



National vs International Course Book Analysis: An English as a Foreign Language Case in the Slovak Context

Eva Reid

Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia, eva.reid@uniba.sk

Linda M. Steyne

Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia, linda.steyne@uniba.sk

Even though the learning of English is no longer compulsory in the Slovak education system, it remains the dominant foreign language in most schools. It is usually taught from the third grade of primary school but is often taught from first grade and even in kindergartens. Research indicates that course books are heavily relied upon by those teachers teaching English, giving them a critical position in the process of language learning. However, most of the course books used are those produced for international markets and not those written with the specific needs of Slovak learners in mind. This paper analyses three English language course books for primary school learners and discusses their suitability for the needs of Slovak primary school learners. The research tools for collecting and processing data were qualitative document analysis, categorisation and comparative analysis (Flick, 2009). Data collected from the chosen course books were assigned and compared in the following categories: linguistic, socio-linguistic, pragmatic and non-verbal competences. Conclusions are drawn from the findings that English language course books should target the needs of specific learners and that national course books meet the needs of Slovak learners better in all four of the addressed categories.

Keywords: national course books, international course books, primary education, linguistic competences, socio-linguistic competences, pragmatic competences

INTRODUCTION

Course books and textbooks are considered the primary source of teaching materials for most school subjects. They follow curricula and provide ready-made materials for teachers and students. Teachers like to use them as they are professionally produced and provide a clear structure, plenty of materials, and exercises. They also save teachers' time. This is true in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), as well, where course books play a significant role. Authors of these EFL course books, of British or American English, follow curricula and create learning opportunities and real activities that teachers and learners can carry out (Ismajli & Neziri, 2019). Dozens of publishers

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provide an enormous range of course books, each with complex sets of not only students' books, workbooks, and teachers' books, but also recordings, flash cards, posters, various materials for interactive boards, and online platforms that learners can access anytime.

Even though course books offer many possibilities, their effective use depends on two determining factors. The first is the creativity and skills of the teacher using them. Sometimes, however, teachers end up following their course books, one exercise after another, which becomes tiresome and boring for students. The second factor is the suitability and appropriateness of the course book itself. This includes the cost to learners, the authenticity of the language used, the suitability for the age and proficiency, and the needs of the target learners. This paper discusses this latter issue of suitability of English language course books specifically for the needs of Slovak learners. It looks at three course books of British English—two intended for the international market with one created specifically for Slovak primary schools—comparing them based on the suitability of linguistic, socio-linguistic, pragmatic and non-verbal competences for the needs of Slovak learners.

Review of Literature

The Position of Course Books in the Slovak Education System

According to various national and international studies, it would seem that classroom teachers in Slovakia believe that course books should play a prominent role in education. The PIRLS and TIMSS international assessment and research projects reported in 2001, 2006, and 2011 (Galadova et al., 2013; Nogova, 2008) that 91.8 per cent Slovak primary school teachers use course books as primary teaching and learning material, while only 8.2 per cent use them as supplementary material. By comparison, in the case of 45 other countries, course books are considered primary teaching and learning material, on average, by 71.6 per cent of all schools while 23.2 per cent consider them supplementary and 5.3 per cent do not use them at all. Similar results were found in several other studies carried out on the use of course books in various subjects at the lower secondary level (Jurščáková, 2020; Páleníková, 2016; Huttová, Nogová, 2005) with more than 70 per cent of teachers generally using course books as primary teaching and learning material. Maňák (2008) claims that course books hold such a strong position in Czech and Slovak schools that they often substitute curricula and learning standards. If that is the case, then the need for them to be of high quality is undeniable.

The creation of quality course books requires adherence to certain principles. According to Knecht and Janík (2008), a quality course book needs to reflect the newest findings in the following areas: the subject matter, methodology, pedagogy, and psychology. It also needs to follow curricula and standards set by the Council of Europe (Council of Europe Charter..., 2010). Průcha (1998) adds that course books have to be methodologically feasible and appropriate to the cognitive abilities of pupils. Moreover, course books should be attractive to both teachers and pupils, up to date, and meaningfully connected to reality. In addition, we would argue that foreign language course books should also be

target-learner specific, i.e., they should meet the specific needs of language learners in whatever country or region they are being used.

