

Using Language Learning Materials

Using Language Learning Materials:

Theory and Practice

Edited by

Claudia Fernández and Adon Berwick

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PREFACE

BRIAN TOMLINSON

The genesis of this book was the MATSDA/University of Liverpool 2019 Conference on *Using Language Learning Materials: Theory and Practice*, which was held at the University of Liverpool on June 15th–16th, 2019. The plenary speakers were Rod Bolitho, Anne Marie Guerrettaz, Carmen Herrero, Alan Maley, Hitomi Masuhara and Brian Tomlinson, who all gave stimulating presentations on how teachers actually use their materials in the classroom. In addition, practitioners and researchers from twenty-five countries worldwide presented their research findings, their observations and their proposals for action in relation to materials development, teacher development and materials use.

MATSDA (the International Materials Development Association) is an association which was founded in 1993 and is dedicated to bringing together teachers, materials developers, publishers, and researchers in a joint endeavor to increase the effectiveness of materials development and use (www.matsda.org). We hold an international Conference each year (in 2018 at the Shanghai International Studies University and in 2021 with Universiti Sains Malaysia), we publish our journal *Folio* twice a year, we run workshops which feature expert facilitators motivating and monitoring materials developed at the workshop, and we sometimes run materials development competitions. We also often publish books based on our conference themes featuring written versions of presentations made at the conferences. For example, *Applied Linguistics and Materials Development* (a book edited by Brian Tomlinson and published by Bloomsbury in 2013) was based on a MATSDA Conference on that theme held at the University of Limerick and *SLA Research and Materials Development for Language Learning* (a book edited by Brian Tomlinson and published by Routledge in 2016) was based on a conference on that theme held at the University of Liverpool. We have also published numerous books based on our conferences with Cambridge Scholars, the publishers of this book.

We were very happy with the 2019 Conference on *Using Language Learning Materials: Theory and Practice* and decided to publish a book on that very important topic. We needed an Editor and decided to approach

Claudia Fernández, a presenter at the 2019 MATSDA Conference. Claudia approached Adon Berwick to co-edit the book with her, they approached presenters at the 2019 MATSDA Conference and then they submitted a proposal to Cambridge Scholars and this book was born.

This is a book which features chapters on the role of the learners and the role of the instructors in classroom use of language learning materials and which does so in reporting studies of how materials are actually used in seven different countries and in the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors of education. We hope you will enjoy it and gain from its insights.

Brian Tomlinson
Founder and President of MATSDA
TESOL Professor, University of Anaheim;
Honorary Visiting Professor, University of Liverpool

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The editors wish to thank the authors whose chapters have been included in this volume. We are aware of the unprecedented challenges that the year 2020 brought to many of us, and want to acknowledge their resilience and hard work to get their manuscripts ready for this volume.

Many thanks to the invaluable help of our external reviewers, all members of the MUSE International group (<https://museinternational.wordpress.com>), for kindly agreeing to review the manuscripts and for their suggestions to improve them. They are: Raquel Criado, Mel Engman, Marcus Grandon, Di Liang, and Nausica Marcos Miguel.

Many thanks to everyone who attended and presented at the MATSDA/University of Liverpool conference in June 2019. The conference would not have been possible without the invaluable work of Brian Tomlinson, Filomena Saltao, and Hitomi Masuhara.

We would like to thank Adam Rummens, Rebecca Gladders and the team at Cambridge Scholars Publishing for their support and patience during the creation of this volume.

And last but not least, many thanks to Brian Tomlinson for giving us the opportunity to edit this timely volume and be part of this exciting project.

Claudia Fernández
Adon Berwick
Chicago, U.S.A. & Brisbane, Australia,
April, 2022

INTRODUCTION

CLAUDIA R. FERNÁNDEZ AND ADON BERWICK

There is no doubt that a central aspect in the language teaching profession is to create, evaluate, and use materials. Materials play a central role in what teachers do as they serve as tools to facilitate and promote learning. Even if teachers do not write their own materials, and mostly use those created by others (such as commercial textbooks), they are still material creators, evaluators, and users. Inquiry into *materials research*, the overarching term proposed by Gray (2012) to refer to the study of language teaching materials, has mainly focused on the domains of development and evaluation (McGrath 2013; Mishan and Timmis 2015; Tomlinson 2013) with these gaining prominence as important, even essential, aspects of teacher education. In the last few years, however, researchers have recognised that in addition to the materials development and materials evaluation domains, a third domain of materials research should also focus specifically on materials use (Garton and Graves 2014; Graves 2019; Graves and Garton 2019; Gray 2012; Tomlinson 2012). This domain directs attention to the complex interactions between the teachers, learners, and materials with current research not only seeking to identify the nature of such materials, but also the complexity of these interactions. Research into *materials use* is concerned with what teachers and learners do with the materials when they enact the materials; or simply stated: action with or around materials that promotes learning (Guerrettaz 2021).

