How can young learners' speaking proficiency be developed?
An analysis of speaking activities in selected English language textbooks for early school education in Poland

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Abstract

The aim of the following paper is to analyse speaking activities included in selected English language textbooks for early school education in Poland in order to provide a view of the manner in which this particular language skill is developed at this level of education. Significantly, in the research, the author makes an attempt to apply the provisions of complex systems theory that leads her not only to determine the specific contexts in which she places the language material present in the scrutinized textbooks, but also to create a checklist for evaluating them. In the conducted analysis, both the quantity and the quality of the encountered activities are taken into consideration. Consequently, it is possible to describe the way in which young learners' speaking proficiency is increased in the analysed textbooks, check whether speaking activities are integrated with the selected contexts and indicate potential problems that can be noticed in this respect.

Key words

complex systems theory in applied linguistics, early school education, English language textbooks, speaking activities, young learners

W jaki sposób może być rozwijana sprawność mówienia w języku obcym u dzieci? Analiza ćwiczeń w wybranych podręcznikach do nauki języka angielskiego dla edukacji wczesnoszkolnej w Polsce

Abstrakt

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przeprowadzenie analizy zadań zorientowanych na doskonalenie sprawności mówienia w języku obcym zawartych w wybranych podręcznikach do nauki języka angielskiego dla uczniów klas I-III SP używanych w polskich placówkach, aby zbadać sposób, w jaki umiejętność ta jest rozwijana na tym konkretnym etapie edukacyjnym. Warto zaznaczyć, że autorka podejmuje próbę zastosowania założeń teorii systemów złożonych, aby osiągnąć zamierzony cel. Początkowo autorka opisuje podstawowe założenia tej teorii i wykorzystuje je, aby zidentyfikować konteksty, w jakich wybrany typ zadań może zostać osadzony, a następnie przedstawia ułożoną na tej podstawie listę kontrolną, według której są analizowane wybrane podręczniki, zarówno pod względem ilościowym jak i jakościowym. W końcowej części tekstu autorka przedstawia wyniki przeprowadzonego badania, które umożliwiło przybliżenie sposobu, w jaki sprawność mówienia w j. angielskim jest rozwijana u uczniów klas I-III SP z wykorzystaniem ćwiczeń zawartych w wybranych podręcznikach, sprawdzenie, na ile zadania te są zintegrowane z kontekstami, w których autorka zdecydowała się je osadzić oraz wskazanie potencjalnych problemów w tym zakresie wymagających szczególnej uwagi.

Słowa kluczowe

ćwiczenia zorientowane na doskonalenie sprawności mówienia, edukacja wczesnoszkolna, młodsi uczniowie, podręczniki do nauki języka angielskiego, teoria systemów złożonych w lingwistyce stosowanej

1. Introduction

Nowadays, it is observable that several important documents determining the manner in which English is taught in early school education as well as academic papers concerning the topic recommend the development of pupils' speaking abilities at the initial stages, especially in the first and the second year, whereas only in the third year of primary school, are teachers expected to pay attention to the improvement of all four skills, that is listening, reading, speaking, and writing (for instance, European Commission 2012: 5; MEN 2014: 67; Studzińska et al. 2015: 11; Szpotowicz, http://www.bc.ore.edu.pl, 5). In addition to this, in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (*CEFR*), the Council of Europe (2001: 9) promotes the Communicative Approach as one of the leading approaches towards foreign language education and, importantly, it is focused on developing communication abilities (Savignon 2007: 209). Noticeably, Hanna Komorowska corroborates this view as she claims that owing to significant improvements in transport and means of communication, "the ability to speak a foreign language fluently has become the measure of success" (2002: 148, translation mine). Hence, the author of the following paper has decided to analyse selected English language textbooks (hereafter ELTs) utilised in early school education in Poland to determine the manner in which the official recommendations have been put into practice.

