

Textbook: Focus on Students' National Identity

## Foreign language textbook as a methodological and technological phenomenon: axiological dimension

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### Abstract

The article considers the functions, structure and content of a foreign language textbook in terms of axiological measurement of modern education. The article gives a new understanding of a textbook as a tool to design and realize the content components of language education. A textbook is supposed to provide socio-linguo-cognitive aspects of communication and cognition in a foreign language. The authors pay special attention to the determination of axiologically significant parameters of the praxe-methodological aspect of the textbook content. The textbook's content through linguistic culture has to form a student's personality, which realizes itself as a bearer of national values, accepts the equality of different cultures and perceives cultural diversity as a source of not only social, but also personal progress.

*Keywords:* theory of the foreign language textbook, axiological approach, moral values.

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### Introduction

A textbook, as the main medium of instruction in a foreign language classroom, has undergone a complex path of its development, and has undergone serious changes with regard to its function as well as its structure and content. When designing a textbook, we know that these changes are caused by the need to

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take into account the realities of social development (external factors) as well as the data of methodological science and related scientific branches of knowledge (internal factors) in a certain historical period of time. Since the socio-cultural (in the broad sense) context of education has changed recently in general and linguistics in particular, and there have been serious paradigmatic shifts in teaching technology itself, it is legitimate to ask a number of questions:

How have the changes in society and science in recent decades determined (or should determine) the functional and structural-content of a modern textbook? Does the domestic theory of foreign language textbooks, created in the second half of the last century, need to be updated today? And if the answer to the second question is yes, then how should it be implemented?

The search for answers to the above-mentioned questions makes the main content of this paper. Realizing that the problems of a foreign language textbook theory are multifaceted and multidimensional, the authors will limit themselves to studying only those parameters which are connected with the axiological aspects of modern language education (foreign languages) and fully demonstrate the innovative level of its development; and the theory and practice of foreign language teaching.

### **Purpose and objectives of the study**

Therefore, the main goal of the study is to validate functional and content features of a foreign language textbook as a methodological and technological phenomenon in the context of modern value-based ideology of language (foreign languages) education.

In order to achieve this goal at least three objectives should be accomplished, namely:

- a) to clarify the factors causing the relevance of addressing the axiological component of the modern foreign language textbook theory;
- b) to justify the new functional load of a textbook acting as a methodological basis for modern foreign language education;
- c) to describe the specifics of didactic content of a foreign language textbook as a technological basis for axiologically marked content of foreign language education.

### **Literature review**

Methodology has traditionally given a great deal of attention to the problem of a textbook. For example, functions and didactic principles of a textbook (Y.K. Babansky, V.P. Bespalko, D.D. Zuev, V.M. Korotov, V.V. Kraevsky, I.Y. Lerner, M.R. Lvov, etc.) are justified in the general theory of a textbook in Russia (V.V. Kraevsky, I.Ya. Lerner, M.R. Lvov, etc.), the educational potential of a textbook (G.G. Granik, S.M. Bondarenko, M.I. Skatkin, etc.), principles for selecting and constructing textbook content (V.O. Punskey, V.N. Stoletov, etc.). These didactic principles are consonant with the main provisions of the foreign language textbook theory (I.L. Bim) and the theory of Russian as a foreign language textbook (M.N. Vyatutnev, O. Kogan, etc.), which are, undoubtedly, relevant today as well. At the same time, this theory initially emphasized the connection of a textbook with all the factors determining its structure and content.

Nowadays, this fact is most evident in a number of interesting publications devoted to the problem of electronic textbooks and representing a justified response of a professional community to the challenges of modern digital reality (O.V. Maslennikova, M.Y. Bukharkina, M.V. Yakushev, etc.). At the same time, despite specialists' great attention to the problems of textbook publishing and the abundance of foreign language textbooks on the market, the main provisions of the foreign language textbook theory as a methodological and technological phenomenon have remained outside the sphere of specialists' interest (Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger, 2015). In the meantime, there are at least three obvious circumstances in modern linguistic education which speak in favour of the relevance of addressing primarily axiological aspects of the theory of foreign language textbooks.