Scholars argue we need to understand more about how materials are used so that this knowledge can be used to inform the future development of materials (Graves 2019; Tomlinson and Masuhara 2018). Such knowledge is crucial because the effectiveness of materials greatly depends on how materials are enacted in the classroom. Research into materials use reveals significant information about the learning-teaching process: it can inform more effective teacher preparation and training, help to improve the pedagogical effectiveness of materials, highlight the interactions of teachers and learners with materials, and provide insights into how language acquisition occurs. Given the centrality of materials and the importance of the dynamics between materials and their users, it is certainly exciting to

see a turn towards researching how materials are actually used in language learning contexts, attested by the MATSDA 2019 / University of Liverpool conference *Using Language Learning Materials*, as well as the number of recent research agendas appearing in the literature (see Garton and Graves 2014; Guerrettaz et al. in press; Harwood 2021). The purpose of this volume is to contribute to the emerging body of research on materials use by advancing our understanding of how materials are used in the classroom and the factors that influence their use.

Another critical term important to define in materials use is *enactment*, which has been referred to by researchers as “the process by which the *written* curriculum materials become transformed into a *real* teaching experience in the classroom setting” (Li and Harfitt 2017, 404, emphasis in original). Written curriculum materials form part of what is the *formal curriculum* (Doyle 1992) or *intended curriculum* (Harwood 2017); that is, pedagogical decision making (including the preparation of materials) that takes place before actual instruction. The *enacted curriculum* is “jointly constructed by teachers, students, and materials in particular contexts” (Ball and Cohen 1996, 7). It is this view of the co-construction of the curriculum by teachers and learners with materials that we feel better reflects the processes involved in materials use. Differentiating the intended and enacted curriculums foregrounds the role of the instructors’ insights and decision-making processes as agentive forces in transforming the curriculum according to their contexts and needs. These definitions are important because they help us to better conceptualise the domain of materials use and to understand that using materials is a complex undertaking because of the critical, multifaceted, and dynamic nature of this endeavour.

Given the complexities, the areas that make up the domain of materials use are vast and diverse. It is beyond the scope of this volume to present them all; however, the contributions in this volume call attention to three main areas that are important to advance our understanding on how materials are used. The first refers to the critical information that can be gathered by materials writers when observing how teachers (and learners) use their materials, and by doing so, develop materials in a more effective way. Another is the role of the teachers’ cognitive characteristics that influence their use of materials, such as their beliefs about language, knowledge of the target language, the nature of second language teaching/learning, and views on using their textbooks. The third aspect is materials adaptation, or “the process that involves making changes to existing materials to better suit specific learners, teachers and contexts for the purpose of facilitating effective learning” (Tomlinson and Masuhara

2018, 82). What follows is a brief summary of how the chapters in this volume address these three areas of materials use research.

In Chapters One and Two, materials use is seen from the lens of the materials writer, in particular during the piloting phases of materials development. These chapters describe and analyse how, by observing how teachers and learners interact with materials during the piloting phase, materials writers are better able to improve them. In Chapter One, **Tony Waterman** presents a reflective account on how materials are used during the piloting process of a completely new coursebook for a technical English course for Forward Air Controllers working for the Royal Air Force of Oman in the Sultanate of Oman. It addresses potential challenges in materials development and how material writers might address them to produce more effective teaching materials. Rather than focusing on how the teacher used the materials, the piloting phase focuses on how learners work with the materials and the feedback provided as the teacher used the materials as intended by the writer. The challenges are identified and categorised, and potential revisions are suggested as examples of what writers can expect working in their own contexts. This chapter shows the importance of the materials writers to observe how users actually use their own materials in order to improve them, a practice that unfortunately is not common in the development of commercial materials.

In Chapter Two, **Umar Muhammad-Gombe** reports the piloting process of materials designed to promote rule discovery of the adjectival differentiation in Hausa by native speakers of Kanuri in Nigeria. Similar to Chapter One, he reports how, by observing learners using the materials as they were intended, the materials writer can identify characteristics of the materials in need of improvement, and how to make them more effective for learning the target forms. The observation and subsequent reflection by materials writers on how their materials are used by learners are key to improve their effectiveness. This author's account describes what teachers go through when using materials as originally intended, and then, upon observing learners working with them, adapting them to improve their potential to promote learning. Both Chapters One and Two present an approach to materials development that puts materials use at the centre of the process. Rather than writing the materials and expecting teachers (and learners) to adhere to them, they are developed by observing how their users use them, and based on that information, modified to better suit learner needs.

