Adoption, Adaptation, and Development of Language Instructional Units

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Abstract
The aim of present paper is to shed light on the teacher as a course designer, and how teachers can best achieve this goal in their own context. Teachers usually use published materials for their teaching purpose. The question is whether we should ever teach a foreign language without published materials (McDonough & Shaw, 2003), whether we should develop our own materials, or whether we need to take a course book and teach that, or whether we supposed to modify the materials to meet the needs of our learners. Whichever our choice, we are concerned with the validity of our choice and hence these questions along with the criteria for selection, modification and development of materials will be addressed in the following sections of this article.

Introduction
Graves (1996) poses a number of questions which are interesting to quote ‘How and with what will I teach the course? What is my role? And what are my students’ roles?’(p. 26). She mentions that for some teachers the materials they use form the backbone of the course. In choosing materials teachers take variety of steps. Sometimes there is no suitable materials for the course one intends to teach. In such cases the teachers are expected to develop their own materials, though rarely can one find a teacher not to use published course materials (Cunningsworth, 1984) at some stage of teaching. At some other times, choosing material may mean collecting a variety of materials from the published books an still in some other situations the teachers modify the existing materials in order to meet their purpose. In choosing, developing or adapting materials a number of criteria are taken into account. Two of the most important of them are ‘effectiveness’ of the materials in achieving the purpose of the course and their ‘appropriateness’ for the students and teachers (Graves, 1996). Developing new materials and activities is time consuming and difficult it is not surprising why most teachers use published materials for their purpose. We usually embark on developing materials when there are no suitable materials for our purpose. It is usually very rare that teachers develop their own materials and do not use published materials. Tomlinson (2003, p. 109) in developing principled frameworks for material development cites a number of authors. For example, he mentions the six principles of material design identified by Nunan (1988):

a. Materials should be clearly linked to the curriculum they serve.
b. Materials should be authentic in terms of text and task
c. Materials should stimulate interaction
d. Materials should encourage learners to focus on formal aspects of the language
e. Materials should encourage learners to develop skills, and skills in learning
f. Materials should encourage learners to apply their developing skills to the world beyond the classroom

Hall (cited in Hidalgo et al., 1995), Tomlinson (1995, p. 110) discusses the four theoretical principles which underpin writing of the planning and writing of materials:
a. The need to communicate
b. The need for long term goals
c. The need for authenticity
d. The need for student-centredness

At the end he proposes his own frameworks for materials development which aim to be principled, flexible and coherent and which have developed from his answers to the questions about how he think people learn language. In his framework he refers to a ‘text-driven’ method which he think is ideal for developing course books and supplementary classroom materials. An the other is ‘task-driven’ method which is ideal for localizing and personalizing classroom materials, for autonomous learning.

Appropriateness of the materials usually refers to how comfortable and familiar the materials are for the students. Is the language level of the materials within learners’ achievable level? In other words are the materials within zone of proximal level of the learners, following Vygotsky. Are the materials interesting and relevant. It should be mentioned that ‘course book assessment is fundamentally a subjective rule-of-thumb activity, and that no neat formula, grid or system will ever provide a definite yardstick’ (Sheldon, 1988, p. 245 in McDonough & Shaw, 2003, p. 61). Sometimes a text which looks to be appropriate will appear to be very difficult to implement as we introduce it to the class. One example of this situation is provided by Fujwara (1996). She describes a situation in which a text that seemed right in achieving the purpose of the course, developing listening skills and strategies, was in practice too difficult for the students and therefore a text which looked to be appropriate proved to be inappropriate in practice. Therefore, texts will be selected subjectively and their actual appropriateness will be a matter of actual practice.

Criteria for Developing Materials
Richards (2001) believes that any attempt to introduce a new curriculum, syllabus, or set of materials must take into account the relative ease or difficulty of introducing change into the system. Curriculum changes are of different kinds. He suggests some questions to ask before any kinds of curriculum innovation:

- What advantages does the curriculum offer?
- How compatible it is?
- Is the innovation very complicated?
- Has it been used and tested?
- Have the features and benefits of the innovation been clearly communicated to teachers and institutions?
- How clear and practical is it?

Richards continues that curriculum planners might provide many compelling reasons for adopting a communicative teaching methodology. However, teachers might feel that it makes testing more difficult compared with a more traditional grammar based approach. He emphasizes that the implementation of a new syllabus needs to involve the cooperation of many factors.

According to Johnson (1989), teaching and learning materials provide the corpus of the curriculum. They normally exist as physical entities and are open analysis, evaluation and revision in ways that teaching and learning acts are not and they have direct influence upon what happens in classrooms. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) Materials should provide a clear and coherent unit structure which will guide teachers and learners through various activities. They emphasize that materials should truly reflect what you think and feel about the learning process. In teaching and in evaluating our students, we need to adapt procedures that are congruent with what we regard as the proper objectives of language teaching. In proposing that the semantic dimension should be given the highest priority in syllabus design, we are implying that the success of our teaching should be judged whether or not our pupils are able to communicate meanings appropriately. To Wilkins (1976), to ensure that this is so we
need to introduce new forms of language learning materials and we need to have at our disposal new
techniques of assessment.

