

## **The Implementation of Projects in Communicative Textbooks and Action-oriented Textbooks<sup>1</sup>**

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This paper aims to illustrate the difference between the implementation of projects in communicative textbooks and action-oriented textbooks. I conclude that many communicative textbooks place projects at the end of the units as an attachment to the unit so that the students start doing the project after they complete the unit. I also conclude that projects in many communicative textbooks function only or primarily as reuse activities, just as final tasks, which will allow students to reuse the language content of the unit. In action-oriented textbooks, on the contrary, the textbook unit is actually a project as a whole, so that the students can, initially, appropriate the planned project scenario with the possibility of modifying it, and then they can begin the project at the beginning of the unit, implement it during the unit and finalize the project at the end of the unit even if the project scenarios are placed at the end of the units. Although the projects in action-oriented textbooks also allow students to reuse the language content of the unit, the ultimate goal of the projects in these textbooks is to train learners as social actors.

**Keywords:** Communicative textbooks, Action-oriented textbooks, Projects, Social actors.

### **1. Introduction**

This paper has been designed and should be read as a continuation of studies that I have presented and published with ESBB and elsewhere (see, for example, Acar, 2020c). It also intentionally makes considerable reference to works by Christian Puren on the action-oriented approach within a European framework. My own work is situated within the same framework based on considerable communication with Puren, but refers to the Turkish educational context. I will therefore primarily adopt an unorthodox approach in this study in that I mainly reference my own earlier studies alongside Puren's work to better contextualize this continuation study, and I will therefore not attempt to make detailed reference to standard literature, for example on project-based learning in this field of interest. (See also Nunn, 2015, which explains ESBB encouragement for continuation studies in a non-standard mode.)

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The new goal set by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CoE, 2001) and CEFR companion volume (CEFRCV) (CoE, 2020), namely, training social actors, has many implications for language teaching and learning. The basic implication is that the reference action for which the learners will be trained is no longer the action of language communication, or language interaction, but social action. Interaction in this new social action paradigm, namely, the action-oriented approach (AoA), however, does not disappear but its status changes. In the AoA, it is no longer the goal as in the communicative approach (CA) but a means at the service of social action. Thus, the ultimate goal of language teaching is no longer to train communicators but to train social actors in the AoA, which is renamed as social action-based learning (SABL) by Acar (2020c, 2020d, 2020e) and the social action-oriented approach (SAOA) by Puren (2015, 2019b, 2020) due to the new reference action, which is social action.

As early as 2002, just after the publication of CEFR (2001), Puren (2002), to the best of my knowledge, is the first researcher who detaches the AoA from the CA. In his 2014a article, he shows that the AoA is not a simple extension of the CA since the genes or the characteristics of social action and the language interaction (as specified in Van Ek's (1975) Threshold Level document) are opposed to each other. In other words, contacting foreigners in short-term contact situations and getting involved in short-term language interactions with them as outlined by the Threshold Level document (Van Ek, 1975) display characteristics different than those of acting with them or doing things with them in long-term social action situations. Thus, the AoA also does not correspond to task-based language teaching (TBLT) (Ellis, 2003; Estaire & Zanon, 1994; Nunan, 1989; Willis, 1996), which constitutes the strong version of the CA (Ellis, 2003). This argument was explicitly articulated again in 2019 by the authors of the CEFRCV in their book "The action-oriented approach: A Dynamic Vision of Language Education" as follows:

This book has therefore sought to theorise the underpinnings of the AoA and to explain why, as for example Bourguignon (2006), Puren (2002, 2009) and Richer (2009) argue, the AoA cannot be seen as synonymous with TBLT, as is sometimes assumed. (Piccardo & North, 2019, p. 276)

Different from training in language interaction (as in the CA), training in social action (as in the AoA) is outlined by Acar (2022) as follows:

"Social action training, or co-action, consists of training to make society as good citizens with others in the public domain and training to work effectively with others in the professional domain. In the educational domain, social action brings together the two educational challenges: students have to 'make a class society' (together) in their 'mini-classroom society' in order to be trained as good citizens, and to work effectively with others (and the teacher) - this work consists of learning the target language and culture effectively in their 'mini-classroom company' - in order to be trained as good professionals

in their future professional company later on since they are equipped with the transversal competencies, the ones that are required both in the collective learning of the target language and culture and in a company” (pp. 31-32).