In Slovakia, all textbooks intended for state schools are evaluated by the National Institute for Education according to set criteria. Foreign language course books are evaluated based on the following criteria (National Institute for Education in Slovak Republic, n.d.): correspondence with the national curriculum; teaching guidance, organisation, and set-up (symbols, colours, font, graphics, suitability of illustrations, support for a variety of class organisation, support of and for autonomous learning, critical thinking activities, practice activities, etc.); layout of the content (clarity, age appropriateness, cross curricular connections, intercultural dimensions, development of grammatical competences, language strategies, connection to real life, etc.); and ethicality. Despite the criteria, the process of creating, choosing, and evaluating course books in Slovakia is not always transparent, reliable, nor consistent. Rehúš (2016) criticised the process in comparison to that in other countries and pointed out the inadequacies of the Slovak course book market in general. In 2021, the Ministry of Education opened the textbook market, no longer mandating which should be used but allowing schools to choose based on their needs.

The Position of Course Books in English Language Education

Slovak state schools are required to follow the national curriculum, from which they create their own school curricula. The national curriculum for foreign languages lays out the required subject knowledge, competences, and skills that pupils are expected to develop during each key stage. It also defines general competences (i.e., knowledge, skills, existential competence and ability to learn) and communicative competences (linguistic, socio-linguistic and pragmatic competences). Levels of language proficiency are based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as A1 and A2 as basic users, B1 and B2 as independent users, C1 and C2 as proficient users (CEFR, 2018). The proficiency descriptors are adapted to correspond to ISCED education levels with pupils achieving a certain level of proficiency as they complete each level: A1.1+ at the end of primary; A2 at the end of lower secondary; and B1 or B2 at the end of upper secondary, depending on the type of secondary education completed.

According to the Slovak national curriculum, primary school pupils are required to start their first foreign language from in their third year. Many schools, however, offer a first foreign language earlier, in first grade, with some kindergarten and nursery schools starting at even younger ages. Although no longer the compulsory first foreign language, the top choice of the vast majority of pupils for their first foreign language is English (Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information, 2022).

The dominance of English as lingua franca in science, business, technology, international relations, health care, and education means that there is not a country in the world in which it is not taught. All those learners have created an overwhelming demand for English language textbooks, which in English language teaching (ELT) publishing are called course books because they are intended to be taught as a course. Some countries, like Germany, produce national course books, created to meet the needs of the

learners in their state schools. For those countries not producing their own national course books, international ELT publishers fill the gap. However, to ensure a profit, those publishers must produce course books that appeal to a wide range of learners in a variety of teaching and learning situations in as many countries and cultures as possible. While there are some edits and adaptations made to publish editions appropriate for more than one country in various geopolitical regions, it is neither cost effective nor feasible to adapt each course book series for every national market, particularly for those with small populations. According to Bolitho (2003), international publishing houses try to maximise their sales potential sometimes resulting in lower quality. Despite being based on the CEFR, a widely accepted foreign language standard, these international course book editions do not reflect the needs of individual cultures or first languages (i.e., L1).

In the case of Slovakia, the market for course books is miniscule compared to that of populous countries like China and Brazil. Thus, international ELT publishers do not adapt their course books for the needs of Slovak learners. However, the differences in linguistic (i.e., phonological, grammatical, and lexical), socio-linguistic, and pragmatic aspects of the two languages are great and need to be addressed. Phonological aspects were addressed as there are significant differences between in Slovak and English in speech sounds, word stress patterns, rhythm of speech and intonation. Also, contrary to English, there is little variation between orthographic and orthoepic forms in the Slovak language (Reid, Debnarova, 2020). Grammatically, the two languages differ in the number of tenses (English has far more), word order, and how questions or negatives are formed, all of which create problems to Slovak learners. Vocabulary is often culture-specific, with many English lexical items referring to things which are culturally or geographically distant or unknown to Slovak learners. Moreover, socio-linguistic, pragmatic and non-verbal norms of the one language could cause misunderstandings and miscommunications if used in the other. For this reason, we support English language course books specifically created for the needs of particular learners, in this case, students in Slovak state schools.

METHOD

Research Design

The issues of whether to use national or international course books and which ones are more suitable for Slovak learners are discussed and supported in this section by the analysis and comparison of one national and two international English language course books for primary school children. Each is evaluated on its support of phonological, grammatical, lexical, socio-linguistic, and pragmatic competences. Non-verbal aspects are also considered as a crucial part of intercultural communicative competences. Examples of activities suitable for Slovak learners are provided. Based on the analysis, arguments supporting national level course books are presented.

Qualitative document analysis and comparative analysis are the research methods used in this study. Course books are the sources of the data (documents), providing valuable information written by skilled professionals. Document analysis is highly reliable and

unobtrusive in that there is no influence on the part of the author as the course books intended purpose was not research. Documents tend to be factual and another attraction of documents is their availability, often at a low cost. The method of categorising was applied for the processing of data. Open categorising was used in this document analysis, which expresses data in the form of concepts arising from the research question. This helps to elaborate a deeper understanding of the text. All analysis and findings are based on constant comparison between categorised data (Flick, 2009).

