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MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT

大学英语教材建设

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前 言

大学英语教材的质量对于提高高校外语教学质量,培养学生运用语言的能力起着举足轻重的作用。在大学英语教材不断涌现的今天,教材建设是摆在广大教师面前的、亟待解决的重要研究课题。建立有效的大学英语教材编写,评估和改编的原则是客观评价大学英语的有效保障,也是验证教材编者的教材编写是否符合二语习得的理论,为广大教师在教学中根据学生的需求,调整、改编教材中的任务活动提供理论依据。该书不仅涉及语言运用,而且涉及文化、语境、认知、心理等因素,主要是集中在如何运用二语习得的研究成果对任务活动进行评估,改编和编写。

该书涉及教材建设的核心,即,教材评估,改写和编写,所采用的理论框架是 Tomlinson 的多维教材建设模式和他提出的评估好的教学材料的标准。多维模式的教材研究是一个全新的领域,其社会价值在于教材更多地利用课文和任务活动激励学生表达情感,激发学习者的情感投入,尝试个性化学习,让学生把教材主题与其生活、见解和情感相联系。这种模式倡导体验为基础的教学理念,以多维的模式为学习者在情感、感官、心理图式和内心语言方面提供更多个人的空间,把课文和学习者过去的生活经历和语言经验联系起来,把课文选取和学习者的兴趣、观点和需求联系起来,对课文内容进行反馈和补充,从而达到学习者个人认知上的连续性和完整性。

本书从各个侧面如内心语言,任务教学,教材材料选择,语言及文化意识等进行理论探讨,而且给出三个典型教材评估、教材改编和教材建设的案例,为大学英语教材的建设提供了参考。

College English Materials Development

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1 Introduction to Materials Development

Materials, indeed, as Tomlinson (1998) defines them, refer to anything that is used by teachers or learners to facilitate the learning of a language, whereas materials development refers to anything that is done by writers, teachers or learners to provide sources of language input and to explore those sources in ways that maximize the likelihood of intake.

Materials development can be effectively connected to areas of linguistics such as SLA, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, language and discourse analysis and pragmatics and to teachers' development and their awareness of methodologies while teaching.

Masuhara (2000) emphasizes the teacher's central position in language teaching and learning and characterizes them as being the ones who are often in charge of the essential stages of curriculum development by participating in the selection, teaching and sometimes rewriting of the materials.

The reality shows, however, that textbooks do not conform easily to

the developments in notions about teaching and learning that have come out of applied linguistics debates in the last two decades. Although materials development and evaluation appear to give life to theory in the language classroom, the literature remains sparse and teacher – training courses give little importance in their programs.

Teacher training programs have not always managed to prepare and equip teachers with the necessary tools to cope with changes in language learning materials. The realization that no course book can be ideal for any particular class has contributed to materials design research and its conceptualization, as teachers feel more and more the need to be able to evaluate, adapt and produce materials that meet the learners' needs and preferences.

There have been few books on materials design as, indeed, materials development and evaluation were treated as a subsection of methodology, in which materials were usually introduced as examples of methods in action rather than as a means to explore the principles and procedures of their development (Tomlinson, 2001a).

In 1990s, attitude began to change. It was realized that not only is materials development an important skill needed by all teachers but also that by engaging in materials development teachers can help themselves both to understand and apply theories of language learning and to achieve personal and professional development (Tomlinson, 2001a: 67).

There are numerous course books that can be used by teachers of English for College English course books, with a multitude of accompanying materials and sufficient teacher guidance in teacher's books, teacher resource books, tests, video cassettes and course book – related software. When selecting materials the teachers might not even realize that they adopt a certain set of beliefs about the learning objectives, techniques, procedures, the teacher's role and the learner's role. In order

to raise the consciousness of teachers, many researchers suggest a more thorough course book evaluation (Harmer, 1991; Cunningsworth, 1984; Sheldon, 1988; Williams, 1983). There is a relatively small amount of literature on the evaluation of textbooks and materials. While checklists exist which can offer a framework for evaluation of a particular resource, local circumstances will need to be factored into the evaluation, since subjective biases, conscious or otherwise, render any evaluation exercise somewhat inexact. Given that we know that learners don't necessarily learn the language items we teach at all, and certainly not in the order we teach them, a fixed and a priori language syllabus seems to be at best pointless, and at worst counter-productive. Given that we do know that wide exposure and motivation is likely to lead to acquisition, then a syllabus of varied and interesting texts seem to be the best way forward in the current state of knowledge. A thorough knowledge of the previous research on materials development in terms of materials evaluation and adaptation may help better understand the nature of materials design.

