

Textbook: Focus on Students' National Identity

## New Type of University Textbook: Teaching Linguistic Research Fundamentals in Post-COVID Research Space

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### Abstract

As the COVID-19 crisis was still gaining its momentum in early 2020, it became increasingly clear that the world would never go back to its normal and striving for a positive outcome in any life sphere would ultimately involve reassessing pre-pandemic norms and setting up new reference points to make up for coronavirus disruptions. While some industries could afford at least a short timeout to readjust and refigure their practices, education was not the one to venture into delays and adjournments. No matter what level of training they worked at, educators were to provide an immediate response to the coronavirus-instigated realities. Designed as a case study, this paper provides an empirical account of developing and implementing a new type of university textbook meant to address issues of the emerging global learning environment, keep up with students' and instructors' demands in professional areas, and offer hands-on solutions to new format-induced challenges. The study focuses on the concept of the post-COVID university textbook meeting high standards of academic programs and complying with hybrid training models, examines relevant methodological approaches, and provides an analytical report on integrating a linguistic research textbook based on the novel approach into the training process at the Department of Linguistics and Translation Studies of Moscow City University. The proposed concept of the new type of university textbook designed to help students succeed in virtual and blended learning environments has a high application potential across subject areas and disciplines.

*Keywords:* linguistic research; post-COVID research space; university textbook.

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## **Introduction**

Recent decades saw a technological breakthrough that affected numerous industries and brought changes to many professional practices. Education was one of the spheres under impact for which the resulting benefits included novel learning environments as well as new teacher-to-student interaction formats, innovative instruction methods, technologies, mediums, and tools. While the latter are in abundance (Petrova, 2013; Tareva, 2011; Tareva, 2015), and more learning solutions are still being developed and integrated into general and professional education programs, the textbook as a reliable time-honored training tool still stands on its solid academic ground. Despite growing concerns in academic circles about its future status, at present, the textbook plays a central role in class discourse and especially more so in higher education classrooms relying on greater self-study course components (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2013).

Remaining an irreplaceable assistant in learning, the textbook is extremely sensitive to external influence, ready to undergo changes – both external and internal – to provide better learning experience and increase the efficacy of instruction. History of didactics knows numerous examples of textbook modifications for the benefit of students. A recent example is related to the revolution in book publishing which introduced an alternative format – traditional textbooks now have to compete for students' choice against their electronic versions. With growing numbers of students opting out for e-textbooks, there emerge studies suggesting that as far as student performance is concerned, the electronic textbook is as effective as the traditional one (Woody, Daniel, & Baker, 2010; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2013; Joo et al., 2017; Udina, 2017).

While the “e-shift” affecting the formal structure of textbooks is still in progress, more changes seem to be crossing the threshold into the post-pandemic learning and research environment, transforming long-standing academic practices. As the COVID-driven crisis appears to be reaching its prime and bringing about irreversible changes to lifestyles both locally and globally, the hybrid teaching model is likely to be maintained, so the textbook will have to adjust its content and structure again to serve interests of both parties to the education process. Therefore, there is an objective need to examine how the textbook should change in order to meet instructors' demands and students' expectations in remote- and mixed-mode learning. A call for more extensive research in this area is required. Thus, this study intends to provide a conceptual framework for the new type of textbook, specifically, a university textbook on linguistic research fundamentals, designed to be used in distant- and mixed-mode training models.

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

The aim of the study was to develop the novel concept of a linguistic research textbook that would embrace up-to-date and classical language theories in their current scholarly interpretation; rely on time-proven methodological principles combined with newly available digital techniques; comply with the distant-mode format of training; address the needs of students enrolled in undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate programs; focus on most relevant issues; set high performance standards while offering step-by-step practical solutions and illustrative samples. The research sought to examine the changing nature of linguistic research space, develop and implement the concept of a new type of university textbook on linguistic research fundamentals agreeing with the new academic realities, and test the efficacy of the proposed concept in authentic educational contexts.

### **Literature review**

As the textbook for centuries has been the most common and widely used teaching tool, there is a significant volume of published studies examining its methodological, psychological, cultural, ideological, aesthetic, and evolutionary values. In education research, much of the available literature deals with fundamental issues related to conceptualizing and developing course books intended for different audiences, such as general content and structural properties of the genre (Klerides, 2010), methodological and paradigmatic principles (Bim, Afanasyeva & Radchenko, 1999; Tareva & Kasantseva, 2011), audience orientation (Ruiz-Cecilia et al., 2021), cultural differences (Keles & Yazan, 2020), format efficacy (Chesser, 2011; Hoseth & McLure, 2012), digital copies, supplements, and alternatives (Verkijika, 2019; Woody, Daniel, & Baker, 2010), etc.