A common practice of teachers when using materials is adaptation. It has been observed that teachers make adaptations on a regular basis and for a myriad of reasons either consciously or unconsciously (Islam and Mares

2003; Li and Harfitt 2017; Tomlinson and Masuhara 2018). Materials adaptation also views the instructor as an able and active agent when preparing and enacting the curriculum (McDonough, Shaw, and Masuhara 2013; Remillard 2005). However, concerns raised by scholars are not only the little training that teachers receive on materials adaptation (Graves and Garton 2019), but also a common belief among some teachers that textbooks should not be adapted, but followed as scripts (Tomlinson and Masuhara, 2018). In Chapter Three, **Claudia Saraceni** reports on the limitations of published materials in several second languages and makes an argument for the necessity to adapt activities to improve teaching effectiveness. Within a framework of students' identity and voice, she found that given the narrow, controlled nature of most of the activities in the textbooks, these materials do not promote learners' needs and wants to communicate purposefully and meaningfully. This can affect the development of learners' autonomy and critical skills. The chapter provides recommendations for adapting materials to develop learner criticality and to empower learner identity and voice. These techniques can promote the diverse nature of language use in the classroom: not through imitation, practice, or controlled production, but through self-expression.

Teachers' cognitive characteristics are a powerful factor that influence the use of materials, and one that has attracted much interest (e.g., Li and Harfitt 2017; Remillard 2005). What teachers believe about the nature of language along with language learning and teaching greatly influences their perspectives about materials and how they read, interpret, evaluate, and enact them in the classroom (Menkabu and Harwood 2014). In Chapter Four, **Tamas Kiss** and **Ji Li** explore this phenomenon by analysing the decision-making processes of an English for Academic Purposes instructor as he enacts the teaching materials in a Sino-British university in mainland China. Using teacher cognition (Borg 2006) as its conceptual framework, this qualitative case study investigates how unique individual beliefs interact with more commonly held and socially anchored values. Such values come into play when the instructor resorts to classroom techniques for which the materials were not designed, and are not in line with the communicative, learner-centred approaches advocated by the institution.

Chapters Five and Six are empirical studies carried out in actual classrooms that address two areas of materials use: materials adaptations and teacher cognition. In Chapter Five, **Susanna Schwab** investigates how an English as a foreign language textbook is used in elementary schools in Switzerland. Through in-classroom observations, she identified the extent to which the several adaptation techniques introduced in McDonough, Shaw, and Masuhara (2013), McGrath (2016), and Shower (2010) were put

to use by four teachers. She describes the wide range of techniques and strategies used by the teachers using the same material, and discusses factors such as experience, beliefs, and training that influence how these materials were used. One important concept that she introduces as a result of her observations is “textbook awareness” and how it can impact an effective use of the textbook.

In Chapter six, **Asma Aftab** investigates, through classroom observations, surveys, and teacher interviews, the nature of different types of materials to teach English as a second language in eleven Pakistani schools, as well as teachers’ perceptions of the textbook and how they are reflected in its use. Most teachers observed in this study perceive the textbook as an authoritative tool and use it as script rather than as a resource (a situation commonly reported in the literature, see Tomlinson and Masuhara 2018, for example). In addition, the supplemental materials (i.e., worksheets) that some teachers used were traditional grammatical exercises. Such strong adherence to the textbook and the little evidence of teachers’ adapting and supplementing materials to compensate for shortcomings in the textbooks led the author to conclude that most teachers were teaching the textbook rather than the language. This is because most of the teachers had limited pedagogical training in language teaching and were concerned that modifying or supplementing the textbook would confuse the students, thus affecting their performance in examinations. This study addresses an important aspect of teaching education that is concerned with preparing teachers to adopt materials in order promote their own confidence and more effective language teaching (Graves and Garton 2019).

In Chapter Seven, **Claudia Fernández** explores materials adaptation by reporting how instructors use an innovative textbook within a task-based Spanish as a second language curriculum at university level in the U.S.A. Based on Remillard’s (1999) model of curriculum development as the conceptual framework, the study identified, through a survey and interviews, how instructors use a newly adopted textbook, specifically whether and to what extent adaptations were made and the reasons for these adaptations. She discusses the participants’ rationale to adapt the new textbook, the role of both training and experience in materials adaptation, and the role that supplemental materials, such as the Teachers’ Guide—an aspect of materials use that has been little investigated (Harwood 2021), may play to support instructors effective use of innovative materials.

In Chapter Eight, **Adon Berwick** concludes the volume by revisiting some of the themes that arise from the chapters and posing questions that

practitioners and researchers may consider for future investigations into the use of language learning materials.

The use of language learning materials is a burgeoning domain of research. What is required are more empirical studies to investigate and unpack the processes and factors by which instructors make decisions about using materials in the way that they do. Such a body of knowledge would allow us to develop theories that help us better understand such a crucial dynamic in the language teaching and learning profession. It is our hope that this volume makes a valuable contribution to this body of knowledge and helps advance this domain of materials use research.

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CHAPTER ONE

PILOTING: FROM INSPIRED MATERIALS TO CLASSROOM REALITIES

TONY WATERMAN

Introduction

This chapter aims to present a reflective and insightful account of how materials are used during the piloting process of a completely new coursebook for a new technical English course for Forward Air Controllers (FACs) working for the Royal Air Force of Oman in the Sultanate of Oman. It addresses potential challenges and how educationalists might address them to produce more effective teaching and learning materials. The challenges were categorised, and potential revisions are suggested as examples of what educationalists can expect working in their own contexts.

