

The Evolution of the English Language Textbooks in Postcolonial Algeria :

Some cultural and educational issues

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Abstract

The English language textbooks that have been used in Algerian schools since 1960's have undergone a number of revolutionary changes and some reforms characterized by the growth of nationalism, cultural identity and exchange, communication needs, and purposeful education. The analysis of the English language textbooks, used at both middle and secondary school levels, will shed light on cultural, educational aspects and language proficiency development of the Algerian learners. The post independence period is characterized by the general use of British course books till the late 1970's. However, the 1980's saw the emergence of Algerian textbooks which introduced some national cultural elements and a few pedagogical reforms; the Notional/Functional and communicative trends in language teaching had more impact on textbook design by adapting a functional and communicative purpose and a culturally biased content. The 1990's tried to remedy to the structural/grammatical shortcomings whereas The 21st century and globalisation brought radical reforms to the course content in general and the textbook in particular: competency based pedagogy and file/sequence organisation, together with a variety of subjects and learning strategies, required much more efforts from the educational partners.

الكتب المدرسية في
الإنجليزية التي تم
استخدامها في المدارس
الجزائرية منذ عام 1962
خضعت لعدد من التغييرات
الثورية وبعض
التي تتميز نمو الهوية
والقومية والتبادل
الثقافي، واحتياجات
الاتصالات والتعليم
الهادف. تعتمد هذه
تحليل الكتب
المدرسية في اللغة
الإنجليزية
في كل من المستويات
المتوسطة والثانوية،
تسليط الضوء على
الجوانب الثقافية
والتعليمية وتطوير
الكفاءة اللغوية للمتعلم
. تتميز فترة ما

الكتب الدراسية
البريطانية حتى أواخر
1970. ومع ذلك، شهد عام
1980 ظهور الكتب

العناصر الثقافية
الوطنية والإصلاحات
التربوية بحيث تميزت
الاتجاهات الوظيفية
والتواصلية في تدريس

يعبر عن
التسعينيات
علاج أوجه
القصور الهيكلية /
النحوية في حين
21 جذرية لمحتوى
تعليم
المدرسية على وجه الخصوص
يس :

واستراتيجيات التعلم ،
ي لزم بذل جهود
أكبر بكثير من
التعليمية .

Introduction:

Multiculturalism stands for a complex concept which attempts to include a number of issues comprehensively. If culture reflects the specific qualities of a community, multiple cultures reflect the combination of heterogeneous qualities of cultures within the same community. The colonial and postcolonial contexts are the most representative situations where complex multicultural qualities are conflicting, complementing, and/or correlating with each other. These aspects are prominent in chronological and developmental contexts of colonial / postcolonial, independence and development periods of Algerian modern history; they are, to a great extent, characteristic features of educational programmes and language teaching materials and textbooks. The case of Teaching English as a Foreign Language stands a particular one -because English was not the language of the colonial authority; however, it has undergone a systematic multicultural inclusion into the Algerian educational context. The present paper and study is the result of collaborative action research undertaken under the subject of materials design and analysis at the ENS of Constantine with teacher trainees involved in the analysis and evaluation of teaching materials.

1. Colonial culture and destruction of native culture

In almost every colonial context, the native culture was neglected and the colonial culture was imposed on the native people -from the colonial point of view- as a mark of domination, obedience, civilization, and modernism

which aimed at exploiting both human and natural resources. The existing cultural institutions and practices were abolished, destroyed, or deviated from their natural (educational and cultural) aims in order to serve the dominating power of the colonial authorities. During the colonial period, in Algeria, Quran schools, religious and educational institutions, together with their leaders, were banned if they taught, or claimed for, resistance to -and independence from- the colonial power. However, a few pro-colonial *Zaouia* and *Wali* were promoted and encouraged to practice 'maraboutism'. Consequently, a wave of illiteracy and ignorance swept over the Algerian community for more than a century.

