ADAPTING MATERIALS FOR TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH

Iulia PARA
West University of Timișoara, Romania

Abstract: Selecting materials for teaching Business English is a crucial act, but the aim of this paper is not that of discussing whether we should use authentic or "doctored" texts. It presents several ideas, which have emerged, from personal experience and from the literature on the subject. The findings are suggestions and comments, rather than solutions. The article is intended to provide information regarding the steps of this so called "trip" of any Business English teacher, to the final destination of providing appropriate materials for students who study different fields of business. According to the field of business they study, it is in their interest for the Business English teacher to develop their linguistic and communicational skills and competencies.

Keywords: Business English, ESP, materials, adapting

1. Introduction

Selecting materials for teaching Business English is a crucial act, but the aim of this paper is not that of discussing whether we should use authentic or "doctored" texts. It presents some ideas, which have emerged, from personal experience and from the literature on the subject. The findings are suggestions and comments, rather than solutions.

If we use Hutchinson and Waters' analogy (1992) of a journey for teaching, then we should know:

      1. Why we want to go there;
      2. Where we start from;
      3. What is our final destination;
      4. What is the aim of our trip.

The aim should tell us what the successful learner has to know by the end of the course.

The means to get there also include the materials we use, and a starting point should be adopting and adapting materials. Adoption is concerned with whole course books, while adaptation concerns the parts that make up the whole. Lecturers should have in mind the development of all language and communication skills in the case of their students (Dejica-Cartis, D. 2012; Dejica-Cartis, A. & D. Dejica-Cartis. 2013).

Assuming that we have answered the questions (needs analysis generating and only afterwards the course design) there are, according to Hutchinson and Waters (1993) three possible ways of providing teaching materials:

      a)   Select from existing materials: material evaluation;
      b)   Write your own materials: materials development;
      c)   Modify existing materials: materials adaptation.

a) *Select from existing materials* or, even adopting a whole course book is the easiest of the three. The authentic materials provide models of correct and appropriate

173

language use. This is a necessary function of materials, but often it is taken as the only purpose with the result that "materials become simply a statement of language use, rather than a vehicle for language teaching" (Hutchinson and Waters, 1993: 108);

b) *Write your own materials.* Sometimes teachers have to write the teaching materials themselves, materials that will fit the specific subject area of particular learners, mainly when suitable books are not always to be found in libraries, nor are they commercially available. But few, (if any) teachers have been trained in this respect, and therefore the result may not be according to the authors" expectations.

c) *Modify existing materials* – is a combination of the first two, when the student is challenged with a difficult material from the linguistic, conceptual point of view, or when the existing materials have to be adapted to the learner's needs and wants.

Before discussing the reasons for adapting, we should consider to what extent we feel that they need to be adapted. It will also be useful to think of adaptation in terms of the **source** of our materials – if they are commercially produced and used internationally, if they are designed at the national level by our ministry of Education or by the British Council.

Adaptation is mainly a process of "matching", i.e. to maximise the appropriacy of teaching materials in context, by varying some of the inner features of a textbook to better suit our particular circumstances. Before venturing into adaptation, we should ask ourselves: do we have to adapt? And if so, what procedures should we use?

2. Reasons for Adapting

The reasons should depend on our teaching situations and priorities, which may change over time even within the same context; adaptation does not imply that a course book is defective and needs "improving".

According to McDonough and Shaw (1996), some reasons for adapting may be:
- not enough grammar coverage in general;
- not enough grammar points of particular difficulty to these learners;
- the communicative focus means that grammar is presented unsystematically;
- comprehension questions are too easy, because the answer can be elevated straight from the paragraph with no real understanding;
- inauthentic listening passages, as they sound very much like the written material that is read out;
- not enough guidance on pronunciation;
- subject – matter inappropriate for learners of this age and intellectual level;
- photographs or other illustrative material, not culturally acceptable;
- amount of materials too great/ too little to cover in the time allocated to lessons;
- dialogues too formal, and not really representative of everyday speech;
- too much or too little variety in the activities;
- lexicon and the key to the exercises would be helpful.

More reasons could be added, more causes could be identified, and these are only some of the possibilities.

3. Principles and procedures

If we have decided that a text/piece of writing needs adapting in terms of modification of content – this can be achieved in the form of exercises, activities, instructions, tests, etc., the focus is on what the materials contain measured against the requirement of a particular teaching environment.

There are some points to remember regarding the core methods that can be useful to content in order to bring some change:

Firstly, it can be regarded as another kind of "matching" process where techniques are selected according to the aspect of the materials that need alteration.

Secondly, content can be adapted using a range of techniques; or a single technique can be applied to different content areas. For example, texts may be simplified from the grammatical point of view; their subject matter modified, or can be made shorter, or broken down into smaller pieces.

Thirdly, adaptation can have both quantitative and qualitative effects, i.e. we can change either the volume of material, or we can change its methodological nature.

Fourthly, techniques can be used individually or in combination with others, so there may be a variety of possibilities.

We have used in our particular case (An Introduction to Business in English) the following techniques:

- adding, including expanding and extending;
- deleting, including subtracting and abridging;
- modifying, including re-writing and re-structuring;
- simplifying.

1) *Adding.* The process implies that materials are supplemented by putting more into them, both quantitatively (*extending*) and qualitatively (*expanding),* e.g. *Unit 1. The West University of Timişoara*, the reading paragraph delivered may also be paralleled by the delivery of listening understanding text, using the same vocabulary and ideas but presented through a different medium, regarding the spoken language. In general, the addition should go further, by bringing about qualitative as well as quantitative change, adding to the methodology by moving separately and developing it into new directions, for instance, insisting upon a different language skill.

