
*Estudios de
lingüística inglesa aplicada*

elia

**KEY CONCEPTS IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS /
CONCEPTOS CLAVE DE LA LINGÜÍSTICA APLICADA**

KEY ISSUES IN EFL COURSEBOOKS

Brian Tomlinson

Anaheim University, USA

brianjohntomlinson@gmail.com

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12795/elia.2015.i15.09>

1. Introduction

Despite increasingly sophisticated developments in delivering language learning courses electronically, the coursebook still remains the main means of teaching and learning the target language for most of the millions of learners of English as a foreign language throughout the world. For example, a British Council survey (2008) revealed that 65% of their respondents frequently used a coursebook and only 6% never did. Another survey (Tomlinson, 2010) showed that 92% of the respondents used a coursebook regularly. Interestingly this survey also revealed that most of the respondents were compelled to use a coursebook and that 78% of them were very critical of the coursebooks available to them.

2. What is a Coursebook?

A coursebook is a book addressed to the learners of a language which consists of information, advice, texts and activities designed to help them to learn their target language. It is usually specific to a particular language level and typically gives attention to the learning of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation as well as the development of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. It is divided into units (often with a focus on a topic or theme) and each unit is divided into sections focusing on a particular learning point or skill. Typically each unit is of a similar length and follows a similar format. It is often supplemented by a teacher's book, by a student workbook and by a CD Rom and/or website.

3. What Types of Coursebooks are There?

3.1. Global Coursebooks

A global coursebook is one published commercially to be sold worldwide. It aims at catering for any learner at its target level and is usually visually appealing to attract custom. However, recently there have been many criticisms of the global coursebook for aiming at everybody but actually catering for nobody, for lacking authenticity and relevance, for simply cloning previous best-sellers and for encouraging materialistic aspiration (see Gray, 2010; Masuhara, Haan, Yi & Tomlinson, 2008; Tomlinson, 2012a; Tomlinson, Dat, Masuhara & Rubdy, 2001; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2013). Global coursebooks are usually developed by professional materials writers recruited by the publishers.

3.2. Local Coursebooks

A local coursebook is one produced by a ministry of education, institution or publisher to be used in a specific national, regional or institutional location. Local coursebooks are often written by teams of teachers plus local (and sometimes) international materials experts as part of materials development projects (see Tomlinson, 2012a, p. 167 for examples). They often have the advantage of being more relevant and engaging for their target learners than the equivalent global coursebooks but sometimes lack the glossy appeal and professional design of their global counterparts

3.3. Adapted Coursebooks

Adapted coursebooks are local versions of global coursebooks either developed by the international publisher to appeal to specific markets or adapted by local experts for a ministry, institution or publisher with the permission of the international publisher. They are often more locally relevant than their global original but are also often considered less suitable than tailor-made local equivalents.

3.4. Textbooks

A textbook is any book which is intended to promote learning. It could be a coursebook (especially in American English) or it could be a book designed to teach listening skills or to provide extra grammar practice or to prepare students for a particular examination.

4. Current Issues in EFL Coursebook Development and Use

4.1. What is the Value of the Coursebook?

For many years there has been heated debate about whether coursebooks are valuable resources for language learning or not. Supporters of the coursebook say it provides teachers and students with systematic security, that it provides expertise not otherwise available to the teacher, that it provides the learner with a means of reinforcement and revision and that it saves the teacher and the learner time. Perhaps its biggest attraction though is to the administrator as it provides a means of standardisation and accountability. Opponents of the coursebook argue that it disempowers the teacher, that it can never meet the needs and wants of a specific class of learners and that it encourages coverage of teaching points rather than facilitation of language acquisition. For discussion of these pros and cons see Tomlinson (2012a).

4.2. What Makes an Effective Coursebook?

From my confidential and my published research into what people want from a coursebook (e.g., Tomlinson, 2010), it seems that:

- publishers want a book which sells well and is considered to be of high quality;
- writers want a book which sells well and which enhances their reputation;
- administrators want a book which helps them to standardise and timetable teaching and which helps to prepare students for their examinations;
- teachers want a book which is easy to plan for and use, which appeals to their students and which helps to prepare their students for their examinations;
- students want a book which is relevant to their needs and wants, which engages them and which helps to prepare them for their examinations;
- practitioners who write about materials development want a book which matches what research and observation tells us is most likely to help learners to understand and use language effectively (e.g. Harwood, 2014; Tomlinson, 2013a, 2016).

The ideal coursebook would be one that satisfies all the above requirements. Very few coursebooks, if any, have achieved this, but I know of locally published coursebooks in Namibia and in Norway which have come close.