2. Culture of renaissance and back to the roots

The minority of Algerian citizens who had access to culture and education had two divergent routes and sources of information which, later on, converged towards a rejection of colonial culture and domination. Those who could attend Quran schools travelled to Tunisia or Egypt while those who had the chance of attending French schools could find jobs in colonial institutions and/or go on for further studies in French institutes and universities. Despite their differences, the former was inspired by Middle Eastern, religious and political trends while the latter was inspired by western modernism, human rights, and freedom for auto-determination. They grew as distinct educational trends but with similar political aims. Multiculturalism -though not obligatorily multilingualism- resisted to colonial domination: thus the combination of Algerian, French, and Middle Eastern Arab cultures were prominent within the colonial context itself.

3. Post-colonial culture and status quo in education

In post-independence education, Algeria preserved a postcolonial-cultural heritage. The French school system was kept as an organisational structure and educational content for a number of years. A few changes were noticed; the teaching of Arabic and other nationalist /identity related issues were introduced. The teaching of English as a foreign language did not have any importance because the country had not yet changed its school system to introduce foreign languages. As French remained the language of administration and education for more than a decade, a claim for 'arabisation' was made within the educational, religious and political nomenclature.

The teaching of English as a Foreign Language during the post independence period is characterized by the general use of British course books till the late 70's. These commercial textbooks were designed for

general learners without any focus on a particular home culture or educational programmes. Their main target is a particular proficiency level in English as a foreign language but not a particular culture or country. Therefore, their cultural input was overloaded with foreign language culture and a complete neglect of the mother tongue/first language culture (Altan 1995). The cultural input consisted mainly of artificial texts that presented the language aspects and grammatical features of English. This cultural input was characterized by imaginary characters, involved in artificial situations, and illustrated basically with stick-drawing figures (Broughton, E.G 1965 *Success With English*. Coursebooks 1 and 2, Penguin Books). Proper names, places, activities, roles and environmental setting were stereotypes of the English speaking culture. Rote learning, pattern drills and habit formation were used as an educational culture at Algerian Middle School Level; cultural content and/or cultural value was never considered.

At Secondary School Level, the educational and cultural input was neither much worse, nor much better. The *New Concept English* Series of L.G. Alexander (1967) consisted of four course books and only two of them were used: *Practice and Progress* and *Developing Skills*. As their content pages and introductions indicated, both textbooks focused on proficiency development in language patterns, sentence structure and paragraph writing. There was no diversity in cultural potential or cultural tolerance and no mention of cultural (topic/theme) issues to be discussed. All texts in *Practice and progress* introduced language items, again, in non-authentic reading extracts. Even though the introduction of the books mentioned the existence of tapes, for the presentation of the texts in their oral form, the Algerian teaching environment did not provide –or rather did have the media equipment- for the aural-oral activities to take place. Hence, the cultural features of spoken English were ignored. Not only did the practice of English language teaching deprive the learner of exposure to multicultural content –as it was limited to English speaking culture- but it also imputed the materials from the cultural features of speech, let alone to say, that no activities of cultural processing –as was the case at middle school- were provided.

| Middle School | Secondary School |
|--|---|
| <p><i>Success With English E.G Broughton 1965</i> -Coursebook 1: <i>Beginners</i> -Coursebook 2: <i>Post-beginners</i></p> | <p><i>New Concept English, L.G Alexander 1967</i> -First Things First: beginners /post beginners -Practice and Progress: pre-intermediate-96 lessons -Developing Skills: intermediate-60 lessons</p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| | <p>-Fluency in English: advanced-48 lessons - Nine of the lessons were selected from <i>The Listener</i>. -Reading extracts from authentic texts (<i>The Listener Magazine</i> 1929-1991 established by Lord Reith (BBC) and edited by Lambert,R.S)</p> |
|--|---|

4. Rebirth of the nation and growth of national culture

The conflicting and complementary cultures of Arabic and French represented a multicultural dilemma for the Algerian Educational system and hence the reforms opted for a balance between the national language dominance and foreign language complementarities. The rebirth of national culture in nationalist educational programmes was a search for identity and multiculturalism through foreign languages.

