

Textbook: Focus on Students' National Identity

Tertiary Level Foreign Language Textbook Through the Current Educational Paradigm Lens

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Abstract

Proposing the distinctions between internal and external linguistics, F. de Saussure could hardly anticipate a fantastic impact, which social, geopolitical and technological progress (an external phenomena) would exert on the linguistic paradigm (an internal entity) change. Anyway, this influence is traceable. The increasingly globalizing world, appearance of trans-national corporations, cooperative events, broadening academic exchanges promote the establishment of the English language in the status of a lingua franca. This motivates and stimulates the desire and necessity to learn English not only in its capacity of commonplace communication practices (EGP) but as professional communication tool (ESP). The goals of mastering these two counterpart acquisitions turn out to be different, the methods have to be improved, the tools of teaching to be varied. The conceptual statement of the undertaken research establishes reciprocal dependency relations in dichotomies “paradigm – method” and “goal – tool”. The shift of linguistic paradigm is externally determined. The claim of the article is that alongside all the obvious developments in educational domain there are constituents, which retain their position though they may change their formal attire. One of these constants is the textbook whose functional loads are essential for it supplies thematically and professionally relevant information, brings the teaching materials to order and designates the learning algorithm.

Keywords: educational paradigm shift, methodology clusters, digital textbooks.

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Introduction

Though with quite a number of wide embracing language teaching methodology reviews the academic community have by now established a fairly complete scale of inadequacies, failures, successful attempts and happy findings, relevant for the instruction room strategies, the never ending aspiration for further improvement sets up new goals prognosticating new challenges which require immediate response. There is no denying the arresting consistency of the object and the crucial points for discussion in this educational domain, which focus on the content, the mode of its presentation and the tools supporting and promoting its better acquisition (Galskova, 2003; Kitaygorodskaya, 2009; Renandya & Widodo, 2016; Jovanov, 2019). Neither seems there to be any arguing the necessity of the firmly embedded but probably slightly outdated ideas reconsideration.

Here we have to admit the dominant role played by linguistic theory alternations, since the factors causing shifts in methodology clusters applied and traced in recent retrospection are hiding in the depths of linguistic paradigms (Kolodkina & Juinn Bing Tan, 2008). The arguments supporting this statement are to be found in the general system theory conception, outlined by L. von Bertalanffy, which proclaims isomorphism as a specific uniform principle organizing the structural frame of any system (Bertalanffy, 1968). This and some other statements precondition its unlimited applicability (Chen and Stroup, 1993), which creates the foundation for the following statement. Within the total scientific field, there exists a kind of inclusive subordination and adherence, due to which linguistics (as a humanitarian scientific branch) in its development follows the routes, turns and trends of hard science. The next step leads to teaching methods, which closely interrelate with and depend on current tendencies and achievements in linguistic research.

A broader panoramic view on the 21st century's first quarter reality exposes fast-going developments in various directions and destinations. The most impressive of these is digitalization, causing paradigmatic shifts in art, science, social interactions, leaping to the so far unknown heights of educational culture. It is an intrinsic proof of the revolutionary essence of paradigm shifts proclaimed by T.S. Kuhn (Kuhn, 1962), if anyone ever doubted his assumptions. Digitalization dramatically changes the whole orchestration of studies, thus requiring new claviers and new scores. Our old acquaintance paperback textbook no longer plays premier roles (even if it is hardcover). It has to adjust to the diction of the day.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of the undertaken research is to unveil the forthcoming challenges professional communities are facing. It is not because traditional modes and patterns of organizing academic discourse have outlived themselves. Neither is it because once well-working textbooks are no longer in trend (though they are not). The core of the problem is closely related to the necessity of achieving and maintaining balance between students' development of cognitive abilities and the exploited tools of cognition. Texts, as it seems, will retain their status of a referential unit on a music stand, as well as the conductor will never let the baton loose. The basic objectives entail systematizing the already existing requirements educational texts and textbooks should meet and foregrounding the perspectives of new format texts intrusion into educational atmosphere.

Literature review

With the widening process of globalization, the English language increasingly and reasonably getting the world recognized status of *lingua franca* (ELF), the registered situation that about 80% of the English language users are non-native speakers (Jenkins, 2007) does not surprise sociologists or politicians, though it surely poses challenges for language instructors. There is a growing necessity of working out and developing classroom materials, ensuring cultural awareness and providing learners with tools for becoming comfortable communicators. The initial research hypothesis states that the dominant linguistic theory governs the methods of teaching languages which methods in turn determine supporting materials and tools employed by teaching instructors.

A brief survey of the prevalent language teaching methodology clusters transition through at least half a century reveals their progress from an infamous Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) of the 20th century late sixties up to the aggressively capturing educational territory Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), proven to be more substantial and beneficial strategically (Derakhshan, Salehi & Rahimzadeh, 2015). Tracing a more detailed history of language teaching methodology (LTM) evolution clearly shows the governing role of the prevailing linguistic theory conception of the time in its dominant development vector. Thus, when the focus of linguistic theory concentrated on language functions with an intent attention on the one providing effective communication new methods came to the proscenium.

