

ESP Global Textbooks Modification

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Recent years have witnessed renewed interest in the role of language teaching materials in facilitating the teaching and learning of English. Published materials are usually designed and written by experienced and competent authors following market needs analysis conducted by the publishers. Yet, not always the contents will be relevant enough for the learners. The aim of the paper is to emphasize the need for adaptation of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) published materials to the particular needs and circumstances of the course in order to best help learners achieve their objectives.

Keywords: adaptation, supplementation, teaching materials

Introduction

Teaching materials can be referred to as:

Anything which is used to help to teach language learners. Materials can be in the form of a textbook, a workbook, a cassette, a CD-Rom, a video, a photocopied handout, a newspaper, and a paragraph written on a whiteboard: Anything which presents or informs about the language being learned. (International Teacher Training Organization, 2011)

Tomlinson (2003, p. 2) used the term “materials” for:

Anything which can be used to facilitate the learning of the language. They can be linguistic, visual, auditory, or kinaesthetic. They can be instructional, experiential, elicitive, or exploratory, in that they can inform the learners about the language, they can provide experience of the language in use, they can stimulate language use, or they can help learners to make discoveries about the language for themselves.

McGrath (2002) distinguished the following categories of text materials used in English LT (Language Teaching): (1) all materials that have been specifically designed for language learning and teaching; (2) authentic materials that have been specifically selected and exploited for teaching purposes by the classroom teacher; (3) teacher-written materials; and (4) learner-generated materials (p. 7).

One of the most commonly used teaching/learning material is a textbook. Hedge and Whitney (1996) defined a textbook as “an organized and pre-packed set of teaching-learning material” (p. 322). According to International Teacher Training Organization (2011), a course book can be understood as:

A textbook which provides the core materials for a course. It aims to provide as much as possible in one book and is designed so that it could serve as the only book which the learners necessarily use during a course. Such a book usually focuses on grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, functions, and the skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Despite a wide range of alternative materials, a textbook still tends to be the main teaching-learning aid. It “not only survives, it thrives” (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994, p. 316). The popularity of a textbook was confirmed by the results of a research on ESP (English for Specific Purposes) learning/teaching materials undertaken at one of the leading universities in Poland in 2009. The survey was carried out among undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate students of Management and Finance. The research shows that the leading role of textbooks is unquestionable. The only real alternative for a textbook seems to be the Internet. Fifty-five percent of the respondents find textbooks specially written for language teaching/learning purposes as very useful and 41% as useful. The Internet is perceived as very useful by 45% and as useful by 48% of the students.

Textbooks are valued equally by both learners and teachers. Writing about textbooks Hutchinson and Torres (1994, p. 316) emphasized that:

Learners see the textbook as a “framework” or “guide” that helps them to organize their learning both inside and outside the classroom—during discussions in lessons, while doing activities and exercises, studying on their own, doing homework, and preparing for tests. It enables them to learn “better, faster, clearer (sic), easier (sic), more”.

Textbooks define what needs to be learned and what will be tested at the end of the course. Using the Internet as a learning tool may lead to a situation in which learners have to search for information, evaluate its suitability, and select the most relevant pieces. With too much information available from various sources it may be a challenging and time consuming task that not every learner wants to undertake. Besides, learners and teachers may use different sources and as a result find different information. This may pose a problem when testing the knowledge by means of traditional tests.

When using materials that do not provide background information or guidelines on what and how to teach, teachers have to prepare everything themselves from deciding what to teach, through finding the appropriate material, to choosing the right teaching strategy. This may be a challenge for someone who has not got professional knowledge or experience in the field. Less experienced teachers prefer ready to use teaching materials. In particular they rely on a published course book which “makes all the decisions for them in terms of syllabus, content and methodology” (Ellis & Johnson, 1994, p. 115). It can be a valuable support for the teacher, particularly when accompanied by a teacher’s book which provides guidelines that “specify subject matter content, even where no syllabus exists, and define or suggest the intensity of coverage for syllabus items, allocating the amount of time, attention and detail particular syllabus items or tasks require” (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 25). It should be borne in mind though that even if the course book is “the visible heart” of any ELT (English Language Teaching) program (Sheldon, 1988, p. 237), it should not become the syllabus. It should be selected to achieve a satisfactory match with the syllabus, the teaching-learning context, the teaching objectives, and the learner needs.