The 1980's saw the emergence of the first Algerian textbooks which introduced some national cultural elements and a few pedagogical reforms. The Notional/Functional and communicative trends in language teaching had an important impact on textbook design by adapting a functional and communicative purpose and a culturally biased content (Hutchinson and Torres, 1994). The effects of the notional/functional approach and the "common core syllabus" on the newly designed Algerian textbooks are obvious in the titles, content, and methodology. *Madjid in England* and *Andy in Algeria* are both representative titles of the overseas student's and the foreign person's functional common learning needs. The content of both textbooks focused on describing objects, people and places, mail and pen friendship, invitations and exchanging visits. The methodology proceeded through interpersonal interaction, repeating, copying and writing activities. The cultural potential is not focusing on any particular cultural value; it rather insisted on interpersonal communication exchange as a feature of successful social behaviour with foreigners. The purpose, then, was not to create a multicultural diversity, but to make of the Algerian learner a positive contributor in the international community.

Within the same scope, and still at middle school level, two other textbooks appeared -*Spring 1* and *Spring 2*; both followed the same notional/functional design and methodology with additional language

functions of requesting, inquiring, instructing, describing, defining, comparing and contrasting, etc... Communication practice is to be considered here as a major cultural contribution; the language functions do not only pretend to teach English but also to establish a communicative value of information exchange among members of the same community (Byram, 1989 and 1992). Hence, information gap, reasoning gap, and information transfer activities gave the English language classroom its dynamic features.

Furthermore, the cultural input of the target language was associated to national cultural features. Examples of this multicultural mixture are very frequent: descriptions and maps of towns and cities, geographical and weather maps, songs, cooking recipes, clothing, and entertainment from both British and Algerian cultural knowledge. Language transfer from the target language to the mother tongue, and vice-versa, was also given importance. For example, 'a carpenter' was named 'Mr Nedjar', and a 'butcher' was named 'Mr Djezzar' or 'Mr Lehham'.

Within the same notional/functional and communicative trends, the secondary school level was also invested with newly designed textbooks in the early 1980's. The three grades- according to their streams (literature, science and maths, and technology) had, each, an Algerian course of English. They were namely *New Lines, Midlines, The New Midlines, New Skills; Think it Over*, and *Comet*. Bias of input and activity type was prominent in all these textbooks because of two major pre-occupations: the first one was the combination of both English speaking culture with the Algerian culture, and the second was the inclusion of educational programme goals and content in the English course for some long term objectives to be achieved.

The search for diversity, identity and local culture inside the English textbook continued, and increased, in the secondary school level textbooks. As the initiator of these secondary school textbooks, Kisserli - head of project of *New Lines*' (1981:5), indicates in the introduction:

'(...)Although our aim is to teach you to speak the language, (...) it would be unrealistic and artificial to avoid introducing selective and appropriate socio-cultural facts about the country and the people who speak this language as a mother tongue. A language is not simply a chain of words and sounds. It cannot be separated from its cultural aspect. In the same way, we have made frequent reference to the Algerian context, past and present, and the central character, Rachid, represents the link between our linguistic needs and the cultural framework of the English language.'

The above mentioned ideas and quote characterized all secondary school textbooks and language teaching materials which implemented the English course. Functional purposes, topic/type input, and adapted/authentic texts characterized the multicultural dimension of these textbooks. For example, *New Lines'* content consists of 18 units (3 units devoted to revisions) focusing on the following communicative functions and purposes: Describing (people, regular activities, and places), Instructing (finding the way), Narrating (trips and journeys, stories and past events), Planning (future activities), Describing (processes), and Expressing ability (possibility, probability and permission, obligation and certainty).

