Adapting and Supplementing Textbooks to Include Language Planning

Marc Helgesen
Miyagi Gakuin Women's University
march@mgu.ac.jp

This paper introduces *language planning (LP)* and suggests reasons for including LP in the classroom. Those reasons include increased complexity, fluency and, at times, accuracy. LP can also be useful to in facilitating greater vocabulary variety and in helping learners avoid fossilization. The main section of the article looks at specific ways LP activities can used to adapt and supplement coursebooks that do not already include them.

WHAT IS *LANGUAGE PLANNING*?

As "communicative" has become the standard in language teaching, we as teachers have accepted certain truths:
  • Students learn to speak English by speaking English.
  • The more they speak English, the more they learn.
We often take that to a not necessarily logical extreme:
  • Students ought to be speaking English every minute.

So we walk into the classroom, hand out a pairwork, say something like this:
Teacher: *Here's the task.*
 You're student A.
 You're student B.
 TALK NOW!

In essence, we are asking them to create the meaning *(think of what they want to say)* and create the form *(think of how to say it)*, simultaneously and in a foreign language. As a result, students say whatever they can say instantly. This demand for instant production means we lock them into surface level conversations (*What do you like music?*). As Sandy (2003) points out, learners need "mental preparation time, on their own, not only to think about how to answer a question or respond to a text, but more to work out what they want to say or how they feel."

What Sandy is describing is a form of *language planning* (LP) -- giving students time and often a task that allows them to think through the items they will talk about.

Research (Yuan and Ellis, 2003; Bygate, et. al, 2001; Foster and Skehan, 1999; Skehan & Foster, 1997; Foster and Skehan, 1996) suggests numerous benefits to be gained by incorporating language planning in the classroom, especially in the areas of fluency, complexity and accuracy:

• *Increased fluency*. This makes sense. The first time you say something, you are mentally constructing it as you go. With language planning, learners do it once in their minds first so, once they get to the speaking part, they have already been through it mentally.

• *Increased complexity*. Again, the learners have thought through what they want to say so they are able to explain things in a complex, connected way.

• *Increased accuracy*. They've mentally been through it so they are able to say things more clearly and correctly. Sometimes. While LP research shows fluency and complexity consistently improve, the results on accuracy are mixed. This doesn't mean, however, that LP is

a negative when it comes to accuracy. What sometimes happens is, as linguistic complexity goes up, the learner jumps to a higher level of grammar. Naturally, errors are going to occur when students are working with language they have not yet mastered. It should be noted that teacher-fronted LP activities are more likely to result in increased accuracy than those that are group- or individually planned.

Other benefits include the following:

• *Greater vocabulary variety*. When students are attempting "instant production", there is little time for mental "word-searching." They have to use the words they already know and can access easily. When they do LP, they have time to remember new vocabulary they are in the process of learning – or even look up new words they need.

• *Learners may avoid fossilization*. They have time to think about how they will say things and don't have to rely on the forms they usually use.

Although LP is a fairly new concept in ELT and most of the research is very recent, it should be noted that it is a very natural, common sense concept. You've probably used it in your own language learning:

Think of the first time you tried shopping in a foreign language. Before you went up to the clerk, you probably said to yourself, "I need to find *x*, so I've got to say '〜〜〜〜〜〜.' And then the clerk will probably say, '————— ' Then I need to say something like, '〜〜〜〜.' " That's language planning**.**

This "think ahead" strategy is something good language learners have always done. Part of our purpose in looking a LP as a specific set of classroom techniques is to make it – and the related benefits – available to all the students, not just those who naturally do these the activities on their own.

ADAPTING TEXTBOOK ACTIVITIES

Since language planning is new, LP activities are not included in many coursebooks. However, as Graves (2003, p. 230) points out, any "coursebook must be adapted to your particular group of learners." Using the (perhaps, since it was published in the spring of 2003, unfortunate) acronym SARS (Select, Adapt, Reject, Supplement), Graves suggests ways of considering how to modify one's own coursebook. In that spirit, I will consider ways to modify—in particular to adapt and supplement—coursebook materials to incorporated language planning.

