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FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEXTBOOK EVALUATION – METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Despite the fact that in recent years there has been an increased interest of researchers and practising teachers in the issues related to the evaluation of foreign language textbooks, it seems that there is still the need to work out principles for flexible and possibly exact prediction of the effectiveness of teaching materials in real school conditions. Such principles can, however, only be elaborated on the basis of determining the category of textbook evaluation.

The ambition of this study is to define the category of textbook evaluation on the basis of metatheoretical dimensions, arising from the category of educational evaluation. The textbook evaluation shall then be defined from the point of view of (1) the notion, (2) functions, (3) object, (4) methods, (5) criteria, and (6) addressee, performer and process of textbook evaluation. In determining the notion, functions and addressee of evaluation, generally applicable postulates shall be attempted, in all others, however, examples of foreign language textbooks shall be used.

The notion of textbook evaluation

Generally speaking, *an evaluation is a judgement of merit, sometimes based solely on measurements such as those provided by test scores but more frequently involving the synthesis of various measurements, critical incidents, subjective impressions, and other kinds of evidence* (Ebel 1980:554). It is one component of the general model of scientific procedure consisting of the formulation of intention, programme of implementation, implementation, and evaluation. This model has several modifications depending on the particular sphere of application, e.g.:

INTENTION	PROGRAMME	IMPLEMENTATION	EVALUATION
HYPOTHESES	DESCRIPTION OF EXPERIMENT	EXPERIMENT	COMPARISON: HYPOTHESES vs. EXPERIMENT
PROJECT	TECHNOLOGICAL MAP	PRODUCT	COMPARISON: PROJECT vs. PRODUCT

Working on a school textbook, its authors first discuss their ideas about the aims of the course and transform them into the graded and final aims of the textbook. All this proceeds on the level of INTENTION. Afterwards a PROGRAMME of implementation, i.e. a textbook design, is formulated. This stage comprises a description of activities dealing with basic factual material from the aspect of both the learner and the teacher.

The IMPLEMENTATION of intention consists of writing the textbook and the EVALUATION is ensured by means of the comparison of final skills and habits with the textbook aims, or by means of a comparison of the textbook content with its aims (cf. Arutjunov (1982)).

The above procedure indicates that the evaluation stage in the case of textbook design might be performed by experimental testing of the textbook in real classroom environment (i.e. the comparison of the textbook content with its aims).

The main purpose of these evaluations is the prediction of the newly designed textbook's effectiveness based on various parameters and criteria. In this manner the extent to which the particular textbook may help (or hinder) learners in their efforts to achieve the set aims of instruction may be assumed. This indicates a close connection between the textbook design and textbook evaluation, and between recently developed theories of textbook design and theories of textbook evaluation. The theory of textbook design covers the elaboration of optimal parameters for the production of teaching materials in the same way that research into the theory of evaluation involves the elaboration of evaluative criteria for teaching materials (cf. Pfeiffer (1977);(1980)). Having regard to this mutual relationship between textbook design and textbook evaluation, both of them must be considered as part of the theory of textbooks and teaching materials.

Despite this logical coherence there have been voices stressing the need for the constitution of a theory of textbook evaluation, and in fact the evaluation of any learning and teaching materials, as a specific discipline that would summarise the developments in this area and which could serve as a source of feedback for the theory of textbook design. Pfeiffer (1977:8), for example, states that *at present*

it seems more purposeful to develop the theory of evaluation as an independent discipline than to treat it as a metatheory of the preparation of glottodidactic materials. Although various concepts and general postulates supporting the above demands have been developed, in my opinion there is no reason to consider textbook evaluation to be an independent discipline, or an interdisciplinary sphere of research within the framework of applied linguistics (cf. Mleczak (1981)). Reading of theories of general educational evaluation (e.g. Nevo 1983; Ebel 1980) has led me to conclude that textbook evaluation belongs to the area of educational evaluation because the same methodological principles and structures can be applied to textbook evaluation as are given for general educational evaluation. Textbook evaluation thus may be understood as the systematic analysis of a textbook with the aim of identifying the relative effectiveness of various aspects of textbook materials through a system of objective criteria (evaluative indicators). Textbook evaluation derives its principles from the same sources as textbook design and educational evaluation. In the case of foreign language textbook evaluation the contributing models are: linguistics, psychology, pedagogy, foreign language teaching and learning theories, and sociology.