2. Theoretical background

The analysis of textbooks described in this paper is based on the provisions of complex systems theory, since, arguably, the content of ELTs for early school education is influenced not only by one factor, but a number of them that are connected with each other and, thus, can be perceived as elements of a system, which complies with the definition of a complex system provided by Diane Larsen-Freeman and Lynne Cameron

(2008: 26), who claim that it is "a system with different types of elements [...] which connect and interact in different and changing ways". Although this theory was primarily introduced to the field of exact science by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in 1968 (2008: 2), Larsen-Freeman and Cameron have also described examples of the application of this theory to the study of language, particularly its evolution, both in first and second language acquisition, the analysis of discourse, and situations in the classroom in language classes. According to Larsen-Freeman (1997 quoted in Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008: 4), "[c]omplexity theory deals with the study of complex, dynamic, non-linear, self-organizing, open, emergent, sometimes chaotic, and adaptive systems". Furthermore, "context" is a crucial notion in this theory as it is "not separate from the system, but part of it and its complexity" (2008: 34).

What can be noticed is that ELTs have not yet been examined in light of this idea; nevertheless, the author of this paper sees potential for conducting such research, since she believes that language utilized in ELTs in the form of activities can be regarded as a complex system – one which is located, among others, in the normative as well as developmental-psycholinguistic contexts.[1] What is worth emphasising is that the author has decided to name the latter context "developmental-psycholinguistic" because, first of all, it constitutes a reference to developmental psycholinguistics and secondly, because Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (Larsen-Freeman 2002, 2007 in 2008: 93) claim that "complexity theory encourages an integrative approach", as in the case of the "sociocognitive approach" described by them (2008: 92-93). Thus, the author sees an analogy between this example and the above presented idea which consists of two seemingly closely related concepts.

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[1] It needs to be highlighted that more contexts could be distinguished in this case. However, the ones aforementioned have been selected by the author of this paper due to their apparent importance and limits of space.

The hypothesis that the language included in ELTs can be regarded as "dynamic" is based on the statement made by Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008: 199) for the authors indeed advance the idea that "'language is dynamic'. [...] [E]ven if a frozen or stabilized version of the language is used in a syllabus, grammar book, and test, as soon as the language is 'released' into the classroom or into the minds of learners it becomes dynamic". Hence, it can be argued that it is possible to perceive language included in ELTs as dynamic due to the fact that each attempt to fulfil the given tasks, particularly those aimed at developing pupils' speaking abilities, influences the manner in which this language is used. What is important to note is that according to Juarez Lopes Jr. (2015: 15), "the task phase can be nonlinear, unpredictable, chaotic, adaptive, complex and sensitive to initial conditions". Even though the scholar investigated the aforementioned task phase in the classroom environment, while the students were involved in a speaking activity, it can be remarked that all activities conducted in lessons have a particular source, which can also be a textbook. In addition, any modification in the control parameters that can be found in the relevant contexts may have a profound impact on the linguistic aspect of textbooks. For instance, within the normative context, these could be changes introduced to (1) international recommendations, or (2) the Polish guidelines, including the *Core curriculum for general education* and selected curricula for teaching English. By contrast, it can be hypothesised that the developmental-psycholinguistic context entails (3) the manner in which a foreign language is acquired by children as well as, to some extent, (4) the developmental stage of children aged between 6 and 10. Therefore, any new idea put forward in these areas could influence language utilised in textbooks too.

In the following sections of the paper, all the above-mentioned factors are characterised. Significantly, scrutinising their descriptions has led the author to create a checklist for evaluating selected ELTs in terms of the manners in which

they aim at developing pupils' speaking skills. In the conducted analysis, the author focuses on both the quantity and the quality of activities.

3. State-of-the-art

Initially, it is worth indicating that in 2012, Krystyna Drożdział-Szelest and Mirosław Pawlak (2012: 360) advanced the idea that "[t]he absence of studies [in Poland] focusing upon vocabulary, pragmatics, speaking and listening is conspicuous". Moreover, it can be argued that Polish open access repositories lack papers devoted to the analysis of textbooks, which was proved in research carried out by the author of this article in March 2016, the aim of which was to determine the quantity and quality of academic works, such as MA theses, PhD dissertations, or papers examining ELTs used in Polish early school education. In the study, the author concentrated on investigating fields in which such analyses have been performed as well as perspectives, methods and techniques adopted by scientists in their papers. It is worth mentioning that apart from the repositories of Polish universities, the author also searched through the resources offered by the Pomeranian Digital Library and Digital Libraries Federation.