Pre-Listening Tasks

Many coursebook tasks include pre-listening tasks as warm-up activities. These are often done for the purpose of schema activation and to integrate top-down and bottom-up processing. (Helgesen, 2003a). It should be noted that *pre-listening tasks are language planning*, indeed, they are one of the most common and accepted types of LP. If a listening activity does not have a pre-listening task, one can be easily added simply by asking several simple questions:
  • *What is the task? What do you need to do?*
  • *Look at the questions? What do you already know about this topic? What vocabulary do you think you will hear?*
  • *Look at the picture(s) (if any). What vocabulary can you name?*

By having students work through these questions, they familiarizing themselves with the task. In the process, they are preparing themselves to listen.

Personalize Listening Questions

After a listening task, ask 3-5 questions about the learners, based on the listening topic. They answer about themselves. Example: If they were listening to descriptions of people, they

would hear questions like: *How long is your hair? Do you wear glasses? What do you look like? Write at least 3 words. etc.*

Then they compare in pairs or small groups.

• If they compare answers, it builds fluency & complexity.

• If they try to remember the questions based on their answers, it works on accuracy.

Note that there is no reason you can't do both.

Extend Textbook Dialogs

Most coursebooks contain dialogs. And the purpose of a dialog, of course, is *to have practiced* the *dialog.* That is, the purpose is to move beyond the conversation on the page to having conversations containing the learners' own ideas and information. Build on dialogs with a *3-minute conversation task.* Assign the topic. Learners close their books. They try to have an English only conversation. Note that this is not the same thing as "free conversation." It is the combination of the assigned topic plus the challenge of using English – and only English – for three minutes that makes it an actual tasks. With this technique, the dialog practice served as LP.

Preview the Page

Before starting a pair- or groupwork activity, give learners a few minutes to look over the page and read the questions or task information. They'll naturally start thinking about their answers. Use background music to fill the silence. Using relaxing background music during mental preparation activities can "fill up" the empty time. It helps both the teacher and students become comfortable with silence. The most common genres are new age, light classical or world music. Put the CD player on one side of the classroom and tell student that, if they don't like music, they can sit on the opposite side of the room.

Evaluate the Questions

In a pairwork or groupwork that involves asking and answering many questions, have them look over the questions before they start. They rate each for interest. They can either use a numerical system (1=very interesting, 2=so-so, 3= not interesting) or something as simple as smiley faces (☺, ☺, ☹). Going through and rating the questions means learners have to think about the content. They begin the production phase of the activity by talking about the most interesting questions which means they are starting at a high level of interest. Then they start with the interesting ones.

English Please

Have the learners, in pairs or groups, answer questions in Japanese first. Then, after a minute or so, say, "English please." They have to try to say the same thing, but this time in English. This allows them to think of their answers before having to explain those answers in a foreign language.

Focus on Target Structures

Do pronunciation work with the language map or target sentences at appear in the coursebook. Remember, of course, that pronunciation is not only a mechanical process. Pronunciation does not begin in the voice box. It begins in the mind (Maley, 2001.). Do pronunciation tasks that encourage learners to work with the sounds mentally, then attempt to match them physically. By doing pronunciation work just before a fluency activity, it makes the learners aware of the forms which can will come up during the task. Ways to practice that

involve the three primary senses used for information processing (visuals, auditor and kinesthetic) appear in figure 1 on the following pages.

The Language Map and the Senses

These are techniques for helping students use different senses to work with different language forms. Introduce them one at a time, after learners already know what they will be doing in a particular task. The letters after each idea indicates the main sense(s) used:

V= visual/sight   **A**= audiory/hearing   **K**=kinesthetic (haptic)/touch

• **Listen & Repeat**. Say each sentence. Students pause a few seconds and think about what they heard. Cue them say it. (This is very traditional so it's an easy way to introduce sensory work.) (A-K)

• **Silent L & R** (*Listen & Repeat)* Say each sentence. Students pause and then repeat it without making any sound. They pay attention to their lips, teeth, tongue, etc. and think about pronunciation. (K-A)

• **Look at the words.** Students close their eyes. Say each sentence. Students imagine the words and notice how they are written. Typed or by hand? What color are the words? They can mentally change the color of words, underline key grammar items, etc.(V- A)

• **Lip-reading**. (Use this when you have several target sentences). Students work in pairs. One chooses a key sentence and says it silently (as in *Silent Listen and Repeat*). The partner watches and guesses. They take turns. (V-K)

• **Whose voice?** Students close their eyes. Say each sentence. Students repeat it in their minds. Ask students to think about the voice they heard when they repeated it. Was it yours or their own? They repeat it again in their own voice.(A)

