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Models for Textbook Evaluation

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Abstract

This article focuses on the content of EFL/ESL textbooks as they are one of the significant resources for English teachers. What is the best content for textbooks in English language classroom with divers student population? How much is culture depicted and which culture? Is this the source culture, target culture or international culture? The article below explores varied criteria for textbook evaluation offered by different authors. It discusses the importance of relationship between teachers and textbooks and shows different models for textbook evaluation which teachers can use for making their choices.

Key words: textbooks, culture, evaluation

Introduction

Textbooks are one of the powerful resources in EFL/ESL classrooms. There are many EFL/ESL textbooks with a focus on target culture and international culture that Cortazzi and Jin (2011) examined, and they conclude that the development of intercultural skills and culture-sensitive language learning depends very much on the ways textbooks are used in the classroom. The role of the language teacher is often like the role of a diplomat who avoids acute corners and supports the peaceful development of relationships. Many teachers, unfortunately, avoid this sophisticated and responsible role as too difficult, so they totally avoid talking about culture. Probably this sort of teaching makes their lives easier, but certainly it does not help students very much.

Over time many models for textbook analysis have been created by various authors. Some checklists fail in evaluating the cultural content in them (Dwyer, 1984; Brown, 1995, p. 146-150, 159-166, 176-177). Harmer (1991) and McDough & Show's (1993) checklists draw attention to stereotypes of races and cultures in textbooks. Some checklists warn teachers that there can be varieties of target cultures but point out only Britain and the United States (Savignon, 1983, p. 169-175). Cunningsworth (1995) presents a checklist for textbook evaluation and this one is slightly more related to the cultural content, gender issues, and ethnic diversity by asking questions like: Will your students be able to relate to the social and cultural contexts presented in the course book? 'Are women portrayed and represented equally with men?' 'Are other groups represented, with reference to ethnic origin, occupation, disabilities, etc.?' 'Do they cover teaching techniques, language items such as grammar rules and culture-specific information?' Cunningsworth (1984) also introduces a question if the cultural environment assists learners in detecting social situations they may really appear in. This issue, the importance of cultural skills together with cultural knowledge, is discussed further in Skierso's (1991, p. 432-453) and Snow's (1996, p. 231-250) works. As Cortazzi and Jin (2011) state they 'distinguish cultural recognition from cultural production. Students may need to recognize the meaning of target group behavior, but they may not wish to follow it. Some may have mixed feelings about 'Western' cultures and such cultures therefore need to be presented in an objective and sensitive manner' (p. 202).

It is beyond question that checklists vary in understanding the role of culture in EFL/ESL textbooks. More evidently, they represent their authors' point of view, how deeply aware of or interested in culture they are. Surprisingly enough, the questions about culture are at the end of the checklists, as if remembered at the last minute.

Main Part

Framework for textbook evaluation

Cortazzi and Jin (2011) cite Byram's framework for textbook evaluation which is thoroughly distinguished. Byram offers several areas of interest in the textbook while evaluating the cultural content and explores the breadth and depth of focus in the given textbook.

Table 1. Criteria for textbook evaluation (after Byram, 1993, as cited in Cortazzi and Jin, 2011, in Cultural Mirrors, p. 203)

<p>Criteria for textbook evaluation</p> <p>Focus on cultural content:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social identity and social groups (social class, regional identity, ethnic minorities) • social interaction (differing levels of formality; as outsider and insider) • belief and behavior (moral, religious beliefs, daily routines) • social and political institutions (state institutions, health care, law and order, social security, local government) • socialization and the life cycle (families, schools, employment, rites of passage) • national history (historical and contemporary events seen as markers of national identity) • National Geography (geographic factors seen as being significant by members) • stereotypes and national identity (what is “typical,” symbols of national stereotypes)
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Cortazzi and Jin (2011) examined a range of ELT textbooks and revealed three patterns in English textbooks reflecting culture. These patterns are: 1. Textbooks with *source culture* - it means learners' own culture; 2. Textbooks with *target culture* - referring to cultures where target language is used as a first language; 3. Textbooks with *international target culture* - referring to cultures around the world, using English as an international language.

To illustrate the EFL textbooks with source cultures, Cortazzi and Jin bring the examples of the textbook for Venezuela - *El libro de ingles*, for Turkey- *Spotlight on English*, and for Saudi Arabia- *English for Saudi Arabia*. These textbooks are produced at national level and introduce source cultures. The settings in these textbooks are source cultures, characters travel inside their country, performing activities familiar to their cultures, talk about traditional food, focus on their traditions and history and name national heroes.

