that, if the L2 is acquired as a natural language, the central areas of syntax do not need to be learnt. Instead the learner needs to acquire lexical entries in the mental lexicon. The overall assumption is that core aspects of syntax do not need to be taught because they are inexorably imposed on the language by the learners' minds. Furthermore the Minimalist Program draws attention to a growing theme in much linguistics and acquisition literature, to be discussed below. An important, perhaps crucial, aspect of language acquisition is acquiring the vocabulary of the language around which different phrases are built; acquiring vocabulary means learning not just word meanings but also the syntactic restrictions that a lexical entry projects onto the rest of the sentence.

The coursebook thus should not attempt to teach core aspects of grammar, which will be built up in autonomous ways by the students from the UG principles in their minds. This denies the grammatical slant to many syllabuses and sequences in coursebooks. Despite the communicative revolution in language teaching, conventional grammar lives on as a core element in coursebooks.

The important early aspects of syntax to be acquired concern word order, not inflections

The assumptions about syntax above suggested that learners do not need to acquire central aspects of syntax but need to acquire language-specific aspects related to the lexicon. Let us try to concretise this by taking two linked areas of English. The first is the acquisition of functional phrases built around inflection such as past tense *-ed*. In the L1 it has long been claimed that children go through a stage when they produce strings of lexical phrases such as *Go shop* without any of the inflectional elements such as *-ing* and *-s* around which functional phrases can be built (Radford, 1990) to yield sentences such as *Mummy is going to the shops*. At a particular moment the other elements come on line, so to speak, and children start integrating the lexical phrases within the main structure of the sentence. The major step in the acquisition of syntax is going from lexical phrases to functional phrases. Though using a very different model, the European Science Foundation Project (ESF) (Klein and Perdue, 1997) came to similar conclusions that there was a common stage with no grammatical inflections in people acquiring five L2s from six L1s.

Secondly there is the question of word order. The Multidimensional Model (Pienemann, Johnston and Brindley, 1988) established that L2 learners start with formulas such as *How are you?,* go on to Subject Verb Object (SVO) order as in *Shirley teaches geography*, and then learn how to move various elements in the sentence about to get the order in questions *What does Shirley teach?*, subordinate clauses *Peter asked if Shirley taught geography,* and so on. The ESF project established a common basic grammar for L2 learners consisting of three rules about SVO word order: a sentence may consist of (Klein and Perdue, 1997): a) a Noun Phrase followed by a verb followed by an optional Noun Phrase; b) a Noun Phrase followed by a Copula verb followed by a Noun Phrase, Adjective, or Prepositional Phrase: *it's bread*; c) a Verb followed by a Noun Phrase **pinching its*, i.e. a subjectless sentence. The foundation on which the learners can build is word order: learning the syntax of a language means discovering how to put the elements of the sentence in the appropriate order. Only after learners have acquired the SVO order described in the Multidimensional Model and in the ESF project can they go on to acquire other word orders, say questions.

Teaching should in the earlier stages concentrate on establishing the basic word order of the sentence *Joanna drinks Scotch*, with the corollary that inflectional elements may be minimised; that is to say, the learner should not be discouraged from saying *Joanna drink Scotch*. The difficulty this poses for teaching is the need for questions that involve movement in classroom interaction and management: *What's your name?, Do you like coffee?*. Other obligations on classroom teaching may determine that some moved elements are necessary, perhaps treating questions as sets of formulas. But the overall implication is that early teaching should go light on inflections, shouldn't make the students use sentences with movement and should emphasise the basic rules of word order.

One warning that has to be made, however, is that this only applies to the language that the students are expected to produce, not to the language they hear. To progress to the next stages in which they use inflections and movement, they must be exposed to examples of such expressions. Without invoking the ghost of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985), it is nevertheless necessary for the students to encounter examples of structures they do not produce themselves; otherwise there is no reason for them to go beyond their current stage.

The coursebook should therefore concentrate on the acquisition of word order rather than the acquisition of inflections. In themselves these suggestions would radically alter the shape of an English coursebook, much of which is based on inflections. *The Beginners' Choice* (Mohamed and Acklam, 1992) for example teaches plural nouns +*s* in Unit 1, nouns ending in -*y* and irregular nouns in Unit 2, present tense -*s* in Unit 4, past tense -*ed* and irregular past tense forms in Unit 6, and so on. Though English makes comparatively minor

use of inflectional morphology compared to some languages, courses such as this manage to cover virtually all the noun and verb inflections by the end of the first 120 hours.

Vocabulary items need to be linked to structural context and concepts

What follows from the general assumption that vocabulary is closely tied in to syntax? The specific claim made within the UG tradition is that lexical items function as heads of phrases (Cook and Newson, 1996). On the one hand they are heads of lexical phrases such as the verb *open* in the Verb Phrase *open the door*; on the other they are heads of functional phrases such as the grammatical inflection *-ed* in the Inflection Phrase *He opened the door*. This relates to the claim that learners first acquire lexical phrases, and then progress to phrases with grammatical inflections, i.e. another way of saying that they have an inflectionless phrase.

