CONTRASTING TWO IRANIAN ESP TEXTBOOKS WRITTEN BY TEFL EXPERTS AND FIELD-SPECIALISTS

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Abstract. *With the growth of English for specific purposes (ESP), a large number of textbooks have been published for different areas of specialization by different publishers. Therefore, on the basis of the importance of textbooks as one of the elements in curriculum which will guarantee effective teaching and learning in EFL/ESL courses and the necessity of textbook evaluation for selecting an appropriate textbook, this study tried to evaluate two ESP experts. To this end, a checklist, including twelve items selected from different checklists prepared by different authors, was used. The results were listed clearly and logically to provide readers with a vivid picture of evaluating and contrasting procedure.*

Key words: *ESP, textbook evaluation, checklists*

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of textbooks in English courses is now widely recognized. It stems from the vital advantages of textbooks in language courses including their psychological essence for students to measure their progress and achievement, their popularity among learners as credible materials, and their sensitivity to learners' need regarding the efficiency of time, money, adaptation and revision. However, because of the vast array of textbooks to choose from, the textbook selection process poses problems on language courses in general and English courses (Hycroft, 1998: as cited in Zangani, 2009). According to him, the critical issue in any language course is textbook selection. The magnitude of the problem becomes more crucial when there are numerous textbooks in the same area written by authors from different fields of study. This can be clearly perceived in Iranian ESP textbooks frequently written by either field specialists or TEFL experts. To this end, textbook evaluation seems to be an inevitable part of any syllabus and it also has a significant influence on the ability of students to meet their language learning objectives and affects both the process of learning and the outcomes (Nunan, 1984). Understanding the importance of textbook evaluation in accomplishing the course goals and objectives, the present study tried to evaluate and study the differences that a field specialist ESP textbook writer and a TEFL expert ESP textbook writer may have in the quality of the textbooks. It seems that, the clarification of this issue may decrease the burden of the process of textbook selection in ESP courses and give guidelines for teachers to cope with textbook selection.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Textbook as a teaching material usually receives special attention in English courses in comparison with other materials. This can be verified according to different EFL researchers. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) suggest that a textbook is an almost universal element of English language teaching. Holliday (1994) agrees with this observation and suggests that textbooks not only represent the visible heart of any ELT program but also offer considerable advantages for both the student and the teacher. Textbook even receives more importance in ESP courses where English is taught as foreign language because the learners have little access to target discourse community to extract new information about the type of discourse used frequently in their specialized field (Ellis, 1994). As a result there is a need for good textbooks which will prepare the students for situations they are intended for and selection becomes inevitable. Nunan (1984) believes that in order to select a good textbook, it is inevitable to evaluate the existing textbooks. He further claims that, evaluation of a textbook often signals significant administrative and educational decision in which there is considerable professional, financial, and political investment. However, textbook evaluation, as Moran (1991: as cited in Zangani, 2009) often gravitates to is the lack of generalizable criteria as the basis of the evaluating process. In order to alleviate this problem some scholars in the field have suggested ways of helping teachers to be more sophisticated in their evaluative approach, by presenting evaluation 'checklists' which equip administrators and classroom teachers with the tool necessary for making an informed evaluation of reading textbooks, and balance the need for a thorough evaluation with the need for efficiency (Hutchinson and Torres (1994). These checklists should not only be a good fit for teachers, students, and the curriculum, all of which are important as educators seek to use materials and methods appropriate to their particular context. They should also enable teachers to evaluate four broad characteristics of textbooks including: physical characteristics, content, method, and activities of the intended textbook (Swales, 1980; Sheldon, 1988). Most of these standardized evaluation checklists contain similar components that can be used as helpful starting points for ELT practitioners in a wide variety of situations although some scholars object the generalizablility of these checklists. The best way to compensate for the context specific problem is the eclectic approach by which different teachers select different criteria on the basis of the context the textbook will be used. Because of the saliency of the present study, the checklist used includes different components browsed from different checklists to fit the nature of ESP textbooks.

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As stated above, textbooks play a crucial role in language teaching and learning and it is generally agreed that selecting textbooks is the most controversial and challenging issue for teachers and administrators which shows the importance of evaluation. However, there is little research focused on the differences among textbooks which is written in the same area by different authors from different fields such as ESP textbooks. Therefore, the current study aims at contrasting two ESP textbooks for the students of accounting written by different authors from different fields. The findings of this study can largely assist the researchers, material designers, and teachers to suitably select textbooks.

4. METHOD

4.1. Materials

Two textbooks which were contrasted are:

A) Bonyadi, A.R. *English for the Students of Accounting*. Urmia: Islamic Azad University publication. 2007.

B) Aghvami, D. *English for the Students of Accounting*. Tehran: the center for studying and compiling. University books in humanities (SAMT). 2005.