In text-driven method he refers in details to a number of procedures from ‘text-collection’, ‘text
selection’, ‘text-experience’ etc. he believes that using such framework as a guide, one can very
quickly develop principles and engaging materials either for a particular class or for a particular course.

In developing materials and activities one will need to allocate enough time and be aware of
why, how and to whom the material will be used.

Criteria for Adoption / Adaptation
Graves (1996) points out that teachers consider a variety of factors in developing, choosing, or
adapting materials. Two of the most important are their effectiveness in achieving the purpose of the
course and their appropriateness for the students and the teacher. She emphasizes that appropriateness
includes student comfort and familiarity with the material, language level, interest, and relevance.
Some teachers incorporate instruction in how to use unfamiliar materials as part of their course design.
Graves (1996) contends that developing new materials and activities for using them requires time and a
clear sense of why they will be used, how, and by whom. Because of the lack of time, teachers are
often constrained or prefer to adapt existing materials.

We adapt materials for different reasons. McDonough and Shaw (1993) citing Madsen and
Bowen (1978) mention that materials are adapted in order to achieve ‘congruence’. They further
discuss that a good teacher is constantly striving for congruence among several related variables:
teaching materials, methodology, students, course objectives, the target language and its context, and
the teacher’s own personality and teaching styles. McDonough and Shaw’s list of reason for adaptation
reflect their concern that communicative language teaching implies an unsystematic approach to
grammar presentation, and they believe that they need to approach grammar systematically.

Cunningsworth (1995) also lists a number of factors for adaptation of materials:

a. The dynamic of the classroom
b. The personalities involved
c. The constraints imposed by syllabuses
d. The availability of resources
e. The expectation and motivations of the learners

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) explain that materials are used in all teaching. They believe
that materials need to be reliable. They continue that to enhance learning materials must involve
learners in thinking about and using the language. The activities need to stimulate cognitive not
mechanical processes. They point out that producing one hour of good learning materials gobbles up
hours of preparation time. The choice of teacher is primarily constrained by cost (Breen, Candlin,
Dam, and Gabrielsen 1989). For Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), preparing new materials from
scratch for every course taught is clearly impractical, even if every teacher actually had the ability.
They contend that being creative with what is available is crucial, especially if the work environment is
heavily constrained. Where possible no one would use unsuitable carrier but there can be situations
where there is no alternative. The very act of being creative can put a new perspective on material and
reveal possibilities such that it is no longer making the best of a difficult situation. To Dudley-Evans
and St John (1998), modifying activities is generally when the input and the content are adequate but
some or all of the exploitation is unsuitable.

Adoption of the material is the process of choosing and selecting materials. Rarely do we adopt
materials without any modification. So the process of adaptation and adoption has blurring boundaries.
As McDonough & Shaw (2003) state ‘adaptation is linked to issues of administration and the whole
management of education, is so far as it derives from decisions taken about material to be adopted’ (P.
85). Published coursebooks which are written by experienced and qualified people contain valuable
materials for the teachers. Reason is their contents are usually carefully tested in pilot studies in actual
teaching situation before publication. Therefore teachers can select their materials from such coursebooks with a degree of confidence. Despite these, however, Cunningsworth (1984; 1995) warns the teachers that coursebooks ‘are good servants but poor masters’. By this he means teachers should use the coursebooks actively. That is they should formulate objectives with the needs of the learners in mind and then seek out published material which will achieve those objectives. In other words should not set the objectives for the teachers. He further goes on to discuss that those teachers who set their objectives in term of finishing chapter x and y of such and such coursebooks are in fact slave of the course book or what he terms ‘servant of the course book rather than master’ (Cunningsworth, 1984, p. 1).

There is a plethora of teaching materials in the market today. The teachers must select from among this mass of teaching materials. The question is what should be the criteria for selection of teaching materials. Apart from those rule-of –thumb criteria cited at the beginning of this assignment which included effectiveness of teaching materials and appropriateness of them for the learners, Cunningsworth (1984; 1995) outlines a number of principles for material evaluations:

a. Relate the teaching materials to [one’s] aims and objectives

In other words, once we select the teaching materials we need to keep in mind that the materials used should take the learners forward as directly as possible towards the already set and determined objectives.

Be aware of what language is for and select teaching materials which will help equip your students to use language effectively for their purpose

Kelly (1969) points out language teachers have always had access to books, and over the history of teaching the importance of textbooks has varied. Designing appropriate materials is not a science; it is a strange mixture of imagination, insight and analytic reasoning, and this fact must be recognized when the material are evaluated (Low, 1989). According to Graves (1996), for many teachers course development starts not with determining objectives or conceptualizing content but with ideas about the course in action. She continues that they think about material they will use, activities their students will do, techniques they will employ. They think about the way they want their students to learn and their own role in the classroom. Graves (1996) emphasizes that for many teachers the material they use forms the backbone of the course. It is something concrete that students use, and it provides a focus for the class. She believes that it is something concrete that students use, and it provides a focus for the class. Choosing material, may mean development of new material when teaching a course for which there are no suitable materials, collecting a variety of materials, or adapting existing materials (Nunan 1988 b).

