

To write a textbook for teaching a “little” languages

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Abstract: In this time of domination of English in all fields, including linguistics, methodology of preparing textbooks for learning and teaching the foreign languages is also under its influence. This article shows how some achievements in this field can be well used, but also how it's necessary to pay attention to differences, whether structural, sociolinguistic, or purely pragmatic when writing a textbook for teaching the "little" languages such as Bosnian. Apart from some theoretical assumptions, this article offers some very practical advice that can be applied to writing books of other languages.

Key words: textbook, Bosnian language, methodology of writing textbook, textbook evaluation

Introduction

It is ironical that those teachers who rely most heavily on the textbooks are the ones least qualified to interpret its intentions or evaluate its content and method. (Williams, 1983; in: Ansary and Babaii 2002)

Even if I am, as the author of the textbook “Bosanski jezik kao strani jezik”, maybe last who should analyze it, I'll undertake this job because the writing such a book is not like writing any other textbook for the foreign language. So, I will attempt not to discover its good and bad sides, but to explain what the special was in it, such as: political reasons, methodical needs, user requirements, methodological difficulties and practical use.

Why do we need the textbook for learning/teaching Bosnian as a foreign language?

The answer is simple: because we didn't have it. Indeed, there is one: Pelesić-Muminović, F., *Bosanski jezik za strance*, but this book is more for individual learning of Bosnian. Beside, even if it is wrote in two languages parallel, which could be considered as an advantage, it used the old grammar-translation approach and it shouldn't be useful in the classroom (it was my personal experience).

And why is so important to have the textbook for Bosnian? Couldn't we use one of Croatian, or Serbian, or former Serbo-Croatian? are the questions people often ask me. Now, the answer is not so simple.

First of all, the strangers who came in Bosnia and Herzegovina mostly don't know anything about history of Bosnian language. It seems them so naturally to associate the name of the language with the name of the country and they don't know what should be a problem. The truth is that, even Bosnian exists for at least thousand years, and in big part of this time its name was Bosnian, in last hundred years this name was forbidden. And while the names Serbian and Croatian existed and developed at least in the common name “Serbo-Croatian”, the name “Bosnian” was moved and almost forgotten.

The same was with the particularities of this language – while those of Serbian and Croatian was raised from the dialect to the standard language, in the same time the particularities of the Bosnian was characterized more and more as a dialect.³⁴⁸ Nowadays, when the name “Bosnian” is in use again, we have a big problem: there is no book which analyzes the specificity of the Bosnian language, nor literature, history... In last fifteen years the scientists of this three “national discipline” make an effort to compensate that gap of hundred years, but some key books still didn't see the light. One of those books is the textbook for Bosnian as a foreign language too.

Secondly, as I already sad, the Bosnian, even so similar to Serbian and Croatian, still isn't the same. There are some particularities which separate Bosnian from those two languages. Maybe one stranger couldn't understand why these few things are so important, but in this place the sociolinguistics reasons take effect. Namely, after relatively recent war (1992-95) in which three army was created – one Bosnian's, second Serbian's and third Croatian's, the society was mostly – weather we would like to admit it or not – separate in those three categories. And how can it be recognized who belongs to which category? Mainly through his/her language – exactly those little differences between Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian. And even we're trying to delete those fine borders between the three nations which constitute the majority of people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is still possible to happen that someone at least look at you weird if you say “kava” instead of

³⁴⁸ More about the history of standard Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian language see in: Robin 2005.

“kafa” or vice versa. And that should be the problem for some stranger who don’t know (and maybe even shouldn’t know) about this social situation.

