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| Research Article / Araştırma Makalesi |

Characteristics of Projects in the 5th Grade English Textbook

5. Sınıf İngilizce Ders Kitabı *İngilizce 5*'te Yer Alan Projelerin Özellikleri

Ahmet Acar[1]

keywords

1. action-oriented approach
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1.eylem odaklı yaklaşım
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Abstract

This article aimed to investigate the action-oriented approach (AoA) in the English textbook *İngilizce 5* used in the 5th grades of public secondary schools in Turkey by means of analyzing the characteristics of the so-called project presented at the end of unit 5 *Health*. It is argued that the unit objectives of the textbook are stated in terms of functional-notional objectives rather than action objectives and that the so-called project presented at the end of unit 5 does not carry the characteristics of a pedagogical project. Further to this, it is misleadingly conceptualized as an individual assignment by the authors of the textbook, it lacks the process dimension and it functions only as a pretext for reusing the language content of the unit. The attempt to employ pre-programmed projects at the end of each unit of the textbook *İngilizce 5* is subject to criticism. By proposing an alternative mini-project that meets the minimum characteristics that can be expected of a project, the article illustrated how to make this textbook action-oriented.

Öz

Bu makale, 5. ünitenin sonunda sunulan sözde projenin özelliklerini analiz ederek Türkiye'deki devlet ortaokullarının 5. sınıflarında kullanılan *İngilizce 5* İngilizce ders kitabındaki eylem odaklı yaklaşımı (EoY) incelemeyi amaçlamıştır. Ders kitabının ünite hedeflerinin eylem hedeflerinden ziyade işlevsel-kavramsal hedefler açısından ifade edildiği ve 5. ünitenin sonunda sunulan sözde projenin pedagojik bir projenin özelliklerini taşımadığı iddia edilmektedir. Buna ek olarak, ders kitabının yazarları tarafından yanıltıcı bir şekilde bireysel bir ödev olarak kavramsallaştırılmıştır, süreç boyutundan yoksundur ve yalnızca ünitenin dil içeriğini yeniden kullanmak için bir vasıta işlevi görür. *İngilizce 5* ders kitabının her ünitesinin sonunda önceden programlanmış projeleri kullanma girişimi eleştiriye tabidir. Makale, bir projeden beklenebilecek minimum özellikleri karşılayan alternatif bir mini proje önererek, bu ders kitabının nasıl eylem odaklı yapılacağını göstermektedir.

[1] Assoc. Prof. Dr., Dokuz Eylül University, Faculty of Education, Department of English Language Teaching, İzmir, Turkey; ahmet.acar@deu.edu.tr, https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8940-4359

INTRODUCTION

Since the goal of the communicative approach (CA) and task-based language teaching (TBLT) (Ellis, 2003; Estaire & Zanon, 1994; Nunan, 1989; Willis, 1996) is to train successful communicators, linguistic action (speech acts) in both CA and TBLT is the reference action, which will enable the students to be involved in intercultural dialogues successfully in short term contact situations or tourist trip situations as referred to in Van Ek's (1975) *The Threshold Level in a European-Unit/Credit System for Modern Language Learning by Adults*. The goal of training successful communicators has been replaced with a much more challenging goal in the two other subsequent Council of Europe documents, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001) and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages Companion Volume (CEFRCV, 2018), that of the goal of training social actors. The natural implication of setting such a goal for language learners is that the reference action is no longer the speech action (linguistic action) but the social action, which is defined as acting with the others by Puren (2004). For this reason, the action-oriented approach (AoA) is used in this article to refer to social action-based learning (SABL) as used in Puren (2020) and Acar (2020a, 2020b). CEFR (2001, p.9), in the following quote, considered speech actions at the service of social action:

> The approach adopted here, generally speaking, is an action-oriented one in so far as it views users and learners of a language primarily as 'social agents', i.e. members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action. While acts of speech occur within language activities, these activities form part of a wider social context, which alone is able to give them their full meaning. We speak of 'tasks' in so far as the actions are performed by one or more individuals strategically using their own specific competences to achieve a given result.

Considering learners as social actors (social agents), in the above quote, implies a paradigm change from training communicators (as in the Threshold Level document) to training social actors who can live and work together in their democratic society. It should be noted that communication in the AoA does not disappear but its status changes: it is no longer both the means and the goal but just a means at the service of social action.

