

# Making the Textbook More Communicative

Judith M. Lamie

[j.m.lamie \[at\] bham.ac.uk](mailto:j.m.lamie@bham.ac.uk)

University of Birmingham, England

## Introduction

Textbooks play a pivotal role in language classrooms in all types of educational institutions - state schools, colleges, language schools - all over the world. Some fortunate teachers are free to choose the textbooks they use themselves. The vast majority of teachers have textbooks either suggested for them, or, in the case of the teaching of English in Japan, prescribed.

This article suggests a number of ways in which traditional, grammar-focused textbooks, operating on a grade-quota system, can be adapted and supplemented to cater for the ever growing stress being placed in English teaching on communication. Although the materials directly relate to English teaching in junior and senior high schools in Japan, they are of relevance to all teachers of English world-wide.

## Textbook Approval and Adoption

Textbooks produced or approved by a governing body, such as a Ministry of Education, may purport to adhere to curriculum guidelines, but in reality not fulfil the objectives they set themselves. As Fullan (1991, p.70) states:

an approved textbook may easily become the curriculum in the classroom, yet fail to incorporate significant features of the policy or goals that it is supposed to address. Reliance on the textbook may distract attention from behaviours and educational beliefs crucial to the achievement of desired outcomes.

In Japan teachers have a curriculum which states that its goal is to develop students' communicative competence, but textbooks that remain focused on the presentation and rote testing of grammatical items. As a result teachers, in order to comply with government policy and student demands find themselves in the position of having to modify or supplement the materials available.

## Textbook Application and Adaptation

Modification can take place in a number of ways, from short isolated activities designed to foster communication, to entire lesson restructuring, which may or may not involve actual use of the prescribed textbook. The table below and subsequent examples focus to a large extent on the former as it is in that area, where realistically, most change takes place:

Modification	Example
Additional activities	Show & Tell
	Twenty Questions
	Noughts & Crosses
Organisational changes	Pair and group work (native language; target language)
Supplementary materials: textbook	Other published texts: Fast Forward (Black, 1986), Headway (Soars, 1993)
Supplementary materials: authentic	Newspapers; maps; radio/television broadcasts; films; poems; stories (copyright consideration)

Table I: Textbook Application

### a) Additional Activities:

Activities, such as Show & Tell where students are requested by the teacher to bring in an item of interest and present it to the class - or Twenty Questions (see Figure 1) , in which the teacher, or a student (to the whole class, or in a group) has the name of an object, profession, person, place or action, on a card and the remaining pupils try to discover its identity - can be inserted at any time into the lesson, although in order not to disrupt the continuity, they most naturally fall at the beginning or the end.

Isolated exercises do not effect the textbook procedure, but can be used to supplement the grammar point. For example, a simple game of Noughts & Crosses (see Figure 2) - where students two teams, the noughts (0) and the crosses (X), have to select an item and then use it correctly in a sentence/phrase to win their mark being placed on the board (the aim of the game being to achieve a straight line of three) - can be used to reinforce the language point being covered, in the case of the example shown prepositions.

<b>TWENTY QUESTIONS</b>
TENNIS
BASEBALL
RUGBY
GOLF

Figure 1: Twenty Questions

**Noughts & Crosses**

IN	NEXT TO	IN FRONT OF
ON	BETWEEN	BEHIND
UNDER	OPPOSITE	INSIDE

Figure 2: Noughts & Crosses

**b) Organisational Changes:**

Although the content of the lesson may not vary, the organisation may be adapted to encourage communication and interaction between the teacher and the students and the students themselves. Where teachers previously focused on individual activities (Table II: Column A), pair and group work may be used (Table II: Column B), preferably in the target language. The following extracts from a teaching plan, produced by a senior high school teacher taking part in an in-service training course on teaching methodology, demonstrates how simple organisational change can take place.