Cortazzi and Jin (2011) give reasons for a strong emphasis on the source culture in these textbooks: There is a need for learners to talk about their culture with visitors. A deep reason is that such materials are usually designed to help students become aware of their own cultural identity' (p. 205-206). They follow the argument that learning English-speaking cultures is harmful for their children's identity. I would probably agree with the statement if, as had been said earlier, we meant assimilation with the target-language culture. But, as it also has been mentioned, the inseparability of language and culture causes the need of culture-sensitive language teaching which is not only harmless for the learners' identity within their culture, but also helps to comprehend it more deeply.

As a counterargument for the fact that introducing foreign cultural aspects in the textbooks are damaging national identity, Cortazzi and Jin (2011) bring the example of Lebanon. Lebanese textbooks have cultural content that is not source culture and 'as a result, more than half are bilingual; they are familiar with other cultures and are generally regarded as very cosmopolitan, yet very few think of themselves as French, or American, or British; their ethnic identity as Lebanese is basically not in question' (p. 206).

Cortazzi and Jin (2011) identify several problematic situations in teacher, student and textbook interactions. Firstly, teachers' and students' culture of learning may be incompatible with each other and with reference to target culture, as in the classroom using the textbook there is a three-party dialogue. This may cause the misrepresentation of culture content and source culture will be dominated in the classroom interactions.

Secondly, teachers' and students' culture of learning may coincide but differ from textbook culture of learning. Similarly in the above situation source culture will dominate the dialogues.

Thirdly, the situation may be paradoxical in the case of a native speaker teacher. Teacher's culture of learning and the target culture of learning of the textbook are congruent, but different from students' culture of learning. In this case, as students' expectations are not met, the teacher's professionalism will be doubted by the students. It is crucial for the teacher in this situation to become aware of the students' culture of learning. The solution to these problems move towards teachers and textbooks.

Model for textbook analysis

Karen Risager (1991) offers four categories in her model for textbook analysis. She mentions that the model was initially derived from the analysis of realistic prose but modified for analyzing textbooks and pedagogical needs (Andersen & Risager, 1978). The following is the schema for categories:

1. The micro level-phenomena of social and cultural anthropology:
 - a. the social and geographical definition of characters
 - b. material environment
 - c. situations of interaction
 - d. interaction and subjectivity of the characters: feelings, attitudes, values, and perceived problems.
2. The macro level social, political, and historical matters:
 - a. broad social facts about contemporary society (geographical, economic, political etc.)
 - b. broad sociopolitical problems (unemployment, pollution etc.)
 - c. historical background.
3. International and intercultural issues:
 - a. comparisons between the foreign country and the pupils' own
 - b. mutual representations, images, stereotypes
 - c. mutual relations: cultural power and dominance, co-operation and conflict.
4. Point of view and the style of the author(s)' (p. 182-183).

Risager (1991) uses the above model to examine elementary EFL textbooks used in Scandinavia. She presents the overall picture of textbook development from the 1950s and adds that though the description stems from textbook analysis in Scandinavia, the whole Western Europe has followed the same trend. Below is the detailed account of Risager's (1991) description.

Micro level: phenomena of social and cultural anthropology

The social and geographical definition of characters - During the whole period textbooks have been dominated by middle class representatives. However, from the 1970s some working class photos also appear. The textbooks for young learners never mention occupation, while occupational concern is seen in textbooks for adults

From the late 1970s and 1980s textbooks become rich with various age groups. Elderly people and children start to appear in textbooks, while in the past they did not exist. Overall the age of characters is adapted to the age of learners. After World War II, English language learning classes became extended both in terms of age groups and social affiliation.

As for the social relationships of characters, in the 1960s it was confined within the family consisting of a mother, a father, and siblings interacting in the house or a garden, but from the 1970s the focus was shifted from the family members to the young people, friends, tourists, visitors and thus people's residence disappears and hotels and reception desks come into sight. So, 'marginalization of native everyday life' (Risager, 1991, p. 184) is seen. Textbooks in the 1960s had no core characters and thus, fragmentation of social space is evidenced.

From the point of geographical environment, in the early textbooks only urban lifestyle was described, but from the 1970s different countries and cities came into light.

Material environment - Technological achievements in reproduction sphere made it possible to change primitive drawings with colorful realistic drawings and photos. Motivation factor was raised depending on the aesthetic dimension.

So, even if the visual materials are of great value, representing everyday life, their arrangement tends to represent the universe in a very fragmented way. Very few pictures are used to illustrate social and geographical contrasts, for instance. At any rate, the heavy emphasis on photographs tends to stress the objectifiable, material

aspects of culture-though photos may occasionally illustrate affective aspects too, for instance certain atmospheres. (Risager, 1991, p. 185)

Situations of interaction - Situation shift is also evidenced in late textbooks from garden, home, shopping, and bus settings to booking office, theatre, and restaurant situations. This means that textbook content is increasingly moving towards communication orientation. However, spare time conversation influence is high based on the linguistic needs, which is marked with common language use.