Implications for language teaching concern the organisation and presentation of vocabulary. Traditionally, the main criterion for teaching has been the frequency of words in the language, sometimes modified by *"disponibilité"* (Gougenheim, *et al.*, 1964), that is to say the ease with which they are accessed by native speakers — the word *hand* may not be frequent but is accessible. Teachability has also sometimes been taken into account (Mackey, 1965); the word *table* is inherently easier to present and practice in the classroom than the word *truth*. This discussion suggests, however, that the selection of words for teaching should be based on their structural possibilities. The verb *like* for instance is characterised by usually having an animate subject, except for some metaphorical expressions, *Beech trees like moist ground*; by having a direct object *Simon likes football*, or a clause introduced by *to* such as *I like to fly*; and by lacking an object in the expression *if you like*. This contrasts with, say, the verb *think*, which takes different types of object, with the verb *travel*, which typically has objects with *to*, and with virtually all the other verbs of English. Teaching *like* means exemplifying, explaining or any other method, so that the students can build up the lexical entry in their minds; minimally it means checking that the range of structures in which *like* occurs are actually covered somewhere. It may be that a coursebook indeed includes this; if it is using natural patterns of language, it is bound to cover the major ways in which the frequent vocabulary items occur. Yet this at best will be accidental and unplanned, at worst will not happen because of the skewed pattern of language presented through the exercises and activities used with students.

The second major consequence for teaching arises from the discussion of the relationship of L1 and L2. Teaching techniques have to build on the links between the L1 and L2 vocabulary in the mind rather than ignore them or fight against them. Partly this may be no more than an acknowledgement of

the L1 in the student's mind rather than the classroom pretence that it doesn't exist; however much the teacher may eschew translation, it will be happening privately inside the students' minds; using it publicly may provide a short cut. The traditional teaching technique of word lists may be effective, except for the point made above that it detaches the vocabulary from its structural context. A further aspect is the relationship to the conceptual system; if L2 learners get access to vocabulary through a system of concepts in neither language, teaching may well start from concepts that are universal. An obvious point is vocabulary such as *pizza* that has an international presence; entry to English vocabulary can be through such global aspects of culture as food or computers. *Flying Colours* (Garton-Sprenger and Greenall, 1990, p. 2) has an exercise "Find the international words" (*bar*, *pizza*, *tennis*, etc.). A second aspect is universal relationships such as the semantic primes favoured by Wierzbicka (1992) including *this*, *the same*, *other*, *one*, *two*, *many*, *all*, *think*, *say*, *know*, *feel* and *want*. It is no coincidence that these are found in the early stages of any English teaching program.

A conceptual organisation could play an important part in the choice and sequencing of vocabulary in the coursebook. Rigorous presentation of concepts only perhaps occurred in the strict audio-visual method association of language with pictures. Most of the coursebooks have specific vocabulary exercises which concentrate on meaning whether organising words in terms of meaning—"Look at the words in the box", "Are the things luxuries or necessities?"*Reward* (Greenall, 1994), or sorting out their various meanings—"Which meaning does *like* have?" *COBUILD* (Willis and Willis, 1988). They do not, except incidentally, practice words in structural contexts. The wordlists found in many coursebooks are either straight alphabetical lists as in *COBUILD* (Willis and Willis, 1988), alphabetical lists with a phonetic transcript as in *Headstart* (Beavan, 1995) or a mini-dictionary with parts of speech, phonetic transcripts and brief meaning definitions as in *The Beginners' Choice* (Mohamed and Acklam, 1992). None of them include basic structural information or give examples of the word in context.

Pronunciation is needed for internal purposes in the learners' minds

For many years it has been known that short-term memory works less efficiently in the L2 than in the L1 (Lado, 1965). While the deficit is not large, nevertheless information is harder to process and store for short periods in a second language, let alone for the periods involved in long-term memory (Long and Harding-Esch, 1977). In the past decade the "Working Memory" model of Alan Baddeley and his associates has come to occupy a central position in this field (Gathercole and Baddeley, 1993). This claims that the memory system for processing short-term information uses a central store which can

hold the information only briefly. To keep information from being lost it has to be recycled through this store by using an articulatory loop; saying the information over and over whether aloud or silently refreshes the information just as it is about to disappear. The L2 deficiency has been attributed either to the coding of information in the central store (Service, 1992) or to the speed with which information can be passed round the articulatory loop (Papagno, Valentine and Baddeley, 1991). In either case the crucial fact is that Working Memory depends upon phonological information being processed in the mind. The comprehension of speech, as well as all other language processes, involves getting information through Working Memory; indeed Working Memory may be an offshoot from speech rather than the other way round. One consequence is that sheer speed of articulation is important: in the first language speed of articulation correlates with Working Memory span (Gathercole and Baddeley, 1993) and hence with other tests that employ measures of span such as IQ tests.