The chapter considers the importance of piloting materials and of using them with unpractised learners in the classroom within the process of coursebook development. The term “unpractised learners” is used in this chapter to describe those learners who are new to the target language of the coursebook syllabus, which may focus on specialised lexis and/or functional language, as well as specialised content related to an English for specific purposes (ESP) or English for Academic purposes (EAP) learning domain, in the case under review here, the highly specialised work of air force forward air controllers. Furthermore, unpractised learners can also refer to learners who are not familiar with certain sub-skills or activity-types specific to the ESP or EAP learning domain. Such unpractised learners will be indicative of future learners who will use the materials in terms of: successful language acquisition; effective skills work carried out both in the classroom and during self-study; and efficient use of domain-specific language and work- or study-related tasks. Having such feedback from unpractised learners will provide the materials piloter with an accurate view

of how effective the new materials actually are in the target learning context.

Materials piloting should ensure the materials are fit-for-purpose (Guo 2018) in terms of linguistic accuracy, content, specific skills, pedagogic realities and assessment requirements. These materials may include: the student book; the teacher's book; peripherals such as workbook and/or activity books; audio, video and digital materials; and review and revision activities together with assessment tools.

Using new materials with unpractised learners is vital for the writer to see and appreciate how they are, or are not, providing clear, effective presentation and practice of relevant language, sub-skills and content. The experience of using the new materials in the classroom then informs the writer of the revisions needed and how best to revise problematic materials. It is essential that all parts of a new course are piloted including any peripherals together with all assessment tools. Examples of problematic materials are examined together with potential revisions to ensure revised materials promote effective learning.

From this examination, potential strategies and practices are offered together with a framework for approaching piloting of new materials, which could be adopted, adapted or used to inspire innovative practices by writers who need to engage in materials piloting in a wide variety of learning contexts worldwide.

Key aspects in piloting materials

In terms of the whole writing process, once the decision has been taken to produce a course, the writer begins with a comprehensive needs analysis (NA). Benesch (2001) considers NA to be an essential principle underpinning ESP course design and Richards (2001) emphasises the importance of discovering the learners' genuine needs. Long (2005) sets out a comprehensive approach to the collection of data to support syllabus design and ensure coverage of learners' current and future learning contexts.

A needs analysis typically relies on data sources such as key stakeholders, documentation and relevant artefacts, and ideally relies on input from stakeholders across several stages of piloting. The writer gathers NA data to find out what the learners know and do not know at the present moment using a present situation analysis (PSA). NA data could be collected by studying course material the learners have already studied, course tests completed, interviews with their language teachers, and interviews with a sample of learners to see how much they know about the ESP or EAP domain which they are preparing to work/study in. This PSA data is then complemented by a future situation analysis (FSA) which collects NA data

to discover from stakeholders what the learners need to know for their future employment or studies. Such stakeholders could include: domain experts, such as trainers or academic lecturers; future colleagues; former learners; and current or former teachers. The writer conducting such an NA will hopefully enjoy access to all relevant and useful stakeholders and to any documentation which broadens the NA and/or may be usable as course material. Potentially useful documents or artefacts could include: examples of correspondence; reports; procedures and safety precautions; posters and signs; diagrams and plans; and specific paperwork relating to the specialised area of study.

Needs analysis data inform the construction of an initial syllabus including domain specific content and specific linguistic resources and sub-skills required, as identified by the NA, outlined by the course's overarching training objectives (TOs) and detailed in the learning outcomes (LOs). This detailed syllabus will then guide the production of the student book, the teacher's book and any required peripherals. Once all the materials have been completed, assessment material can be produced either by the course writer and/or by an examinations team.

At this point, or even during the writing process, McKernan (2008) suggests that if English Language Teaching (ELT) personnel are available, it is advisable to engage colleagues within the institution such as English language teacher colleagues and particularly local English teachers, to review the materials, and hence make use of their extensive knowledge of the local learning context (Lenning and Ebbers 1999). Domain experts, such as technical trainers or academic lecturers, should also be involved (McKernan 2008) to study and offer suggestions for pre-piloting revisions to be made to avoid presenting learners with ineffective materials, a measure in line with Ellis' (1997) notion of pre-use evaluation of materials. Such predictive evaluation should result in pre-use revisions to avoid confusion in the classroom and preclude the wasting of valuable class time.

Materials piloting with unpractised learners is conducted towards the end of the production process when the writer requires feedback on how effective the new course is in the classroom before it can be released to potentially large numbers of teachers in multiple locations. Materials piloting can be undertaken with one or more classes of learners depending on the scale of the project from in-house to country-wide, in keeping with Tomlinson's (2011) notion of analysing materials when they are materials-in-action. That is to say, when materials are used by unpractised learners in the classroom with the piloter being able to see exactly the way the lessons unfold as driven by the materials. Such classroom observation can reveal both successful material and shortcomings or even disasters, which will all require revisions, both minor or major, which no amount of professional

colleagues' proof-reading or focus group discussion work may uncover. Indeed, Tomlinson and Masuhara (2018, 72) reiterate this belief that trialling is "the most reliable way of gaining information about the effectiveness of the materials for their users".

