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# TSL3111

## Developing and Using Resources for the Primary ESL Classroom

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### Topic 4: Selection and Adaptation

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Lecturer's Notes

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## Topic 4: Selection and Adaptation

In topic 2 and 3 we already looked at factors to consider when we evaluate and select coursebooks and multimedia materials.

We will never find materials that are perfect for every class and every situation. Even the KSSR textbooks that are written especially for Malaysian primary schools will sometimes need to be adapted in the various ways listed in the chapter.

*Ask students to read the chapter below about adapting materials, and then answer the questions.*

### Principles and Procedures for Adapting Materials

(McDonough, Shaw, & Masuhara, 2013, pp. 69-78)

#### 4.4 Principles and Procedures

The reasons for adapting that we have just looked at can be thought of as dealing with the modification of content, whether that content is expressed in the form of exercises and activities, texts, instructions, tests and so on. In other words, the focus is on what the materials contain, measured against the requirements of a particular teaching environment. That environment may necessitate a number of changes that will lead to greater appropriacy. This is most likely to be expressed in terms of a need to personalize, individualize or localize the content. We take 'personalizing' here to refer to increasing the relevance of content in relation to learners' interests and their academic, educational or professional needs. 'Individualizing' will address the learning styles both of individuals and of the members of a class working closely together. 'Localizing' takes into account the international geography of English language teaching and recognizes that what may work well in Mexico City may not do so in Edinburgh or in Kuala Lumpur. Madsen and Bowen (1978) include a further category of 'modernizing', and comment that not all materials show familiarity with aspects of current English usage, sometimes to the point of being not only out of date or misleading but even incorrect. Islam and Mares propose and explain some additional principles including 'Catering for all learner styles', 'providing for learner autonomy', and 'Making the language input more engaging' (Islam and Mares, 2003: 89-90). Tomlinson and Masuhara (2004) demonstrate how incorporating systematic as well as impressionistic evaluation helps adaptation to be more principled and coherent. They also show how the principles of evaluation as part of the adaptation process can be different from those for selection and adoption purposes.

In this section we shall now look at questions of procedure - at the main techniques that can be applied to content in order to bring about change. There are a number of points to bear in mind. Firstly, this can be seen as another kind of matching process or 'congruence', where techniques are selected according to the aspect of the materials that needs alteration. Secondly, content can be adapted using a range of techniques; or, conversely, a single technique can be applied to different content areas. For example, a reading passage might be grammatically simplified or its subject matter modified, or it can be made shorter or broken down into smaller parts. The technique of simplification can be applied to texts, to explanations and so on. Thirdly, adaptation can have both quantitative and qualitative effects. In other words, we can simply change the amount of material, or we can change its methodological nature. Finally, techniques can be used individually or in

combination with others, so the scale of possibilities clearly ranges from straightforward to rather complex. All these points will be raised again in the discussion of individual techniques.

The techniques that we shall cover are as follows:

- Adding, including expanding and extending
- Deleting, including subtracting and abridging
- Modifying, including rewriting and restructuring
- Simplifying
- Reordering

Each will be briefly introduced, and a few examples given. There are implications for all of them in Parts II and III of this book where we consider language skills and classroom methodology. Readers interested at this stage in more detailed examples of procedures for adaptation are referred to the 'Further reading' at the end of this chapter. The first references have broadly similar lists of techniques, and offer a large number of worked examples.

- 1 when you have finished reading through the discussion of techniques, select one or two of them and consider their application to any materials with which you are familiar.
- 2 It will be useful at this stage to work on a small scale, taking single content areas, such as an exercise, a text, or a set of comprehension questions.

### ***Adding***

The notion of addition is, on the face of it, straightforward, implying that materials are supplemented by putting more into them, while taking into account the practical effect on time allocation. We can add in this simple, quantitative way by the technique of extending, and might wish to do this in situations such as the following:

- The materials contain practice in the pronunciation of minimal pairs (bit/bet, hat/hate, ship/chip) but not enough examples of the difficulties for learners with a particular L1. Japanese speakers may need more l/r practice, Arabic speakers more p/b, Spanish speakers more b/v and so on.
- A second reading passage parallel to the one provided is helpful in reinforcing the key linguistic features - tenses, sentence structure, vocabulary, cohesive devices – of the first text.
- Our students find the explanation of a new grammar point rather difficult, so further exercises are added before they begin the practice material.