2) *Deleting or omitting.* Is the opposite process of addition and when a decision to omit material is made, it can be done both quantitatively and qualitatively. The method can be used on a small scale, i.e., omit irrelevant/redundant exercises, or a whole text/unit of a book on a larger scale, e.g. *Unit 7. Banking*

The most commonly used aspect of reducing the length of materials is *subtracting* from the text when it is somehow too long, inappropriate or irrelevant to its purposes. Deletion does not have an impact on the overall methodology.

If the changes are greater and the text is not only subtracted but also shortened, it is *abridged* – a technique mainly used when irrelevant details are left out (e.g. *Unit 8. Stocks and Shares*).

3)   *Modifying.* When speaking about *modification,* we refer to an internal change in the approach or focus on some material. It is a frequently used technique that can be applied to any aspect of "content".

It can be sub-divided into *re-writing* (when some of the linguistic content needs modification) and *restructuring* (which applies to classroom management).

When we re-write something, we try to make materials "more communicative" and relate activities more closely to the learners" interests, needs and wants. We introduce models of authentic language and set problem-solving tasks which require thinking in the foreign language. Modifying, therefore, refers to a "modality change" or, to a change in the nature or attention to an exercise, or text, or classroom activity (e.g. *Unit 13. Advertising and Publicity*).

4)   *Simplifying.* Is also a "re-writing" activity in which many elements of a language course can be simplified, but to a certain extent only, to make sure it is understood by the learners regarding vocabulary and concepts. They (the learners) are unlikely to gain much from texts which are too difficult linguistically or conceptually. Their subject content should be within the learners" conceptual grasp "if you want to discuss matters clearly and easily, your students will need to understand the terms" (Nuttal 1983, 101).

A reader is more likely to achieve a high level of understanding if s/he is familiar with the subject content. We can have a very simple text linguistically, but not understood because the student has minimal familiarity and background knowledge of the subject matter. Therefore, we have to make a choice when selecting materials and if they are too difficult, simplifying is a must. Otherwise, the result will be a source of serious misunderstandings and it may lead to confusions, to the overuse of the native language and these will often demotivate the students. However, we should beware of "simplifying" grammar or speech as it may lead to a distortion of natural language, or sometimes change the meaning or intention of the original text and consequently affect the overall coherence. Therefore, simplification is a difficult procedure, and we should only use it very carefully when the complexity of the subject matter or the language is regarded as being too advanced. This is the case of *Unit 8. Stocks and Shares*, where we have to be very careful and selective when we simplified the authentic text we found on the Internet.

The result of these considerations and theoretical studies has materialised in our book, *An Introduction to Business in English*. Most of the texts we have used are taken from the Internet, and, therefore they had to be adapted. In our theoretical considerations, we have exemplified some of the techniques we have used in the case of some specific units.

As the title says, the book comprises a selection of reading texts, dealing with business issues. Taken as a whole, the texts give the student a considerable amount of information about what is really happening in the business world - the significant trends, the important new ideas – and encourage the reader to examine critically business practices and institutions in our own country. The main aims of our book are:
-    to develop reading abilities and practice the understanding of the business texts;
-    to improve the students" vocabulary, specialist terms and language commonly used in business;
-    to deliver students the chance to practice their spoken English and to encourage them to analyse and discuss ideas related to business;

- to offer other language activities, e.g. grammatical exercises, assignments, case studies, role plays, which will help them to improve their language skills.
- The book has 15 units, each unit focusing on an important branch of business. The text is a source of information, and also a pretext to introduce business vocabulary related to the topic. The pre-reading, while-reading and after-reading activities where devised so as to make sure the students have acquired the information, skills and vocabulary they need in real-life situations, as you can see in the example given bellow, after the Conclusions.

4. Conclusion

Adaptation is an activity carried out by most teachers in order to make their work more relevant to their learners. The need to adapt is a consequence of the setting of objectives in a particular educational context and "adaptation can only be carried out efficiently if it develops from an understanding of the possible design features of syllabus and materials" (McDonough & Shaw 1996, 97).

The materials should, therefore, be appropriate and adapted to the learner's needs, wants and proficiency level. As proficiency increases in time, a greater amount of challenging materials can be introduced. By using them, our final goal is to prepare our students for future autonomy and give them access to an accumulated capital or information, interest, culture and pleasure. The more a person reads, the more effectively can he gain access to the capital.

We hope our students will enjoy working with the book, and if we have succeeded in our endeavor, only time will tell.

References

1. Cotton, D. 1989. *International Business Topics,* Nelson.
2. Dejica-Cartis, D. 2012. 'New Horizons in Developing Communication Students' Textproduction Competence' in Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, Volume 47, 2012, ELSEVIER, Pp. 1827-1831
3. Dejica-Cartis, A. & D. Dejica-Cartis. 2013. 'Tentative suggestions regarding the development of foreign language oral communication skills in students at universities of applied sciences' in Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, Volume 84, 9 July 2013, ELSEVIER, Pp. 934-938.
4. Hutchinson, T. and Waters 1993. A. *English for Specific Purposes,* C.U.P.
5. McDonough, J., and C. Shaw. 1996. *Materials and Methods in ELT.* New York: Blackwell.
6. Nuttal, Ch. 1983. *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language. ?:* OUP.
7. Para, I. and Moise. J. 2013. *An Introduction to Business in English*, Mirton, Timișoara.
8. Para I. 2017. *ESP as an Instrument of Communication in Business English*, Lambert Academic Publishing.