

Textbook: Focus on Students' National Identity

Foreign Language Textbook: On Actualizing a Learner-Centered Practice

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Abstract

The paper represents the study of the ways of implementation of innovations into the system of foreign language teaching of university students. The most interesting issue is the innovative potential of a foreign language textbook. The authors give the arguments to prove the need to modify this means of teaching professional intercultural communication to ensure its individual, personal and competence orientation. The researchers analyze the main characteristics of modern textbooks on a foreign language, argue for the need to change their structure and content. The article gives the data of empirical survey of teachers' attitude towards a modern textbook of a foreign language. Modern trends in education that require changes in the design of the textbook are as follows: informatization, digitalization, intercultural orientation of the educational process, focus on personal self-development and national self-identification of the students. It is necessary to specify the characteristics of an "open-type foreign language textbook", its specific features. There is an attempt to distinguish the content and structural organization of the open textbook from traditional teaching materials.

Keywords: open tape textbook; learner-centered approach.

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Introduction

In search of linguistic educational innovations, researchers do not stop implementing various projects. New targets, due to social norms, require a change of the content of teaching foreign languages towards the competence dimension of the process of teaching university graduates. Special training principles are being

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developed; the principles of “dialogue of cultures”, “autonomy of educational activity”, etc. can serve as an example.

The striving for renewal and, accordingly, for increasing the efficiency and quality of foreign language education is a characteristic feature of Russian linguodidactics. Of course, these trends are significant, but only if they have genuine parameters of educational innovation and are not a consequence of “fashion” on the principle of "Let innovations go on!".

In contrast to the current desire to present well-known and implemented in practice educational strategies and tactics as innovations in teaching foreign languages, there is another way that leads to the identification of innovative features of traditional components of educational system. These include, in particular, teaching tools, among which *a textbook* occupies the leading place, which in general didactics is defined as a book containing a systematic presentation of educational material in accordance with educational standards and programs.

A textbook is an educational tool, which teaching, upbringing, developing influence is not disputed at all. It was, is and will be the only key (main) means of forming a foreign language communicative competence in the absence of a natural language environment. In this regard, it is interesting to dwell on the study of the possibilities of changing the purpose, content, principles of design, format of a foreign language textbook, potentially capable of responding to the educational challenges of the time. This article deals with consideration of these aspects.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of the study is to reveal the features of the modern foreign language textbook, the structure and content of which is aimed at developing the student's individuality, considering his needs, the formation of his personal qualities, including professionally significant ones. The goal of the study is to represent a new model of an “open type” textbook, the co-author of which is the student himself.

Literature review

The choice of pedagogical tools that are adequate to the conditions and characteristics of the process of teaching a foreign language is one of the most important issues in organizing university language education (Winch 2010; Dexter, Clement, Moraguez & Watson 2020; Gavriyuk, Tareva & Lakhno, 2019; Peng & Pyper, 2019). Traditionally, teaching aids are determined by all components of the methodological system, they are set by goals and content, are based on principles, implement teaching methods and techniques,

reflecting the specifics of the concept of the author/group of authors. Remaining dependent on these components of the learning system, the textbook becomes a “platform” for their interaction, being an integral “materialized model” (I.L. Bim) of the process of teaching a foreign language.

The problem of choosing a textbook for higher professional education at the present stage is extremely difficult for an unambiguous solution. This is due to several circumstances. Firstly, current trends in teaching foreign language communication for professional purposes require new textbooks and teaching aids (Sternberg & Hayes, 2018; Yang & Coxhead, 2020) – we need means of forming a set of competencies that ensure the readiness and ability of graduates for professional, research and socio-cultural activities. Secondly, only adequate educational materials can significantly improve the quality of vocational education, the course, and the effectiveness of the interaction between the teacher and the student, determining the specifics of the independent educational, cognitive and research activities of the latter (Winch, 2010; Mili & Winch 2019) – the priority areas of university education (according to the Federal State Educational Standard of the last generation). Thirdly, in textbooks it is difficult to define the concept of the authors: it is not always highlighted by the authors. A serious analysis of the entire content of the textbook is required to determine the authors’ approach, and to understand how their concept is consistent with the educational context, personal experience, and personal vision of the teacher (Atkinson, 2020; Peng & Pyper, 2019; Nawani, 2010; Calafato & Gudim, 2020; Mili & Winch, 2019). Fourthly, in the abundance of textbooks (training courses) presented on the market of educational publications, it is rather difficult to navigate. The situation is aggravated by the fact that the Russian market of printed matters for educational purposes is more and more actively and persistently conquered by foreign educational and methodological complexes, the quality and effectiveness of which do not always meet the requirements of the modern higher education system in Russia, since they are not based on the domestic professional and business reality, do not take them into account and in fact proclaim a pro-European, pro-American way of doing business, economy, entrepreneurship.

