Brian TOMLINSON, ed. *Developing Materials for Language Teaching, Second Edition.*
London: BLOOMSBURY, 2013. 526 pp.
eISBN: 978-1-4411-7687-5
Materials for life and learning: A review of *Developing materials for language teaching*

Shawn Severson

srseverson@gmail.com
Ph.D. Student, Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto
Centro de Linguística da Universidade do Porto (Portugal)

1. Definition of developing "materials" and intended public

In its second edition, updated and reworked, to report on the state of the art of materials along with new theory, forms and possibilities, *Developing Materials for Language Teaching* is more just than a manual for creating course content. This 26-chapter book also serves as a teacher-training manual, providing a rich framework of theory attached to practical examples of teaching materials used in the classroom. In addition, an underlying current flowing throughout the work is a focus on the learner, which could have lent itself to an interesting title change, which would be rendered as Developing Materials for Language *Learners*.

Indeed the designation of materials for language learners would give a clearer perspective of the content, since a superficial read of the table of contents and the title would otherwise lead one to believe that the book serves as an editorial guide for textbook writers and publishers, providing current insights on publication. This, however, is not the central aim of the book, as it provides extensive guidance for adapting books to the classroom setting, making one's own non-published materials and catering to learner needs. Keeping in mind comprehensible content for input and meaningful opportunities for output, classroom interaction will be enriched and can even be extended outside of the classroom through technology.

The objectives of the book can best be summarized as the following: leading teachers in choosing materials available to them; providing ideas and a framework for adapting existing materials; guiding teachers through materials development adapting to learner needs; assisting in establishing best practice for skills development; and underlining the need for teacher training as well as emphasizing how developing materials promotes theoretical and practical awareness.

2. What are materials, how are they evolving and how should they be adapted?

Materials as a topic are quite broad and complex. They are often evaluated according to what teachers expect them to look like and also scrutinized in an *ad hoc* way, judged by how they have worked with past groups of learners or how they compare to those used in the past. Materials are not normally evaluated against a theoretical framework or principled set of criteria, which means they are not always judged fairly. They make up a wide array of media and forms — coursebooks, workbooks, worksheets, video content, literature, audio files, TED talks, websites and so on. Coursebooks naturally take the stage, both as a focus

in this book and in the classroom, being so widely adopted, practical, economical and viable. As most textbooks are aimed for a global market, potentially offensive content is avoided in favor of what is safe for the majority of cultures.

A working knowledge of the publishing process and ways to adapt materials mimicking this process also boost personal teacher development. User feedback and needs assessment can ensure learner-centeredness, when teachers apply these elements of the publishing industry to their own practice on the classroom level. Indeed, viewing the topic of materials from a variety of angles, many questions arise, lending themselves to a heightened critical awareness of materials. From the creative standpoint, and a question which most publishers would rather not consider, should materials be theory-driven or practice-driven? Should materials be driven by syllabus needs, learner needs or market needs? What are user preconceptions as to what "good" language learning coursebooks look like? From the administrative viewpoint, should one even adopt published materials? And within the institution there is the overarching question as to whether materials should conform to learner expectations as well as whether materials should promote personal and educational development. Finally, should materials promote some sort of teacher development as well? Throughout the course of the book, these concerns will be addressed.

3. Methods, practical examples and new possibilities for materials development

A framework for designing coursebooks is assembled in Part B that is "principled, flexible and coherent" (p. 91). Often creativity and intuition, on one hand, or editorial directives, on the other, lead ELT materials authors in their writing. Nevertheless, using guiding principles based on research will be the most effective avenue for teachers to create well-designed materials and presents two broad approaches to do this. Firstly, the text-driven approach lends itself to maximizing content found in texts and creating engaging materials while exploring different multidimensional activities. Similarly, the task-based approach focuses on what learners would typically "need" the language for, that is, what task they would have to perform using the language rather than on generic language learning.

It is important to point out that materials adaptation is necessary not only because materials are generic, but also because stakeholders shape the published materials we use, providing a shopping list of requirements not necessarily informed by experts on language materials. The coursebook is analyzed as a system through application of systemic functional theory, identifying how stakeholders give input and how publishers react to predispositions as they make crucial decisions, all of which mark the final product. In the end, considering the voices that are manifested in the coursebook will better help teachers choose and adapt materials.

Adaptation can best be done through a process called "humanizing", working as a way of helping the learning process draw on affect such that learners make connections between what is found in the book with something in their minds. This can be achieved through making use of life experiences, interests, attitudes

and feelings with a view to making meaningful connections with course content. For effective and durable learning, learners should ideally feel at ease in the classroom, self-confident so that they are involved intellectually, aesthetically and emotionally.

Appealing to one of the most powerful senses, our sense of sight, pictures may speak volumes, however, the role of illustrations and pictures is principally to decorate books and so are integrated for didactic purposes far less often than expected. Images, then, instead serve as adornments and represent "a great waste of effort on the part of the publisher and a great waste of opportunity for the language learner and teacher" (p. 147). They may not be gratuitous, as they do indeed serve to introduce the topic and provide context, yet in the majority of cases a connection with the actual activities they introduce is lacking. Hence it is doubtful that there are lasting effects on the language learner through images.

Learning through the senses and through creativity can promote ongoing success and so have great implications for language teaching. Contrasting the underlyingly conservative tendencies of education with the creativity of teaching we attribute considerable hype to, the discussion on creative writing proposes eight key components of creativity, to illustrate the importance of being creative in language teaching. Putting creativity into practice can be achieved through a scheme that elaborates on the factors Inputs, Processes and Outputs, which make it possible to transform materials on hand.

