

'Dead on the page' no more!

The case for authentic, locally appropriate ESOL materials

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Abstract

What does *authenticity* mean for ESOL teachers and students? How might ESOL teachers develop authentic materials which are locally appropriate? Through comparison and analysis of two language learning samples, one scripted and one naturally occurring, this paper identifies three aspects of interactional complexity which ESOL teachers need to consider when presenting authentic materials to their learners: interactional strategies, sequencing in spoken interaction and language form. The paper goes on to challenge the widespread use of simplified language for the teaching of speaking and listening, and considers *easification* as an alternative pedagogical design for the teaching of non-standard varieties and for the teaching of complex, naturally-occurring language. It concludes with a description of a teacher-led ESOL materials group and the technologies used by this group to produce materials which bridge the *inside* of the classroom with the *outside* challenges of daily life experienced by migrants in an English-dominant environment.

Introduction

"Here it is very difficult for a person to work without the local language. I try hard to be better in all the aspects because in the future I want to work here."

"You don't understand what they say and they don't understand what you say, that means you don't say anything. So we just greet each other, for example, when I'm weeding in my garden, they see me and say, 'you're weeding', and I say, 'yes I'm weeding, you're weeding too'. Just like that, no further talk."

"In the street, for example, when I don't know where to go ... or sometimes if someone sits next to me and talks to me and asks where I'm from and with the little I speak I speak to the person."

The comments above from ESOL students in Leeds and London demonstrate that when English language learners are migrants to English-dominant

countries, an ability to use and understand English as it is spoken where they live is crucially important in daily life. Yet the types of spoken English used regionally, and in local communities, are often different from the standard variety reproduced in commercially available textbooks and (with reference to the UK context) the *Skills for Life* materials produced to accompany the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum. Such materials also simplify and fictionalise spoken language for the purpose of comprehension, but the consequence of this is a tidying up of language which somehow becomes 'dead on the page' (Cooke and Simpson 2008: 56). Invented exemplars of spoken language are fabrications which frequently lack two distinct features discussed in this paper: (1) regional differences in accent and dialect; and (2) interactional complexity. Whilst Standard English is important, it should not dominate language teaching to the exclusion of regionally- or locally-oriented content, or possibly more problematic, naturally-occurring language: "... to hold back potentially confusing language knowledge points both to a distortion of the teacher role and to a denial of the tight relationship between language taught in class and language knowledge required for daily life" (Simpson 2009: 431). In this paper we discuss the knotty issue of authenticity in ESOL classrooms and materials, and describe the activities of a teacher-led ESOL materials group devoted to the development of materials that suit the needs of their students. As a way in, we compare two texts which are stretches of spoken language developed for use in ESOL classrooms: one authentic and one contrived.

Two transcripts compared

'Authenticity' is a problematic term. Its scope and application to ESOL classrooms will be discussed in more detail later. This provisional definition of authentic language, from Johnson (1998: 24), is provided as a way into thinking about the following two conversations. Johnson says that: "Texts are said to be authentic if they are genuine instances of language use as opposed to exemplars devised specifically for language teaching purposes."

The two conversations illustrate the difference between idealised spoken language for teaching purposes and authentic 'live' language. Both conversations are telephone calls in which female friends make travel arrangements. The first conversation, *travel1*, is from the *Skills for Life* materials; Tina lives in Leeds and Lucia is travelling to see her. The second conversation, *travel2*, is also between two friends in Leeds but is a genuine telephone call. By comparing the two conversations we identify three areas where they differ: interactional strategies, sequencing in spoken interaction, and form.

travel1

- | | | |
|---|--------|--|
| 1 | Tina: | Hello ... Tina speaking. |
| 2 | Lucia: | Tina, Hi. It's Lucia. |
| 3 | Tina: | Hi! How're you doing? |
| 4 | Lucia: | Fine thanks. And you ... and the baby? |
| 5 | Tina: | Oh, we're fine. |
| 6 | Lucia: | I can't wait to see you. |

7	Tina:	Me too. So when are you coming?
8	Lucia:	Next Friday, if that's OK.
9	Tina:	Friday the 24th?
10	Lucia:	Yes.
11	Tina:	That's fine. How are you travelling?
12	Lucia:	I'm coming by coach.
13	Tina:	And what time will you get here?
14	Lucia:	The coach arrives at about five fifteen.
15	Tina:	Good.
16	Lucia:	Oh, I nearly forgot. How do I get to your house from the station?
17	Tina:	Don't worry, I'll meet you.
18	Lucia:	Where shall we meet?
19	Tina:	In front of the Information Centre.
20	Lucia:	Good. Let me give you my mobile, just in case. It's 079 069 244 01.
21	Tina:	Good. See you then.
22	Lucia:	Yes, sure.

