

Textbook: Focus on Students' National Identity

French Textbook as a Means of Family Education

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the educational potential of a foreign language textbook within elementary general education, its resource for elementary pupils' family education is identified and discussed. The linguistic constituent of contemporary Russian elementary school French language textbooks as well as the issues of visual support perception as a tool of presenting educational material and a source of educational impact on a child are taken into account. Key research methods applied in the study are pedagogical, psychological and methodological academic papers analysis, synthesis, generalization, modeling and experiment. The authors provide compelling evidence on the specifics of family image representation in the foreign language textbook in the framework of modern society norms and values system. The paper also looks into the balance between national, individual and universal family values being embraced by the pupils during the foreign language education.

The practical significance of the results the study provides stands for the recommendations to the educational component of the foreign language textbook renewal: accumulation and enhancing the forms and means of family education. All these forms are seen as a unity of content and visualizing of a positive family image and absolute value of family traditions on the pages of a textbook.

Keywords: the French language textbook, family image, family education.

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Introduction

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Contemporary science characterizes this decade as a period of informational technologies, Internet and digitalization progress. These trends have profound effect on education and upbringing of the younger generation. Today school students according to the theory of generations represent generation Z (homelanders), whose interaction with technology is an integral part of education and development. Their life values are science, healthcare, security and the family as the basis. Russian and foreign researchers (Kaur & Kauts, 2019; Chunta et al., 2020; Williams, 2019; Obukhov, 2016; Kulakova, 2018) define a contemporary elementary student, a typical generation Z representative, as independent, freethinking, criticizing adult's opinion and of eclectic outlook. These facts should be taken into consideration while planning the educational tutorial work with elementary students as this age is the most susceptible for norms and values instilling. The researches provide confirmation that the family image being formed in the early childhood has a tremendous impact on the further socialization and building positive attitude to the family life and family values. School and family cooperation is of paramount importance within the educational process. According to the Federal State Educational Standard of elementary general education (2009) the elementary school-leavers are "respectful and fostering family and society values", "eager to take actions and responsibility in the family and the society". In this respect pedagogy has family values and family education as one of the priorities in younger generation upbringing within the contemporary comprehensive school. This aspect of educational institutions work depends on many concomitant factors. Kulikova T.A. gives prominence to the "influence line" of building a full-fledged, emotionally colored concept of the family, family economy basics, and pedagogically competent sex education (Kulikova, 1999, p.221). The research by Sorokovykh G.V. looks into contemporary education and proves it to be of high upbringing potential, boosting educative traditions of the nation, especially within the framework of contemporary realities. The author claims that the pedagogical science has accumulated invaluable experience of different educational forms and methods, an effective scheme of foreseeing the results. The crucial task is to "define basic educational mandate and the system of fundamental values" for every level of education (Sorokovykh, 2020). A school textbook traditionally reflects and determines social mandates within the curriculum. According to the relevance of the issues discussed we offer a research looking into the potential of an elementary school French language textbook as a means of family elementary students' education while mastering the foreign language, the forms and the assets of its realization.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of the study is to examine a French language elementary school textbook as a means of family elementary students' education. The paper looks into the linguistic and visual constituents of the manuals which deal with the family and parent-children issues.

Literature review

Considering the elementary students' education issues, contemporary researches assign a special role to the textbooks applied during the classes and extracurricular activities.

