

RESEARCHING MOROCCAN EFL TEXTBOOKS: ASPECTS AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

School textbook evaluation seems to take three interrelated paths: process, application or product. Seen from an integrative comparative angle, the current article has twin goals. First, it aims at reviewing the literature underpinning current EFL textbook evaluation in Morocco, locating areas of theoretical and methodological convergence, and highlighting virgin 'avenues' that have not yet been traveled by. Second, it wishes to lay the foundations for a firmly grounded understanding of the theoretical and methodological potentials that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) may hold for researchers interested in arriving at a fresh outlook on textbook evaluation, regardless of whether the analysis is linguistic (narrative), visual (pictorial) or both (multimodal). Findings of the present article reveals that process-oriented research has exhibited relatively strong methodological features while the product-oriented research is still facing both methodological and theoretical challenges that can be overcome by being open to new 'critical' approaches to the study of school textbooks.

KEYWORDS: *EFL Textbooks, Process, Product, Gender, CDA*

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last three decades, the evaluation of school textbooks has witnessed significant growth (Apple, 1990; Rogers et al. 2005; Stray, 1993, Svendsen, 2015; among others). Very often, the investigation seems to be articulated from three perspectives: process, application or product. According to Svendsen, (2015), "process-oriented research focuses on the production and distribution of teaching resources, and application-oriented research focuses on how teaching resources are used in teaching... product-oriented research focuses more specifically on content" (p.33). The current article evaluates research into EFL textbook in light of Svendsen' (2015) tripartite taxonomy.

The overall structure of this article takes the form of five parts, including this introduction. The first part is concerned with the status of English and EFL textbooks in Morocco. The second part is devoted to current research which evaluates EFL textbooks in terms of 'process'. Here, areas of convergence and divergence will be highlighted and problematic areas, if any, are addressed. 'Content-oriented' research is the focal concern of the third part where two major studies are reviewed and potential areas of divergence are addressed. The last part is devoted to the theoretical and methodological potentials of applying CDA to advance our understanding of school textbook content.

ENGLISH AND EFL TEXTBOOKS IN MOROCCO

According to Kachru (1985), the historical spread of English worldwide can be charted into three broad circles. Inner Circle countries, Outer Circle countries, and Expanding Circle countries (Kachru, 1985). The first circle represents the traditional homeland of English. The Outer circle countries form the earlier phase in the spread of English in non-native settings. Morocco is located within the third circle, which Kachru (1985) calls ‘the Expanding Circle’. This circle includes countries where English is taught as a foreign language with no colonial history. Currently, this circle is expanding rapidly and is used for international communication, such as in business, diplomacy, and tourism” (McKenzie, 2008, p. 269).

EFL textbooks are the main instructional and learning tools that provide learners, as well as teachers, with a variety of learning resources, effective language models and sets of visually appealing materials (Richards, 2011, p. 254-255). In Morocco, EFL textbooks are officially produced and are therefore subject to the approval of the Ministry of National Education, which supervises all the processes related to production, dissemination, and use of these textbooks. The National Charter for Education and Training (NCET) adopted in 1999 introduced a new textbook philosophy which recommends decentralized education delivery and increased responsiveness to local needs and realities (The National Charter for Education and Training, 1999, Lever 15] (NCET)

One of the merits the NCET is the adoption of a new policy which is built on school textbook plurality. This way, NCET puts an end to the ‘one textbook fits all’ policy and gives more freedom for local education authorities to select the textbooks that best suit the region (Table 1). Recently-published EFL textbooks in Morocco are also characterised by the heterogeneity of textbook designer committees which includes university professors, ELT supervisors in addition to ELT teachers from both high and middle schools.