(DfES [2003] Skills for Life ESOL learning materials, Entry 2, Unit 3, p.17).

Listen at www.esoluk.co.uk/1.mp3

The opening six lines comprise a formulaic routine of telephone greeting. Otherwise, interactional strategies are noticeably absent. Tina's succinct questions about the travel arrangements, [7] when, [11] how, [13] time, and Lucia's short responses produce a sanitised exchange of transactional information. Migrants belong to wider communities where there are 'unwritten rules' about how you speak to people and how to react to what they say to you. Migrant learners of English need exposure and classroom practice in using these rules, or strategies, to enable them to achieve what they need to with language. For example, in social interaction speakers use appropriate interactional strategies such as sharing opinions, expressing interest, laughter and small talk. The use of interactional strategies that are suitable to a context is an important component of communicative competence (Hymes 1972): that is, to be communicatively competent, participants in interaction need a knowledge and ability to use language in a way that is appropriate for the situation. When interactional strategies are missing, we can perceive people to be aloof, abrupt or even rude. Hence interactional strategies are valuable tools in social exchanges and ones which migrants need to utilise in social settings such as shops, workplaces, colleges and when making telephone calls. The following conversation (*travel2*) demonstrates how interactional strategies are part of authentic day-to-day talk. (NB non-standard spellings of some words are used to approximate regional pronunciation.)

travelz

- 1 Carol: hello
- 2 Simone: hiya carol its only Simone
- 3 Carol: hiya y'all [right
- 4 Simone: [hiya yes are you (both laugh)
- 5 Carol: yes
- 6 Simone: are you off to Lisa's
- 7 Carol: are you going
- 8 Simone: yes
- 9 Carol: alright yes
- 10 Simone: what time are you off
- 11 Carol: as soon as they get dressed and
- 12 Simone: because we're on about going to chippie for some dinner
- 13 Carol: alright yes sounds like fun yes erm well they're just getting dressed now I'm just gonna get my clothes on
- 14 Simone: alright
- 15 Carol: do you want me to come round to yours first and then [or
- 16 Simone: [yes do that
I might go to chippie in my car don't know what to do
(both laugh) I'm a right lazy cow aren't I
- 17 Carol: no, I've gotta go to shop gotta go to co-op
- 18 Simone: oh have ya
- 19 Carol: so
- 20 Simone: alright well I know I might tell Lisa to come here then when we all come here go to chippie then all go to Lisa's
- 21 Carol: yes
- 22 Simone: shall I tell her that [cos I unless she just wants
- 23 Carol: [yes better won't it
- 24 Simone: me to get her some chips unless if she dunt wanna come out
- 25 Carol: yes see what she wants to do if she dunt wanna come out we'll just pick her summet up
- 26 Simone: yes alright then sorted
- 27 Carol: alright I'll be round at yours in whenever
- 28 Simone: yes alright
- 29 Carol: I've got my kit on
- 30 Simone: there's no rush
- 31 Carol: alright
- 32 Simone: alright
- 33 Carol: see you soon
- 34 Together: Bye

Listen at www.esoluk.co.uk/calling/calling3.html

What is perhaps obvious is that the conversation at *travel1* was written first and spoken later by actors. The language is dead on the page because it lacks the spontaneity of unscripted authentic language. In the second conversation we see numerous interactional strategies not evident in the first, for example, humour and laughter [lines 4, 16], expressions of interest [13] and trivial details [29]. Though the conversation is transactional, in that it has a goal-oriented purpose, it has these additional interactional features which are real and keep it alive on the page.