The functions of textbook evaluation

On the basis of the above definition and taking into account the functions of educational evaluation, the following functions of textbook evaluation can be defined:

- a) corrective function (“formative” in educational evaluation)
- b) selective function (“summative”)
- c) commercial function (“socio-political”)
- d) administrative function (“administrative”)

The corrective function implies that the evaluation results are used for the modification (improvement) of the theoretical models of textbook design, or if the textbooks are already used, for possible compensations of revealed “weak points” using other means (e.g. supplementary materials, teaching methods and procedures).

The selective function is exploited mostly in conditions where educational systems are based on varying rather than on unified principles. Educational institutions and teachers select the most appropriate teaching materials for their specific purposes.

The commercial function is used to motivate textbook users and to gain public support. It dominates in reviews published in periodicals.

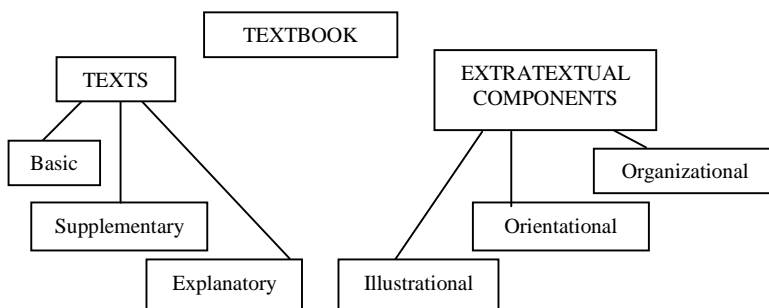
The administrative function characterises editorial assessments and other evaluations where a certain authority is exercised.

The objects of textbook evaluation

The object of textbook evaluation may include all types of teaching materials regardless of their designation, range of application, theoretical roots, or design. In order to define what is understood by the term *textbook* in this contribution, the following characteristics can be presented. Regardless of various approaches and concepts, which have appeared recently for textbook preparation or analysis, the basic characteristics of any school textbook must be presented in terms of its structure and functions. This approach has been defined as the structural-functional approach (cf. Bejlinson (1977)). Its main premise is that the textbook is considered to be a complex structure of components (parts, elements), which have specific didactic functions. The structural component of the textbook is defined as

[...] a central structural block (system of elements) which is closely related to other components of the particular textbook (together with other components making an entire system); it has a definite form and performs its function only by its own means (Zujev 1983:95).

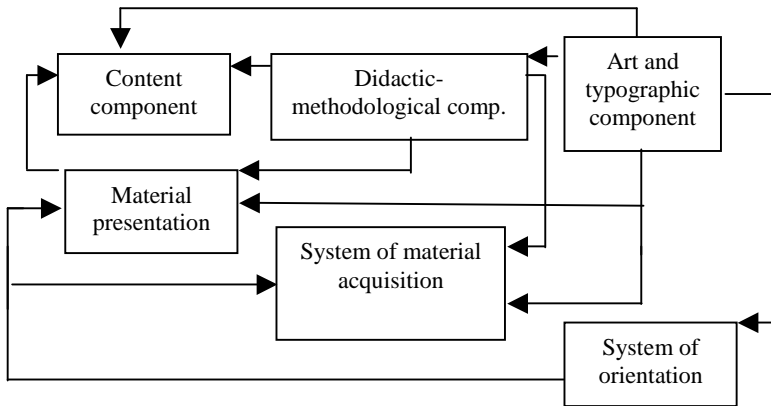
This concept advances from basic structural components towards the definition of the components of hierarchically more specific levels:



(Zujev 1983:106)

The term *texts* represents the coherent verbal presentation of the teaching material in the form of the “basic text”, or “supplementary” (e.g. material of evidence; text presenting optional material), or as the “explanatory text” (e.g. explanatory notes, vocabularies). Thus the “texts” present the content of teaching while the “extra textual components” influence the manner of acquisition of the given content. The essence of the “extra textual components” is the organisational component” (e.g. questions, assignments) used to stimulate and direct the pupils in the educational process and to form habits for individual work with the textbook. The “orientational component” (e.g. table of contents, bibliography) and the “illustrational component” (e.g. photographs, maps, diagrams, plans, schemes, drawings) are the other types of the “extra textual component”.