Much less attention so far has been given to discipline specifics in textbooks (Tareva, 2011). As far as linguistic education is concerned, a large body of literature on languages and linguistics has investigated key principles practice-oriented textbooks are to answer while theoretical course books on linguistics as a teaching tool have not been treated in much detail. The present study seeks to fill in this blank with the conceptual framework that could be used as a basis for a contemporary course book on the humanities across a wide disciplinary range.

General as well as field- or approach-specific trends in developing textbooks for different levels of education have also been frequently discussed in the literature. Yet no fundamental work has so far investigated the specifics of designing a textbook intended for students enrolled in training programs at different levels, specifically, undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate programs. Therefore, this research

may carry implications relevant for educators specializing in multi-level training research.

As the pandemic challenge is a new one to educators and students across the globe, most researchers are focusing primarily on its immediate effects on the teaching process and learning environment while its long-running aftermath likely to transform the present-day education system and the textbook as part of its toolset has not been examined yet, so this research reporting on the crisis-inspired concept of university textbook is an attempt to make a contribution to the growing field of blended learning and digital didactics.

## **Methodology**

In accordance with the objectives of the study, an appropriate methodological procedure was developed. The research was conducted in three stages: Stage 1 – Preliminary Analysis, Stage 2 – Concept Development and Implementation, Stage 3 – Peer Assessment, Field Testing and Evaluation.

In Stage 1 our instruments included in-class and online-session observations, video-recorded student presentations, and community discussions, resultant conclusions being used to configure the structure of relevant content and support design arguments.

Stage 2 was initiated after the results obtained in the previous step were analytically processed and rated on the basis of their relevance and frequency. The Concept Development and Implementation stage relied on a complex procedure that consisted in designing the structure of the textbook, selecting and configuring content to be included and the way for it to be communicated to students. This phase was followed by sequential writing, co-writing, reviewing, and editing, each of the co-authors working both in autonomous mode and in collaboration.

The pre-finalization stage presupposed extensive testing and peer assessment. The textbook was reviewed by two renowned experts in the field who supported both the concept and its implementation. The authors were also honored to receive a recommendation from the Academic Board of the Institute of Foreign Languages, Moscow City University. Integral part of the assessment procedure was field testing integrated into the implementation stage of the student research work monitoring project which is currently progressing at the Department of Linguistics and Translation Studies, Moscow City University.

## **Results**

Drawing on the active learning approach (Suleimanova, Fomina & Vodyanitskaya, 2020) and extensive experience in developing professionally oriented university textbooks relying on advanced methodology and up-to-date authentic material (see, for instance, (Suleimanova et al., 2012; Suleimanova et al., 2013)),

the authors argue that the new learning and work environment emerging as a result of the COVID-19 limitations in education and communication spheres will preserve current online practices and digital formats, therefore, the university textbook must respond to the transformations by preparing students to deliver in multidimensional contexts. Conducting linguistic research under such conditions and sharing its results requires, among other competences, solid theoretical training and appropriate digital skills, so the proposed concept of the new university textbook on linguistic research is based on the balanced combination of theoretical provisions, their practical application in research, transparent methodology, both conventional and computerized, and digital forms and formats of presenting and exchanging research results.

In this vein, the resulting textbook (Suleimanova, Fomina, & Tivyayeva, 2020) intended for linguists-in-training consists of four sections covering metalanguage, methodology, academic discourse, and academic writing. The book offers an overview of metalanguage development for research purposes, available online resources for researchers in general and linguists in particular, trending linguistic research techniques and data processing methods, step-by-step academic writing guidelines, community ethics, international academic publishing conventions, and public presentation tips. Each section consists of up to eleven subsections dealing with specific issues under the category. All subsection elements are organized in a similar manner: an informative piece introducing new concepts or developing an idea is followed by comprehension questions, samples and practice assignments employing authentic works of contemporary linguists as illustrative material.

The list of topics covered in the textbook includes but is not limited to theory and hypothesis in linguistics, discourse and discourse analysis, concept, research methods and approaches, digital techniques, genres of academic discourse, research ethics, reporting research results in online-events. Practice assignments include text analysis, writing, editing, searching, data processing, and results handling tasks. A large volume of practice problems introduce students to online resources indispensable in contemporary linguistic research and help them develop professional operating skills. Specifically, students are offered an overview of available web corpora to be used as an empirical basis in their research, multidisciplinary databases as sources of cutting-edge scientific information for smarter research, publishing options for research management. As many assignments require individual work, students are encouraged to make independent professional decisions relying on data analysis. Integrating and balancing theory and practice with a special emphasis on digital procedures and methods ensures wider post-COVID-19 job opportunities for digitally trained graduates.