All the units are supported with realistic characters, events and situations which illustrate aspects of cultural life in both communities of native and target languages. Rachid and Nadia, Peter and Margaret, Ziana Mansouria and Manchester, Across the Atlantic and a Tour around Africa, The battle of Djebel Bouhanche and 'how Bristol blew up' are all multicultural and educational contexts created by the textbook designers to make foreign language learning a pleasant experience. The implementation relied on authentic and adapted materials of different kinds (texts, tables and maps, pictures and drawings, photos, newspaper articles and letters, and reading extracts) which exposed the learners to the foreign language culture and exploited the learners' background knowledge through the local culture.

The other textbooks, designed for other secondary school grades and streams (as mentioned above), followed the same procedure of design and diversity of cultural content. Furthermore, the educational programme course had its fair share of the topic/theme orientation. As the learners improved their literary and scientific knowledge –as part of international culture which is to be considered as a an aspect of multiculturalism- issues related to famous historical places and events, authors, philosophers and scientists, discoveries and inventions, humanist problems and challenges are widely covered. The multiple task pedagogy increased as the communicative approach flourished by the end of the 1980's, and consequently a diversity of activities, somehow, brought some accuracy to the language learning process.

5. Remedial education or cultural remedy

The major criticism of the communicative (notional/functional) trends was the lack of correctness which was noticed in learners' performance. Despite the appropriate communicative achievements, the learners persisted in producing incorrect, mispronounced or ill-constructed utterances. The need

for correctness and accuracy was so obvious that most syllabus designers had to focus on grammar tasks as essential elements in communicative performance (Skehan, 1996).

The Algerian syllabus designers were also sensitive to the issue and this was reflected in the 1990's Algerian textbooks –as a second generation– which tried to remedy to the structural/grammatical shortage by adopting the textbook content to language needs and educational requirement of passing written exams. A series of English textbooks (from N°1 to N°9) entitled '*My Book of English*' and '*My New Book of English*' were published - under the leadership of Mr. Bereksi as the head of project.

The first series (three books) were devoted to teaching English at primary school, considering English as a first foreign language –competing with French, and hence increasing the multilingual and multicultural conflicts and choices, both parents and learners had to undergo and make. The second and third series (each consisted of three books) were devoted to middle and secondary school learners respectively. The attempt to remedy to educational requirements did not necessarily lead to an improvement in cultural background and communicative outcome. The content and methodology of the teaching/learning units exaggerated their focus on linguistic items and neglected the cultural communicative potential of the input. An extreme value judgement to these textbooks is their dangling design and inappropriate activity type and grading. For example, in '*My New Book of English*', the designer admits that the choice of input materials is not enough and teachers are requested to supplement the course with their own materials:

'(...) teachers and students alike were faced with the delicate and time-consuming job of finding material that could fit the new syllabuses. The present book hopes to bring an answer to that unending quest for texts and activities. It should remain clear however that teachers are urged to supplement the material provided in this book with material of their own, be it texts, or maps, or postcards, or poems, or cartoons, or charts, or tapes, or whatever authentic material they may lay their hands on that could inspire them and their students.' (Bereksi.1998: 5)

One wonders if a whole team of textbook designers and their head of project could not provide all types of materials within the textbook (or additional audio and video media), how can they require from the English language teacher to provide them? The shortage of materials is not a reason to overload the teacher with tasks that are not his. As a consequence of such hazardous implementation, the folk song '*My darling Clementine*' turned

into an Algerian melody which made fun of Algerian teachers of English. The freedom to adapt (select, design and develop) language teaching materials requires qualifications and experience. The Algerian teacher, performing his job in remote and deprived areas is not in a position to fulfil all these requirements.