A second issue is one of interactive sequencing. In *travel1* the priority is to present learners with an unambiguous text but this creates a cohesive structure which is too good to be true: none of the complexity of the mechanics of turn-taking, no repair sequences, no false starts, no back-channelling, no repetition. *Travel2*, by comparison, contrasts starkly with the sequential neatness of *travel1*; there are, for example, incomplete sentences [11, 19, 22], back-channelling [21, 28] fillers [13] pauses [15, 22, 27] and the cohesion built by repetition [2-4, 24-25] overlaps and the co-construction of turns [4, 22-26, 34].

The writers of the dialogue in *travel1*, by smoothing out the turn-taking, paradoxically made the text less coherent. Coherence in discourse is the quality of being unified and meaningful (Cook 1989), and is necessary for communication. Textual cohesion is the surface trace of coherence: the cohesive features of spoken discourse are what help to make it coherent for participants. The authors of *travel1* have built in textual cohesion through, for instance, transparent turn-taking (the question and answer sequence in turns 11 to 14), lexical repetition (coach/coach, turns 11 and 14), and elegant variation (travelling/coming, turns 11 and 12). But the conversation remains stilted and unrealistic as talk – in fact it seems very written-like. The intricacies that make the talk of *travel2* complex are the very ones that make it coherent (i.e., convincing for the participants as interpersonal communication): the turn-taking mechanisms we see in *travel2* – the overlapping speech, the co-construction of turns, along with the credible openings and closings – are the means by which participants become interpersonally involved in the conversation.

A third issue is the form of the language. Though both recipients of the telephone calls live in Leeds, there is significant difference in accent, vocabulary and certain grammatical features. The Yorkshire dialect often shortens or drops entirely the definite article before nouns as can be seen in *travel2*: [12] 'going to [the] chippie' and [17] 'gotta go to [the] shop. Gotta go to [the] co-op'. This dialect feature is not evident in *travel1* because it is a written-to-spoken standard variety of English; there is no complexity in terms of non-standard vocabulary. *Travel2* by comparison provides a rich array of phonological, lexical, prosodic and grammatical features, including truncations, metaphors, non-standard verb phrases, exaggeration and other idiosyncrasies.

[2]	hiya	(hello)
[6]	you off to	(you going to)
[12]	we're on about	(we're talking about)
[12]	chippie	(fish and chip shop)
[15]	come round	(travel to)
[16]	right lazy cow	(very lazy woman)
[24]	dunt wanna come out	(does not want to leave the house)
[25]	pick her summet up	(buy her something)
[26]	sorted	(arranged)
[29]	got my kit on	(got my clothes on)

We contend that learners of ESOL benefit from this *localness* of non-standard language. After all, this is the language that they encounter in their daily lives. Through exposing students to this language, and exploiting it in a pedagogically useful way, language teachers can help their students to develop an awareness that conversations do not follow a perfect sequence of turn-taking and that speakers of English may be using non-standard varieties. Here is what one teacher in the ESOL materials group we describe later says about such matters:

I also think that students are led to believe that um particularly native speakers whatever a native speaker is er speak perfectly and don't make mistakes and don't stutter and don't conjugate verbs wrongly whereas in daily speech even proficient educated highly articulate speakers when we're speaking on you know off the cuff we make mistakes and I think it could actually be good for the learners to hear that.

Exposure to interactional strategies, natural patterns of turn-taking and non-standard form is unlikely to happen when learning materials present scripted language as conversation. The pedagogic design principle behind the *travel* conversation is simplification of spoken language to provide an exemplar of form and structure. We see the same principle in commercial coursebooks and increasingly so. According to Tomlinson (2004: 69): "There is a return to a greater emphasis on language form and the centrality of grammar, especially in lower and intermediate coursebooks."

As demonstrated above, the simplification process ducks the complexity of authentic talk, thus not allowing students in classrooms access to this complexity. A large-scale exploration of ESOL practice in the UK found that 'less experienced teachers are over-reliant on the AECC and associated materials' (Baynham et al. 2007: 8). This raises cause for concern, given the simplification prevalent in the *Skills for Life* materials and global coursebooks. Migrants are dealing with complexity and non-standard language in their daily lives; as ESOL teachers we need to find ways to bring the outside in. Simplifying spoken interaction to the extent that it bears little resemblance to what is experienced outside does not help in this regard. In the last section of this paper we will consider easification (Bhatia 1983) as an alternative design principle. That is, the notion that materials should not be simplified, but rather made more accessible (easified) without compromising their authenticity.

