From technical to teachable: The role of texts in documentation and pedagogy

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Acknowledgments

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Question for today

How can documentary texts enhance language pedagogy?

Focus: Practical strategies for adapting texts from language documentation to different language teaching contexts.
What do I mean by ‘text’?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicative act:</th>
<th>Format /Medium:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal narratives</td>
<td>Spoken or written</td>
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<td>Oral histories</td>
<td>Digital or analog</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>Songs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jokes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conversations</td>
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<td>...the list goes on!</td>
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</table>
Why texts?

For pedagogy:
- Recent turn toward more communicatively-oriented instruction
- Source of realistic situations, naturalistic, contextualized input
- Embedded cultural information

For documentation:
- Radically expanded role of texts in documentary linguistics (Himmelmann 2006, 2008)
- High potential for reuse (Woodbury 2003, 2011)
- Embedded cultural information
So...

Language documentation and pedagogy share a common interest in texts:
- Teachers ideally want to bring realistic, authentic language into the classroom.
- Linguists often aim to document a wide range of contexts of language use.

These would seem naturally compatible, yet we don’t see much interaction between the two.

Why the disconnect?
Challenges for Pedagogy

1. Texts may seem to contain too much advanced information—especially for beginners.

- Documentary materials are not immediately useable in the classroom, often needing to be adapted.
- No natural ‘scope and sequence’ to texts!
- Typically not “Dick and Jane” language.
Challenges for Pedagogy

It can be difficult for educators to adapt texts from documentation for use in language teaching.

- Access to texts?
- Time investment?
- Linguistic training?
- Challenge for educator’s language ability?
- Length of text?
- Appropriateness of text? (e.g., given age of learners, cultural sensitivities)
Challenges for Documentation

1. Documentation is inaccessible, either for practical or technical reasons.

- **Practical:** The documentation doesn’t exist (*underdocumentation*), or can’t be located, or is restricted (*cultural sensitivities, permissions*)

- **Technical:** The documentation uses jargon, is missing useful information (*e.g., word-for-word translations*), or is in an inaccessible format.
Challenges for Documentation

Documentary linguists’ training may not prepare them to respond to educators’ interests effectively.

- Most documentary linguists don’t have a background in applied linguistics or language teaching (*Penfield & Tucker 2011*)
- Collaborations may assume expertise that linguists may not possess (*Crippen & Robinson 2013*)
Challenges for Documentation

There may be disincentives around educational outputs for academic linguists.

- Educational outputs of documentation may not be recognized or given the same academic weighting as other research outcomes.
Consequences of division

- **For documentation:** Materials are underutilized, losing a major audience and source of critical feedback

- **For pedagogy:** Educators left with less culturally-rich material, have to ‘reinvent the wheel’ in developing resources
What can be done?

Educators:
- How to adapt texts to be accessible to learners?
- How to communicate needs to linguists? (Gerdts 2010)

Documentarians:
- How to present it? (e.g., choice of orthography, elements of analysis)
What can be done?

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**Documentarians:**
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Taanshi li loor sa keu kiiwaniihthaaw
‘How the Bear Lost His Tail’
Beginner: Adapting Documentation

- **Learners:** Third-grade L2 class
- **Strategy:** Condense selection to 10–25 sentences
  - Might need speaker help for this
  - Eliminate unnecessary story details
  - Simplify sentences
  - Pull out vocabulary (in sets)
  - Create an illustration for each sentence (through student artwork, clipart, photography, etc.)
  - If possible, record simplified story with a speaker

“I don’t have a line to put there, me,” he said.

Adapted: "Mo dayaan en liiñg,” ihtweew.

“I don’t have a line,” he said.
Original: Sa keu dedañ, akota chiipatapiiwiw ekwa dañ la glaas. His tail is inside, and he's sitting there now on the ice.

Adapted: Sa keu dedañ. Chiipatapiiwiw dañ la glaas. His tail is inside. He's sitting on the ice.
Original:
Kii-, kiipashikow oota osche.
He got up from there.

Adapted:
Pashikow.
He gets up.
Beginner: Delivery

1. Teach vocabulary in small sets

2. Turn each sentence into an activity
   - Comprehension questions/exercises, e.g.:
     - Total Physical Response Storytelling: Point to ‘the bear is running away, etc.’ (using illustrations)
     - Yes/No questions: e.g., Is the bear sitting on the grass? Does the bear like to eat fish?
   - Limited production questions (drills vocabulary in sentential frame):
     - Content questions: What does the bear like to eat? In which season does the story take place?
Paul Creek Language Curriculum:
http://www.interiorsalish.com/nxamxcincurriculum.html
Advanced: Adapting Documentation

- **Learners:** Master-Apprentice learners in a small-group immersion setting

- **Strategy:** Go beyond the story:
  - Prepare content questions around things that happen in the story
  - Identify target structures (e.g., drilling pre-verbs, adapting for persons, conditionals, etc.)
  - Assemble/create illustrations
Advanced: Delivery

1. Learners order the pictures and tell the story themselves
2. Learners role-play the story from viewpoint of bear/wolf, adapting for different persons
3. Discussion of content questions about the story:
   - Why did the wolf want to hurt the bear?
   - How do you think the bear feels now? Etc.
   - Who do you think was right?
4. Embed target structures (e.g., conditionals) in communicative activities:
   - What could the bear have done differently?
   - What would you have done if you were the bear?
   - What would you have done if you were the wolf?
“No English Storybooks”  
(Sauk Language Department)  
http://www.talksauk.com

- Encourage Sauk-only interactions between speakers and learners
- Reinforce specific vocabulary, grammatical patterns
- Provide opportunities to ask questions about characters’ intentions, relationships, etc.
- Reusable! (novice—advanced, different target structures)
Conclusions

1. Educators, texts are your friend!

- A single text can be adapted into many lessons (or even entire units) for many levels.
- Given the scarcity of pedagogical materials for many languages, educators benefit from getting the most out of what is available.
Conclusions

For educational adaptation to happen, linguists need to be mindful of: what they document, how it’s presented, and how their materials are made accessible to audiences in education.

Documentation can fill a major need in language pedagogy.
Overview: Technical to Teachable

- Phonetics & phonology
  - The linguistic jargon or label of a concept is not as important as the concept itself
    - Herrick

- Tone & vowel length in Cherokee
  - Minimizing jargon and providing additional (visual) cues can make complex, technical data more accessible to non-specialists
    - Hirata-Edds
Overview: Technical to Teachable

- Teaching morphology without templates
  - Surface-oriented paradigmatic approaches to word structure may benefit both language pedagogy and documentation
    - Cox

- Texts in documentation & teaching
  - Documentary materials can serve pedagogical needs, and vice versa
    - Sammons
Kichi-marsii!
Ketêpihipwa! Mahalo!
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