

# Language Textbook Development: A Study on Ecological, Syntactical and Literary Perspectives

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## Abstract

*The selection or development of academic material and its effective utilization for the optimum benefits of the students plays pivotal role in educational planning. The significance of this phenomenon increases manifold in the case of foreign language teaching and learning. There are multiple factors which stand relevant and significant in the development of language textbooks. The researchers have reviewed literature for the purpose. The study has focused on ecological, syntactical and literary perspectives of language textbooks. After thorough discussion on the subject it is finally concluded that the development of language textbooks is a critical task and appropriate ecological, syntactical and literary considerations in this regard, play positive role in the development of quality language textbooks and subsequently result into better language teaching and learning.*

**Keywords:** language textbook, development, ecological, syntactical, literary, perspectives

## Introduction

Language stands significant in almost every education system all over the world where English is understood or taught. Being the international language, English occupies a very significant role in the world in general and the education system in particular. Similarly, English language holds a very crucial and developmental role in the in the educational system of Pakistan. Undoubtedly, English occupies as very significant role in the classroom instructions as well, as it is used as a medium of instructions in the classroom right from the primary education onwards. English is sole language of world literatures. All important forms of knowledge are being transmitted in English: in most of the current technological advancement, electronic development, applied scientific advancements, knowledge of research and science, and mechanical experimentation, English is used a medium of communication and correspondence. However, in Pakistan, focus on English from the perspective of *English as a language* and not as a subject has not been laid down properly.

Such failure in the academic systems is capable to be addressed and the remedy can be ensured. Solutions are easily possible when the disturbing indicators are properly



and plausibly identified in the educational system. It has also been observed that teachers and their common allies, present different sorts of reasons in their daily interaction such as: unrealistic curricula, unworkable systems, inadequate conditions, insufficient incentives, miniscule budgets, outdated methodology, low salaries, negative attitudes, societal corruption, political uncertainty, Urdu Bazaar publications, cynicism, student apathy administrative dishonesty, and inappropriate study material, to name some of them as per researchers' point of view and not to demean any one. Instead of this, the main objective is to solve the current issue in the academic context of teaching/learning and find out some possible solution.

This research is delimited to the study of the textbooks being used as the study material in the secondary schools. Selection of the suitable textbook materials for the students plays very pivotal role in the academic environment. One of the most significant features and attributes of the text material is that it has to be in line with the requirements of the social and cultural standards besides being up to the mark in the perspective of linguistic standards, so that students might be able to learn language from the material as well. The presence of the students in the class is the very basic requirement where the textbook material is used. The use of textbook material in the classrooms should be socially plausible and linguistically appropriate in order to make the whole system of knowledge transmission smooth and hassle free in the process of language learning. The linguistic cohesion, relevance, upgraded instances and functions of language and its use need to be incorporated properly that might provide the actual ground for the learners to learn English language properly.

The study underscores some of the very important principles in terms of the production of textbook materials for the non-native learners of English language through textbooks. It also highlights how language skills can be incorporated in the language materials so that the students also learn how the skills can be acquired while learning a language – English in this case. The basic concept behind the idea is that the students may be able to learn English as a language rather than merely a subject in order to pass the exam of the relevant class. It is also quite pertinent to see whether the language textbook materials are prepared as per the linguistic principles and graded accordingly. This will enable the learners to learn a language rather than simply cramming a few rules of a language. Most importantly, the students are prepared in the secondary schools in order to get maximum marks for which the cramming of certain notes is preferred that rather mars the proficiency of the students.

### **Rationale of the Study**

English plays a significant role in the education system of Pakistan. Soon after independence, when the Pakistani leaders controlled the reigns of the country, particularly, in the academic context, a lot of work was carried out on the teaching of English language. The advent of English medium schools broke the tradition during the 90s and they started teaching English from the kindergarten; however, before that English was the part of the academic endeavor from class six. It was a common practice to teach

English to the KG students even. Consequently, it was observed that the students of private schools are more expressive and vocal whereas the students of government schools are vernacular and less expressive and their language is also erroneous. It also improved the confidence level of the private school students whereas the students of government schools were found to be vice versa.

In view of this, the curriculum planners and designers, later on, planned and designed the courses in line with the requirements and needs of the students. Curriculum designers and planners decided to bring all the students at par with each other whether they are from private sector or government sector. This would serve the purpose at different levels such as confidence level of students, language proficiency and academic competence. The rationale behind this development was that it would improve the academic system of the government schools in order to develop the teachers and students' understanding in English discourse.