The history of ESP course books is not long, yet it reflects major changes in the approach to FLT (Foreign Language Teaching). Thirty years ago, textbooks concentrated on teaching language correctness (grammar) and professional vocabulary; twenty years ago they concentrated on communication skills, particularly on oral communication skills. In today’s working environment, language skills, communication skills, and job-related skills have become to be perceived as the requisites that are equally important to university education and qualifications. For this reason, when teaching EFB (English for Business), for instance, such new business skills

as conflict management, assigning roles in a team, setting goals and communicating them, taking on responsibility, planning tasks and organizing teamwork need to be incorporated in a course. Additionally, in many situations, EFL language users need to go beyond language correctness and mastery of grammar, beyond terminology, vocabulary, and phraseology, and beyond good communication skills and cultural awareness. In times of flexible labor market and ever-growing number of cross-cultural business encounters, linguistic competence needs to be combined with sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence.

Attractive modern textbooks are expected to match individual needs of the learner and at the same time reflect the current trends in ESP methodology. ELT materials market offers textbooks and course book packages covering various aspects of language learning and use. They range from comprehensive general courses to specialised series which concentrate on one aspect of English or one specific skill. They claim to offer authentic materials and to cover all language skills, most grammar structures and functions, as well as comprehensive vocabulary. Publishers advertise course book packages as providing everything the teacher and the student might be looking for: authentic texts on professional topics, relevant lexical input, task-based activities, and relevant skills sections and components aiming at developing learner's cross-cultural awareness. Yet, as Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) argued one set of didactic material is seldom enough to meet the exact learning needs of any ESP learner. Other sources of information may be necessary to complement the contents of a textbook so as to meet the objectives of the course.

Developing Cultural Awareness in ESP Courses

In times of globalization, it has become obvious that the key to professional success is effective communication in *lingua franca*.

No matter how extraordinary the idea, it will not be understood or fully appreciated unless communicators involved have good language skills. Each individual needs an adequate vocabulary, a command of basic punctuation and grammar, and skill in written or oral expression. (Guffey & Loewy, 2008, p. 16)

Knowing the language system, however, is not enough to enable the speaker to communicate freely.

A lot more is involved: There are rules of use without which rules of grammar would be useless; what is needed is not so much a better understanding of how language is structured, but a better understanding how language is used. (Dakowska, 2007, p. 92)

Communication is not a simple exchange of information. As Hyland (2005) noticed "Acts of meaning-making, are never neutral but always engaged in that they realize the interests, the positions, the perspectives and the values of those who enact them" (p. 4). Language is closely connected with culture therefore there may be different discourse and communication practices in various communities. Any speaker communicating in a foreign language should be aware of such cultural peculiarities and take them into account when entering a cross-cultural communication process.

Culture is the way we do things. It is how we behave as individuals and in teams. Culture is shaped by our experiences and influences the way we view and understand the world around us. It influences (1) our values and what we consider as desirable/undesirable, (2) the behaviors we consider as acceptable/unacceptable, (3) our morals around right/wrong, and (4) how we view and interpret the world (Zofi, 2012, p. 193).

People from different cultures see and understand things differently. They learn about the other culture's values by observing *cultural displays* or *events* in which cultural attitudes are revealed (Lewis, 2006). Developing cross-cultural awareness requires getting a deep insight into communication partners' culture and comparing it to our native set of values and behaviors. It has become obvious that to expand internationally business people need to communicate in English and to do it effectively they should try to meet the standards adopted by the users of this language. When communicating within one culture it is more probable that the impressions created by a particular speaker's words will be understood by the speaker in the way the speaker intended them to be understood. In multicultural encounters, impressions of interlocutors may vary significantly as different communities have different ways of doing business. Different business communities have different client expectations. "We can also feel threatened or uneasy when interacting with people from different cultures, especially if we are unfamiliar with behaviours that seem inappropriate in a given situation" (Zofi, 2012, p. 95).

There are various cultural categories according to which countries can be classified. Writers seek dimensions that would cover all cultural aspects but it is a complex task. Lewis (2006) argued that "the need for a convincing categorization is obvious" (p. 29) as it would allow: (1) predicting a culture's behavior, (2) clarifying why people did what they did, (3) avoiding giving offence, (4) searching for some kind of unity, (5) standardizing policies, and (6) perceiving neatness.

Such a categorization has not yet been agreed upon but cross-culturalists (Lewis, 2006; Tomalin & Nicks, 2010) notice big differences between the so called "Western" and "Eastern" cultures. English speaking countries and most of European states, for instance, belong to the former category while, e.g., Asian and Latin American countries belong to the latter one (although there may be very big differences between countries that are classified as either Western or Eastern). "When members of different cultural categories begin to interact, the differences far outnumber the commonalities" (Lewis, 2006, p. 38). Communication style that people use depends to a great extent on which cultural category the interlocutors represent.

In times when English became a lingua franca in global communication, developing socio-pragmatic competence of learners is the role of English language teachers. Therefore, when teaching English it is necessary to supplement ready-made materials with tasks showing the differences between various cross-cultural backgrounds, particularly the ones that pose potential risk of miscommunication, e.g., Western and Asian communication styles. Without cultural differences background, Asian learners may find certain Western behaviours difficult to understand.

