METHODS OF ADAPTING FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS ACCORDING TO NEEDS AND MOTIVATIONS OF PUPILS AND STUDENTS

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The article discusses the rationale for teachers to adapt the contents and activities contained in a textbook according to the learning needs and internal motivation of their pupils or students. Questions teachers should ask themselves to determine what parts of a textbook need to be adapted are discussed. Finally, specific approaches to adapting a textbook are explained.

Key words: textbooks, classroom activities, secondary school, university, motivation, student needs.

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The American president Abraham Lincoln is reported to have said, “you
1 can fool some of the people all of the time, and you can fool all of the people
2 some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time.” While
3 it would be inappropriate to suggest that the craft of teaching is anything
4 like the art of political deception, Lincoln’s sentence can be rewritten in a
5 parallel style to refer to using a language textbook as follows: “You can use
6 a textbook with some of the people all of the time, you can use a textbook
7 with all of the people some of the time, but you cannot use a textbook with
8 all the people all of the time.” There may be some teachers and students
9 together who feel that the best way to learn a language is to do every task
10 in a textbook as designed by the authors. There may also be some textbooks
11 that can always be used unchanged with a particular group of students
12 because these textbooks are written by experienced teachers, contain all
13 the elements students need, and can be completed in the time available for
14 teaching [2]. It is not possible, however, to say that a whole textbook may
15 be used by all teachers with all students. This notion goes beyond perhaps
16 already obvious concerns as choosing textbooks appropriate for students’
17 age, language ability, and, for university students, their major (specialty).
18 Even the best textbooks have a set of strengths and weaknesses—aspects
19 that make them user-friendly and aspects that aren’t included or aren’t
easily used by teachers and students. For example, grammar structures
20 might be chosen and placed in the textbook in an order that doesn’t match
21 a particular group of students’ needs or readiness for acquisition [2].
22 Discussion questions may be nonexistent, or they might be written for a
23 population with specific work and travel experiences that a typical Ukrainian
24 pupil or student does not have yet.

To evaluate the amount of adaptation a book requires, teachers are
effected to look through a textbook multiple times and ask themselves
questions that lead to familiarization with the textbook and personalization of the textbook [2]. Questions to ask in the process of familiarization include:

1. What is the physical appearance of the textbook?
2. What are the topics and skills?
3. What questions and tasks are asked of students?
4. What is the target language level?
5. What kinds of activities and sources are included?
6. How much time is each unit or lesson supposed to take?

When determining how to personalize a textbook for students, more questions need to be answered. First, _Will this book appear interesting to my students?_ If not, the teacher may have to take some extra time to prove to the students why a textbook is useful [2]. For example, many students nowadays do not find the practical English textbook written by V.D. Arakin to be appealing in any way, but some teachers still believe that the book offers some useful grammar points and exercises. In that case, the teacher can anticipate resistance and be prepared to tell students directly, “I understand this may not be your favorite book, but it has some very good materials for reviewing grammar.” Teachers should also be ready to mention the short-term and long-term goals in using a textbook. A long-term goal may include “this book will help you prepare for the IELTS exam” or “understanding the grammar rules as explained by V.D. Arakin will help you answer grammar questions when you are a teacher.” A short-term goal may be articulated as, “I know past tense forms/progressive forms of the verbs are very confusing, so we are going to do some practice with them today.” Such explanations of goals should be targeted to the anticipated career and language goals of a particular group of students.

If the topics in a textbook are important but not interesting, and the activities don’t appear designed to generate interest, the teacher may have to add questions or activities that lead students naturally from their current state of interest into a heightened one. This may be done through pictures, jokes, or personal questions. Alternatively, the teacher may take the opportunity to let students talk about why something is not interesting for them. The teacher should take care in the second case not to challenge the students’ opinion or try to prove them wrong. Thus, such a task works when talking about different types of movies or foods.
(which are a matter of taste), but not when talking about school and homework!

Another question concerns the level of difficulty of the textbook: Is the language in the book too difficult, too easy, or just right? Language that is too difficult will need extra explanation from the teacher, or activities will need to be curtailed to use fewer vocabulary words or grammar forms. Language that is too easy requires more challenging activities, or supplemental vocabulary lists if the goal of teaching is vocabulary development. Are there activities that are missing? Some books have no listening tasks; others have grammar and vocabulary but no speaking activities. Are there things in here I don’t feel I can teach? If an element is required by the school or national curriculum, or important for students to know in the future, a teacher may need to consult with a senior colleague. Otherwise, cutting a topic or exercise is a possibility. How much time do I have to teach these things? Some teachers believe it is their job to cover as much material in a textbook as possible. An alternative approach, however, is to take the best or most important elements of a textbook and cover them well in the time one has available. How much power do I have to change things? If inspectors or educational staff who review teachers’ lesson plans insist that teachers cover the material ‘lock-step’ (in the manner and order proscribed in the textbook), some methods of adapting a textbook cannot be implemented. Similarly, some students may be easily upset if things are taught ‘out of order’ or if they don’t use all of a textbook. Again, teachers must be prepared sometimes to explain to their students the reasons for making changes.

At the end of this familiarization and personalization process, the teacher should be able to categorize chapters and tasks of a textbook as either completely suitable, completely unsuitable, or partially suitable. For those elements of the book that are completely or partially unsuitable, there are several options the teacher can choose from. Teachers can omit the unit or task—not use it at all. Teachers can resequence. This means that some aspects of the book may be used out of their original order—either because one topic or task is more difficult and should be done later in the course, or because timewise it fits better in another part of the year. Teachers can change the lesson focus, goal, or instructions. For example, a grammar cloze activity may be used as a speaking activity; one student can complete a sentence orally, and another student can
respond. A reading passage can be used not for general reading comprehension, but for students to find key grammar structures and to analyze their meanings. Teachers can have students make their own materials. If a book does not have sufficient dialogues, for example, students can be asked to use key vocabulary or grammar structures from the textbook to write their own dialogues in pairs or groups of three and present them to the whole class. If a topic has no conversation questions, students can write their own questions to ask other students in a “pair shuffle”—students line up in twos and ask each other questions, then change partners and ask the same questions to a new partner [1].

A specific example of adaptation comes from work in 2003-2004 with an English textbook which had very lengthy reading passages containing highly specific adjectives and technical vocabulary. It was pointed out that many reading activities that are conducted with less difficult texts are still possible to use such as:

1. **Pre-reading activities**—vocabulary and grammar presentation, student discussion of general questions about the topic they will read, and predicting the story contents from the title; and

2. **Previewing activities**—students skim the whole passage, read only the first and last paragraph, or read the first and last lines of each paragraph to try to guess what the text is about.

In addition, the reading passages could be adapted in the following ways:

1. Students may be asked only to scan the text for certain information, vocabulary, or grammar structures.

2. The teacher may divide the text into sections and have groups or pairs do a comprehension or discussion task with a portion of it.

3. Have students pantomime or act out all or part of the text [1].

In conclusion, whatever teachers do with a textbook, they need to be enthusiastic about it. They need to believe that the textbook and its contents have something meaningful to offer their students. The textbook should be seen as a starting point for building up students’ knowledge from where they are currently to where they need to be. The textbook should not be treated as the ultimate source of all knowledge or as the curriculum in and of itself. From this philosophical viewpoint of teaching, adaptation of a textbook is both natural and inevitable.
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