



Contemporaneity of Language and Literature in the Robotized Millennium

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The Art and Science of Material Production

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1. Introduction

Teaching materials (including text books, workbooks, teacher's manuals, supplementary materials etc..) of today have evolved as a result of developments in the field of textbook preparation for at least fifty years. After independence language experts have tried out and are still trying different kinds and levels of textbooks. Efficient materials incorporate a number of reforms and innovations that begin at different times and in different places during the last fifty years. To understand these reforms, the state of the art of material production before fifty years should be reviewed and the challenges and problems faced by the user of such materials should also be probed into. Some fifty years ago, the writing of textbooks was considered to be a respectable task or responsible enough to be entrusted to professional workers. Michael West in his learning to Read a Foreign Language had said that the efficient schoolmasters [...] were too busy in writing the textbook except when they were retired and out of date. As a result these school masters were left to literary hacks, private tutors, unemployed lawyers or less successful school masters. The textbook industry lay in the hands of such inexperienced people and there were hardly any definable principles that governed the making of second or foreign language (L2) teaching books. The books used for English teaching in the early years of the past century were in most cases and for most purposes imported from the United Kingdom. There were books, which, in the country of their origin, served to teach the English children their own language. And when books of our school children begin to be written, there were also entirely based on these English models. In other words, students used the same for almost identical books, which the native learners used. There is a crucial difference between learners whose native language is English and those who learn it as a second language as in the case of our country. Books that will help the former will almost surely not produce satisfactory results with the latter. Unfortunately, this was the situation in our country. To understand the reforms that becomes necessary to produce quality textbooks for Indian learners who learn English only as a second language, several factors have to be highlighted. These books were used because, at those times, the difference between the teaching and learning of the first language (L1) and a foreign language (L2) were not fully realized. In countries like India, where education, especially at the secondary and tertiary stages, was given through the medium of English, the need for this distinction was hardly ever felt. If there was any theoretical justification for the use of such books or the ones modeled on them, it was what one might call 'the theory of exposure'. The amount and quality of learning is proportionate to the density and frequency of exposure to the language i.e., the more English one sees or hears the greater responsibilities of learning the language quickly and efficiently. The amount of exposure determines the amount of language that will be learnt irrespective of the situations of circumstances of such exposure to the new language. Harold Palmer in his The Principles of Language Study summed up the start of the art of material production in 1920's. He said that if hundred different language-teachers were asked to do to design an ideal course book, the outcome would be hundred different courses. Most of them would differ from the others fundamentally which would prove that few or no fundamental principles are generally recognized.

2. Defects and Problems in Textbook Preparation

To understand the problems faced by the uses of such teaching materials, one must study the learning-teaching methodology book of the early years of the twentieth century. Palmer, a great pioneer of foreign language, wrote: "the sort of English presented in the majority of Readers now used in Japan is marked in the earliest stages by an abundance of words and expressions suitable only for English (an American) children of age from five to ten years, and in the latter stages by types of diction ranging between the pompous and the archaic styles" (Palmer The Reformed English Teaching in the Middle Grade School 5). What was true of books used in Japan was equally true of those used in India. The processes at EFLU had analysed Palmer's statement and found that the book suffered from three major defects. The materials included them were usable with native English - Speaking learners but not with learners of English as a foreign language, as in the case of India. (i) Those materials, especially written in the future were often in mixed 'styles' and 'registers' and (ii) The materials did not concentrate on or provide for the essentials of language at the earliest stage and failed to provide a systematic approach to language

teaching at any stage. What happens when materials used for L1 learners of English are used for foreign language (FL) learners of the language? Two alternative arrangements are possible. The materials used by the children of the age four or five in English schools for teaching English can be used to eleven- year old children, since teaching must begin at the beginning. This fails because such materials will be too childish for the relatively grown-up learner. Secondly, this alternative creates the more serious defect, the usage of grown-ups' materials in England for the learners of roughly the same age in our country. The learners of our country find it difficult to follow the materials used in England.

So whether one errs on the side of simplicity and introduces baby's materials or on the side of psychological maturity, and introduces lexical items, which are difficult and unnecessarily he/ she creates problem for our learners. L1 materials used for FL teaching created both types of problems. The third defect is the failure to concentrate on essentials - by far the most serious one. No course, however comprehensive, can include all the words found in a language. Also, if the language has to be taught for a fixed number of hours, it is very clear that nothing can be has to be taught for a fixed number of hours, it is clear that not everything can be taught. Something must have preference over the others. Any textbook that fails to find a proper place for essentials and wastes time on non-essentials will result in wasted opportunities. The fourth defect is much more specific than the first three. Michael West enumerated some of the other problems that were caused by unplanned books for those who attempted to read them. The readers can spend only a very small part of the time. The reasons according to the Professors of EFLU were, the reading matter was difficult, the words used in most cases were unfamiliar, a large number of new words were used on each page and there was hardly any link (especially in terms of words) between one lesson and another. Many textbooks and other teaching materials of today suffer from some (or all) of the defects referred to above. The result is that learning becomes difficult, uneconomical and ineffective.