• **Fix the pronunciation.** Students mentally repeat the sentence, imagining a very strong local accent. They the mentally "fix" the pronunciation, hearing in their own voice with native-like pronunciation. (A)

• **Picture it**. Students close their eyes. Say the sentences. Students image a scene that shows the meaning of the sentence. Then they imagine the sentence next to the picture. They mentally repeat the sentence.(V-A)

• **Pictures and words**. (Use this when the forms/sentences involve particular themes such as shopping, a sports event, etc.) As in *Picture it,* students imagine themselves in the picture. Then they mentally write the sentence next to the picture. To review, give them a key word from each sentence. They think of the picture and try to remember the sentence. (V-A)

• **Tap the rhythm**. Students hear the model, then tap the rhythm on their desks, matching the stress and timing. Note: this is often easier with two hands – as if they were playing drums. (V-A)

• **Nonsense syllables.** Students repeat the sentences matching the stress and rhythm. They use nonsense syllables instead of the real words. (example: nonsense syllables = DAda Dadada). (A)

• **Write now**. Say each sentence. Students "write" with their fingers on their other hand or some rough surface. Some students will want to close their eyes as they do this. Others will want to say the words, mentally or aloud as they do it. (K and, with options, V-A)

• **Writing in the air**. (Use this when you have several example sentences, a language box, etc.) Students work in pairs. One chooses a key sentence and writes it with a finger in the air (or on the partner's back or hand). The partner watches (or feels) and guesses the sentence. (K-V)

• **That makes sense.** This involves all the senses. Students close their eyes. Say each sentence. Students imagine themselves saying the sentence. As they do, they imagine each sentence appearing next to the picture of themselves. They listen to the voice as well. (V-A-K)

Figure 1: The language box and the senses.

Guided Visualization[1]

A very useful way to prepare for a speaking activity, especially one where learners are sharing a personal experience or story (real or imagined), is to have them mentally (re)experience the event as a way to get ready to talk about it.

Have the learners close their eyes some may not be comfortable with closing their eyes initially. Don't worry. Just keep going with the activity. As they become comfortable, most will join in. In a slow, relaxed voice, guide them through the story. Pause often to give them time to visualize. Again, you may want to use background music.

A guided visualization is easier demonstrated than explained. Read the sample script in figure 2, below. As you read, in your own mind imagine the story.

__Think about a time – a guided visualization.__

Think about a time you felt very happy – or very sad. It can be any time that it is OK for you to talk about. Any time your were happy – or sad.

And, in your mind, you can experience that time now. You remember the time…and the place…and the people who were there. You can experience those now.

And you can see yourself. Look around. Where are you? Are in inside or outside? Look at the place you are. What do you see? What do things look like? What do people look like. Notice their clothing. Notice what they are doing. Notice their faces.

Who are these people? Do you know them? Who are they? Are they talking? Listen. What are they saying? What are you saying? What else do you hear? Birds? Cars? Music? Other sounds. What do you hear?

And what do you feel? What's the weather like? Is it hot? Cold? Do you feel the wind? Are you standing or sitting? Can you feel the ground under your feet? Or can you notice a chair or something else against your body. Are you moving? Feel the movement of your body. And notice your emotions. How do you feel in your heart? This is an important time for you. How do you feel?

And now, you will have about a half -a- minute to experience the time now. And as you do, notice everything you can see, you can hear and you can feel. (:30 pause).

And when you are ready, take a deep breath, come back to room and open your eyes.

Figure 2: Guided visualization script.

As you read, did you notice that the script was structured to guide you in remembering the situation of the story by leading you through the three main senses: sight, hearing and feeling? It began with sensory neutral language: *remember, experience*. Then it moved into visual images: *Look around. What do you see? What do things look like?* From there, we progressed to sense auditory: *Are they talking. Listen. What else do you hear?* Next we moved into the sense of touch/feeling. This kinesthetic sense, also called "haptic", includes both physical sensations *(Do you feel hot/cold/the wind?*) and emotions (*How do you feel in your heart?)* Finally, before the 30-second imagination time, the listener is reminded to experience the story through these senses (you can *see*, you can *hear* and you can *feel*). Barring a handicap like blindness or deafness, we all experience life through all the senses, and we all have a preferred modality – the sense that for us is strongest. By guiding the listener through the three main senses, you are ensuring that everyone gets some focus in their main sense (preferred modality). Also, since we all have all the senses, the other input makes the visualization a richer, more complete experience. Note that the other senses, smell (olfactory) and taste (gustatory) are also very powerful. They can be a part in

guided visualization where they fit into the story (the tastes and smells of childhood holiday, for example) but are generally less flexible than the other senses.