Teaching of English language is not possible with any reliable and authentic materials or the textbooks. It is mandatory to refer to some study material to initiate the language class as language teaching implies the classroom activities through such materials in order to reinforce the learning through different methods. It has also been proved by different researches. As Chastain (1976) identified that alongside the textbooks, certain other paraphernalia plays a significant role in language teaching and learning. Apart from the language teaching, textbooks are highly crucial in the teaching of any subject such as: Physics, Chemistry, natural or Administrative Sciences. Textbooks provide a unanimous reference to the learners and the teachers both. It serves as a model reference for the classroom practitioners as well. While focusing on language teaching, textbooks provide a wholesome view of language in itself. They reflect the language in written form which is not possible to grasp until there is a moderator for this. Another important issue is that textbooks provide only written material for language teaching. In fact, language textbooks are required to provide a world view to discover new realities and experiences (Chastain, 1976).

Another important point about language teaching is that it falls in the category of skills. Good textbooks are invested with integrated approach for the teaching of language skills. This approach results into equality of emphasis for four language skills. The language textbooks also provide the knowledge and understanding of the culture of the target language to the learners.

### **Research Questions**

Following three questions have been formulated for the present study:

- 1) What is the significance of ecological aspects in the designing of language textbook material at secondary level?
- 2) What is the significance of form and function in the development of language textbooks at secondary level?
- 3) What is the significance of literature in language textbooks at secondary level?

### **Detailed Discussion**

The comprehensive discussion on ecological, syntactical and literary aspects of language textbooks development is appended below:

#### **Ecological Aspects in Language Textbooks**

Ecology is defined as the relations and interactions between different organisms, plants and human beings (Collins Dictionary). The same concept was introduced in language as well. When a language travels from one country or culture to the other, it also leaves a specific impact upon the learners of the target language. A language traverses and carries its social and psychological meaning and connotations. Haugen's (1979) notion of ecology is similar to this one. He says that ecological aspects best suit in bilingual context. In his essay, Haugen's idea was basically a reaction to the Chomsky's idea where he states that language is decontextualized, monolithic and static energy. Ecology dates back to Charles Darwin's concept of human evolution and development of the organisms in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as identified by Fill (2017).

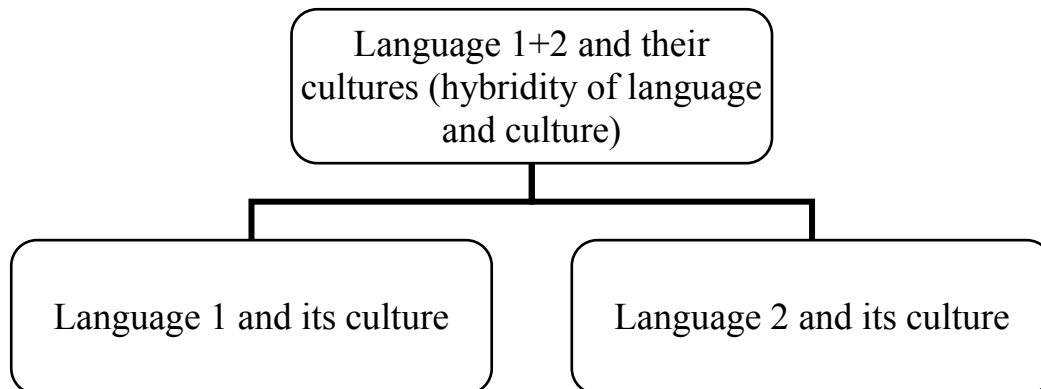
According to eco-linguistics, ecology is the study of interaction between any two given languages and their environment (of two different languages). Haugen in his second essay in 1979 defines ecology as the study of humans in their social context with reference to civilization and environment. Thus, language ecology can be defined as the exploration of language within its cultural, social, societal, individual and historical contexts and frameworks. Haugen (1972) asserted in one of his statements that the term 'Ecology' has been witnessed literature increasingly in the range of guises. However, the literature where ecological aspects are seen is more related to the cognitive development, human interaction, language policy and planning, linguistic/language diversity, evolution, language ideology, language ecology of classroom interaction as well as the ecologies of literacy and discourses. In fact, there can be an infinite world of possibilities for language ecology.