Classroom piloting is usually carried out following a multi-stage process. The first stage may have the materials writer conduct an initial classroom pilot after which the piloter/writer will make any revisions identified during his/her classroom piloting, thereby avoiding potentially confusing or unhelpful material being handed to teachers to pilot. The second stage will have several teachers conducting classroom piloting. After stage two, the writer will want to collect all piloting feedback data and make necessary revisions before the materials are used again. Stage three will have teachers piloting the revised materials after which the writer again collects all piloting feedback data to inform a second set of revisions. Then the materials will be handed to the institution for use on-site or potentially across multiple sites.

The materials writer is the closest to and most knowledgeable about the target domain and materials, and therefore an ideal professional to conduct the initial stage of the piloting process. The materials writer has gained specific knowledge during the NA, syllabus construction and materials production process to inform the piloting and resulting revision process (Donovan 1998). As Macalister and Nation (2011) point out, if the materials producers and the materials pilots are not the same educators, then planned procedures and processes may not be followed and course objectives may not be attained.

Minor revisions may be simple and immediate to address, such as rectifying a spelling or grammar error. However, many types of revisions necessitate more time, thought and action to enact, such as amending instructions so a task works more effectively, abandoning or replacing a confusing or unusable task (Hadfield 2014) or even re-writing a series of activities or an entire unit. In all cases, the materials piloter should minimise disruption to learners or excessive loss of valuable class time.

Once the materials writer has piloted the materials and made necessary revisions, the new course can then be handed over to classroom teachers to pilot so as to gather their feedback which may provide alternative or supplementary professional, pedagogic or cultural insights and suggestions. It is essential that evaluation of materials relates to the target context of learning (Richards 2014) and that the materials writer-piloter is aware of the potential effects of "teacher beliefs, materials and (their) use, exam washback and teacher education" (Tomlinson and Masuhara 2018, 97) within the local learning context.

After a second piloting, it is essential that writers collect and carefully examine written feedback backed up with face-to-face exchanges of information from the teachers (Richards 2001). This should ensure feedback is exploited to the full and that the teachers see that their extra effort expended during piloting is both valued and leads to more efficient learning. Subsequent re-piloting of materials may be necessary, particularly in technically focused areas when rapid technological advances dictate updates in order to maintain accuracy, relevance and usefulness which in turn safeguards “fitness to the learning purpose” (Hutchinson and Waters 1987, 159). For the purposes of this chapter, an example of using and piloting an English for Military Purposes (EMP) course is outlined to gain insight into some of the challenges encountered and potential solutions available to writers during the revision process.

Learning objectives, teaching frameworks, and context

The materials piloting process I describe here involved developing a completely new coursebook for a new technical course—English for Forward Air Controllers (FACs)—working for the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) in the Sultanate of Oman. The learning objectives of the course were constructed and sequenced in an order to help learners achieve the objectives incrementally which would address the overarching training objectives below:

1. Learn and use highly specific terminology related to FAC military radio conversations.
2. Interact orally in military radio conversations directly related to the work of FACs.

The coursebook was created following content-based, text-based, and conversation-based materials frameworks. Content-based material consisted of bespoke written or audio texts supplemented with military photos which presented factual information and examples of how specific areas of an FAC’s work is conducted to inform the inexperienced learners of key aspects of an FAC’s duties. Text-based material consisted of written or audio texts supported by visual input presenting the most important specialised language needed by these hopeful FAC trainees during their subsequent technical course, conducted in English, prior to their becoming fully-trained FAC’s. Conversation-based materials included audio examples of actual FAC radio conversations followed by speaking practice material, usually conducted in pairs, to acquire the specialised EMP they would require as FAC trainees.

Table 1.1 Example units with overarching training objectives

		Training Objectives (TOs)	
Unit		The learner will be able to:	
1	FAC overview	identify and describe key FAC duties	
3	Topographical features	recognise, and use key topographical features accurately in R/T	
5	Map reading	use compass points and map coordinates accurately in R/T	
8	Weather	describe weather conditions accurately in R/T	

R/T = radio telephony

The coursebook was constructed as twelve themed units with overarching training objectives (TOs) covering essential areas of study (see Table 1.1) with each activity/exercise being written to fulfil a specific learning objective (LO), (see Table 1.2), together with re-cycling and review materials, and assessment tools. Assessment comprised of a mid-course test and a final examination with all parts of the tests mirroring the types of exercises learners had had throughout their course. The twenty learners were all Omani males, aged 19–25, members of the Royal Air Force of Oman and wearing its uniform at all times during the working day, with Arabic as their first language (L1). The learners had four 45-minute classes five mornings a week for six weeks with their English language teacher, complemented by a daily 45-minute period of self-study, with any needed extra study undertaken during the afternoons / evenings.