Importantly, the only article that was found to comply with the topic of this paper is the one published by Janina Duszyńska in 2014. In her work, Duszyńska describes the outcomes of the research she carried out on four selected ELTs utilised in Polish schools and printed at different times: these are *SNAP Stage 3* from 1985, *Chatterbox PUPIL'S BOOK 2* from 1992, *Chatterbox PUPIL'S BOOK 4* from 1997, and *New BINGO 3a* from 2007. The research posed the question whether the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women influenced the manner of presenting men and women in textbooks for foreign language education in early years of primary school after the year 1995 (Duszyńska 2014: 61). What is noticeable is that the paper concerns gender stud-

ies and, as Duszyńska claims (2014: 65), she adopted a "qualitative strategy, in accordance with ethnographic, comparative research" (translation mine). Moreover, to examine the selected textbooks, she searched through secondary sources and conducted a quantitative, rhetorical, and semantic analysis of the texts (2014: 67).

Despite the fact that certain Polish scholars, including Jan Iluk and Maria Stec, have published studies into teaching children foreign languages at the level of pre- and primary school that referred to, among others, methodology, official recommendations, foreign language lessons, or designing syllabi, they did not scrutinize ELTs for early school education specifically. What this section demonstrates is that hardly any publication relevant to the subject of the present paper can be found and if any exists, it does not apply the provisions of complex systems theory.

4.   The normative context

First of all, the elements of the normative context suggested above are to be analysed as it can be argued that these are legal regulations that have a substantial impact on the content of ELTs owing to the fact that no textbook is supposed to be printed if it does not comply with the valid requirements.

4.1. European recommendations

What needs to be explained initially is that even though the *CEFR* is regarded as the basis for foreign language education in Europe, apart from the Communicative Approach (hereafter CA), which has been promoted in recent years by European institutions and also in the *CEFR* (2009: 9) as one of the leading approaches towards teaching foreign languages, other guidelines offered by the document are not analysed in the present paper, since in summer 2016, when this article was written, no specific descriptors for young learners were includ-

ed there. Importantly, they were issued for public consultation only in autumn 2016 and for the time being, they have not been officially added to the *CEFR*.

With regard to CA, it is worth indicating that Sandra Savignon (2002: 22) challenges the commonly held belief that this approach is related only to speaking exercises. What is more, according to the author, the forms of work used within CA are not limited only to pair and group tasks (2002: 22), which can frequently be associated with developing students' speaking skills. As Savignon (2002: 2) reminds her readers, what seems to be the most crucial purpose of applying CA to language teaching is to provide learners with the "ability to use language in a social context" since in this case language is perceived as "social behaviour," as defined by Dell Hymes. Hence, for the scholar, communicative competence stands for "the ability of classroom learners to interact with other speakers," which she differentiates from their capability to produce speeches individually (2002: 3). It is worth mentioning too that to achieve the anticipated goal, various activities aimed at provoking interactions between learners are supposed to be incorporated in the course of lessons (2002: 3). In addition, the emphasis is put on the development of "functional language" (2002: 4). Nevertheless, it ought to be remembered that concentrating on developing learners' communicative competence does not mean that the remaining competences, for instance using grammar in a correct way, can be neglected (Lightbown and Spada 1993; Ellis 1997 quoted in Savignon 2002: 7).

Another important publication that ought to be taken into account while investigating this manner of increasing young learners' speaking proficiency is entitled *the Nuremberg recommendations on early foreign language learning* (2011). Although its origins date back to 1996, it has been modified over the years, depending on prevailing trends in foreign language education. This is an indication of its value as well as up-to-date character. It is noteworthy that the *Nuremberg recommendations* concern young learners specifically. As its editors

state (2011: 30), while teaching children a foreign language, particular attention is to be paid to "an appropriate [...] heard and spoken language" due to the pupils' stage of development. What is apparent in this case is the blending of the two contexts distinguished in the present paper; namely, the authors of official guidelines are supposed to produce them with a view to children's needs and capabilities.