They may "hide" under the common umbrella of Communication methods and embrace (to develop the umbrella metaphor) a number of panels in its canopy. Among once most popular and widely used all over the world is Suggestopedia (Reservopedia), based on behaviorist linguistics principles with the assumption of psychological relaxation being a relevant factor for a better perception and implementation of the target language essential functions (Lozanov, 1995). Technically, it realizes gamification principles for it is a

role-play in a stress-free home-like physical environment with very limited home preparation, deferred and superficial correction work. Another trend in this bunch is the Community Language Learning (CLL) method introduced by an American Jesuit priest Charles Curran, adhering to the idea that psychological postulates should be of first consideration in language learning process (Nurhasanah, 2015). It offers the learners freedom of choice and realization of their preferences in making decisions on what, when, where and how to learn, whom to invite as a role-play partner and how to enact the dialogue, with the teacher acting as a counselor. Yet another method, which fits in this category, is the Task-Based Language Learning (TBLL) in which though the role-play platform remains (Suleymanova, 2018) the role of a teacher is more prominent than in CLL, for it is the teacher who designs the classroom scenario, assigns the roles and runs the play. Its another distinctive feature is being (presumably) goal oriented.

The Immersion Language Learning (ILL) method emerged in Canada. It was wrongly interpreted in Russia as implying the necessity to visit the country of the target language in order to immerse in natural language environment. Initially, it had nothing to do with gamification. Its functional aim was reached by teaching all disciplines in educational institutions in target language so that the students were immersed in the target language environment staying in their home country (Chen, 2019). This method was introduced in countries with multilingual population such as Canada, Great Britain, Belgium, Switzerland, Luxembourg. It keeps giving good results. School-leavers as a rule have a good command of at least two languages.

This range and variety of language teaching methods are rooted in N. Chomsky's linguistic theory conception of language competence, which creates a theoretical platform for their implementation (Chomsky 1965).

At that time scholars used to believe (many language instructors still do) Direct or Natural Method (DM / NM) – very similar in essence to ILL was the best way of inspiring a person to practice communication skills. It seemed to be a break-through on the assumption that people of any age group could and – consequently – would acquire these skills automatically, like children, who learn them in everyday communicative practices at school, at home, in the playground. It failed to prove so. It could not be otherwise because firstly, it is not the learner's native tongue, secondly, communication in this case is not ample, and thirdly, it lacks systemic foundation. Finally, even grasping lexis and grammar – the English language grammar is much simpler than the grammar of many other languages – one has to obtain some wider information not to merely be capable of structuring the frames but of charging these frames with sense, which is if not more, then at least equally important.

This leads to the conclusion that the entire educational process – first and foremost – should be content

oriented. Technically, it requires a collection of authentic texts within the frameworks of curricula disciplines.

Methodology

With N. Chomsky's idea of language competences primary value and firm belief that the relevant competence of the speaker is not grammatical correctness but pragmatic aims to make oneself understood (Hülmbauer, 2008) the principles of "communicative umbrella" methods were acquiesced upon as an indispensable requirement for classroom work orchestration and a vital property of the English language textbooks. The pattern once approved of and approbated in various syllabi, there seemed no point in further design development. This experience of educational institutions abroad appeared inviting and for the lack of better examples was borrowed and followed by Russian language instructors, teachers, scholars and educational boards, which resulted in a flood of all kinds of language textbooks. This natural disaster is excusable for two reasons: firstly, because there are no, there just cannot be general English language textbooks, which would meet the demands of any discipline, any level of knowledge, any specific course (Hadley, 2013); secondly, creative teachers may not and should not trample the desire to compile a textbook which they presume opportune in their classroom. The more so that the majority of educators agree that textbooks are an essential requisite in the teaching-learning process, as they facilitate language learning.

The definition of a textbook given by G. Hadley, Professor at Niigata University as "published materials designed to stimulate language learning and support language instruction" (Hadley, 2008) reveals its *raison d'être*. The simplicity of the definition makes it applicable to both – teaching English for general purposes (EGS) and teaching English for special purposes (ESP). Though there is no unanimity of opinions on whether the gap between EGP and ESP is wide enough to be taken into consideration when devising learning material and compiling textbooks, the diversities are obvious to those who have had professional experience of teaching both. These diversities are multidimensional and reveal the specificity of language study and language use. They are summed up schematically in table 1.

