Making and Using "Chips or Chips?":
A Discussion of Practical Uses of Our Textbook

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Introduction

Writing an original text for the EFL classroom provides an opportunity to examine and observe the effectiveness of your original materials and offers insight into an aspect of textbook production that instructors rarely see. In this paper, we will discuss the process we underwent to produce our first EFL textbook, "Chips or Chips? Let's Compare Britain and America". What started out as a grammar practice book evolved into a topic-based reading text with activities characteristic of Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

In Part 1: Presenting an Idea, we will discuss the origin of the idea for the textbook, in Part 2: Writing, Planning, and Managing "Chips or Chips?", the roles of each author will be delineated. In Part 3: Making the Finishing Touches, the editing process and our experience working with the publishers will be discussed. Part 4: Using "Chips or Chips?" in the Classroom elucidates ways in which "Chips or Chips?" can be implemented in the classroom. Part 5: Conclusion, discusses how the experience has influenced our current teaching practices and our understanding of creating original textbooks for the EFL classroom.

Part 1: Presenting an Idea

1.1 Hirano's Proposal

There is a fairly general agreement that the English proficiency level of Japanese university / college students is getting lower and lower these days. Although they have studied English since they were junior high school students and have done their best to prepare for entrance examinations, many of them are not willing to study and don't like English. Koichi Ano (2005) addresses the possible cause of this phenomenon in his article.

> The grammar translation method is still the main stream in senior high school English education in Japan even though Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology shows in the Course of Study that aim of English education of secondary school is to foster communication ability (Ano, 2005, p.13)

The best way to teach English especially to Japanese students who don't like English and whose English level is low is a problem that teachers have to promptly address. So, we thought it would be most effective if we made an English textbook in accord with Kobe Kaisei students' English level. We were fairly certain that the students would be accustomed to using the grammar translation method, so to break away from that conventional style, we decided to make a content-based textbook that would engage the students.

1.2 A Grammar Companion Book: Howard

Upon hearing Hirano's idea, I thought about ways that we could create a unique handbook that would supplement the freshmen grammar lessons at Kobe Kaisei. Having worked with graded readers and having used extensive reading in my classes for over ten years, I immediately thought of creating authentic reading passages in which the students could see the grammar structures they were learning in context. Adopting the idea launched by consciousness-raising, I contemplated a book that would draw the students' attention to a particular grammar point they had learned.

Consciousness-raising is a technique used in grammar classes that encourages students to discover language rather than have the rules presented to them (Thanh Binh and Thi Huong Lan). This is done by typographically changing the text of the grammar structure the students are learning by putting the phrases in bold, italics, or increasing the font size so that students become aware of the structures (Zang and Li). The consciousness-raising activities that would appear in the grammar companion book would serve as a tool to help the student recall what she had seen in class, and give her the opportunity to check her understanding.

The grammar companion book was to be organized into fifteen units that followed the syllabus of the freshmen grammar classes taught at Kobe Kaisei. Each unit would feature a written piece by Hall and myself. The reading would compare some aspect of British and American culture, and it would include many instances of the grammar structure corresponding with the unit. A

manga persona of Hirano would serve as a study guide, who would appear in a side bar in each unit to explain any pertinent or salient points about the grammar and the passages. This would give students something to think about while progressing through the units.

Part 2: Writing, Planning, and Managing "Chips or Chips?": Howard, Hall, Hirano

2.1 The Units and Activities: Howard

Although it started out as a grammar companion book, as Hall and I began drafting passages demonstrating the different grammatical structures, the endeavor proved to be unwieldy and resulted in choppy, unnatural writing. After conferring on what to do, we decided to shift the focus and write a topic-based reading and communicative textbook. The units remained in the same order, but the focus shifted from grammar to vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and task-based activities

The activities used in the textbook are similar to those found in the TBLT approach. The tasks require students to use the vocabulary and the information they learned from the reading in certain tasks like interviewing a classmate, or describing their favorite movie. These tasks were designed to get students to communicate using their vocabulary and grammar knowledge.

2.2. Writing Chips or Chips: Hall

The approach to writing the texts for each unit was based on many years of teaching in Japanese universities. The tone, vocabulary, and level were pitched in order to appeal to the students I have come to know

over nine years in Japan. I tried to make the texts as personal and conversational as possible and to put myself in their minds.