Different aspects, opportunities and perspectives of upgrading a school textbook are being studied (Son & Diletti 2017; James H. Williams, 2016). A school textbook and its scale has become the focus of public attention. How to make it a means of culture broadcasting rather than "recurrent tasks bank"? According to Patricia Bissa Enama most answers to this question are intertwined with the national educational curriculum, the school role, the aims of school subjects and consequently the education taken as a whole. We don't take the knowledge for its sake, but experience and expertise for the better society and vice versa. While examining any textbook on a global scale the grade, the school day duration and the extracurricular activities should be taken into consideration (Patricia Bissa Enama, 2019, p.91). The studies by Dridi Mohammed reveal that any educational policy of textbooks design should be based on its social function. The textbook shouldn't be confined only to identity and cultural values of a model society, it should contribute to its transformation and improvement (Dridi Mohammed). Russian researchers (Bim I.L., Afanasyeva O.V., Radchenko O.A., 1999; Bim I.L. 2010) define contemporary elementary school foreign language textbook as a multifaceted system, that alongside with the content aspect (topics and problems), material (language and speech items), activity (speech activities with above mentioned items) comprises motivation and value forming aspects that reflect the feelings and emotions, the interaction of all these provoke. This unity enhances facilitating education and upbringing atmosphere. For mastering the foreign language contemporary textbooks offer a model family image and the author's view on the processes within the family. This forms the elementary students' idea of the issue. To create an image of a family and family education the contemporary elementary school textbooks offer the tasks to follow: genealogical family research, looking for the information on family symbols, traditions and mascots, composing associative arrays with the word family, learning the occupations of the family-members, forms of joint rest, family responsibilities. Role plays are also a means used in the textbooks, e.g. "I'm a family man", writing essays on different topics, e.g. "the main childhood memory", discussions on the issues of family care of the elderly and the younger, parental and filial duty. The authors focus their special attention on the visual support in the textbooks. According to Guo Daibao, Zhang Shuai, Wright Katherine & McTigue Guo (2018, 2020) contemporary textbooks demonstrate the pictures for texts supporting and decoration which contributes to indifferent attitude to the visual constituent of the textbook. But the visual component usually stands for more complicated function than the language code. As of today, digitalization has transformed the function of visual support in the textbooks. It has gained the key role in the visualization of the educational content. Acknowledged Russian academicians V.N. Lyakhov (1978) and D.D. Zuev (2015)

who address the issues of the visuals in the textbooks claim that psychological and pedagogical literature “lacks the unified view of the tasks, solved by the visuals in the textbooks”. They are also concerned that the textbooks’ authors rely on the visuals only to facilitate the comprehension of the texts and neglect their emotional, educational potential.

Methodology

Key research methods applied in the study are pedagogical, psychological and methodological academic papers analysis, synthesis, generalization, modeling and experiment. Contemporary textbooks for 2-4 grades students “The French Language” by N.M. Kasatkina, T.V. Beloselskaya, A.V. Guseva, E.M. Beregovskaya 2020-2021 has become the focus of the study. The complex meets the recommendations of Federal State Educational Standard of general elementary education (Kasatkina N.M., 2020). First-year students, Pedagogy (French Language program), Institute of Foreign Languages, MCU, took part in the trial.

Results

The conducted study of the textbooks for 2-4 grades students “The French Language” by N.M. Kasatkina, T.V. Beloselskaya, A.V. Guseva, E.M. Beregovskaya 2020-2021 has resulted in the defined specifics, forms and means of family education. Family-related topic comprises a separate chapter in the textbooks for each year. At the same time the lexis on family communication is included in other topics as well (school, leisure activities, holidays etc.). Different lexical units and model phrases related to Family topic are introduced with reference to their phonetic and grammatic specifics. The 2nd grade textbook has the word “Daddy” at page 3 due to its easy articulation whereas the word “Mummy”, that has nasal vowel in French which is not present in the Russian language appears first at page 61. The textbooks gain considerable advantage with the authors’ close attention to the rules of family communication etiquette and phrases with the meaning to follow: taking care of the nearest and dearest; politeness, benevolence, complicity, consent, concessions etc. One of the educational means is fairy tales, both popular: Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, the Wolf and the Seven Young Goats and stories with animated characters: (rabbits (la famille Lapin), hedgehogs (la famille de Pic), bears (la famille Ours), cats (Madame Chat), squirrels (Madame Ecoreuil), tortoises (la famille Tortue), birds (Maman l’oiseau) etc.) (fig. 1). The genres of this kind let combine the fairy-tale fiction and life truth. The plot with fairy-tale characters forms so called symbolic “life situations bank” on family issues. That’s the way the authors offer to use fairy-tale therapy for boosting family values and traditions.