4.2. Instruments

From the discourse point of view, there are some specific features and characteristics in scientific English that make it different from other kinds. In order to provide this, we browsed approximately seven checklists proposed by different authors and selected eleven features which were common to most of these checklists to do the evaluation. The following ten EFL/ESL/ESP textbook evaluation schemes were consulted to evaluate the two ESP textbooks under study.

- Basturkman, H. *Ideas and options in English for specific purposes*. Newjersy: Lawrence Erlbaum. 2002.
- Rivers, W. *Teaching Foreign-Language Skills* (pp. 475-483). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1981.
- Chastain, K. *The Development of Modern Language Skills: Theory to practice* (pp. 376-384). Philadelphia. The Center for Curriculum Development, Inc. 1971.
- Sheldon, L. Evaluating ELT Textbooks and Materials. *ELT Journal*, 42 (4), 237-246. 1988.
- Miekley, J. ESL textbook evaluation checklist. *The Reading Matrix*, 5(*2*). 2005.
- Zangani, E. *The ESP Textbook Problem: The Evaluation of ESP Textbooks in Humanities*. The Undergraduate Program of Iranian Universities. The Asian ESP Journal, 5(2). 2009.

After a close examination of the checklists, these criteria were found to be most common to all the schemes proposed by the above mentioned materials:

1. Is the textbook clear, attractive, and easy to read?
2. Are appropriate visual materials available in the textbook?
3. Are objectives explicitly laid out in the introduction, and implemented in the material?
4. Is the content clearly organized and graded?
5. Are interesting topics and tasks used in the textbook?
6. Is top-down or bottom-up reading strategy used in reading sections?
7. Are the instructions clear?
8. Is there good vocabulary explanation and practice?
9. Is there periodic review and test sections?
10. Are approaches educationally and socially acceptable to target community?
11. Is there adequate fluency practice in all four skills?

4.3. Procedure

The four EFL textbooks ere scrutinized against each one of the features in the checklist one by one. The results of the scrutiny of the two textbooks on every feature are combined under common headings to save space and time. In order to save space and redundancy during the study, the two books were indicated by two signs, i.e. (A) Was assigned to (Bonyadi, A.R. (2007). English for the Students of Accounting) and (B) as assigned to (Aghvami, D. (2005). English for the Students of Accounting).

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1. Is the textbook clear, attractive, and easy to read?

The physical characteristics of textbooks have significant role in motivating the readers (Ellis, 2003). The cover of textbook (A) is completely different from that of textbook (B). There is a picture of a calculator on the cover of the textbook (A) which can motivate the learners to exploit the content of the textbook. In addition, the papers of this textbook are of high-quality. In contrast, there are no pictures on the cover of the textbook (B) and it can be said that, all of the textbooks in the series of SAMT textbooks have the same format. And the paper is of low-quality. Although both books are acceptable with regard to orthography, none of the texts has pictures to support the text or help learners exploit the content of the texts.

5.2. Are appropriate visual materials available in textbook?

Visual materials can be defined as the facilities that can be employed by teachers and learners to enhance language learning in classrooms. They may range from simple hand-made realia, charts and pictures, to electronic and digital materials. Unfortunately neither of these textbooks applied visual materials to reinforce the theme of the text as well as vocabularies and grammatical points. It seems to be very useful to use pictures and visual materials prior to reading a text to activate learners' interests. On the side of the teachers, visual materials can help them present the content easily. Worth mentioning is that using different graphs and tables can provide learners with semantic-mapping which is one of the most efficient reading strategies (Ellis, 2003).

5.3. Are objectives explicitly laid out in an introduction, and implemented in the material?

Having an introduction gives a general idea and makes clear the philosophies behind writing textbooks (Abdi, 2009). Objectives are statements describing what learners will be able to do as a result of instruction which includes activities (what learners will do), conditions (under what circumstances), and standards (how well they will perform) (Nunan, 1984). On the basis of this definition the evaluation of the two books becomes apparent.

The first ESP textbook (*English for the students of Accounting*, written by Ali. R. Bonyadi, TEFL PhD, 2007) begins with an introduction which tries to clarify goals and the intended teaching objectives. First of all, the writer introduced the broad, general purposes behind the book and then he mentioned three parts of formal objectives on the basis of which the readers or the users of this textbook can set up a framework for their use. The step by step presentation of goals and objectives in introduction phase of this

book provides the readers and textbook users to set-up a framework for their effective use. Its main objectives are introduced as follow:

- to develop reading skills and provide practice in comprehension written accounting discourse;
- to present technical and sub-technical collocation phrases used in accounting discourse;
- to provide activities for practice and improvement of critical thinking.