Table 1.2 Example section of a unit with learning outcomes (LOs)

		Learning Outcomes (LOs)	
Learners will be able to ...		Key language	Activity + skill practised: R; L; V; Sp; W
3.1	Recognise and describe key natural topographical features	cliff low sand dunes ridge rocks trees wadi	Task One – Match descriptions with photos by reading a text [R/V] Task Two – Match words with definitions [V] Task Three – Produce sentences from prompts [W] Task Four – Describe natural features [Sp]

R = reading for content / language
V = vocabulary work
W = written consolidation work

L = listening for content / language
Sp = speaking practice

During the NA process, I had worked very closely with the FAC instructors for approximately six months to produce the coursebook and then piloted it myself with the first batch of trainee FACs to receive this extra English support for their future careers in RAFO. The English for FACs coursebook was planned as a twelve-unit, six-week intensive course and this was the time it took to pilot it and make a substantial number of revisions with the rest being completed over a two-month period after the end of the course. As an education officer, I had signed the Omani Official Secrets Act and therefore cannot divulge any examples of military conversations, protocols or technical content relating to the work of a RAFO FAC. However, I am able to describe how selected materials were used, the types of challenges the learners and myself faced during the piloting process and the strategies I used to correct, change and enhance both course material and assessment tools ready for other educational officers to use. Whilst these challenges relate to a highly specific type of ESP course, many of the strategies for making revisions to address these challenges will be similar or at least familiar to those which ELT writers may encounter in ESP, English for general purposes (EGP), or EAP in learning contexts worldwide. Some revisions may involve creative strategies resulting in innovative materials and activities being produced in response to classroom realities and materials seen to fail to address either local learning contexts and/or syllabus requirements. In such scenarios, it may be incumbent on the materials writer to produce detailed teacher notes in the revised teacher's book to support other teachers when they use the new coursebook.

Pre-piloting phase

All key stakeholders, in this case the Principal and Deputy Principal of the Operations Training Wing, the Standards officer, FAC trainers and current FACs—both officers and NCOs (non-commissioned officers)—were involved in the materials piloting process. Clear explanations were given to senior stakeholders of just what the piloting process would and wouldn't do so that when a major problem arose, they had already been appraised of such an eventuality and hopefully wouldn't lose confidence in the project, in keeping with van Lier's (1996) notion of providing reassurance to stakeholders that the new course is progressing in a satisfactory manner.

Learners also need to be informed that because this is a piloted course, there will be problems but that the process will be improving the material. Moreover, by asking learners to help improve the course for other learners who would follow them, they are imbued with a sense of importance in their interaction with the materials piloter and encouraged to point out when

something is wrong, unhelpful or in need of change. Actively seeking learners' input during piloting enables the piloter to benefit from learners' viewpoints and experiences in the piloting classroom (Kerfoot 1993).

Teaching and piloting simultaneously add to the cognitive workload of the piloter or teacher. This is because of the need to both enact all those customary thought-processes as a teacher together with those required as a materials piloter. Therefore, I organised the timetable so I would have time each day, immediately after the four classes, to study my field notes written during the classes, maximise my memory recall, reflect on the challenges noted, and identify possible ways to rectify problematic materials. I also selected the best ways for me to make notes during the classes. This could be a separate notes sheet or making notes on the actual materials themselves (see Figures 1.6 and 1.7 below) or another way of quickly noting down immediate thoughts clearly, not to mention legibly, in real time so I could address each challenge later. I needed to be prepared for any and all types of challenges, from a missing apostrophe to the need to re-write a whole unit, if necessary.

Preparation for the first day of the course included checking that all essential learner- and teacher-materials were ready for use: learner coursebooks and a teacher's book; audio materials; test practice materials and all assessment material; and any administrative documentation such as attendance records and absentee permissions, reports and test result forms. I had also prepared resources for use on a digital classroom board (SMART board or similar) such as materials suitable for digital presentation, together with clear answer keys for efficient checking of classwork, self-study work and homework.

Purely practical aspects of teaching and piloting also include ensuring the classroom being used is set up with the right number of chairs and desks, fully functioning audio and visual equipment, and that all pedagogic peripherals such as board markers and remote controls are present and working.

During the piloting phase: Materials use and revisions

My materials piloting approach is closely aligned with Tomlinson's (1999, 54) notion of an evaluation which "makes judgements about the effects of materials on their users" during piloting in the classroom and which are based on local criteria (Tomlinson 2003). Taking Tomlinson's notion and applying it to my many years piloting my EMP courses, I have compiled a significant number of challenges and used them to construct categories of the types of challenges which I have encountered (Table 1.3). These

challenges have become evident during classroom piloting with military learners where both my own evaluations of the materials-in-action (Tomlinson 2011) together with those of other teacher/pilots, and also the learners involved, have played a critical role in the production of more effective materials. Being aware of these categories and building up a mental record of example challenges and potential solutions often enables me to make revisions efficiently and effectively rather than begin from zero when addressing every shortcoming in the material.