<b>Procedure (text review)</b>	<b>Organisation A</b>	<b>Organisation B</b>
Teacher asks students to consider the following questions:	Individual	Pairs
1) What is the question Japanese people never ask when they begin to speak to people from abroad?	(Read and consider)	(Read and discuss)
2) What sort of people are there who look a lot like this American woman?	Individual	Groups
3) In what respect do they look like her?	(Teacher nominates)	(Discuss)
Feedback		Group nominee

Table II: Lesson Plan Extract

**c) Supplementary Materials: Textbook**

Additional published textbooks, such as Oxford English's Fast Forward (Black, 1986), a course with a grammatical and functional syllabus, presented through short dialogues and texts and utilising a variety of communicative activities, language games and role-plays, may be used to supplement the prescribed textbook. For example, if teaching Sunshine English Course 1 Program 3 part 1,

and the grammar structure I like Japan, Fast Forward Chapter 1 Part C: Talking about interests and hobbies (Black, 1986, p.14) may be applied:

- Consider the question
  - Listen to dialogue 1
  - Discuss in pairs
  - Feedback
- Match the words with the pictures (pairs)
  - Feedback
- Ask partner (hobbies)
- Repeat (a) with Dialogue 2
- Ask partner
- Complete survey/table
  - (prompts on chalk board / overhead transparency):
- In groups prepare and present survey findings
  - (bar charts; pie charts; line graphs).
- Supplementary materials: authentic
  - With the importance afforded to the development of cultural awareness, materials such as newspapers (Figure 3), magazines (Figure 4), and films (Figure 5) can provide a useful and beneficial stock for the teachers.

### **In the News**

1. In groups discuss where you think the following newspapers should be placed on the grid below:

(A )The Times (B) The Guardian (C) The Independent (D) Daily Mail (E) The Express (F) The Sun (G) The Daily Star

Broadsheet

|

Left Wing | Right Wing

|

Tabloid

2. Select one member of your group to present your findings.

3. Considering your answers to number 1, match the front page headlines with the appropriate newspapers:

The Times --Gizza Break Gazza

The Independent --How Low Can Fergie Stoop

Daily Mail --DTI Inquiry Into London Art Market

The Daily Star --Anti-abortionists to Target MPs

Figure 3: Using Newspapers in the Classroom

### **MAGAZINE SEARCH**

Look at the six magazines and answer the following questions.

1) Match the magazine with the topic:

- (A) Wild About Animals
- (B) Football
- (C) Shoot Cars
- (D) Top Gear
- (E) Animals
- (F) Jackie
- (G) Fashion
- (H) Just 17
- (I) Younger teenage interest (13-15)
- (J) Madame Figaro Older teenage interest (16-19)

2) Where would you find the following:

1. a) An article about a young Hollywood actor?
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. b) Information about the new car market?
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. c) Lots of pictures of football players?
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. d) Advice on breeding your own fish?
8. \_\_\_\_\_

3) Look at the advertisements in the magazines. Which one do you like the best? Why?

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Figure 4: Using Magazines in the Classroom

## INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE

The film you are going to watch is an adventure film. What other film genres (types of films) do you know?

Can you think of an example for each?

What is your favourite?

What is the legend behind the Holy Grail?

Mark these statements true or false:

- Indiana's father's name is Henry.
- Indiana goes to Rome, Italy, looking for his father.
- Dr. Schneider is a woman.
- The three numbers in the church are III, VIII, and X.
- Indiana's father is scared to death of rats.

Answer the following questions:

- Indiana went from Italy to where? \_\_\_\_\_
  - Who did he find there? \_\_\_\_\_
  - How did Indiana and his father escape from Berlin? \_\_\_\_\_
  - What three things did Indiana have to do to reach the grail? \_\_\_\_\_
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With print media, for example, activities can range from low level text searches in order to identify genres and content, to higher level more detailed critical examination of issues (moral, cultural or political). Discussion is more likely to ensure that students operate at levels beyond the 'literal' level (Barrett, 1966) and take them up the skills hierarchy to inferential and evaluative levels.

## Conclusion

However good the textbook, it will never be perfect for every teacher's teaching situation. In some respect it will always need adapting, modifying or supplementing. The only limit for this is the teacher's time and imagination. With a little of both most objectives can be fulfilled.

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## Author's Details

Judith M. Lamie, Director Japanese Secondary Teachers' Programme, EISU, School of Humanities, University of Birmingham, England. Email: j.m.lamie [at] bham.ac.uk