Three EFL course books used in Slovakia for primary school children were chosen for this analysis. The two most commonly used mass-market course books were selected: Oxford University Press's *Family and Friends* (Simmons, 2019) and Pearson's *English Adventure* (Worrall, 2005). For comparison, an EFL course book by Slovak publisher TakTik's *Cool English School* (Reid, et al., 2017) was chosen.

The aim of this analysis was to determine the suitability of the selected course books for the needs of Slovak primary school learners. By suitability we mean whether each course book meets the needs of Slovak learners in the areas of linguistic, socio-linguistic, pragmatic, and non-verbal competences. Based on the research aim, the following research question was asked: How do selected course books fulfil the needs of Slovak learners in development of linguistic, socio-linguistic, pragmatic, and non-verbal competences?

Data Analysis

Categories for data analysis were based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2018). The most important domains in foreign language learning according to CEFR (ibid.) are general and communicative language competences. These communicative language competences and their individual components form the categories for data selection and comparison: linguistic, socio-linguistic, pragmatic and non-verbal competences.

Table 1
Categories for data analyses

Categories	Examples
Linguistic competences	
- Phonological	Phonemes, word stress, rhythm, weak forms, etc.
- Lexical	Culture related lexis
- grammatical	Focus on different grammar
Socio-linguistic competences	Greetings, introducing, use of exclamations, likes dislikes, appropriate use of "please/thank you", politeness, apologising, etc.
Pragmatic competences	Interaction patterns, suggestions, requests, encouragements, idioms, etc.
Non-verbal competences	Gestures, extra-linguistic speech sounds, onomatopoeia, etc.

Linguistic competences include three categories of phonological, grammatical and lexical competences.

FINDINGS

Phonological Competences

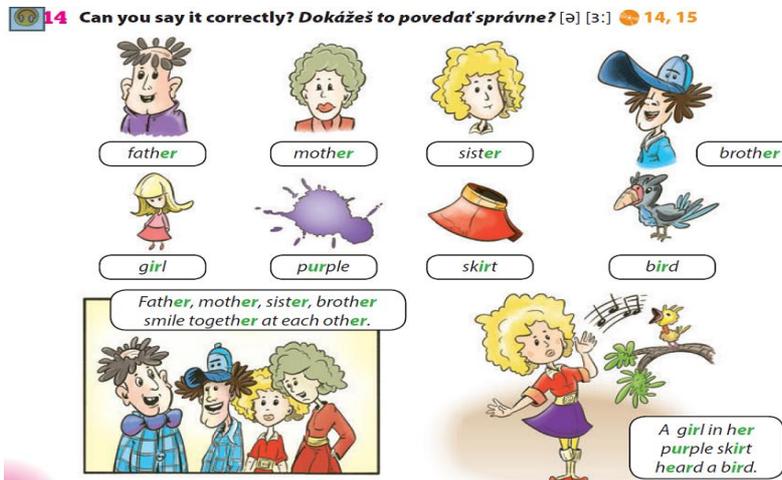
Teaching and supporting phonological competences are the first category of analysis. English pronunciation is generally neglected in foreign language education (Scrivener, 2011; Gilbert, 2008) even though its importance is undeniable (Kelly, 2000). It is not only important because written and spoken language differ greatly, but also because the segmentals and suprasegmentals of L1 and the target language can differ greatly. The CEFR (2008) recommends teaching and practicing pronunciation from the initial stages of foreign language learning, especially from an early age. Learners need to acquire the ability to perceive, distinguish, and produce unfamiliar sounds and unfamiliar sound sequences, syllables, stress, rhythm, intonation, phonetic reduction, weak forms, etc. (Section 5.2.1.4).

Although some international course books include pronunciation, they cannot cover the variety of differences between English and all the international learners with their numerous L1s, each with its own sound system, word stress patterns, rhythm, assimilation, intonation, etc. Thus, pronunciation is dealt with in generalisations rather than in relationship to L1. The result is that phonemes often covered in these course books are not relevant to the learners using them. For example, Spanish learners would benefit from learning how to produce /b/ and /v/; French, Russian and Italian learners could use help with /h/; and Portuguese learners need training in correctly producing /tʃ, dz/ and /ʃ, ʒ/. Slovak learners, however, use all those phonemes already in their L1. They need help with phonemes that are different or non-existent in their L1, e.g., specific vowels (ʌ ə æ ɜ: aɪ oɪ eɪ eə ʊə ɪə aʊ əʊ aɪə oʊə eɪə aʊə əʊə) and consonants (θ ð ŋ w). Word stress differs greatly between the two languages and can cause misunderstandings when used incorrectly; Slovak always stresses the first syllable, while English has variable stress. Slovak has a syllable time rhythm and English has a stress time rhythm. The two languages have disparate forms of assimilation and weak forms do not exist in Slovak. Course books created specifically for Slovak learners meet this need, focusing attention on the specific differences in phonemes, word stress, sentence stress, rhythm, assimilation, weak forms, elision, and intonation.