Table 1.3 Categories of challenges

Challenges
1. Materials layout and appearance
2. Making materials more learner- / teacher-friendly
3. Adjusting learner challenge
4. Making pedagogic changes
5. Ensuring domain-specific accuracy
6. Major revisions

These categories can be generic in nature or specific depending on the requirements of the materials piloting process in terms of level of the materials, the content, the specificity of the syllabus, and specialised needs of the learners, such as balance of skills, domain-specific activities and use of the language. Working in ESP, EAP or other areas of ELT will involve the construction of a syllabus which informs the materials produced covering often highly-specific aspects of content, skills work and language. Therefore, the piloter must be ready to note and then seek support from domain experts to clarify if the ELT material is both correctly used and relevant to the needs of the learners.

Materials layout and appearance

I have started with these types of revision as they are generally the first thing educationalists think of when materials piloting and revisions are mentioned but the order is purely arbitrary here and open to re-ordering and extending as individual needs arise. Examples of materials layout and appearance include:

1. Mistakes with spelling, punctuation and grammar
2. Textual considerations
3. Design and formatting of written tasks
4. Maintaining accuracy and consistency of referencing devices

Responding to challenges presented during materials piloting in terms of materials layout and appearance is important for as Tomlinson (2011, 110) recommends, “teachers engaged in writing materials need to develop the same care and attention to presentation that one would expect of good publishers”. The materials piloter needs to be ready to find mistakes with spelling, punctuation and grammar which the computer’s spellchecker has not corrected. Textual considerations such as font type, size, style, and colour must be large enough to be clearly legible, in particular any presentation material and answer keys to be presented on the SMART board or other digital board or computer screen. Written tasks should be designed to give sufficient space for learners to write answers, sentences or paragraphs, bearing in mind that some learners’, for example many Arabic L1 learners’ handwriting is bigger and necessitates more space than native speakers’ and other learners’ handwriting, and certainly more space than digitally produced scripts in English coursebooks.

Challenges with accuracy and consistency of referencing devices refer to changes needed across a number of artefacts such as the student book, teacher’s book and digital resources for use on the SMART board. Such revisions can occur multiple times and if not corrected, can easily lead to confusion for both learners and the teacher resulting in wasted class time. Such revisions often take significant time to rectify but are essential to ensure the production of professional and user-friendly material. Referencing devices are quoted repeatedly in student and teachers’ books, workbooks, activity books, tapescripts and actual audio recordings, task rubrics, the syllabus, schedules of work, contents tables, on-line materials and more and necessitate diligent checking to maintain consistency and accuracy.

Making materials more learner- and teacher-friendly

Enacting revisions to make the materials more user-friendly should always be a priority. Two examples of making materials more learner- and teacher-friendly include:

1. Simplifying instructions and examples
2. Using learner feedback to enact revisions, possibly deleting material completely

Speaking activities require careful, thoughtful piloting since such activities can involve many *moving* parts. That is to say the learners are not working under the direct control of their teacher but with both pedagogic artefacts and with each other. The speaking activity presented below (Figure 1.1) re-cycles the language of the unit using the same, or similar visuals to

those already studied so that learners are not presented with a single photo for each language item but are exposed to a variety of visuals depicting target lexis (Waterman 2019). The idea of having secret cards and guessing what their partners are describing may be new to learners and/or teachers so having clear instructions is essential. Replacing pedagogic jargon and producing short sentences with imperative verb forms and a minimum of detail can all be effective. Likewise, selecting lexis known to the learners/teachers and keeping individual stages of any example short, simple and clear should avoid confusion and exemplify exactly what is required of the learners.

After the initial materials piloting, it became clear that the suggested procedures in the original teacher's book for the activity shown in Figure 1.1 needed to be shorter (e.g., Make enough sets of cards; Pairs work through the cards; Teacher monitors the task and then the language produced). Without unnecessary information these revised procedures should present teachers with easy-to-follow instructions for setting up and running the pair work activity successfully.

Initial materials piloting may expose textual content, tasks, visuals and even tests which are highly problematic for the learners and impede them from using recently learned language successfully. That is why I encouraged my learners to give feedback at the end of tasks and units. For example, after one time-consuming task involving headings and directions, they expressed a certain disappointment that, unlike most tasks so far, this writing task was both too long and did not add anything useful. I asked for suggestions while I studied the actual content of the task in relation to the whole unit and, after receiving no learner suggestions, I told them the task would simply be deleted and not replaced as the unit already had sufficient practice and they were progressing well.

Task Four – Describing natural features  Teacher's notes

Suggested procedures:

1. You will need to make a set of cards for each pair so you may need to make 10 photocopies of each of the two sheets of photos for your 20 learners. Cut up each of the two sheets and place the 'cards' in an envelope, which you can make out of a single sheet of A4.

2. Give the class clear instructions and follow this up with an example as follows. Place a set of cards face down in front of a pair at the front of the class and take the top card keeping it secret. You describe the feature without saying the name of the feature:

This is a ...
There are ...