Integrating citizenship education and professional training into language teaching cannot be possible by means of communicative tasks, since the ultimate goal of the tasks in TBLT is only to teach learners to communicate by having them communicate with each other in class. That is why Puren (2009, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2016, 2017, 2019a) argues that the best way to train social actors is by means of pedagogical projects. In the AoA, pedagogical projects aim to educate students as critical but responsible, autonomous but supportive citizens (Puren, 2017). Language textbooks are by nature restrictive in that their content is pre-determined by the curriculum developers and textbook writers. Pedagogical projects, which require maximum autonomy from the students, because this is one of the primary goals of project pedagogy, are not compatible with language textbooks. In other words, pedagogical projects cannot be predetermined by the textbook or curriculum since this will restrict the autonomy of the students, which is the main concern of pedagogical projects. Full-blown holistic pedagogical team projects, as exemplified in Nunn (2016), are certainly incompatible with the constraints of language textbooks, but it is possible to design "mini-projects" that can nevertheless present a maximum of the characteristics of pedagogical projects. Acar (2021b) argues that

Mini-projects differ from pedagogical projects in two respects: (1) They are limited by the timeframe of the textbook unit (2) They may not integrate all the characteristics of pedagogical projects, in particular, they offer limited autonomy compared to the pedagogical projects, the production of a mini-project is generally not used in the following units repeatedly, and they require the students to reuse the language and cultural content of the textbook unit (actional situation of reuse). (p. 730)

Thus, the implementation of the AoA in language textbooks is by means of mini-projects and the textbook unit design in an action-oriented textbook is what I call “mini-project-unit design”, where the unit is the mini-project itself. On the contrary, in the communicative unit, the project is predetermined and attached to the end of the unit with the primary purpose of reusing the linguistic content of the unit, which I call "project-supported unit design", where the learners start doing the project after they complete the unit.

## **2. Project-supported Unit Design**

The unit objectives in the communicative textbooks are stated in terms of functions and notions or CEFR can-do statements, in other words, the unit objectives are communicative objectives. Such communicative unit objectives also indicate the primary function assigned to the projects at the end of these units, which is to enable the learners to reuse the language content of the unit learned throughout the unit in more or less free language production as in the final P stage

of the PPP (Presentation, Practice, Production) model. Consequently, such preprogrammed projects at the end of the units mainly provide the students with a communication situation where they reuse the language content of the unit, just as complex final (communicative) tasks located at the end of the units of many other communicative textbooks. Thus, the unit is a *project-supported unit* and not a *project-unit*.

It is also important to note that employing preprogrammed projects at the end of the units of many communicative textbooks resulted in two different cases. In this first case, the alleged projects at the end of the units do not carry the characteristics of pedagogical projects and hence they are not projects even if the textbook writers title them as projects. I call these so-called projects *false projects* and the units employing them *false-project units*.

### ***False-project Unit***

These textbooks, which employ false projects at the end of the units, do not even reflect the project-supported unit design. The typical examples of such textbooks are the English textbooks currently used in the various grades of the public schools of Turkey, which employ false projects at the end of the units. What are presented at the end of the units are either complex final (communicative) tasks or not even complex final (communicative) tasks. In several of my articles (e.g. Acar, 2020a, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d), I analysed the so-called projects located at the end of the units of these textbooks and indicated that these so-called projects do not carry the characteristics of pedagogical projects, which are the presence of the design stage, the learners' involvement in the design stage, the presence of the action scenario, the high level of autonomy, collective dimension, informational competence, communication at the service of action, the reality dimension (real action), a collective self-evaluation of the process/product. Thus, the so-called projects at the end of the units of these textbooks are not projects even if the writers of these textbooks name them as projects.

The English textbook, *Upswing English*, for example, employs such false projects at the end of its units. It is used by students who are in the eighth grade of public secondary schools in Turkey, at the average age of 13. The textbook names the more or less complex final tasks at the end of its units as projects, which poses the first problem in terms of project pedagogy and its pedagogical projects, which are not compatible with the constraints of a textbook, since projects must be chosen, designed, implemented and even evaluated with maximum autonomy by the students themselves (with the help of the teacher). In the first pages of the textbook, under the title *Plan of the Book*, the subtitle *Language Skills and Learning Outcomes* presents the unit objectives in terms of can-do statements. For Unit 10 *Natural Forces*, these objectives are given as follows:

Students can ...

- identify the main points of TV news about natural forces and disasters.
- talk about predictions concerning the future of the Earth.
- negotiate reasons and results to support their predictions about natural forces and disasters.

