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M.A. Thesis in Teaching English as a Foreign Language -TEFL

**An Evaluation of the Iran Language Institute's Adult
Advanced English Textbooks 1 and 2**

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February 2009

In the Name of God

Declaration

I –Hedyeh Kohandel Shirazi (843743)- an M.A. student of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at the International Branch of Shiraz University, hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own research, and that I have provided exact references whenever I have quoted someone. I also declare that the topic of my research is an original one and has not been studied before. I hereby promise not to publish the findings of this research and not to make it accessible to others without the permission of Shiraz University. All rights of this research belong to Shiraz University.

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Date: February 2009

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized loop followed by a horizontal line and some smaller, less distinct markings.

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THESIS

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Dedication

To my family for their unconditional love and support throughout my life

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Abstract

An Evaluation of the Iran Language Institute's Adult Advanced English Textbooks 1 and 2

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The purpose of this study was to investigate instructors' views on the present and ideal condition of the ILI Advanced 1 and 2 books published by the organization. A questionnaire was distributed among 20 instructors at the ILI institute to gather their viewpoints on the mentioned issues. The instructors were asked to evaluate the 2 selected textbooks designed for the different levels of language proficiency. This questionnaire by Tahriri and Shahini (personal communication) was adopted by the researcher and was applied to evaluate the materials regarding their internal and external aspects. Then the data was gathered and was analyzed and compared using SPSS. The results of the analysis revealed that the mean differences for the necessity or the ideal situation regarding the general information, the theoretical consideration, organizational features and practical consideration, content of the textbooks, skills, vocabulary, activities and structure of these textbooks were all much more than the mean for the present condition according to the instructors' viewpoints. Furthermore, there were significant differences between the ideal situation and the present condition of the responses. This difference shows that the books do not meet the expectations of the instructors.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.0. Introduction

The present chapter includes the following parts. The first part presents an orientation under the heading preliminaries. The second part opens with the theoretical framework. The following part is about the objectives of the study and provides research questions. Part four deals with the significance of the study.

1.1. Preliminaries

Textbooks are an important means of teaching in the hands of teachers and an important means of learning in the hands of students. Their presence is felt nearly in every class which deals with teaching and learning. Richards (2001, pp. 1-2) mentions the advantages and disadvantages of textbooks. The advantages are as follows: 1) Providing structure and a syllabus for a program, 2) Standardizing instruction, 3) Maintaining quality, 4) Providing a variety of learning resources, 5) Being efficient, 6) Providing effective language models and input, 6) Training teachers, and 7) Being visually appealing. Regarding disadvantages, they: 1) may contain inauthentic language, 2) may distort content, 3) may not reflect student needs, 4) can deskill teachers, and 5) are expensive.

Considering their importance, they should be evaluated from time to time to be kept up-to-date and for the useless parts to be removed or changed. To make the job of evaluation easier, some frameworks have been developed (e.g. Tucker, 1975; Daoud & Celce-Murcia, 1979; William, 1983; Skierso, 1991; Sheldon, 1988; and Littlejohn, 1998, to name a few). The framework used in this study, however, is a revised checklist and criterion based on Littlejohn's framework.

The various evaluations done on textbooks, on the one hand, help us see the strengths and weaknesses of these tools and ,on the other hand, indicate the importance of textbooks being worthy of evaluated from time to time. According to Richards (2001, p.1),

Textbooks are a key component in language programs. In some situations they serve as the basis for much of the language input learners receive and the language practice that occurs in the classroom. They may provide the basis for the content of the lessons, the balance of the skills taught and the kinds of language practice the students take part in.

With Regard to textbook evaluation, many studies have been conducted, among which Yakhontova (2001) investigated the use of the US-based English for academic purposes textbook *Academic writing for graduate students* by Swales and Feak in the Ukrainian university classroom. The study concludes that a textbook whose design is based on US classroom is of some limitations when used in a Ukrainian classroom and therefore, there may be a need for modified versions of such materials designed specifically for nonnative speakers who live outside English-speaking environments. Also, Azizifar, Koosha, and Lotfi (2010) evaluated two series of ELT textbooks in Iranian high schools from 1965 to the present time using Tucker's textbook evaluation model. The results showed that the textbooks lack basic features which are necessary for the Iranian educational system.

Rahimi-Alagha (2007), also, used a modified checklist and criterion based on Littlejohn's framework developed by Tahriri and Shahini (2006) and evaluated a sample of ESP textbooks for Humanities which are published by SAMT (i.e. the organization for researching and composing university books in humanities in Iran.). The results of her study showed that there is a huge gap between the present condition of the books and the ideal situation.

Another similar study is Hajizadeh (2008) which dealt with the evaluation of the ILI pre-intermediate and High-intermediate series textbooks using the same questionnaire as in this study. He concluded that the ILI textbooks are in need of a thorough revision both in terms of the selection of the content and gradation. And finally Kirkgoz (2009) evaluated three English textbooks used for grade 4 in

Turkish state primary schools. In her study, teachers and students provided responses for a 37-item textbook scheme named Smiley Questionnaire which had been developed considering curriculum objectives. It had five components: language, subject and content, language skills, methodology and overall. Also, teachers and students were interviewed regarding textbooks. Her results indicated that the textbooks met the requirements of the criteria in the questionnaire.

Regarding textbook development, as Awasthi (2006) rightly mentions “a special care has to be taken in its preparation, selection, and or adaptation to suit to the linguistics proficiency of the learners on the one hand and their immediate and future needs on the other.” (p.9) However, evaluation is necessary for at least three reasons: 1. In situations where the teachers are allowed to have their choice of textbooks, they need to know for sure which one of the textbooks meet their requirements; 2. To keep up-to-date with current developments in the field; and 3. adapt/select materials for a given course.