Thus the pronunciation of language is needed not just for external purposes so that speakers can communicate with others but also for the internal purposes within the mind for handling language and other information. Without an ability to process sounds silently and quickly the language user will be handicapped. The deficiency that users have in the L2 as well as the L1 is due to an inability to handle the sounds of speech.

Language teaching has by and large seen pronunciation as a part of communication: can the students produce and comprehend the phonemes of the language? Most coursebooks now include some pronunciation work; *COBUILD* (Willis and Willis, 1988) has exercises on English sounds, most apparently intended to develop phonemic awareness — *Which sounds do the words in each set have in common?; Headstart* (Beavan, 1995) teaches only stress patterns such as *April* versus *September*. If Working Memory is the gateway to language processing and pronunciation is the key to Working Memory, the coursebook should equip the students with the capacity to handle sounds internally as efficiently as possible, not treat pronunciation only as part of communication.

L2 users need to learn about the properties of the L2 writing system

Both teaching and SLA research have concentrated on what might be called the higher levels of writing such as discourse connections, stylistic variation and schemas. Yet language teachers have to deal continually with everyday low-level writing problems — reading the students' handwriting, correcting the students' spelling, explaining the use of capital letters, and many other chores. Both fields at present seem largely unaware of the systematic nature of the writing system. Like the teaching of pronunciation, low-level writing skills are left to ad hoc correction by the teacher, virtually endlessly since spelling mistakes such as *devided still occur even in postgraduates (Cook, 1997c).

Perhaps this area is one case where the route of informing the teacher can be productive since information about the diverse nature of English spelling is so little known. Needless to say, coursebooks provide little help for students, apart from the occasional books oriented towards advanced students such as Carney (1997).

The main message from the scant research into low-level aspects of SLA writing is the presence of the L1 whether as a source of long-term transfer or of short-term aid. The actual construction of letters varies from one language to another; while English children are taught to start straight letters at the top (Peters, 1985, p. 54), Japanese children learn to make horizontal strokes before vertical. Some spelling mistakes are made by users of English regardless of whether they are L1 or L2 users or which L1 they have, such as vowel substitution between "a", "e" and "i" as in *catagories*, *penecillin*, and *imaginitive* (Cook, 1997c). Other mistakes reflect the L1 phonology or orthography, such as the Greek *bepent* (depend), *descride* (describe) and *propably*. At a more general level there is the transfer from one of the major writing systems to the other, usually seen as a contrast between meaning-based systems such as Chinese and sound-based systems such as Arabic or English. Chinese L1 speakers carry over their phonological strategies to the acquisition of the Japanese syllabic writing system (kana), English users their visual strategies (Chikamatsu, 1996). The speed with which Chinese students can read English is much less than that of students with other L1s (Haynes and Carr, 1990).

L2 coursebooks have mostly assumed that students are literate and that literacy transfers from one language to another, despite differences in writing system. No specific teaching of the writing system appears in main coursebooks. *COBUILD* (Willis and Willis, 1988) has an exercise on full stops and commas in Unit 1; *Hotline* (Hutchinson, 1992) has no apparent exercises on the writing system yet by Unit 3 students are asked to "Write an episode about what happens next"; *Buzz* (Revell and Seligson, 1993) is for young learners and assumes they need large sans-serif type but the extent of its teaching of the writing system is letters of the alphabet and "I-spy". The coursebook should have exercises for teaching the low-level skills, some aimed at all students, such as spelling, others aimed at specific problems for particular individuals such as writing direction. If L2 students transfer their way of holding the pen from their first language for example, this may damage their wrists (Sassoon, 1995).

Coursebook assumptions

Most of the above suggestions are not incorporated into current textbooks. There may of course be sound reasons for this, in particular that they are excluded by other factors. Coursebooks have to meet a set of requirements of their own. This is not the place to elaborate on them at length; some outlines

are available in Tomlinson (1998). An actual book to be sold to students has to respond to pressures from potential buyers such as educational institutions and teachers and to questions of cost. The following assumptions summarise some of the main possibilities:

● *Usable with large groups*

A problem with many teaching materials in the past few years has been that they depend on the students dividing into pairs and groups. In cultures used to more formal teaching this may in itself be a disadvantage. But more seriously its effectiveness diminishes with class size because of the noise and the difficulty of adequate supervision by the teacher. Without dictating any specific teaching method, a coursebook should in principle be usable with large groups. The use of alternate paths to suit students' individualities may then be impractical in a coursebook with a limited number of pages — the average length of the nine coursebooks looked at here is only 113 pages.