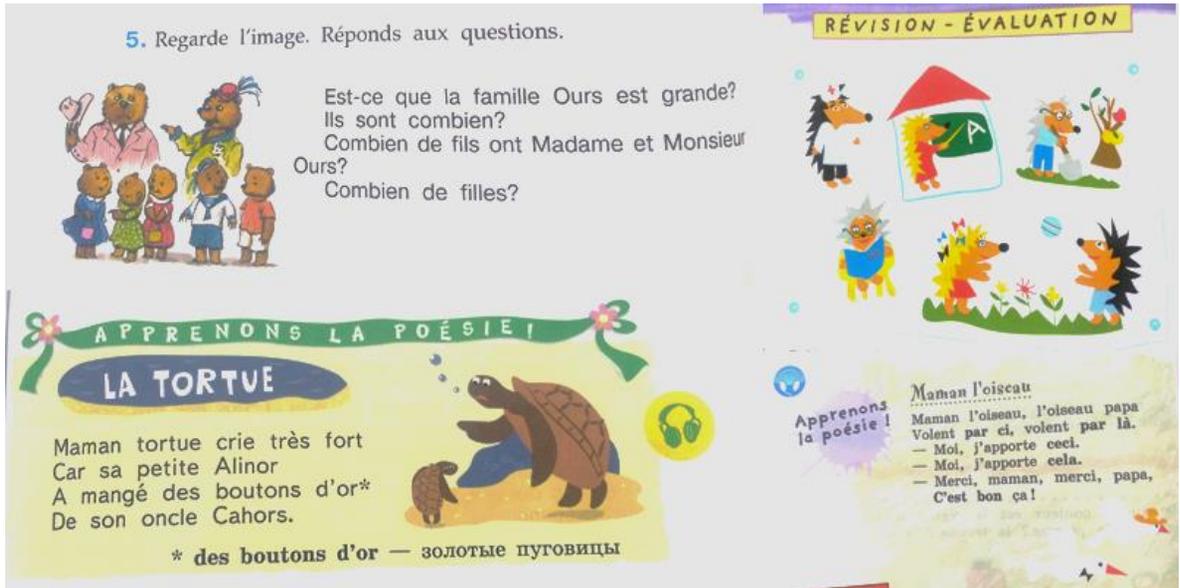


Fig. 1 Fairy-tale characters, representing family members in the French language textbooks

To estimate the emotional-value constituent of these textbooks illustrations the following analysis components were carried out:

- visuals reflecting different emotional state and life situations within the family and implying different educational patterns;
- visuals, promoting students' contemplation, comparison and discussion;
- interconnection of the fragments with real contemporary society life situations;
- the possibility to transfer the behavioral patterns of the characters to one's life and personal experience, being able to critically assess and revise some elements of one's own behavior;
- vivid characters and their visual expression in the story line of the picture;
- regional background, an opportunity to easily find and explain the difference, make generalizations when comparing the rules and norms of behavior patterns in both your country and the country of the target language.

Hereafter the poll was carried out, the first-year students, French language teachers-to-be taking part in it via the Google forms. They were asked about the associations that textbooks illustrations could provoke (fig. 2)



Fig. 2. The French textbooks illustrations proposed for the analysis.

The questions were open, and every participant could provide well-grounded opinion. The results showed that the visuals were interpreted in an ambiguous and subjective manner. One and the same picture triggered negative emotions in some respondents – fear, tension, melancholy and tranquility, peace and happiness in others. The respondents having negative emotions explained it with the wrong mimics, position disengagement of the family members. The second group pointed out that the family (different generations) were all together, presumably during the pandemic. Next picture (fig. 3) illustrates the answers to the question “Which moral values does the artist touch upon depicting this family?”