4.3. How are Coursebooks Developed?

Most commercial coursebooks are developed by publishers giving a brief to two or three professional materials writers to develop a coursebook which closes a gap in the market, boasts a distinctively up-to-date feature and clones the successful features of currently best-selling coursebooks. Most ministry of education and institutional coursebooks are developed by educational administrators giving a brief to two or three experts in applied linguistics and/or materials development to develop a coursebook which prepares students for a new curriculum and/or examination syllabus. In both cases the brief usually consists mainly of content specifications rather than pedagogical approaches and the writers set out to keep to their brief whilst satisfying their implicit principles (see Prowse, 2011). The publishers and/

or administrators usually expect their coursebooks to look like coursebooks usually do and are intolerant of radical innovation (Tomlinson, 2013b). This usually leads to the writers having to compromise some of their principles to satisfy their employers (see Bell & Gower, 2011).

Coursebooks used to be trialled with target-level students before publication (Donovan, 1998), but nowadays the cost of producing a coursebook is so high that cheaper and faster means of evaluating draft coursebooks are employed (Amrani, 2011), for example, teacher questionnaires and focus groups.

4.4. How should Coursebooks be Developed?

My view after fifty years spent developing, evaluating, using and researching coursebooks is that a coursebook should be:

- developed by a large team of writers made up of teachers and applied linguists (and ideally students) of different genders, ages, experience and specialism from the different areas likely to use the book. *On Target* (1994), for example, was written by thirty teachers/teacher trainers/examiners from different parts of Namibia.
- driven both by principled universal criteria of language acquisition which apply to any learner of any level anywhere and by local criteria which take into account the specific characteristics of the actual target contexts of learning (Tomlinson, 2013c). These criteria should be developed by the writing team prior to the writing of the book and then used for developing units, evaluating units as they are drafted and evaluating the units in use prior to the publication of the book.
- driven by a principled and flexible framework devised (and frequently revised) by the writing team. For an example, see Tomlinson (2013d), which provides a detailed and exemplified description of the text-driven framework which was devised and used for the writing of *On Target* (1994) in Namibia.
- written quickly so as to maintain the energy and stimulus initially generated by the team. *On Target* (1994), for example, was written

in six days and subsequently evaluated and edited by a team of advisers.

4.5. How should Coursebooks be Adapted?

There seems to be general agreement (e.g. McDonough, Shaw & Masuhara, 2013; McGrath 2013) that all coursebooks (no matter how locally specific they are) will need to be adapted, not always because of inadequacies in their writing, but because of the need for the coursebook to come as close as possible to matching the needs and wants of each particular class of students and the experience and beliefs of each teacher. It is also commonly agreed that adaptation should be preceded by principled analysis and evaluation (Tomlinson, 2013c) and that it should aim at maximising the potential of the book to stimulate and engage the students both affectively and cognitively (Tomlinson, 2013e, 2015).

4.6. How are Coursebooks Used?

Coursebooks can be used as a resource with the teacher (and ideally the students) deciding how and when to make use of them. Or they can be used as a script with the teacher basing their entire course on them and doing exactly what the coursebooks say. We know that young, inexperienced teachers and teachers from prescriptive educational cultures typically follow their coursebook as a script (Zacharias, 2005; Gray, 2010; Widodo, 2015), that more confident and well-trained teachers tend to both adapt their coursebook and use it a resource (Tsui, 2003; Lee & Bathmaker, 2007; Widodo, 2015) and that most teachers use it primarily as a means of preparing their students for examinations (Pelly & Allison, 2000).

4.7. How should Coursebooks be Used?

There seems to be a consensus that coursebooks should be used flexibly so as to cater for each individual in a class and should be designed in such a way as to facilitate flexible use (Bao, 2014). Ways of doing this include letting learners choose which activities to do and which sequence to do them in, encouraging learners to choose from a menu of activities within a unit, getting learners to find their own text to use in conjunction with a set

of generic activities (Maley, 2011; Masuhara, 2016; Tomlinson, 2013d). There also seems to be a consensus that coursebooks should not only be adapted but should also be supplemented with, for example, extensive reading/listening/viewing, task-based activities and activities encouraging learners to experience English outside the classroom.

5. Conclusion

I have provided a brief overview of some of the issues concerning academics and practitioners involved the development and use of EFL coursebooks. From this glimpse of the field it is apparent that there have been dynamic developments recently and that much research, debate and innovation is taking place. For more detailed overviews of these issues (and other such issues as authenticity, learner autonomy, ideology, evaluation and technology) see Tomlinson (2011, 2012a, 2012b and 2012c).