Authentic materials in ESOL

In this section we examine more closely the question of authentic content in ESOL classrooms. Debates amongst applied linguists over what counts as authentic content in language learning are commonplace, and arguments over the nature and role of authentic materials in language classrooms abound. Attention to the nature and role of authenticity in the content of ESOL lessons is worthwhile, not least because the very *raison d'être* of ESOL teaching includes enabling students to address the challenges of daily life in an English-dominant environment. Returning to Johnson's (1998) summary of authenticity, language is said to be authentic if it is a genuine instance of language use rather than one designed for pedagogic purposes. It could be argued, of course, that once such language appears in a classroom context, it can no longer be considered authentic; authenticity depends on context as well as text (see Widdowson 1990). This straightforward distinction also obscures the range of materials to be found in ESOL classrooms, and it is probably more useful to embrace a scale rather than a dichotomy. This scale might range from:

- *naturally-occurring texts* (e.g., newspapers; recordings and transcripts of real conversations in out-of-class settings);
- *authentic-like materials* that are created for language teaching but contain realistic content (e.g., an unscripted recording and transcription of an interview between a teacher and a town councillor about local issues);
- *contrived materials* (e.g., communicative activities designed by a teacher or materials developer to provide opportunities for practice to exemplify a particular function or aspect of form or lexis).

By 'text' we mean any sample of spoken or written language. The authenticity debate extends beyond texts to the circumstances of their use in class. Breen (1985) and others have pointed out that in addition to *text* authenticity, there are further aspects of the teaching and learning context which can be considered authentic to a greater or lesser degree. These include:

- *learner* authenticity, the idea that students should be motivated and interested in the content;
- *task* authenticity, in which activities should be as near as possible to the ones students would do in real life with the text;
- *classroom* authenticity, which refers to the fact that classrooms are social contexts in their own right and have their own reality.

Hence naturally-occurring texts such as newspaper articles can invoke *text* authenticity, but unless they are part of an activity which motivates and interests students, the criterion of *learner* authenticity is not achieved. Likewise, the 'contrived' material of the communicative classroom, if it engages learners and helps them learn, fulfils the criteria of *classroom* and *task* authenticity. Authenticity depends not only upon the source of materials but also on the way they become meaningful for students in classrooms. In ESOL contexts – that is, where adult migrants are learning the dominant language of their new country – there is, of course, a place for contrived materials, ones which require students to appeal to the classroom and the institution, rather than to the outside, for their meaning-making. We argue, however, that meaningful materials for ESOL should include those that are *relevant* to

students' lives and concerns and which are *realistic*. To develop materials with these principles in mind, teachers are likely to draw on uses of language that students might recognise from the social world beyond their classrooms.

Relevance

Materials which are relevant to the everyday experiences of ESOL students are not inherently superior to those which are not. As Cook (2000) and others have convincingly argued, procedures for language learning do not – and indeed should not – always rest on content that relates to the immediate concerns of students' lives. Yet such concerns have historically been a feature of English language learning for migrants. Adult ESOL in the UK in the 1970s, for instance, saw the development of high quality materials that reflected the realities of unemployment and racism that were experienced by many immigrants, for example, Wilson and Naish's *Asian Women Speak Out* (1979). Through the 1980s and 1990s, however, there was a feeling amongst teachers that the materials available for ESOL were not appropriate for their students' needs; they increasingly turned to commercially available textbooks. Things changed with ESOL's inclusion within the *Skills for Life* strategy at the turn of the century (DfEE 2000), the corresponding introduction of the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum in 2001 and the subsequent publication of materials to accompany it (DfES 2003). The *Skills for Life* materials, as they have become known, have met with an ambivalent response from teachers, in particular because of the way they present interaction as smooth and problem-free. Moreover, the attempts made in the *Skills for Life* materials to render the content relevant to ESOL students' lives have not met with complete success. As Cooke and Simpson (2008: 56) suggest: "if students in east London need to learn how to shop in the market for cloth ... how will they be best served by listening to a tape of people going to a market in Liverpool?" Hence neither the commercial textbooks, from which much cutting and pasting is done, nor the widely and freely available *Skills for Life* materials resolve the dilemma of local context. The challenge remains to explore other ways to address the curriculum.