To fulfill the ultimate goal of the book which is to provide language practice based on subject-specific reading, the writer included different accounting-oriented texts. In addition to the goal, the realization of objectives has done through the inclusion a variety of noun phrases and verb collocations, although the final goal which is to provide activities for the improvement of critical thinking has not been met in exercises. This inconsistency between objectives and realization should be improved in next versions of this book. Except for the inconsistencies mentioned above, there is an acceptable degree of concordance between the objectives set in the introduction of the books for each section of the lessons in the series and their implementation in the material. On the other hand, the second ESP textbook (*English for the students of Accounting*, written by Davoud Aghvami, staff of SAMT, 2005) has no introduction section which is the sign of its deficiency and may have adverse effects on readers and users.

5.4. Is the content clearly organized and graded?

Some of the reading comprehension texts tend to be more difficult for the learners to understand than others due to their structural complexity. In working with learners from different proficiency levels, specially where English is taught as a foreign language, there is the potentiality of misunderstanding the reading text not because of new vocabularies used in the text, but simply because the sentences are too complex for them to comprehend. The logical sequence of texts makes it possible for readers to relate the previously learned materials to the new one and consequently make the comprehension easier. The preferable sequence for arranging the content is language complexity. In order to analyze the organization of the two compared ESP textbooks in the present study, Fog's complexity formula was rendered (number of words ÷ number of sentences + (number of compound sentences ÷ number of sentences) × 40). The results of text analysis showed that, all things being equal, the complexity of the reading texts of textbook (A) is more than the complexity of the texts used in textbook (B). It is with mentioning that, for analyzing the texts of the two textbooks we put aside the number of new words because neither of them provided prior opportunity to cover new words before reading the text and we considered it as equal condition for both of them.

5.5. Are interesting topics and tasks used in the textbook?

The topics of readings in both cases are closely related to the learners' specialist field (accounting). It is difficult to judge on behalf of the learners whether they are interesting or not for them, and it needs research. Nevertheless, the majority of the topics seem to be attractive to the learners because they are compatible and comparable to their interesting academic field. In addition, as the texts and topics are scientific texts and are in line with ESP learners need (Basturkman, 2002), they meet the learners' interests and they may be eager to pursue the topics. However, it seems that it would be better if the topics were

updated to become more congruent with the taste of the new generation which might be a bit different from that of the authors who extracted from sources published many years ago. Nowadays, learners' needs are different from what they used to be and; hence it looks better to include texts more related to new technologies used in their specialist field. For instance, it is possible to take and adapt some texts, words and jargon which are currently used in accounting all over the words such as the types of letters, accounting documents and the likes. It is also possible to include adapted and simplified versions of quotations and sayings of scholars renowned in their field to be familiarized with the assumptions and theoretical background of their studies. With regard to tasks, there is no real-world task in neither of these textbooks. It is better to provide learners with real-world tasks so that they get encountered with the discourse used in accounting. This can be also provided by the teacher himself.

5.6. Is top-down or bottom-up reading strategies used in reading sections?

Led by Chastain's (1971) work, the distinction between the bottom-up and top-down processing became a cornerstone of the reading methodology for years to come. In bottom up processing, readers must first recognize the multiplicity of linguistic signals and use their linguistic data-processing mechanisms to impose some sort of order on these signals. In top-down processing the reader draws on his/her own intelligence and experience to understand the text. The close study of these two compared textbooks indicates that they provide the readers with little linguistic knowledge prior to reading the text, except for the textbook (A) which has a few noun phrases and verb collocations in a small table before each text which is not enough. On the other hand, there is a variety of grammar and vocabulary exercises at the end of each reading text which shows the importance of presenting linguistic knowledge on the side of authors. It seems that the lack of vocabulary and grammar presentation before texts is not due to the usage of top-down strategy; rather the authors shirk and expect the teachers to present the linguistic knowledge. Practical experience in this area proves this fact. So we can say that both textbooks follow bottom-up strategy in reading section.

5.7. Are instructions clear?

Most of the instructions in both textbooks compared are clear and easy to understand for ESP learners. Even if the learners might not be familiar with the structures and the lexis used in the instructions, the models given for each group of exercises provide contextual clues for the learners as to what they are expected to do. However, some of the instructions in the textbook (A) may be beyond the proficiency of ESP learners in terms of linguistic complexity. For instance, the instruction of an exercise in the textbook (A) is "based on the account balance as Mr. Wilson presented in lesson three, prepare an income statement using the following chart". In addition, in the same book in L8 we encounter the same problem of complexity in the instruction that follows: *"Write six sentences in the passive form. Three about what happened in the past and three about what will happen in the future"*. This problem exists in B2, too. Possible solutions might be to use simplified language or use the learners' native language instead of the target language in the instructions.