The Characteristics of Mini-projects in Language Textbooks

The new reference goal (training social actors) and its reference action (social action) are what require finding practical ways of implementing the AoA (or SABL) in and/or outside the classroom, in language curricula as well as language textbooks. Puren (2008b, 2009, 2014a, 2014b, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019a, 2019b) argued that the most effective way of implementing the AoA is in the form of project pedagogy since the project is the best model of social action and it is the reference learning action to train social actors in their real mini-society (classroom). More specifically, he argued that the students can be involved in pedagogical projects that they choose, design, implement and evaluate as autonomously as possible (with the help of the teacher).

Mini-projects, on the other hand, are pre-programmed by curriculum developers or textbook writers, but they also reflect the characteristics of pedagogical projects as much as possible though not fully. Mini-projects differ from pedagogical projects in two respects: (1) They are limited by the timeframe of the textbook unit (2) They may not integrate all the characteristics of pedagogical projects, in particular, they offer limited autonomy compared to the pedagogical projects, the production of a mini-project is generally not used in the following units repeatedly, and they require the students to reuse the language and cultural content of the textbook unit (actional situation of reuse). It should be noted that although mini-projects offer reuse situations, they always have an educational dimension besides it, and this is what mainly differentiates a mini-project from both the final task of TBLT and communicative situations of CA. This means that a mini-project always has (alongside its linguistic objective) an educational objective, that is, educating students as critical but responsible, autonomous but supportive citizens (Puren, 2014b, 2017).

There are also other characteristics of mini-projects that make them different from the basic activities of both TBLT and CA. The presence of the design stage of the mini-project is an important characteristic of mini-projects. The design defines the action and sets the objective of the action, presents the plan of the action (action scenario), leads the students to search and select the information necessary to carry out the mini-project (research and work on resources) (what Horton (2007) calls information literacy or what Puren (2008a) calls informational competence), specifies the final linguistic product, sets the necessary evaluation criteria to evaluate the product and process. In selecting the social action of the mini-project, the priority is given to the real action though the use of realistic simulations is also possible (Puren, 2009; Maurer & Puren, 2019). In the AoA/SABL, communication is not the ultimate goal of any mini-project, but just a means for realizing the mini-project, contrary to CA, in which communication is both the means and the goal. Thus, in the action-oriented textbooks, the unit is the unit of action, whereas, in the communicative textbooks, it is the unit of communication.

The design stage of the mini-project also reflects the other characteristics of mini-projects, such as autonomy and collectivity. Although autonomy given to the students in a mini-project is not as high as in the pedagogical projects (since mini-projects are specified by the textbook authors or curriculum developers), still a certain level of autonomy is given to the students in the action scenario of the mini-projects by offering mini-choices to the students in these steps or by offering the students at least two mini-

projects, which are variants of the same social action, at the end of the textbook unit (Acar, 2020a). Regarding the collective dimension, the objective of the action as well as the steps of the action scenario and the evaluation stages of the mini-projects should integrate the collective dimension since social action is by nature a collective action.

As can be observed from this analysis, a mini-project design does not only focus on the product (like *making a poster*) but also has a process dimension (action scenario), in other words, a single instruction focusing on just the product such as *Make a poster* does not make it a mini-project since it lacks the process dimension of the mini-project. It should be noted that what is most important from the point of view of the training of a social actor is the process dimension of a mini-project, although what is most important from the point of view of the learning of the foreign language is the work of collective preparation and realization of the final language production.

All these characteristics of mini-projects relate to complexity. A mini-project can be more or less complex depending on its total preprogramming by the teacher, the textbook or curriculum or its total non-directivity. In other words, if the mini-project is chosen, designed and implemented by the students (social actors) in full autonomy (under the guidance of the teacher) without imposition from an outside authority, it will no longer be a mini-project but a pedagogical project, it will be more complex for the teacher and the students to implement it. For this reason, Puren (2009, 2014a, 2016, 2019b) rightly puts forward that mini-projects are the best way of training social actors by means of language textbooks; in other words, "mini-projects should be the main action units in textbooks prepared in accordance with social-action-based learning (SABL)" (Acar, 2020a, p. 29).

METHOD

This section presents information about the research design, study group, data collection tools, and data analysis.

