DEVELOPING MATERIALS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING
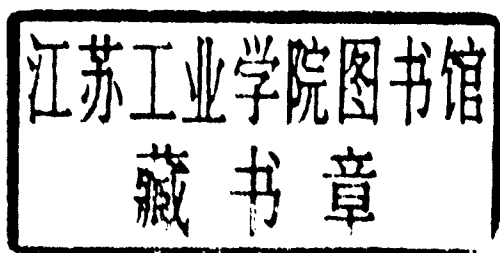
Brian Tomlinson

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continuum
LONDON • NEW YORK

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Preface

Brian Tomlinson

This book has developed from a realization that the recent explosion in interest in materials development for language teaching, both as 'a field of study and as a practical undertaking' (Tomlinson, 2001), has not yet been adequately catered for by the literature on materials development. A number of books have dealt with important aspects of materials development and have raised issues of great significance to the developers and users of language learning materials (for example, Sheldon, 1987; McDonough and Shaw, 1993; Byrd, 1995; Hidalgo *et al.*, 1995; Cunningsworth, 1996; Tomlinson, 1998; Richards, 2001). But no book has provided a comprehensive coverage of the main aspects and issues in materials development for language learning. And no book has attempted to view current developments in materials development through the eyes of developers and users of materials throughout the world. This is what *Developing Materials for Language Teaching* aims to do. It has been designed and written (by native and non-native speakers of English from eleven different countries) so that it can provide both an overview of what is happening in the world of materials development for language teaching and a stimulus for development and innovation in the field. It includes reference to the teaching of languages other than English (for example, Italian, Spanish, Japanese) and offers both objective and critical overviews of current issues in the field and proposals for principled developments for the future. It has been written so that it can be used as a coursebook on teachers' courses and on postgraduate courses in applied linguistics, and also to provide stimulus and refreshment for teachers, publishers and applied linguists in the field.

Ultimately, 'It is the language teacher who must validate or refute specific proposals' for applying linguistic and psycholinguistic theory to language teaching (Chomsky, 1996: 46) and it is the language teacher who must validate or refute the materials which are developed for the language classroom. Widdowson (2000: 31) offers the 'applied linguist' as a 'mediating agent' who must make 'insights intelligible in ways in which their usefulness can be demonstrated'. In this book we offer the informed and reflective practitioner as the ideal agent for mediating between theory and practice. Some of the contributors to this book might be labelled teachers, some materials developers, some applied linguists, some teacher trainers and some publishers. But all of them share four things in

common. They have all had experience as teachers of a second or foreign language (L2), they have all contributed to the development of L2 materials, they have all kept in touch with developments in linguistic, sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic theory and they all have respect for the teacher as the person with the power to decide what actually happens in the language classroom.

This book is dedicated to classroom teachers and teachers in training. It aims to help them to make decisions about materials for themselves and to help them and others to contribute to the development of materials which can facilitate the acquisition of an L2. It does so by applying insights gained from applied linguistics, from materials development and from classroom practice.

This volume is being used as the core textbook for the Distance Version of the MA in Materials Development for Language Teaching in the Centre for Language Study at Leeds Metropolitan University. For information about this course, please contact Brian Tomlinson at B.Tomlinson@lmu.ac.uk

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Contents

PART E – TRAINING IN MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT

Introduction: Are Materials Developing?

Brian Tomlinson

What is Materials Development?

> Materials development is both a field of study and a practical undertaking. As a field it studies the principles and procedures of the design, implementation and evaluation of language teaching materials. As an undertaking it involves the production, evaluation and adaptation of language teaching materials, by teachers for their own classrooms and by materials writers for sale or distribution. Ideally these two aspects of materials development are interactive in that the theoretical studies inform and are informed by the development and use of classroom materials. (Tomlinson, 2001: 66)

This book deals with both the aspects of materials development outlined above. For example, Chapter 6 (Tomlinson) and Chapter 23 (Nation) deal with the principles and procedures of aspects of the development of materials and Chapter 1 (Tomlinson) and Chapter 2 (Rubdy) deal with the principles and procedures of the evaluation of materials. On the other hand, for example, Chapters 7 (Mares), 8 (Singapore Wala) and 30 (Lyons) focus on the actual writing of materials.

