

2024/25 ELT webinar (autumn semester)

University of Stirling TESOL programmes

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Textbook English: A distinct variety of English? A critical examination of the language of EFL textbooks

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Do you remember learning a foreign language at school and feeling like the dialogues in your textbooks sounded a bit... off? If so, you are not alone! In this research presentation and workshop, we examine the nature of language of secondary school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks.

Previous research has identified important discrepancies between individual lexicogrammatical features in textbooks and those found in ‘authentic’, naturally occurring language use. Given the crucial role that textbooks play in foreign language teaching, this study aims to determine whether Textbook English constitutes a distinct variety of English and, if so, how it differs from ‘real-life’, extra-curricular English.

We will see how different corpus linguistic methods can be applied to compare EFL textbooks used in lower secondary schools in Germany, France, and Spain with corpora representing learners’ target language. The results suggest that Textbook English can indeed be considered a distinct variety of English. However, Textbook English is not homogeneous: internal variation is mediated by text register and the textbooks’ targeted proficiency level. Textbook dialogues are particularly far removed from naturally occurring conversations, while textbook fiction from intermediate-level textbooks onwards is very similar to young adult literature.

Finally, we will explore how corpora and corpus-derived resources can be critically applied to develop and adapt teaching materials, with the aim of bridging the gap between ‘textbook language’ and real-life, extra-curricular English use. We will also discuss the implications of this type of research for EFL materials development, teacher training, and language teaching.



References

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