

Dragana M. Gak

gak.dragana@gmail.com

(Fakultet tehničkih nauka – Engleski jezik, Novi Sad)

TEXTBOOK – AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN THE TEACHING PROCESS

Summary

The textbook plays an important role in teaching and learning. It represents a useful resource for both teachers as a course designers and learners as persons who are acquiring the English language. However, the use of a ready-made textbook has its advantages and disadvantages. This paper aims at investigating the benefits and hindrances in using a ready-made textbook as well as ways of textbook adaptation. Textbook adaptation is a process of overcoming problems in using only ready-made textbooks. Textbook adaptations at activity level, unit level and syllabus level are an integral part of the course-developing process which assists the teacher in meeting the learners' specific work-related needs.

Key Words: textbooks, students' needs, textbook adaptation.

Introduction

The textbook is a book used as a standard source of information for formal study of a subject and an instrument for teaching and learning (Graves 2000: 175). It should be regarded as one of the many sources teachers can draw upon in creating an effective lesson and may offer a framework of guidance and orientation. Additionally, the textbook provides confidence and security for an inexperienced teacher who finds adapting existing textbooks challenging especially for tailored work-related courses.

It is necessary to emphasize that no ready-made textbook will ever fit perfectly every language program. There is no ideal textbook, ideal for every teacher, ideal for every group of learners and ideal in every teaching situation. Moreover, teachers' reactions to using ready-made textbooks are manifold. Many teachers are required to use textbooks and are bound to the textbook in its existing form. Since this simplifies class preparation for teachers, this is acceptable for some teachers who eventually begin to over-rely on textbooks and decide to follow the textbook closely, making no or only small essential changes and additions. On the other hand, some teachers reject the textbook approach to learning and wish to make substantial changes to the textbook they need to use.

Adapting a textbook to fit actual needs of a group of learners is a demanding and time-consuming process. Apart from lack of time and resources that majority of teachers state to be the main obstacles in adapting textbooks, teachers also need training and experience in modifying textbooks.

It is not only the teachers who have a significant impact on the use and modification of textbooks; the learners' reaction to textbooks needs to be taken into consideration as well. For the learners the textbook is one of the most important sources of contact they have with the language. It is a framework or guide that helps them to organize their learning. It is helpful to involve students in the process of adapting textbooks. Consequently, they would feel that their needs are respected and they would feel much more motivated to successfully finish the course (Graves 2000: 176).

Advantages and disadvantages of using textbooks

The use of textbooks in teaching has both advantages and disadvantages, depending on how they are used and what the contexts for their use are. What one teacher considers an advantage in a textbook, another teacher may consider a disadvantage (Graves 2000: 175).

The following list contains the most frequently stated advantages of using textbooks (Graves 2000: 175; Basturkmen 2010: 149):

- It provides a syllabus for the course because the authors of the syllabus have made decisions about what will be learned and in what order.
- It provides security for the students because they have a kind of a road map of the course: they know what to expect and they know what is expected from them.
- It provides a set of visuals, activities, readings, etc., and so saves the teacher time in finding or developing such materials.
- It provides teachers with a basis for assessing students' learning. Some textbooks include tests or evaluation tools.
- It may include supporting materials (teacher's guide, cd, worksheets, and video.)
- It provides consistency within a program across a given level, if all teachers use the same textbook. If textbooks follow a sequence, as within a series, it provides consistency between levels.

Textbooks also have limitations, which can lead to teachers' and learners' dissatisfaction with the course. The following list contains the most frequently stated disadvantages of using only ready-made textbooks (Graves: 175; Basturkmen 2010: 149):

- The content or examples may not be relevant or appropriate to the group and they may not reflect the students' needs since textbooks are often written for global markets and often do not reflect the interests and needs of students.
- They may contain inauthentic language, since texts, dialogs and other aspects of content tend to be

specially written to incorporate teaching points and are often not representative of real language use.

- The content may not be at the right level.

There may not be the right mix of activities (too much of X, too little of Y), there may be too much focus on one or more aspects of language and not enough focus on others, or it may not include everything teachers want to include.