- express predictions concerning the future of the Earth.
- give reasons and results to support their predictions about natural forces and disasters.
- identify specific information in simple texts about natural forces and disasters.
- write a short and simple paragraph about reasons and results of natural forces and disasters. (Tıraş, 2020, p. 8)

Such communicative unit objectives already indicate that the units are communication units. These communicative unit objectives also assign the function to the so-called projects at the end of the units, which is to enable the learners to reuse the language content of the unit. This poses the second problem in terms of project pedagogy and the AoA since in an action-oriented textbook the unit objectives are stated in terms of social actions (Acar, 2020c; Puren, 2014b). The third problem, which essentially makes the units of this textbook false project-units, is that the projects at the end of the units do not carry the characteristics of pedagogical projects such as the presence of the design stage, the learners' involvement in the design stage, the presence of the action scenario, the high level of autonomy, collective dimension, informational competence, communication at the service of action, the reality dimension (real action), a collective self-evaluation of the process/product, all of which will be explained in the following example.

In Acar (2021d), I already analysed the characteristics of the so-called project located at the end of unit 10 *Natural Forces*, which is presented by the textbook as follows:

1. Prepare a poster about possible natural forces and disasters in the future. Decide on three to nine possible ones. Use photos, drawings, illustrations, etc. to make your poster interesting and eye-catching.
2. Display your poster and express your opinions about the reasons and possible results of the natural forces and disasters in your poster. (Tıraş, 2020, p.112)

This so-called project does not carry the characteristics of pedagogical projects. There is no design stage. The social objective in *preparing a poster about possible natural forces and disasters in the future* is absent. It is not stated why the students will prepare a poster about possible natural forces and disasters in the future. There are also no instructions as to the specifications of the poster other than *using photos, drawings, illustrations*. Thus, if each student will prepare a poster, the result will be individual posters in different sizes, shapes, and formats. There is no instruction related to whether the students will prepare the poster(s) in pairs, groups, or as a whole class. It is deduced that each student will prepare a poster so the collective dimension is also absent. There is also no collective self-evaluation of the process and product dimension of the so-called project. The action scenario in the design is also absent. The instructions *Decide on three to nine possible ones. Use photos, drawings, illustrations, etc. to make your poster interesting and eye-catching* display the steps of a complex task rather than the steps of an action scenario since the so-called project does not reflect a social action. There is no instruction leading the students to search and manage information related to the reasons and possible results of the natural forces and disasters in the poster. Information management is, thus, restricted to searching for and finding the *photos, drawings, and illustrations* for the poster. The students will prepare a real poster but the action

they will carry out is not a social action. Consequently what is real is the complex task rather than the social action. The real function of the poster is expressed in the last instruction *Display your poster and express your opinions about the reasons and possible results of the natural forces and disasters in your poster*, which is a one-way communication if each student will express their opinions about the reasons and possible results of the natural forces and disasters in their posters orally to the classmates, in which case there is no interaction in the classroom. This is a subject of criticism even in terms of the communicative approach, whose reference action is language interaction, which is not reflected in any instruction of the so-called project. It should also be noted that even if there were interaction, it would be purely communicative as it would not lead to a joint decision (about the best poster, or what the class would do with the poster, etc.). Thus, this so-called project located at the end of Unit 10 is not a project but a complex task and its sole function is to enable the learners to reuse the language content of the unit.

In Acar (2021d) I intended to illustrate what a mini-project could look like for unit 10 of the English textbook *Upswing English* by proposing the following mini-project:

A: As a whole class, prepare a report including a list of solutions to the problem the earthquake victims could face after an earthquake and send it to a relief organization like the Turkish Red Crescent Society and/or to the municipality and/or to the office of the governor or district governor.

B: Make an individual search on the internet and/or consult a relief organization like the Turkish Red Crescent Society and/or your parents and grandparents who might have experienced an earthquake about the problems the earthquake victims could face after an earthquake. If you collected the information about the major problems that earthquake victims could face or faced from these sources (e.g. your parents and grandparents) in your native language (Turkish), as a whole class, translate these problems into the target language (English). As a whole class, select, organize, analyze, interpret and evaluate the major problems to which you will find solutions.

C: As a whole class, decide on the format of your report (e.g. text size, font size, the subsections of the report), and develop an evaluation grid to evaluate each group's report.