Table 1: EFL Textbooks Currently Used In Moroccan Schools (Public and Private)

	EFL Textbooks	Level/Stream
1	Focus	Middle School
2	Horizons	
3	Visa to the World	Common Core
4	Window on the World	
5	Outlook	
6	Ticket to English 1	First Year
7	Gateway to English 1	
8	Ticket to English 2	Second Year
9	Gateway to English 2	
10	Insights into English	

METHODOLOGY

The methodological stance that the present article adopted was mainly comparative. Being so, four layers of analysis were taken to guide the analysis: theoretical stance, research design, research tools, and findings.

Data came from four recently-published studies which targeted EFL textbooks from different vantage perspectives. Studies were selected according to the following criteria:

- **Balance:** given that researchers would often belong to different institutions (faculties or centers of training, such as CFIE, CRMEF), the carried-out comparison observed this variable by choosing studies which belong to both bodies.
- **Currency:** the comparison-targeted studies that have been published between 2014 and 2017.
- **Visibility:** studies that have wider online visibility were prioritized.

APPLICATION-ORIENTED RESEARCH

Application-oriented research aims at investigating how EFL textbooks are used in teaching. This type of research often seeks to ‘understand’ teachers’ *perceptions* and *attitudes* towards using textbooks. Table 2 itemizes the studies which are currently being investigated.

Table 2: Studies Representing the ‘Application-Oriented Research’

Author (s)	Year	Title	Institution
Rahhou & Bakkas	2017	A Study into the Textbook Use in the Moroccan EFL Classroom Gateway to English 2 as a Case Study	CFIE*
Laabidi & Nfissi	2016	fundamental Criteria for Effective Textbook Evaluation	Fes Sais & Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah university

*CFIE= *Centre de Formation des Inspecteurs de l'Enseignement*

Rahhou and Bakkas’s(2017) study was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the diploma of ‘*Inspecteur Pedagogique de l’Enseignement Secondaire Qualifiant*’. Belonging to the Center de Formation des Inspecteurs de l’Enseignement (CFIE), the study, we believe, is expected to show a considerable level of praxis given that the authors were receiving ‘training’ to be ELT supervisors, upon whom it is incumbent to find practical solutions to teaching and learning challenges. Laabidi and Nfissi (2016) came from a public university (Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah and Fes Sais), where very often, though not necessarily, the theory holds the rein, with the authors being either PhD students or researchers belonging to labs at the time of writing the papers.

CENTER OF TRAINING

Rahhou and Bakkas’ (2017) study seems to lay more emphasis on textbooks designed for second year Baccalaureate students (*Gateway to English 2*). The researchers seem to build their rationale for the investigation on the claim that “very few studies have been conducted on the use of the prescribed textbooks in the Moroccan EFL classroom and little evidence has been documented on the factors influencing the teachers’ use of these instructional tools” (p.1), and therefore, their study sets out to “explore how the teachers make use of textbooks in the Moroccan EFL classroom along with the adaptations they make.

Methodologically, the mixed research design is employed to account for the quantitative data as well as for the subjective opinions of the study population. The fixed Typology-based approach was used throughout this study in the sense that the quantitative and the qualitative methods were planned at the outset and the procedure goes as predetermined and planned. As for the interpretation of the study results, the convergent parallel design is adopted. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were the main research tools.

FACULTY OF ARTS

Laabidi and Nfissi (2016) investigate Moroccan teachers' perspectives concerning the EFL textbook "*Visa to the World*" designed for common core high school students in Morocco. The authors assess the effectiveness of this textbook on the basis of seven main criteria: the physical appearance and format of the textbook, the accompanying materials, the content, and the topics, the exercises and the activities, cultural presentation, the four skills and the language methods that the textbook adopts.

Data collection instrument used in the study is the questionnaire to assess the overall effectiveness of the textbook from the point of the view of the teachers. Participants include 50 ELT high school teachers who use *Visa to the World*", and the time frame for the study extends over one academic year (2011 -2012).