The latter factor is especially significant in the context of the orientation of the process of foreign language teaching to the development of the student's individuality, ensuring his self-identification in culture, society, and profession. The difficulties of cultural self-determination through a textbook of a foreign language are emphasized today by several scholars who find in the content of the textbook components that are potentially dangerous for the formation of a personal view of the surrounding space, for the development of a sense of patriotism and national pride. Foreign language textbooks may contain facts and didactic tools that lead to national inequality and national expansion to the detriment of students' understanding of another way of life and awareness of their national identity (Tareva, Schepilova & Tarev,

2017; Sherlock, 2016; Keles & Yazan, 2020; Rieger, 2020; Hjelm, Valijärvi, Lee, Linnenweber, Tárkányi & Troll, 2017).

Methodology

The current objective situation in the field of educational publication products leads to the fact that the choice of the optimal textbook (most of all corresponding to the goals of training, educational context, methodological concept of the department, a specific teacher) is significantly difficult. Focusing on one and the same consumer, for example, a student of a non-linguistic (economic) university, the authors of textbooks offer different, sometimes contradictory goals, forms of work, text material, etc. Undoubtedly, the presence of a variety of university textbooks indicates positive changes in comparison with the period of using a single textbook for all: the teacher is given the opportunity to choose educational materials, but he is far from always being able to adequately cope with this task.

The conclusions made are confirmed by the data obtained during several diagnostic studies. For instance, the study (Sternberg & Hayes, 2018) discusses the steps authors need to undertake while preparing to design a textbook. Another research (Mili & Winch 2019) studies one aspect of the relationship between the use of textbooks and good teaching by examining how teachers' subject knowledge in the subject they are expected to teach relates to how they use and rely on textbooks. D. Nawani (2010) shows various ways in which textbooks can be analyzed through some criteria for determining "goodness" of textbooks and its pedagogic significance.

In our study, being based on complex diagnostics methodology (observation, questionnaire, survey) of J. Hilton (2016) and D. Atkinson (2020), we identified the opinion of teachers of language and non-language universities about quality of textbooks used for teaching foreign languages. Diagnostic results were obtained during a survey of foreign language teachers at the National Research University Higher School of Economics and Moscow City University (2018-2020, 117 respondents in total). As a result of the carried-out diagnostics we can state that many practicing teachers recognize the ineffectiveness or low effectiveness of the textbook they use in the educational process. To the question, "*Are you satisfied with the teaching and developmental potential of the foreign language textbook that you use in the educational process?*" 56% of the respondents answered negative, 32% of the respondents admitted that the use of the textbook is possible, but subject to its mandatory addition with specialized manuals and other materials. The analysis and interpretation of the data obtained allowed us to identify 5 arguments in favor of the need to modernize both the content and the structure of a modern foreign language textbook.

Argument 1. The competence-based orientation of the process of teaching foreign languages and professional activity is distinguished by an orientation towards the student's individuality, his originality and uniqueness, considering the purely individual needs and personal values of the student. One textbook in its classical version is not able to implement this training strategy, to make the learning process truly individualized, despite the postulation by many authors of the principle of personal and individual orientation when designing and implementing the concept of an educational material. Most often, the authors of textbooks are guided by a certain student model - a certain image of him (more often - a sample), which most likely does not exist.

