Humanizing the Coursebook
(Please answer in **full sentences** and **in your own words**)

1. What does Tomlinson mean when he says teachers need to humanize their coursebooks? Why are most coursebook lacking humanization?

2. What are some examples of how coursebooks can be humanized? What do all these examples have in common?

3. If one were to try to humanize and localize a coursebook for adolescent Korean learners, what kind of activities and materials might you want to try with them? Why?

CHAPTER

9

Humanizing the Coursebook

Brian Tomlinson

Introduction

My first and most dramatic attempt to humanize a coursebook took place one wintry night in Liverpool 35 years ago. As a very young teacher of a night school class of underpriviledged underachievers I could take the tedium no more. I ordered the class to line up along the window with their middle-class, middle-of-the road coursebooks in their right hands. We opened the windows and, on the command 'throw', they threw their coursebooks away. Now we had no irrelevant materials for the English class and, in fact, now we had no materials at all. So, instead the students brought their own. Soon we had a lot of comics and magazines and even one or two books as well. Then we had a lot of fun devising activities together that involved the students in doing things that connected to themselves.

   In my 35 years of teaching English since that dramatic act of defiance in Liverpool I've suffered countless other coursebooks (including some I've written myself) which have needed humanizing because they didn't engage the learners I was using them with and because they didn't manage to connect with the learners' lives. Sometimes it wasn't the coursebook's fault; the books were potentially humanistic (including, I hope, those written by myself) but they didn't match the psychological and sociological realities of my particular groups of learners. Often, though, it was the fault of the coursebooks because they didn't sufficiently take into account the resources of the learner as a human being. Many of these coursebooks concentrated on the linguistic and analytical aspects of language learning and failed to tap the human being's potential for multidimensional processing. That is, they made insufficient use of the learners' ability to learn through doing things physically, to learn through feeling emotion, to learn through experiencing things in the mind. They didn't acknowledge that, for human beings, the most important factor in learning is affect (Arnold, 1999; Schumann, 1999). In order to achieve effective and durable learning, language learners need to relax, feel at ease, develop self-confidence and self-esteem, develop positive attitudes towards the learning experience and be involved intellectually, aesthetically and emotionally (Tomlinson, 1998c). They also need to make use of their experience of life, their interests and enthusiasms, their views, attitudes and feelings and, above all, their capacity to make meaningful connections in their minds. Not many coursebooks encourage them to do this.

Instead, many of them use an interrogative approach which continually under-estimates and questions the ability of the learners, and which often results in diminishment and loss of self-esteem for the learner and a minimalizing of opportunities for effective learning.

I hope from reading this Introduction it's becoming clear that what I mean by a humanistic coursebook is one which respects its users as human beings and helps them to exploit their capacity for learning through meaningful experience. I hope it's also becoming clear that by humanizing the coursebook I mean adding activities which help to make the language learning process a more affective experience and finding ways of helping the learners to connect what is in the book to what is in their minds.

Humanizing without the Coursebook

One way of humanizing a coursebook is for the teacher to replace sections of it with more humanistic materials which involve the learners in gaining and reflecting on experience. Or, as with my Liverpool example, for the teacher to take the drastic step of replacing the coursebook altogether. This was a step which I also took with a class of domestic science and handicraft teachers at a primary teacher-training college in Vanuatu. They were a class of women with at least ten years' experience of apparently failing to learn English formally and with no confidence at all in their ability to use English for communication. No course-book ever written could have helped them (unless it had been written for that class alone) and I soon decided to replace the book we'd been allocated. Instead I told them that they were each going to write a novel. They were asked to think of an environment they knew well and to develop a story situated in it. When they'd recovered from their shock, they set about the task and then spent every English lesson for the term writing their novels, while I made myself available as an informant and supporter. In true Melanesian style, they read each other's work in progress and made helpful suggestions. They quickly gained confidence and self-esteem and soon they were illustrating their books with the beautiful drawings which they all seemed capable of and 'publishing' them in elaborate and attractive ways. I'm not claiming that by the end of term their English had mi-raculously improved, but they'd all written, revised and 'published' books which were at least 60 pages long. Even if they hadn't acquired much English (though I'm sure they did), they'd done something in English which they were proud of and they'd gained far more confidence and self-esteem than all their coursebooks put together had ever given them.