Realism

Who has not, upon reading a transcript of a real conversation, been struck by its complexity, its deviation from a 'standard' model of language, its messiness? The *travel2* conversation in the Introduction is a good example of this apparent 'deviation' from the norm of Standard English, and yet, the deviation *is* the norm of authentic talk. As we maintain above, attempts to flatten out the complexities of real interaction for presentation in language lessons results in misrepresenting the nature of real interaction. In recent groundbreaking work, Roberts and Cooke (2009) draw on research into interactional practices in institutional settings, using the example of job interviews to show that the language practices of real interviews are very different from those that are taught in classrooms. One of their examples compares an invented job interview presented in the *Skills for Life* materials with a real job interview; they find that the two examples (invented and real)

'contrast on almost every level': in terms of length, discourse structure, content, clarity and coherence.

Content in ESOL pedagogy which presents language in a controlled way as problem-free (as with, for instance, the *Skills for Life* materials) cannot truly align with students' real life concerns because it does not adequately reflect the realities of communication outside classrooms. As a result, an injustice is done to ESOL students, who are ill-prepared for those realities. As Roberts and Cooke (2009) say, invented or over-simplified functional materials which 'flatten out interactional complexity' do not meet the needs of adult migrant students who must 'develop authentic voices in their new second language both for social and interpersonal encounters' (Roberts and Cooke 2009: 620).

To address this concern, Roberts and Cooke (2009) advocate the use of materials that reflect what happens in everyday and institutional interactions. This corresponds with what students themselves value, which is the English that is not often used or heard in the classrooms but is entirely characteristic of outside. In the extracts below, two students are asked by their teacher to consider the English they learn in their ESOL classes and the type of English they hear outside the class, and to think about what is different and what is similar.

Maria: They are different.

Teacher: How?

M: At college you learn good English, good things. People tell me I have good English. It's a specific thing we learn. Not everybody speak slang language. But outside they speak to speak. They don't use grammar. They use slang.

T: How is this different?

M: I feel bad not understanding. That okay when I first come here but now I should know.

Ahmed: It depends where you work. I work with educated people so their English is good. Inside the ESOL classroom not enough space to improve your English. Streets and shops are bigger space where you meet new people and new words. In college we are here only to learn. Outside is to practise.

A number of points are raised in these extracts. First is the recognition by Maria that proficient speakers 'speak to speak'. Real language use has a purpose or a function: whether the purpose is to achieve some transaction, to get something done, or simply to oil the wheels of interpersonal and social relations, achieving that purpose is at the heart of communication. Second, however 'good' the English Maria encounters in class might be and consequently however 'good' hers becomes, it does not equip her adequately for communicative life outside class ('I feel bad not understanding'). Third, Ahmed's understanding of the classroom space is noteworthy: he regards it as 'not enough space' to practise English. 'Bringing the outside in' – that is, allowing some of the complexity of real communication into the classroom – helps in some sense to break down this dichotomy, by making the classroom a space where the language of 'outside' is both taught and practised.

Local appropriateness and pedagogy

It is clearly not easy to bring some of the complexity of realistic and relevant language use from the outside *into* classrooms in a way that is both pedagogically useful and accessible to students, including beginner level students, as well as to their teachers. The challenge is to develop or generate appropriate materials and to move from these to a pedagogy that offers meaningful engagement to students. In this paper we describe an attempt to reject materials that are 'dead on the page' – indeed to do away with the page itself – and develop materials that reflect what happens in everyday and institutional interactions, and that address the twin demands of relevance and realism.

So what does 'realistic' and 'relevant' mean in practice? An underlying principle of the ESOL materials group which we describe below is that the materials we develop should maintain a sense of local appropriateness. The variety of English heard and used in the area will not be Standard English. Students are fully aware of the need to gain access to the standard variety of the language; after all, language use is intimately bound up with issues of power and dominance, and they are certainly aware of the privileges which access to the standard variety entails. Nevertheless, they are also aware that their daily lives are spent in environments where the standard variety is not widely used: for practical purposes, they also need to engage with local accents and dialects of the linguistic milieu which surrounds them, and of which they are a part. Generating recordings of non-standard and locally appropriate voices is an important dimension of the work of the ESOL materials group.

