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THE TEXTBOOK AND THE REAL WORLD

The great danger today is of slogans, collective opinions, ready- made trends of thought. We have to be able to resist individually, to criticize, to distinguish between what is proven and what is not, so we need pupils who learn early to find out by themselves, partly by their own spontaneous activity and partly through material we set up for them.

Jean Piaget.

Have you ever dreamed of finding the "ideal textbook"? Finding the ideal textbook is a golden dream that a lot of foreign language teachers have as a possible key to solve all the teaching problems in the classroom. The market is constantly producing new textbooks which look very attractive and promising because of their contents, illustrations, or the rationale behind them. However, in spite of all the improvements and innovations of today's textbooks, most of them still fail to meet some other essential requirements in order to carry out the language teaching process, and to reach the teaching goals successfully. We might find a textbook full of very colorful illustrations, but the language samples it provides are contrived or irrelevant to our students' needs or interests. Similarly, we might find a text with a very well sequenced set of contents, but it happens that the exercises and activities included are mechanical or inappropriate to the teaching objective.

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Pitfalls like these often cause the teacher to feel dissatisfied with the materials used. Experience tells us that regardless of the authors' efforts to develop suitable materials, it is very difficult to find a textbook meeting universal standards of excellence in all aspects. A strong reason for this is that textbooks are oriented to general audiences rather than to particular second or foreign language classes. Materials developers are not able to foresee all individual teachers' and learners' needs. This leads us to the conclusion that such a thing as an ideal textbook can not exist. A textbook itself has demonstrated to be simply a starting point that the teacher has to supplement or adapt to make it work for his/her particular audience and the specific environment.

ADAPTATION is one of the most successful tools for improving the language teaching task and for trying to approximate the target every teacher desires: to have at hand a set of materials with the desirable characteristics for fulfilling the needs of a particular foreign language class.

Adaptation is a technique that every teacher has already had the opportunity to apply in one way or another for different purposes; for instance, by adding necessary examples which are not found in the book, or simply by introducing a visual aid. In this sense, it can be said that every teacher is already an adapter of the materials he uses. Even if we used the "ideal text", we would have to be constantly adapting. This task is a must for every foreign language teacher who wants to make the teaching learning process more

motivating by providing more real language within a greater number of meaningful situations.

In dealing with materials adaptation, it is important to mention a basic principle that materials adapters call the principle of "congruence", which is the final goal of effective adaptation. This principle is the target that a good teacher has to be constantly striving for. Here we are concerned with achieving congruence between the textbook and the real world, or "contextualization". This is based on the idea that language should carry a message that communicates something to somebody. Therefore, whenever we contextualize a written piece of discourse, we are seeking three important aspects:

A)   SITUATIONAL REALISM.   It implies the idea that the sencond language should be presented to the students through relevant and realistic situations in which human interaction takes place.   Thus, the place, the participants, and the actions of a specific language situation should be consistent with real-life experiences.

B)   LINGUISTIC REALISM. It indicates the necessity for the linguistic content used in any teaching lesson to be appropriate to the situation, so that the utterances sound natural and express the things that real people would say in a real communication exchange.

C)   REALISTIC ORAL INTERPRETATION.   It deals with the teacher's actual pronunciation in the presentation of the lesson.   It refers to the type of realistic pronunciation that demands the use of language including all the usual characteristics of normal and natural communication (contractions, assimilations,

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reductions, etc.) Since the application of this aspect depends primarily on the use of the teacher's language in the classroom, rather than on the scope of the textbook itself, only the first two aspects will be considered hereafter.

In order to illustrate how those aspects can be achieved by means of adaptation, I would like to present two dialogues that contain very clear examples of incongruencies between the text and the real world. Such types of incongruencies frequently appear in ESL/EFL materials.

