

Book Reviews

Developing Materials for Language Teaching

Brian Tomlinson (Ed.)

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As foreign language teacher educators, we are often in search of materials that promote language learning. Depending on our teaching contexts, we are asked to adopt course textbooks or supplementary materials. Most language teachers might not necessarily be aware of principles that guide their language course material selection, adaptation, and evaluation. Brian Tomlinson's edited volume, titled *Developing Materials for Language Teaching*, provides key principles and conceptual frameworks for how to evaluate and adapt language materials and offers numerous practical tips for how to effectively and efficiently develop language materials that align with short- and long-term language-learning objectives.

This edited volume is divided into 26 chapters that are neatly arranged into four parts. Chapters 1–3 (Part 1) comprise historical as well as current perspectives on material development in language teaching while highlighting the importance of principled methods regarding the development, adaptation, and evaluation of language materials. Chapters 4–11 (Part 2) include information about key principles and procedures of materials development and describe a (mis)match between language acquisition research findings and current practices in materials development. Chapters 12–16 (Part 3) focus on essentials for developing materials for target groups, while Chapters 17–26 (Part 4) offer recommendations for developing materials for specific types of skills. This volume includes Tomlinson's comments at the end of each part, in which he integrates ideas from specific chapters in one short essay that is organized around a central theme or question.

The entire volume aims to debunk myths surrounding materials development for language teaching and provides frameworks for developing both coursebooks and supplementary classroom materials. In the introductory chapter, Tomlinson provides a general overview of the book and defines the two key terms, *language materials* and *materials development*. Tomlinson's views of what constitutes language materials is that they "could obviously be videos, DVDs, emails, YouTube, dictionaries, grammar books, readers, workbooks or photocopied exercises ... newspapers, food packages, photographs, live talks given by invited native speakers, instructions given by a teacher, tasks written on cards or discussions between learners" (p. 2). The term *materials development* refers to the "actual carrying out of the procedures of designing, developing, monitoring, revising, producing and using language teaching materials" (p. 1). Furthermore, Tomlinson presents a list of key questions (e.g., *How should materials be evaluated? Who should develop materials? Should texts be authentic?* etc.) that are pertinent to developing materials for foreign language teaching that help critically evaluate the validity and authenticity of language materials.

The volume asserts that developing materials for language teaching involves mutual understanding and relationships among several agents: researchers, practitioners, material writers, administrators, teachers, and, most importantly, learners. In Chapter 21, Dat Bao states that "course authors and research scholars in L2 learning often do not communicate while a textbook is being created" (p. 432). To reinvigorate productive communication within the language teaching materials sector, the contributing authors also recommend organizations such as the Materials Development Association (MATSDA) and Materials Writing Special Interest Groups (MAWSIG), which provide a forum for groups of professionals by organizing online and in-person sessions and offering several blog and video posts about principled

materials writing. It is the goal of the volume to bring together teachers, learners, material developers, researchers, and publishers to discuss issues about materials development.

Developing materials for language teaching should be informed from the empirical findings of fields such as applied linguistics and second language acquisition (SLA). Many teacher educators (e.g., Graves, 2019; Jordan & Gray, 2019; Mishan, 2022) have expressed reservations about “the shaky relationship between the coursebooks intended to teach the language and the research that explores this process” (Mishan, 2022, p. 497). In Chapter 18, Paul Nation argues that “good materials design does not leave learning to chance” (p. 389). Activities should reflect on advances in SLA research, and the entire volume builds on the idea that developing materials is not an ad hoc or spontaneous endeavour. Instead, the work’s goal is to make coursebooks as principled as possible and integrate activities that actively promote language learning. Language materials, whether designed for adult or young learners, “should encourage creativity, ... be engaging, ... be innovative, teacher- and learner-friendly, ... raise awareness of one’s own culture and other cultures (pp. 209–210). Many contributing authors (see Chapters 1, 5, 17, and 19) to the volume argue that most publishers tend to focus on the sale of language textbooks rather than effectively informing language materials with research findings in applied linguistics and SLA.

Furthermore, this volume is a valuable resource for diverse audience groups such as foreign language teachers, teacher trainers, textbook authors, and SLA researchers. The work also contains chapters that discuss materials development, not only in English but also in other foreign languages such as Finnish, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Urdu (see Chapters 2, 3, 7, 12, 14, and 16). Teacher educators in university-based language teacher training programs can find these chapters informative for their courses in the areas of material development, TESOL techniques, and language teaching methods. Each chapter concludes with a Reader’s Tasks section, which provides well-structured, hands-on exercises to complement the theoretical and methodological discussions covered in the chapters. Graduate students or teacher educators interested in pursuing experimental research into the effects of materials on effective and durable learning might find the volume particularly insightful. The work also offers readily accessible answers to common questions regarding developing and adapting language materials designed for the four teacher skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), including grammar and vocabulary (see Part 4 for more details).

Although this edited volume has a companion website for online resources, it contains only a PDF version of a couple of chapters from the book itself. The contributing authors could have uploaded the colour versions of the numerous black-and-white sample pages and screenshots (see Chapters 3, 6, 13, etc.) to illustrate examples taken from paper textbooks and their digital alternatives. Despite this minor issue, *Developing Materials for Language Teaching* contains frameworks and key considerations for developing materials tailored for language education and provides historical perspectives, current trends, and future developmental trajectories with regard to both digital and traditional (paper) materials in language education.

The Reviewers

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