When deciding on the unit activities, I focused on activities that would engender oral communication. I was also aware that Japanese students of English are often reticent to speak in larger group situations. (Braddock, R., Roberts, P., Zheng, C., Guzman, T., 1995; Cortazzi M., Jin L., 1996; J. Jones J, 1999). For this reason, the activities created were ones where students speak either in pairs or in small groups.

Additionally, many of the speaking activities are preceded by structured, lead-in activities designed to allow students to prepare to speak. Most of the activities in the book can be modified to some degree or another by the teacher, depending on the level of a particular class.

In summary, the key points in creating the book were; to engage the students, hence the personal nature of the material in each unit, to create as many opportunities for students to speak but to allow them enough opportunity to prepare what they are going to say, and to create activities which were easily modified so that teachers could adjust according to the level of their students.

2.3. Writing Chips or Chips: Howard

Based on over ten years' experience teaching EFL/ESL in Japan and in Colorado, I endeavored to write reading passages and activities that engaged the students in the learning process. Each passage introduced some aspect of my culture, and I wanted to be certain that the students learned something new from each reading. I did research on the Internet, mostly using Wikipedia, but I also used my own knowledge of my country and culture.

When I designed the activities for each unit, I worked with Hall to make sure our activities did not overlap, and we alternated between creating speaking activities and writing activities for each unit. I used activities that one would find in TBLT and CLT classrooms. It was also important that the activities were flexible enough for classroom settings outside of Kobe Kaisei and Japan. I wanted the units and the activities to be applicable to any teaching context, so I developed tasks that required little to no technology or additional materials other than a writing tool.

2.4. Managing Chips or Chips: Hirano

While Hall and Howard worked on the content of the textbook, I acted as a manager and liaison to the publisher's. As manager, I applied for a grant from Kobe Kaisei that would cover some of the cost of publishing the textbook. I worked with the grant committee and other administrators to effectively use the resources available for publishing the textbook. This entailed writing and submitting the grant, filling in the necessary paperwork, and following the procedures necessary to obtain the funds. I also met periodically with Hall and Howard to discuss the progress of the textbook and to address any questions or concerns they had.

In addition to my managerial duties, I worked with the publisher's throughout the creative process. I set up the first meeting with the publisher's in which we discussed our plan for the textbook. They roughly agreed with our concept and suggested we change some of the topics of the reading.

After the initial meeting with the publisher's, we agreed to send our first draft on August 31, 2013. After we received the first edited draft, we checked the editor's comments, and if any comments or corrections were unclear, I called the publisher's to ask for clarification. Sometimes we agreed with the changes, but other times we disagreed and kept the original.

Working with the publisher's was challenging at times, especially when explaining the cover art. I explained our idea and tried to describe the image we had imagined for the cover art, but each time, the finished product was not exactly what we had in mind. The cover art was very important to us because it is the first impression of our textbook. We wanted it to be perfect, but there wasn't enough time to fine tune the details.

My role in making Chips or Chips gave me an objective perspective on the publishing process. It allowed me to see everything as a whole. I was able to participate in all aspects of the project from submitting a grant proposal, to working with foreign teachers, and corresponding with the publisher's.

Part 3: Making the Finishing Touches

3.1. Revising and Editing

We were given three opportunities to revise the original manuscript. When we received the first edited copy of our manuscript, there were many sections that needed to be revised. The reading passages in most of the units were either too short or too long. We had to cite all of the pictures we used to illustrate each reading. We also had to revise the writing exercises in order to fit the text onto the page. The pagination of some of the units was inconsistent and confusing, so we had to correct that as well.

Revising the passages and going through the manuscript carefully took about a week. All three of us examined the manuscript, and Hall and I worked together to search for any errors or inconsistencies we may have overlooked. Hirano provided a non-native English speaker's perspective on the text and provided feedback as to whether or not a passage or review questions were clear and understandable.

The second edited draft of our manuscript required that we proofread the manuscript for small grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors. We also took the time to scour each page for any other errors as this would be the last time we could make any big changes. We also addressed the copyright concerns regarding the illustrations we used, and confirmed that it was okay.

The third and final revision required a glance through the manuscript. We checked again for grammar, spelling, or pagination errors. We also revised the teacher's manual to make sure that it coincided with the revised manuscript. In addition, we agreed on the final version of the cover art, and sent the manuscript on its way.

3.2 The Illustrations, the Cover, and the Audio

As we mentioned above, the copyright of the photographs we used was a concern. Believing this to be the publisher's responsibility, we felt that expressing our concerns was sufficient to insure the authorized use of all images in the textbook.