The possibility exists, as Tomlinson (1998a) acknowledges, of using a check list to ensure that certain language items are covered in the texts, and finding further texts to fill important gaps - a adaptation process which could benefit our language teaching. Many evaluation checklists have been designed to help teachers make a systematic selection of textbooks. The most representative ones are as follows:

Breen and Candlie's (1987) interactive step by step guide to course book evaluation envisage two phases, one addressing the overall usefulness of the materials and another aiming at a more searching analysis with a particular group of learners and classroom situation in mind and assumptions underlying materials design.

Hutchinson (1987) likewise regards evaluation as an interactive process involving subjective and objective analysis of materials and the

extent to which they match teacher and student needs in a given context.

McDonough and Shaw (1993) have also proposed two complementary stages, beginning with an external evaluation and moving on to an internal evaluation of two or more units in terms of presentation skills, grading and sequencing of tasks, kinds of texts used and the relationship between exercises and tests.

Sheldon's (1988) framework covers practical factors like availability and physical characteristics such as layout and graphics to more psychological and psycholinguistic aspects such as learner needs and learning objectives, their assumed background, target age range, culture, conceptual and schematic development, expectations and learning preferences. Organizational factors such as provision of linkage, sequencing, stimulus revision, recycling and internal and external coherence as well as criteria that address appropriacy, authenticity, cultural bias and flexibility are also given considerable importance.

Cunningsworth's (1984) proposal for materials evaluation is the most comprehensive. It takes the learners' context and learning principles as its starting point. The general guidelines and the criteria are presented with useful case studies.

Littlejohn's (1998) analysis contains two main dimensions: publication which refers to physical aspects of the materials and the design which refers to the thinking underlying its production.

Grant designed a three - part questionnaire which can be used as a checklist when teachers select textbooks for their students. Basically the questionnaire helps teachers to examine the extent to which a textbook suits the students, the teacher and the syllabus and examination.

Tomplinson (1998) provides an overview of many of the tenets and basic principles of second language acquisition that are currently relevant to an understanding of what good materials, as well as principled judg-

ments should contain. The strong point of Tomlinson lies in the effectiveness in encouraging learners to make discoveries for themselves through self – investment, through intellectual, aesthetic and emotional engagement with authentic input, though sensitivity to learners' readiness to learn. I would like to acknowledge that many of the ideas and principles elucidated in this book are based on Tomlinson (2003).

1.1 Materials Evaluation

Tomlinson (2003a) thinks that materials evaluation is a procedure that involves measuring the value (or potential value) of a set of learning materials. It involves making judgments about the effects of the materials on the people using. As we know, evaluations can vary since the needs, objectives, backgrounds and preferred styles of the participants will be different (Tomlinson, 2003a). The reason for the difference is subjectivity of the materials evaluation. It is clear that an evaluator will not only evaluate the effect of the materials by focusing on the users but also analyze the materials objectively by examining the details of the materials such as texts selection to see if the materials would meet the needs of the learners and the needs of the syllabus. So from Tomlinson's point of view, separation of evaluation from analysis will make it easy for evaluators to come up with evaluation criteria and analysis questions.

Littlejohn (1998: 192) provides a general framework for analyzing materials prior to evaluation:

1. Analysis of the target situation of use;
2. Materials analysis;
3. Match and evaluation (determining the appropriacy of the materials to the target situation of use;
4. Action.

Tomlinson (2003) suggested the different stages:

1. Define your local teaching situation;
2. Define your programme;
3. Evaluate your course book;
4. Devise suitable adaptation.

The local teaching situation should be defined with respect to the following:

1. Type of school;
2. Age, ability, interests and socio – cultural background of students;
3. Language level to be aimed at upon completion of the course;
4. How does it meet your own ideas about teaching objectives, methods and techniques?
5. Human and material resources.