First, such external factors as linguistic, ethno-socio-cultural communicative and informational context of human life and educational system has changed in recent decades. To a large extent, in recent years it has acquired a pronounced plurilingual character, which requires accentuation of the value of cultural pluralism and humanity as an ideal of humanism and, consequently, the recognition of equality and community of different languages and cultures, mastering the ethics of interpersonal and intercultural communication (Safonova, 2017; Richards & Rodgers, 2014), respect for foreign culture/s and a sense of pride in your own culture and language, etc.

Secondly, it is also necessary to take into account the shift of linguistic education in its valuable objects, among which the primary one is a personality, in particular, a multilingual bi(multicultural) linguistic personality with a complex structure (abilities, competencies, personal qualities, values and meanings) and multidimensional cultural identity (regional, national, social, etc.) and distinguished by certain moral value orientations, meaning orientations and need in communication, learning and knowledge.

Thirdly, a special role is played by internal factors which determine the peculiarities of contemporary

language education. It is primarily the adoption of the anthropic principle of methodological research by methodological science and, as a result, the increasing degree of "human dimensionality" of the methodological approaches and theories, including the theory of a foreign language textbook.

## **Methodology**

The methodological basis of the research is the systemic-activity (A.N. Leontiev, A.A. Leontiev, S.L. Rubinstein, P.Y. Halperin, V.V. Davidov, D.B. Elkonin) and axiological approaches (B. Bim-Bad, S. Egorov, N. Nikandrov, E. Osovsky, S. Ravkin, B.T. Likhachev, V.A. Slastenin, P.G. Shchedrovitsky, A.D. Deikina, V.D. Yanchenko). These approaches view education as a value and activity as the basis for personal development and the formation of moral values. The main provisions of these approaches define the understanding of the key concepts for the textbook theory: "personality", its "social, communicative and moral development", "culture", "knowledge", "learning activity"; and they allow us to consider the textbook as a system interacting with the environment and conditioned by a set of internal and external factors. These approaches prove that the development of a person and the richness of his/her worldview are determined by the content of their activity and social relations. This is fundamental to the development of the textbook theory and the design of its content and technological aspects. It determines the target orientation of the latter on the development of personal qualities of a student, his moral values, readiness and ability for foreign language communication and cognition with the help of the language.

The choice of the above-mentioned approaches in order to solve the research objectives required the use of the following theoretical research methods: analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, generalization, including theoretical analysis of philosophical, pedagogical, psychological, psycholinguistic, psychophysiological, neurophysiological, linguistic and methodological literature on the stated research problem and comparative analysis of approaches and technologies; pedagogical modeling and scientific design.

## **Results**

The analysis of the functional load of a textbook in didactic process shows that even today it remains the main teaching tool, through which the basic properties of a methodological system are modelled, and then, in accordance with this system, a particular learning process is realised. It is not a coincidence that any textbook, including foreign language textbooks, is a carrier of certain educational content and, at the same time, an organizer of the processes of mastering this content by the students (Van den Branden, 2016).

But from the point of view of the axiological component of the theory of foreign language teaching and the

value-based dimension of language education it is necessary to talk about new functions of a foreign language textbook, related not only to the acquisition of its verbal and semantic code by the learners, but also to the formation of a certain system of values and concepts. This system reflects the degree of students' understanding of the conceptual system of a foreign language, the meanings of worldview ideas and concepts of another linguistic-sociocultural reality and, at the same time, their awareness of their own universal nature as a cultural-historical subject; and of themselves as a subject of their own culture.

The acceptance by foreign language textbook theory of this provision means, in fact, its acceptance of the value of the individual not only as a subject of speech and activity, but also as a subject of culture and its cognition, a subject of morality responsible for the preservation and development of humanistic values.

Only in this case by using integrative and interdisciplinary platform this theory is able to build a *methodological* basis of modern linguoeducation and foreign language teaching and present a foreign language textbook as a carrier of axiologically marked content of foreign language teaching. Simultaneously, it can be considered as a technological phenomenon designed to organize the process of personal, social, communicative, cognitive and moral development of a learner, who studies a foreign language and foreign culture in connection with their own culture and the system of values, relevant for a particular historical period of the development of society.