Perhaps the best example of partial replacement I've experienced was a teacher in a high school in Jakarta who asked her class if they liked their coursebook. Of course, in typical Indonesian fashion, they told her what they thought she wanted to hear and were unanimous in their praise of the book. However, she persisted and eventually persuaded them to tell her what they really thought of the book. It seems that they found it very boring and, in particular, disliked the dull reading texts which seemed to have no connection with their lives. The teacher's response

was to divide the class into twelve groups (the same number as weeks in the semester) and to give Group 1 responsibility for finding something interesting for the class to read in English. Group 1 spent the week searching Jakarta for a text which could engage their peers and on the Friday they delivered it to the teacher. On the Monday she used the text for the reading class and then challenged Group 2 to find an equally interesting text for the following week. This procedure continued for the whole of the semester with the students finding the texts and the teacher supplying a variety of potentially engaging activities. The next semester the teacher asked the class if they wanted to continue to find their own texts and was rewarded with a resounding, 'Yes!' This time, however, she told Group 1 that, not only were they responsible for finding an interesting text but that they were also responsible for developing the activities and for 'teaching' the reading lesson on the Monday. On the Friday, Group 1 showed their text and activities to the teacher and she gave them some advice for their lesson on the Monday. This procedure continued for the whole semester, with the teacher sitting in the back of the students' class while they gained confidence and enjoyment connected to their lives (an experience similar to that of Jensen and Hermer (1998: 191) who found that 'the pupils are the best collaborators in a performance-based learning environment. They even find and devise exercises and games themselves, research situations and texts').

Other examples of partial replacement from my experience include:

- Getting a class of Italian university students to script and record a radio soap opera set in the college they were visiting in England (by giving each small group responsibility for producing an episode).
- Helping a multilingual class of intermediate-level learners to video their versions of poems, short stories and extracts from novels.
- Getting classes of high school students in Indonesia to participate in TPR Plus activities (e.g., collective miming of stories, making of sculptures, painting of murals, cooking of meals, etc.) which start off with the students following instructions spoken by the teacher but then develop into activities initiated by the students themselves.
- Encouraging teachers in Indonesia and Japan to get students to develop their own class libraries by staggering into class with a huge cardboard box and inviting the students to come and look at their new class library. Of course, the box was empty and the students were challenged to fill it with reading material which would interest their friends. In many cases, the students quickly filled their box as a result of visits to travel agents, embassies, newspaper offices, publishers and supermarkets. And one enterprising class in Jakarta even looked for English-sounding names in the telephone book and then visited houses asking for unwanted books, magazines and newspapers for their libraries.
- Encouraging teachers in Japan to give each student in their class a blank cassette and then prompting them to record something interesting in English for their class Listening Library (one teacher told me a year later that her class now had over a thousand cassettes in their Listening Library).

For other ideas for supplementing the coursebook with student-centred, student-initiated activities providing sensory experience of language learning, see Jensen and Hermer (1998), who quote a father in Bateson (1972) telling his daughter, 'All that syntax and grammar, that's rubbish. Everything rests on the notion that there is such a thing as "just" words – but there isn't.' They advocate a performance approach which promotes 'a full sensory, physical and emotional appreciation of the language' (p. 179) and provide many practical examples of how to achieve their humanistic aims.

Humanizing with the Coursebook

Often teachers are obliged to use a coursebook in all their lessons. In such cases they can humanize it by reducing the non-humanistic elements of the book and by expanding and adding to those sections which invite the learners to think, feel and do in order to learn.

Here's an example of such an approach:

1. getting the whole class to act out a variation of a coursebook reading text from the teacher's spoken instructions;
2. giving them the coursebook text and asking them in groups to find as many differences as they can between the two similar texts within a demanding time limit;
3. organizing a competition in which the groups take it in turns to articulate a difference without referring back to the text;
4. stimulating the groups to develop an extended version of the text in a local context;
5. giving the students some of the coursebook activities for homework.

Other coursebook-based humanistic activities I've used include:

- Getting students individually and then in groups to draw a version of a reading or listening text before doing the coursebook comprehension activities (e.g., how they think the boy sees the school in Roger McGough's poem 'First Day at School' (1979); how they think the young whale sees the people on the beach in 'The Great Whale's Mistake' (Bell and Gower, 1991: 141)).
- Getting students in groups to work out what happens in my mime of a text prior to reading the text in the coursebook.
- Getting students to dramatize texts they are going to read in the coursebook from my spoken narrative of the text.
- Getting one group of students to mime their version of a text from the coursebook which another group are going to read and then inviting that group to tell the story of the text before they read it.
- Giving the students part of a coursebook text and then asking them to complete it themselves before reading the text in the coursebook and doing the associated activities.