It is an untarnished truth that humans exist within their cultural bonds and cultures also differ in their exposition and display from the outer cultures. The exercises of certain cultural norms, values and practices may be liked and disliked in the other culture. The language textbooks try to bring in the cultural diversities in the lessons. If the ecological aspect is not catered for while incorporating the elements, it may be culturally inappropriate for the host culture. It usually takes place when a language invades another country through textbook materials. One of the major effects that are implicitly evidenced is that it influences the native language besides intervening the cultural values and traditions of the people of that country.

Cooke (1972) highlights the significance of cultural and ecological aspects for teachings through texts and asserts that the cultural similarities in the process of teaching other cultures, the similar traditions, values and norms must be focused in the text materials and in the classroom activities as it may attract the students' attention right from the beginning to achieve the learning objectives. This approach stresses that similarities are present in all cultures and differences in the expression of these similarities may be natural (Chastain, 1976).

It can be asserted that ecological aspect of language teaching/learning has a double effect on the individual: psychological and social. One language carries words with it to the jurisdiction of another language. These words have cultural and psychological connotations which are understood by the people of the host culture. Other language text materials may perform this double affect both on the host language and the host culture. For instance, when people are learning a language along with the cultural values that the target language has, both the cultures and languages seem being intertwined and creating another entity. In this regard, Lazar's (1993) view is very effective that when the culture of the writers of language books is not the same, teaching becomes comparatively difficult as the ecological aspects may not be incorporated as per the requisite demands.

According to Muhlhausler (2004), ecology of language is quite a significant aspect of language acquisition and learning. However, he further emphasizes that ecological approach in learning these languages may be fruitful at large. It is quite necessary that while learning non-native languages ecological aspects be considered in the expression of the language in native polity. In addition to this, the interdependence of the languages is also required to be considered in respect to syntax, semantics and cultural challenges. The nativity of language and its relation to the rest of the world has to be commensurate within its context. In this regard, culture plays a significant role. The relationship between L1 and L2 in terms of culture has been demonstrated in the following:



Languages travel in the form of materials such as: textbooks, electronic and print media, travelers etc. Textbook is one of the medium of language transportation. The transmission of languages transforms not only the language and culture of the host region but also the living style, rituals, civilization and traditions. This influence and the subsequent hybridity change in language and culture can be conducive and troublesome subject to the host perceptions and social construction of the change. It is the common interest of the people of developing and under developed countries that they want to speak international languages; however, at the same time they are interested to save their own culture and languages and do not want them to be jeopardized by certain external forces.

In this perspective, it is recommended for the language curricula designers to adhere to the academic requirements and cultural norms for the selection of the textbook materials. In terms of linguistic and language understanding, there are two major types of language teaching, English and Urdu, which are directly linked to the recognition issue. Our recognition is attached more with the British and American models and less with the Pakistani model of pedagogy in language teaching and the same may be the reason of the failure in our system. This range of variability is plainly apparent at the pragmatic level: at one extreme there are people who operate almost completely in English; at the other end stand those who have no use of English at all. This clearly reflects that appropriate direction in this regard has yet not been determined.

Owing to the dominance of such a system as mentioned above, it is quite evident that a few lucky students who have mapped out their careers and have prospects to further enhance their education, proceed on to their future career whereas the rest of the students of this stage keep wallowing around in the institutions without any clarity of why they are busy in the academic pursuit. Due to this unawareness at the levels of the learners and the teachers, the level of motivation and pursuance remains low; particularly in learning English language.

It is however, quite significant to highlight that the knowledge of the international languages especially English in this case, is pivotal and essential. However, the cultural and ecological features of a language should not distort the recipient culture, particularly when both the cultures have radical social differences. In view of the above, it is quite mandatory that the planning is reasonable, conducive and commensurate with ecological aspects and social and cultural requirements.

### **Structures and Meanings (Form and function) in the SL Textbooks**

Structures and their meanings in the second language textbooks carry special importance as they may have dual meanings and different structural patterns. Target and native languages may have different structural patterns; as a result, the structure of the target language may change and produce different meaning or become erroneous in its use. The Longman dictionary defines the term *syntax* as the “study of how words combine to form sentences and the rules which govern the formation of sentences”. However *semantics* has been defined as the “study of meaning in a language”. In other words, syntax is the way words form different structures; however, semantics can be defined as the functions (in terms of the meaning) of the structures.