There is also a third aspect of materials development which is dealt with in this book, that is the use of materials development as a means of facilitating and deepening the personal and professional development of teachers (e.g., Chapters 27 (Tomlinson), 29 (Canniveng and Martinez) and 31 (Popovici and Bolitho)). There is a growing inclusion of materials development on courses for teachers: for example Leeds Metropolitan University runs an MA in Materials Development for Language Teaching, and MA TESOL/Applied Linguistics courses throughout the world now include modules on materials development. This is mainly because of the realization that, 'Every teacher is a materials developer' (English Language Centre, 1997) who needs to be able to evaluate, adapt and produce materials so as to ensure a match between the learners and the materials they use. It is also because of the realization that one of the most effective ways of 'helping teachers to understand and apply theories of language learning – and to achieve personal and professional development – is to provide monitored experience of the process of developing materials' (Tomlinson, 2001: 67). This concrete experience of

developing materials as a basis for reflective observation and conceptualization enables teachers to theorize their practice (Schon, 1987).

Although a number of chapters in this book focus primarily on one of the three aspects of materials development described above, many of them deal with two or even three of these aspects. For example, Chapter 19 (Stranks) looks at both the theories and the practicalities of developing grammar teaching materials, Chapter 20 (Masuhara) looks at the application of reading research and theory to the development of coursebook materials for teaching reading, and Chapter 28 (Tomlinson and Masuhara) considers the theoretical principles of using simulations for learning, outlines procedures for developing and using simulations and reflects on actual examples of simulations used on materials development courses for teachers. In addition, a number of chapters (for example Chapter 25 (Bolitho) and Chapter 26 (Pulverness)) focus on issues related to the content of materials, as well as concerning themselves with the application of theory to practice.

What are Materials?

In this book 'materials' 'include anything which can be used to facilitate the learning of a language. They can be linguistic, visual, auditory or kinaesthetic, and they can be presented in print, through live performance or display, or on cassette, CD-ROM, DVD or the internet' (Tomlinson, 2001: 66). They can be instructional, experiential, elicitative or exploratory, in that they can inform 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. See also Richards (2001: 251) for a definition of materials.

Most language learning materials are in print and most of the chapters in this book focus on print materials. However, Chapter 10 (Hill), for example, focuses on visuals, Chapter 21 (Hill and Tomlinson) and Chapter 24 (Ferradas Moi) focus on auditory materials, Chapter 12 (Derewianka) and Chapter 13 (Ferradas Moi) focus on the computer and the Internet, Chapter 14 (Cives-Enriquez) focuses on live materials and Chapter 20 (Masuhara) focuses on a multi-dimensional approach. Most materials are instructional ('instructional materials generally serve as the basis for much of the language input learners receive and the language practice that occurs in the classroom' (Richards, 2001: 251)) and many of the chapters in this book focus on materials for instruction. However, many other chapters advocate more attention being paid to experiential materials (e.g., Chapters 4 (Saraceni), 15 (Islam) and 21 (Hill and Tomlinson)) and to elicitative materials (e.g., Chapters 16 (Cook) and 25 (Bolitho) focus on materials stimulating learner discovery).

What are the Issues in Materials Development?

What should Drive the Materials?

The obvious answer to this question is that the needs and wants of the learners should drive the materials. But teachers have needs and wants to be satisfied too (Masuhara, 1998) and so do administrators, with their concerns for standardization and conformity with, for example, a syllabus, a theory of language learning, the requirements of examinations and the language policies of a government (see Chapter 3 (Singapore Wala) and Chapter 30 (Lyons) in this volume for discussions of the multiple requirements of a national and of institutional textbooks). These needs and wants are not irreconcilable and, in my experience, they can best be satisfied by localized projects which consult learners, teachers and administrators before, during and after the materials writing process. This is what happened in the process of developing the most satisfactory textbook I have ever been involved in, *On Target*, a coursebook for secondary school students in Namibia. Prior to the writing of the book, students and teachers were consulted all over Namibia about what they wanted and needed from the book. During the writing of the book, Ministry of Education officials were present throughout each day in which 30 teachers wrote the materials, and the syllabus, the curriculum and the examination documents were frequently referred to. After the writing of the book, it was trialled extensively and revised in relation to the feedback which was provided by students, teachers and officials. A similar approach is currently being followed by Bilkent University in Turkey in the production of new textbooks for their English courses. See Tomlinson, 1995, 2001, for descriptions of these projects and Chapter 31 (Popovici and Bolitho) in this book for descriptions of similar projects.