Moreover, as has already been mentioned, the document highlights the significance of improving pupils' communicative skills, which occurs thanks to an appropriate "content, linguistic form and methodology of all inputs" (2011: 25). Interestingly, the authors are not so focused on describing the potential manner of eliciting speaking from pupils, but of practising their pronunciation instead, for they claim that "the special ability shown by children in the field of pronunciation should be fostered discriminatingly and intensively, particularly through the use of authentic audio materials" (2011: 25). What appears to be essential in the excerpt above is that the authors underline the vital role of high-quality input in foreign language education that can be ensured, for instance, by the use of authentic materials. Significantly, the same point is repeated in the document twice (2011: 25, 28).

Having analysed the available European guidelines concerning the teaching of foreign languages to children, it can be observed that their scope is rather general and although they promote CA in education, they provide few specific tips on practising it as it is supposed to be the primary function of the national curricula. It can be argued that the European documents only demonstrate the recommended trends and directions in which the curricula at national levels are expected to be developed.

4.2. The Polish *Core curriculum for general education*
and curricula for teaching English

Initially, it should be pointed out that in Poland, it is the *Core curriculum for general education* that determines knowledge and skills in terms of foreign languages that learners are to demonstrate at specific stages. What appears to be essential is that the amendment introduced to the document in May 2014, which is still valid at the time of writing this paper, divided the expectations towards pupils in the first three years of primary education into two categories: the requirements for children completing the first year of primary school and the requirements for children finishing the third year of primary school. Hence, when the ability to speak a foreign language is taken into consideration, the former group of pupils is supposed to: "(1) understand simple instructions and react to them in a proper way, (2) name objects in their neighbourhood, (3) perform traditional children's rhymes, chants and songs, (4) comprehend the sense of stories told in the classroom provided that they are supported with images, gestures and objects" (2014: 27, translation mine). Besides that, pupils completing early school education are expected to "ask questions and give answers using the learned phrases", "describe objects in their neighbourhood", and "take part in mini performances" (2014: 27, translation mine). Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that the Polish *Core curriculum* highlights the importance of developing pupils' speaking skills in early school education as it facilitates the improvement of their communicative abilities (2014: 61). Hence, considerable emphasis is to be put on teaching children the manner in which they can express various functions of language (2014: 61).

Importantly, it can be noticed that the *Core curriculum* in Poland refers to teaching foreign languages generally and that there are specific curricula for teaching English that provide teachers with specific guidelines concerning the teaching of the subject. For the purpose of this paper, three such publica-

tions written by Magdalena Kębłowska (2014), Mariola Bogucka (2014), and Ilona Studzińska et al. (2015) have been examined. It seems important that these curricula corroborate the European regulations and, therefore, also promote CA in teaching a foreign language. For instance, Mariola Bogucka (2014: 23) claims that CA in early school education consists in creating an "information gap" that is supposed to be fulfilled by children thanks to proper communication and it may occur owing to the fact that they are naturally curious and in the case of the lack of particular elements, they will search for a way to solve a given issue. Yet, it is worth highlighting that in order to make this type of activity successful, the specific situation is supposed to reflect pupils' interests and needs (2014: 23). Moreover, while using CA in class, one needs to remember that the syllabus should be based on language functions rather than grammar structures (2014: 23).

Noticeably, all the examined curricula refer specifically to developing children's speaking skills. Firstly, Kębłowska (2014: 17) enlists certain types of activities that can be utilised by teachers in order to elicit language production from learners, for instance, "asking questions about a text or a picture", "simple activities including information gap", "describing a person, place or illustration on the basis of a model", "conducting dialogues based on those presented in a textbook", or "telling fairytales and stories" (translation mine). Besides this, the scholar mentions some techniques that have already been enumerated in the present paper, like drama exercises or performing songs and repeating short rhymes (2014: 17). Significantly, Kębłowska's curriculum is the shortest out of the selected ones and possibly also for this reason, it contains the least amount of information concerning the subject of this paper.