Argument 2. A classical textbook of a modern type is aimed at realizing the idea of “equality” of forms of communication (oral and written), types of speech activity; the balance of relevant situations, tasks and exercises is usually observed (with a relatively and objectively smaller volume of tasks and materials for listening due to the impossibility of incorporating the audio texts, which cannot be printed into the “body” of the textbook). Meanwhile, the need for a particular type of speech activity differs from University to University, from faculty to faculty, from department to department, from one group of students to another. This means that the textbook may contain information, on the one hand, redundant, on the other hand, insufficient for specific purposes and characteristics of student training.

Argument 3. A textbook for a University is a teaching tool, the validity period of which is rather prolonged (in contrast to the teaching materials for comprehensive secondary schools, which must be revised/updated every five years). To confirm, let us refer to the adherence of a certain cohort of teachers to the use of “old” textbooks, the validity of which is measured in decades. The long “century” of the textbook leads to the fact that it acquires every chance of becoming outdated, and not only from the point of view of the materials contained in it, reflecting the realities of the world, studied through language and simultaneously with it. The language itself, as it develops, changes, reflecting the phenomena of sociocultural reality, and the processes of this development are not fixed by the textbook, separating the linguistic material presented in it from life. In this regard, it is interesting to cite the results of a survey of teachers of foreign languages, whose work experience in a comprehensive secondary school does not exceed three years (a total of 58 people have been interviewed to date, empirical research is ongoing). 86% of them admitted that the thematic, situational language and speech material proposed by the textbooks during their professional training (during the period of study at a pedagogical university) is used by them in pedagogical activities in about 30-35%, and 9% of teachers have further reduced this indicator. The survey data lead us to the next argument.

Argument 4. Undoubtedly, a university textbook is not able to predict and anticipate all the variety of types,

forms, situations of professional activity in which a graduate may find himself (it would be naive to assume the opposite!). In addition, the process of professional intercultural (in a foreign language) communication is characterized by the action of various factors of uncertainty: informational, when there is not enough information about the conditions of communication, subjective, when there is not enough data about the participants in communication, contextual, when there is no information about the subject of the conversation, formal, when there is no definite information about the working language of communication, the style of communicative behavior, acceptable speech genres, etc. are not determined. Considering these objective circumstances, the textbook in its classical version is deliberately focused on a significant limitation, reduction of situations of professional foreign language communication. The aforesaid cannot but have a negative impact on the rate of “inclusion” of a graduate in the real process of foreign language communication, due to the specific parameters of the professional and linguistic properties.

Argument 5. A classical model textbook is a means external to the subjects of the linguistic educational process: neither the student nor (to a lesser extent) the teacher can interfere with the content and structure of the textbook. Of course, an autonomous teacher can refuse some of the material, or change the sequence of studying the material: linguistic phenomena, topics, texts, situations. He can attend to the problem of creating accompanying materials – textbooks, video and audio applications, computer programs, etc. But at the same time, the system incorporated in the textbook continues to be unchanged, being key, basic. The logic of work on its components certainly obeys the conceptual ideas of the authors. In such a context, it is difficult to talk about the implementation of a learner-oriented educational paradigm, in which the student, as a genuine subject of educational activity, determines what and how he should learn, what tools to use to form his own foreign language (intercultural) communicative competence.

Results

With all the traditionally indisputable potential of a foreign language textbook, today its concept needs to be revised, updated, correlated with the latest educational attitudes. Work in this direction is undoubtedly underway. It is extremely attractive and interesting to consider the theory and technology of designing and using an electronic textbook of a foreign language in University educational programs (Bourina & Dunaeva, 2018; Cuttler, 2018). Models and options for adapting foreign textbooks to the conditions of teaching foreign languages in Russian Universities are being studied (Tareva, Schepilova & Tarev, 2017). A textbook of a foreign language is considered today as a “strategic resource of society,” and special innovative requirements must be applied to its creation, approbation, and expert assessment. In addition to the traditional principles of constructing a foreign language textbook (compliance with the needs of the pedagogical process, purposefulness, orientation towards students, motivational value, consistency and

complexity, taking into account the peculiarities of the native language, a scientific approach to the selection of educational language, speech material, communicative and culturally determined orientation of the content) are proposed innovative principles relevant for modeling a foreign language textbook for professional purposes. Among them:

- inclusion of bi- and/or polylingual texts, bi- and/or polycultural situations of communication, etc.;
- orientation of the content to meet the professional needs of students;
- focus on the socialization of students;
- availability of situational tasks, business games;
- inclusion of original, authentic teaching materials;
- problematization and contextualization of content (inclusion of professional interculturally determined problems);
- interdisciplinary integration;
- inclusion of bi- and/or polylingual texts, bi- and/or multicultural situations of communication, etc.