Both the projects described above decided to adopt a text-driven approach rather than a syllabus-driven, grammar-driven, functions-driven, skills-driven, topic-driven or theme-driven approach. That is, they decided to start by finding written and spoken texts with a potential for affective and cognitive engagement, and then to use a flexible framework to develop activities connected to these texts. Later on they would cross-check with the syllabus and the examination requirements to ensure satisfactory coverage. For a description and justification of such an approach, see Chapter 6 (Tomlinson) in this book.

The situation is complicated in the case of materials produced by publishers for commercial distribution. 'The author is generally concerned to produce a text that teachers will find innovative, creative, relevant to their learners' needs, and that they will enjoy teaching from ... The publisher is primarily motivated by financial success.' (Richards, 2001: 257). Publishers obviously aim to produce excellent books which will satisfy the wants and needs of their users but their need to maximize profits makes them cautious and conservative and any compromise with the authors tends still to be biased towards perceived market needs rather than towards the actual needs and wants of the learners. For discussions of the compromises necessitated by the commercial production of materials (and especially of global coursebooks) see Ariew (1982), Bell and Gower (1998) and

Richards (2001), as well as Chapters 7 (Mares), 8 (Singapore Wala), 15 (Islam) and 19 (Stranks) in this volume.

Who should Develop the Materials?

These days most commercial materials are written by professional materials writers writing to a brief determined by the publishers from an analysis of market needs. These writers are usually very experienced and competent, they are familiar with the realities of publishing and the potential of the new technologies and they write full-time for a living. The books they write are usually systematic, well designed, teacher-friendly and thorough. But they often lack energy and imagination (how can the writers be imaginative all day and every day?) and are sometimes insufficiently relevant and appealing to the actual learners who use them (see Tomlinson *et al.*, 2001).

Dudley Evans and St John (1998: 173) state that 'only a small proportion of good teachers are also good designers of course materials'. This observation is contrary to my experience, as I have found that teachers throughout the world only need a little training, experience and support to become materials writers who can produce imaginative materials of relevance and appeal to their learners. This has certainly been the case with teachers on materials development courses I have run in Brazil, Botswana, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mauritius, the Seychelles, Vanuatu and Vietnam, and on textbook projects I have been a consultant for in Bulgaria, China, Turkey and Namibia (Tomlinson, 2001).

This issue is addressed in a number of chapters in this book, for example Chapters 6 and 27 (Tomlinson), Chapter 30 (Lyons) and Chapter 31 (Popovici and Bolitho).

How should Materials be Developed?

Typically, commercial materials are written over a long period of time by a pair or small group of writers (e.g., in the year 2000 *Inside Out* (Kay and Jones), *Landmark* (Haines and Stewart), *Wavelength* (Burke and Brooks) and *Clockwise* (McGowen, Richardson, Forsyth and Naunton) were published). The materials usually take a long time to produce because these days most of the materials produced are courses (supplementary books are generally not considered profitable enough), since most courses have multiple components (for example Greenall (1995) has seven components per level) and because the important review and trialling process takes time. The result very often is a drop in creative energy as the process drags on and the eventual publication of competent but rather uninspiring materials.

My own preference is for a large team approach to writing materials, which aims at fast first draft production by many people followed by refinement by a smaller group of experts. This is the procedure that the Namibian and Bilkent projects referred to above decided to follow. In the writing of the Namibian coursebook, *On Target* (1996), 30 teachers were selected to provide a team of varying age, experience and expertise and were then brought from all over the country to Windhoek. On the first day, I demonstrated some innovative

approaches to extend the teachers' repertoires of activity types and to stimulate thought and discussion about the principles of language learning. On the second day, we worked out a flexible framework to use in producing the materials and made some decisions together about the use of illustrations, music, cassettes, etc. Then, for four days the teachers wrote and monitored materials in small teams while a small group of facilitators supported them and cross-checked with the syllabus. That way we managed to complete the first draft of the whole book in one week, and then this was trialled, revised, edited and published within the year. In Bilkent University we followed a similar procedure and 20 teachers in small teams produced and monitored 60 units within a week for a group of four 'writers' to select from, revise and trial.

In both cases described above, the teachers managed to inspire each other with ideas, to maintain creative energy, to relate their materials to the actual learners who were going to use them and to suggest useful improvements to each other's materials. All this was achieved to a far greater degree than I have ever managed when writing a coursebook by myself, with a partner or in a small team working at a distance from each other. And all this was achieved because a large group of enthusiastic teachers were working together for a short time.

How should Materials be Evaluated?