What appears to be crucial is that in the case of Bogucka's publication, aside from presenting the techniques mentioned above, not only does she advise teachers to encourage children to sing songs and perform both rhymes and short poems in-

cluded in textbooks, but also to create their own versions of these pieces (2014: 23).

Finally, it is worth indicating that in their curriculum, Studzińska et al. (2015: 11) state that improving pupils' speaking skills in the form of games and other entertaining activities is particularly vital at the very beginning of primary school, since children then encounter a new reality, so different from the time they spent in kindergarten. What distinguishes this particular curriculum from the others scrutinized in the present paper is that its authors enlist communicative functions that children are supposed to master by the end of the third year of early school education, for instance "introducing oneself as well as other people", "describing animals, their habits and areas of living", "determining the colour, size and age of something" etc. (2014: 14-15, translation mine). Similarly to the scholars mentioned above, Studzińska et al. enlist specific techniques of developing pupils' speaking abilities that can be applied in class. Apart from those aforementioned, the authors suggest using drill type activities in the form of games, holding "short dialogues referring to pupils' real experiences and preferences" (translation mine) as well as conducting surveys in the classroom to provide children with as authentic a context for using a foreign language as possible (2014: 17-18).

5.   The developmental-psycholinguistic context

Arguably, what may have a substantial impact on activities aimed at developing speaking skills that can be found in ELTs for early school education are pupils' capabilities and the way in which they acquire a foreign language, as the content-related aspect of language material offered by textbooks does not seem to be sufficient to determine whether young learners are able to fulfil the given activities. Hence, not only are the authors of textbooks supposed to take into account the validated guidelines, but also the manner of acquiring a foreign language by children.

It is also worth mentioning that according to Małgorzata Pamuła (2002: 15, translation mine),

> the holistic approach towards foreign language education requires taking into consideration the biological, physical, motor and emotional development of children. Even though these factors do not influence the extent of mastering the second language in the direct manner, they have an essential impact on the whole learning process.

Moreover, as the scholar emphasises, achieving success at school is determined by one's personal traits rather than the selected curricula (2002: 29), which demonstrates the vital role of individual differences in this matter. Nevertheless, as Johanne Paradis (2007: 388) points out, four stages of second language development have been distinguished by Patton Tabors, namely "(1) home-language use, (2) non-verbal period, (3) formulaic and telegraphic use, and (4) productive language use". Although this was in the year 1997, the aforementioned steps still appear to be valid as, presumably, they reflect the manner in which speaking activities should be constructed. At first, the authors of textbooks are expected to offer exercises in which children have the opportunity to practice the acquired fixed phrases and only then activities focused on production.

Another essential point made by Paradis concerns possible factors influencing foreign language acquisition by children. It is worth noticing that the author pays particular attention to pupils' motivation, aptitude and personality characteristics, the typology of the children's mother tongue, their age of acquisition, socio-economic status, and, finally, the quality and context for the second language input (2007: 395-398). What can be advanced on the basis of these factors and the guidelines scrutinised in the previous sections of this paper is that some of the aforementioned elements may be reflected in the content of ELTs, since activities are supposed to be adjusted to pupils' ages: they are expected to be engaging and attractive as well as be of high quality in terms of input. Last but not least,

if feasible, it should be possible to modify their instructions with regard to learners' needs and capabilities.

Significantly, in 2002, Hanna Komorowska (2002: 153) suggested nine principles of teaching speaking that, arguably, the authors of textbooks should also take into account. For instance, speaking exercises are supposed to be preceded by activities focused on introducing potential lexical items or grammar structures that are to be used by children at the productive stage (2002: 153). Secondly, according to the author, sections concentrating on increasing speaking proficiency need to be commenced with controlled practice activities aimed at eliciting single sentences and then the level of difficulty is expected to go up until pupils have the opportunity to produce more complex language freely (2002: 153).

6.   The analysis of textbooks

Significantly, thanks to the application of the principles of complex systems theory, which enabled distinguishing the contexts described above, as well as the study of papers concerning the use of the checklist as a methodological tool (Demir and Ertaş 2014; Mukundan, Hajimohammadi and Nimehchisalem 2011), the author of the present paper was able to create a checklist for evaluating the selected textbooks in terms of the manner in which they aim to improve children's speaking skills.