Research Design

This study used document analysis as a qualitative research method to analyze the activity named as a project at the end of unit 5 of the English textbook *İngilizce 5* used in the 5th grades of public secondary schools in Turkey.

Study Group

The activity named as a project at the end of unit 5, which was selected randomly among all the units of the English textbook *İngilizce 5,* was chosen for the analysis since the analysis of each project in each unit will exceed the page limitation.

Data Collection Tools

According to Bowen (2009, p. 27), document analysis is "a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents - both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material."

Data Analysis

The activity named as a project at the end of unit 5 was analyzed to investigate whether it carries the characteristics of mini-projects. Thus, the research question that this study aimed to reply is: Does the activity named as a *project* at the end of unit 5 carry the characteristics of a mini-project as a form of the application of the AoA in language textbooks?

FINDINGS

An Analysis of the 5th Grade ELT Textbook *İngilizce 5* in terms of the AoA

İngilizce 5 is used in the 5th grades of public secondary schools in Turkey by students at the average age of 11 in Turkey. The textbook contains 10 units built around topics, and at the end of each unit, there is a section titled as *project,* which the textbook introduces as "Project reinforcement assignment" (Yalçın, Genç, Orhon, & Şahin, 2019, p. 9) in the section *introduction of the book*. However, the attempt to employ pre-programmed projects at the end of each unit is problematic in terms of the AoA since according to Puren (2009, 2014a, 2016, 2019b) the maximum a language textbook can employ in a pre-programmed manner is a mini-project. Projects, on the other hand, are chosen, designed, and implemented by the social actors (with the help of the teacher) with maximum autonomy and hence can not be presented in a pre-determined manner by a textbook or curriculum.

Unit objectives in the textbook *İngilizce 5* are stated in terms of functions and notions. At the beginning of Unit 5 *Health*, for example, objectives of the unit are given as "In this unit, we name illnesses and express our needs and feelings. We make suggestions about illnesses" (Yalçın et al., 2019, p. 76). This is also problematic in terms of the AoA since unit objectives in action-oriented textbooks are not stated in terms of functions and notions but in terms of actions (Acar, 2020a). This is actually one of

the differences between the communicative textbooks, in which the unit is the communication unit, and action-oriented textbooks, in which the unit is the unit of action. Thus, the functional-notional unit objectives of *İngilizce 5* naturally make the textbook communicative rather than action-oriented. The functional-notional objectives of each unit also clarify the sole function given to the so-called projects at the end of each unit: putting the students in a reuse situation, in which the students can reuse the language content of the unit. The action objectives of each unit and the mini-projects in the action-oriented textbooks, on the other hand, have a very important characteristic, which is educating social actors, and this educational dimension of mini-projects is what mainly differentiates between mini-projects and communicative tasks of TBLT or simulated situations of communication in CA.

The Analysis of the Proposed Project in Unit 5

The so-called project proposed at the end of unit five *Health* is "Make a poster. Give suggestions for a healthy life" (Yalçın et al., 2019, p. 87). However, this so-called project lacks a design stage, in which even the objective of the action is not defined clearly (what is the aim of the poster?) along with the recipient of the message and the rationale for preparing the poster: To whom and for what reason will the students give suggestions for a healthy life on the poster? Where will the poster be displayed? The function of this poster, thus, can even be criticized from a communicative point of view since there is no requirement for interaction among the students in the design.

There is no action scenario in the design. The students immediately embark on preparing a poster to give suggestions for a healthy life to unknown recipients; in other words, the so-called project just focuses on the product, and the process dimension is absent, which is even enough to prove that the so-called project cannot be considered as a project. There is not instruction to guide the students in searching and selecting the necessary information, which relates to informational competence (Puren, 2008a), to prepare the poster, neither is there any evaluation criteria to evaluate the product and process dimension of the so-called project. The action is a real action since the students will prepare a poster; however, since the objectives of this unit are stated in terms of functional-notional objectives, the unit is not an action unit but a communication unit, and the poster functions only as a pretext for reusing language content (notions and functions) of the unit. Besides, in the AoA, the mini-projects always have an educational dimension besides its linguistic dimension. It is, however, difficult to talk about the educational dimension of this co-called project since the objective targeted is only a linguistic objective (reusing the language content of the unit).