Practices of incorporating online content are brought to light, intended for use inside and outside of the classroom. More than just a comprehensive list, this section provides background and tools for digital content so as to acquaint us with the teaching potential that ICT affords. A variety of tools useful for teacher- and student-created digital materials are highlighted as well as a few types of publisher content that are available on the market. A strong indication for the future of technology and its role in teaching is summarized in the popular adage "technology will not replace teachers, but teachers who use technology will replace those who don't" (p. 175). The message that technology is here to stay here is undisputed in line with that of the entire volume.

To show the dimension of technology for teachers, potentialities of blended learning and a framework for it as well as the recent phenomenon of the flipped classroom are explained. As the latter is an emerging field, relatively little discussion is dedicated elsewhere, however some preliminary indications of value to language learning are touched upon. Guidelines and tips for technology use and an introduction to new avenues of reaching students enable hands-on exploration and also provide opportunities for reflection as to technology's role and affordances.

4. Considering learning needs, from young to adult learners

This section, Part C, focuses on teaching young learners and adult learners, highlighting the importance of learner needs of any age group. Several considerations are addressed, from the orthographic system of English to the political and social context of learners to whether the content should have a specific

purpose or be general. Learner variables are also considered such as motivation, personality, use of learner strategies and affect as a means of promoting learning through the "emotional conduit" (p. 242).

Not only are emotions important, but also beliefs. In particular, beliefs expressed by publishers and textbook writers are compared to those actually found in textbooks, revealing a mismatch between beliefs and practice. Furthermore, the reality of some young learners is different from others, meaning that learning objectives that are laid out in educational policies need to have the gap bridged between young learners' existing level of ability and those targets.

Materials, albeit shaped by publishers' beliefs, are found to make a substantial contribution to a successful program, as teachers by themselves will find it difficult to devise a way of meeting proposed standards, sometimes described as "unrealistically ambitious objectives" (p. 226). In particular, the concrete situation of young learners such as refugees means that on top of the difficulty of goals, the daily life and conditions described in textbooks contrast greatly with the environment the learners actually live in. Principles of learning focused on input and output relate learner success and satisfaction to task difficulty and the support provided by textbooks.

Considering adults and using adults learning Spanish as an example, the volume gathers together a set of conditions from the literature which were tested for creating the proper environment and for enabling students to overcome negative affective variables for adults. The study in question elaborates on patterns of classroom interaction which are aimed to build an environment that is sufficiently playful, without being childish, organized and principled. The focus of such a class is to keep to the L2 to a large extent, sometimes using fixed phrases, without the risk of being alienating or demotivating, promoting feelings of success and satisfaction.

Similarly, adults need to be presented with language and situations that are not artificial, that is, those that extend outside of the classroom context and relate to a variety of roles that an adult learner may play when using the L2. To show language-learning success, the learner should be portrayed in textbooks living within the target culture. This inclusion within coursebooks would showcase positive role models to emulate instead of the present largely unattainable goal implied for learners which would suggest how "unsuccessful they are in closing the unbridgeable gap" (p. 266) when comparing their own speech to the unreachable target of native speakers.

Adults also need to develop strategies for language learning to promote interaction in the target language outside of the classroom, two practices leading to autonomy, self-efficacy and engagement with learning an L2. The interaction of positive classroom practices, teacher endorsement of strategies and opportunities to learn meaningful language are vital so learners use the target language outside the classroom, that is, "mining the L2 environment" (p. 289).

5. Materials for skills development and authentic language exposure

Part D focuses on skills, both from a language standpoint and from a learner skill standpoint. The language areas consist of lexico-grammatical matters, namely vocabulary and grammar in addition to pragmatics, through analysis of language frequency and collocations. On the other hand, five skills are considered: speaking, writing, listening, reading and also cultural awareness. Bringing these all together, the authors of this part provide an exhaustive treatment of useful practices meeting learner needs, opportunities that materials can offer and learner engagement through affect. Finally, the section shows how decisions are being made using English language corpora as to what types of vocabulary should be taught. Corpora are gaining prominence in driving the type of language we teach in the classroom, not only through focus on how often we use certain words and lexical chunks and in what contexts, but also through data-driven study of language in terms of levels of formality and situational context.

6. Value of teacher training and means of ongoing materials development

The volume comes to a close with the subject of teacher training, stressing the importance of actively creating materials. Responding to challenges presented to teachers due to potential shortfalls of materials on the market coupled with different contexts necessitating other types of materials, a variety of objectives unfold for teacher training programs. In particular, teachers have to be engaged and actively implement theoretical points into their own practice. Hence, teacher training provides a crossroads between theory, observation, understanding and practice.

7. Conclusion

Textbook authors and publishers make final decisions in regards to materials, but given the predisposition of teachers to certain types of activities and practice which do not align with current understanding on language learning and acquisition, it is important for teachers to understand how to evaluate existing materials and to develop their own. Looking at what materials are out there is one of the first steps, but then with technology, teachers can respond to challenges they face in the classroom and turn to digital content. As digital materials change and the internet evolves, teachers need to explore new ways of engaging learners and making studying a language worthwhile. Skills need to be developed through implementation of principles and by seizing opportunities that become apparent when considering best practice in skills development. Finally, working creatively and engaging in teacher training and teacher development will help to make learning opportunities more satisfying and meaningful.

_____