6.1. A description of the checklist

It is important to note that to meet the requirements for constructing checklists (mentioned, for instance, by Sheldon 1988; Skierso 1991; Byrd 2001; and Demir and Ertaş 2014), the criteria for assessing textbooks have been adapted to the Polish pupils' backgrounds thanks to the contexts indicated above, namely normative and developmental-psycholinguistic, which can be regarded as a part of the Polish system of educa-

tion understood as a complex system in this paper. In addition, the guidelines included in the Polish *Core Curriculum* and curricula for teaching English written by the Polish authors have been taken into consideration. Moreover, the selected textbooks have been evaluated on a scale of 0 to 4, in which

- – 4 indicates "highly satisfactory level",
- – 3 equals "satisfactory level",
- – 2 means "rather unsatisfactory level",
- – 1 expresses "unsatisfactory level",
- – 0 demonstrates the lack of a given feature in a textbook.

It is worth noting that an even-numbered rating scale is recommended and so this has been developed in the present paper to avoid the problem of the so-called "central tendency", that is, "the inclination to rate people in the middle of the scale even when their performance clearly warrants a substantially higher or lower rating" (Grote 1996: 138 quoted in Mukundan, Hajimohammadi and Nimehchisalem 2011: 24). Furthermore, it should be emphasised that a quantitative method of analysis has been applied mainly to the initial part of the checklist, since it is believed to be more practical and objective (2011: 21), whereas the criteria included in the latter section have been established on the basis of a qualitative examination owing to their non-measurable character.

6.2. The analysed material

In the course of the research, the representatives of six series of textbooks approved for use in Polish early school education were analysed, namely:

- – two for first-year pupils: *Happy House – New Edition* (number of approval 41/1/2009) by Stella Maidment and Lorena Roberts, published by Oxford University Press; *New Sparks 1* (number of approval 12/1/2009) by Magdalena Szpotowicz and

Małgorzata Szulc-Kurpaska, also published by Oxford University Press;
- two for second-year pupils: *Fairyland 2* (number of approval 15/2/2009) by Jenny Dooley and Virgina Evans, published by EGIS; *Twister 2* (number of approval 100/2/2009) by Andrea Littlewood and Peter Jeffery, published by Wydawnictwo Szkolne PWN;
- two for third-year pupils: *English Adventure 3* (number of approval 67/4/2009) by Anne Warroll, published by Pearson Longman; *Kid's Box 3* (number of approval 105/3/2010) by Michael Tomlinson and Caroline Nixon published by Cambridge University Press.

Noticeably, the textbooks selected for analysis were printed by various publishing houses so as to ensure the reliability of the research. Significantly, if feasible, next to the rating ascribed to a particular criterion, the number of activities fulfilling it, according to the author, have been provided [in square brackets] in order to support the attribution of a given score. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that due to the limitations of the study, concerning especially the number of the scrutinized textbooks and contexts, the matter requires further investigation that would provide a general and clearer view of the problem.

6.3. An analysis of speaking activities in the textbooks

Having examined the achieved outcomes presented in the charts below, it is worth noting that all the selected textbooks fulfil the requirements concerning the support of speaking activities with visual aids, providing instructions in English and focusing on the improvement of children's functional language to a highly satisfactory degree. Moreover, it is worth highlighting that two of the textbooks, namely *New Sparks 1* written by Polish authors and *Twister 2* issued by a Polish publisher contain instructions both in English and Polish. What is also important is that the examined activities reflect – to quite a satis-

factory extent – situations children can encounter in their environment (the average rate equals 3.5) and that they are preceded by pre-communicative activities preparing children for the subsequent production (the average rate equals 3.5 as well).

Noticeably, in terms of the forms of the scrutinized activities, some of them appear as pupils become older and their speaking proficiency presumably more advanced. This is applicable, for instance, to conducting surveys in the classroom, although it should be remarked that the number of activities of this type still seems to be insufficient (the average rate equals 0.67), describing objects in the pupils' surrounding environment, answering questions or carrying out short dialogues in which young learners can ask and answer questions with their partners. Similarly, certain activities begin to disappear as children start to develop, which is apparent in the case of naming objects that pupils can encounter in their surrounding environment as well as reciting rhymes and chants.