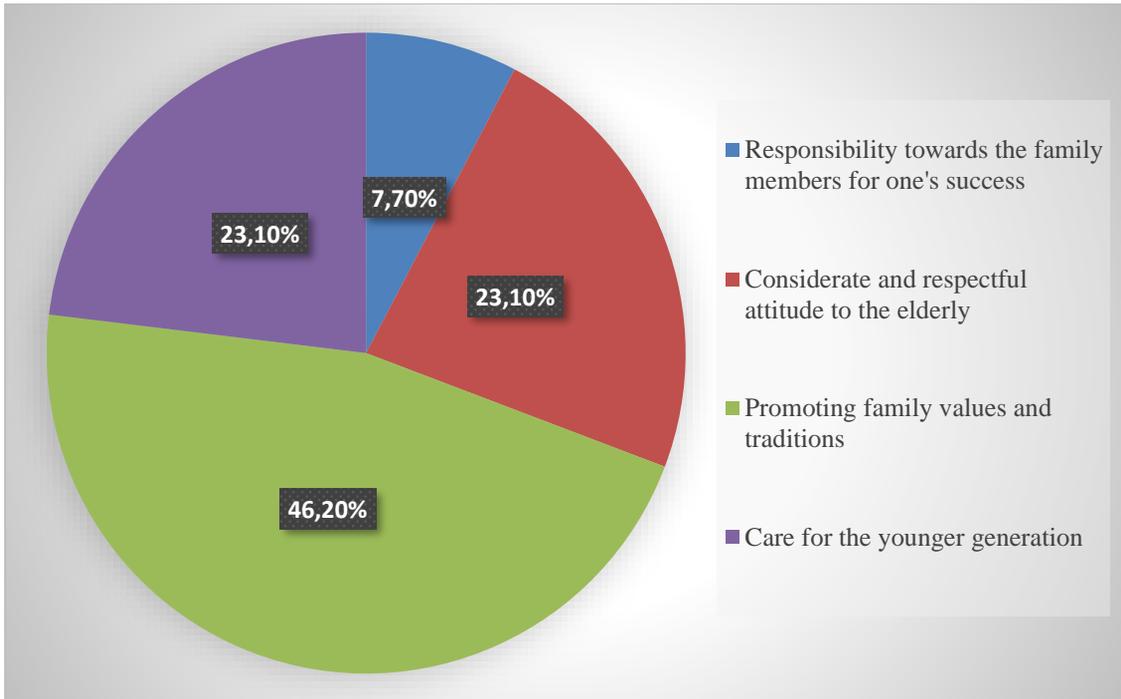


Fig 3. The respondents' answers about moral values displaying in the textbook illustrations.

The answers to the following question “Do the illustrations provide an opportunity to acquaint the students with gender and social roles within the family?” were mostly positive, but the students mentioned that gender roles were somewhat outdated, and didn't conform to modern social expectations. The women were busy with sewing and knitting and men were either working or relaxing. The children were busy with household chores helping the older generation or playing.

Despite the fact that the illustrations depicted French families, 77% of the respondents considered them Russian. (fig.4)

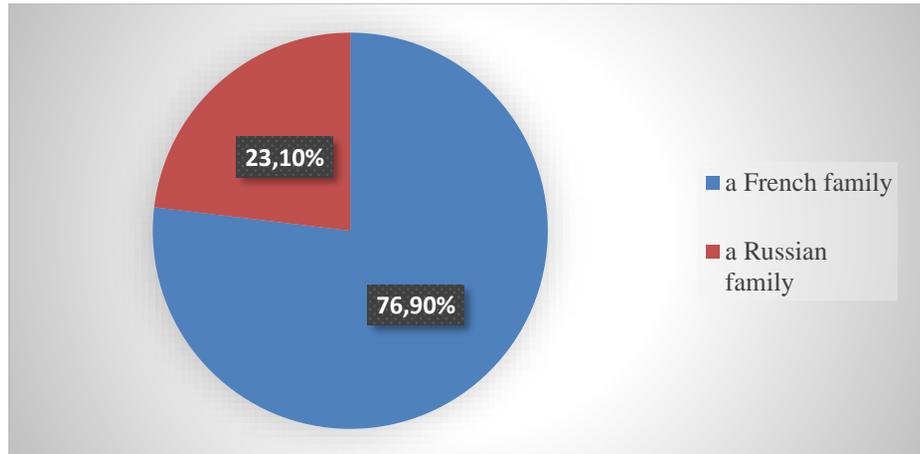


Fig 4. The respondents' answers about the families depicted in the pictures.

From our perspective, it could be linked to either globalization processes or lack of regional background in the illustrations, non-verbal communication means typical of France and Russia, e.g. kissing hello and good buy. As for characterological features of the characters in the pictures, the respondents highlighted the variety of images in the illustrations that evoke a range of emotions and moral ambiguity. Meanwhile, the men, fathers, were described as busy, reliable, strong, annoyed, angry; mothers – as kind, caring, hardworking, and happy; children – as diligent, enthusiastic, naughty. Figure 5 provides the answers to the question “Would you like to be a member of one of the families in the illustrations?”