Table 2
Suitability of development of phonological competences in course books

International course books: English Adventure Family and Friends	National course book: Cool English School
English Adventure: - pronunciation not included	Cool English School: Focus on Slovak interference (segmental and suprasegmental). Focus on differences between Slovak and English – phonemes: e.g., /e/ in men vs. /æ/ in man, /n/ in garden vs. /ŋ/ in eating, /v/ in vet vs. /w/ in waves, interference of Slovak assimilation of final consonants /k/ in book vs. /g/ in bag
Family and Friends: - same for all nationalities, not paying attention to peculiarities between L1 and English - Phonics used: irrelevant phonemes for Slovak learners, e.g., /m/ in mum, /n/ in nurse, /p/ in pen, /b/ in orange, included - Only 9 out of 32 phonemes were relevant for Slovak learners, e.g., /ʌ/ in umbrella, /w/ in window	

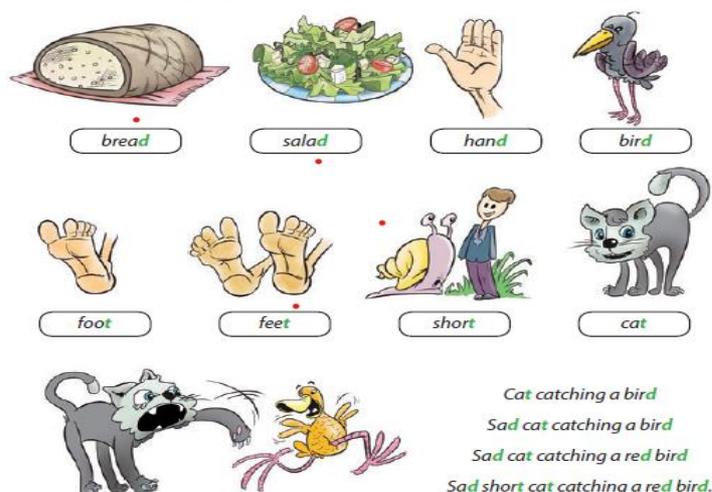
The Slovak course book, Cool English School (Reid et al., 2017), presents the differences in pronunciation and leads learners to practice them (see Picture 1). The activity features the English phonemes /ɜ:/ and /ə/, which do not exist in the Slovak language. Words with problematic phonemes are recorded for listening and repeating, drilling, and ear training. A tongue twister activity is included to practice problematic phonemes, word stress, rhythm, and intonation.



Picture 1
Pronunciation of /ɜ:/ and /ə/ (Reid et al., 2017, p. 16)

The Slovak course book deals with the interference of Slovak assimilation of final consonant sounds from voiced to voiceless, in this case the assimilation of the voiced /d/ to a voiceless /t/ (see Picture 2). This common feature of Slovak can create misunderstandings if done in English. The national course book highlights the final consonants, and learners are made aware of their correct pronunciation. They listen and repeat, drill, and do ear training with correct pronunciation. As with the previous activity, a tongue twister is provided for more practice.

 **14** Can you say it correctly? *Dokážeš to povedať správne?* [d] [t]  47, 48



Picture 2
Pronunciation of /d/ and /t/ (Reid et al., 2017, p. 48)

Grammatical Competences

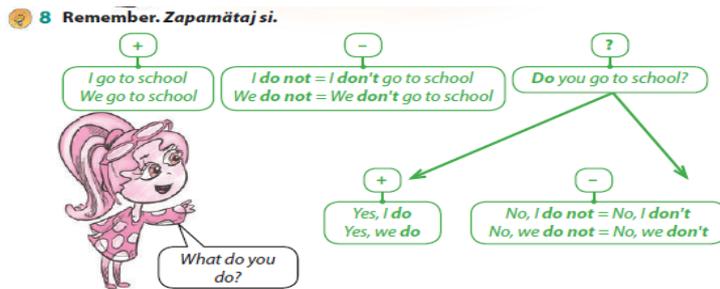
The next category analysed covers grammatical competences. International course books tend to follow a similar grammar syllabus no matter where they are used and whatever the learners' L1. National course books pay more attention to differences and compare structures of L1 and the target language, including differences in word order, articles, tenses, modal verbs, phrasal verbs, prepositions, structure of questions, negatives, use of "there is/there are", and "I like +ing".

