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**Chapter 3**

**Languaging Design**

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**Keywords**

Languaging, Text, Designing Language, Design Teams, Codefine, Designerly tools, Words

**Abstract**

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**Introduction**

Having thought about metadesign for so long it is hard to explain why words have been undervalued as aspects of designing. Although my chapter will describe the use of verbal language as a ‘designerly tool’, I acknowledge that designing and verbalising are types of behaviour that also communicate. Both are embodied activities. In a sense we ‘inhabit’ language and are guided, in real time, by where it decides to take us. By learning and inventing as we go, we ‘language’ (verb) our place in society and the world. Here, ‘languaging’ is used to refer to both words and images, because they often work together to form unified capsules of communication (see chapter 14).

When languaging (i.e. verb) is playfully 'in-flow' it allows teams to co-design a world; to explore intentions and meanings; and to use its derivation and usage to investigate the gaps between intended meanings and miscommunications. This process enables us to re-design words (and other signs) to make use of new opportunities. Acts of languaging and interpretive drawing both call for the willingness to engage in the processes of active listening, collective reflection and collaborative re-interpretation. This can lead to new possible boundaries and commonalities being agreed, disputed, and codefined. These transactions can become the basis for richer, more mindful and considerate, acts of co-design.

This chapter begins with an exploration of the derivation of languaging, its uses and contexts, to better position it as a tool for designing. It will conclude by outlining the metadesign languaging tool *Codefine* (Lockheart, 2016). It is a non-hierarchical, three-stage process used to develop an understanding of a keyword via individual definitions, group discussions and finally team agreement on the purpose and intended usage.

Codefine is part of a ‘tool set’. It is often coupled with our ‘collective story-telling’ and ‘metaphors be with you’ tools to role-play and locate an authorial persona for designers who often find a writing ‘self’ hard to locate. These tools can encourage rapid acts of improvised role-play that help them find a relevant identity. Some metadesign tool processes have periods of silence that encourage individuals to reflect upon their own ideas and interpretations prior to sharing them with the group. We also encourage deep listening as a team tool. These tool sets achieve co-creative outcomes at the same time as building team consensus and fostering bonds of mutual attachment and support (see Chapters 1, 9 and 10). They also assist new teams in the collective, empathic journey from ‘me-to-we’. Metadesign tools are intended to slow down team communication processes so that meanings can be properly considered at a pace that enables them to evolve and find agreement for the appropriate purpose and at the right time and place.

**The Derivation of the Term Languaging**

The noun *language* comes from the classical Latin *lingua* meaningtongue or language, and the French *langue* meaning tongue, (OED, 2020). It is also "The system of spoken or written communication used by a particular country, people, community, etc., typically consisting of words used within a regular grammatical and syntactic structure" (OED, 2020). It can also be used for non-verbal communication ‘other than by the use of words, as gesture, facial expression, etc.’ (OED, 2020). Thus, language can be used to create a community with the same form of speech, or style of recording speech through writing and demonstrates the community’s social life and values. In discussing Academic Literacies (AL) Brian Street writes, “language is not only a means of representing that social life to ourselves, but more profoundly it is a way of helping to define what constitutes social reality in the first place: language does not just reflect a pre-existing social reality, but helps to constitute that reality” (1998, p.3). This would suggest that the values contained within a community can either narrow or extend its cultural values, and indeed, can constitute it from within. The development of a community of metadesigning is a key component of redesigning design.

Language is both a noun and verb (OED, 2020). There are two transitive verb forms in English, the first “To express in language, put into words; to tell, describe, report” and, in extended use, “to communicate nonverbally, as by gesture, facial expression, etc.” (OED, 2020). One of the derivatives of these verb forms is *languaging*. Though less common in everyday speech, the OED entry gives the first recorded use of languaging as 1702, so it is not a new word. Indeed, the *-ing* form of the verb tends to be used in academic papers focusing on language and its purposes, such as philosophy and linguistics. Indeed, Bross and Bowdery (1939) state in *A Realistic Criticism of a Contemporary Philosophy of Logic* that “since speaking and writing are activities” (1939, p.106) languaging is best used to discuss these activities.