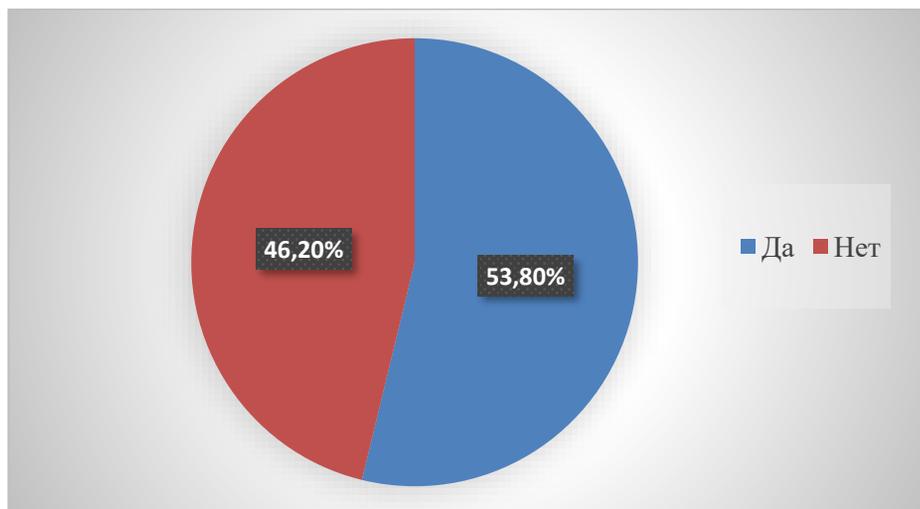


Fig 5. The respondents' answers to the question “Would you like to be a member of one of the families in the illustrations?”

The answers were divided equally at 50%. The respondents who agreed to live with these families mentioned that the pictures exuded family traditions, happiness, everyone is busy with something and takes part in family affairs. They described such a family as harmonious, in which they wanted to live. Another group of the respondents who answered “No”, considered that their families’ values differed in great extent from the families in the pictures. None of the pictures was associated with the feeling of family warmth and home, the place where they would be comfortable and where they would like to return to in the evenings.

Discussions

The issues of elementary students’ family education are touched upon throughout the entire series of grades 2-4 of the textbook “The French language” (by N.M. Kasatkina, T.V. Beloselskaya, A.V. Guseva, E.M. Beregovskaya) published in 2020-2021. These textbooks’ speech environment is characterized by the use of positive communication mechanisms, which is reflected in the absence of speech pessimism in the text materials, the atmosphere of interaction, family communication participants positive thinking, promoting cooperation and mutual assistance. The communication behavior of the family members reflects their positive emotional experience, creates emotional tune, peace and harmony. The authors demonstrate the traditional family roles distribution: parents’ authority, interrogative and imperative constructions that indicate the manifestation of family members' care for each other, the parents’ commitment to their children, the needs and the desires of the latter. Considering these textbooks from the perspective of contemporary life situations, it is plausible that they don’t mention the modern family features, such as loss of family traditions, separation of family members from each other, less time spent within the family, weakened family ties, some family members’ escape from the problems to the virtual reality. From our perspective the family education component, can be boosted by more tasks on family issues – speaking topics, other creative assignments which could be based on the educational tasks of the lesson. The family issues could be also touched upon during introduction and training new vocabulary and grammar, special didactic guidelines should be delivered. Special story lines can contribute to educational tasks fulfillment. They should be recurrent, with the same characters – French or Russian families. The materials in the textbooks shouldn’t be based on Russian family model only, but the intercultural approach should be incorporated in the educational process. The contemporary textbooks’ authors, illustrators and editors should take full responsibility for new visual material and its conformity to the modern expectations.

Conclusion

An attempt to analyze the elementary school French language textbook as a means of family education resulted in the following:

1) Keeping in mind that the textbook is the main educational means in the elementary school, its compliance with the cutting-edge educational guidelines, psychological and pedagogical features of new generation elementary school students and its implementation in the informational environment are of paramount importance. The researchers focus on various multifunctional textbook components in their unity and correlation responsible for realization of educational and development functions of a subject.

2) The linguistic and visual components' analysis of the French language textbook for 2-4-grades elementary students (by N.M. Kasatkina, T.V. Beloselskaya, A.V. Guseva, E.M. Beregovskaya) published in 2020-2021 has shown that the authors offer a positive family image. It is due to manifestation of a positive attitude to family values, moral norms, good habits, and partnership within the family. The form and style of materials presentation, its compliance with the age specifics and particular individual perceptions of the elementary school students has become the focus of the research.

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