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How authentic is language included in English and German language textbooks for primary education in Poland? A case study

ABSTRACT. This study aims at investigating the authenticity of vocabulary and grammar structures included in two selected English language textbooks (hereafter ELTs) and two German language textbooks (hereafter GLTs) for the first stage of education in Poland. In order to achieve the assumed objective, the author examined literary materials, that is, songs, rhymes, or short stories, included in selected ELTs and GLTs in accordance with the principles of the corpus stylistics method developed, for example, by Semino & Short (2004), Mahlberg (2014), or McIntyre (2015). With the support of BYU-BNC and DWDS corpora, the performed analysis indicated, for instance, that in the case of both types of textbooks studied, the number of authentic words that children are to learn seems to be rather insufficient. The outcomes of the study enable suggesting certain modifications targeted at the increase of the authenticity of language that the analysed textbooks include.

KEYWORDS: corpus stylistics method, early school education in Poland, English language textbooks, German language textbooks, literary materials in textbooks.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the Polish *Core Curriculum* (2014)[1], the objectives of teaching foreign languages to pupils at the level of early school education include making them cognizant of both the plurilingualism and the fact that they need to learn them if they want to communicate with foreigners (MEN 2014: 7). Arguably, in order to be capable of making meaningful contacts in

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[1] *The Core Curriculum* of 2014 was still valid at the time of writing this paper.

the future, children should be taught as authentic language as possible. As Bogucka (2014: 17) claims, lexical items and functions that the Polish pupils are expected to master by the end of the first stage of education "are inspired by authentic language used by their peers in English-speaking countries"[2].

It should be highlighted that although certain Polish scholars, including Komorowska (e.g., 2008), Iluk (e.g., 2012), or Stec (e.g., 2016), have published studies into teaching foreign languages at the level of primary school that referred to, for instance, methodology, official recommendations, foreign language lessons, or designing syllabi, they have not examined specifically the authenticity of language included in textbooks. Hence, the aim of the present research is to investigate the extent to which vocabulary and grammar structures that some English language textbooks (hereafter ELTs) and German language textbooks (hereafter GLTs) contain can be regarded as authentic.

The research questions that the study attempts to answer are as follows:

1) To what extent can the analysed material be perceived as authentic?
2) What is the difference between the examined ELTs and GLTs with regard to the authenticity of the language they include?
3) What can be done in order to make the examined material more authentic?

In order to achieve the assumed objective, the author analysed literary materials, that is, songs, rhymes, or short stories, included in selected ELTs and GLTs in accordance with the principles of corpus stylistics method that were the subject of the publications by Leech and Short (1987), Semino & Short (2004), Stubbs (2005), Ho (2011), Mahlberg (e.g., 2014), Hoover et al. (2014), or McIntyre (e.g., 2015), to mention a few.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The present research concentrated on literary materials included in selected ELTs and GLTs owing to the fact that, according to the report *Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe* published by Eurydice and the European Commission, more than 90% of students in Poland "learn English from the first grade until their school graduation" (2017: 73). Even though the second most popular foreign language at European schools is French, it is not so popular in the Central European countries, for instance in the Czech Republic or Poland. Instead, it is German that is commonly taught there (2017: 73–74).

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[2] Translation mine.

Examining specifically literary materials in this study can be justified by the fact that, according to Komorowska (2002: 29), listening to stories, fairytales, or songs facilitates children's learning of a foreign language. Thus, it can be hypothesised that the more authentic language these elements comprise, the more authentic language pupils learn. Moreover, as Bogucka (2014: 18) advances, presenting new lexical items in class at this level should be done by means of a "story, play, rhyme, or song"[3]. The same elements can be used for reinforcing pupils' knowledge of lexis and grammar structures (2014: 24–25). This point is corroborated by Studzińska et al. (2015: 17) with regard to short plays and their significant role in putting new words and structures in context. The same statement is made by Rapacka (2012: 21). Bogucka points out to a close connection between learning vocabulary and grammar structures by children between six and nine years old, as well (2014: 18). It allows regarding these issues as equally essential and, thus, subjecting both of them to the analysis. Aside from this, Studzińska et al. (2015: 16) state that, at this age, grammar should be taught with the use of "numerous examples and repetitions in the form of various activities"[4], which also makes the aforementioned literary materials appropriate for this purpose.

With regard to the selected method of analysis, it should be underlined that until the present time (that is, 2018), corpus stylistics method has been widely used for studying literary works by the scholars mentioned in the introduction. Yet, applying it to the present study appears to be justified too. Despite the fact that songs, short stories, rhymes, and plays that ELTs and GLTs contain are rather abridged or simplified due to cognitive constrains of pupils' stage of development, it can be argued that they are still literary pieces. Furthermore, they sometimes have their source in literary canons of the countries the official language of which children are taught.