In view of the above it can be asserted that mostly, the students of the target language use structures of the target language embedded in the structures of the native language (Baumgardener, 1993). As a result the meanings of those structures are quite different and they mean differently, particularly not the one intended by the non-native speaker. It is all because of the inadequate knowledge that has been given to them which is the outcome of the materials and sources provided to them by the school administration to cram in order to pass the exams of the Boards and get good marks. The futile effort leads them to get good marks and they remain unable to communicate in the target

language. This aspect has been highlighted by Harmer (2008) that the willingness of students and their orientation, why they want to learn English, is very important.

Textbook is one of the sources that help students learn language through drilling and practicing the same in the classroom in presence of the teacher and without the teacher in order to avoid ambivalence and ambiguity of meanings. Such classroom practices that are prevalent in the classrooms make students cram certain rules but the application of such activities in the daily life is hardly seen. The same has been discussed by Baker (2005) that while learning languages there is “always an essential distinction of language ability and language use that can be termed as the degree and function of a language” (p, 03). Whereas, May (2013) talks about the majority and minority languages where the major language eclipses and influences the minor language like a heavy weight boxer knocks out the low weight. Similarly the structures and syntactic patterns dominate the native language and also some structural changes may become visible in the native language.

The language teaching in Pakistan have been in practice acrobatically and traditionally where form and function had no importance. The activity is practiced conventionally by blackening the whole text through Grammar Translation Method (GTM). This practice further improves the mother tongue of the students and introduces the target language only. However, most of the language teaching takes place in the mother tongue that also hampers the learners to be proficient in the target language. The teaching of language skills is not integrated either. The integration of language skills help students grasp the main objectives of the language learning based on the correct understanding of the structural patterns of the target language. As Bloomfield (1933) categorically pointed out the need to understand the teaching and practice of the form of the language that follows:

In language, forms cannot be separated from their meaning. It would be uninteresting and perhaps not very profitable to study mere sounds of language without any consideration of meaning (p: 140).

In this regard, Chomsky’s (1975) view on language learning in terms of structures and patterns is quite important. According to him language learning is a unique human accomplishment and children usually learn through LAD that is an innate Learning Acquisition Device that helps children to learn and produce constant language patterns and structures once they have acquired some vocabulary. As per his research, language structures are the outcome of the innate human faculty; furthermore, the aim of the linguists is to determine what language properties are and constitute universal grammar in order to make the process of learning language patterns possible for the learners. In the perspective of basic rules that he developed, he established a variety of syntactic structures that were based on a simple sentence.

Similarly, Krashen (1987) also asserts that teaching of structural pattern should be carried out on the basis of natural order. That means the structures should be practiced from easy to difficult i.e. starting from the basic structures to the deeper ones. Krashen (1987) has cited many researchers such as: Makino (1980), Fathman (1975) and Duly &

Burt (1974), who have the similar opinions about teaching of syntax through the language textbooks. Particularly, when it comes to the second or foreign language learners, it is quite significant to introduce the basic structures at the beginning and then the difficult should be left for the upcoming time or higher levels. It is noteworthy to mention that there is a possibility that this natural order may not give the desired results at certain places; however, it may be conducive to language learning at many places. Piaget (1976) has the same view of teaching syntactic patterns – from easy to difficult.

However, regarding the understanding of English structures, Pittman (1963) emphasizes on the practice element of the syntactic patterns more in the classroom through the textbooks. This activity can be extraordinarily valuable for the students if the practice of the controlled structured is carried out in the social and academic situations in order to give extensive practice in English speaking and writing to the learners (1963: 179). Consequently, it can be deduced that if the textbooks of language entail the structural practices and exercises according to the natural order; the learners can improve their skills in the language otherwise; it may be merely a class to give a plethora of knowledge to the students to pass the exam.

In addition to the above, basic language structures vary in its form at different levels. For example, the English basic structure – Sub+Verb+Obj is considerably different from the Urdu structure – Sub+obj+verb. Aside from this the position of adjectives and adverbs is also different in the syntax of different languages. Therefore, the understanding on how the structures can be different in target or native languages is important to be aware of for the learners. The focus from vocabulary should shift to the correct exposition of syntactic structures. Mostly, the textbooks of language focus more on the diversity of morphological and lexical aspects. As Freeman (1986) identifies that the main focus of the language textbooks is to communicate the correct language use to the learners. As far as vocabulary is concerned, they can learn it in the later phase (p. 41). The same aspect has been emphasized by Bloomfield (1933) that students should be given more and more practice on the structural patterns and then they should be explained how these are useful in practical life. Their awareness of the basic structures can lead them to the understanding of the deeper language structures.