REMARKS

It seems that both studies, although they work on the same genre of research, exhibit a number of differences, the majority of which are methodological. First, both studies display an immense attentiveness to the investigation of teacher's 'perceptions'. However, none of the studies justified this choice. More specifically, the studies do not seem to establish a strong theoretical stance on the relationship between studying the perceptions and evaluating or improving the quality of EFL textbooks. 'Perceptions' seem to be taken as a priori, that need not be questioned or investigated. Second, we note a heavy reliance on questionnaires. However, while Laabidi and Nfissi's (2016) questionnaire seems to be more methodological and hence more reliable, drawing on well-established items from the literature, Rahhou, and Bakkas (2017) questionnaire seems to be lacking methodological rigour, personally developed and not adequately pre-tested. The third methodological discrepancy concerns the use of the mixed research design. Rahhou and Bakkas (2017) opted for a mixed research design which is likely, if carried out properly, to strengthen the methodological choices of the researcher; Laabidi and Nfissi (2016), however, relied on one research instrument: the questionnaire.

Finally, as far as focus is concerned, we note a disagreement between both studies, with Laabidi and Nfissi (2016) being more focused in terms of the research outcomes, Rahhou and Bakkas (2017), on the other hand, end up with 'general', if not vague, items which are hard to be tested or falsified.

CONTENT-ORIENTED RESEARCH

Evaluating the content of Moroccan EFL textbooks in terms of gender inequalities has received considerable attention from Moroccan researchers. Given this centrality of 'gender' as a category of analysis, we are going to review two studies, discussing patterns of the intersection and highlighting areas for improvement. The two studies belong to different institutions, with the first coming from a center of teacher training while the second belong to a public university. (This does by no means indicate that the content-oriented research in Morocco has solely addressed gender, e.g Ait Bouzid (2016a), (2016b) and (2017))

Mechouat (2017), from a teacher training center, examines four officially produced EFL textbooks which have been used in the Moroccan high schools for Common Core English language learners from the early 1990s to 2005. The analysed textbooks include "English in Life" (1990), "Quick Way" (2002), "Visa to the World" (2005), and "Window on the World" (2005). Theoretically, the researcher uses a feminist theoretical approach which was put forward by Oliver (1974) and Porreca (1984). Methodologically, however, the researcher seems to draw on a mixed research design to the

investigation of gendered dialogues and related illustration.

Jaafari (2018) examines the manifestations of unequal distribution of power to genders in discourse as the language in use across eight Moroccan EFL textbooks. Theoretically, Jaafari claims to be drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The research is also characterized by the implementation of M.A.K Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, mainly modality analysis at the interpersonal level and transitivity analysis at the experiential level. Methodologically, the study combines quantitative and qualitative analysis, with the first being encoded in tables of frequencies and percentages and the latter lending itself to thematic analysis.

REMARKS

The analysis of the two works reveals that there are various similarities between the two studies although they claim different theoretical and methodological points of departure. The overruling objective has been to interrogate the content of Moroccan EFL textbooks to reveal traces of gender imbalances.

First, the two researchers have various EFL textbooks in the intersection, especially textbooks designed for common core students. They have relied on almost the same categories of analysis and have come up with almost the same statistical patterns. The claimed visual analysis has relied on many images in common, with a strong matching in the analysis. Second, in terms of statistical findings both researchers have arrived at the same results which reveal gender imbalances in the studied textbooks. Surprisingly, none of the researchers seem to refer to the other, giving the impression that they were working in islands.

Mechouat (2017) focusses on 4 EFL TB designed mainly for Common Core students while this choice seems to resonate with the principle of convenient sampling, the researcher, however, fails to take the historical dimension into account. How can we generalize the findings? A time span of almost 15 years was not accounted for and the results did not make it clear whether a change over these years have or have not taken place and in what direction. Second, the researcher seems to rely on tables of frequencies and percentages without considering the reliability of the instrument which is more likely to affect the reliability of the findings (inter-rater reliability).