Materials are often evaluated in an ad hoc, impressionistic way, which tends to favour materials which have face validity (i.e., which conform to people's expectations of what materials should look like) and which are visually appealing. In order to ensure that materials are devised, revised, selected and adapted in reliable and valid ways, we need to ensure that materials evaluation establishes procedures which are thorough, rigorous, systematic and principled. This often takes time and effort but it could prevent many of the mistakes which are made by writers, publishers, teachers, institutions and ministries and which can have negative effects on learners' potential to benefit from their courses. For ways of achieving this, see Chapters 1 (Tomlinson), 2 (Rubdy), 4 (Saraceni) and 5 (Islam and Mares) in this volume.

Should Texts be Authentic?

Materials aiming at explicit learning usually contrive examples of the language which focus on the feature being taught. Usually these examples are presented in short, easy, specially written or simplified texts or dialogues, and it is argued that they help the learners by focusing their attention on the target feature. The counter-argument is that such texts overprotect learners, deprive them of the opportunities for acquisition provided by rich texts and do not prepare them for the reality of language use, whereas authentic texts (i.e., texts not written especially for language teaching) can provide exposure to language as it is typically used. A similar debate continues in relation to materials for the teaching of reading and listening skills and materials for extensive reading and listening. One side argues that simplification and contrivance can facilitate learning; the other

side argues that they can lead to faulty learning and that they deny the learners opportunities for informal learning and the development of self-esteem.

> Most researchers argue for authenticity and stress its motivating effect on learners (e.g., Bacon and Finneman, 1990; Kuo, 1993; Little *et al.*, 1994). However, Widdowson (1984: 218) says that 'pedagogic presentation of language ... necessarily involves methodological contrivance which isolates features from their natural surroundings'; Day and Bamford (1998: 54–62) attack the 'cult of authenticity' and advocate simplified reading texts which have the 'natural properties of authenticity' and R. Ellis (1999: 68) argues for 'enriched input' which provides learners with input which has been flooded with exemplars of the target structure in the context of meaning focused activities. See also Widdowson (2000). (Tomlinson, 2001: 68)

My own view is that meaningful engagement with authentic texts is a prerequisite for the development of communicative and strategic competence but that authentic texts can be created by interactive negotiation between learners as well as presented to them (see Breen and Littlejohn, 2000, as well as Chapters 4 (Saraceni), 6 (Tomlinson) and 14 (Cives-Enriquez) in this volume). I also believe, though, that for particularly problematic features of language use it is sometimes useful to focus learners on characteristics of these features through specially contrived examples (providing that the examples are based on observation of typical authentic use). For further discussion of the issue of authenticity see, for example, Chapters 4 (Saraceni), 18 (Barnard and Zemach), 19 (Stranks) and 20 (Masuhara) in this volume.

Other Issues
Other issues which have received attention in the literature and which feature in this book include:

- Do learners need a coursebook? (See Hutchinson and Torres, 1994; Tomlinson, 2001; and Chapters 4 (Saraceni) and 14 (Cives-Enriquez) in this volume.)
- Should materials be learning or acquisition focused? (See Tomlinson, 1998c; Tomlinson, 2001; and Chapters 6 (Tomlinson), 20 (Masuhara), 22 (Dat) and 23 (Nation) in this volume.)
- Should materials be censored? (See Tomlinson, 2001; Wajnryb, 1996; and Chapter 4 (Saraceni) in this book.)
- Should materials be driven by theory or practice? (See Bell and Gower, 1998; Prowse, 1998; and Chapters 6 (Tomlinson) and 11 (Maley) in this volume.)
- Should materials be driven by syllabus needs, learner needs or market needs? (See Masuhara, 1998; and Chapters 6 (Tomlinson), 8 (Singapore Wala), 18 (Barnard and Zemach) and 31 (Popovici and Bolitho) in this volume.)
- Should materials cater for learner expectations or try to change them? (See Chapters 9 (Tomlinson), 14 (Cives-Enriquez), 16 (Cook) and 31 (Popovici and Bolitho) in this volume.)

- Should materials aim for language development only or should they also aim for personal and educational development? (See Chapters 4 (Saraceni), 9 (Tomlinson) and 31 (Popovici and Bolitho) in this volume.)
- Should materials aim to contribute to teacher development as well as language learning? (See Tomlinson, 1995; and Chapters 1 (Tomlinson), 29 (Canniveng and Martinez), 30 (Lyons) and 31 (Popovici and Bolitho) in this volume.)

What are the Current Trends in Materials Development?

