

Materials and Media

In the previous lesson, you've discovered the world of materials and materials design and development and their importance in the teaching/ learning process. In this lesson, you will learn what media is and the distinction between materials and media.

Tomlinson (1998, p.11) defines materials as “anything which is used to help to teach language learners. Materials can be in the form of a textbook, a workbook, a cassette, a CD-Rom, a video, a photocopied handout, a newspaper, a paragraph written on a whiteboard: anything which presents or informs about the language being learned”.

In this definition, Tomlinson confused the definition of materials with media of language teaching. The question that asks itself is: Is the textbook or the course-book a teaching material? Or is it a collection of language teaching materials printed in the same book? The same questions can be asked about the other examples Tomlinson (ibid) uses in his definition of materials; only a “paragraph” can be considered as a material while all the other examples are media which of course help the teacher to present language teaching materials to the learners.

In his contradictory glossary of terms Tomlinson (1998), for example, defines the course-book as: “a textbook which provides the core materials for a course. It aims to provide as much as possible in one book and is designed so that it could serve as the only book which the learners necessarily use during a course. Such a book usually includes work on grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, functions and the skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking.” (Tomlinson, 1998, p. 09)

Accordingly, the textbook is a container of a certain number of activities, exercises, language items and language abilities. It is a medium of presenting language in its written form, thus, using a writing channel of communication, to the learners. The same considerations can be made about the terms “workbook, a cassette, a CD-Rom, a video, a photocopied handout, a newspaper, and a whiteboard”. All of them are media of presenting language to the learners while using the writing or the aural channels of communication.

Media like the CD-Rom, the cassette or the tape can help the teacher to present the oral aspects of language to the learner. Other media like the blackboard, newspapers, the textbook or the hand-outs can help him present all scripted –written- aspects of the language, with some additional visual elements like pictures and drawings. Video and the white board are audio-visual media which can help him combine and present oral and visual–nonverbal or paralinguistic- features of language to the learners.

Accordingly, materials are all aspects of language usage and language use. All what the learners are exposed to inside or outside the classroom, in terms of speech,

writing and visual-paralinguistic- meaning, represent materials that the learners work on, in order to improve their proficiency level in that language.

Teaching a foreign language implies the exposure of the learners to the forms and contexts in which language is expressed. These forms and contexts of language usage and use, and the various tasks designed for teaching and learning, are the materials.

Presenting these materials to the foreign language learner, in or outside the classroom, through different pedagogical means, requires the use of some tools that we call media. They include all kinds of equipment that the teachers, or other pedagogues, use inside or outside the classroom. (Olshtain & Celce-Murcia 2001, p. 214-215)

In short, materials and media have been twinned and confused for a long time. Materials are language and culture specific, most relevant to and dependent on an approach, while media are worldwide means of communication, relevant to education technology and dependent on financial resources.

On one hand, one type of media, like the cassette or the audio tape can help the teacher to expose the learners to radio news, conversations and dialogues, repetition drills, and songs as materials which the learners have to listen to, understand, memorize or just repeat. On the other hand, one material like a song can be presented to the learners through at least two media of language teaching; it can be written in a textbook or recorded on a cassette. Thus the learners can either read it as comprehension, rhetorical, literary analysis task, or listen to it as a repetition or memorization task.