We also make some assumptions about teachers' roles. It is important to regard teachers as *bricoleurs* (Baynham et al. 2007) who use whatever is at hand to do the job, as creative individuals with agency who have both a knowledge of pedagogy and an awareness of the importance of being able to draw on a range of content and adapt it for particular groups or classes. Hence the materials developed by the group have minimal prescription, unmediated by detailed teachers' notes and guidance about techniques for their classroom use. In brief, teachers are assumed to be able to draw on their own 'sense of plausibility' (Prabhu 1990) about what is appropriate and about what will work for their students in their own classroom settings.

ESOL materials group

The final part of this paper is an account of how the ESOL materials group has recognised and is trying to address the challenge of local appropriateness in language learning materials. How do we capture authentic language and how might it be presented? In considering this twofold question we need to consider technologies for language learning and the design principle of 'easification rather than simplification'.

Meeting monthly in Leeds, the ESOL materials group is open to all and publicises its meetings through the ESOL Research email forum (details at the end of this paper). The group comprises experienced ESOL teachers, teacher trainers, researchers, practitioners on Level 5 ESOL courses and students on MA/PhD programmes. The group came together in response to a shared but vague perception that something was missing in their teaching of ESOL.

As one member of the group comments: "I think so many materials are not authentic or have an inauthentic feel about them that really you can either sit around and complain about it or you can try and do something about it."

The ESOL materials group is teacher-led and is dedicated to the collaborative development of ESOL teaching and learning materials that are particularly appropriate and relevant for students in the Yorkshire area. The materials are made available through the *ESOL UK* website portal <http://www.esoluk.co.uk> (further details at the end of this paper). For example, the materials on the *Up North* section of *ESOL UK* are conversations which are unscripted and unrehearsed. The telephone conversations on the *Calling You* section were captured through linguistic undercover work, discussed below. The videos on *ESOL Citizenship* are of members of the public talking spontaneously about their lives and roles. In summary, the *ESOL UK* portal makes available language learning materials from a diverse range of authentic sources.

What are the challenges for ESOL teachers who want to capture and produce their own authentic materials? Technology is essential in the production and dissemination of any learning materials; in our case this includes voice recorders, computers with audio editing software, digital cameras and video recorders. Admittedly, there are challenges in using technology and capturing authentic material; however, these challenges should not prevent us from trying. We find that the fruits of the struggle are worth the effort.

Technology

The group's first experiment with technology was using voice recorders (further details of technologies at the end of this paper). These are portable and can be used by teachers and students to capture conversations in almost any context. ESOL materials group members used voice recorders to capture conversations between themselves and later with work colleagues, students, neighbours and schoolteachers. This is an excellent method for bringing the outside in. Another idea would be to encourage students to purchase or borrow from their college or centre if available, voice recorders and capture conversations in their daily lives. These authentic samples might then become the language learning content of their ESOL lessons.

Another method used by the group is to record conversations using the computer audio editing software Audacity. For one activity, the group paired up with a microphone each, connected to a computer using an audio splitter. They chose a topic of interest and spoke spontaneously on that topic. ESOL teachers could try the same method with their colleagues or with students, or with both in combination. These methods do not generate authentic materials: speakers know they are being recorded for language learning purposes. We find, however, that with unscripted conversations speakers quickly forget the recorder and fall into their usual interactional patterns.

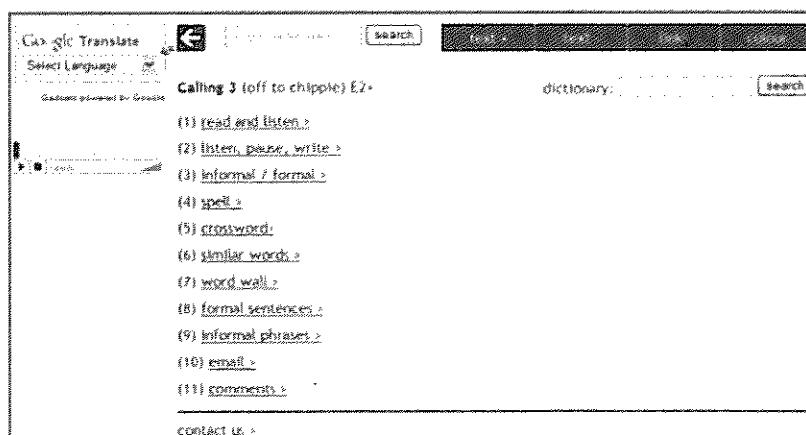
Pedagogy

If the first challenge of authenticity is how to capture the language with technology, the second is pedagogic: how do we present the language? Arguing against the simplification of legal texts for second language readers, Bhatia maintains that 'the use of simplified material means that the