Table 3

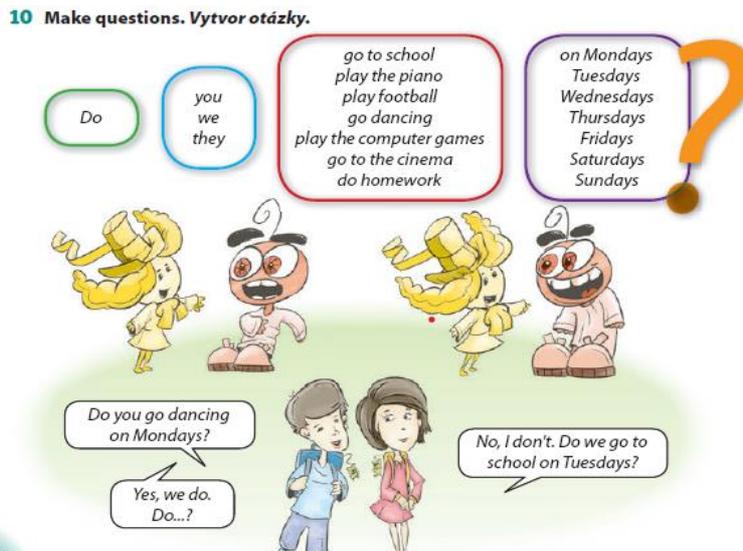
Suitability of development of grammatical competences in course books

International course books: English Adventure Family and Friends	National course book: Cool English School
Same for every country	Adjusted to the needs of Slovak learners
Same approach to every aspect and practice	Emphasis on differences, more practice of differences, practice in appropriate contexts, e.g., questions and negatives using "do", different use and meaning of "can"

The national course book, Cool English School, introduces and practices the English grammatical structures used to create questions, negatives, and short answers with the help of auxiliary verb “do” (see Picture 3). There is no corresponding structure in Slovak, so practice is emphasised using a meaningful connection to pupils’ everyday lives. Practice is provided by means of rhyming structures (see Picture 4).



Picture 3
Use of “do” in questions, negatives and short answers (Reid et al., 2017, p. 81)



Picture 4
Practice of “do” in questions, negatives, and short answers (Reid et al., 2017, p. 82)

Lexical Competences

As concerns how lexis is approached, vocabulary is culture specific and needs to reflect the reality of the learners who are using the course book, especially at the primary level. International course books, selling to a global market, ignore this and include words such as shake, lion, crocodile, giraffe, crab, stick insect, mango, star fruit, and

pineapple. Children at the primary level need to first learn vocabulary connected to their home country, in both L1 and L2. While a Slovak child might see a pineapple at Christmas and a lion in a zoo, they are more likely to come into contact with cherry blossoms and storks every spring, strawberries and barn swallows in summer, and beetroot and deer or wild boar in autumn. There might be the occasional brown bear as well, but to be sure, there will be no crocodile.

Table 4

Suitability of development of lexical competences in course books

International course books: English Adventure Family and Friends	National course book: Cool English School
Same for every country	Adjusted to the needs of Slovak learners
Can differ from the reality of Slovak learners: e.g., snake, lion, stick insect Star fruit, mango, pineapple	True to Slovak reality: Frog, rabbit, pig, fish, goat, bear, sheep, deer Bread, carrot, peas, cheese, strawberry, pear Vocabulary of Christmas food and drink (comparison of English and Slovak)

Picture 5 is an example of how the national course book approaches new vocabulary. New words are introduced; relatable illustrations create meaning; and practice is connected to the newly learnt grammatical structures and the reality pupils are familiar with.