Materials Adaptation and Supplementation

The three main options the language teacher has when deciding on what to base the course on include: (1) selecting from existing materials; (2) writing his/her own materials; and (3) modifying existing materials.

McGrath (2002) noted that in many cases the assumption is that the teaching will be based on a course book package, "although other materials may be used at the teacher's discretion" (p. 7). It needs to be remembered, however, that one of the tenants of modern ELT methodology is that the selection of any teaching/learning materials involves "matching the given materials against the context in which they are going to be used and the needs and interests of the teachers and learners who work within it, to find the best possible fit between them" (Rubdy, 2003, p. 37).

ESP courses preparing learners to use the language in professional and workplace interactions should provide opportunities for developing interpersonal cross-cultural communication awareness. “Diverse backgrounds of history, customs, traditions, and taboos, as well as accepted manners of communicating in different parts of the world, interfere with straight comprehension” (Lewis, 2008, p. xix). Yet, the interpersonal dimension of language and cross-cultural differences are not present in adequate amount in either general or ESP ready-to-use courses as such courses are designed to be used in various parts of the world and cannot include detailed information about particular countries. Teachers do not deal with a “global learner”. They know their learners’ cultural background and the needs and expectations of the people they teach.

In ESP adaptation of the teaching materials is necessary. Meaningful and challenging tasks are an essential element of the teaching process as:

Fluency is natural language use occurring when a speaker engages in meaningful interaction and maintains comprehensible and ongoing communication despite limitations in his or her communicative competence. Fluency is developed by creating classroom activities in which students must negotiate meaning, use communication strategies, correct misunderstandings and work to avoid communication breakdowns. (Ur, 1991, p. 60)

It is, therefore, important that “teachers follow their own scripts by adapting or changing textbook-based tasks, adding new tasks or deleting some, changing the management of the tasks, changing task inputs or expected outputs, and so on” (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994).

Publishers of ready made materials add CDs, skills books, and workbooks to widen the array of tasks included in the course, which as a result may be more suitable for a greater number of learners. Yet, Tomlinson (2003) considered them as sometimes “insufficiently relevant and appealing to the learners”. As they cannot meet the exact expectations of particular learners, such materials must frequently be customized to match different teaching/learning objectives. In fact, a big number of teachers often adapt ready-made materials to cater for different needs of their students. According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998, p. 176), the reasons for modification of the material include: (1) matching carrier content to real content; (2) providing variety; (3) grading activity level to learning and language level; and (4) presenting the material well.

The definition of materials adaptation has a broad meaning which can involve various changes. Madsen and Bowen (1978) noticed that “Every teacher is in a very real sense an adapter of the materials he uses’ employing one or more of a number of techniques: supplementing, editing, expanding, personalizing, simplifying, modernizing, localizing, or modifying cultural/situational content” (p. vii). Similarly, Tomlinson (1998) referred to “reducing, adding, omitting, modifying and supplementing” (p. xi).

There is no black-and-white dividing line between modifying materials, supplementing with extra input activities, and preparing materials from scratch. In each case it is a question of degree and perspective. To supplement with extra activities can be viewed as a form of modification. Changing the input is more likely to be viewed as supplementation or preparing new material (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, p. 176).

Defining supplementation as identifying gaps in a course book, McGrath (2002, p. 82) distinguished two ways in which it can be done: (1) by utilizing items, such as exercises, texts or activities, from another published source: a course book, a supplementary skills book, a book of practice exercises or a teacher’s resource book; and (2) by devising your own material; this may include the exploitation of authentic visual or textual items.

Supplementation using published materials is easier and not so much time-consuming although various limitations and copyright issues may arise. However, appropriate supplement material may simply be unavailable. Therefore, devising one's own material seems to be a better, yet more challenging, option. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998, p. 176) explained that the development of new material along traditional lines could be from one of two directions: one starting point (A) is having some good input/carrier content while another starting point (B) is when there is a gap in the course material. They present the options in the following way (see Figure 1).