The proposed model gives a true picture of individual relations within the school textbook, which can be confirmed by comparison with a “systemic didactics diagram” presenting the following general structure of a textbook:



Although the given schemes presenting textbook structural components are very general and simplified, they do provide a starting point for further specification. This specification is, however, irrelevant for the purpose of this passage whose aim is to provide general characteristics of the textbook as an object of evaluation.

Beside structure, there are basic textbook functions that are important for this characterisation. Furthermore, I would set out three premises, which must be taken into account before the textbook functions can be formulated. These premises are:

- (1) The textbook is part of a system of teaching materials, its core.
- (2) The textbook is a relatively independent subsystem with a specific set of functions and a characteristic structure.
- (3) The textbook is a complex subsystem in which each component has its specific role, composition and form.

These premises support the foregoing characterisation of textbook structure and provide the basis for the formulation of the following list of textbook functions applicable to textbooks designed for present-day schools:

- The informational function, i.e. the textbook functions as a basic informational source in the presentation of teaching content.
- The transformational function, implying that the textbook presents a didactic interpretation of scientific information.
- The systemic function, i.e. the textbook divides all teaching material according to the type of school, stage, year, etc.

- The self-educational function, helping the learners to acquire skills and motivation for independent acquisition of the material.
- The supervisory function, i.e. the textbook enables the learners to find out their shortcomings in the acquisition of the material.
- The integrational function, i.e. the textbook shows the learners the way to select and integrate the information gained from different sources.
- The coordination function, i.e. the textbook takes a central position in a set of other teaching materials linked to it.
- The formative-educational function, i.e. the textbook contributes to the active formation of a learner's personality (cf. Zujev (1983)).

It is clear that such a list of functions has an abstract character; it refers to the textbook as an ideal product and hardly any textbook can provide space for their complete fulfilment. In addition, in line with the claims of the Yugoslav researcher Nickovic (1977), the proposed complex of functions is not determined only by hitherto achieved standards of textbook production but also by progressive new features and elements.

A similar range of functions can be seen in the studies of Kupisiewicz (1973), and Koszewska (1978). The functions of textbooks are essentially interpreted equally, and differences are found only in terminology and in wider or closer specification.

If we want to pass from the general theoretical level to the level of practical application, our attention must be concentrated on a more concrete object of interest, which enables us to comment on the above-mentioned tendencies. In agreement with Choděra (1983:63) I hold that *the textbook 'per se' does not exist. There is only a concrete textbook with a concrete aim programme in specific conditions.*

In the case of foreign language teaching, in comparison with other school subjects, its specificity determines the foreign language textbook as being primarily a model of language activities with a system of rules and exercises on the basis of which receptive and productive communicative skills are to be developed. This type of textbook therefore mostly presents texts with instrumental and practical character, in contrast to textbooks in e.g. physics, chemistry, biology where we often find the informational function dominating. In connection with the specifics of foreign language teaching, it is also important to take into account the absence of an empirical basis in learners who are starting to become familiar with elementary units of the particular foreign language, i.e. they lack personal experience of the language. On the other hand, in other subjects learners can use a certain potential of experience that may facilitate their entry into a new discipline. In foreign language learning it is partially possible in the case of the universals of language use.

Considering these and other specifics, Bim (1984) suggests four functions of a foreign language textbook:

- (1) The informational function rests in learning information on language and speech elements, situations of language use, spheres of social life, culture and background.
- (2) The motivational function helps stimulate the learners' language activities, forms their interest towards the learning subject, and forms a foreign language atmosphere.
- (3) The communicative function helps develop the main forms of language skills, and enables learners to communicate in the respective foreign language.
- (4) The feedback function aims at the execution of assessment and self-assessment of the learners' progress as the condition for the functioning of feedback mechanisms. This function exerts influence upon the success in the learners' progress towards set aims and stimulates learning.

The above functions applicable to foreign language textbooks obviously cover only the characteristics that are relevant to this special category of textbooks.