- The sequence of units is not in accordance with the real work-related needs.
- The activities, readings, visuals, etc., may be boring.
- The timetable for completing the textbook or parts of it may be unrealistic.
- The textbook doesn't take the students' background knowledge into account.

Graves (2000: 176) suggests that, in order to minimize difficulties when selecting textbooks, teachers should: use the textbook as a resource for students, but not the only resource; use a textbook as a guide, be free to modify, evaluate, develop, change, eliminate, or add to the material in the textbook, supplement the textbook with lots of outside readings.

Textbook Adaptation

During the second half of the 20th century, due to great expansion in science, technology and economy, English was accepted as the primary language for international communication. As a result of this, English for specific purposes (ESP) has become one of the most important segments of English language teaching (ELT) and, the need to design appropriate courses increased. Additionally, a new generation of learners, who knew exactly why they are learning the language, was created. Therefore, the importance of the learners and their attitude to learning became an integral part of a course designing process. One way of incorporating learners' needs into a course is adapting the existing textbook so that it can be used as a useful and productive element in the teaching process.

Graves (2000: 205) defines the textbook adaptation cycle as a series of steps which includes: planning (in-

cluding needs analysis and textbook structure analysis), teaching (implementing modifications), replanning (after the completion of one course, plan again using all conclusions made during the previous course) and reteaching (the implementation of new conclusions and decisions made on the basis of the previous course and replanning). This is followed by continuous assessment.

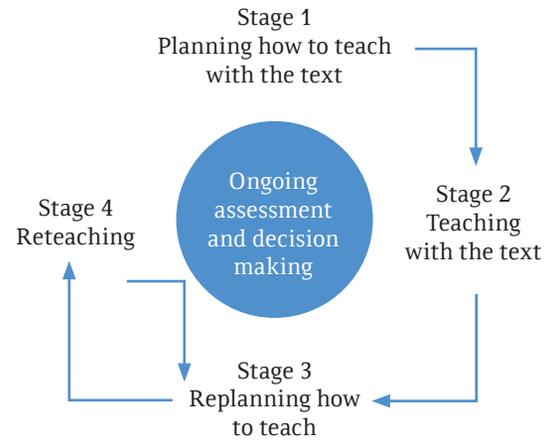


Fig. 1. The Cycle of Textbook Adaptation

The planning of textbook adapting provides a basis for all necessary changes. It is a complex process and it starts with a thorough needs analysis which gives teachers insight into students' wishes and objectives. This is followed by looking into the textbook organization. Teachers need to understand the textbook, its content and structure in order to know what they are adapting or supplementing and to decide what kind of adding and resequencing is possible and necessary. Frequently the table of contents shows what is in the book, how the units are sequenced, and the content and organization of individual units.

Once the teacher is familiar with the overall content and the organization of the book, it is helpful to become familiar with one of the units – what the content of the unit is, what the objectives are, and how the content helps

to achieve the objectives (Graves 2000: 186). There are several ways to do this. One is to make a diagram of the unit. Another is to make lists of content, objectives, and the relationships between them. This is followed by considerations on how the teacher wants to adapt the textbook. There is a range of choices about how much the textbook should be adapted. The teacher may adapt the textbook at the activity level, at the unit level and at the syllabus level. The adaptations are cumulative: adapting at the unit level involves adaptation at the activity level, adapting at the syllabus level involves adaptation at the unit level. Such choices depend on teachers' experience with the textbook; it is easier to adapt a textbook the teacher has already taught from.

In the interest to create the best possible course, teachers may choose to ask the learners to express their views of how effective the textbook and the adaptations. This gives teachers valuable feedback and guidelines for replanning and reteaching and creates a crucial connection between the teacher and learners. Each time the teacher goes through the cycle of planning, reaching, replanning and reteaching he/she becomes more comfortable making choices about what to emphasize, what to leave out, and where to supplement and personalize the textbook.

Adapting at the activity level

Activities can be classified into four types (Graves 2000: 188):

- warm-up activities – usually based on previous topics. It can be considered a review activity and it is usually given at the beginning of a class as a creative way to start a class or break the routine of a class.
- presentation activities – introduce new topics.
- practice activities – it is a meaningful opportunity for the learners to practice the taught material.
- consolidation activity – it is developed after the practice and these activities reinforce the topics that had already been taught.

