Textbook: Focus on Students' National Identity

Special Features of Digital RFL Textbooks

Galina A. Dugina [*] (a)

(a) Moscow City University, 129226, Moscow (Russia), 4-1, 2nd Selskokhoziastvenny Proezd
DuginaGA@mgpu.ru

Abstract

The task of selecting the appropriate digital textbook for developing verbal skills in Russian as a foreign language has recently become more vital. During the general on-line studying foreign students learning Russian expressed their concern about the fact that there was less possibility for them to speak Russian in on-line class. Those complaints were further confirmed by the results of a survey among students conducted in April 2020. There appeared an issue of choosing an appropriate digital textbook or course of study to help students in mastering monologue and dialogue skills, to boost their motivation to speak Russian (both spontaneously and purposefully) under the teacher's guidance or without it.

Basic research methods included making a systematic review of on-line resources which can meet foreign students' educational demands, analyzing the sources; determining the criteria for selecting the appropriate electronic publications and courses. The following key words were used for the search: "Russian as a foreign language" or "RFL textbook". The criteria for selecting digital textbooks included their consistency with the key words, themes, and the level of study; a full-text format, availability of assignments aimed at developing monologue and dialogue skills in the Russian language.

The use of the abovementioned methods helped to make a list of electronic textbooks and on-line courses, to specify their peculiar features and to analyze their exercises aimed at developing speaking skills. The review of the sources given in the article as well as the analysis of their technical and educational resources will hopefully help teachers giving Russian language on-line classes to select the most appropriate variant of a textbook (or assignments in it) which will effectively accomplish the task of developing speaking skills.

Keywords: an electronic textbook, Russian as a foreign language

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has necessitated on-line education which is quite different from the traditional off-line format in the way information is perceived and the learning process is organized and structured. There

---

[*] Corresponding author. E-mail: DuginaGA@mgpu.ru

are certain difficulties in on-line teaching including teaching foreign languages and Russian as a foreign language. Educators have faced a number of problems: how to teach foreign students in different countries to write and speak Russian using available educational resources (printed books, audio apps, electronic textbooks, on-line videoconferencing platforms like Skype, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc.)? Is there a universal digital textbook (course or platform) which will help a foreign student to master the Russian language as quickly as possible? Evidence suggests that this was exactly what this category of students asked for (Dugina 2020: 245). In her research the author used the competency-based approach to analyze digital textbooks. The approach is aimed at "achieving education results – professionally significant competencies – while getting activity experience" (Tareva 2011: 67). Veretennikova and Dugina list the reasons for on-line education being inappropriate for some students (Veretennikova, Dugina 2020).

Farther, let us consider modern tendencies in developing dialogue and monologue skills while teaching RFL.

The methods of teaching a Russian dialogue and monologue rely on a number of special discourse tools: "a response to a previous reply, drawing the partner's attention, changing the subject, summing up", which require the use of specific language resources (Borisova, Latysheva 2003: 140). A text-dialogue is used at the initial stage of study, while a narrative or reasoning monologue is used at an advanced level (Polyakov 2017: 44).

While teaching speaking "discussing conversation subjects, students' involvement in dialogues and polylogues, producing and reproducing micro-monologues and students' own reasoning texts" are highlighted (Popovicheva 2020: 15-16). To overcome difficulties in perceiving information a number of tools should be used: multimedia (video- and audio files, PowerPoint presentations etc.). For example, the voice assistant Alice employed by Yandex browser can be recommended for use at the initial stage of teaching (Dunaeva et al 2020: 7).

Researchers claim that to assess whether utterances are constructed correctly interaction with the teacher is advisable, since "effective teaching of productive types of speech activities is not possible without a tutor" (Levina 2015: 641). One cannot but agree with it, but when teaching a large group, it is difficult to listen to each student speaking (several times during a session) and comment on the way they speak. According to the author of the article projecting further out we may see the tutor being substituted by artificial intelligence to assess students' utterances. It means that special machine algorithms (programmes) will be developed, which will analyze the correctness of oral or written speech (Elnikova 2020: 25).

Purpose and objectives of the study

The aim of the study is to analyze available digital RFL textbooks (platforms, courses) with regard to developing speech skills (a monologue and dialogue). An assumption was made that using the method of systematic review to find electronic textbooks in open and semi-open sources it is possible to find an appropriate textbook or assignments in it to work with in on-line class.