Importantly, certain features of corpus stylistics method described by such academics as Carter (2010), Biber (2011) or Mahlberg (2007; 2014), make it apparently suitable for investigating the authenticity of texts. What is vital, this method involves two kinds of corpora: a target and a comparison one (Biber 2011: 16). The former contains lexical items included in the examined texts, whereas the latter is more general and serves the purpose of demonstrating common words/expressions in use (2011: 16). As Wynne (2005: 3) claims, utilising an extensive corpus in a stylistic study enables examining "literary effects in texts by using the evidence of language norms in a reference corpus. These effects can often be described as deviations from the norms of language use" (www.pala.ac.uk). Therefore, it can be put forward that by

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[3] Translation mine.
[4] Translation mine.

comparing language used in texts with the linguistic data collated in the more general corpus, it is feasible to study the level of authenticity of the former.

What is more, as Carter (2010: 42) puts forward, corpus stylistics method is "an essentially quantitative procedure and involves an assessment of significance drawn statistically from a corpus-informed count", which is supported by qualitative analysis and the author's own interpretation of the gained results. It is crucial in the present research, as well.

It is worth indicating that under the umbrella of the corpus stylistics method, three types of analyses are conducted. These are "'keyword' analysis, identifying typical extended lexical phrases, and collocational analysis" (Biber 2011: 17). The first term describes "words which are usually frequent (or infrequent) in a text as compared to the reference corpus" (Mahlberg 2007: 223). They include "proper nouns, content words that give an indication of the aboutness of the text, and function words" (2007: 223). By contrast, collocations concern words frequently appearing together, whereas "extended lexical phrases" stand for "repeated sequences of words" (2007: 223, 225). The latter can also be called "clusters" (2007: 225), "ngrams", and "lexical bundles" (Biber et al. 1999; after Mahlberg 2007: 225). Significantly, the longer clusters are, the more individual feature of the text they constitute and vice versa (2007: 228). For the purpose of the following study, all three types of analyses will be utilised.

It is essential that corpus stylistics method is supposed to be concentrated on examining stylistic features of texts and selecting the key points of the research is dependent on the scholar conducting it. Mahlberg (2007: 221) invokes the examples of categories given by Leech and Short (1981), who suggested, for instance, scrutinizing the "number of adjectives in a text, (…) the predominance of simple sentences, [or] the fact that nouns tend to be postmodified by prepositional phrases". Mahlberg (2007: 222) also underscores that another scholar, Masahiro Hori, in his corpus-driven investigation devoted to stylistic features of Dicken's works, rejected functional words and other types of high-frequency items that, in his opinion, did not influence the writer's style. In the case when a scholar does not intend to concentrate on any specific units, a corpus-driven analysis can indicate promising targets (Mahlberg 2014: 384), which can be useful in the following analysis too.

3. THE ANALYSED MATERIAL AND THE CORPORA

The subject of the present study are literary materials, that is, stories, short plays, rhymes and the lyrics of the songs included in four textbooks for third-grade pupils of primary schools: two for the German language, namely

ABC Deutsch 3 (2014) and *Ich und du 3* (2015); and two for the English language, that is *New English adventure 3* (2015) and *Super sparks 3* (2016).

The selection of these particular textbooks has been dictated by a few factors. First of all, they are all targeted at third-grade pupils, which allows assuming that they contain the broadest range of material for the analysis at this stage of education. Secondly, each of these publications claims to include numerous songs, chants, and stories facilitating learning new lexical items (http://www.wszpwn.com.pl, http://www.pearson.pl/, the back cover of *Super sparks 3*). Aside from that, vocabulary in *New English adventure* is said to be presented in a "natural communicative context" (http://www.pearson.pl/), while the main objective of *Ich und du* is "preparing pupils for understanding and communicating in German"[5] (http://www.wszpwn.com.pl). Moreover, it is highlighted that *ABC Deutsch* "refers to children's environment"[6] (http://www.wszpwn.com.pl).

In terms of the utilized corpora, it ought to be emphasised that the target one, that is the one containing language used in the literary materials in the textbooks, was created thanks to Wordlist Tool available in WebCorp – an electronic corpus founded by Birmingham City University. This device enables uploading the analysed text and displaying the words included in it with regard to the frequency of their occurrence (http://www.webcorp.org.uk). Moreover, it allows determining the length of the ngrams (up to 5 words) and examining the text from such a perspective.