- Getting the whole class to write a local version of a coursebook text by inviting them to shout out sentences and later to revise and connect them into a coherent story.
- Giving the students the comprehension questions from the coursebook and getting them to write the text they are based on.
- Getting students to bring photographs to class to represent their local application of a coursebook text or task they've used in a previous lesson.
- Getting students to act out coursebook dialogues in voices appropriate to a given context (e.g., the shop assistant is the customer's ex-boyfriend).
- Getting students to suggest different contexts for a coursebook dialogue which would change its meaning.
- Getting students in pairs to continue and develop a coursebook dialogue into a dramatic event with each student playing one of the characters.
- Getting students to write the inner speech monologues of characters in a coursebook dialogue (e.g., the outwardly polite shopkeeper who is getting inwardly incensed by the customer who can't make his mind up).

Developing Humanistic Coursebooks

Of course, the ideal scenario for most hard-pressed teachers would be to be able to use a coursebook which is already humanistic. Is it possible to develop coursebooks which are humanistic and which at the same time satisfy the conservative caution of the publishers, as well as the requirements of conventional institutions, curricula and administrators? It is. But it's not easy; and no coursebook can be completely humanistic for all its users because it can't possibly relate directly to each user's life.

There are a number of ways of developing coursebooks which are more humanistic.

Writing in Large and Varied Teams

Writing a coursebook (and especially a series of coursebooks) can be a long and laborious process. Often the writer(s) start out energized with enthusiasm and ideas but, after making the almost inevitable compromises with the understandably conservative editor, and after churning out innumerable units with the same format, they start to lose their creative energy. Long before the end of the book/series, the writers have changed their main objective to completing the book so that it can start to repay them for the tedious time they've devoted to it and so it can give them back their life. One way of stimulating and maintaining creative energy is to write coursebooks quickly in large and varied teams. The team might consist of new and experienced teachers, new and experienced materials writers, a poet, an artist, an applied linguist, a musician, a Chief Examiner and a cartoonist, all pooling their resources and stimulating each other. That's how we wrote a secondary school English coursebook for Namibia (Tomlinson, 1995) and how we're writing a series of coursebooks at Bilkent

University in Ankara. We wrote the Namibian coursebook with a team of 30 writers in six days. On the first day, I demonstrated novel humanistic approaches and activities to stimulate thought and ideas. On the second day, we worked out a flexible unit framework and divided into ten writing teams of three. Each team wrote a Unit 1 designed to engage the learners and interest them in the book. The units were displayed on the wall and voted for by everybody in a competition to decide on the unit most likely to appeal to the learners. The winners revised their unit and developed another one while all the other teams wrote a new unit each. Throughout each working day representatives were present from the Ministry of Education and from the publisher (Gamsberg Macmillan) and they were kept busy giving permission and advice. Also, specialist members of teams (e.g., the artist, the poet, the Chief Examiner) were visited for feedback and suggestions. The units were displayed, monitored and revised, and a small team of advisors checked the units against the syllabus and against lists of student and teacher needs. They also sequenced and connected the units and were eventually responsible for a final editing and revision of the book. The result was the most imaginative and humanistic coursebook I've ever been involved in, mainly because the short intensive writing period helped generate and maintain energy and the varied interaction with other human beings helped put the focus on the people involved in the learning process rather than on the language being learned.

Using a Text-driven Approach

The teams in the Namibian project described above started not by selecting a language point but by selecting a potentially engaging text from the books, magazines, newspapers and cassettes made available to them. They devised pre-reading or listening activities to help to activate the learners' minds in readiness for connecting the texts to their own lives and they developed post-reading activities aimed at helping the learners to articulate and develop their mental representations of the text. In other words, the initial emphasis was on the people experiencing the texts and not on the language in them. Later, the writers developed activities focusing on the content of the text and helping the learners to connect it to their own lives. Then they developed language activities focusing on language features which were salient in the text. Because we'd checked that the texts chosen constituted a representative sample of the main genres and text types, it was not too surprising that the language features chosen for the activities corresponded very closely with the language features listed in the syllabus.

    In my experience as a writer and facilitator of coursebooks, the text-driven approach described above can be a very effective way of ensuring that a course-book is humanistic. If the initial focus is on a potentially engaging text it's much more likely that the writer will keep the learners in mind than if the initial focus is on a language item or skill. And it's much easier to develop learning activities to match a text than it is to find an engaging text to match teaching points.