Intended to facilitate gaining professional skills outside of the conventional face-to-face learning

environment, the textbook features the following digital-era concepts and strategies:

- consistent research work criteria applicable to student papers at any level, in other words, valid for undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate, and doctoral training programs, thus setting high performance standards at an early stage;
- step-by-step research strategies leading to a positive outcome in all research phases (planning, designing, implementing, reporting);
- samples demonstrating best international industry practices and approaches that are high on the agenda in the global academic community;
- the theory-to-practice concept emphasizing the integrative approach and independent student work in acquiring professionally-oriented digital skills and taking them to the next level;
- presentation style and format elements relevant for web-based professional interaction which is dependent both on verbal and non-verbal communication channels (e.g. QR-codes, e-posters, digital handouts, etc.);
- research management strategies aimed at promoting research in post-pandemic global academic community.

The textbook was introduced into the education process at the Department of Linguistics and Translation Studies, Moscow City University in the fall semester of the academic year 2020/2021 marked by the distant-mode learning under the pandemic-crisis conditions. The first student research projects designed and implemented in strict compliance with the proposed guidelines were successfully presented in the course of the MCU student session of the 56<sup>th</sup> Linguistics Colloquium hosted as an online event, which demonstrates the workability and efficacy of the proposed conceptual framework.

## **Discussion**

Linguistics as a university subject in America, Europe and Russia has evolved along with theoretical trends and practical priorities in research (Falk, 2006; Ivanova & Tivyaeva, 2015). The focus on language change and typology marking 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century linguistic studies was superseded by a shift to synchronic structuralist and descriptive studies, which in their turn became peripheral as linguistic semantics, pragmatics, and discourse analysis emerged (Seliverstova & Suleimanova, 1988; Kurdyumov, 1999; Biryukova & Popova, 2015; Kholodova et al., 2018).

Shifts in mainstream linguistic research avenues could not but affect university course books shaping their content, methodology, and teaching approaches. As linguistics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century seems to have a penchant for experimental procedures, computer-based technologies, and digital methods (see, for instance, (Nikitina, 2020; Suleimanova, 2020; Suleimanova & Vodyanitskaya, 2020)), there emerges a need for novel teaching tools responding to challenges of the newly developed digital research space. This need is yet intensified by the global pandemic crisis that gave rise to a number of digitized practices both in education and at workplace and triggered demands for digitally competent employees. The latest developments demonstrate that the “digital turn” in the humanities, and in linguistics specifically, is already in the active phase and is highly unlikely to roll back, therefore, current web-powered practices are to remain high on the agenda.

The authors’ concept of the new type of university textbook on linguistic research stands out among other similar works due to its practice-oriented approach which reveals itself in theoretical content selection, hands-on research solutions, and practice contextualization. While many university textbooks on research fundamentals provide a substantial theoretical basis, they are often decontextualized in terms of practical application. The textbook presented in this case study offers insights into trending linguistic research procedures and international academic discourse conventions.

## **Conclusion**

COVID-driven challenges faced by national education systems required immediate responses from educators who did their best to alleviate format-induced consequences by introducing web-powered practices. However, their efforts were mostly focused on solving concurrent problems, not extending to the post-COVID teaching and research space. While temporal limitations do not allow for any longitudinal evaluations reporting consistent results, it is obvious that the education system will not go back to its pre-COVID standards and practices, therefore, new realities require new ideas and solutions in all education-related fields. The present study seeks to present a wider perspective and introduce a novel concept of a university textbook designed to be used in blended learning contexts and prepare students as tomorrow’s jobseekers for efficient professional communication in digitized working space.

The main strategy employed by the authors to achieve this goal builds on the balanced combination of theoretical accounts referring to available web resources on linguistics, automatic analysis tools, and research management to demonstrate their application potential in solving specific task-oriented problems and practice assignments encouraging student acquisition of digital skills necessary for collecting, processing, and organizing data.

The concept of the new type of university textbook drawing on the active learning approach, providing both theoretical and methodological foundation for students specializing in any area of studies along with developing their professionally-oriented digital skills and thus making them instantly employable offers useful implications for higher school educators and has potential application along a range of disciplines.

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