And thirdly, as a country trying to be a part of European Union, Bosnia and Herzegovina should reach its level, this is, be considerate to many things in politics, economics, business, but also the culture, education, science... In this sense, like all “big countries”, Bosnia and Herzegovina should enhance the education of Bosnian language and Bosnian culture to the Bosnian foreign language learners. All around the world there are Bosnian people which children are forgetting the mother tongue. Somewhere it is organized the classes of Bosnian in primary school, some universities also introduce Bosnian, from one semester courses (for example in Wuerzburg, Germany) to three or four years study (in Izmir, Turkey). And Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the country, has a little or nothing with that. It means that about Bosnian language and culture can teach anyone who knows Bosnian, and sometimes even Serbian or Croatian. The country should take care of representing its language(s) in the world, and one of the ways is by creating the textbooks for learning/teaching Bosnian language, based on real Bosnian language and Bosnian culture.³⁴⁹ And, of course, the textbooks of Bosnian can be used also to represent Bosnia and Herzegovina in the world, to make it closer, more familiar to other countries and to minimize all of bad predictions which exist about it.

What the textbook for teaching/learning foreign language should be?

From the viewpoint of methodologists, the textbook presents a list (set of) rules (guidelines, recommendations and prohibitions) to work on school material (Аргуюнов, 1990: 15, in: Nenezić 2009); textbook is a comprehensive and methodical system that is realized in certain material and has a concrete goal for a certain period and certain the composition of students (Пассов, 1989; in: Nenezić, 2009).

The theory of textbook is still the young discipline which didn’t develop yet its apparatus and methodology, but as its goals, it describes:

- a) obtain the authors to analyze and systematize the books from before and make one unique and optimal model for all the textbooks concerning one discipline
- b) reach the model and structure equality of the textbooks of the different disciplines
- c) establish one non-contradictory assertive criterion for the textbook valorization (Nenezić, 2009).

Even if we still don’t have the unique measures, we cannot say that we don’t have many (sometimes contradictory) directions and recommendations about what should be the textbook for teaching/learning the foreign language.

1. Communicative method instead of the grammar-translation approach. Actually and pretty globally acceptable method for teaching any languages today is communicative method. Ideal textbook will be the one which wouldn’t have the grammar at all, and it could teach its costumer to speak liquidly and similar as much as it is possible to the native speakers (for example: Millard, 2000, Tomlinson, 2008; in: *Kurtz 2009*).

To reach that, the textbook should have:

2. multiply-answer-chose questions (Chastain, 1987, Walz, 1989; both in: Millard, 2000),
3. text resemble natural speech (Millard 2000, Rühlemann 2009),
4. sentences linked to each other through a common meaningful theme (Hadley Omaggio, 1993, Walz, 1989; both in Millard, 2000),
5. grammar items associated with the others which are used together frequently (Millard, 2000).

Beside that, all are agree that the textbooks must offer:

6. information about the target language culture (Santos, 2002),

implying that:

7. book is completely written in the target language (and classes should be also completely in that language: Strzalka, 1998).

Based on these principles, we have many evaluation checklists for the textbooks (for example: Miekley, 2005) and they mostly respect this rules.

Learning third language

It is important to notify that all of these rules are based on learning of English as a foreign language (for example: Miekley, 2005). Question is: Should those rules be used in writing the textbook for some other language?

First of all, we must take care about the fact that learning some language beside English often means learning third or fourth language. And that means the learners, even if they “might not know English well, they do know enough to make mistakes influenced by previously learned languages” (Gunske, 2007: 22). Some scientists

³⁴⁹ This is the problem with much other languages, even such „big“ as Chinese is; see in: Hai-lin and Xiao-ling, 2010.

propose interesting ways to begin teaching taking into account the above findings (Gunske, 2007: 22), but the problem with textbook is still pending.

Additionally, the learners don't like the textbooks only on foreign language (and it is not only my personal experience: Strzalka, 1998). Accustomed on the learning based on grammar-translation approach, they mostly don't understand that the different languages follow different patterns (Santos 2002), and even if they do, it is hard for them to realize that difference, especially when their mother tongue belongs to the other group of languages. Actually, the teacher is the one who should explain it, but how the textbook can help him/her?

It seems that the textbook which use English or another learners-familiar language for explaining will be better than the textbook completely written in the target language. If so, than the textbook I cited in the beginning (written half in Bosnian and half in English) should be perfect, and we wouldn't need one more book. But things are not so simple and using just target language is not the only problem in composing the textbook for third or fourth language.