Using a Multidimensional Approach

> A multi-dimensional approach aims to help learners to develop the ability to produce and process an L2 by using their mental resources in ways similar to those they use when communicating in their L1. Doing so not only helps learners to maximise their brain's potential for communicating in an L2 but it also maximises their brain's potential for learning. (Tomlinson, 2000a)

A multidimensional approach is based on the principle that using affect, mental imagery and inner speech is what we do during effective language use and what we do during effective and durable learning, too. As Berman (1999: 2) says, 'we learn best when we see things as part of a recognised pattern, when our imaginations are aroused, when we make natural associations between one idea and another, and when the information appeals to our senses.' The procedures which can be used in a coursebook to apply the principles of a multidimensional approach (and thus to create a humanistic coursebook) include:

- engaging affect (i.e., emotional involvement, positive attitudes towards the learning experience and self-esteem) through activities which involve learners recalling and recounting personal experiences, thinking about and articulating their own attitudes and views and creating their own personal mental representations of what they listen to and read;
- imaging activities (Tomlinson, 1998c) which encourage learners to create mental images while processing or producing language (an 'overwhelming amount of empirical evidence seems to show that imagery is a remarkably effective mediator of cognitive performance, ranging from short-term memory to creativity' (Kaufman 1996: 77));
- inner voice activities which encourage learners to talk to themselves in an L2 inner voice while processing and producing language in the L2 (Tomlinson, 2000a, 2000b);
- kinaesthetic activities which involve learners in momentary mental activity before following instructions in the L2 in order to perform physical activities such as playing games, miming stories, making models and cooking meals (Asher, 1994; Tomlinson, 1994a);
- process activities which help learners to create a version of a text themselves before reading or listening to the complete text (Tomlinson, 2000a).

Using Literature

In my experience, one of the best ways to achieve the objectives mentioned so far in this chapter is to use literature as a means of stimulating multidimensional mental activity during language learning (Tomlinson, 2001). This only works if the learners are helped and encouraged to experience the literature rather than study it, if the texts are accessible without glossaries and introductions and if the literature relates to the learners' lives (Tomlinson, 1998b). I've found that the

best way to do this is to build up a library of texts which are linguistically simple but cognitively and emotionally complex, and then to use them as the basis of humanistic activities which encourage personal engagement and response (Tomlinson, 1994a). Unfortunately most coursebooks rarely use literature (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2001) and when they do, they usually ask learners to read the text carefully and then answer comprehension questions on it. They thus ensure that the learners study the text. The text remains a text and the learners fail to create literature from it. As a result, the text has little impact on their minds, their lives or their language acquisition.

Varying the Unit Focus

One of the reasons why many coursebooks are considered to be superficial and dull is that most of them try in each unit to cover the four skills, plus grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation points. This inevitably leads to a bits-and-pieces approach which often provides only very brief, trivial and disconnected encounters with the language being learned. If most of the units had only one main focus there would be a better chance of providing more sustained and meaningful encounters with the language in use and, therefore, of developing a more humanistic coursebook. For example, Unit 1 could focus on a reading project (involving a number of texts), Unit 2 could focus on an extensive listening task, Unit 3 could focus on an extensive writing task, which includes reading, listening and speaking in preparation and follow-up activities, and Unit 4 could provide grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation activities focusing on salient features in Units 1 to 3. That way the emphasis is more likely to be put on communication between people and less on unconnected bits of language. And the language work will be related to what the learners have already experienced.

Talking to the Learners

The voice of most coursebooks is semi-formal and distant, and matches the stereo-type of the knowledge-transmitting teacher talking at his learners. The writers reveal very little about their personalities, interests, beliefs and experiences and spend most of the time either telling the learners what to learn, do and say or interrogating them about what they know. It's a very unequal and anti-humanistic relationship which does little to encourage or engage the learner. For example, a recent survey of eight adult EFL coursebooks concluded that the 'the voices of the authors are neutral and semi-formal' (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2001: 88); though it did find that two of the courses 'managed to be neutral, yet at the same time friendly and supportive' (*ibid*).

What I'd 'like to see materials writers do is to chat to the learners casually in the same way that good teachers do' (in all cultures) 'and to try to achieve personal contact with them by revealing their own preferences, interests and opinions' (Tomlinson, 1998c: 8–9). There is research evidence that using a personal voice in a textbook can foster deeper and more durable learning (Beck *et al.*, 1995) and

that the best way to achieve this is to include features of orality. The features I would recommend to the coursebook writer are:

- Informal discourse features (e.g., contracted forms, ellipsis, informal lexis).
- The active rather than the passive voice.
- Concreteness (e.g., examples, anecdotes).
- Inclusiveness (e.g., not signalling intellectual, linguistic or cultural superiority over the learners).
- Sharing experiences and opinions.
- Sometimes including casual redundancies rather than always being concise.