The recent attempts of material developers to revise and develop new series of English text books have been intended to improve the learning of English language. Using a rather complete evaluation scheme the present study aims to do an evaluation of a the ILI Advanced one and Advanced two text books which are widely used in all ILI branches all over Iran.

1.2 Objective and significance of the study

This study intends to conduct an evaluation of the Iran Language Institute's (ILI) Adult Advanced English textbooks. The series is currently in use at the ILI branches all over Iran. In particular, the result of this study may be beneficial to English teachers, institutes and learners and specifically for the Institute. For teachers it might provide an insight into the book they use and the way they can adapt it. The studies which have been done on the subject are either old or failed to do a systematic analysis of the books. Text books are the second effective factor in every classroom after the teacher (Riazi, 2001).

A large population of Iranian EFL learners study at the ILI every year on a regular basis. Accordingly, there is a need to meet the learners' essential needs and also to provide them with the latest advances in textbook production. Such a study may provide guidelines as to the weak points and strengths of the materials. Action could be taken, afterwards to improve the content and the methodology of the books. Since most teachers in language institutes are text book oriented and the only exposure is provided via text books, the text book might play even a more important role.

Sheldon (1988) has offered several other reasons for textbook evaluation. He suggests that the selection of an ELT textbook often signals an important administrative and educational decision in which there is considerable professional, financial, or even political investment. A thorough evaluation, therefore, would enable the managerial and teaching staff of a specific institution or organization to discriminate between all of the available textbooks on the market. Moreover, it would provide for a sense of familiarity with a book's content thus assisting educators in identifying the particular strengths and weaknesses in textbooks already in use. This would go a long way in ultimately assisting teachers with making optimum use of a book's strong points and recognizing the shortcomings of certain exercises, tasks, and entire texts. As such, this study will try to find answers to the following questions:

1.3 Research Questions

- 1. Where do the ILI textbooks stand regarding the accessories?**
- 2. What is the status of the ILI textbooks regarding goals and objectives?**
- 3. How are the organizational features and practical considerations?**
- 4. What is the status of the textbooks considering their content?**
- 5. What is the condition of the textbooks in providing relevant skills?**
- 6. How is the presentation of vocabulary items in the textbooks?**
- 7. How is the presentation of structure in the textbooks?**
- 8. How is the presentation of activities in the series?**

9. What is the overall impression of the instructors with respect to the textbooks?

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The evaluation process should be systematic and is best seen as a matching exercise: matching our analyzed needs with available solutions. If this matching is to be done as objectively as possible, it is best to look at the needs and solutions separately. It would be useful to set out one criterion based on many other checklists which makes it easy for teachers to evaluate various aspects of the materials at their disposal and thus make informed decisions. Since this study is in fact, designed to evaluate some textbooks in the field of general English proficiency, it was required to apply a checklist as the underlying framework. Yarmohammadi (2005) states that different researchers such as Chastain(1971), Tucker(1975), Candeline and Breen(1979), Daud and Celce Murcia(1979), Williams(1983), Hutchinson and Waters(1987), Sheldon(1988), Skierseo(1991), Penny Ur(1996), Littlejohn(1998) and recently Amerian(1987), Kheibari(1998), Shahedi(2001), Ansari and Babae (2002) have proposed various methods and frameworks for evaluating English texts. Each one of these frameworks may have some strengths or even weak points.

Riazi (2002) has summarized and presented major evaluation schemes of 1970's, 1980's and 1990's in a useful article with an analysis of their features. Some other frameworks are also presented by: Cunnings worth (1987); McDonough and Shaw (1993), Davison (1975); and Byrd (2001). These schemes might incorporate some similar points and almost all of them warn us that they should be used according to the situation in which the course book is used and that some adaptation on them may be needed.

According to Yarmohammadi (2000), we need to apply new evaluation schemes on textbooks as the needs, goals, and situation of English teaching change over time. Hence, the revised checklist and criterion based on Littlejohn's

framework developed by Tahriri and Shahini (Personal Communication) was applied in this study.

The first part is about a general description of the textbook (what Littlejohn calls 'explicit' information about the materials) and some other questions about the existence or necessity of the teaching aids.

The second part, which is a deeper level of analysis, concerns with the theoretical considerations, organizational features and practical considerations, content, skills, vocabulary, structure, activities located in the material. In fact, the theoretical framework may be known as an integrated framework based on the checklists introduced in recent years.

As described in previous chapter, in Tucker's scheme (1975), two types of criteria are also introduced, 'internal' criteria which are language related and 'external' criteria which give a broader view of the book. Two separate scales as well serve as the basis for rating the criteria: the value scale (VS) which assigns a relative weight to each criterion and range from 0 to 5, and the Merit Scale (MS) which is used to record the evaluator's judgment on the features of the textbook against the set criteria.

Skierso's Scheme (1991) has eight main sections too, including bibliographical data, aims and goals, subject matter, exercises & activities, layout & physical make-up, and vocabulary & structure that are very similar to six main sections in the checklist used in this study.

Besides, Penny Ur's Scheme (1996) consists of a list of criteria as a general one to be applied to any language teaching text book, and two further columns including the significance of each criterion that is to be determined by the teacher before the application of the checklist and the ratings of the relevant features of a text book when one is evaluating it by applying the criteria. This is also in accordance with the division in the checklist applied in this study, and finally; Littlejohn (1998) who presents a general framework consisting of *publication* and *design* of the book under evaluation. The publication provides the textbook evaluator with some general overview of tangible or physical aspects of the material and how they appear as a complete set of book. The design of the book relates to the thinking underlying the materials. This classification can