Literature review

Internationally, an electronic textbook is considered to be a version of a printed one which underwent a web-markup and includes special tools to work with the text: «E-textbooks and digital content systems are evolving into interactive platforms that enable learners to mark-up material to help them retain information» (Van Horne S., Russell Je. & Schuh K.L. 2016: 408). Yet, the tools are not always used by students. Some researchers treat a digital textbook as a comprehensive electronic resource, which includes: «reference books, workbooks, and dictionaries, and support personalized and advanced learning through selfevaluation functions» (Young Ju Joo, Sunyoung Park, Eui Kyoung Shin 2017: 84). In Russian educational practice this interpretation of textbooks is reflected in distant RFL learning courses. The terms used in scientific publications on electronic education are «digital textbooks (also called e-textbooks or electronic textbooks)» (Bikowski, D., & Casal, J. E. 2018: 119). In Russian scientific literature the terms "digital / electronic textbook / guide" can be observed.

In Russia there is no generally accepted idea on what an RFL e-textbook contains. For example, in the article by E.G. Azimov several types of e-textbooks are mentioned:

"- e-textbooks of universal character;

- web applications to textbooks;

- distant learning courses;

- mass open on-line courses;

- courses created with the help of multimedia technologies or virtual reality technologies" (Azimov 2020: 41).

According to Elena V. Pinevich et al., the most optimal way to organize learning involving the use of an e-textbook is a mixed format with both distant and in-person activities, or an in-person format with students using their smartphones or laptops to do on-line tests, questionaries, virtual simulators, smartboards etc. "This type of training is considered to be the most efficient, it becomes more and more popular all over the world" (Elena V. Pinevich, Liudmila V. Panina, & etc. 2020: 6). At the same time, the main textbook in use for educational purposes is a printed one, supplemented by on-line tests, video- and audio-materials, podcasts etc.

The concept of a textbook described above with regard to learning foreign languages is generally aimed at developing students' reading and listening skills, priming them for learning writing and speaking, the latter being mostly developed during oral and written communication with an interlocutor. Dugina mentions in her article that according to foreign RFL students "the main reasons for dissatisfaction with distance learning are poor communication quality" (Dugina 2020: 243). In case of using an e-textbook as the sole tool of teaching a foreign language the problem is increased by the missing interaction with an instructor who could highlight mistakes and inaccuracy in students' utterances.

It is possible to teach students to produce monologues in a foreign language via an e-textbook, but it is hardly feasible in case of teaching dialogic speech since the presence of an interlocutor is required. The problem is solved in in-person training by using a "potential interlocutor" technique, when a new communication situation is "created" prompting students participating in these dialogues to repeat received information several times but in a new form consistent with the new situations" (Polyakov 2017: 43). Our research was aimed at finding an answer to the question whether the mentioned above technique is employed by RFL e-textbooks, and if so, then how students' monologues and dialogues are checked.

Methodology

The method of research was conducting a systematic review of RFL on-line textbooks containing training material to develop monologue and dialogue skills. The review is supposed to be a guide for instructors giving on-line classes aimed at teaching students to speak Russian. Such kind of reviews are not available at present, while there are a lot of printed RFL textbooks, as well as distant RFL courses and on-line projects.

Conducting research with the help of the method of a systematic review required searching sources in several library and scientific data bases:

- Google Scholar (https://scholar.google.ru);

- the electronic catalogue of the Russian State Library (https://search.rsl.ru/ru);

- the electronic catalogue of the e-library «CyberLeninka» (https://cyberleninka.ru);

- the publications from the Russian Science Citation Index of the eLIBRARY.RU catalogue (https://www.elibrary.ru/querybox.asp);

- the electronic library system «Russian as a Foreign Language» (https://ros-edu.ru);

-       the   electronic   library   system   «Online   University   Library» (https://biblioclub.ru/index.php?page=book_blocks&view=main_ub);

- the electronic course catalogue of the project «Open Education» (https://openedu.ru).

- learning platform URAIT (https://urait.ru/)

The search was done according to the key words "Russian as a foreign language" in titles, key words, abstracts. The key word "textbook" was added to the mentioned above key words while searching in some data bases. E-textbooks containing these key words and published since 2010 were selected.