The methods of textbook evaluation

Considering the fact that the school textbook is a means of education and instruction, it cannot be investigated in isolation from the educational process. Therefore the methods of textbook analysis and evaluation must be an organic part of the research instrumentalism of pedagogical sciences.

Taking into account research procedures and data processing and interpretation, textbook evaluation methods may be generally divided into:

- A. Methods of theoretical analysis
 1. The theoretical-analytical method (e.g. the determination of the conformity between the textbook and the syllabus – comparative study)
 2. The special analytic method (i.e. analysis according to a set of internal didactic criteria)
 3. The comparative analysis of textbooks (i.e. two or more textbooks are mutually compared)
- B. Empirical analytical methods
 1. Experimental investigation in the use of textbooks
 2. Public inquiry applied to teachers
 3. Public inquiry applied to learners
- C. Statistical (quantitative) methods

The individual methods as shown in the above scheme are partially based on some other researchers' suggestions (cf. Koszewska (1980); Tupalskij (1977); Heindrichs (1980); Prucha (1984)) and will now be explained in connection with their applications.

Methods of theoretical analysis

Some of the applied methods of theoretical analysis achieved wide publicity at the time when they were carried out. The project published under the name *Mannheimer Gutachten* (cf. Engel *et. al.* (1977)) therefore deserves more place as it deals with foreign language teaching textbooks. It comprises results of a group study, a board made up of specialists in methodology, literature, and linguistics in Germany in 1974. The aim of the group was to provide a critical standpoint on selected textbooks of German as a foreign language published in Germany. Full attention was concentrated on the textbooks which:

- were designed mainly for the acquisition and extension of language competence;
- were primarily intended for teaching German to non-Germans (home and abroad);
- were suitable for general and regional use.

It was agreed that the selected textbooks would be analysed from the viewpoint of methodology, linguistics, and culture. Three groups of experts designed “catalogues” which corresponded with the above intentions.

After the results of this research had been published, a lively discussion was initiated and some significant criticism was expressed (cf. Freudenstein (1978); Hertkorn (1978); Heindrichs (1980)). In my opinion, the following critical remarks may be presented in relation to the above project:

- (1) The study does not distinguish satisfactorily between descriptive and evaluative elements and the criteria used have a decidedly analytic-descriptive character. (The authors themselves admit this). Such an approach makes the obtained data too vague and impractical for gaining any real knowledge of the analysed textbook.
- (2) There is no clear support from specialised literature, which seems to result in weak argumentation.
- (3) The needs of Germany are intensively stressed while the needs of the addressees (foreigners) are not considered at all.
- (4) The heterogeneity of the evaluated books made their evaluation according to uniform measures impossible.
- (5) The study does not take into account any empirical data obtained in the educational process.

Some partial problems of the *Mannheimer Gutachten* were overcome in other evaluative projects based on the method of theoretical analysis. For instance, the *Pariser Gutachten* (cf. Binder *et. al.* (1976)) dealing with textbooks of German for beginners make use of teachers' opinions and emphasise the role of the educational process in the final evaluation of textbooks. According to the authors of this study, the success or failure of a textbook depends not only on its conformity with theoretical, linguistic and methodological concepts but also on its practical use in the teaching process. Reference to any justified pedagogical or linguistic theory (or even a trend of the day in methodology) cannot be used as a basis for a final evaluation of textbooks; this can only be undertaken using empirical data obtained in the educational process.

This relation between theory and practice as interpreted in the above thesis is, to my mind, of the greatest importance for the methods of textbook evaluation. The significance of empirical data is undoubtedly irreplaceable, but given that practice necessarily leads behind the development of theory, theoretical concepts must function as the basis for textbook evaluation as well as for the practical production of textbooks always in close relation with practical needs.

Empirical analytical methods

Attempts to use empirical textbook evaluation methods were reported from the University of Philippines in 1978–1979. Selected textbooks of German as a foreign language were observed in parallel courses. An increase in the knowledge of course participants was measured by six diagnostic tests, which were developed in a language centre at Bonn University. First results showed that any evaluations, which can be derived from the tests only partially, correspond with statements of theoretical evaluation.