The analysis of the situation in the field of reforming/modernizing a university textbook of a foreign language indicates that at present two main interrelated requirements are persistently traced. The essential is, firstly, the idea of the need for clear orientation of the textbook on the formation of professionally significant competencies, and, secondly, the idea of such a structural-content specificity of a foreign language textbook, which is individually and subjectively determined. These two provisions should be considered today as dominants among modern requirements for a new type of educational material, focused on the formation of (intercultural) communicative competence of university graduates.

Discussions

This paper describes the theoretical layout of an “*open-type foreign language textbook*”, maximally focused on providing a competence-based and subjectively defined strategy for teaching university graduates. *An open textbook qualifies as a model of the process of teaching a foreign language, the architectonics of which is as flexible as possible, capable of adapting to the professional, cognitive, interculturally determined needs of a particular student.* With this consideration, the textbook becomes the central and system-forming element of *an open informational individually oriented educational environment*, which

ensures the development by students of objects of mastery in a flexible *combination of invariant* (universal, intended for all students) and *variable* (personally determined) *components of the content of teaching professional foreign language communication*.

The model for such a textbook did not come up suddenly. Its format was prepared by the long course of development of the concept of the textbook as a universal teaching tool. Initially, for a long time, a “stable” textbook “reigned” in the educational space, which was text-centered: it included a text that was the same for all students as the core of the content and structure of the textbook, along the “orbits” of which other extra-textual components “revolved” (questions, tasks, exercises, illustrations, tables, etc.). Subsequently, a text began to be accompanied by additional sources of information, which led to the emergence and development of multilevel textbooks: a stable textbook included two blocks: for the core level of education and the second level, requiring in-depth study.

The open-type foreign language textbook is conceptually close to the textbook model formulated in the theory of productive learning of A.V. Khutorskoy (2005), from the point of view of which the ideal formula for personality-oriented learning is: “*each student has his own textbook*”. His own textbook is the one that allows the student to live it in his own way, to introduce his own semantic content and understanding into it, to rework and make it unique because of application. The scientist defends the idea of a “crumbly” textbook base, the essence of which is to include a personal component in the textbook content. Such a textbook is designed according to two types of educational content:

- *invariant*, including fundamental educational objects and basic technologies of activity, which students must master;

- *variable*, expressed in the individual content of education, designed by students both in relation to fundamental educational objects, and in relation to others, chosen by them directly and of his own free will.

The following description defines the specifics of an *open-type foreign language textbook* and emphasizes its innovative potential. It should be noted that the format of such a textbook can be both printed and electronic.

The structure of the open textbook is unique. The components common to educational printed publications (preface, table of contents, main content divided into sections, appendix) are being transformed.

The preface indicates the main tasks of the stage of formation of a foreign language communicative competence, which the textbook is focused on, with a mandatory targeting of the student's perception,

understanding and acceptance of target attitudes and educational value orientations. It also explains the features of this type of textbook and the functions of the teacher and student in its configuration. In fact, the activities of the subjects of the educational process are described as of full-fledged co-authors of the textbook.

The table of contents of the open textbook includes invariant (mandatory) topics intended for study. At the same time, the table of contents includes unfilled blocks, preliminary (at the beginning of the academic year), subsequent (during training) and final (by the end of training at this stage), the specification of which is the prerogative of the student. The student fixes those sections, topics, areas of communication, situations in which he is personally interested.