The follow verb list contains vocabulary useful to helping learners experience each of the three main senses (V – visual, A – Auditory, K – Kinesthetic [also called *haptic*.). Use sensory specific verbs:

V: *see, look, view*. Have them notice what people and things look like.
A: *hear, listen, tell, say*. Then can notice language as well as other sounds.
K: *feel, touch, connect*. They notice physical sensations and emotions.

Mental Rehearsal

Give learners time to think about what they want to say. It is often useful to have them do this twice. The first time they *create the content* (think about what they want to say). The second time, they *create the form* (think about how to say it. You might give them a choice of the sensory modality they want to use the second time. Invite them to close their eyes. They think though the information they though of the first time. This time, they chose how to experience it:

• "watch the movie in your mind." Think about how to describe it (visual)
• "experience it again" and listen to the story. (auditory)
• "experience it again" and mumble along (or speak silently). (kinesthetic)

Draw Pictures

Students draw pictures of events (real, imagined or hoped for) as a way of preparing to talk about them. As they do, they think about how they will describe the pictures. Hint: Many of our students are good artists and, as a result, want their pictures perfect. Ban erasers.

Mind Maps as Mental Rehearsal

Mind mapping, also called schematic mapping, can be a useful way for students to plan what they want to say (or write) about a topic. Mind maps were developed by Tony Buzan who claims they are superior to regular note taking in that they present information in a way similar to the way the mind operates. Buzan (2000) calls this radiant thinking. This is in contrast to the linear (straight-line) concept represented in traditional note taking. In radiant thinking, words, pictures, examples and concept radiate from the center and connect with related subtopics.

I must confess that I was slow to make use of mind mapping. I originally learned of it as a way of note taking and felt my traditional way of taking notes was quite adequate. Once I understood mind mapping as a way of note making – that is, preparing notes for a language production activity such as speaking or writing, my opinion changed. I found it to be a useful tool in helping the learners plan what they want to say.

Mind mapping, like any other skill, takes some practice. It is suggested that you introduce it by creating your own example. Choose a topic similar to one you want the learners to talk about. Draw your own mind map on the board or an OHP. Talk through the topic as you point out the relevant notes on the mind map. Give students a copy of the suggestions and the mind map on the next page. Talk about how mind maps work. Then have them create mind maps about their own experience.

The following are suggestions to students and teachers who are new to mind mapping:

• Use large sheets of paper. B4 or A3 is better than notebook size.
• The paper is horizontal, not vertical.
• The main topic goes in the middle of the page in some kind of image. The main topic can be a word or a picture.
• Write additional notes on branches. Write whatever they think of. Maybe you won't talk about every detail but they can "edit" later.

- Don't write full sentences[2]. Single words or sets of 2-3 words work well.
- Simple pictures are great.
- Numbers and dates are useful, too.
- Start by thinking about WH- questions.
- If possible, use colored pencils. Four or more colors is great.
- Use different writing styles accentuate different ideas.
   - Like anything else, making mind maps gets easier with practice. Have learners make them regularly.