Finding the reference corpus was more challenging, since it was essential to utilise two separate ones for two different kinds of the investigated textbooks. In order to achieve the purpose of this study, the corpora were supposed to be possibly the most objective sources of data. For this reason, they were to be extensive and containing as many authentic texts as possible. In the course of research, two reference corpora apparently meeting these conditions were finally chosen: for ELTs – Birmingham Young Univeristy–Bristish National Corpus (hereafter BYU–BNC) created originally by Oxford University Press; and for GLTs – Digitale Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache des 20. Jahrhunderts–Kernkorpus 21 (hereafter DWDS) created by Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. These corpora are possibly the largest and the most widely-recognized databases, owing to the fact that the former includes "100 million words of text texts from a wide range of genres (e.g. spoken, fiction, magazines, newspapers, and academic)" (http://corpus.byu.edu/bnc/), whereas the latter contains 15 462 297 tokens found in academic, fictional, and newspaper texts (http://www.dwds.de/r).

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[5] Both translations mine.

[6] Translation mine.

4. THE METHODOLOGY

The present research was conducted in a few steps:

Step 1: Literary materials, that is, stories/short plays, songs, and rhymes, included in the four textbooks, were selected.

Step 2: The content of the selected literary materials was uploaded to Word-list Tool in WebCorp. The minimum frequency was established at 1 and ngram size at 1 word in order to analyse keywords. High-frequency functional words, like "the" or "a" were excluded from the analysis. No particular keywords were chosen preliminarily, but it was the author's intention to conduct corpus analysis to identify relevant items for further examination. The input was computed.

Step 3: The procedure from Step 2 was repeated for 2-, and 4-ngrams in order to analyse the authenticity of potential collocations and extended phrases.

Step 4: The words/phrases for further comparison with the reference corpora were selected from the obtained lists. The so-called *hapax legomena*, that is, words/phrases occurring only once in the investigated material, as well as the names of the characters in the textbooks were excluded from the investigation. Moreover, the instructional significance of the indicated words/phrases was determined with the support of the lists of lexical items and grammar structures provided in the curricula for teaching English and German. The former were published by Bogucka (2014), Kębłowska (2014), and Studzińska et al. (2015), whereas the latter by Rapacka (2012). It should be underscored that although the utilised curricula for teaching English seem to be more detailed, their content corroborates with Rapacka's publication. The range of the vocabulary that pupils are expected to master by the end of the third grade includes such topics as family members, daily activities, school, festivals, health, weather conditions, or house (Rapacka 2012: 15; Bogucka 2014: 18; Kębłowska 2014: 8; Studzińska et al. 2015: 15–16).

With regard to grammar structures, they are enlisted only in the curricula used for teaching English and embrace, among others, "to be", "have got", "can", "there is/are", or questions with "it" (Bogucka 2014: 19; Kębłowska 2014: 9; Studzińska et al. 2015: 16). By contrast, Rapacka claims that the grammar structures taught need to be the most basic ones (2012: 10) and children should learn them implicitly (2012: 21). Yet, on the basis of the provided scenarios (e.g., 2012: 30, 51–54), it can be argued that they are similar to these covered in the English language lessons.

Step 5: The selected words/phrases were searched in the reference corpora and the obtained results were collated in tables.

Step 6: The achieved outcomes were interpreted by the author in view of the applied theoretical background, which enabled providing answers to the research questions posed.

5. THE ANALYSIS

The following section presents the analysis performed in accordance with the steps described in Section 4 of this paper. The numbers of the examined texts in particular textbooks are demonstrated in Table 1.

The following tables show the results of the study in accordance with the number of ngrams as well as their frequency and the percentage share in the target corpus. The last column demonstrates the frequency of a given word/phrase in the respective reference corpus. The present author's objective was to demonstrate six most frequent words/phrases in each category, owing to the fact that in the majority of cases the frequency of the subsequent outcomes in the target corpus was too low to be considered statistically significant. If fewer words/phrases are indicated in tables, it means that the subsequent positions on the list were already regarded as minor.

Table 2 demonstrates the results of the analysis of lexical items in the ELTs. All the examined texts consist of 483 types and 1675 tokens in terms of keywords, 1091 types and 1674 tokens with respect to collocations, and 1457 types and 1673 tokens in relation to extensive phrases comprising 4 ngrams. Visibly, WebCorp regards contractions as one lexical item.