The main content of the open textbook is organized *modularly*, with the sequence of modules which is specified by the authors of the textbook. The content of the module is invariant, but at the same time maximally focused on the student's personality, on the activation of his emotional values and needs. The module includes:

- an introductory part, which provides a generalized understanding of the content of the module; material of a motivating nature that encourages the student to learning and cognitive activity (for example, an indication of professional and socio-cultural spheres and situations where the material being studied can be applied); visibility (visual and/or auditory), capable of activating students' interest, forming his motive for communicative activity;
- the predictive part, formulating the expected results in the form of descriptors of competencies, mastered or improved in a given segment of the learning process, modeled in the textbook;
- the main part, which includes invariant components of the training content, correlated with the sequence of the studied sections / topics / areas of communication / situations; such components include texts, language material, skills formed in the course of tasks / exercises, tests, etc.;
- the final part, in which the student, together with the teacher, notes the level of development of competencies or their components during the module.

It is important that the module, while remaining an invariant component of the textbook, is not a rigid structure. It should include tasks of a creative nature, the implementation will ensure the clarification of the meaning of the studied educational material and each topic, the formulation of personal tasks, the organization of an educational situation that is understandable for students, the activation of independent research activity, reflective awareness of the results of educational activities.

Each *module*, in turn, includes “*open*” *submodules* formed (filled) by students independently. In contrast to

the relatively traditional organization of the module, the submodule is characterized by a matrix organization: the student is offered options for filling the matrix, and he can use any of them, or offer his own author's submodule, including a) information materials that meet his needs, b) training components (assignments, questions, problems for discussion, etc.), created personally by the student. An important characteristic of information organized in a module and a submodule is its polycode, which integrates verbal, visual, auditory and other components into the communicative entity, and openness: the content of the module / submodule is not textually "closed", it interacts with various educational information spaces, primarily with the Internet resources, professionally, as well as socially and culturally significant.

Application is a component of an open textbook, which is not subject to formalization and unification. The student independently decides what to include in this section. This may include links to sources of information that may be useful to him in his professional activities, a personal dictionary, problematic, situational tasks, the author of which is the student himself, etc.

One of the important requirements for an open-type foreign language textbook is the observance of the rule according to which the invariant (1) and variable (2) elements of the teaching content and the corresponding components of the textbook (language, speech (texts, situations, communication tasks) material, tasks, exercises) should be in a ratio in which the dominant (1) over (2) should not be traced. The proposed relations of these elements are shown in Table 1 (in %).

Table 1. Соотношение invariant and variable content elements of an open-type foreign language textbook

Volume teaching content elements (invariant: variable)	Linguistic University	Non-linguistic University	
		Standard number of academic hours	Enlarged number of academic hours
BACHELOR PROGRAM			
50 : 50	1 year	Semester 1	1 year
40 : 60	2 year	Semester 2	2 year
30 : 70	3-4 years	Semester 3	3-4 years
MASTER'S PROGRAM			
20 : 80	1-2 years		

This rule means that even at the initial stage of education, compulsory for all students and individually determined learning components must coexist on a parity basis. Later, priority is given to the variable elements of the content of education, which manifests itself in absolute form at the master's level. About the topic, the invariant block of topics should harmoniously coexist with the options for topics proposed by the students, and each of them has a set of topics that may differ from that offered by classmates. Similarly, the text included in the textbook by the authors must necessarily correlate with text products (printed or on an audio or video basis), selected by students on their own initiative, considering their actual requests and

preferences. Of course, freedom of choice here has nothing to do with anarchy and permissiveness. The main measure of the significance of the proposed educational materials should be the regulatory documents: the Federal State Educational Standard of Higher Professional Education and the syllabus built on its basis, with the content of which students should be familiarized.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is worth noting that an open-type textbook is a modern developing educational system aimed at implementing individually oriented strategies for mastering the ability to foreign language professional intercultural communication. The student can determine the goals of educational and cognitive activities, choose sources of information for constructing his own knowledge, choose and use the means of solving problems adequate to the goals of educational activities, present the results of his own cognitive activities, compare the results with the goals set. The textbook is focused on the development of students' competencies, laid down as strategic guidelines for education in the modernization of the content of higher education.

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