The point to note here is that adding by extension is to supply more of the same. This means that the techniques are being applied within the methodological framework of the original materials: in other words, the model is not itself changed.

Another, more far-reaching perspective on addition of material can termed expanding. Consider these possibilities:

- The only pronunciation practice in the materials is on individual sounds and minimal pairs. However, this may be necessary but not sufficient. Our students need to be intelligible, and

intelligibility entails more than articulating a vowel or a consonant correctly. Therefore, we decide to add some work on sentence stress and rhythm and on the related phenomenon of 'weak' and 'strong' forms in English. A further advantage is that students will be better able to understand naturally spoken English.

- If there is insufficient coverage of the skill of listening, the reading passage provided may also be paralleled by the provision of listening comprehension material, using the same vocabulary and ideas but presented through a different medium, making sure that it is authentic in terms of the spoken language.
- Although the new grammar material is important and relevant, the addition of a discussion section at the end of the unit will help to reinforce and contextualize the linguistic items covered, particularly if it is carefully structured so that the most useful points occur 'naturally'.

These kinds of additions are not just extensions of an existing aspect of content. They go further than this by bringing about a qualitative as well as a quantitative change. Expanding, then, as distinct from extending, adds to the methodology by moving outside it and developing it in new directions, for instance, by putting in a different language skill or a new component. This can be thought of as a change in the overall system. Note that there are some minor terminological issues between writers on adaptation techniques (e.g. McGrath, 2002; Islam and Mares, 2003; Tomlinson and Masuhara, 2004). For example, McGrath advocates that creative addition involving qualitative changes should be called 'exploitation'. What matters, however, is not so much the art of categorization but that teachers can make creative use of the techniques described in their own adaptations.

Finally in this section, it is worth pointing out that additions do not always have to be made onto the end of something. A new facet of material or methodology can be introduced before it appears in the framework of the coursebook. For example, a teacher may prepare the ground for practice in an aspect of grammar or communicative function determined by the syllabus through a 'warm-up' exercise involving learners talking about themselves and their everyday lives.

### ***Deleting or omitting***

Deletion is clearly the opposite process to that of addition, and as such needs no further clarification as a term. However, although material is taken out rather than supplemented, as a technique it can be thought of as 'the other side of the same coin'. We saw in the previous section that material can be added both quantitatively (extending) and qualitatively (expanding): the same point applies when a decision is taken to omit material. Again, as with addition, the technique can be used on a small scale, for example, over part of an exercise, or on the larger scale of a whole unit of a coursebook.

We shall refer to the most straightforward aspect of reducing the length of material as subtracting from it. The following kinds of requirement, might apply:

- Our pronunciation exercises on minimal pairs contain too much general material. Since our students all have the same mother tongue and do not make certain errors, many of the exercises are inappropriate. Arabic speakers, for example, will be unlikely to have much difficulty with the l/r distinction.

- Although a communicative coursebook has been selected as relevant in our situation, some of the language functions presented are unlikely to be required by learners who will probably not use their English in the target language environment. Such functions as 'giving directions' or 'greetings' may be useful; 'expressing sympathy' or 'ordering things' may not.

Deletion in these cases, as with extending, does not have a significant impact on the overall methodology. The changes are greater if material is not only subtracted, but also what we shall term abridged:

- The materials contain a discussion section at the end of each unit. However, our learners are not really proficient enough to tackle this adequately, since they have learnt the language structures but not fluency in their use. The syllabus and its subsequent examination does not leave room for this kind of training.
- Students on a short course are working with communicative materials because of their instrumental reasons for choosing to learn English; some of them wish to travel on international business, others plan to visit a target language country as tourists. The lengthy grammatical explanations accompanying each functional unit are therefore felt to be inappropriate.

Addition and deletion often work together, of course. Material may be taken out and then replaced with something else. Where the same kind of material is substituted, as for instance one set of minimal pairs for another, the internal balance of the lesson or the syllabus is not necessarily altered. The methodological change is greater when, for example, grammar practice is substituted after the omission of an inappropriate communicative function, or when a reading text is replaced by a listening passage. This takes us directly into the next section.

### ***Modifying***

'Modification' at one level is a very general term in the language applying to any kind of change. In order to introduce further possibilities for adaptation, we shall restrict its meaning here to an internal change in the approach or focus of an exercise or other piece of material. It is a rather important and frequently used procedure that, like all other techniques, can be applied to any aspect of 'content'. It can be subdivided under two related headings. The first of these is rewriting, when some of the linguistic content needs modification; the second is restructuring, which applies to classroom management. Let us look at some examples of each of these in turn. You will undoubtedly be able to think of many more.