What the textbook for Bosnian language should be?

As I already sad, the complete process of learning some language as a foreign is under hard influence of this one for English. Writers, trying to be modern as much as they can, often copy the methods and structure of the English textbooks. On the one side, they are right because the English is language with the most develop methods for teaching and learning, and none serious scientist should ignore those achievements. On the other side, in this consideration they should be reasonable and critical, this is, they should respect the differences between English and the target language.

For example, the textbooks for teaching / learning English usually starts with present simple, sometimes with the present continuous tense in the same lesson (Acklam and Crace, 2006, Oxenden and Latham-Koenig, 2009, Kay and Jones, 2003). It means that students learn two new suffixes, and two different ways to make some tense. In Bosnian it would mean that the students should learn eighteen suffixes, three possible stem which couldn't be recognized just by regarding the infinitive form, not to speak about some sub-classes of verbs with their particularities, and all of that just to learn the present tense in regular verbs.

The same things are with possessive adjectives: since the learners of English should learn six new words for the beginning, the learners of Bosnian should learn 29 forms just for the singular.³⁵⁰

Obviously, the differences between English and Bosnian are so big that they can't be overcome so easy. But it should be mentioned one more facts: since the students already accept some order in teaching / learning (one more influence of English!), they expect the same in every new language, which make them prepared for accepting of certain information, and the textbooks should take the advantage of it. Just, it must be chosen the best way for it, because when the learners see this bunch of suffixes, they will be concerned and scared of Bosnian, so we would do nothing.

So, if the Bosnian textbook want to respect the rule *from easy to hard*, the order of grammar units must be totally different than in English textbook, and the learners expecting can be kept by announcing soon teaching of things they are waiting them to appear in every next page.

But which principle should be applied in the ordering of the grammar units? It should be the frequency of use in the common speech, even if it implies just partly explanation of some of them.³⁵¹ In the explanation of the rules of Bosnian, definitely it must be back at the one rule several times.

Beside it, under prediction of English or their mother tongue, the learners /students make often the same and repeated mistakes, such as in gender or in cases. One textbook can't predict the mistakes caused by mother tongue, but can the one's caused by knowing English and it can pay attention on them by giving more exercises (Gunske 2007: 22).

So, we see that the knowing English can even help to learn the Bosnian in above mentioned ways. But, there is one big difference: since it is so flecitive, it seems impossible to teach someone to speak Bosnian liquidly and correct without the grammar. The proof for that are many strangers who are in Bosnia and Herzegovina for more than ten years, but out of school system, and they still make many mistakes in their speech, especially if they are from the countries which languages don't have the gender or inflection. "Mitigating circumstance" is the fact that the syntax, particularly the word order in Bosnian is much easier than in English (since it is almost free) so, when (somehow) learn the morphology, the students / learners can be considered as they know the Bosnian

³⁵⁰ Here it could be listed much differences, and the one is, for example, insisting on syntaxis, what can be accomplished in English, as the analytic language, but not in Bosnian, as the extremely flecitive: „To understand the essential concepts of syntactic it is necessary to know morphology, because it can be said that the syntax is actually functional (applied) morphology. Syntactic level inevitably demand the involving of the semanthic level, because the syntactic units are complex language signs, which can't be analyzed by one side. Also, the relationship between syntax and stylistics is very complex, so it is important that teachers can refer the students how to functionally associate the level of grammatically with expressive values of certain syntactic structures.“ (Петровачки, 2010: 443-444)

³⁵¹ The textbooks of other, not so „small“ languages have the same problem: Wagner.

language.³⁵² It means also that the full attention must be paid to the organization, explanation and practice of grammar in an effort to make it easy and understandable as more as it is possible. Of course that in this place we can and we should use the rule for the English textbooks to associate grammar items with the others which are used together frequently.