Table 1. Number of the examined texts

Textbook	Songs	Rhymes	Stories/short plays
English adventure 3	9	–	9
Super sparks 3	12	6	19
Ich und du 3	7	1	3
ABC Deutsch 3	8	4	6

Noticeably, even when certain keywords are recurrent, such as "I'm", "it's", and "look", their frequency remains at the level of 2–4%, which is seemingly not high and it can prove that the texts abound in various lexical items. However, the basic ones reappear throughout the textbooks, possibly in order to strengthen the memory trace. In the reference corpus, the rating differs as "it's" is the most frequent. It can be caused by the fact that this keyword can stand for "it is" or "it has". Similarly, "got", which is the third

Table 2. Lexical items in the examined ELTs

Number of ngrams	Indicated word(s)	Freq. in target corpus	Percentage in target corpus	Freq. in reference corpus
Keywords – 1 ngram	I'm	75	4.48%	61 855
–	it's	72	4.30%	125 310
–	look	37	2.21%	51 549
–	don't	26	1.55%	92 334
–	there's	19	1.13%	31 836
–	got	19	1.13%	89 430
Collocations – 2 ngrams	Be careful	5	0.30%	1 097
–	Do karate	4	0.24%	5
–	Tree house	4	0.24%	25
Extended lexical phrases – 4 ngrams	Yes I am I am	11	0.66%	1
–	Sizzling in a pan	9	0.54%	0
–	I want to buy	8	0.48%	29
–	I want to live	8	0.48%	37

most frequent word in BYU–BNC among the indicated ones, can be related to "have" or the past form of "get". Furthermore, the distinguished keywords imply that pupils using the examined textbooks are relatively often exposed to contracted forms of verbs. Judging by the frequency of these forms in the corpus, children seem to be taught to a certain extent authentic and natural language.

Another conclusion from the data analysis is that collocations could scarcely be found in the list provided by WebCorp. It is particularly compelling as it could be assumed that children are expected to learn words in chunks and a greater number of fixed phrases should be provided in the textbooks. "Be careful" can be perceived as authentic, since its frequency in BNC is relatively high. Yet, the other two collocations are almost absent from the reference corpus.

With regard to 4-ngram phrases, it can be noticed that, owing to their specificity, their frequency in the reference corpus is low. However, the structure "I want to (do)" can be regarded as authentic.

Table 3 demonstrates the results of the analysis of lexical items in the GLTs. All the examined texts consist of 230 types and 1329 tokens in terms of keywords, jointly with 150 types and 482 tokens related to extensive phrases comprising four ngrams. It should be highlighted that collocations have were not included in the chart as the research indicated that the majority of the 2-ngram phrases recurrent in the texts evaluated cannot be identified as

collocations. It is due to the fact that they mainly consist of a pronoun and a verb, for instance, "Ich bin" (18 types), "Wir drehen" (12 types), or "Ich muss" (11 types). Hence, it can be put forward that they represent grammar structures typical of the analysed material.

Table 3. Lexical items in the examined GLTs

The number of ngrams	Indicated word(s)	Freq. in target corpus	Percentage in target corpus	Freq. in reference corpus
Keywords – 1 ngram	ich	99	7.45%	39 530
–	ist	64	4.82%	41 380
–	wir	34	2.56%	12 122
–	uns	25	1.88%	7 493
–	alle	23	1.73%	5 368
–	bin	19	1.43%	3 108
Collocations – 2 ngrams	–	–	–	–
Extended lexical phrases – 4 ngrams	und wir drehen uns	12	2.49%	0
–	hast du meinen Bruder	11	2.28%	0
–	ich muss ihn weiter	10	2.07%	0
–	tritt ein Tritt ein	8	1.66%	0
–	lach und mach Krach	7	1.45%	0
–	wie geht es dir	6	1.24%	16

Noticeably, the most frequent item in the target corpus is "ich" (Eng. "I"), whereas the next positions are occupied by "ist" (Eng. is) (4.82%), and "wir" (Eng. we) (2.56%). When compared with the content of DWDS, two changes in the order of the items can be pointed out to; namely, "ist" appears more often than "ich" in the reference corpus. Nonetheless, in this section, no more serious deviations from the authentic language included in the corpus can be observed.

Taking into consideration extended lexical phrases comprising 4 ngrams, it is visible that they make the analysed texts unique for the sake of the fact that five out of six distinguished phrases do not appear in DWDS. It can be advanced that a potential reason for their absence from the reference corpus can be their connotation with fun and games. Importantly, the only phrase that is present both in the examined texts and in the selected corpus is "Wie gest es dir" (Eng. how are you) and it is probably due to its universal and neutral character.