## **Discussions**

As it is widely known, didactics traditionally emphasises the dual nature of a textbook: it is both as a learning tool and a part of the teaching of the subject (V.V. Kraevsky). The implementation of this dual function becomes possible due to the fact that a textbook not only structures the content (subject aspect) of teaching, text and illustration materials, but also specifies the system of actions (procedural aspect) for mastering the content (technology of mastering the material and orientation in the textbook) in order to achieve the planned learning outcomes (Harwood, 2014). Both the content and the system of actions constitute, as noted in the theory of a textbook, its internal structure or didactic content, which is an interconnection of four aspects: informational, semiotic, methodological and praxiological (Syatkovsky, 1981, p. 35). At the same time, the last aspect, in fact, complements the first three, as it deals with the optimization of each of them. This gives grounds to analyze the didactic content of a textbook in terms of three interrelated aspects: praxioinformational, praxiosemiotic, praxiomethodological. As a result, it has been established that filling this universal multidimensional "framework" with specific constituents and properties ("structural material"), which conform to the axiological specificity of modern linguistic education, requires the focus primarily on the emotional and motivational sphere of students' personalities, their interests in cognitive activity and the abilities (intellect, memory, perception, etc.) required. It is

essential, as emphasized in various publications (Habtoor, 2012; Tok, 2010; etc.), their ability to relate their culture and the culture of the people of the studied language, understand the similarities and differences in these cultures, in the worldview of their speakers, in systems of norms, duties, rights, etc., accepted in different linguosocieties. When designing didactic content of a textbook, one should also take into account such a component as existing/acquired emotional and evaluative experience of the subjects of the educational process or, in other words, their empathetic abilities.

Consequently, the didactic content of a foreign language textbook is designed to motivate not only and not so much the speech and communicative activity of a student, but also his cognitive, intellectual, emotional and, most importantly, creative activity. The cultural orientation of each aspect of this component exclusively towards the country of the language learnt should be excluded, otherwise the textbook will promote alien values to the detriment of national values (which, as our analysis shows, is the case with textbooks of foreign publishers). Moreover, students' knowledge of a different reality, different behavioral patterns, social and linguistic labels, as well as comparing and contrasting the "alien" world with their experience gained in their native culture, helps to actualise an outlook on the world formed in the student's native language and to give it a problematic character. This, in turn, is a powerful factor in the students' personal development, as it creates a certain background in which a person is deeply aware of belonging to a particular nation and culture; and an understanding of the uniqueness of their own culture is formed.

It should be noted that the selection of the axiological component of the didactic content of a language textbook, i.e. the selection of national, cultural and moral values of an L2 native speaker, as well as the development of the technology of working with this component, is an urgent problem waiting for its researchers. In this regard, we cannot but agree with V.V. Safonova (Safonova, 2001) that depending on how much the tasks and content of cultural enrichment of a foreign language practice are thought through and, let us add, axiological enrichment of this practice, the socializing and developing effect of studying a foreign language will be either positive or negative.

However, our analysis of English textbooks for primary schools shows that their authors do not fully take into account both socio-cultural realities of modern schools (differences in the development and upbringing of first graders, the presence of children "from disadvantaged backgrounds", the multiculturalism of educational environment, etc.) and the importance of axiological colouring of didactic content of a textbook, and scientific data of such sciences as axiology, educational theory, psychophysiology, neurophysiology, psycholinguistics. Hence, the authors' have a somewhat simplified view of the moral, cognitive and emotional development of a young schoolchild, as well as of the language acquisition process. Therefore, the recognition of such textbooks as a methodological basis for educational process

seems debatable. This conclusion applies not only to the praxioinformational and praxiosemiotic components of textbook content, but also to the praxiomethodological ones. For example, the imitative technology of teaching the lexico-grammatical side of oral speech adopted in a number of primary school textbooks (a remnant of the theory of behaviorism and audiolinguistic approach) does not take into account the regularities of cognitive formation of modern 6-8 year old children, causing left brain fatigue due to numerous repetitions of words and speech patterns after the teacher and, as a result, reduced interest in another language and another culture. Or, for example, the outdated whole-word method in teaching reading in English (used in teaching English as a native language in British and US schools) does not take into account the difficulties faced by Russian-speaking pupils who have no experience of oral communication in English (Miles, McFadden & Ehri, 2020).