Nevertheless, the investigation also indicated problematic areas within both the normative and the developmental-psycholinguistic contexts that potentially require further analysis and the application of appropriate solutions, which is demonstrated below.

6.3.1. The normative context

THE NORMATIVE CONTEXT						
Criteria / Textbooks	HH 1	NS 1	FL 2	TW 2	EA 3	KB 3
I European recommendations						
The activities are focused on developing pupils' functional language.	4	4	4	4	4	4
The textbooks include authentic materials aimed at provoking speaking.	1 [5 semi-authentic]	0	0	1 [6 semi-authentic]	0	0
The activities provide learners with the opportunity to work in pairs and small groups.	3 [19]	1 [1]	3 [23]	3 [15]	4 [41]	4 [35]

II Polish guidelines						
The activities include the recitation of chants and rhymes.	2 [4]	4 [10]	0	4 [10]	1 [1]	1 [1]
The activities aim at naming objects that children can find in their surrounding environment.	4 [15]	4 [14]	4 [21]	4 [13]	1 [4]	2 [6]
The activities provide learners with the opportunity to ask questions on the basis of a model in the textbook.	2 [5]	0	4 [11]	2 [4]	4 [15]	4 [18]
The activities provide learners with the opportunity to answer questions.	1 [4]	0	2 [11]	1 [4]	4 [41]	4 [50]
The activities provide learners with the opportunity to describe objects they know from their surrounding environment.	0	0	4 [19]	3 [6]	1 [2]	1 [2]
The textbook includes drama and role-play activities.	4 [15]	1 [1]	2 [3]	0	3 [8]	2 [5]
The textbook includes songs.	4 [19]	3 [12]	4 [19]	3 [8]	3 [9]	3 [8]
The textbook includes speaking games.	3 [6]	0	3 [9]	2 [7]	4 [16]	3 [9]
The textbook includes activities with "information gaps".	0	0	0	0	0	1 [1]
The activities provide learners with the opportunity to create their own versions of the songs/texts included in the textbook.	0	0	0	0	0	1 [1-semi]
The textbook includes drill type activities (mainly repetition).	3 [15]	3 [14]	4 [21]	3 [13]	4 [20]	1 [4]
The activities provide learners with the opportunity to present their authentic experiences and preferences.	1 [1]	0	4 [10]	3 [6]	3 [7]	3 [8]
The activities provide learners with the opportunity to conduct a survey in the classroom.	0	0	0	0	2 [2]	2 [2]
The instructions are provided in English.	4	4	4	4	4	4

One of the problems indicated within the normative context is the insufficient number of role-play and drama exercises in textbooks for second-year and third-year pupils, which seems to be surprising owing to the fact that as children's linguistic abilities improve, one might expect them to participate in free language production to a greater extent.

Moreover, the selected textbooks evidently neglect the utilisation of authentic materials as advanced by *the Nuremberg Recommendations*. Notwithstanding the attempt made by the authors of *New Sparks 1* and *Twister 2* to fulfil this guideline to a certain degree by incorporating some activities supported with photographs of real people, it appears to be doubtful whether the exercises in question were indeed based on authentic materials. It can be argued that this issue could be solved, although to find an appropriate manner of doing so requires further research. In addition, the examined textbooks include scarcely any "information gap" exercises that, if properly conducted, may constitute a highly beneficial activity to improve children's communicative skills, something which is recommended in the curricula written by both Bogucka and Kębłowska.

Furthermore, the selected textbooks do not contain activities giving pupils the opportunity to create their own versions of the learned chants, songs, and rhymes, a form of involvement which is recommended by Bogucka in her curriculum. Despite the fact that this technique can be regarded as a means to engage young learners' imagination, it can be pointed out that this type of activity may be challenging for them at this stage, since they are still unable to think in an abstract way; therefore, children should be provided with specific instructions if they are supposed to accomplish the given activities.