learner's encounter with the authentic, unsimplified text is postponed for a considerable time' (Bhatia 1983: 45). In the same way, simplifying spoken and written language for ESOL students may delay the fluency they seek. Using *easification* as a pedagogic design principle, be it on paper or through new technology, 'challenging' talk can be made accessible without resorting to simplification. Paper-based materials, for example, can make language more accessible using such methods as lots of white space and provide annotations and glosses, adding pictures and using larger and less complex fonts.

In a website environment, similar and different methods of easification can be used without changing any of the authentic language. The *travel2* conversation of earlier is one of a number of telephone calls on the *Calling You* section of the *ESOL UK* website. Telephone calls between family and friends were captured through linguistic 'undercover' work, where authentic language is achieved because the speakers do not know that they are being recorded. Consent was asked for after the recording, as required by the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (2000)¹. A standard voice recorder was used, along with a pickup coil which attaches to the back of a telephone. The conversation was then transcribed verbatim, and the audio and transcript were placed into a webpage for access through the Internet. A number of interactive exercises were developed to easify this particular conversation for ESOL students, which we describe here.

In the top-left corner of **Figure 1** there is an option to translate the webpage into 35 other languages. Though this is not a perfect translation method, it does give learners access to what effectively is a bilingual dictionary. In the top-right corner of **Figure 1** there is a dictionary with a search-box. This will take the students to a definition of whatever word they type as well as a British and English pronunciation of that word.



Similar to annotating a paper-based text, **Figure 2** shows a pop-up box for potentially difficult vocabulary, which activates when the student rolls their mouse cursor over particular words. In the screen shot, the cursor has been placed over the phrase 'we're on about', activating the gloss in the pop-up box ('we have been talking about').

Carol: As soon as **we have been talking about**

Simone: Because **we're on about** going to **chippie** for some dinner.

The activities numbered 1 to 10 in **Figure 1** are all based on this short sample of authentic language. These activities focus on lexis and phrases rather than the features of turn-taking referred to earlier (see Cook 1989, Chapter 10, for a discussion of teaching conversation). They enable multiple access points into what might be considered 'difficult' language for an Entry-level learner.

1. Read the text on its own or read and listen by clicking the MP3 player on the left
2. Audio gapfill
3. Drag and drop words to make a more formal or 'standard' equivalent of informal sentences from the conversation

(3) informal / formal >

Read the Informal sentence. Drag the words to make a formal sentence.

2 of 7

Some words might not be needed

Informal "We're on about going to chippie."

4. Spell some of the key words used in the conversation
5. Crossword with questions to identify key words
6. Drag and drop chunks and words into semantically-related sets

words to move	are you off to	whenever	lazy
planned			
dawdle			
proceed slowly			
organised			
first-aid kit			
avoid work			
sports kit			
at any moment			
a time not set			
no matter when			
slow			
unknown time			
	sorted	get your kit on	no rush

7. Word wall as a friendlier variation of hangman

8. Drill activity to memorise and copy formalised sentences from the conversation
9. Drill activity to memorise and copy informal sentences from the conversation
10. Opportunity to reflect on what the student has learned and email their teacher.

Rather than simplification, these activities help to easify the language. Simplification is the most common pedagogic design principle for ESOL materials – whether *Skills for Life*, commercially available, or teacher-developed. However, as argued throughout this paper, simplified language in ESOL materials fails to connect with the realism and the relevance of the linguistic milieu outside the classroom. As one member of the materials group commented: “Having something that’s real in the classroom that relates to what they’re going to hear most of their day is important because there needs to be some kind of connection otherwise why are they coming to class.” This connection, we maintain, is crucial.