SITUATIONAL REALISM. A common deficiency is the lack of congruence between the situation and the students' interests. It is not unknown to anybody that the situation used to present language samples needs to be appropriately related to the student group that is to use the material. However, it is perfectly possible to find dialogues lacking this important relationship, as the following:

    -What did you do yesterday?
    -My father and I went to the zoo.
    -Oh, that's nice! Did you have a good time?
    -Yes, we saw a lot of interesting animals
     and birds.
    -Which animals did you like best?
    -The monkeys and the lions. They're fun to
     watch.
    -I like to watch them too. I think monkeys
     are the funniest animals of all.

There is no doubt that the situation presented is more appropriate for children than for adults. The setting is definitely not attractive as an example of an adult human experience. Going to the zoo is not an activity of general interest

for adult students.   On the contrary, it is an
uncommon, and thus, unbelievable situation that
adult students would find hard to identify with.

In order to remedy this lack of contextualization,
it is necessary to rewrite the dialogue to make
it appropriate to an adult level.   This is one
of the many available possibilities:

>   -What did you do last night?
>   -I went to dance with Jane.
>   -Oh, that sounds interesting.   Did you have
>   a good time?
>   -It was great. We danced all night long.
>   -What kind of music did you dance most?
>   -Break and Salsa. They're exciting to dance.
>   -Certainly. I think we have the same likes.

The changes included obviously made the context
more realistic, and therefore, more suitable for
the audience it is intended for.

<u>LINGUISTIC REALISM.</u>   In the following conversa-
tion, examples of lack of inguistic
realism will be clearly seen in the participants'
interactions.

>   -Can Mrs. Dawson cook?
>   -Yes, she can. She's a good cook.
>   -Can she make pies and cakes?
>   -Yes, she can.   She can make wonderful pies
>   and cakes.
>   -Can she get breakfast in a hurry?
>   -Yes, she can. She can get it in ten minutes.
>   -Can she sleep late in the morning?
>   -No she can't. She has to get up early.

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It is not hard to find in the above conversation examples of unrealistic exchanges of information in which language use is not representative of the real world. It is unlikely to find real people interacting in that way. Although the dialogue is situationally acceptable, as people often show interest in finding about other people's abilities, it is not linguistically realistic. Real people carry out interactions rather than interrogations, as it is the case in the above conversation.

In order to make the language more congruent with the language in the real world, the following adaptation can be made:

> -Can Mrs. Dawson cook well?
> -Sure. She can make very delicious dishes.
> -Is she also good at baking?
> -Oh, yes. She's very good at making pies and cakes.
> -Is she a fast cook?
> -She certainly is. She can get a good lunch in half an hour.
> -No wonder she's a good cook.

It can be noticed how by avoiding mechanical, repetitive questions, and illogically unrelated exchanges, a dialogue can be adapted to make it sound more like an exchange between real people in a real communicative setting.

In short, it is necessary for every English teacher to be always alert to detect incongruencies in situation and language use that might be present in the textbook s/he teaches with. In addition, a good professional should always be willing to go beyond the text by using adaptation as one of

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the most powerful sources of motivation and realism, whenever it is necessary. As soon as we discover our ability to adapt dialogues, readings, drills or exercises to make them congruent with the real world so that they meet our students' needs effectively, we will stop looking for the "ideal textbook".

Virginia Angulo A.

SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR THE TEACHING OF

LISTENING COMPREHENSION

With the application of new methodologies such as Total Physical Response and the Natural Approach, the teaching of comprehension becomes worthy of better attention in the language classroom. During the last few years, there has been a noticeable change of attitude by language teachers toward the importance of emphasizing listening and reading comprehension practice in the second/ foreign language curriculum. More English teachers support the necessity and significance of including those two skills as main links of the language-teaching process.

Particularly the recognition of listening comprehension as a separate skill is undoubtedly valid, if we take into consideration that learning a language involves the integration and manipulation of many skills, and specifically that listening takes an active and essential role in the communication process. From this point of view, there can not be effective, appropriate production, if there