Encourage one of the two learners to try and guess the name of the natural feature. Once he has guessed correctly, you place your card face up and your 'partner' follows the same procedure by taking the next card and using it with his partner.

3. Now give out the sets of cards face down and pairs work through the cards. When they finish the set, they can jumble the cards up and repeat the activity so both partners get opportunities to describe most of the cards.

4. Teacher monitors the task and then the language produced. Make sure you manage to monitor each pair for their use of the target language and related use of English.

5. When most pairs have finished describing most of the cards, give some feedback from your monitoring and deal with any questions or leave major problems for a later correction session.



Task Four – Describing natural features  Teacher's notes

Suggested procedures:

1. Make enough sets of the cards for pair work.

2. Place a set of cards face down and take the top one keeping it secret. You describe the feature without saying the name of the feature. This is a / These are ... and your partner (a 'strong learner') guesses the name of the feature. Then you reverse the procedure with your partner taking the next card.

3. Pairs work through the cards ... when they finish, they can jumble the cards up and do it again so both partners get opportunities to describe most of the cards.

4. Teacher monitors the task and then the language produced.

5. When most pairs have finished describing most of the cards, give some feedback from your monitoring and deal with any questions.

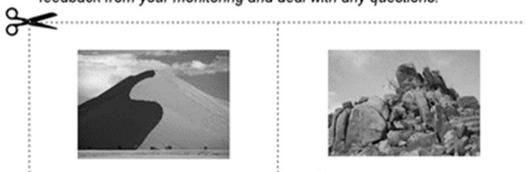


Figure 1.1. Revision of lengthy and complex instructions in the teacher's book

Adjusting learner challenge

Learner challenge refers to the amount and complexity of the language the learner is expected to comprehend and use and is closely linked with making materials user friendly, though a separate category. Overly or insufficiently challenging materials usually result in learners failing to complete an

activity successfully and thus it will require the materials piloter to adjust the content, the language, the task, the instructions, and/or some other area of the materials. It may be necessary to either decrease or increase the challenge presented to learners.

Task Three – Describing weather in Oman 

First look at the map below and check you and your partner know the names of the military bases. Then listen to the weather forecast and write the letter of the correct weather for the correct base. You have an example to help you.

Map of MoD bases in Oman



Figure 1.2. A simplified listening activity

For a listening activity shown in Figure 1.2, learners hear an audio recording twice with an opportunity to check their ideas with a partner in between. It quickly became evident that they did not have enough time, nor in many cases the artistic skill, to draw weather symbols on the map so it was clear that the learners needed a less challenging way of completing the activity with success. The revision gave them letters corresponding to weather symbols so all they needed to do was to listen and write in letters on their maps.

An example of increasing learner challenge was in response to learners telling me how easy a writing task had been. When I checked how well most of them had done, it was clear that the slashed-sentence exercise contained insufficient input information to present adequate and useful challenge in terms of meaning, military usage of lexis, knowledge of military procedures, syntax, collocation, and more. In addition, the written task had only occupied many of the learners for part of the 45-minute writing class.

Consequently, I increased the complexity and length of most of the sentences and also increased the number of sentences. I also ensured that none of the sentences corresponded exactly with the texts in their coursebooks to avoid mere copying.

Making pedagogic changes

Pedagogic revisions move the focus onto the teacher using the materials and the underlying ELT principles of learning driving the syllabus, the coursebook and the assessment tools. Three examples of making pedagogic changes include:

1. Dealing with fast-finishers
2. Inserting teacher support material into the teacher's book
3. Exploiting pair work material

Here, the materials piloter needs to be prepared to question his/her own pedagogic beliefs against the realities of the classroom. Materials piloters may be expatriates or locally based educationalists and will be confronted with pedagogic challenges whether they share the learning history of the learners or not. One way to address pedagogic problems in the materials-piloting classroom is to offer teachers various strategies for exploiting materials. Another way is to include locally relevant strategies offered by "local" colleagues. For example, Omani colleagues sometimes suggested making a simple pair-work task into a competition between teams of two with learners judging and awarding points according to what teams produce. Omani learners become highly engaged with points-based games which can increase learner engagement, interaction and motivation to use English. Such games can then be repeated using the same materials as revision tasks as well as providing templates to adapt similar pair-work tasks into stimulating activities.

Materials-piloter experiences with learners may also lead to the inclusion of extensive teacher suggestions for how to use specific classroom management techniques with innovative tasks. Moreover, the materials piloter may perceive that more extensive teacher notes would be beneficial to both "local" and "expatriate" teachers. One potential pedagogic tip might be how to provide fast-finishers with an extension to the activity they have already completed so that they: are not wasting their time; have additional challenge; and do not become bored and potentially disrupt learners who are still attempting the original task. Addressing differentiated learning, such as fast-finishing learners, resulted in the post-piloting inclusion of an extension task requiring pairs to test each other on what they had just done