● *Usable with multilingual groups*

Ideal as it may be to have a class that shares a single first language, this is very far from the case in many schools in London, in Kuala Lumpur or in Berlin. The classic EFL methods taught only through English because they emerged from multilingual classes. As we have seen from the assumptions above, the L1 can no longer be avoided, posing a severe problem for the coursebook of catering for multiple L1s. Introducing the L1 into the coursebook may be difficult for practical reasons or the conclusion may be that there should be different coursebooks for each L1.

● *In step with teachers and students*

A coursebook has to be usable. If it departs too far from existing practice, it will not be adopted by teachers or acceptable to students. Its innovatory features must be within a framework that the users can feel happy with. The draft of *People and Places* (Cook, 1980) avoided the present continuous tense *He's standing* on the grounds that it was not needed for the twin goals of the course: travelling and talking about yourself. Feedback from teachers showed that this was too revolutionary and the published version had to incorporate this familiar element in the beginners' course. The main argument above that we should not use the native speaker as a target may be difficult to apply because of the belief by many successful L2 learners, including teachers, that this is indeed their goal. The arguments about minimising practice with inflections may also depart too far from what teachers and students expect in a classroom.

Sample materials

Is it actually possible to base a coursebook on the above eight suggestions? We have seen that some of the changes from existing coursebooks might be readily achievable. For example it would be straightforward to make use of examples of situations involving L2 users or to make certain that the vocabulary that was introduced was exemplified in a range of sentences. Other ideas might be harder to implement, say the minimal importance of inflections. Let us try to exemplify what might be through two lessons of a possible beginners' course:

Lesson 1. Franco's Pizzas: The students hear a radio jingle: *Pizzas, pizzas, Franco's Pizzas; Pizza, pizzas, tomato and cheese; pizzas, pizzas, Franco's pizzas; pizzas, pizzas, pizzas to go*. They see an illustrated menu offering 4 types of pizza: *(1) basic (cheese, tomato), (2) spicy (chilli, onion), (3) Mexican (beans, beef, chilli), (4) vegetarian (green pepper, sweetcorn)*. They have a fill-in order form with columns for the four types and rows for possible customers. The students repeat the jingle, identify the types of pizza with translation or illustration of any items, listen to customers on the phone and record their orders, and order pizzas from each other.

The lesson is based on international vocabulary with a clear illustratable meaning (*pizza, cheese, . . .*), using a familiar food concept. The vocabulary is presented in phrases (*green pepper, pizzas to go*), not sentences, and is related to their L1 experience. The plural inflection *-s* is present but not contrasted with the singular.

Lesson 2. DNC World News. 7.00 GMT: The students hear a brief news summary: *Good morning from London. I'm John Adams. President Clinton flies to Delhi for new peace talks. Tony Blair speaks in Tokyo about the Euro. In New York Kofi Annan talks to Middle East leaders. Stay tuned*. They see a world map with main capital cities labelled in English and a form giving place-names and leaders' names with boxes to check. Activities include: repeating the news bulletin, marking which leader is where on the form, and expanding the set of cities and countries by assigning capitals to each person in the class, then using their own names and cities, and ending with a news bulletin of their own about their classmates.

Again the starting point is an international use of English not necessarily aimed at natives, with a particular fixed form. The vocabulary the students practice is phrases and names. While the language includes inflections and full sentences, these are not the teaching point of the lesson. SVO word order is used without any questions or other moved elements.

These two lessons show that it is possible to produce such materials by, on the positive side, including as many of the suggestions as possible, and,

on the negative side, not going against the suggestions. Doubtless many other possible beginners' lessons could be derived from the same suggestions. The materials indeed appear more similar to existing coursebooks than might have been anticipated, so problems with teachers' or students' preconception should be minor. The more radical differences from conventional materials may only be visible on a larger scale, particularly the emphasis on vocabulary in phrases and on L2 rather than L1 use of English. But this small fragment of a coursebook at least shows that the suggestions can actually be applied.

Few, indeed, of the suggestions made here seem far-fetched and outlandish. Of course an L2 learner needs to learn how words are used in contexts as well as their meaning. Most L2 users tell anecdotes of how their two languages relate in their minds. People tackle L2 learning in different ways, as they do most other things. The claim that L2 users have rights of their own may go against the common-sense view that only the native speaker is right but nevertheless is in accordance with contemporary ideas about the rights of different groups, which were also as controversial when first suggested. Yet put together, the suggestions challenge much language teaching by undermining teaching methods that emphasise syntactic structures and communication but not vocabulary in structures, treat students in groups rather than as individuals, expect the students to forswear knowledge of a first language in the classroom, and have goals based on becoming as similar as possible to native speakers. These suggestions are only a small sample of the possibilities. SLA research can provide a rich source of ideas for teaching, even if the proof of the pudding is that they work in actual teaching.

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