Interestingly, for readers who are designers, languaging has also been likened to ‘a process or function analogous to the process of chiseling’ (Bross and Bowdery, 1939, p.106). The authors further link languaging to “the use of language as an instrument” (1939, p.107). This metaphorical definition of the activity of languaging to physically shape an external discourse suggests its use relates to the generative process of finding and defining words, playing with them and their relations within an external discourse community, which may then result in the meaning being situated in a new coinage with new or amended rules of use. As such, languaging can change the fixed nature of our understanding of language with its rules, dictionaries and traditions.

In linguistics the term Languaging was introduced via psycholinguistics in a paper written by Lado (1979 in Swain, 2006) entitled, *Thinking and ‘languaging’: A psycholinguistic model of performance and learning*. Here Lado uses the term to refer to the global uses of various languages (Lado, 1979 in Swain, 2006), which also links to the idea of global Englishes (Rose and Galloway, 2015; Crystal, 2004). According to Swain (2006), the term has also been used by Hall (1996 in Swain 2006) in psychotherapeutic literature along with ‘re-languaging’ meaning “recognizing and restructuring ones knowledge by languaging” (Swain, 2006, p.97). Applied in practice to language teaching, languaging is used to describe playing with language to create new words (Swain, 2006; Turner, 2011), because the addition of the suffix *-ing* links immediately to the idea of ‘language as an activity’ (Swain, 2006, p.95). Swain (2006, p.96) continues that “languaging about language is one of the ways we learn a second language to an advanced level”. Swain, (2006) states that languaging conveys “a dynamic, never-ending process of using language to make meaning” (Swain, 2006, p.96).

The use of writing within design education sometimes causes anxiety for students with SpLDs such as Dyslexia. However, it reflects the assumption that individuals can use speech and writing to mediate their thinking (Swain, 2006, p.96). Indeed, Turner (2011, p.39) suggests that languaging “accentuates the processual, the shifting, the fluid” which is common to many in the humanities and social sciences for “the theoretical analysis of social process” (Turner, 2011, p.39). As a continuation of this connection to process, and within this applied linguistics context, the word *Translanguaging* has been used to explore what happens to language when it is used to communicate across and beyond multicultural spaces (Wei, 2011). Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (1992), and Maturana (1997) suggest languaging puts into language those metaphorical, visual, designerly or tacit forms of knowledge which are so hard to speak about. As such, languaging is useful to design teams where new language can be defined and used for the purposes of the brief and the team. In some cases, such nelogisms can be jettisoned once the project has concluded. Some words, however, will prove useful and live on in subsequent teams and toolboxes.

**Languaging as Cognitive Tool**

According to Daniel Everett, “Language is a tool” (2012:146) and many designer educators and theorists have created ‘design-friendly’ words to define or clarify their own or the practices of others: Nigel Cross used the term *Designerly* (1982); Gene Youngblood coined *Metadesign* (1986); the perceptual psychologist James Gibson created the noun *affordance* (1979) which has been appropriated within the design community (Maier & Fadel, 2009: Gaver et al, 1999; Gaver, 1991). The idea of ‘*regenring’* depends on a communicative shift from one physical or tacit form, to an equally suitable genre of writing (English, 2012). For metadesigners, ‘languaging’ is likely to entail the generative process of finding and defining words, interrogating their meaning and usage, then adapting or reinventing them as metatools, or as part of a more designerly grammar. This gives designerly tools a shaping purpose. As previously mentioned, Bross and Bowdery (1939) see languaging as a process of *chiselling* the outer world as distinct from the inner world of inference and thought. Similarly, Vygotsky (1987, in Swain, 2006:) writes, “Thought is not merely expressed in words: it comes into existence through them ...thought finds its reality and form [through language].” And Maturana and Varela (1992) (the concept is further developed in an essay by Maturana (1997) called Metadesign) develop a biology of cognition that applies empirical and scientific knowledge to cultural, human contexts. They outline languaging thus:

*Language was never invented by anyone only to take in an outside world. Therefore it cannot be used as a tool to reveal that world. Rather, it is by languaging that the act of knowing, in the behavioural coordination which is language, brings forth a world.* (Maturana and Varela, 1992, p.234).