Statistical (quantitative) methods

As an example of statistical methods, the study entitled *Systematische Lehrwerkanalyse* (Bung 1977) may be mentioned. It represents a method of systematic and quantitative record and description of selected aspects of textbooks. The subject matter consists of eight textbooks of English. Similarly, the study *Sprachlehrwerkanalyse mit Hilfe der elektronischen Datenverarbeitung, dargestellt an Deutsch-Lehrwerken für Ausländer* (Willée 1976) is an attempt at the objective measurement of the material of two textbooks of German for foreigners. In spite of some advantages connected with the application of statistical methods used in the above studies, e.g. comparatively easy applicability (given exact observance of prescribed mechanisms or data processing and interpretation), they can be used only for the evaluation of those parts or partial aspects which are suitable for the application of mathematical methods or computers, leaving many aspects of the

textbook unnoticed. An essential part of the results covers the statistical element of vocabulary as well as its material selection, as can be seen in Zubov *et. al.* (1977).

The object of their interest is represented by a battery of lexis that is to be learned during one year of teaching the appropriate foreign language. The investigation goes into the number of lexical items designed for acquisition, the pace of new word presentation, the length of interval between reoccurrence of the same word. For the purpose of processing the individual items, a computer was used. The method was applied to two selected textbooks of French.

Criteria of textbook evaluation

The selection and determination of the kinds of information that should be collected for the purpose of judging the qualities of school textbooks is a very difficult task. This may be the reason why at present any scientifically based methodology of textbook evaluation does not exist. The difficulty consists in the fact that the aspects by which textbooks are evaluated can only be relative, not absolute, because even a textbook which clearly defines its aims, explains its linguistic and psychological starting points and which is harmoniously structured, need not be suitable for learners; *we do not know exactly how one acquires linguistic competence. Until we do (if ever) it will be impossible to write the ideal textbook* (Danesi 1976:122). Nevertheless, evaluators must keep to certain strategies if they want to proceed systematically.

A careful investigation reveals that the following features dominate in the majority of the available lists of criteria: (a) considerable tendency towards descriptivism at the expense of evaluation; (b) excessive orientation towards linguistic aspects of evaluation and neglect of the formative-educational function of textbooks in the educational process; and (c) the lack of theoretical foundations underlying the selection of evaluative criteria which often results in bias towards one methodological approach excluding all others.

From the number of evaluative checklists two of them may be used to show the typical tendency towards descriptive evaluation of foreign language textbooks: the *Mannheimer Gutachten* (cf. Engel *et. al.* (1977)) and the criteria developed by Heindrichs (1980). The study of these criteria shows that the two lists of criteria were developed after the detailed analysis of foreign language textbooks. The former list is more specific as it was designed for the evaluation of the textbooks of German as a foreign language; the latter is more universal. The individual criteria in both lists differ mostly in the degree of explicitness and the terminology used. The most important point, however, in judging these two lists is the result that must necessarily be achieved when applying these criteria. The evaluators obtain a precise picture of the textbook but they can hardly answer the principal question, i.e. whether the textbook is appropriate for the

purpose it was designed for. Such “criteria” might possibly be called “analytic-descriptive” but cannot be considered as the final aim of the design. They form only an indispensable step necessary for making a prognostic statement about the potential effectiveness of a textbook.

A typical feature of another approach to evaluative criteria is an extraordinary orientation towards linguistic evaluation of foreign language textbooks. This certainly results in the partial underestimation of aspects of evaluation other than linguistic ones. Thus a very flexible system of textbook evaluation designed by Tucker (1968) presents criteria which are intended to cover all parameters of foreign language textbook evaluation, namely pronunciation criteria, grammar criteria, content criteria, and general criteria. Under these headings altogether 18 criteria with an evaluative (not descriptive) character are formulated. The majority of them (11) deal with the linguistic content of the textbook, albeit from the viewpoint of FLT/L requirements. The remaining criteria are formulated as follows: availability of supplementary materials, adequate guidance for non-native teachers, competence of the author, appropriate level for integration, durability, quality of editing and publishing, price and value.