Interaction and subjectivity - Early textbooks did not depict feelings, values and opinions of characters, but new ones already show the expression of opinion, compassion or indifference as categories of language function. Religious beliefs and activities are not included in textbooks and problems are limited too. 'Perceived problems are very rarely shown, and they are seldom of a serious type. In good cases the problem may be about pocket money, or pupil participation. There are only a few more problems represented in the newer books compared to the earlier ones. We see here a strong under-representation of the subjective aspects of culture' (Risager, 1991, p. 186). This is again a demonstration of headache-avoiding policy, but, as I have shown, language and culture are inseparable, and religion is a very important aspect of culture. I do not think this is appropriate.

Macro-level: Social, Political, and Historical Matters

Broad social facts about contemporary society - In the textbooks of the late 1970s the sociocultural facts appear in the form of useful information for tourists. Many different towns are mentioned in the sense of geographical information in new textbooks compared to old ones, though no information exists on cultural geography. The trend towards sociocultural orientation in new EFL textbooks exists but is not full-fledged.

Broad sociopolitical problems - In recent textbooks, the problem orientation is already detected. Topics like women's works, immigrant workers, unemployment, racism are briefly referred to.

Historical background - Historical background is missing from textbooks, though 'thematic units have in some cases given way to historical information, for instance a theme on 'la Bretagne' (Risager, 1991, p. 187). Meanwhile, many historic events are part of idioms and have to be taught. for example: the idiomatic meaning of the American idiom *rope in* is 'to include someone to persuade someone to join in doing something' (Kirkpatrick and Schwarz, 1995). This idiom reflects the experience of catching and collecting cattle with the help of lassoes by the frontiersmen in the West. A very important historic event is reflected in the idiom *a witch-hunt*, the idiomatic meaning of which is: 'a search for, and persecution of, people whose views are regarded as evil' (Kirkpatrick and Schwarz, 1995). The prototype of the idiom refers to the organized hunts for witches.

International and Intercultural Issues

Comparisons between pupils' own country and the foreign country - Risager (1991) explains the absence of comparison in textbooks by saying that books created locally in cooperation of target and native language and culture experts would be especially effective. Publishing houses may think about national appendices to their international books. This comment also concerns the two items below.

Mutual representations - This category is also not presented in EFL textbooks, but in very recent ones authors offer some discussions about possible stereotypes.

Mutual relations - This category is also absent from textbooks. 'Target country or countries are still considered as isolated units' (Risager, 1991, p. 188).

Point of View and Style of the Author

Authors in general restrain themselves from expressing personal attitudes towards sociocultural issues or engaging with critical analysis.

Conclusion

The above analyses of textbooks proposed by Risager (1991) show that, though there has been considerable change in textbooks since the 1950s, the traditional focus on purely linguistic matters was replaced by increasingly important cultural information. However, the textbooks published in the 20th century still lack some elements of sociocultural context. The trend toward cultural orientation kept growing and the increasingly diverse classrooms in the 21st century already brought the necessity of the introduction of foreign countries, their representatives and mutual relations.

Modern textbooks should include more intercultural aspects and teachers should be more aware of intercultural competence. From this analysis it is visible that language teachers, whether native or non-native speakers, must take a more reflective and ethnographic path towards cultural content and methodology.

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მოდელის სახელმძღვანელოების შეფასებისთვის

ნინო თვალჭრელიძე

რეფერატი

სტატიაში ყურადღება არის გამახვილებული ინგლისურის, როგორც უცხოური ენის და მეორე ენის სახელმძღვანელოებზე, როგორც ერთ ერთმნიშვნელოვან რესურსზე ინგლისური ენის მასწავლებლებისთვის. რა არის სახელმძღვანელოებისთვის ინგლისური ენის მრავალფეროვან საკლასო ოთახში საუკეთესო შინაარსი? რა ადგილი უჭირავს კულტურას სახელმძღვანელოებში? არის ეს ადგილობრივი კულტურა, თარგმნილი კულტურა, თუ საერთაშორისო კულტურა? მოცემულ სტატიაში ვიკვლევთ სხვადასხვა ავტორის მიერ შემოთავაზებულ კრიტერიუმებს სახელმძღვანელოს შესაფასებლად. განვიხილავთ მასწავლებლების დაამოკიდებულებას სახელმძღვანელოებთან მიმართებაში, მის მნიშვნელობას და წარმოადგენს სახელმძღვანელოების შეფასების სხვადასხვა მოდელს, რომელიც დახმარებას გაუწევს მასწავლებლებს შემოთავაზებული სახელმძღვანელოებიდან საკუთარი არჩევანის გაკეთებისას სწორი გადაწყვეტილების მიღებაში.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: სახელმძღვანელოები, კულტურა, შეფასება.