The second drawback of this second-generation series of textbooks is its inconsistency in the design of activities. The designer and head of project states:

'The number of activities varies from one unit to another. Sometimes two or more activities can have the same final objective. They are here for you to choose the most apt to meet your pupils' needs and learning strategies, or to use for consolidation purposes, or for remedial work, or for homework (although I do not recommend it) or just to leave it aside. There is no need for you to go slavishly through each activity of the textbook. Your pupils will find it boring and de-motivating.' (Bereksi. *ibid*)

If all the above stated recommendations are trustworthy, one would ask 'why at all did the designers implement the activities if they thought that those activities might be redundant, unnecessary, useless for homework, boring and de-motivating?' When the two quotes are put together, the materials included in these textbooks reveal complete absence of cultural bias because the activities themselves do not reflect any kind of cultural information processing or language proficiency development. The only concluding and negative remark is that those materials were not designed for teaching and learning purposes; in fact, they represented a collection of tests. The unsuitability of activities to the cultural (information) input is due to the fact that those tests contain sampling activities of previous language knowledge, and consequently they are unfit to the input (Hamada 2007). There is only one successful achievement that can be attributed to this second-generation textbook series: making learners get better marks, passing exams, and increasing the rate of success in the educational system.

The failure of remedial education through cultural remedy was due to the lack of determination in selecting appropriate cultural input and learning procedure, in addition to complete reliance on teachers' probable potential to implement the course. The lack of resources, experience, and freedom of initiative, in addition to the shortage of media at schools, worsened the educational and cultural context. The drastic reforms which have been undertaken since the end of the twentieth century represent a rebellion against this established state of affairs.

6. Globalisation and multicultural education

The 21st century and globalisation brought radical reforms to the course content in general and the textbook in particular: competency based pedagogy and file/sequence organisation, together with a variety of subjects and learning strategies, required much more efforts from the educational partners: teachers, learners, parents, and socio-educational authorities (Riche 2005). The designers recapitulated all the pedagogical trends of the structural bottom-up learning of phonology and language forms, performance objectives for the practice and integration of the four skills, communicative functions for discourse processing and production, and project work as a social-educational achievement of the learners through the learning process which stands for the development of a positive social behaviour. The claim of “competency based pedagogy” stands on the constructivist principle that language is learnt as a Second not a Foreign language for the sake of developing knowledge (savoir) and performing the knowledge (savoir faire) which lead to a change in behaviour (savoir être).

The socio-cultural dimension in teaching a Second language favours the integration of the individual in social life; the Algerian learner of English is supposed to integrate the global village of internationalization through exposure to modern communication means, topics, and materials. The cultural input of the secondary school textbooks, for example, was biased to serve this purpose. In *At the Crossroads* (for first year secondary school), for example, the cultural themes introduced the learners to internet communication means and sites (all what the computer technology can provide for communication purposes), narrating and reporting tales and stories (famous authors and literary works, sports achievements, experiments and research findings, etc...), science and ecology. In *Getting Through* (for second year secondary school) the themes exposed the learners to life styles, conflicts’ resolutions and peace keeping, climate change and nature protection, modern technology, scientific experiments, and science fiction. In *New Prospects* (for third year secondary school), the learners are exposed to old civilizations, business and ethical issues, educational systems, astronomy and the solar system.

This international culture does not focus on any kind of multiculturalism; it rather involves the individual learners in the issues and problems of all humanity. Here, the learner is supposed to develop a state of awareness and knowledge of modern challenges to be accepted as a member of that wide community of people who use English as an International language. However, the social-educational perspective does not coincide with the real life performance in that the project-work (Becket and Slater

2005) which is supposed to be the sign of competency development turns out to be a victim of the sociolinguistic context and modern means of communication. The sociolinguistic context reveals that English is almost never used outside the school system and the modern means of communication offer information for free on various websites; the cybercafés' culture invaded the socio-educational culture and the Algerian learner becomes a good customer of downloaded materials to get good marks at school. In the long run, this attitude towards leaning- as a socio-educational behaviour- will certainly bring more changes in terms of individual behaviour towards other economic, social, and political issues.

Conclusion

Some positive aspects of the Algerian postcolonial textbooks are to be reinforced and encouraged by the Algerian teachers while some negative, over-estimated aspects must be disregarded. The claim for appropriate and accurate language use, together with the exposure to diversified foreign and national cultural issues can never be rejected. However, overloaded course, inappropriate correlation between ambitions and achievements will certainly lead to conflicting situations and hence destroy the positive aspects of multiculturalism.

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