The titles and abstracts of the found sources were analyzed. The selection only included on-line textbooks aimed at developing speech skills in the Russian language (mostly at A2 level), as well as textbooks or e-sources which were available and/or contained parts (exercises) aimed at developing verbal skills (relevant results).

In case of digital textbooks one of the main criteria of selecting a source was the availability for looking through and analyzing electronic versions (these are open sources and the ones requiring the authorization of a user in a library system). A printed textbook was excluded from the search.

Other sources which were not part of the search included:

-    digital teacher's books;

-    on-line textbooks and courses not aimed at teaching RFL;

-   scientific publications, synopses of theses and other publications that are not textbooks;

-   digital RFL textbooks other than A2 level of study (with the exception of one electronic course, supposedly of B1 level, because its focus was consistent with the purpose of the research); the limitation of the textbook level was connected with the knowledge and competencies of foreign students who start learning Russian.

The search in Google Scholar was based on finding the key words in publication titles. 552 publications were found. Due to a large number of irrelevant results the search was limited by changing the search enquiry to "RFL textbook". Three publications were found, but they were not consistent with the research purpose.

Among the chosen e-textbooks there were some which focus on developing the speech skills of our interest (a monologue and dialogue). Textbook titles, abstracts and contents were analyzed. The following items were excluded: phonetic and grammar textbooks, educational programmes, books on auding, tests, general introductory Russian language courses, textbooks focused on teaching writing, specialized guidebooks with medical vocabulary, books for teaching RFL in other countries.

Results

The results of the search are presented in Table 1, listing sources, numbers of the most appropriate sources, numbers of rejected results and reasons for rejection.

Table 1. The results of the search in data bases using the key words "Russian as a foreign language".

Source	Relevant Results	Rejected Results	The reasons for rejection
The electronic course catalogue of the project «Open Education»	1	5 electronic courses	The incompatibility between the teaching objectives and language proficiency; discrepancy in key words
The electronic catalogue of the e-library «CyberLeninka»	0	1000 scientific publications	The absence of features of an electronic textbook or an electronic course

Source	Relevant Results	Rejected Results	The reasons for rejection
The electronic catalogue of the Russian State Library	0	771 AutoAbstracts	The absence of features of an electronic textbook or an electronic course
The electronic catalogue of the Russian State Library*	0	2767 articles, textbooks, monographs	The absence of features of an electronic textbook or an electronic course
The publications from the Russian Science Citation Index of the eLIBRARY.RU catalogue	0	0	-
The electronic library system «Russian as a Foreign Language»	8	126	Textbooks on phonetics and grammar, educational programmes, textbooks on listening, tests, general introductory courses of the Russian Language are excluded
The electronic library system «Online University Library»	1	10	Textbooks aimed at professions are excluded; textbooks unrelated to the speech development
Learning platform URAIT	1	29	Discrepancy in key words; textbooks on phonetics and grammar are excluded
Google Scholar	0	552	Discrepancy in key words; scientific publications, textbooks aimed at professions, textbooks aimed at studying abroad are excluded

Source	Relevant Results	Rejected Results	The reasons for rejection
Google Scholar*	0	3	Scientific publications, textbooks aimed at professions, textbooks aimed at studying abroad are excluded

* The search with the key words "RFL textbook".

As a result of the systematic review one distant course and ten e-textbooks were chosen. The list is presented in Table 2. Each analyzed source is presented as a bibliographic title for citing and its URL-address in a library catalogue is given. The value of the lists of this kind is in providing specific information on a publication which makes it possible to find and use the necessary source.

Table 2. The list of e-textbooks

№	Textbook	URL
1	Kissyuk, V. V. Slushaem i govorim: uchebnoe posobie po audirovaniyu i razvitiyu rechi dlya nachinayushchih (bazovyj uroven') [Listen and Speak: the textbook on listening and speaking for beginners (basic level)] / V. V. Kissyuk. — Moskva: Moskovskij gosudarstvennyj stroitel'nyj universitet, EBS ASV, 2013. — 76 p. — ISBN 978-5-7264-0741-8. — Tekst: elektronnyi // Elektronno-bibliotechnaya sistema «Russkii kak inostrannyi»: [site]	https://ros-edu.ru/book?id=20030 (accessed: 04.02.2021).
2	Obshchaemsya po-russki: uchebnoe posobie [Communicating in Russian: the textbook] / E. F. Serebrennikova, V. Belyakov, Kim Ok En [i dr.] ; pod redaktsiei L. G. Vikulova. — Irkutsk: Irkutskii gosudarstvennyi lingvisticheskii universitet, 2010. — 290 p.	https://ros-edu.ru/book?id=21095 (accessed: 06.02.2021).