5.8. Are there good vocabulary explanations and practice?

The priority of the textbook (A) to the second one is the inclusion of some prefabricated and verb collocations, which the authors might have assumed to be more significant in carrying the semantic load of the related sentence at the very beginning of each lesson (e.g. cash position, trends of earning, financial transaction, …). None of these phrases or collocations is provided with meanings which may have two functions, firstly they challenge the learners, and secondly, they provide the learners with a kind of pre-reading activity in which the teachers with the help of students initially focus on those presented collocations trying to contextualize them in simple sentences before going to the main text. In addition, students may take notes of any unknown vocabulary item in the spaces provided under further notes on vocabulary following the table. On the other hand, in the textbook (B) there is not any new word presentation. Another issue in presenting new vocabulary is whether the new words are presented at an appropriate rate so that the text is understandable and so that students are able to retain them. The length of texts in progress and the number of new words in the proceeding texts are good evidence to answer this issue. On the basis of the lexical analysis of each text in both textbooks, it can be said that the number of new words has been controlled in the first ESP textbook because Bonyadi tried to control the language by extracting the text. In contrast, the second ESP textbook ignored the appropriateness of input and all the texts have the same length and complexity. With regard to exercises, although the variety of vocabulary exercises in the second ESP textbook is larger than that in the first one, all of them in both cases are mechanical and do not reinforce the new vocabularies being taught. In other words, all of them are browsed from the text itself without any changes or modifications so they may not result in vocabulary expansion. In addition, none of them is challenging because all of the answers can be found in reference to the text without any effort.

5.9. Is there periodic review and test sections?

There is not any systematic review and test section in the two compared textbooks. There is just a translation section at the end of each lesson including the list of phrases extracted from the main text. Although the translation section is not methodologically preferable, they are compatible and comparable with the format and the testing method which will be used in ESP learners' final examination because in most cases the ESP learners are asked to translate the text. Experience has shown that in some ESP courses the grammatical points are ignored in the expense of translation.

5.10. Are approaches educationally and socially acceptable for the target community?

A complete syllabus specification will include all five aspects: structure, function, situation, topic, skills (Nunan, 1984). The difference between syllabuses will lie in the priority given to each of these aspects. From the point of the design of the textbooks, when we compare them, we find that in both of them the reading skill seems to be of the first priority in the design of the books, but there are too few exercises which support reading strategies. In other words, the authors of the both books tried to put emphasis on grammar and vocabulary rather than on reading strategies. Even the reading passages are selected or probably manipulated so that they reinforce a particular grammatical point included in the grammar section of the books. The differential point of these two books is that, in the

textbook (A) the order of linguistic content is based on the noun phrases and verb collocations embedded in the text regardless of their complexity, while the linguistic content of materials in the textbook (B) is ordered according to the structural complexity, starting from less complex structures to more demanding ones. As stated before, the topics of all texts in both books are ordered in such a way that the previous topic supports the following one. As the theoretical framework of these two books is closer to structural syllabus, the lack of functional notional realization is completely apparent.

5.11. Is there adequate fluency practice in all four skills?

If we define the writing skill as the ability to communicate one's thoughts and ideas to a particular person or group of addressees through the orthographic form of a language, it is possible to claim that it is completely neglected in the textbook (B), but the textbook (A) includes written exercises. For instance, one of the exercises which is embedded in all lessons of the textbook (A), is to complete a chart in which the learners are supposed to write correct clauses. The authors could have included writing activities in different formats varying from the controlled to free writing according to the proficiency levels of the learner groups.

6. CONCLUSION

The textbook is an almost universal element of English language teaching and can play an important role in the success of language programs (Hutchinson and Torres, 1994). In fact, they are the realization of the processes of means/ends specification in the curriculum planning (ibid). Sheldon (1988) agrees with this observation and suggests that textbooks not only represent the visible heart of any ELT program but also offer considerable advantages for both the student and the teacher. Based on the aforementioned observations and ideas, the present study tried to evaluate and study the differences a field specialist ESP textbook writer and a TEFL expert ESP textbook writer may have in the quality of the textbooks. To this end, the intended textbooks were evaluated under the framework of eleven criteria which were chosen from six sources. The step by step scrutiny through the materials indicated that the advantages of the ESP textbook written by the TEFL expert were more numerous than the advantages of that written by the field specialist (they were clearly discussed in the previous section). According to these findings, the researchers concluded that it would be fruitful to use ESP textbooks written by TEFL experts because they would encompass those language features which meet ESP learners' need. It is our hope that the findings of this study decrease the burden of the process of textbook selection in ESP courses and give guidelines for teachers to cope with textbook selection. Because the checklist used in the present study included different components browsed from different checklists to fit the nature of ESP textbooks, the present study can be regarded as a salient one. So, it is recommended that, other researchers in the field of ESP/EGP/ESL/EFL can do similar studies in order to elaborate the findings.

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