Picture 5

Practice of animals, verbs, singular and plural (Reid et al., 2017, p. 58)

Socio-linguistic Competences

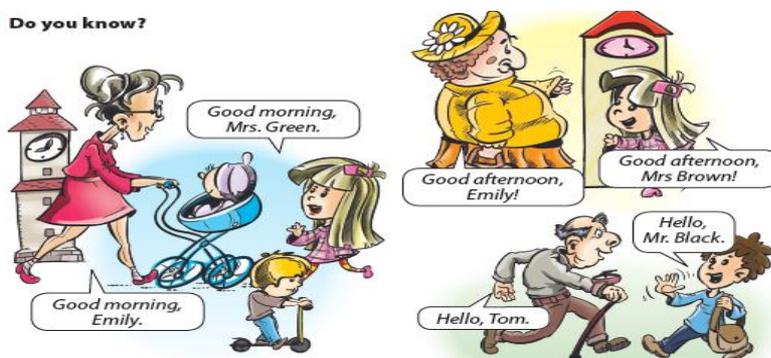
The next category analysed deals with sociolinguistic competences. These include greetings, forms of address, polite phrases, apologising, expressing likes and dislikes, and the correct use of please and thank you. All three course books address these. However, despite the clear link between this competence and the cultures of L1 and the target language, the international course books ignore the learners' culture. In contrast, the national course book compares specific differences between the target language and L1 with activities practicing socio-linguistic competences included in texts, songs, dialogues, role plays, simulations.

Table 5

Suitability of development of socio-linguistic competences in course books

International course books: English Adventure Family and Friends	National course book: Cool English School
English Adventure: greeting (Hello), exclamations (Oh no!, Wow!), polite phrase (Here you are.), apologising (I'm sorry. No, sorry), likes and dislikes (I like, I don't like), correct use of "please and thank you"	Cool English School: Greetings upon arrival and departure (Hello, Good morning, Bye, Goodbye, See you tomorrow, How are you? I'm fine.), exclamations (Great! Oh, thank you! She's cool!), polite phrases (Here you are., Good job.), likes and dislikes (I like, I don't like, okay, I'm happy!), disappointment (Oh, no!), correct use of "please" and "thank you", idioms
Family and Friends: greetings (Hello, bye, How are you? I'm fine, thank you), letter addressing (Dear...), introduction (This is my...), exclamations (Oh, no! Okay! Great!), polite phrases (Can I have..., please?, here you are., Please share my lunch., Nice to meet you!), likes and dislikes (I like, I don't like)	

One activity from the national course book (see Picture 6) teaches pupils appropriate English greetings. First, it notes greetings dependent on the time of day (note the clock in two of the illustrations). This is helpful as direct translations of Slovak equivalents into English can cause confusion: While "Good morning" ("Dobré ráno") is used up until 10 a.m., "Good day" ("Dobrý deň") is used until evening. Slovak learners tend to use direct translations of the Slovak, unaware that English uses "Good morning" and "Good afternoon". Second, it presents the use of the English "hello" in both formal and informal situations which is also different from Slovak. The Slovak equivalent of "hello" ("ahoj") is informal only. This socio-linguistic awareness—and practice—is vital for effective communication in English.

15 Do you know?

Picture 6

Socio-linguistic competences: Greetings (Reid et al., 2017, p. 28)

Pragmatic competences

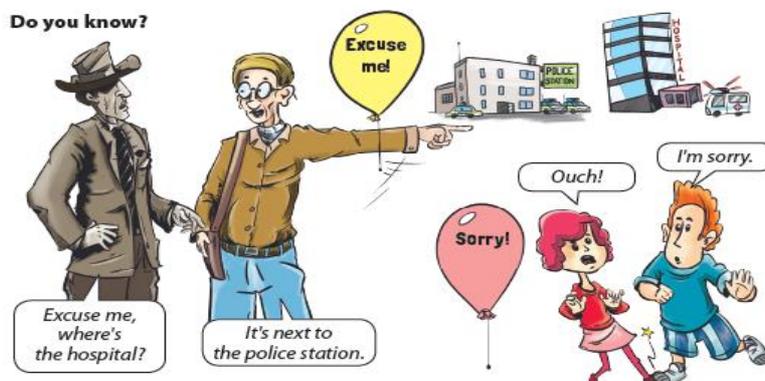
Pragmatic competences are the next category analysed. These include interaction patterns and functional use of language, both of which are closely connected to culture. Again, all three course books include aspects of pragmatic competences. Yet again, The international course books do not consider the learners' L1 or home culture. The national course book, on the other hand, compares functional use of language, introduces functional phrases, and provides opportunities to practice interaction patterns in dialogues and role plays.

Table 6

Suitability of development of pragmatic competences in course books

International course books: English Adventure Family and Friends	National course book: Cool English School
General and same for all nationalities and cultures, do not consider peculiarities and differences. Interaction patterns, short answers, suggestions, encouragements.	Considers peculiarities and differences of native and target languages and cultures. Differences between functional use of language of idioms and phrases, interaction patterns, short answers, attracting attention, warning, giving advice.
English Adventure: interaction patterns, questions and short answers (Do you/Does he like...?, Yes, I do / he does. / No. I don't. / he doesn't.), suggestions, offers, encouragements (Do you want...? Be careful! It's okay. Let's...)	Cool English School: Interaction patterns, questions and short answers (Your turn now!, Have you got...? Yes, I do./No, I don't. What is he doing? He is...), encouragements and requests (Next please. Watch out!), idioms and phrases (Touch wood. Fingers crossed. It's cold. I'm cold. I have cold.)
Family and Friends: interaction patterns, questions and short answers (Do you...?, Yes, I do. / No, I don't.), suggestions, encouragements (Let's..., Well done!)	