№	Textbook	URL
	— ISBN 2227-8397. — Tekst: elektronnyi // Elektronno-bibliotechnaya sistema «Russkii kak inostrannyi»: [site].	
3	Karetnikova, L. G. Da, ya govoryu po-russki: russkii yazyk dlya nachinayushchikh [Yes, I can speak Russian: the Russian language for beginners] / L. G. Karetnikova. — Sankt-Peterburg: Zlatoust, 2017. — 315 p. — ISBN 978-5-86547-866-9. — Tekst: elektronnyi // Elektronno-bibliotechnaya sistema «Russkii kak inostrannyi»: [site].	https://ros-edu.ru/book?id=67967 (accessed: 06.02.2021)
4	Uroki russkogo: uchebnoe posobie dlya inostrantsev po razvitiyu rechi [The Russian language lessons: the textbook for foreign learners for speech development] / E. V. Frolova, S. I. Rudyak, N. A. Zhdanova [i dr.] ; pod redaktsiei S. I. Rudyak. — Novosibirsk: Novosibirskii gosudarstvennyi arkhitekturno-stroitel'nyi universitet (Sibstrin), EHBS ASV, 2007. — 185 p. — ISBN 5-7795-0349-4. — Tekst: ehlektronnyi // Elektronno-bibliotechnaya sistema «Russkii kak inostrannyi»: [site].	https://ros-edu.ru/book?id=68857 (accessed: 28.12.2020).
5	Odintsova, I. V. Chto vy skazali?: kniga po razvitiyu navykov audirovaniya i ustnoi rechi dlya izuchayushchikh russkii yazyk [What did you say?: the textbook on the development of listening and speaking skills for learners of Russian] / I. V. Odintsova. — 4-e izd. — Sankt-Peterburg: Zlatoust, 2019. — 260 p. — ISBN 978-5-86547-661-0. — Tekst: elektronnyi // Elektronno-bibliotechnaya sistema «Russkii kak	https://ros-edu.ru/book?id=81266 (accessed: 11.02.2021).

№	Textbook	URL
	inostrannyi»: [site].	
6	Fedyaeva, E. V. Davai s toboi pogovorim! Sbornik keisov dlya urokov russkogo yazyka kak inostrannogo [Let's talk! The collection of case studies for Russian as a Foreign Language classes] / E. V. Fedyaeva, O. P. Fesenko, V. V. Bestsennaya ; pod redaktsiei A. V. Golubevoi. — Sankt-Peterburg: Zlatoust, 2018. — 107 p. — ISBN 978-5-86547-942-0. — Tekst: elektronnyi // Elektronno-bibliotechnaya sistema «Russkii kak inostrannyi»: [site].	https://ros-edu.ru/book?id=83286 (accessed: 10.02.2021).
7	Ermachenkova, V. S. Slovo: posobie po leksike i razgovornoi praktike [The word: the textbook on vocabulary and speaking practise] / V. S. Ermachenkova. — 5-e izd. — Sankt-Peterburg: Zlatoust, 2019. — 240 p. — ISBN 978-5-86547-969-7. — Tekst: elektronnyi // Elektronno-bibliotechnaya sistema «Russkii kak inostrannyi»: [site].	https://ros-edu.ru/book?id=81455 (accessed: 18.12.2020)
8	Kostyuk, N. A. A chto tut obsuzhdat'? Posobie po razgovornoi praktike dlya izuchayushchikh russkii yazyk kak inostrannyi [What is there to discuss? The textbook on speaking practice for learners studying Russian as a Foreign Language]/ N. A. Kostyuk ; pod redaktsiei A. V. Golubevoi. — Sankt-Peterburg: Zlatoust, 2018. — 160 p. — ISBN 978-5-86547-992-5. — Tekst: elektronnyi // Elektronno-bibliotechnaya sistema «Russkii kak inostrannyi»: [site].	https://ros-edu.ru/book?id=83285 (accessed: 10.02.2021).
9	Kostina, Yu.D. Russkii yazyk kak inostrannyi (bazovyi uroven'): uchebnoe posobie: [16+]	https://biblioclub.ru/index.php?page=book&id=574952 (accessed: 13.02.2021).