The majority of teachers adapt and add activities which fit into the schedule to make students more interested and active in the learning process and provide their students the opportunity to learn in a more pleasurable

way. These newly developed activities should focus on learners' needs, give more control to the students, and allow for students' creativity and innovation to enhance the students' sense of competence and self-worth.

Adapting at the unit level

The next level of adaptation is at the unit level. Each textbook consists of a number of theme-based units and each unit has its own structure. The teacher may add exercises to give extra practice to items that are frequently used or which require extra time to learn. In addition, the teacher may skip over confusing or not relevant parts of a unit or resequence the parts of the unit to fit the course.

Adapting at the syllabus level

Ur (1997: 176) defines the syllabus as a document which specifies all the things that are to be taught in the course for which the syllabus was designed. A textbook can be adapted at the syllabus level by adding items or even whole units that are important to students, such as topics on cultural understanding which are crucial for successful business or omitting components that may not be of high priority for learners. Adapting the syllabus involves the teacher and learners working together to make decisions and it is a way of giving high priority to the recognition of learners' needs within the course.

Additional Factors

There are additional factors that need to be taken into consideration prior to textbook adaptation. In order to make textbooks acceptable in many different contexts controversial topics are avoided and textbooks often present an idealized view of the world. The teacher's understandings about how people learn and what the students' prevailing attitudes towards sensitive issues are play an important role in textbook interpretation and adaptation (Graves 1996: 203). In order to make decisions about how to adapt a textbook at the activity, unit or syllabus level, it is important that teachers are aware of their beliefs concerning what they know about students and their needs.

Also, the institutional context in which teachers work can be crucial for decisions about adapting a textbook. In some contexts teachers have a great deal of independence as far as what they do in the classroom. In other contexts, teachers may need to be sensitive to institutional and cultural constraints with the respect to what, how and how much they can adapt the textbook.

Conclusion

Textbooks give a great contribution in the teaching-learning process both to the teachers and to learners. They offer a framework of guidance and orientation. However, apart from numerous advantages a single textbook frequently does not meet diverse needs of the learners. This generates a need for textbook adaptation at the activity, unit and syllabus levels. Adapting provides teachers with an opportunity to make a greater use of their professional skills and for learners to be involved in the learning process.

REFERENCES

- Basturkmen, H. (2010). *Developing Courses in English for Specific Purposes*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Donna, S. (2000). *Teach business English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dudley-Evans, T. & St. John, M. J. (1998). *Developments in ESP: A multidisciplinary approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Graves, K. (1996). *Teachers as course developers*. England: Cambridge University Press.
- Graves, K. (2000). *Designing Language Course, A Guide for Teachers*. Boston. Heinle. Cengage Learning.
- Harding, K. (2007). *English for Specific Purposes*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hutchison, T. & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes: a learner-centered approach*. England: Cambridge University Press.
- Nation, I. S. P. Macalister, J. (2010). *Language Curriculum Design*, New York: Routledge.
- Richards, J. C. (2001). *Curriculum Development In Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Robinson, P, C. (1991). *ESP Today: A Practitioner' s Guide*. New York: Prentice Hall.

Dragana M. Gak

UDŽBENIK – VAŽAN ELEMENT U NASTAVI

Sažetak

Udžbenik ima posebnu ulogu u nastavi stranog jezika. On je ne samo korisna osnova za držanje kursa već je i orijentir kako za predavača tako i za studente. Međutim, pored mnogobrojnih prednosti, korišćenje udžbenika kao jedinog nastavnog sredstva ima i svoje ozbiljne nedostatke koji su predočeni u ovom radu. Iz tog razloga često je neophodno prilagoditi udžbenik konkretnom kursu i potrebama studenata, posebno za kurseve sa posebnim profesionalnim namenama. Prilagođavanje udžbenika je složen proces koji obuhvata prilagođavanje na nivou aktivnosti, lekcije i silabusa. Posebno je važno uključivanje studenata u ovaj proces kako bi i predavači i studenti bili zadovoljni rezultatom.

Ključne reči: udžbenik, potrebe studenata, prilagođavanje udžbenika.