One illustration from the national course book (see Picture 7) focuses on the functional use of "sorry" in English as compared to the Slovak usage. In Slovak, "sorry" can be used to politely interrupt as well as apologise. Here, learners are made aware that English is different and different expressions are required for the two situations: "Excuse me" and "I'm sorry."



Picture 7

Pragma-linguistic competences: functional use of language (Reid et al., 2017, p. 18)

Non-verbal Competences

The last category analysed deals with non-verbal competences, a significantly integral part of intercultural communicative competences (ICC). Non-verbal communication itself represents 75 per cent of all communication and varies from culture to culture. This aspect of ICC is often ignored in course books yet is crucial in foreign language education as it is largely subconscious and most people do not realise it is not universal. Non-verbal communication includes extra-lingual speech sounds for silence and taste, onomatopoeia, body language, gestures, eye contact, body contact, and proxemics. The international course book *Family and Friends* includes onomatopoeia for animal sounds, but the animals presented (e.g., a tiger, a snake, and a parrot) are detached from Slovak primary school pupils' reality. In contrast, the national course book covers the animal sounds of those animals commonly found in both Slovakia and Slovak fairy tales: a pig, a cow, a horse, a duck, a bird, a bear, and a sheep. It also includes gestures and extra-lingual speech sounds.

Table 7

Suitability of development of non-verbal competences in course books

International course books: English Adventure Family and Friends	National course book: Cool English School
General and same for every nationality and culture, do not consider peculiarities and differences.	Considers peculiarities and differences of native and target languages and cultures and compares them in pictures and in writing.
English Adventure: Extra-lingual speech sounds for disapproval (Grrrr!)	Cool English School: Onomatopoeia for animal sounds (dog – hav/woof, horse – ihí/ neigh, bird – čvirik/tweet, pig – kvik/oink, sheep – béé/baa, bear – brum/grrr), extra-lingual speech sounds for silence (pst/shush), disapproval (hej/oi), enjoyment of food (mňam/yummy), dislike of food (fuž/yuck), gestures for wishing good luck (Fingers crossed), avoiding bad luck (Touch wood).
Family and Friends: Onomatopoeia (tiger – growl, snake – hiss, parrot – squawk)	

Picture 8 is an activity from Cool English School which points out the differences between English and Slovak in extra-lingual speech sounds for requesting silence—“shush” in English and “pst” in Slovak—and expressing anger at someone or something—“oi” in English and “hej” in Slovak. Both languages are presented for comparison, because speakers often believe that their sounds are universal.

16 Do you know? Vieš?



Picture 8
Extra-linguistic speech sounds (Reid et al., 2017, p. 27)

DISCUSSION

The aim of this research study was to determine the suitability of three specific course books for the needs of Slovak primary school learners in the areas of linguistic, socio-linguistic, pragmatic, and non-verbal competences. Document analysis and comparative analysis were the research methods used. A system of six categories based on communicative language competences was created for data processing. The research question was set: How do selected course books fulfil the needs of Slovak learners in development of linguistic, socio-linguistic, pragmatic, and non-verbal competences? The following paragraphs summarise and answer the research question in detail for each category.

The first category analysed and compared phonological components of the three course books. The national course book includes presentation and practice of those aspects of pronunciation which are problematic for Slovak learners of English, namely phonemes non-existent in Slovak and assimilation differences. In contrast, the international course books either do not include pronunciation presentation and practice or include phonemes that are irrelevant for Slovak learners, as they are already familiar with them from the Slovak sound system. To develop phonological competences, the national course books address specific pronunciation problems and, therefore, are more suitable for Slovak learners. The second and third categories analysed and compared grammatical competence and lexical competence, respectively. While the international course books present and practice vocabulary without considering the learners' L1s, current realities, and cultures, the Slovak course book adjusts the introduction and practice of grammar to the most problematic structures, while vocabulary is relevant to