3. Curriculum Design during the Recent Years

Curriculum design can begin from an unorganized set of resources that are used, supplemented adapted or discarded as the design progresses. These resources can include course books, teacher-made materials and materials from newspapers and magazines. Course design can be seen as a kind of writing activity. Since the sub processes of the writing process like gathering ideas, ordering ideas, converting ideas to text, reviewing and editing can be applied to course design. In the course design process, these factors are considered in three sub processes: environment analysis, needs analysis and the application of principles. Environment analysis considers the situation in which the course will be used and determine how the course should take account of this context. To work from list of questions, which focus on the nature of learners, the teachers and the teaching situation is one of the ways of approaching environment analysis. These include questions like, Do the learners share the same first language? How old are they? Do they have special purposes in learning English? Are they highly motivated? Working on these questions will lead to environment analysis. The importance of environment analysis is that it helps ensure that the course will be suitable, practical and realistic. Paul Nation rights that Hutchinson and Waters (1987) make a useful division of learners' need into necessities (what the learner has to know to function effectively), lacks(what the learner knows and does not know already), and wants(what the learners think they need). Need analysis should assess how the learners' need to use the language after they leave the course, measure the learners' test level of proficiency and ask the learners what they consider to be most important for them. Research on language teaching and learning should be used to guide decisions on course design. There is considerable research done on the nature of language and language acquisition, which can guide the choice of what to teach and how to sequence it .There is also extensive research on how to encourage learning in general and language learning in particular, which can be used to guide the class presentation. The principles derived from these researchers include the importance of repetition and thoughtful processing of materials, the importance of taking account of individual differences and learning styles, principles related to learner attitudes and motivation. Goals can be expressed in general terms initially and more details can be given after considering the content of the course. Having a clear statement of goals is important for determining the content of the course, deciding on the focus in presentation and guiding assessment. Learners can also benefit from being informed about the goals. The language courses consist of the language items, ideas, skills, strategies and tasks to meet the goals of the course. The unit of progression of a course is the language or content feature that represents movement or progress through the course. Even though the units of progression in a course might be tasks, topics or terms, it is important for the course designer to check vocabulary, grammar and discourse to make sure that important items are being covered and repeated. One way to provide a systematic and well-researched basis for a course is to make use of frequency lists and other lists of language items or skills. These lists should be chosen and adapted for the needs analysis in order to set the language learning content of the course. Need analysis plays an important role in determining the content of courses, particularly for language items. As well as using need analysis to set language goals, it is useful to decide the basis for ideas content of the course.

The material in a course needs to be presented in a form, which will help learning. The presentation will use suitable teaching techniques and procedures and these needs to be put together in lessons. There are several advantages of having a set format for lessons. First, the lessons are easier to make, as each one need not to be planned separately. It also makes the course easier to monitor, to check whether all that are to be included and principles to be accepted are being followed. Finally, it makes the lesson easier to learn from, because the learners can predict what will occur and are familiarized with the learning

procedures required for different parts of the lesson. The key principle in learning is the amount of time allotted for listening and reading, learning from speaking and writing, direct study of language features and fluency development. The lesson format needs to be checked against the environment analysis of the course to make sure that the major environmental factors are being considered. Perhaps the most difficult task at this stage is to make sure that the learning goals of the course are met- that is, the required language items are well re-presented and well presented in the course. An important and recurring parts of the process of curriculum design is to assess the extent to which the goals are achieved. Assessment generally involves the use of tests. There are two types of tests- proficiency tests and achievement tests. Proficiency test measures what a learner knows of the language. And the achievement test measures what has been learnt from a particular course. The information gained from such tests can be useful in evaluating the course. Other kinds of tests include placement tests- to see if the course is suitable for a prospective learner or to see where in the course of the learner should begin diagnostic tests- to see if learners have particular gaps in the knowledge. Information gained from assessment is a useful source of data about the effectiveness of a course. These information's can contribute to the evaluation of a course. Evaluation tries to evaluate whether this course is good one or not. The meaning attached to 'good' depends on who is evaluating (the teacher, the learners, the owners of the school, the parents, the course designer) and is determined by the sources of information used to carry out the evaluation. It is necessary to decide on an appropriate focus for evaluation. An evaluation of a course can have many purposes, the main one being to assess whether to continue or discontinue the course or to bring about improvements in the course. Thus curriculum design can be an important problem involving a lot of time, resource and person. It is done on a large scale. However, it can also be done on a small scale, and most of the curriculum designs are like this, being done by the teachers to prepare or improve a course that only they will teach. In both the large scale and the small scale, it is important to have a plan to ensure that important sources of information are considered and a well-balanced curriculum design process is followed

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