Unfortunately, after the book had been published, we discovered that one of the photos had been used without authorization. The publisher's office apologized for the oversight and assured us they would insert a different picture in the now already printed books. Although we had done what we could to prevent this, the mistake had still occurred. Using photographs in a published textbook is a risk, and apparently it is not enough to just voice one's concern. It is advisable for the author/s to make sure that the use of each photo is authorized as well. Another option would be to avoid using copyrighted material.

In addition to the photos, as Hirano mentioned above, we also had the cover art to consider. We conferred on the image we wanted to have on the cover, and thought it might be fun to have manga versions of ourselves. The publisher's office requested photographs of all of us, and their in-house artist drew our pictures for the cover. The first version was unsatisfactory, and so we modified it somewhat sending it back to the artist for a revision.

The second version was better, but we added some changes and received a third and final version which was satisfactory. However, we had only seen black and white line drawings of the cover art. It was not until the book had been published that we saw the finished product. Although we did not agree with the color scheme, we all felt a sense of accomplishment when we beheld the finished textbook and its cover art.

The last step of the publishing process was recording the audio CD. Recording the CD was an interesting and rewarding experience. We think it will be a great way for teachers to help their students' improve their vocabulary knowledge and increase their reading comprehension. Assisted reading, or reading while listening to an audio of a native speaker has proven effective for better vocabulary acquisition (Tabrizi and Farokmanesh). It has also yielded significant results in improving reading comprehension (Kasmani and Davoudy).

Part 4: "Chips or Chips?" in the Classroom: Hall

To illustrate how the units in the book can be used in the Japanese university classroom setting, it would be useful to describe how I utilize a particular unit for a class of around 15 mixed-ability students at a small Japanese university.

The unit in question is Unit 1, 'My Hometown'. As an introduction, I use a prediction exercise, giving pairs of students photos of the hometowns, together with a map of the UK and U.S.A. They have a few minutes to guess the locations. Next, students work independently to answer questions on vocabulary on pages 2 and 3 and then share answers with a partner. Then, the reading and listening sections on page 4 are completed. If the students are more able, books can be closed for the first listening and two questions have to be answered, e.g., "What did Earl Grey invent?", or, "What is the last activity on the city tour?" Otherwise, students listen with books open and then answer the comprehension questions on page 4. This is followed with the reading/listening on page 5. After this, the 'My Favourite City' activity can be done (page 6). If the class is low-level, the teacher can make the activity more structured by giving students the initial few words of each sentence, e.g., 'My

favourite city is…..', 'I like it because…..', 'You can visit/see/try/eat/go…….'

To extend this activity further, students can be asked to make mini-presentations about their favourite cities. Students could spend the remainder of the lesson preparing what they are going to say as well as a visual and they then have to make their presentations at the beginning of the following lesson. A time limit, say 1 minute, should be given and a listener sheet should be prepared by the teacher so that the students making up the audience have to listen more closely to their classmates' presentations.

As a further extension, I have used tourist maps of Newcastle upon Tyne, England (my hometown). I give these maps to pairs, they listen again to the reading on page 4 and try to follow the route described on the map using either a finger or a pencil. After this, I give out pocket guides to the city and they have to prepare their own short tour of the city centre, visiting a minimum of five different places. Students have around 30 minutes to prepare these tours and then they present them to other pairs, who have to follow on their own maps. This has proven to be successful with students generally stimulated by the use of 'real' materials. Research has shown the efficacy of realia in the ESL classroom (Berwald, 1987; Rivers, 1983; Heaton, 1979).

Part 5: Conclusion

Writing Chips or Chips gave us access to a part of language teaching that we teachers rarely encounter if ever. We were able to experience first-hand what it was like to create an original textbook and have it published. We watched it evolve from a grammar companion book to a topic-based communicative textbook, and we wrote interesting reading passages about our respective British and American cultures.

Hall explained ways to use the textbook in class. He suggested ways to organize the lesson and ways to augment the text, such as using realia and developing communicative activities like mini-presentations.

Working together to create an original textbook proved mutually beneficial. We learned from each other and we were able to create lasting memories of our time at Kobe Kaisei.

In the future, if we had the opportunity to write another textbook together, there are a few things we would change. Hirano did a lot of work behind the scenes, but her presence is scarce in the actual textbook. We would include Hirano in the textbook if there ever is a second edition. In addition, the comparison between British and American culture might be clearer if they were discussed in the actual passages. Some of the units had passages that were hard to compare. In a second edition, it might be more beneficial to students if Hall and I actually discussed the differences in the reading passages themselves.

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