Since the design stage of the so-called project *Make a poster. Give suggestions for a healthy life* is absent; important characteristics of design such as autonomy and the collective dimension are also absent in this so-called project. The students are not given choices in the action scenario. Indeed there is neither action scenario nor design in the proposed project. Such being the case, it is impossible to talk about the collective dimension as reflected in the design stage. Even the final production (poster) does not reflect the collective dimension since it is not stated whether the students will prepare the poster in pairs, groups, or as a whole class. From the instruction, it is understood that each student will prepare his or her own poster. Since there is no evaluation stage in the so-called project, it is also impossible to talk about the collectivity in the evaluation. There is a section named *Reflect on your English* placed just below the project section of the unit, but the aim of this section is the self-assessment of the language performance of the students in terms of communicative can-do statements, and this evaluation does not reflect action-oriented criteria.

Since the proposed project does not carry the characteristics of pedagogical projects and since its only function is to allow the learners to reuse the language content of the unit, it can be concluded that the so-called project of this unit is neither a project nor a mini-project. Therefore, I propose the following mini-project design to illustrate how to make this unit a real action unit:

> A: As a whole class, you will organize a class health day and celebrate it in your class or school hall, or any place you choose.
> B: As a whole class, decide on a motto for your class health day (you can discuss it in your native language and then translate it into English with the help of your teacher) (e.g., Be healthy live long!) As a whole class, decide on the date, time, and place of your celebration.
> C: As a whole class, decide on whom you will invite to your health day celebration (friends from other classes, your parents, other teachers in your school, etc.) and how to invite them (invitation card/ face to face/ on the phone). Prepare an invitation card, first, in your native language and then translate it into English with the help of your teacher or talk to the guests in your native language on the phone or invite them face to face in your native language.
> D: As a whole class, first, discuss the different possible formats for your posters, then, each group will decide on their choice (dividing the poster into 3 or 4 or more parts, and each part will explain an item etc. or any other format you choose)
> E: Decide, as a whole class, on the criteria for evaluating your posters (visual quality, the relevance of the arguments, originality, effective use of the newly learned language content of the unit etc.) (You can discuss these criteria with each other as well as your teacher in your native language).

F: With the help of your teacher, decide, in groups, on what each poster will display for a healthy life (a poster for healthy eating, a poster for physical activity, a poster for hygiene, or any other you choose). Each group will prepare a poster (by considering their target audience that they decided on in step C) to display on your health day.
G: Each group will consult their parents at home and/or their elders and/or their teacher at school to get ideas and suggestions about their topic and then translate with your teacher those ideas and suggestions into English.
H: Make your posters in groups.
I: Each group will present its posters in the classroom. The other classmates will listen to you, ask questions, and evaluate your poster according to the format you developed collectively (e.g. not ok, ok, excellent). They will also make suggestions for the presenters (you can use your native language).
J: Invite your friends and/or other teachers and/or parents to your celebration.
K: Celebrate your health day and present your posters to the audience.
L: Get the reactions of your guests (in the target language or your native language) about the health day you organized. What do they think about your event? What are the effects of your celebration on them? Do they think that it raised their consciousness about some health issues? How do they evaluate your poster when they compare it to the existing official posters?
M: Make a collective self-evaluation of the organization and realization of your celebration in your native language. What went well, what could have been done to make it better. Why? How?