Jaafari (2018) promises to carry out a CDA analysis, however, it is not clear what aspects, approaches, or critical tools he has employed. First, CDA rests on 'discourse' as a recontextualized social practice. In Jaafari (2018), it is not clear what definition of discourse the study has endorsed. Second, the study employs SFL on equal footing with CDA. It is true that CDA relies on SFL but it cannot be reduced to it. Methodologically, the researcher seems to mix content analysis with CDA and SFL, with the results being numerically interpreted. This, however, runs against the hermeneutic aspect of CDA where the critical spirit of CDA is almost lost. Related to this is the way the study carries out the visual analysis where the critical spirit does not seem to lend itself to a 'critical pattern'.

Comparing the content-oriented research and the processes-oriented one, it seems that the first is still looking for an identity, with researchers set out to analyse *modern* EFL textbooks using analytical categories that are not likely to be theoretically or methodologically productive.

The carried out analysis centers on 'clear' aspects of gender discrimination, leaving understudied 'hidden' areas of the coercive hegemony exercised on women (Said & Jaafari, 2019). Below we will briefly review two critical frameworks that can be employed to the analysis of school textbooks (Said, forthcoming 2019) both linguistically and visually.

Critical Discourse Analysis

In Morocco, however, it seems that although CDA constitutes an empirically well-established method to the analysis of pedagogical contents worldwide, there is no *systematic* study, as far as I know, which is wholly devoted to exploring and describing the systematic potentials offered by CDA to explicitly critique how pedagogical discourses are maintained, disseminated and therefore legitimized through the use of EFL textbooks and other teaching materials. Hence, an explicit intention of the present sections is to concisely review the conceptual and theoretical framework underlying the application of CDA to demystifying the ideological mechanisms underlying the pedagogical discourses as they are exemplified in textbooks used to teach English in Morocco.

The subsequent sections deal with two critical frameworks to the study of EFL textbook content. The first is concerned with the linguistic analysis of social actors (with gender being one of them); the second approach addresses the visual analysis of social actors.

Linguistic Social Actor Analysis

Briefly, Linguistic Social Actor Analysis (LSAA) refers to the combination of sociological and linguistic theories to examine the chains of recontextualizing discourses. Van Leeuwen (2008), a major founder of this approach, sketches “an outline of a sociological “grammar” (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p.56) through developing a socio-semantic inventory to the analysis of social actors. This inventory is tasked with: i) cataloguing the different lexicogrammatical ways in which social actors can be linguistically recontextualized and ii) establishing their critical relevance. To keep up with Van Leeuwen’s socio-semantic taxonomy, we will bring ‘Moroccan Women’ and ‘Imazighen’ under the analytical category of ‘Social Actors’. In short, social actors as a discourse analytical category are seen as the textual instantiations of models of the self and others, both individual and collective. (¹Karimaghaei & Kasmani, 2013).

Inclusion, Exclusion, Activation, Subjection, Beneficialization, Participation, Possessivation, Circumstantialization, Functionalization, Classification, Relational Identification, Formalization, Semiformalization, Informalization, Indetermination, Abstraction, Objectivation, Genericization, Individualization, Collectivization.

Adopting Van Leeuwen’s taxonomy to the analysis of the representation of social actors in EFL/ESL textbooks has been the focal point of numerous studies. (Karimaghaei & Kasmani, 2013; Sarani, & Kord, 2018; Roohani, 2015; Roohani, & Tanbakooei, 2012; Babaii & Kafshgarsouteh, 2016; Saadabad & Kasmani, 2014; Sadeghi & Maleki, 2016; Davari & Moini, 2016; Dashti & Mehrpour, 2017; Günay, 2012). These, and other, studies make use of van Leeuwen’s model as an ideology detector to uncover various kinds of injustice across the deep layers of pedagogical discourses. Using this model, social actors can be represented in sociological and critical ways to determine who has been nominated for representation, rather than solely upon who has been stated grammatically through linguistic criteria (Post, 2009).