***Rewriting*** Currently the most frequently stated requirement for a change in focus is for materials to be made 'more communicative'. This feeling is voiced in many teaching situations where textbooks are considered to lag behind an understanding of the nature of language and of students' linguistic and learning needs. Rewriting, therefore, may relate activities more closely to learners' own backgrounds and interests, introduce models of authentic language, or set more purposeful, problem-solving tasks where the answers are not always known before the teacher asks the question. Islam and Mares (2003) provide an extensive discussion and examples for making textbooks more learning-centred through rewriting.



It is quite common for coursebooks to place insufficient emphasis on listening comprehension, and for teachers to feel that more material is required. If accompanying audio material is either not available, or cannot be purchased in a particular teaching context, then the teacher can rewrite a reading passage and deliver it orally, perhaps by taking notes from the original and then speaking naturally to the class from those notes.

Sometimes new vocabulary is printed just as a list, with explanatory notes and perhaps the mother tongue equivalent. We may wish to modify this kind of presentation by taking out the notes and writing an exercise that helps students to develop useful and generalized strategies for acquiring new vocabulary. Equally a text may have quite appropriate language material for a specific group, but may not 'match' in terms of its cultural content. For example, a story about an English family with English names, living in an English town, eating English food and enjoying English hobbies can in fact be modified quite easily by making a number of straightforward surface changes.

A last example here is that of end-of-text comprehension questions.

Some of these are more like a test, where students can answer by 'lifting' the information straight from the text. These questions can be modified so that students have to interpret what they have read or heard, or relate different sections of the text to each other. Chapter 6 looks at these kinds of tasks.

The point was made in the introduction to this chapter that content changes are not always written down. Adaptation of linguistic content may just require rewording by the teacher as an oral explanation.

**Restructuring** For many teachers who are required to follow a coursebook, changes in the structuring of the class are sometimes the only kind of adaptation possible. For example, the materials may contain role-play activities for groups of a certain size. The logistics of managing a large class (especially if they all have the same L1) are complex from many points of view, and it will probably be necessary to assign one role to a number of pupils at the same time. Obviously the converse - where the class is too small for the total number of roles available - is also possible if perhaps less likely.

Sometimes a written language explanation designed to be read and studied can be made more meaningful if it is turned into an interactive exercise where all students participate. For instance, it is a straightforward manner to ask learners to practise certain verb structures in pairs (say the present perfect: 'Have you been to/done X?'; or a conditional: 'What would you do if . . . ?'), and it can be made more authentic by inviting students to refer to topics of direct interest to themselves.

Modifying materials, then, even in the restricted sense in which we have used the term here, is a technique with a wide range of applications. It refers essentially to a 'modality change', to a change in the nature or focus of an exercise, or text or classroom activity.

### ***Simplifying***

Strictly speaking, the technique of simplification is one type of modification, namely a 'rewriting' activity. Since it has received considerable attention in its own right, it is considered here as a separate procedure. Many elements of a language course can be simplified, including the instructions and explanations that accompany exercises and activities, and even the visual layout of

material so that it becomes easier to see how different parts fit together. It is worth noting in passing that teachers are sometimes on rather dangerous ground, if a wish to 'simplify' grammar or speech in the classroom leads to a distortion of natural language. For example, oversimplification of a grammatical explanation can be misleadingly one-sided or partial: to tell learners that adverbs are always formed by adding '-ly' does not help them when they come across 'friendly' or 'brotherly', nor does it explain why 'hardly' cannot be formed from 'hard'. A slow style of speech might result in the elimination of the correct use of sentence stress and weak forms, leaving learners with no exposure to the natural rhythms of spoken English.

However, the main application of this technique has been to texts, most often to reading passages. Traditionally the emphasis has been on changing various sentence-bound elements to match the text more closely to the proficiency level of a particular group of learners. Thus, for instance, we can simplify according to

**1. Sentence structure.** Sentence length is reduced, or a complex sentence is rewritten as a number of simpler ones, for example, by the replacement of relative pronouns by nouns and pronouns followed by a main verb.

**2. Lexical content,** so that the number of new vocabulary items is controlled by reference to what students have already learned.

**3. Grammatical structures.** For instance, passives are converted to actives; simple past tense to simple present; reported into direct speech.

These kinds of criteria form the basis of many of the published graded 'simplified readers' available for English language teaching.