And there are more, practical things which should be considered if we want the Bosnian to be accepted and liked. They concern the learners which are mostly adult persons, even if they are students. Some of those things (recognized in the others' experience too: Strzalka, 1998) are the next:

The adult learners and students love text, so the textbook should offer it, because the new vocabulary items seem to be better remembered if they are introduced in a context of a longer text (Strzalka, 1998) which, in some way, "keep the meanings of the words" and if learner / student forget the meaning, he or she is still remembering where it words is saw first time, so he / she can quickly find it and remember its meaning. And this fact proof the demand for the textbook for teaching / learning English that the sentences should be linked to each other through a common meaningful theme.

The adult learners and students don't like to play a role because of their natural shyness or just discomfort. A solution to this problem may simply be giving the more inhibited learners more detailed briefing about their role, thus limiting the freedom of choice which seems to be troublesome for some adult learners (Strzalka, 1998). And this correspond with the demand of the multiply-answer-chose questions for the textbooks for English.

The adult learners and students don't like the homework (Strzalka, 1998). They wish to learn and be learned only at the classes, because they other occupations are often totally different and they can connect them to learning Bosnian. However, the rules of the faculty or department sometimes strictly demand it, and it has the methodological reasons. Solution can be not to give the explicit homework exercises in the textbook, but structure it in the way that every exercise can be the homework too.

The adult learners and students don't like the exercises which don't demand the understanding of meanings. Doing these kinds of mechanical exercises, learners do not see how this rather passive activity could possibly improve their overall performance in the foreign language and they easily get disinterested (Strzalka, 1998). But "mechanical" repeating is one of the way of the "unconscious" learning of language so these exercises shouldn't be omitted, but they should be positioned after the harder exercises so they can be used as a "relax".

Moreover, there is one more thing which the textbook for Bosnian must consider and this one for English mustn't, and it is costumers who are the heritage speakers. All around the world there are the children or grandchildren of the Bosnian people who emigrate before about hundred years. Those children are often very interested for learning Bosnian, which they know a little bit, but not enough to communicate with people who today live in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The reason is that the language, in strange surround, slowly disappear, but also, and more interesting, that those speakers keep the condition of language before hundred years, and the language in Bosnia today is changed. Also, the emigrants were often from the rural background and they speech is more dialectal, beside it is old. If it wants to be multi-functional and satisfy the expectations, one textbook for learning / teaching Bosnian should take into account these facts and try to show the dialects too, but of course, to insist on the standard language. This corresponds with demand to natural speech in the textbooks for English (and students especially love the non-standard collocations so it can be used to relax some harder lesson).

Also, those "half-native" speakers often don't know anything, or know a little about the country where their ancients are from. They might have some old picture which their grand parents gave them, and it would be very important to introduce them in recent culture and civilization, beside the fact that it is necessary for all the textbooks for foreign languages (Kramer, 2004: 14).

Conclusion

After all, we can see that in writing the textbook for learning / teaching the "small" languages such as Bosnian, we can use some rules for this kind of textbooks at all, like offering multiply-answer-chose questions, text resemble natural speech, sentences linked to each other through a common meaningful theme, grammar items associated with the others which are used together frequently and information about the target language culture, but some others, like only communicative method and writing completely in the target language, can't. Beside that, the textbook for "small" languages should consider that:

³⁵² There is one more reason for putting more grammar in textbook for Bosnian language: often, the costumers are the students who study some other language, accustomed on the grammar explanations and they ask for it. The others don't ask, and to harmonize those two opposite demands, the textbook should offer enough of both, and the teacher can choose whether use it or not.

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- learners often already know the English or some other language (except their mother tongue, of course) what cause always the same mistakes and different expectations (or, to better say, the same expectations) of the textbook
- learners often already know the Bosnian, but old and dialectal
- learners are mostly adults and have some typical demands
- every language ask specific units order depending of its structure

And I would like to conclude with a quotation from Allwright (1981: 9; in Ansary and Babaii 2002):

There is a limit to what teaching materials can be expected to do for us. The whole business of the management of language learning is far too complex to be satisfactorily catered for by a pre-packaged set of decisions embodied in teaching materials.

This means however perfect a textbook is, it is just a simple tool in the hands of teachers. We should not, therefore, expect to work miracles with it. What is more important than a textbook is what we, as teachers, can do with it.

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