Finally, it can be noticed that the selected textbooks do not offer a sufficient number of activities in which learners have the opportunity to present their own experience related to a given topic, as the average rate ascribed to this criterion

equals 2.33. This, however, is essential for children's development, since utilising the gained knowledge in the real environment can help them to function in society in an integrated manner. What is more, talking about their own life is engaging for pupils and aims at improving their speaking proficiency due to the fact that this particular activity may be perceived as an element of the free practice stage that is indispensable in the learning process.

6.3.2. The developmental-psycholinguistic context

Within the developmental-psycholinguistic context it can be observed that four out of the six examined textbooks do not follow the requirement concerning the order of activities as arguably, both their level of difficulty and the form, being either controlled or free practice, are mixed instead of being developed in a fluent way, from simple to more complex exercises. It also seems to be significant that the level of adjustment to young learners' capabilities may be perceived as a potential problem as the average number of points in this particular criterion equals 2.66. From a practical point of view, speaking activities included, for instance, in *Happy House 1* may be regarded as challenging for children, as a great number of them consists in acting out scenes (15 activities, the highest number in the analysed materials) and involves working in pairs or small groups (19 activities). Notwithstanding the fact that they are beneficial for developing learners' communicative skills, first-year pupils may have significant problems with working in pairs as they can easily be distracted and engrossed in doing something different from the assigned task. Furthermore, owing to the fact that the only model for acting out the scenes is based on listening comprehension, it may be problematic for children to remember the text without any other kind of support.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL-PSYCHOLINGUISTIC CONTEXT						
Criteria \ Textbooks	HH 1	NS 1	FL 2	TW 2	EA 3	KB 3
The level of difficulty of speaking activities included in particular units increases from simple to more complex and from controlled practice to free production.	3	1	4	4	3	2
The activities reflect situations that children can encounter in their environment.	3	4	4	4	2	4
The activities are preceded by pre-communicative activities that aim at introducing lexical items or grammar structures that are to be practised in speech.	4	2	4	4	3	4
The activities are supported with visual materials.	4	4	4	4	4	4
The speaking activities are correlated with activities focused on developing other skills.	3	3	4	4	2	3
The activities are adjusted to young learners' capabilities.	2	3	3	3	2	3
The activities are adjusted to the needs of various types of learners.	4	2	4	3	4	3
The instructions can be modified with regard to learners' needs.	2	2	3	3	3	4

7. Conclusions

Importantly, the problems indicated above may potentially re-flect a more serious issue concerning the lack of integration between the content of the textbooks and the contexts in which they are placed. This is especially visible in the case of

the normative context as, taking into account the score as-cribed to all the adopted criteria in this section, their average rate equals 2.17. Because of the fact that the obtained result may be located only a little above the average, it seems to be justified to undertake measures aiming at improving the situa-tion. Moreover, such a necessity has been indicated in a sur-vey concerning ELTs for early school education in Poland that has been conducted by the author of this paper since the be-ginning of May 2016 among English language teachers. Even though the collection of responses has not yet finished, it is already noticeable that the respondents see potential problems related to, for instance, the lack of integration between the ma-terial included in ELTs and the content of the remaining text-books for general education, or the adjustment of the level of activities provided in textbooks in relation to young learners' capabilities, which requires further investigation.

What should also be mentioned is that according to Natasa Intihar Klancar (2006), it is the combination of known meth-ods and techniques that is the most beneficial for the devel-opment of children's speaking abilities (http://iteslj.org), whereas, arguably, the analysed textbooks apparently lack this feature. What needs to be tackled, therefore, is the major dis-crepancy that can be observed between the number of activi-ties included in the textbooks and the domination of only one or two types of exercises.

Although it is the author's intention to extend the scope of the study and to involve other scholars, it can be pointed out that the present range of the research includes the representa-tives of six different textbook series which constituted approx-imately one-fifth of all the textbooks approved by the Polish Ministry of Education at the time when the paper was written. Thus, it may be argued that it allows for drawing the prelimi-nary conclusions that have been described above.

Finally, this paper constitutes a part of a more extensive project conducted by the author, which is devoted to the analysis of language included in selected ELT textbooks for early school education in Poland.

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