Simplification has a number of further implications. Firstly it is possible that any linguistic change, lexical or grammatical, will have a corresponding stylistic effect, and will therefore change the meaning or intention of the original text. This is particularly likely with literary material, of course, but in principle it can apply to any kind of text where the overall 'coherence' can be affected. Widdowson (1979) goes into these arguments in more detail.

Secondly some teaching situations require attention to the simplification of content when the complexity of the subject matter is regarded as being too advanced. This could be the case for some scientific explanations, for example, or for material too far removed from the learners' own life experiences.

Thirdly, simplification can refer not only to content, but also to the ways in which that content is presented: we may decide not to make any changes to the original text, but instead to lead the learners through it in a number of graded stages. We shall come back to this notion of 'task complexity' in the chapters on reading and listening comprehension.

### ***Reordering***

This procedure, the final one discussed in this section, refers to the possibility of putting the parts of a coursebook in a different order. This may mean adjusting the sequence of presentation within a unit, or taking units in a different sequence from that originally intended. There are limits, of course, to the scale of what teachers can do, and too many changes could result, unhelpfully, in an almost



complete reworking of a coursebook. A reordering of material is appropriate in the following kinds of situations:

- Materials typically present 'the future' by 'will' and 'going to'. However, for many learners, certainly at intermediate level and above, it is helpful to show the relationship between time reference and grammatical tense in a more accurate way. In this example we would probably wish to include the simple present and the present continuous as part of the notion of 'futurity', perhaps using *'Next term begins on 9 September'* or *'She retires in 2015'* as illustrations.
- The length of teaching programme may be too short for the coursebook to be worked through from beginning to end. It is likely in this case that the language needs of the students will determine the sequence in which the material will be taken. There is little point in working systematically through a textbook if key aspects of grammar vocabulary or communicative function are never reached. For instance, if the learners are adults due to study in the target language environment, it will be necessary to have covered several aspects of the tense system and to have introduced socially appropriate functions and frequently used vocabulary.
- Finally, 'reordering' can include separating items of content from each other as well as regrouping them and putting them together. An obvious example is a lesson on a particular language function felt to contain too many new grammar points for the present proficiency level of the learners.

#### 4.5 A Framework for Adaptation

There are clear areas of overlap among the various techniques discussed in this section, but it would be beyond the scope of this chapter to try to cover all the combinations and permutations. The intention here has been to offer a workable framework into which the main possibilities for adaptation can be fitted (not to offer some 'how to do' recipes, which are well covered elsewhere). Figure 4.2 shows how the considerations on which the principle of adaptation is based fit together:

- 1 Choose some materials with which you are familiar, or any others you would like to work with. (If you do not have any to hand, look back at the unit reprinted at the end of Chapter 2.)
- 2 Decide on any features of the material you would like to change because it is not entirely suitable for your own teaching situation.
- 3 Referring as much as possible to the techniques we have been discussing, draw up some suggestions for how to adapt the material to achieve greater 'congruence'.
- 4 If possible, discuss with other colleagues the reasons for your decisions.

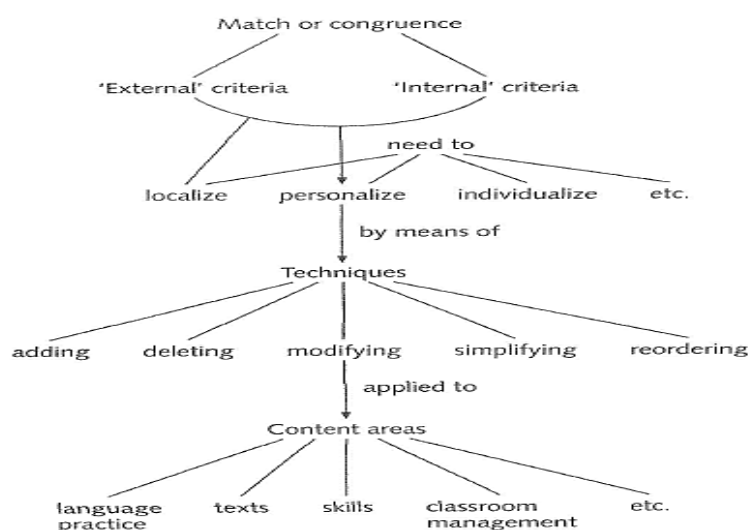


Figure 4.2 a framework for adaptation

## 4.6 Conclusion

At one end of the scale, adaptation is a very practical activity carried out mainly by teachers in order to make their work more relevant to the learners with whom they are in day-to-day contact. It is, however, not just an exercise done in self-contained methodological isolation. Like all our activity as teachers, it is related, directly and indirectly, to a wider range of professional concerns. Adaptation is linked to issues of administration and the whole management of education, in so far as it derives from decisions taken about material to be adopted. Further, the need to adapt is one consequence of the setting of objectives in a particular educational context. Finally adaptation can only be carried out effectively if it develops from an understanding of the possible design features of syllabuses and materials.