№	Textbook	URL
	[Russian as a Foreign Language (basic level): textbook: [16+]]/ Yu.D. Kostina; Rossiiskaya mezhdunarodnaya akademiya turizma. – Moskva: Universitetskaya kniga, 2018. – 148 s.: il. – Rezhim dostupa: po podpiske.	
10	Russkii kak inostrannyi: elektronnyi resurs [Russian as a Foreign Language: electronic course] // Otkrytoe obrazovanie.URL: https://openedu.ru	https://openedu.ru/course/spbu/RUSFOR/ (accessed: 13.02.2021)
11	Laskareva, E. R. Russkii yazyk kak inostrannyi. Prakticheskii intensivnyi kurs + CD: uchebnik i praktikum dlya prikladnogo bakalavriata [Russian as a Foreign Language. Practical intensive course + CD: textbook and tutorial for applied Bachelor degree course] / E. R. Laskareva. — Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Yurait, 2019. — 373 p. — (Bakalavr. Prikladnoi kurs). — ISBN 978-5-9916-3555-4. — Tekst: elektronnyi // EHBS Yurait [site].	https://urait.ru/bcode/426250 (accessed: 13.02.2021).

Discussions

The process of selecting e-textbooks made it possible to analyze their contents and identify methods, exercises and assignments aimed at developing speech skills which the e-textbooks employ.

The following is a general description of the selected digital textbooks. They are full-text files available for looking through, but they cannot be downloaded in a personal computer. However, there are some variants of working with their digital text which fully represents the printed version of the textbooks. These e-textbooks are located in electronic libraries, which involves an authorized access to book resources. Some special features the e-textbooks provide for students can be listed:

- showing miniature textbook pages for scanning;

- copying an excerpt for citing;

- making a bookmark on a particular page;

- printing a part of texts;

- changing the window scale for looking through text;

- reproducing video and audio files (if there is such an application);

- to scroll through the pages quickly.

Designers of electronic libraries provided special tools for instructors:

- downloading concise curricula;

- adding audio- and video materials via URL-references;

- adding e-books from literature collections;

- constructing tests;

- organizing a group and adding students to it;

- tracking dates of using instructional sources;

- creating a programme of a course of study.

The analyzed e-textbooks most often contained assignments for developing monologue skills. For example, post-reading exercises included: retell the text (in turn, the whole text, as if you were this or that character (a "potential interlocutor" technique), with the text support); answer the question; render the text from Russian into your mother language and back into Russian. Other exercises aimed at developing monologue skills were as following: listen to the phrase and think of possible ways to continue it; describe a picture; explain a phrase; describe a situation/a character; make a recording of your monologue, etc.

Assignments for developing dialogic skills were the following: ask each other questions on the text; role-play the dialogue; make up your own dialogue and role-play it; take an interview as a correspondent; alter the dialogue; problem questions presupposing a variety of answers; make a videoclip, etc.

The instructor is to assess how assignments are done, while possibilities for assessing group performance in monologues and dialogues were minimal. And on the contrary, in a distant course, students assessed their peers' monologue skills, which minimized the instructor's role in assessment. This is quite productive in case of a large group of students in an on-line course.

Conclusion

The need to speak Russian, to express their thoughts in oral verbal forms was the prime one for foreign students learning a foreign language in a distant format outside the natural language environment. The hypothesis was confirmed: there are a number of RFL e-textbooks, as well as on-line courses helping students to develop their monologue and dialogue skills by providing opportunities to practise speaking. In general, this is done with the support and guidance of the instructor, giving distant classes via different platforms (which was of particular relevance for the duration of mass on-line study in 2020–2021). Projecting further out, with the advancement of the technical element of e-textbooks tools for automatic analysis of students' recorded monologues and dialogues (audio- and video files) would be available.