Not only the structural, the students also make the semantic mistakes. Of course, these semantic mistakes are the offshoot of wrong constitution of structures of a language. This usually happens when the students learn the target language through native language and try to understand the target language through the concepts of native language. In this way, they make the native language as the matrix language for learning the target language. In this context, Titone (1986) also asserts that while learning a language from the textbooks, the learners try to translate the target language in to their mother tongue to understand the concept and theme whereas they may lose the concept in target language context.

While learning English structures in Pakistani classrooms, the learners make many structural mistakes that directly affect the semantics of the language:



*It's mean you are right'. And 'my mean is  
I am agree with you.  
I will be do it.  
I am absent yesterday.  
Pakistan is one of the best country.  
Who is the incharge of this class? (Mehdi, 2009)*

It is just a glimpse of some of the syntactic and semantic violation which reflects that the language textbooks and their interpretation in the classroom still needs improvement in terms of teaching methodology and the classroom content in form of the language study materials. And also, there are some deficiencies in the content selection of the language textbooks or the methodology which is adopted to exploit the textbook in the classroom. Therefore, correct understanding of structures and their use in language is essential to be developed gradually.

Chastain (1976), in this regard, has argued that the basic cognitive structure should be focused in order to develop the language competence among the learners of a non-native language. Moreover, the basic features and elements of the language may not be mislaid. He further argues:

As soon as the students comprehend the underlying structure, they must be required to perform. Since language is basically a creative activity, they need to activate their competence in order to create the specific utterances. Textual material and the teacher produce situations that promote the creative use of language. (Chastain, 1976: 147)

The meanings of the sentences change as the change is seen in the sentence construction. For instance, the use of 'May' and 'Can' have different semantic effect in the sentences as far they are used for permission. Notwithstanding the semantic and syntactic issues, it is still indispensable to include such activities in the textbooks that are related to the syntactic and semantic construction in a proper way so that the students understand the language nuances. If language textbooks include appropriate exercises on structures it may improve the socio-pragmatic approach of the students in the correct use of language as well and this will also build up the confidence and language competence of the students.

### **Teaching Language through Literature in Textbooks**

Language teaching takes place only when some literature is available for the purpose. The language textbooks do include some sort of literature that is exploited by the teachers in the class for the teaching of language. Besides, it provides a wider perspective and perception of the world to the students exclusively. Usually, the textbooks include the content spread over short stories, plays or extracts from plays or poems etc. at secondary or higher secondary levels. The use of literature at this level does not mean the use of

literature at higher level where literary terms and aspects are discussed with the students rather it is used to acquaint students with the language nuances and its correct usage at large besides giving them the orientation of the literature itself. All these are interrelated as Barnett (1991) reflects on the use of literature that language, culture and literature are integrated and thus cannot be ghettoized or separated.

Learning language through literature increases the vision of students as well as it develops and supports their language learning. The same has been identified by Whitehead (1968) that the main objective of teaching English literature in the language class is to promote the appreciation of English language. Similarly Huck and Kuhn (1968) suggested that 'the purpose of the program should be fostering language skills, developing appreciation, and enrich the content of curriculum' (p. 687).

Some critics may question the presence of literature in the language textbooks as it may not help learn language because the literature has a language of its own. Some other ones think that teaching literature encumbers the process of language learning. These objections are answered by Widdowson (1975) and he first raises the question why people do not like the inclusion of literature in the language textbooks and classroom practices. He further reiterates that there are many people who question the relevance of literature to the practical concern of language teaching, many who regard it as an unnecessary indulgence. He also talks about some others who according to him are of less practical bent and intend to dissociate it from language study in order to preserve it like a sacred relic possessing mysterious potency. He states:

We urgently need an attitude to literature, and a teaching approach based upon it, which, while acknowledging that literature is strange and mysterious and an object of reverence, also recognizes that it is a use of language and so comparable with other uses of language; and that it is only one of the strange and mysterious ways in which human beings manage to communicate with each other. (1975: 124)

Lazar (1993) also views this phenomenon very effective in the process of language teaching to the ESL/EFL learners. She asserts that teaching of literature can help learn language and assists the process. She further says that the main objective of teaching literature in the language class can help the learners improve English language skills. It works as a motivating factor and students take interest in the language of literature and at times, they listen or read literature for the sake of enjoyment. However, the learning of a language is only possible when the language nuances are interpreted appropriately in the classroom. It may be inferred that language learning can be improved and strengthened through literature of the language textbooks.