This chapter completes our discussion of the principles on which materials and methods are based. In Part II, we shall show how some of these principles have been expressed in relation to the concept of language skill.

## Questions for 'Principles and Procedures for Adapting Materials':

1. What has been the main focus when looking at reasons for adapting materials? *What the materials contain*

2. What three changes might the teaching environment necessitate to lead to greater appropriacy? *Personalise, individualise, localise*

3. What does each of these refer or relate to?

Personalise: *learners' interests (and academic, educational or professional needs)*

Individualise: *learning styles*

Localise: *suitable for local context*

### **Adding:**

4. What is adding by extension? *Adding more of the same*

5. What kinds of change does expanding bring about? *Qualitative, as well as quantitative*

6. What does McGrath call this kind of creative addition? *Exploitation.*

### **Deleting or omitting:**

7. What is meant by subtraction of materials? *Removing sections that refer to language that will probably not be used in the target language environment*

8. What is meant by materials being abridged? *Removing sections that are not essential to the course or too difficult, shortening the course.*

### **Modifying:**

9. What does the term modification refer to in this article? *internal change in the approach or focus of an exercise or other piece of material.*

10. What is the meaning of rewriting? *linguistic content needs modification*

11. What is the meaning of restructuring? *applies to classroom management*

### **Modifying: Rewriting**

12. Suggest three things that rewriting may involve:

- *relate activities more closely to learners' own backgrounds and interests*
- *introduce models of authentic language*
- *set more purposeful problem-solving tasks where the answers are not always known*

13. What do coursebooks commonly place insufficient emphasis on? *Listening comprehension*

14. What may adaptation of linguistic content require? *Rewording by the teacher as an oral explanation*

## Modifying: Restructuring

15. Give an example of restructuring that relates to class size? *Restructuring a role-play activity*

### **Simplifying:**

16. Name some elements of a course that can be safely simplified. *Instructions, explanations, visual layout of material*

17. What can result if teachers try to 'simplify' grammar or speech? *Distortion of natural language*

18. How can we change sentence-bound elements to simplify according to:

a) Sentence structure: *reduce sentence length, replace relative pronouns by nouns and pronouns.*

b) Lexical content: *Number of new vocabulary items controlled by reference to what the students have already learned.*

c) Grammatical structure: *passive changed to active, simple past changed to simple present, reported speech made direct.*

22. Simplify the following story for young Malaysians to read using any or all of the points above:

### The Real Spiderman

Alain Robert has climbed over 70 of the world's tallest buildings, including the Empire state Building in New York, the Eiffel Tower in France and the 508-metre Taipei 101 Tower in Taiwan. It's not surprising people call him 'The Real Spiderman'.

Alain began climbing on cliffs near where he lived in Valence, France. One day, when he was 12, he got home and realised that he'd forgotten his keys. So he climbed up the side of the building and into his family's flat through the window – which was eight floors up. That was when he decided to become a professional climber.

(Redston & Cunningham, 2006)

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### Reordering:

23. What may 'reordering' of the parts of a coursebook mean? *It means adjusting the sequence of presentation within a unit, or taking units in a different sequence than originally intended.*

24. Put these sections in an order that seems appropriate:

Order	Topic	Learning Areas
	"Being Healthy"	Modals (must, should)
	"Having Fun"	Leisure activities, possessive pronouns
	"My Cousins, My neighbour"	Adjectives, describing people
	"It's story time"	Simple past tense
	"Fresh fruits"	Colours, giving instructions (imperative)
	"Things I do"	Routines, telling time
	"From the sea"	Simple present tense
	"Pet's world"	Pet vocabulary, Verbs
	"People around me"	Occupations, 'this' and 'that'
	"I see numbers"	Counting, dates, times
	"A ride in the safari park"	Prepositions
	"In school"	Giving Directions

### Reasons

*E.g. Simple present tense should be taught before simple past tense.*

### Works cited in this topic

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