References

Azimov, E.G. (2020). Russian as a foreign language e-textbooks: current state and perspectives. Russian Language Studies, 18(1), 39-53. https://doi:10.22363/2618-8163-2020-18-1-39-53

Bikowski, D., & Casal, J. E. (2018). Interactive digital textbooks and engagement: A learning strategies framework. Language Learning & Technology, 22(1), 119–136. http://dx.doi.org/10125/44584

Borisova, E.G., Latysheva, A.N. (2003). Lingvisticheskie osnovy RKI. Pedagogicheskaya grammatika russkogo yazyka [The linguistic basics of Russian as a Foreign Language. Pedagogical grammar of the Russian language]. Moskva: Flinta.

Dugina, G.A. (2020). Approaches to Foreign Languages Distance Learning: How to Establish Dialogue of Cultures. European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences. Conference proceedings, 236-248. http://doi:10.15405/epsbs.2020.11.03.26

Dunaeva, L.A., Levina, G.M., Bogomolov, A.N., Vasil'eva, T.V. (2020). Digitalization of the Russian as a foreign language area: first results and perspectives. Russkii yazyk za rubezhom, 5, 4-9

Elnikova, S.I. (2020). Artificial intelligence in RFL learning and evaluation system. Russkii yazyk za rubezhom, 2, 20-26

Levina, G.M. (2015). Sozdanie setevogo uchebnika po russkomu yazyku kak inostrannomu: problemy i resheniya [Creating an electronic textbook on Russian as a Foreign Language: problems and solutions]. Russkii yazyk i literatura v prostranstve mirovoi kul'tury: materialy XIII Kongressa MAPRYAL, T. 10, 637–641

Ndyay, M., Nguyen, W.T., & Grunina, E.O. (2020). Innovative technologies in teaching Russian as a foreign language. Russian Language Studies, 18(1), 7-38. https://doi:10.22363/2618-8163-2020-18-1-7-38

Pinevich, E.V., Panina, L.V., Solianik, O.E.; Ionova, N.A. (2020). A New Methodology for Teaching the Course "Russian as a Foreign Language" in the Digital Environment: Development, Results and Prospects. ITM Web of Conferences; Les Ulis, V. 35. https://doi:10.1051/itmconf/20203501012

Polyakov, V.N. (2017). «Potentsial'nyi sobesedniK» – ehffektivnyi pomoshchnik v formirovanii dialogicheskikh navykov i umenii na uroke RKI [«Prospective interlocutor» – an effective assistant in developing dialogic skills and abilities in RFL class]. Russkii yazyk za rubezhom, 4 (263), 41–44

Popovicheva, I.V. (2020). Formirovanie navykov ustnoi rechi na srednem ehtape obucheniya RKI v usloviyakh kitaiskogo vuza [The development of speaking skills on Intermediate level of learning Russian as a Foreign Language in the context of Chinese university]. Yazyk, kul'tura i professional'naya kommunikatsiya v sovremennom obshchestve. Materialy IX mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii, posvyashchennoi 10-letiyu kafedry russkogo yazyka kak inostrannogo. Tambov: Izdatel'skii dom "Derzhavinskii", 14-18

Tareva, E.G., Kazantseva, E.M. (2011). Deyatel'nostno-kompetentnostnyi podkhod k sozdaniyu uchebnykh posobii dlya podgotovki bakalavrov [Competency-based approach to designing textbooks for bachelor-level programs]. Vestnik Moskovskogo gorodskogo pedagogicheskogo universiteta. Seriya: Filologiya. Teoriya yazyka. Yazykovoe obrazovanie, 2 (8), 65-77. Retrieved from https://www.elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=17673411

Van Horne, S., Russell, Je. & Schuh, K.L. (2016). The adoption of mark-up tools in an interactive e-textbook reader. Education Tech Research. Dev 64, 407–433. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-016-9425-x

Veretennikova, L., Dugina, G. Pedagogical conditions for successful distance learning of foreign students: research results. SHS Web Conf., 88 (2020) 02003. https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20208802003

Young, J.J., Sunyoung, P., Eui, K.Sh. (2017). Students' expectation, satisfaction, and continuance intention to use digital textbooks. Computers in Human Behavior, 69, 83-90. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.12.025.