Connecting to the Learners' Views and Opinions

The easiest way to make a coursebook humanistic is to ensure that in most activities the learners are asked about their own views, attitudes, feelings and opinions, that they are helped to think of their own examples and connections and that they are made to feel as though they are equal interactants with the coursebook writers and with the authors of texts which the coursebook includes. Not many coursebooks achieve this, but in the survey of courses mentioned above it was considered that *Language in Use* (Doff and Jones, 1991) and *Landmark* (Haines and Stewart, 2000) 'respect the learners as individuals, and seek to engage them personally in many of their activities' (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2001: 87).

Providing Text-free Generalizable Activities

It's possible to develop a set of generalizable activities (Maley, 1998) which can be used with texts selected by the learner from a resource pack of materials, from a library, from the Internet or from his/her own resources. This ensures that the text relates to learners and is likely to engage them, and this is the way I'm writing a coursebook called *English from the Web*. In this book each unit provides the learners with a set of generalizable pre-reading, whilst-reading and post-reading activities for a particular genre (e.g., sports reports, cartoons, advertisements) and then suggests websites from which the learners can select texts which appeal to them for use with the activities.

Even more humanistic and productive would be an approach which provides generalizable activities in a coursebook plus guidance and stimulus to help the learners write their own texts for use with the activities (either for themselves or for a bank for other learners to select from).

Including Awareness Activities

Once learners have engaged with a text, achieved a multidimensional representation of it and developed and articulated their personal responses to it, I've found it can be very useful to help them to make discoveries for themselves from a more intensive reading of the text. Language awareness activities (Bolitho

and Tomlinson, 1995), pragmatic awareness activities (Tomlinson, 1994b) and cultural awareness activities (Tomlinson, 2001), in which learners eventually work things out for themselves, can not only facilitate language acquisition and mental development, but they can also considerably increase self-esteem and independence.

Providing Alternatives

Providing a choice of route (e.g., analytical v. experiential), of texts (e.g., on different topics or at different levels) and of tasks (e.g., in relation to different learning styles) is a fairly easy way to personalize coursebooks and, therefore, to make them more humanistic.

Localizing Coursebooks

One of the main reasons why global coursebooks are not normally humanistic is that in trying to cater for everybody they end up engaging nobody. They have to make sure that their content and approach is not unsuitable for any type of learner, that their choice of topics and texts doesn't disadvantage any learners and, above all, that they don't offend or disturb any learners. The result, very often, is a book which presents 'a sanitised world which is bland and dull and in which there is very little excitement or disturbance to stimulate the emotions of the learner' (Tomlinson, 1998a: 20), a world which is characterized by Wajnryb (1996: 291) in her analysis of two best-selling coursebooks as 'safe, clean, harmonious, benevolent, undisturbed and PG-rated. What is absent is significant – jeopardy, face threat, negotiation, implicature ... and context.' Learning a language in such a world can reduce the learner from an individual human being with views, attitudes and emotions to a language learner whose brain is focused narrowly on low-level linguistic decoding.

One way of connecting a coursebook to the real world which the learner lives in is obviously to localize coursebooks. It's no accident that the two most humanistic coursebooks I know are published for local markets, *On Target* (1995) for Namibia and *Search 8* (1997) for Norway. Unfortunately, local coursebooks don't generate as much profit as global coursebooks and, despite a recent trend of producing localized versions of coursebooks, the global coursebook is going to remain the resource used by the majority of learners of English in the world. However, it wouldn't be too difficult to:

- provide a bank of texts, tasks and illustrations for the teacher to select from in order to replace or supplement sections of a global coursebook not relevant to their learners;
- produce global coursebooks with generalizable activities which are supplemented by local photocopiable packs of texts and illustrations;
- include in the teacher's book suggestions for localizing the texts and activities in a global coursebook;

- include activities in a global coursebook in which the learners localize some of the texts and the tasks by modifying them in relation to the world they know.

Conclusion

Humanistic approaches to language learning can facilitate both language acquisition and personal development. Unfortunately, most language learners learn from coursebooks and most coursebooks are not humanistic. However, it's not that difficult to make a coursebook more humanistic and it is possible to develop coursebooks which are both humanistic and profitable. We owe it to our learners to try.

Note

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