How have other ESOL tutors used this material and how has it been received by learners? The webpage for the *travel2* conversation has a comments box. Feedback on there includes:

Hilary: Why can't we get materials like this from the commercial providers? My students thought this conversation was really genuine. They found it difficult but they could recognise how real it sounded. With a lot of repetition and roleplay they were soon speaking like notherners. lol

Joesy: Hi, amazing website and resouces. My students roleplayed using the dialogue from the conversation. They loved it.

Ibby: This made me and my students laugh. Really good with lots of wonderful vernacular language use.

Keywords in these few comments include ‘genuine’, ‘real’, ‘repetition’, ‘roleplay’ and ‘vernacular’. These responses were ratified by ESOL teachers at Leeds City College. Among these teachers, roleplay was a prominent technique, using the script first as a scaffold to support the learners’ own conversations. Many teachers exploited the script as a sequencing activity, reproducing the individual speaker turns on slips of paper, and focussing on turn-taking mechanisms to re-sequence the conversation, identifying repair sequences, false starts, back-channelling and repetition. The non-standard form of the language (*chippie, sorted, kit, we’re on about*) featured highly, with teachers providing standard equivalents as a glossary for learners (i.e., *chip shop, arranged, clothes, we’re talking about*). Another tutor created an audio gapfill activity, which comprised a printout of the script with some of the ‘vernacular’ removed.

Authentic language samples are challenging to teach because they *do* use non-standard English and because they *are* complex. But, as demonstrated throughout this paper, these are the hallmarks of naturally-occurring language. ESOL teachers who have used this material have all found ways to make accessible what is often ignored in the classroom because it is widely regarded as inaccessible.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this paper we asked whether ESOL pedagogy might stomach a rich diet of non-standard varieties and complex, naturally-occurring language. In the classroom we believe we should be looking for models of language that better reflect the language experiences that students encounter beyond its walls. These involve both exposure to non-standard varieties and attention to the interactional realities of everyday speech. Technology is cheap, portable and easy to operate, and with technology we can capture authentic language learning content for our ESOL students. A pedagogy based on easification rather than simplification meshes with such content, and encourages teachers to find ways of making authentic content accessible for students. We should also be looking for teacher education courses to invest time and effort in materials development, enabling teachers to become producers and consumers of their own resources, and empowering them to make real links between the *outside* and the *inside*. The ESOL materials group at Leeds has begun building this essential bridge. We hope our description in this paper encourages other teachers to do the same.

Note

The *Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000* (RIPA) governs the recording of telephone conversations and can be found at http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/ukpga_20000023_en_1. RIPA does not prevent individuals recording telephone conversations for their own personal use. However, recording the recording to a third party (that is, someone who was not one of the participants in the call) without consent of the call participants is illegal. This means that you do not need to tell the other person that you are recording the call provided that you never intend to let anyone else hear it. If you want to disclose the recording, you will need the permission of the other participants. From: http://impact.freethcartwright.com/2007/01/can_i_record_te.html

Web resources

The **ESOL Materials Group** at Leeds makes its materials available on the ESOL UK portal: <http://www.esoluk.co.uk>. **ESOL UK** is an educational website for ESOL teachers and their students. The aim of *ESOL UK* is to enable access to language learning mediated by video, audio and the Internet. Telephone conversations can be found in the *Calling You* section of the website, and locally-relevant materials can be found in the *Up North* section.

ESOL-Research is an email forum for researchers and practitioners with an interest in research into teaching and learning ESOL. ESOL-Research is managed by James Simpson at the Centre for Language Education Research, School of Education, University of Leeds. Meetings of the ESOL Materials Group are publicised on this forum. <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/ESOL-RESEARCH.html>

Details of technologies

An Entry-level **voice recorder** with good quality and price is *Olympus WS-321M* and costs £49.99 at the time of writing from amazon.co.uk.

Audacity is free, open source software for recording and editing sounds and can be downloaded from <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>.

An **audio splitter** allows two microphones to be connected to one input jack in a computer or can be used to split audio in the output jack so two people can listen using two sets of headphones. A splitter costs less than a pound and can be found at amazon.co.uk by typing '3.5mm Speaker and Headphone Splitter' in the search box.

A **pickup coil** connects a voice recorder to a telephone. At the time of writing these are £1.25 at amazon.co.uk and can be found by typing 'telephone pickup coil'.

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