¹Karimaghaei, Z. & Kasmani, M.B. (2013). The Representation of Social Actors in Top Notch 2A and 2B. *Asian Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 2, (1), 27-38

VISUAL SOCIAL SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS (VSSA)

The VSSA is concerned with establishing a critical understanding of the various components of the image (participants, places, and things) and viewers of these images. VSSA is not an end in itself; but rather, it is meant as a tool for use in CDA research (Jewitt&Oyama, 2001, p.136) as it helps illuminate how the structures of the images can contribute to the representation of various social concepts (Jewitt&Oyama, 2001).

The VSSA is considered a functionalist approach. However, Kress and Leeuwen extend notions of language to follow Halliday’s theory meta-functions, which postulates that language fulfills three meta-functions simultaneously, namely **ideational**, **interpersonal** and **textual**. According to Halliday, language is a product of the social process, which consists of the exchange of meanings in interpersonal contexts of one kind or another. In this sense, language is a system of semiotic resources (resources for making meaning) which, as per Halliday (1978), simultaneously perform the following three meta-functions:

Representational Meta-Function

This metafunction is primarily concerned with the patterns of representation “conveyed by the (abstract or concrete) ‘participants’ (people, places or things) depicted” (Jewitt &Oyama, 2001, p. 141). It is the visual twin of lexis in a written text. Kress and Leeuwen (1996; 2006), further distinguish this type of metafunction by laying emphasis of the ‘syntax’ of the images- the way elements in the image relate to each other and to the viewer in meaningful ways. These ‘syntactic’ patterns yield two structures of representation: narrative and conceptual. The choice is important since the decision to represent something in a narrative or conceptual way provides a key to understanding the discourses which mediate their representation

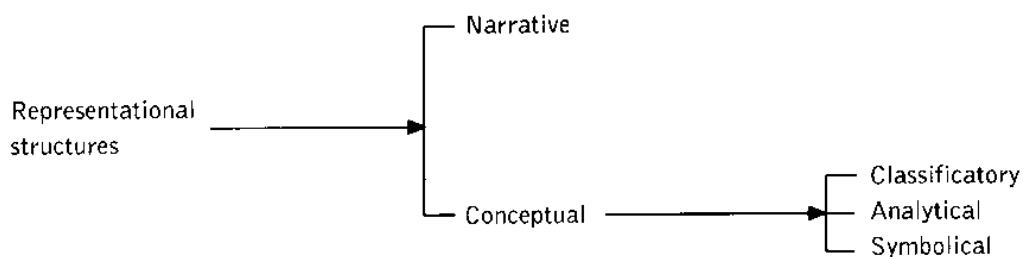


Figure 1

Interactive Function

The interactive metafunction represents the patterns of interactions between the viewer and the participants inside the picture. This interaction can lead to different relations between the represented and the viewer. Generally, there are at least three visual semiotic resources that play a significant role in the articulation of these relations: *distance*, *contact*, and *point of view*.

Compositional Function

The last metafunction addresses the meaning of composition and “the way in which representations and communicative acts *cohere* into the kind of meaningful whole we call ‘text’” (Kress & Leeuwen 1996, p. 181). According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), the compositional function translates into three interrelated systems: *information value*, *salience*, and *framing*.

CONCLUSIONS

The present article has set out to investigate the different trajectories that Moroccan researchers have recently undertaken to investigate EFL textbooks. The analysis of four studies, belonging to two different types of institutions has revealed a number of similarities and discrepancies across different planes. However, it seems that process-oriented research is gaining more sound grounds, taking advantages of the different research tools it employs and the practical implications it advances. Content-oriented research, on the other hand, seems to be entangled within old and less productive theoretical and methodological analytical operations. The article has briefly reviewed two critical frameworks to the analysis of the visual and the linguistic representations of social actors. It is true that the review has not been thorough but its insights can be far-reaching.

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