Table 1. EGP vs ESP diversification

	EGP	ESP
goal	basic language competences	language competences within the sphere of professional activity
scope of	general lexis, detailed grammar	professional vocabulary and terms,

material		relevant grammar patterns
focal point	concentrates on language system and patterns of its actualization	primarily centers round conversational skills
modes of teaching	drills, reproductions, discussions, dialogues	case-study, project work, role play, presentations,
teaching vector	teacher-centered	learner-centered
textbook type	unidisciplinary	interdisciplinary
communicative skills level	reproductive, productive, restricted	reproductive, productive, unrestricted
order of acquisition	preceding	consequent
level of acquisition	tertiary	tertiary / post-grade
field of application	interpersonal discourse	institutional (professional) discourse

Supporting thematic texts should be authentic, thematically relevant and informative. Learning goals are to be clearly worded. Reference notes should help to remove grammatical and lexical difficulties and avoid possible misinterpretations. Abundance of drills and tasks stimulating active cognitive processes is important.

A random choice of textbooks for analysis offered the opportunity to classify them on the following criteria: authentic (published in the native language country) / compiled (published elsewhere), syllabus-bound (covering the course) / general, obligatory / supplementary, standard (traditional) / original (unconventional). All textbooks qualified for intermediate level. The revealed specificity testifies to the fact that home-published English language educational resources stick to a four-componential pattern, comprising a textbook (student's book), teacher's book, practice book and a listening-comprehension block. They adhere to a clear-cut structural organization with the content filling in the frames of modules and units with five to ten lessons in each. This creates a clear-cut picture of the posed goals and allotted time to cover the program. The most professionally significant features of textbooks issued by foreign publishing companies (Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press publishers, Macmillan Heinemann and Addison-Wesley Publishing Company) is authenticity. This means that they center language activity round genuine materials (menus from restaurants, price-lists from cleaning aids companies, boarding passes, wedding

invitations) and genuine texts: “Tennis stars strike it rich on and off the court”, “Yes, justice was done”, “Mysteries of the Universe” (Language in Use: Classroom Book, CUP), “PJ Foods Rationalizes European Operations”, “Bordon Group Reports Record Profits” (Reward, Macmillan Heinemann). This enables the learners to develop their communicative abilities in genuine contexts. Authenticity also refers to language proficiency, which entails appropriate lexis choice and proper grammatical framing of utterances and communicative practices, which are embedded in intensional, culture sensitive communicative situations.

The English language educational material published in Russia presents a conglomerate of printed matter, which may be classified into several categories on a number of principles. The level and the purpose of studies is the criterion classifying textbooks into those meant for teaching general English (EGP) and English for special purposes (ESP). The focus of learning brings forth the subdivision into task-oriented and content-based textbooks with thematic units depending on the speciality / profession the textbook is designed for. There is a great variety of supplementary textbooks meant for extensive reading classes and unsupervised (independent) work.

Results

The current educational paradigm exposes two cardinal changes. The first shift manifests the evolutionary transition from a teacher-focused classroom situation to the learner-centered educational environment. This determined the change of roles in the classroom and the functions of the teaching-learning instrument kit. The textbook acquired greater significance as the central unit of educational process.

The second shift in full accord with T.S. Kuhn’s conception is absolutely revolutionary, since it involves storage medium substitution. Though it opens up hitherto unprecedented perspectives, it does not undermine the role of a textbook in teaching-learning process. The functions of the textbook will not be reduced. Contrariwise, they will broaden, which is preconditioned by the capacities of digital technologies.

Discussion

The undertaken overview of the situation and the authors’ personal professional experience support the relevance of qualifying a textbook as a helpful instrument in developing learners’ language proficiency and communicative skills. Textbooks intend to provide information necessary for activating students’ cognitive abilities and stimulate the desire to share ideas and opinions. They create a

framework for discussions and ensure authentic environment. A textbook, presumably and most probably, may not cover the whole bulk of themes devised within the discipline borderlines. There is hardly a textbook to satisfy any language instructor's demands or any classroom requirements. Yet we cannot but admit it is very helpful and always comes in handy, very often as a starting point for the further program development.

The discussion will not be complete if we omit another important debating point posed by radical changes in educational processes caused by digitalization phenomenon appearance (Benner, 2005; Murray, 2011; Islam, Jahan, 2018). Digital technologies provide educational community with access to new format textbooks, broadening information fields, stimulating search research activities and opens up new perspectives. The new generation textbooks (Latham-Koenig, 2020) work on the chain principle, covering all the aspects of language acquisition.

Conclusion

The use of a textbook for educational purposes is equally advantageous for both parties of the process – students and teachers. When it is “cut and tailored to size and fashion”, it fits the curriculum and formats the process frame, bringing its fragments to order and supporting its cohesion. It has to adjust to educational goals in teaching language for general and special purposes. It creates a platform for discussions and prompts educational methods, which are within the boundaries of the current linguistic and teaching paradigm. In the midst of educational paradigm turn to the learner the textbook changes its focus from teacher-oriented to learner-oriented, exposing both users to new challenges. Integration of fast progressing technologies into educational environment, digitalization of information change the textbook attire again imparting it the property of creating augmented reality. All these functions make the textbook an indispensable participant of classroom studies.

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