Our teaching must aim at what the students need to learn. In other words, we should know what the learners want to do with language after learning it. Therefore we need to look beyond the confines of the classroom into outside world and focus the learners’ attention to what he wants to do in real life situation with what he has learned.

Keep your students’ learning needs in mind.

In addition to selection and grading the materials and putting them as learning units in the course books, we need not only to relate these learning units to one another, but we also need to take into consideration the learners’ need emotionally as well. We have to keep in mind that learning a language is difficult and learners do have intellectual and emotional needs. It is the teachers responsibility to keep these needs in mind once he is selecting the materials.

Consider the relationship between language, learning process and the learners

Islam and Mares (2003) believe that for any adoption or adaptation of materials we need to have clear adaptation objectives. Referring to McDonough and Shaw’s list of objectives in order to achieve appropriateness criterion, the materials should be adopted to: personalize, individualize, localize, and modernize. Islam and Mares expands the list to include: add real choice, cater for all sensory learner styles, provide for more learner autonomy, encourage higher level cognitive skills, make the language input more accessible, and make the language input more engaging.
Adaptation of existing materials is the result of recognizing a mismatch between the teaching materials and the needs and objectives of the classroom. A list of techniques have been offered by the scholars to be used when adapting materials. These techniques are: adding; extending and expanding, deleting; subtracting and abridging, simplifying, recording, and replacing materials (McDonough and Shaw, 1993; Cunningsworth, 1995).

Classroom materials need to be adapted in a principled manner to reflect needs within particular teaching contexts, current understanding of second language acquisition and good teaching practices. Selection of materials without the above mentioned consideration may lead to failure. They emphasized that changes in existing programs should take place only after a careful study of the instructional plans currently in effect. The program designers should utilize whatever information can be collected and they should always be ready to make shifts and adjustments if new information becomes available.

Nunan (1988 a) argues that materials should be designed so that they are capable of being used in variety of ways and also at different proficiency level. He continues that the authenticity of the materials has aroused a great deal of debate. Those who take a hard line on authenticity insist that these should not be edited in any way.

Stevick (1971) points out that language teachers have been reminding one another of the necessity for bridging the gap between manipulating and communication, or between the classroom and life throughout the recorded history. One of the ways in which they quite properly attempt to do so is through adapting old textbooks to fit new needs. He continues that in view of the great variety both of original textbooks and of student objectives, adaptation is and will remain an art. Stevik argues that he cannot offer a mechanical procedure for accomplishing it. He suggested the following overall strategy:

- Predict what the students will need and respond to in each of the three dimensions: Linguistic, social, and topical.
- Make an inventory of the material at hand.
- Compare the results of the first two steps.
- Draw up a list of ways in which the students may use the material.
- Supply whatever is necessary.

Experienced teachers often develop a set of core materials and activities that they adapt each time they teach a course. The materials themselves are flexible and can be used in a number of ways, depending on the target skills or competencies.

It was mentioned that materials are developed for a number of reasons. Two important factors were effectiveness and appropriateness of materials for learning purposes. Effectiveness and appropriateness of materials will be determined only if we take into consideration the characteristics of the learners too. Are the materials developed for adults (Given-Enriquez, 2003) or children. Are they developed for the beginners (Islam, 2003), or are they adult beginners (Cook, 2003). Techniques and principles of selection of the materials varies from beginners to adults and adult beginners.

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) believe that the development of new material along traditional lines could be from one of two directions: One starting point (A), the other starting point (B):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Starting point (A)</th>
<th>Starting point (B)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having some carrier content</td>
<td>Need material for specific objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine its real content</td>
<td>Search for suitable carrier content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Match real and carrier content to course framework</td>
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**Conclusion**

We should develop our own materials, or whether we need to take a course book and teach that, or whether we supposed to modify the materials to meet the needs of our learners. Which ever our choice, we are concerned with the validity of our choice and hence these questions along with the criteria for selection, modification and development of materials were addressed in this paper.

When the real and carrier content are matched, the next stage is to draft activities.

According to Dubin and Olshtain (1986), most new programs are designed either to remedy the deficiencies in existing ones or to expand and improve them. In surveying the existing materials, it is necessary to develop questions as an aid for evaluating them. The following questions, according to Dubin and Olshtain (1986), are set to ask:

- By whom and where were the materials developed?
- Are the materials compatible with the syllabus?
- Do most of the materials provide alternatives for teachers and learners?
- Which language skills do the materials cover?
- How authentic are the text types included in the materials?
- How do learners and teachers who have used the materials feel about them?

**References**