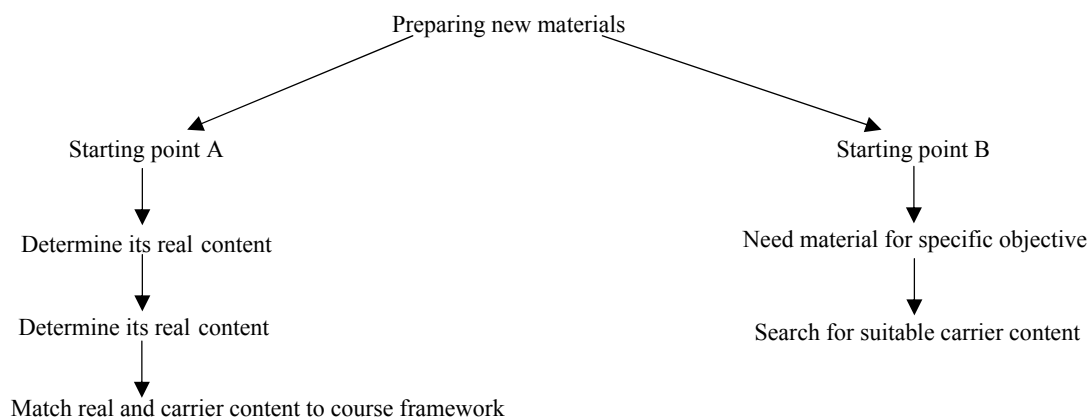


Figure 1. New materials preparation starting points.

When the need to design new material starts from point B, Jolly and Bolitho (1998, p. 97) distinguished five stages in the teaching material development process: identification of the gap, exploration of the problem area, contextual realization of the new material proposal, pedagogical realization, and physical production of the new material (see Figure 2) though the material writer does not have to follow all of them.

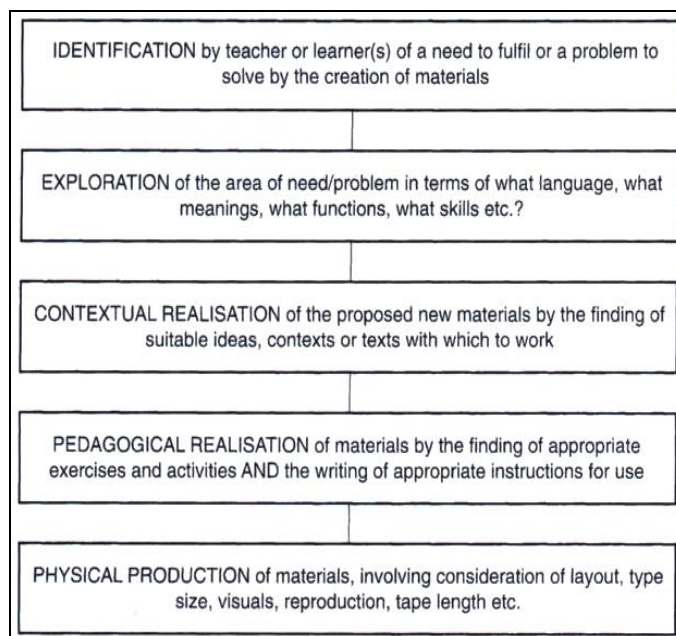


Figure 2. Teaching materials development stages.

Conclusions

There are opinions that teachers prefer to choose and use ready-made materials because they think “They cannot (and ought not to) prepare all materials they need” (Johnson, 1972, p. 1). According to Allwright (1981), “The expertise required of materials writers is importantly different from that required of classroom teachers” (p. 6) but in many cases teacher’s unwillingness to design own materials may adversely affect the teaching process. More and more teachers agree with Cunningsworth (1984) that “There is no perfect textbook which meets all the requirements of teachers and students” (p. 4) and that it is the responsibility of the teacher to explore his own way of using or adapting the course book. Block (1991) claimed that materials prepared by teachers are more likely to meet the objectives of the target learning group as they are more relevant to students’ needs and interests. Cunningsworth (1984) shared this opinion and adds that “Writers of published materials may have greater experience, more extensive training or better resources to draw on than the average classroom teacher, but they do not have direct personal knowledge of each particular teacher’s classes, school, and country” (p. 64).

Saraceni points out that “Despite the fact that adapting materials seems to be a relatively underresearched process, it is always carried out in the classroom, to different extents, by the teachers” (as cited in Tomlinson, 2003, p. 72). The article attempts to show that teachers can, and in many cases should, successfully adapt and/or supplement the ready made textbooks they choose for their learners. Finding new possibilities can enrich the original material and make it more suitable for students with different language skills and personal experience. When materials development projects are discussed a lot of emphasis is put on the need for greater flexibility of learning materials. Tomlinson (2003, p. 75) observed that materials should be:

Much more flexible and open to different interpretations and adaptations by the learners. Such an (...) approach can be considered a way to make materials more relevant to a wider group of learners without the risk of making them superficial and trivial.

McGrath (2003) argued that “When experienced teachers teach using a course book that they know well, they will have a sense of what to use and what not to use, and what to adapt and where to supplement” (p. 4). The ability to adapt and supplement commercial materials may be vital for the success of the teaching process particularly in cases when the needs of the learners are very precisely defined. As Tomlinson (2003) concluded current trends in approaches to language teaching put new demands on the teacher who is “expected to be capable of generating a supportive psychological climate and sustain learner motivation and interest in class” (p. 50).

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