The teaching of literature (for children at secondary level) mostly includes two major genres, that is, prose and poetry. Prose may include fiction, stories, or one-act plays, and in poetry, short and comprehensible poems may be included. However, prose

performs a crucial role in the teaching of language through literature; therefore, the selection has to be made carefully. Lazar (1993) points out that there should be selection criterion for texts such as the age of the students, their emotional and intellectual maturity, and their interests and hobbies. Widdowson (1975) argues that teaching language through literature is not all easy but it does give some meanings. He is of the view that literature can 'provide access to the culture of people whose language they are studying, this can sometimes be complicated as it is very difficult to hybrid the relation of culture and literature.

Many students studying English in their native areas as foreign/second language learners usually have partial exposure to this form of literature. Their approach remains language oriented. However, teachers and language textbooks developers own the responsibility for selection of appropriate literary material for the purpose. The ESL, EFL or EIL teachers need to integrate more training about literature into their lessons to get the maximum results, in addition to their main task of developing their students' reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills so that they could be aware of the language use in certain contexts. However, it is observed that poetry usually does not follow the language rules, but by doing so it communicates with us in a fresh and original way. Poetry is characterized as deviating from the norms of language (Widdowson, 1975: 146). The use of poetry is quite helpful in teaching the language and also in fulfilling the objectives of the curriculum in some way. Lazar points out that the teaching of poetry is not merely reading stanzas but a source of understanding language as well.

Although most ESL students may not be able to understand the poetry of Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser or Frost, however, there are many ways of introducing poetry to the learners that can ultimately boost their language skills. Syllabus designers and textbook selectors need to consider their students' language level when choosing poetry material. Conceptual comprehension and understanding of a poem depend on the how well students can understand the use of figurative and symbolic language used therein. Poetic devices (simile, metaphor, personification, etc.) used in poems can gradually be explained and elaborated at the end in the form of exercises in the textbooks where they first occur. As a result, students would understand their function. It is also important to make sure that students understand other vocabulary in order to discuss the placement of the devices in general. This approach will enable them to apply that knowledge while looking for examples in different poems or using poetic devices in writing exercises. It is, however, significant to understand that the poems should be equipped with reinforcement exercises at the end to explain why the poem is written and how it can be helpful for the learners of second language. In the perspective language we usually think that there are only four skills; however it must be considered that the thinking skills should not be forgotten. Aside from the features and advantages of teaching literature, it can develop the thinking skills of the students in addition to the enrichment of vocabulary and its use.

According to Kintgen (1983: 38) poetry reading is hard and is expected to be hard and poetry should promote the attention towards phonology, form, word, syntax, and

tone. Second language learners have to be attentive to the use of ‘striking metaphors’ ‘unusual syntax’ or ‘inventive games with punctuation’ while emphasizing the words that are central to the meaning of poetry and prose. At the end of the class or course, an oral presentation on prose and poetry may be a good opportunity for the students for the presentation and display of their language proficiency and knowledge of the subject matter.

In view of the above discussion, it is therefore, concluded that the use of literature in language class is useful and that it may increase the learners’ motivational level and develops their language understanding. Teaching literature and culture are somewhat complicated but this may be made easy with the gradual and careful selection of the literary material in accordance with the level of the students.

### **Conclusion**

Textbooks should be updated instead of adopting the old style of writing textbooks for the future generation. The ‘what’ of a textbook (the material in it) is as important as the ‘how’ (according to what linguistic principles) it is being taught. Development of the language textbooks is critical and highly significant area of language teaching and learning process. Qualified and experienced academicians are bestowed with this responsibility. These books are meant to achieve certain goals. The experts in the area utilize their expertise to select the appropriate material after certain deliberations. Language learning requires friendly environmental conditions in accordance with the level of the learners. In case of textbooks, the developers of the textbooks try to create beautiful and relevant images in the lessons to enhance interest of the learner through attractive reflections and backgrounds. This particular element offers important contribution in the process of learning. Syntax of a language is a difficult area for the learners. The input of grammatical structure is required to be managed appropriately as per the age, interest and level of the students. It is deemed to be managed in such a pattern that it increases the interest of the learners instead of distracting their attention. The selection of literary material for language textbooks is quite crucial as well as significant especially in the process of foreign language learning. Language learning through literature if managed properly can result into positive consequences for the learners. Foregone in view, it is finally concluded that ecological, syntactical and literary aspects of the language textbooks are quite significant in the process of language learning and result into positive impact for the students/learners if managed appropriately in accordance with the objectives meant to be achieved through the textbooks.

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