References

- Amrani, F. (2011). The process of evaluation: A publisher's view. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Materials development in language teaching* (pp. 267-295). 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 267-295.
- Bell, J., & Gower, R. (2011). Writing course materials for the world: A great compromise. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Materials development in language teaching* (pp. 135-150). 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- British Council. (2008). *Teaching English: Course books*. London: British Council.
- Bao, D. (2014). *Understanding silence and reticence: Ways of participating in second language acquisition*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Donovan, P. (1998). Piloting: A publisher's view. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Materials development in language teaching* (pp. 149-189). 1st edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gray, J. (2010). *The construction of English: Culture, consumerism and promotion in the ELT coursebook*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9780230283084>
- Harwood, J. (Ed.). (2014). *English language teaching textbooks: Content, consumption, production*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Lee, R., & Bathmaker, A. (2007). The use of English textbooks for teaching English to 'vocational' students in Singapore secondary schools: A survey of teachers' beliefs. *RELC Journal*, 38/3, 350-374. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0033688207085852>
- Maley, A. (2011). Squaring the circle – reconciling materials as constraint with materials as empowerment. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Materials development in language teaching* (pp. 379-402). 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Masuhara, H. (in press). Brain studies and materials for language learning. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Second language research and materials development for language learning*. New York: Routledge.
- Masuhara, H., Haan, M., Yi, Y., & Tomlinson, B. (2008). Adult EFL courses. *ELT Journal*, 62/3, 294-312. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccn028>
- McGrath, I. (2013). *Teaching materials and the roles of EFL/ESL teachers: Practice and theory*. London: Bloomsbury.
- McDonough, J., Shaw, C., & Masuhara, H. (2013). *Materials and Methods in ELT: A Teacher's Guide*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- On Target*. (1994). Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan.
- Pelly, C. P., & Allison, D. (2000). Investigating the views of teachers on assessment of English language learning in the Singaporean education system. *Hong Kong Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 5, 81-106.
- Prowse, P. (2011). How writers write: Testimony from authors. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Materials development in language teaching* (pp. 151-174). 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tomlinson, B. (2010). What do teachers think about EFL coursebooks? *Modern English Teacher*, 19/4, 5-9.
- Tomlinson, B. (2011). Introduction: Principles and procedures of materials development. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Materials development in language teaching* (pp. 1-34). 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tomlinson, B. (2012a). Materials development for language learning and teaching. *Language Teaching: Surveys and Studies*, 45/2 (pp. 1-37). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Tomlinson, B. (2012b). Materials development. In J. Richards & A. Burns (Eds.), *The Cambridge guide to pedagogy and practice in second language teaching* (pp. 269-278). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal0749>
- Tomlinson, B. (2012c). Issues in the development and evaluation of textbooks and other learning materials. In T. Summer & M. Eisenmann (Eds.), *Basic issues in EFL-teaching and learning* (pp. 343-356). Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter.
- Tomlinson, B. (Ed.) (2013a). *Applied linguistics and materials development*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Tomlinson, B. (2013b). Innovation in materials development. In K. Hyland & L. Wong (Eds.), *Innovation and Change in English Language Education* (pp. 203-217). New York: Routledge.
- Tomlinson, B. (2013c). Materials evaluation. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Developing materials for language teaching* (pp. 21-48). 2nd edition. London: Continuum.
- Tomlinson, B. (2013d) Developing principled frameworks for materials development. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Developing materials for language teaching* (pp. 95-118). 2nd edition. London: Continuum.
- Tomlinson, B. (2013e). Humanising the coursebook. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Developing materials for language teaching* (pp. 139-156). 2nd edition. London: Continuum.
- Tomlinson, B. (2015). Challenging teachers to use their coursebook creatively. In A. Maley & N. Peachey (Eds.), *Creativity in the language classroom* (pp. 24-28). London: British Council.
- Tomlinson, B. (Ed.) (in press). *Second language research and materials development for language learning*. New York: Routledge.
- Tomlinson, B., Dat, B., Masuhara, H., & Rubdy, R. (2001). EFL courses for adults. *ELT Journal*, 55/1, 80-101. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/55.1.80>
- Tomlinson, B., & Masuhara, H. (2013). Review of adult ELT textbooks. *ELT Journal*, 67/2, 233-249. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/cct007>
- Tsui, A. (2003). *Understanding expertise in teaching: Case studies of ESL teachers*. New York: Cambridge University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139524698>

- Zacharias, N. (2005). Teachers' beliefs about internationally-published materials: A survey of tertiary Indonesian teachers in Indonesia. *RELC Journal*, 36/1, 23-37. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0033688205053480>
- Widodo, H. (2015). *The Development of vocational English materials from a social semiotic perspective: Participatory action research*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. The University of Adelaide.

Brian Tomlinson has worked as a teacher, teacher trainer, curriculum developer, and university academic in Indonesia, Japan, Nigeria, Oman, Singapore, UK, Vanuatu and Zambia. He has also given presentations in over seventy countries. He is Founder and President of MATSDA (Materials Development Association), a Visiting Professor at the University of Liverpool and at Leeds Metropolitan University and a TESOL Professor at Anaheim University. He has over one hundred publications on materials development, language through literature, the teaching of reading, language awareness and teacher development, including *Discover English* (with Rod Bolitho), *Openings, Materials Development in Language Teaching*, *Developing Materials for Language Teaching*, *Research for Materials Development in Language Learning* (with Hitomi Masuhara) and *Applied Linguistics and Materials Development*.

First version received: June 2015

Final version accepted: July 2015