

ADAPTATION IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Harold S. Madsen
J. Donald Bowen

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Rowley, Mass., 1978.

Harold Madsen and Donald Bowen have written a book explaining how to establish realistic communication in language teaching in the areas of speaking, writing and reading. Adaptation in Language Teaching explains to teachers in training, to teachers and textbook writers, various ways which they can adapt their textbooks and design materials for a specific group of students.

The authors' greatest emphasis is on adaptation, through the establishment of congruence, between the text and the real world without sacrificing necessary language skills. Madsen and Bowen give examples which enable the teacher to achieve this congruence in classroom practice. Many teachers avoid specific exercises, or go through certain sections in textbooks very rapidly because they do not "fit" into their teaching style or objectives. Textbooks may present structures out of sequence, not give explanations or confuse material for written or spoken work. The language teacher must be prepared to change and adapt material in these lessons as necessary, without deleting essential textbook items.

The authors feel that all communication must be understandable and relevant. The teaching of oral communication, in most modern texts, has had this aim. However, upon further investigation, one can find flaws in presentation. Madsen and Bowen point out, using examples from new and old language textbooks, that many situations, drills, dialogues and grammar explanations are based on authors' ideas of how language ought to be spoken, not the way the target language is presently being used. The skill of speaking the "live" target language cannot be set aside as something the students can "pick up when they get there". They need to learn everyday language in the classroom, along with the appropriate register. Students have to be taught to "analyze" the language, just as they will be analyzed by native speakers when they are using the target language.

The authors have not set aside certain chapters on the teaching of the target culture as a separate entity. However, since they have emphasized the use of language in realistic situations, the target culture will be automatically involved in all classroom learning situations, from drills to mini-dramas. Madsen and Bowen point out the positive effect that personalizing a language through culture has on student motivation.

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