To make the point that mind maps can be more useful than traditional notes, figure 3 presents the same information as the above list as a mind map. Which is easier to process, understand and imagine using?
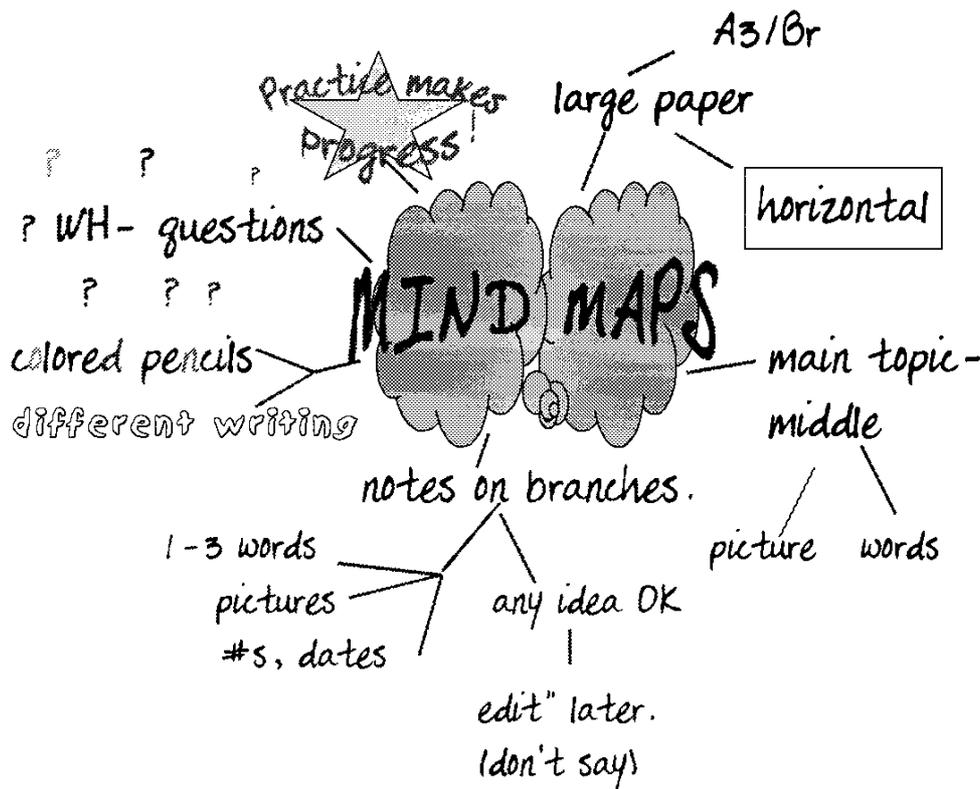

Figure 3: A mind map about mind mapping

Task recycling

Repeating an activity with a new partner can have amazing results with accuracy, fluency and complexity (Helgesen 2003b). Have them do a pairwork or groupwork (especially personalized tasks) with in a new partner. With task recycling, the initial time(s) they do a task serves as the language planning phase for the subsequent times.

Task recycling can be as simple as saying, "Everyone find a new partner. Do the tasks again." The first few times, of course, you'll want to mention the reason: *When you repeat the task, it gets easier. You communicate your meaning more clearly. Your language level goes up and you learn things from a new partner.* Of course, if the activity is something like a pairwork where they've already filled up a page, you might want them to change parts – A's become B's and vice versa, -- or simply have them do the task again without writing down information.

Another easy way to recycle the information is as a *memory game*. Learners close their books and see how much of what they and their partners said they can remember. Or they join a new partner and say everything they remember from that they heard from their previous partner. This can even be done at the level of vocabulary. If a lesson featured a lot of new words, have them work in pairs to see how many they can remember. Since vocabulary learning requires meeting new vocabulary repeatedly, this is a way to make that repetition happen mentally.

The recycling can even be a silent, mental follow-up. For example, ask them, as they take the bus or train home, to spend a few minutes seeing how much of what they said during the task they can remember.

Lynch and Maclean (2001) advocate tasks recycling but suggest a problem related to it:

> Despite the evidence that immediate task repetition lead these learners to change and improve their spoken English, the notion of repetition as a useful classroom procedure will require some 'selling', both to our professional colleagues and to language learners. (p. 159).

Our hesitation to repeat tasks probably stems from being afraid learners will get bored and lose interest. And if the task focuses only on language and not real communication in which the learners feel interested and invested, that is a valid concern. However, if we make sure the learners are sharing their own ideas, experiences and dreams – those things they want to talk about – the boredom problem disappears. And having more than one chance to talk about the same topic means they can share their ideas that much more effectively. The first time through a task, they often spend a lot of energy just putting together the meaning and language. Bygate (2001) refers to this as the 'conceptualization, formulation and articulation'. The second time they are focussed more strongly on getting their mean across.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have attempted to present a rationale for *language planing* and expand our teaching repertoire by suggesting ways to implement it in the classroom both by adapting and supplementing textbook tasks. LP can be a useful tool in the classroom because it can help learner work on fluency, complexity and accuracy.

Fluency: They done said it once so the next time is smoother.
Complexity: They've done it once so the next time it can have more depth.
Accuracy: They've already done this once so they can often say it better.

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Notes:

1. For more on guided visualizations, see: http://eltnews.com/features/thinktank/016_mh.shtml The reason for avoiding full sentences on mind maps is that you don't want students "locking in" to a specific form (i.e., the grammar in the sentence they wrote) before they have clarified the content they want to convey.