It is arguable that there is nothing much new going on in materials development and that in the area of commercially produced materials there is even a sort of principled going back. This is justified by publishers by reference to their confidential research into what learners and teachers want (e.g., the return to the centrality of grammar highlighted in Tomlinson *et al.*, 2001: 84). But in my view it is almost certainly driven by economic constraints and the ever-increasing cost of producing the sort of multicoloured, multicomponent coursebook which seems to attract the biggest sales these days. As a result, publishers dare not risk losing vast sums of money on a radically different type of textbook, they opt for safe, middle-of-the-road, global coursebooks which clone the features of such best-selling coursebooks as *Headway* and they cut down on non-profit-making supplementary materials. Unfortunately this then has a washback effect on non-commercial materials, as teachers and curriculum developers tend to imitate the approaches of best-selling coursebooks on the assumption that this must be what learners and teachers want (though the reality is more likely that the models are the books which have been promoted most expensively and successfully by their publishers).

There is some hope of progress, though, and in my list of current trends below I have noted a number of positive ones:

Positive Trends
- There are more materials requiring investment by the learners in order for them to make discoveries for themselves from analysis of samples of language in use (e.g., Bolitho and Tomlinson, 1995; Joseph and Travers, 1996; Carter and McCarthy, 1997; Haines and Stewart, 2000).
- There are more materials making use of corpus data reflecting actual language use (e.g., Carter and McCarthy, 1997; Fox, 1998; Willis, 1998).
- There are more interactive learning packages which make use of different media to provide a richer experience of language learning and to offer the learner choice of approach and route (Parish, 1995).
- There are more extensive reader series being produced with fewer linguistic constraints and more provocative content (e.g., Prowse, 1999; Tomlinson and Maley (in progress)).
- There is an increase in attempts to personalize the learning process by getting learners to relate topics and texts to their own lives, views and feelings (e.g., Kay and Jones, 2000).
- There is an increase in attempts to gain the affective engagement of learners

(Tomlinson, 1998a) by involving them in texts and tasks which encourage the expression of feelings (e.g., Burke and Brooks, 2000).

- There is an increasing use of the Internet as a source of current, relevant and appealing texts (Tomlinson, 2001: 71; Chapters 6 (Tomlinson), 12 (Derewianka) and 18 (Barnard and Zemach) in this volume).
- There is some evidence of a movement away from spoken practice of written grammar and towards experience of spoken grammar in use (e.g., Carter and McCarthy, 1997).
- There is an increase in the number of ministries (e.g., in Bulgaria, Iran, Morocco, Namibia, Romania and Russia) and institutions (e.g., Bilgi University in Istanbul; Bilkent University in Ankara) which have decided to produce their own locally relevant materials (see Tomlinson, 1995, 2001; and Chapter 31 (Popovici and Bolitho) in this book).

Negative Trends

- There is a return to the 'central place of grammar in the language curriculum' (Soars and Soars, 1996), which contradicts what my own confidential research for a British publisher revealed about the needs and wants of learners and teachers and which goes against many of the findings of Second Language Acquisition Research (Tomlinson, 1998d: 5–22; Ellis, 1999; Tomlinson *et al.*, 2001).
- There is a far greater prominence given in coursebooks to listening and speaking than to reading and writing (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2001).
- There is an assumption that most learners have short attention spans, can only cope with very short reading and writing texts and will only engage in activities for a short time.
- There is an assumption that learners do not want and would not gain from intellectually demanding activities while engaged in language learning.
- There is a neglect (or sometimes an abuse) of literature in coursebooks, despite its potential as a source of stimulating and engaging texts and despite the many claims of methodologists for the potential value and appeal of literature (e.g., Duff and Maley, 1990; Lazar, 1993; Tomlinson, 1994, 1998b; Maley, 2001; and Chapters 4 (Saraceni), 6 (Tomlinson), 9 (Tomlinson), 11 (Maley), 13 (Ferradas Moi) and 24 (Ferradas Moi) in this volume.
- There is a continuing predominance of analytical activities and a neglect of activities which could cater for learners with other preferred learning styles (Tomlinson, 1999: 10; Tomlinson *et al.*, 2001; Chapter 5 (Islam and Mares) in this volume).
- There is an 'absence of controversial issues to stimulate thought, to provide opportunities for exchanges of views, and to make topic content meaningful' (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2001) and there is a resultant trivialization of content (see, for example, Chapters 4 (Saraceni) and 20 (Masuhara) in this volume.
- There is a tendency to underestimate learners linguistically, intellectually and emotionally.