In general, if we talk about a modern textbook as a methodological and technological phenomenon, its content in the above three aspects of consideration should be reconsidered in the context of the ideology of linguistic education rather than language learning. As repeatedly emphasised in didactics (V.I. Zagvyazinsky), the categories of “education” and “learning” are not synonymous and are not interchangeable. The most important thing that distinguishes them from each other is their target orientation. If the first one aims at developing the student's personality and, first of all, his/her system of values, the second one aims at forming knowledge, foreign language skills and abilities as the main components of foreign language communicative competence. Therefore, this competence cannot be the main educational goal, it is only a means of personal development of a schoolchild, and competence is one of its many personal characteristics. From this point of view, the recognition in the Federal State Standards of School Education and the Reference Programmes for Foreign Languages of the formation of foreign language communicative competence among schoolchildren as a priority goal of teaching reflects only the pragmatic aspect of goal-setting, but does not go into the field of education, which is obviously not enough to implement the axiological dominant of the latter and the strategic activity and personality orientation of education in general.

Therefore we believe that a textbook should be constructed in the framework of the modern textbook theory irrespective of the level of school education it is meant for, and should be based on the activity theory (Zimnaya, 2001; Leont'ev, 2008; Elkonin, 1989; Elkonin, 2007) and cultural congruity approaches (Bulkin, 2003; Safonova, 2001, Safonova, 2017), the concept of personality-developing foreign language education (Nikitenko, 2018, Nikitenko, 2019) and the concept of linguocultural personality (Galskova, 2018; Galskova, 2020). The synergy and implementation of these approaches can provide communicative, cognitive, moral, social development of the student's personality and conscious (not based on imitation, especially at the primary level of secondary school) acquisition of a foreign language and facts about

another culture by means of developmental technology. This technology is designed to take into account both psycho-physiological capabilities of the learner and psycholinguistic patterns of language acquisition, in order to stimulate the motivation of all speech and non-verbal activities of students and have a positive impact on moral values, semantic and emotional-motivational sphere of each student.

The above gives grounds to argue that in the modern theory of a foreign language textbook, built on axiological grounds, the key concepts are "personality", "value", "learning", "cognition", "activity", "culture". They are interconnected and interdependent, e.g. learner's personality and his system of values, personality and its activity, activity and learning, learning and cognition, learning and linguoculture, value and culture, development and culture, etc.

## **Conclusion**

Based on our analysis, we can draw a number of conclusions which, in our opinion, are of great theoretical and applied importance.

1. A foreign language textbook, acting as a methodological basis for modern foreign language education, should have a nationally-oriented character. This implies:

- firstly, not a simple demonstration of an "alien" world, "alien" culture, but "problematization" of this culture in correlation with the native culture of the language learner;

- Secondly, modeling the process of mastering the didactic content of the textbook, providing conditions not only for communicative formation and development of the learner, but also for the formation of values, motives, personal stances and attitudes;

- Thirdly, selection and organisation of didactic content of the textbook with a focus on shaping students' ability to self-identify (civil, ethnic, universal), to perceive and understand linguocultural values, a different way of language consciousness and a better awareness of their identity (individuality), and also the ability of moral orientation in situations of communication, also with representatives of another culture, and the ability to make moral choices.

2. New functional load of a foreign language textbook conditioned by axiologically marked content of modern linguistic education puts forward as the main value of the textbook theory not a foreign language communicative competence but personal parameters of a student, his moral, cognitive, social, language and speech abilities as well as personal qualities that allow him to use the learnt language as a tool of communication and cognition. This theory is intended to reflect the relationship between the general pedagogical goal of school education, which is the development of a student's personality and abilities, and

the goals of language education at schools. At the same time, the didactic content of the textbook, constructed within the framework of this theory, in its three aspects of consideration should become a material basis for the implementation of not only and not so much educational, pragmatic, connected with the formation of skills and abilities, but primarily axiologically marked by educational (moral development of the student) and developing (cognitive development of the student, development of speechcreation, communicative, cognitive and speech-thought activity) goals.

Thus, it is obvious that there are now objective trends which determine the need for a new theoretical vision of what a foreign language textbook should be and what its functions and didactic content in modern social and educational contexts are.

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