the cultural background of the pupils. In the second and third categories of grammatical and lexical competences, the national course book was found to better meet the needs of Slovak learners by dealing more with how the two languages differ in grammar and vocabulary. Nevertheless, content developing grammatical and lexical competences were developed in detail in all three course books, and all are satisfactory. The fourth and fifth categories analysed and compared socio-linguistic and pragmatic components in the three course books. The national course book was found to provide many more opportunities to better develop competences concerning a variety of functions such as appropriate greetings, polite phrases, apologies, suggestions, and requests. It includes relevant and meaningful examples and phrases, focusing on the differences between and comparisons of L1 and L2 cultures. Nonetheless, content developing socio-linguistic and pragmatic competences are also included in the international course books, although not in such specific detail. In the sixth, and final, category of the treatment of non-verbal competences such as extra-linguistic speech sounds, onomatopoeia, and gestures, the national course book proved more suitable for Slovak young learners. It includes numerous relatable examples of onomatopoeia and extra-lingual speech sounds and gestures, using comparison of L2 and L1. The two mass-market course books also include some onomatopoeia and extra-lingual speech sounds, but very little is relevant to the reality of Slovak primary school pupils and none refer to the learner's L1 or their culture.

Thus, the results of our analyses using six categories to determine how these three EFL course books develop phonological, lexical, grammatical, socio-linguistic, pragmatic, and non-verbal competences indicate that the national course book better meets the needs of Slovak learners in all six categories. The choice of these categories was based on one of the main domains of the CEFR (2018), which are communicative language competences. All the course books were of a high quality, especially concerning grammatical and lexical competences. The primary and significant difference in quantity and quality of the categories analysed were in phonological and non-verbal competences, which the international course books did not address specifically nor sufficiently.

CONCLUSION

Course book analyses can serve as a valuable resource for teachers who are in the process of deciding which course books to use. Such analyses can focus on various aspects of a course book's content or form. Comparative analyses in particular can provide relevant information for teachers to make an informed decision about which book is most suitable for their specific learners. Various scholars (Weddel, 2009; Horvathova, 2014; Vesela et al., 2014) recommend teachers apply a variety of criteria when making their analysis. For the purposes of this study the focus was on the aspect of communicative language competences. We agree with Sandorova (2017) that it is important for teachers to be acknowledged about relevance of contents and activities in course books and that they should consider the relevance in their decision making. However, according to Lepionka (2008), the best course books are often not chosen by

teachers because those course books on a market in which they are pushed out by international publishers' aggressive marketing.

Based on the findings in this analysis of three course books for primary-aged children, one national and two produced for the global market, the most suitable for primary school learners in Slovakia is the national course book as it meets the specific needs of Slovak learners better than the international course books. One reason for this might be that, as recommended by Ismajli and Neziri (2019), the authors of the national course book—who are themselves Slovak teachers of English—cooperated closely with Slovak primary school teachers to determine what specific needs of Slovak learners of English should be addressed. Understandably, with the need to be marketable in a wide range of countries and cultures, the international course books have some weaknesses; it is impossible for them to reflect the needs and cultural specifics of every country. However, national course books are not always a better choice, as a study by Zare-ee and Hejazi (2018) indicates that they struggle to reach the standard of quality which international course books achieve. The ideal solution would be the creation of high quality national course books, by well-informed authors who integrate the national teachers' requirements and learners' needs into the books, focusing on the differences between English and L1 and concentrating on those competences not now covered by international course books.

The Slovak foreign language course book market is dominated by those published by large international publishers, even though they do not always meet the needs of Slovak learners. Aside from their suitability, their high price is often prohibitive for parents who must pay for them. Both these issues should be of concern to schools and teachers. The solution we support is the promotion and use of national course books which can be created to meet the needs of Slovak learners and published more cheaply. Motivating and facilitating teachers and educators to create appropriate foreign language course books and encouraging schools to use them should be one of the objectives of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic. There have been many discussions over the years in Slovakia about creating official national EFL course books for all levels of education, but nothing has been done and international course books still hold sway. Slovakia should follow Germany, where only official national course books created specifically for the needs of German learners are used in state schools. The results of this small study indicate that national course books provide much more and better language (and culture) awareness and understanding than do those of the international ELT publishers.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Despite the results achieved, the research has limitations. The major limitation is the small sample of three course books for primary school learners. Further research can be extended to more course books and for different age and language proficiency levels. Even though the findings cannot be generalised, they indicate certain weaknesses of international course books, which should be recognised by schools and teachers in their process of course book selection. Further research could also focus on evaluating the satisfaction of teachers and learners with international and national course books. More

complex research with expert course book analyses, together with evaluation by teachers and learners would provide more reliable data to better inform the course book selection process of EFL teachers in the Slovak education system and beyond.

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