Wittgenstein warns that language also constrains and narrows human thought, “The limits of my language are the limits of my world (*Die grenzen meiner sprache sind die grenzen meiner welt*)” (Wittgenstein, 1968, p.68 [section 5.6]), which I use as a call to action to spend design time understanding and exploring a wide vocabulary of words in depth and context. This also has an enduring effect at the level of belief and behaviour. Maturana and Varela suggest that “since we exist in language, the domains of discourse that we generate become part of our domain of existence and constitute part of the environment in which we conserve identity and adaptation.” (1992, p.234). We are positioned within our own unique worlds by the language we use. However, this also implies that we can change our world through our ability to change, play with and ‘design’ our language. In most disciplines this is not something formally encouraged in adult life, though it is a natural developmental stage of childhood. As Andrea Holland writes of observing the language development of her child and her and her husband’s responses, “We all collaborate from birth, in learning language for instance, in learning to play and of course, as writers.” (2008: 17).

**Languaging as Design Tool**

These limits have been evident in how designers are taught to address and play with language since the imposition of a standardised model of writing on HE A&D in 1960 and 70 (Lockheart, 2018). Design is a deeply thoughtful discipline, but not one that easily conforms to the scholastic traditions of study. Nonetheless, we have witnessed the academicization of design and, as a consequence, its shifting loss of status as a discipline. However, over the past thirty years the inter-disciplinarity of design practices have also led to demands for design thinking and new approaches to design to be taught alongside technical skills (Brown, 2008; Coles, 2012; Lockheart and Raein, 2012). Indeed, Buchanan speaks of the repositioning of ‘graphic design within the dynamic flow of experience and communication, emphasizing rhetorical relationships among graphic designers, audiences, and the content of communication’ (1992, p.12). Hence, when design thinking is applied to language, all aspects of structure, grammar, syntax, vocabulary and even spelling become re-designable. This is because designing the language we use is a speculative part of designing the kind of world we wish to inhabit.

Thus, in the terms here explored, Languaging (Maturana and Varela, 1992; Maturana, 1997; Swain, 2006; Turner, 2011) defines a cognitive tool which makes the internal characteristics of a word discernible within a community of practitioners. This is likely to exist as a team working within a workshop space. It needs to be communicative, collaborative and, usually, non-hierarchical (i.e. what Koestler called holarchic). One participant described it as *doing language together,* which became the title of my doctoral research thesis (Lockheart, 2016). When the languaging process is undertaken by the whole team it gives form to thinking. Of course, this is an instrumental view of language that, for designers, equates sensemaking with the familiar world of visualising and forming. Indeed, in my workshops we engage with both at the same time. Thus, the metadesigner bricolages a redesign of process involving neologisms, reframing metaphors, keyword values, playful stages and deeply considered ideas to reach a ‘Textual’ (Barthes, 1977) outcome, which is then collaboratively continued and edited.

I use *Text* here as the French literary theorist, semiotician and philosopher, Roland Barthes, uses it in his essay, From Work to Text (1977:161). He writes, “The metaphor of the text is that of the network; if the Text extends itself, it is as a combinatory systematic (an image, moreover, close to current biological conceptions of the living being)”. The Text, for Barthes (1977), is alive. His ideas on Text are radical and inclusive and downplay the power of the author. Indeed, in his essay, *The Death of the Author* (1977, 142 – 148), he removes omniscience from the authorial voice. It is interesting to note that Barthes (1977) was writing some twenty years prior to the development of the internet and some 30 years before the development of the Wiki technology in which pages of Text are continually changing according to entries and deletions made by its community of readers/authors (see for example the free online encyclopaedia: Wikipedia). For me, Text, a weave of writings and images, is physical, tacit, and workshop-based and from which an agreed and consensual world is brought forth, rather than requiring the web to create a virtual or internet-based platform.

The importance of language for groups within the metadesign approach is further discussed by Maturana (1997) in his essay, Metadesign. Here he devotes a whole section to the importance of addressing the notion of language.

Language is a manner of living together in a flow of consensual coordination of coordinations of consensual behaviors, and it is as such a domain of coordinations of coordinations of doings. So, all that we human beings do we do it in language. (Maturana, 1997)

Maturana (1997) is extending language to include a wider set of coordinations and textual relations, this is what I call a designerly language. Designing the language we use is not simply part of the design process; it is part of designing the kind of imaginative, optimistic and playful world we wish to inhabit. Playfulness allows for the participants to define their route to the outcome and removes the stresses of undisclosed rules or hidden academic conventions. An atmosphere of play sets up the circumstances for new conventions to be created to suit the purposes of the brief, and allow for conventions to be inserted as one of the possible routes, rather than as the only way to ‘do’ writing.