Since the teachers have their own assumptions and expectations, it is important that the teaching situations be defined suggested by Tomlinson (2003a):

Students' needs (socio – cultural, socio – psychological, professional);

1. Overall aims of the course;
2. Specific objective to be aimed at; what language skills will have to be developed, and at which level;
3. Syllabus specification, in terms of language content, grading and structuring;
4. Present language level of students, which may need to be ascertained through a test;
5. Teaching methods and techniques;
6. Testing and valuation procedures;
7. Time allocation.

It is a procedure which involves one or more evaluators measuring the value of a set of learning materials. It involves making judgments about the effect of the materials on the people using them. The following aspects of course book evaluation suggested by Tomlinson (2003a) could be used for effective evaluation:

1. The appeal of the materials to the learners;
2. The credibility of the materials to learners, teachers, and administrators;
3. The validity of the materials (i. e is what they teach worth teaching?);
4. The reliability of the materials (i. e, would they have the same effect with different groups of target learners);
5. The ability of the materials to interest the learners and the teachers;
6. The ability of the materials to motivate the learners;
7. The value of the materials in terms of short – term learning (important, for example, for performance on tests and examinations);
8. The value of the materials in terms of long – term learning (of both language and communication skills);
9. The learner's perceptions of the value of the materials;
10. The teacher's perception of the value of the materials;
11. The assistance given to the teachers in terms of preparation, delivery and assessment;
12. The flexibility of the materials (e. g, the extent to which it is easy for a teacher to adapt the materials to suit a particular context);
13. The contribution made by the materials to teacher development;
14. The match with administrative requirements (e. g, standardization across classes, coverage of a syllabus, preparation for an examination).

As we know that no two evaluations could be the same since learners and teachers are different from context to context. The main point is that it is not the materials which are being evaluated but their effect on the people who come into contact with them (Tomlinson 2003a).

Though most classroom teachers will not be involved in the production of textbooks, all teachers have the responsibility for textbook evaluation, selection and adaptation. When devising any language learning course, it is absolutely essential to start with creating a learner profile and investigating the target learner's expectations about the different aspects of the course (Nunan, 1995; Harmer, 1991). Learner needs, apart from logistical considerations, administrative considerations, psychosocial considerations, are what a course designer has to take into account, according to Richards and Rodgers (1986). As Nunan (1987) suggests, the modern classrooms should experience a shift from a teacher – centered curriculum, decided upon in advance by the teacher, to a learner – centered one, where the purpose for learning, individual differences, learning styles preferences, interests determine to a large extent the content and methodology of the course.

1.2 Types of Materials Evaluation

There are different types of materials evaluation. Since the purposes of language materials evaluations are different, it is not easy to make generalizations about procedures which apply to all types. An evaluation may be carried out for the purpose of selecting a textbook, develop materials for publication; write a review for a journal or as a part of research project. So an evaluator could be a teacher, a learner, an editor, a researcher (Tomplison, 2003a). To conduct an effective evaluation, an evaluator needs to design a set of evaluation principles which are appro-

priate for the teaching situation.

There are usually three kinds of evaluations: pre – use evaluation, while – use evaluation and post – use evaluation. According to Tomlinson (2003a), pre – use evaluation is impressionistic and consist of a teacher flicking through a book to gain a quick impression of its potential value but while – use evaluation involves measuring the value of materials while using them or while observing them being used. It is more objective and reliable than pre – use evaluation since it does not make use of prediction. The areas of evaluation in the while – use evaluation include the following:

1. Clarity of instruction;
2. Clarity of layout;
3. Comprehensibility of texts;
4. Credibility of tasks;
5. Achievability of tasks;
6. Achievement of performance objective;
7. Potential for localization;
8. Practicality of the materials;
9. Teachability of the materials;
10. Flexibility of the materials;
11. Appeal of the materials;
12. Motivating power of the materials;
13. Impact of the materials;
14. Effectiveness in facilitating short – term learning.

The post – use evaluation can measure the actual effects of the materials on the users and the short – term effect of motivation, impact, achievability, instant learning, and act. And it can also measure the long – term effect as regards durable learning and application. According to Tomlinson (2003a), there are different ways of measuring the post –