The design stage of this mini-project reflects the important characteristics of pedagogical projects such as autonomy and the collective dimension. The students (social actors) are given choices in the steps of the mini-project, which gives them a certain level of autonomy. The collective dimension is also present in the design, and it is reflected not only in the objective of the action but also in the steps of the design, final social action as well as the evaluation stage. It should be noted that the teacher reserves the evaluation of the language in the final productions, but for the choice of evaluation criteria, the social actors (students) have a margin of autonomy, so certain criteria will be used in evaluation by the teacher, others in self-evaluation. The presence of the design with a certain level of autonomy and the collective dimension as well as the collective evaluation stage contribute to the educational dimension of the mini-project: educating social actors. Thus, the sole function of this mini-project is not resuing the language content of the unit but it also has an educational dimension. The presence of the action scenario and the final social action also indicates that the mini-project includes not only the product/performance component but also the process dimension, which is the most important dimension contributing to the educational goal of training social actors. Announcing the objective of the action, which is a real social action rather than simulated action, at the beginning of the unit as is required from an action unit of an action-oriented textbook will also indicate that the unit is not a communication unit but an action-oriented unit with an educational dimension. It is also important to note that this mini-project has the potential to form a class identity since it is the social actors' (learners) own health day designed and celebrated collectively. Since the students are led to seek and manage information at step G, the informational competence is addressed in the design. Finally, the presence of the design, which carries the characteristics of mini-projects, makes this mini-project a complex social action while it is difficult to talk about complexity in the proposed project of the textbook *Make a poster. Give suggestions for a healthy life,* which lacks such a design.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The English textbook *İngilizce 5* used in the 5th grades of public secondary schools in Turkey gives place to a section titled as a *project* at the end of its units*,* which the textbook introduces as *Project reinforcement assignment*. It is understood that both the authors and the editors of this textbook view project as an assignment, which is problematic in terms of the AoA, which views the classroom as an authentic mini-society where the social actors (students) collectively take decisions, are involved in actions and make evaluations not only outside of the class but also inside of the class. Thus, in the AoA, a project is not viewed as an individual assignment to be carried out at home. It is a complex social action designed, realized (in steps) and evaluated with a certain level of autonomy and collectivity, a complex social action which not only has a linguistic dimension but an educational dimension and in which the social actors are required to use their informational competence and communication is put at the service of social action. The so-called project of the textbook *Make a poster. Give suggestions for a healthy life* does not meet the characteristics of mini-projects. Besides, the textbook authors' unsuccessful attempt to give place to pre-programmed projects at the end of each unit is also problematic in terms of the AoA. Puren (2009, 2014a, 2016, 2019b) argued that the maximum a language textbook can include in a pre-programmed manner is a mini-project since projects are chosen, designed and realized by the social actors (under the guidance of the teacher) with maximum autonomy. One reason for the misconceptualization of projects by the authors and editors of the English textbook *İngilizce 5* might be the misunderstanding of the AoA in the Turkish ELT curriculum for the primary and secondary schools of Turkey (MoNE, 2018), on the basis of which this textbook was written. The curriculum states that:

> As no single language teaching methodology was seen as flexible enough to meet the needs of learners at various stages and to address a wide range of learning styles, an eclectic mix of instructional techniques has been adopted, drawing on an action-oriented approach in order to allow learners to experience English as a means of communication, rather than focusing on the language as a topic of study (p. 3).

The curriculum sets communication as the ultimate goal of the AoA, which is certainly not true since communication in the AoA is only a means at the service of social action, and the goal of the AoA is to train social actors. Acar's (2020c, 2020d, 2020e) analyses of three English textbooks, *İngilizce 7* and *Let's Learn English* used in the seventh grades of public secondary schools in Turkey and *Count Me In* used in the twelfth grades of public high schools in Turkey, also indicated that these textbooks did not reflect the principles of the AoA just like *İngilizce 5* analyzed in this article. The English textbook *İngilizce 5* makes several mistakes that should be corrected in the future action-oriented English textbooks: Projects, in these textbooks, should not be conceptualized as individual assignments. Rather than attempting to give place to pre-programmed projects at the end of the units, the textbook units should give place to at least two mini-projects, which are variants of the same social action and which carry the characteristics of pedagogical projects as much as possible. By only focusing on final production as *İngilizce 5* did in the so-called project presented in unit 5, *Make a poster*, the textbooks should not ignore the process dimension of mini-projects. The unit objectives should not be stated only in terms of functional-notional objectives since, in the AoA, the unit is the unit of action so the primary objectives of the units should be stated in terms of social actions. The educational dimension, in mini-projects, should be reflected in the mini-project design since the mini-projects have an educational dimension besides offering situations of actional reutilization of the language contents of the textbook unit. It should be borne in mind that evaluation criteria may change depending on the mini-project, and certain criteria will be used in evaluation by the teacher, others in self-evaluation. The teacher is responsible for the evaluation of the language in the final collective productions as well as the students' participation in the project. These suggestions are relevant not only to textbook writers who intend to write action-oriented textbooks but also to curriculum developers who intend to develop English curricula based on the AoA.

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I hereby declare that the study has not unethical issues and that research and publication ethics have been observed carefully.

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