A similar approach can be found in the checklist of evaluative criteria developed by Cunningsworth (1984) dealing with (a) language content, (b) selection and grading of language items, (c) presentation and practice of new linguistic items, (d) developing language skills and communicative abilities, (e) supporting material, and (f) motivation and the learner. The same principle dominates in Heuer (1971), or in Grittner and Welty (1974), and Rivers (1968).

This quite common tendency is clearly expressed in the thought that:

[...] a long time theories of foreign language teaching have been determined mainly by linguistic conceptions concerning the nature of language, its function, use and acquisition. Consequently these theories formed the dominant basis for the preparation of glottodidactic materials (Pfeiffer 1977:7).

The majority of available evaluation methods use bodies of criteria that are usually their author’s original inventions and lack any kind of theoretical justification as far as their selection and presentation is concerned. This often leads to the formulation of very general criteria with limited effect. For instance, Danesi (1976) developed the following four broad criteria in order to describe and evaluate the elementary and intermediate Italian textbooks published in the period 1966–75:

- (1) the utilisation of a preface and/or introduction;
- (2) the format, contents, and methodology employed in the lesson or unit;
- (3) the use of supplementary materials;
- (4) the presentation of cultural information.

This sort of criteria essentially corresponds to the structure of “traditional reviews” with all the disadvantages connected with them. Almost the same criteria were used in *A Critical Survey of Elementary and Intermediate French Textbooks, 1968–1973* (Frechette 1974), in the *Beginning German Textbooks for the High School Level (1969–1973): A Descriptive Evaluation* (Grittner and Welty (1974)), and in *A Critical Survey of New Elementary and Intermediate Latin Textbooks, 1969–1973* (Scanlan 1974).

The lack of theoretical justification underlying evaluative criteria sometimes results in one-sided evaluations of textbooks, e.g. from the standpoint of one methodological approach. This can be seen in the Modern Language Association’s *Selective List of Materials for Use by Teachers of Modern Foreign Languages in Elementary and Secondary Schools*, and in its appendix *Criteria for the Evaluation of Materials* (1962). The material represents and supports audio-lingual methods. A book that does not provide for an initial audio-lingual period is unacceptable. The basic psychology of learning is restricted to habit formation. The familiarization with culture and literature is considered as a secondary goal not to be included during the early phases of instruction. Structure is emphasised over lexical units. In fact, this bias towards audio-lingual textbooks is so pervasive that any text series, which does not adhere closely to audio-lingual methods and practice, would be predestined to receive low ranking.

In this connection the above critical remarks concerning the one-sidedness of these evaluation concepts must be explained more clearly to avoid misunderstanding. If a certain methodological approach in teaching is an integrated part of the whole evaluation concept and it is substantially justified regarding the demands of social practice and the educational process, then respect for this particular methodological approach is well-founded and even required. The above example, demonstrating a bias towards audio-lingual methods, must be considered differently as it represents unjustified orientation towards the “method of the day”.

The addressee, performer and process of textbook evaluation

Generally, evaluation should serve the information needs of all real and potential parties concerned with the evaluation object. With regard to the above definition of textbook evaluation, the object of textbook evaluation, and the functions of textbook evaluation, the parties involved may be as follows: (i) teachers, (ii) learners, (iii) textbook authors, (iv) textbook editors and publishers, (v) principals of school establishments, and (vi) educational and school authorities.

This list includes all possible parties irrespective of any educational system or particular country we may have in mind.

As for the performers of textbook evaluation, they should ideally be individuals or teams possessing (a) extensive competence in research methodology and other data-analysing techniques; (b) understanding of social context and the unique substance of the evaluation object; (c) extensive competence in linguistics, foreign language teaching methodology, and other related branches of science; (d) substantial foreign language experience; and (e) a conceptual framework to integrate the above-mentioned capabilities.

Regardless of its method of inquiry, an evaluative process should include the following three activities: (a) specifying the evaluation problem; (b) collecting and analysing data; and (c) communicating findings to evaluation addressees.

The first activity, i.e. specifying the evaluation problem, is performed by the designer of the evaluation method and evaluative criteria; collecting and analysing evaluative data is performed by using a method of comparative weighting of the criteria and a system of recording and analysing the performer's judgements which is easy to handle; finally, the communication of the findings to the evaluation addressees depends on the character of the evaluation.

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