

THE TREATMENT OF LANGUAGE IN EFL TEXTBOOKS: READING

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Annotation. This article presents at the CEFR’s influence over textbook writers addressing substantive issues, including the nature and use of written language as a linguistic model in EFL course books and the complex issue of oral and written language from a sociolinguistic perspective. This article also gives a brief overview of the role of tasks and the relevance of context in the design of speaking activities in EFL textbooks as well.

Key words: EFL, communication, reading, speaking, textbook, language.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqola CEFR ning darslik mualliflariga ta'sirini o'rganadi, asosiy masalalarni, shu jumladan ingliz tili darsliklarida lingvistik model sifatida yozma tilning tabiati va ishlatilishini, shuningdek, sotsiolingvistik nuqtai nazardan og'zaki va yozma tilning murakkab muammolarini ko'rib chiqadi. Ushbu maqolada, shuningdek, EFL darsliklarida so'zlashuv faoliyatini rivojlantirishda vazifalarning roli va kontekstning dolzarbligi haqida qisqacha ma'lumot berilgan.

Kalit so'zlar: ingliz tili, muloqot, o'qish, nutq, darslik, til.

Аннотация. В этой статье рассказывается о влиянии CEFR на авторов учебников, затрагивающих основные вопросы, включая природу и использование письменного языка в качестве лингвистической модели в учебниках английского языка, а также сложный вопрос устного и письменного языка с социолингвистической точки зрения. В этой статье также дается краткий обзор роли заданий и актуальности контекста при разработке разговорной деятельности в учебниках EFL. Ключевые слова: английский язык, общение, чтение, говорение, учебник, язык.

The speaking communicative activities in EFL textbooks are conceived as pieces of writing that stand entirely on their own in which all the necessary contextual information required in any spontaneous exchange has been supplied explicitly when describing the methodological purpose of the activity. In this sense, the language creativity of students in classroom contexts is subject to the linguistic constraints of the prescriptive practices of language, since they are expected to

find correct linguistic structures and appropriate vocabulary in accordance with the topic and purpose of the unit. Therefore, writing a dialogue or a conversation has become a habitual practice in EFL textbooks though it does not involve any spontaneous use of speech.

Indeed, students are commonly asked to write a dialogue as the initial or final part of an oral activity in EFL learning materials. They are expected to show their knowledge on relevant grammar and vocabulary they have already learnt in previous lessons or that have just been introduced in order to examine them in subsequent units. In addition, the participants' reactions and answers as well as the openings and endings of these kinds of speaking practices are well delimited, so that they can be easily perceived. Thus, in the EFL speaking communicative activities students play active and passive roles in which the speaker is the one who initiates the interaction and therefore, selects the appropriate information for the passive listener. However, as (Brown 1995) points out this is a kind of situation that hardly ever arises in any spontaneous interaction, since “an account of communication which assumes that only the speaker's intentions need to be taken into account is as inadequate as one which assumes that speaker and listener will share common goals and a common context.” With these kinds of oral activities in EFL textbooks students are encouraged to produce grammatical sentences rather than practice any spontaneous use of speech. Indeed, in her analysis of casual conversations by students at Edinburgh University Joan Cutting (2000) evidences the lack of any true communicative sense in ordinary interactions arguing that:

Methodology books purporting to train EFL teachers to teach spoken English mainly ignore the informal side of spoken English. Bygate (1987) and Dörnyei and Thurrell (1992) are examples. They describe conversational rules and structure but do not train students to recognise informal grammar and texts. (Cutting 2006).

Ronald Carter (1997) in a previous work, though with a similar conclusion, pointed out that “spoken English continues to be judged by the codified standards of written English, and that teaching pupils to speak standard English may, in fact, be to teach them to speak in formal written English.”

It is not surprising, therefore, to find that students have many difficulties when they attempt to use the target language in oral spontaneous situations. Although they have acquired a high level

of proficiency in the classroom, in many of the oral communicative activities central features that characterise either written or spoken language are ignored. As Cook (1989) states, this is why in current communicative situations students make use of an idealised system of language that does not correspond to the particular characteristics of spontaneous speech. On the other hand, concerning the essential linguistic features of reading aloud, Chafe points out that written language is used first and the spoken language comes last, as he originally stated: Reading aloud consists of language that was first produced as writing and then, at some later time, delivered as speaking. In spite of its origin as writing, its audience does not read it but hears it. It is written at the beginning, spoken at the end. (Chafe 2006)

In conclusion, from the above it can be inferred that reading aloud becomes a frequent activity in instructional environments, involving no genuine communicative function, since this is a teaching technique intended for students to respond and demonstrate what they have learnt in a lesson (vocabulary, syntax and pronunciation). In this sense, the dialogues to be read aloud belong to models of written language with syntactically correct patterns, subordination, rhetorical organisers, metalingual markers, use of pre-modified noun phrases and lexicalization. In addition, these kinds of speaking communicative activities practised in language learning contexts are artificial or invented and they are taught as final and static products (Stubbs 1980; Halliday 1985; Cook 1989; McCarthy 1991; Carter 2004).

On the other hand, if compared to written language in oppositional terms, we find that spontaneous speech is characterised by simple sequences of phrases, repetition of the same syntactic form, generalised vocabulary, and so on. Furthermore, spoken everyday language has to be processed in real time and involves constant checking and reassuring in order to minimise the risk of misunderstanding in face-to-face interactions. Written language, however, can be planned in advance, re-drafted and edited. It is, therefore, the distinctive functions and purposes they serve in current language use which make it clear that speech and writing are natural manifestations of the same system of language, rather than opposite as has been traditionally held. In this sense, Barton (2007) suggests viewing “written and spoken language as having different grammars.” In this sense, it should be convenient to consider McCarthy and Carter’s challenge on the design and implementation of spoken grammars in the practice of language teaching today (McCarthy and Carter 2001).

Obviously, writing a dialogue or reading it aloud are two practices of oral communicative activities that do not fulfil any of the crucial features that characterise a spontaneous exchange. Thus, in any communicative interchange participants do not show their knowledge of a language by practising the prescriptive rules and making an exchange cohesive and coherent. As Cook (1989) argues, “conversation (...) involves the gaining, holding, and yielding of turns, the negotiation of meaning and directions, the shifting of topic, the signalling and identification of turn type, the use of voice quality, face, and body,” whereas Barton (2007) claims that “writing is based on speech in some very real ways: spoken language is the basis for most people’s learning of written language, for instance, and the very form of written language gets its inspiration from spoken language.” It should also be taken into account that, as Carter (2004) points out, “some ceremonial functions of language such as marriage vows remain oral, but when spoken language is preserved, it is normally in the form of a transcribed ‘text’ which provides its own distortion of the communicative complexity of the original source.”

All in all, the content of the speaking activities in EFL textbooks is focused on analysable formal elements rather than on meaning understood as a pragmatic matter of negotiating an indexical relationship between linguistic signs and features of the context; hence our interest in exploring these kinds of practices in this investigation.

Referances

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