Much of what I have been discussing is the underlying nature of language, how it may be used in a predefined way within the university and, because of these assumptions, how it is not openly discussed in a search for a situated meaning within a specific context. These findings have fed into my workshops. The workshop space allows for time used to develop the agreed meaning of words. A tool I have developed to serve this specific purpose is called ‘codefine’, which is a play on the homophonically similar ‘co-design’. *Codefine* seeks to engage designers in the exact but collaboratively agreed meaning of the words with which they seek to design. This tool is most interesting when used in cross-disciplinary teams as highly nuanced words are hotly discussed until an agreed meaning and discourse of use can be found.

**Languaging as a Metadesign Tool**

Metadesign tools require facilitation but they are designed for collaboration and participation. They contain a range of psychological and designerly approaches which aid the identification and communication of the shifting requirements and needs of a range of planetary stakeholders. Languaging is a key aspect of tool facilitation and development, but also serves to change perspectives and paradigms. Languaging tool sets, involving language development, puzzling and shaping new words, and purposefully designing textual frameworks for communication, are used to create and communicate new thinking for the situated cultures and contexts within which metadesign teams function. Metadesigners’ use of designerly writing and design languaging as tools for this culture and context allow for the codesign and development metaculture and metadiscourse (Lin, 2001, Pp.23-40) integral to the emergent processes of metadesign – or redesigning design (Jones and Lundebye, 2012; Wood, 2008; Tham and Jones, 2008; Giaccardi, 2005; Fischer, 2003). Key to such meta levels of redesign are team work and collaboration (Lunsford and Ede, 2012; Sleeswijk Visser et al, 2005), both in design practice but also in the co-creation of new words – neologisms - to identify and sit within new and emerging contexts.

**Codefine: A Metadesign Languaging Tool**

As each tool is usually tailored to the needs of each workshop, so codefine often begins with visual images or something drawn from a common experience. It usually requires each participant to collect 3 meaningful keywords on a theme or from a current project. These words should be unclear to them so that their first task is to seek clarification. Larger workshop groups are divided with usually 4 participants in each team. If there are 5 in the team, then 4 words might be the starting point.

The tool process begins in silence.

The first participant writes their 3 words onto a single piece of paper (5 mins) and passes it clockwise to the next participant.

Each participant is given 3 minutes to write a definition of one of the words from when they receive the paper. This definition should be from their own knowledge and understanding, so without looking at a dictionary to check the meaning. They should contextualise it and put it into a meaningful sentence.

The sheet continues to be passed until it has been seen and written on by each individual in the team.

**Fig 3.1 Drawn image showing 4 people around a round table passing documents to each other in sequence 2.**

It then comes back to the original author who will be able to see the understandings that surround them in their team. Silence is maintained until all participants have had a chance to read their definitions, then the conversations begin.

There follows a period of reflection and discussion. Participants are asked:

* What insights have you gained about publishing words?
* Words are capsules of thoughtbut how does your audience receive *your* context-free capsules?
* Do they understand your context?
* Did they clarify any aspects of the meaning?
* How might their contexts impact on your words?

There follows a discussion about designerly words which can be concrete or abstract in terms of their context. This means that they may point to designerly issues and specific instances, or they may be more abstract in their context. Students are asked to consider this prior to the use of the next tool, usually the word circle (Nicholls, 2005).

Codefine is a fast way for students to experience the notion of an audience (see chapter 8). It simulates publication and the ambiguities of meaning and likely misunderstandings by readers. It highlights the importance of context in clarifying the meanings of the keywords. By encouraging students to understand how words shift their meanings within different contexts it helps them to clarify and define appropriate parameters and boundaries. It also acquaints students with the knowledge of others within the team. In this respect it highlights differences in understanding and approach makes disciplinary genres more tangible. It also encourages the making of collaborative maps and drawings to explain and frame words.

The democratic nature of the Codefine tool can also prepare participants for other tools that, for example encourage empathy (e.g. the ’cross-championing’ tool by Tham, 2008).

In short, the languaging tools we use combine words and images to encourage design teams to refine, steer and manage the emergence of ideas. Rather than imposing a set of predefined rules, habits, or conventions this is a ludic process that brings all of these elements into play. It allows the frameworks for communication to be designed. When learning occurs through collaboration, we encourage participants to mirror these collaborative processes in the structure of the writing as a mnemonic for communicating and applying the ideas. As I have shown, although languaging is a (meta)design issue words are tricky. By working in teams design students learn from each other and develop a greater self confidence and the ability to communicate within their practice.

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