Table 4. Structures in the examined ELTs

The number of ngrams	Indicated word(s)	Freq. in target corpus	Percentage in target corpus	Freq. in reference corpus
Keywords – 1 ngram	I'm	75	4.48%	61 855
–	it's	72	4.30%	125 310
–	don't	26	1.55%	92 334
–	there's	19	1.13%	31 836
–	he's	13	0.78%	31 720
–	where's	13	0.78%	2 320
Extended lexical phrases – 2 ngrams	I don't	20	1.19%	36 698
–	I want	17	1.02%	9 203
–	I've got	9	0.54%	8 746
–	I'm hungry	8	0.48%	65
–	it's got	7	0.42%	1 868

Table 4 demonstrates the results of the analysis of grammar structures in the ELTs. All the examined texts consist of 483 types and 1675 tokens in terms of keywords, together with 1091 types and 1674 tokens in relation to extensive phrases comprising 2 ngrams. Moreover, it ought to be explained that no longer phrases have been examined as the investigation has revealed that structures consisting of two items are the longest that the pupils are to be taught.

On the basis of the results obtained, it can be advanced that the examined textbooks include the main structures enlisted in the afore-mentioned

Table 5. Structures in the examined GLTs

The number of ngrams	Indicated word(s)	Freq. in target corpus	Percentage in target corpus	Freq. in reference corpus
Keywords – 1 ngram	–	–	–	–
Extended lexical phrases – 2 ngrams	ich bin	18	2.15%	566
–	ich muss	12	1.43%	48
–	ich habe	8	0.96%	578
–	wie ist	8	0.96%	24
–	ich gehe	6	0.72%	38
–	das ist	6	0.72%	1 418

curricula for teaching English, with "I'm" and "it's" dominating the remaining items. These structures together with "don't" can also be regarded as the most authentic. Visibly, all the keywords in Table 4 are quite common in BNC, although "where's" is far less frequent in comparison with other structures.

Table 5 demonstrates the results of the analysis of grammar structures in the GLTs. All the examined texts consist of 239 types and 837 tokens in relation to extensive phrases comprising 2 ngrams. No keywords regarding grammar structures could be distinguished as one item is not sufficient to build a structure in German.

All the indicated phrases appear to be fairly authentic. Noticeably, two structures dominate in the texts, namely "Ich bin" (Eng. I am) and "Ich muss" (Eng. I must/I have to). However, the reference corpus shows that these are "das ist" (Eng. it is), "ich habe" (Eng. I have) and only then "ich bin" (Eng. I am) that can be perceived as the most authentic.

6. CONCLUSION

Having presented the outcomes of the performed analysis, it is possible to answer the research questions posed in the introduction.

1) To what extent can the analysed material be perceived as authentic?

With regard to lexical items, the great majority of the indicated keywords included in the examined ELTs and GLTs appear to be relatively authentic, most probably due to their universal character. As shown above, in the case of the former textbooks, these are basic contracted forms, whereas in the latter ones, these are mainly pronouns. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that they are quite repetitive and it was challenging to find more than six keywords, the frequency of which would allow using them in this study. Therefore, in the case of both analysed types of textbooks, the number of authentic words that children are to learn seems to be rather insufficient. Moreover, it can be argued that the analysed ELTs and GLTs lack authentic collocations and chunks, even though they can be useful while teaching children foreign languages.

2) What is the difference between the examined ELTs and GLTs with regard to the authenticity of language they include?

In Table 1, it can be noticed that the target corpus of the selected GLTs is smaller than the one created on the basis of the ELTs, especially in terms of stories/short plays. Although the percentage share of authentic keywords in the category of lexical items is higher in the GLTs than in the ELTs, the former apparently lack authentic collocations and more extended phrases.

When grammar structures in the analysed textbooks are to be compared, the study reveals that the examined ELTs offer a larger variety in this respect. It has possibly been caused by the fact that contracted forms are treated by WebCorp as one word and, thus, it was possible to distinguish both 1- and 2-ngram phrases, which could not be done in the case of the GLTs. Still, it is observable that the former include examples of both affirmative and negative phrases as well as questions, whereas the latter appear to expose the first type predominantly, which can be perceived as less authentic.

3) What can be done in order to make the examined material more authentic?

The outcomes of the study enable suggesting certain modifications aiming at increasing the authenticity of the language that the analysed textbooks include. For instance, (1) it could be useful to add to the GLTs more stories/short plays. It would enhence the authenticity of the language included in these textbooks. Furthermore, it could enable utilising in them a greater variety of grammar structures so that a more equal balance between the forms was maintained. In addition, if it is recommendable for children to learn language in chunks, (2) the authors of ELTs and GLTs could pay more attention to collocations and more extended lexical phrases – not only would it be good to use more of them in textbooks, but also to make them more authentic. It could be achieved, for example, thanks to working with more authentic sources or corpora while writing textbooks. Arguably, pupils could benefit from it both at the further stages of education and in the real communication in the future.

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