D: Form groups and each group will write a report including a list of solutions to the problems you specified and organized beforehand (e.g. Specifying a list of volunteer hotels and/or landlords who could offer free accommodation to the earthquake victims.) by following the format you decided collectively. Each group will also choose a title for their report that also reflects your class identity (e.g. Innovative solutions to the problems of earthquake victims: A report from 8C society of secondary school X)

E: Each group will present their report to the whole class. The other groups who listen to the presentation take notes, ask the presenters questions about their report, the presenters will answer the questions and finally, the other groups will evaluate the presenters' report by using the evaluation grid you formed and developed collectively.

F. As a whole class, select the best report.

G. Select the most innovative solutions from all the reports and integrate them into a new collective report that you will send to a relief organization like the Turkish Red Crescent Society and/or to the municipality and/or to the office of the governor or district governor.

H: Do a collective self-evaluation of the organization and realization of your mini-project: What worked well? What could have been done to make it better? Why?

Consequently, the units of such communicative textbooks as *Upswing English* cannot even be called project-supported units.

### ***Project-supported Unit***

In the second case, the projects located at the end of the units of some other communicative textbooks carry many characteristics of pedagogical projects and hence the units of such communicative textbooks can be classified as *project-supported units* but not as *project-units* since the projects are attached to the end of the units with the primary function of enabling the learners to reuse the language content of the unit in more or less free language production as in the final P stage of the PPP model, where the learners start doing the project after they complete the unit. Communicative textbooks with project-supported units also state the unit objectives largely in terms of functions and notions (communicative objectives) and the function of the unit content is to prepare the learners to be able to carry out the final project announced at the end of the unit, which has the same function that of the final complex (communicative) tasks at the end of the units of many communicative textbooks. Thus, project-supported units of these communicative textbooks are communication units but not social action units.

One example of such a textbook with project-supported units is *Own It! 2* (Cambridge University Press), which is used by students in the sixth grade of some private secondary schools in Turkey. The teacher's book gives the following information about the projects at the end of the units: "The *Own It!* projects or *Around the World* pages at the end of the unit give students the opportunity to consolidate and demonstrate all their learning in a fun, personalized way" (Copello, 2020, p.4). The textbook, furthermore, claims that the projects at the end of the units "encourage students to 'own' the language and topic knowledge they have gained throughout the unit in an individual or collaborative project" (Copello, 2020, p.14). Thus, it is clear that the primary function assigned to the projects at the end of the units is to enable the learners to reuse the language content of the unit in more or less free language production. In the "*You spoke, We listened*" section of the teacher's book, such information about project work is given:

Collaboration is an effective way of empowering students. *Own It!* includes a project in every other unit of the *Student's Book* with more available in the online *Teacher's Resource Bank*, as well as an accompanying *Project Book* which offers extra support and practical tips for teachers. In addition, students can work together on their projects in the digital

collaboration space and teachers can track and assess their work there. Project work allows students to...

- build collaborative skills, such as communication, teamwork and leadership ;
- acquire practical, transferable skills associated with different types of projects, like doing research and making presentations ;
- choose and explore areas that they are interested in, thereby increasing their motivation ;
- engage with the real-world issues as projects are often interdisciplinary and based on real world scenarios. (Copello, 2020, p.25)

Consequently, the teacher's book stresses important characteristics of projects such as the collective dimension, informational competence, and the reality dimension (real action). Unit 4, in the teacher's book, presents the social studies project titled *Your community needs you*. In the sections *Plan, Present and Check*, the instructions are presented as follows:

#### PLAN

5. Work in groups. Plan a poster for a volunteer project. Complete the steps below.

Choose an idea for a volunteer project. Use the ideas below or your own.

-Teach older people how to use the latest gadgets.

-Help at an after-school or local sports club for younger students.

-Work in an animal shelter.

Think of phrases to attract volunteers.

Prepare your poster.

Add photos.

#### PRESENT

6. Display your poster on your classroom wall. Remember to include useful information for volunteers, photos and follow the tips in *How to agree as a group*.

#### CHECK

7. Look at your classmates' posters. Would you like to work on their projects? Vote for the best poster. (Copello, 2020, p.85)

Although the specifications of the final product (poster) as well as collective self-evaluation of the product/process dimension of the project are not given any place in the design of the project, the project carries some important characteristics of pedagogical projects such as the presence of the design stage, the presence of the action scenario, autonomy, and the collective dimension. The project, however, is located at the end of the unit, which necessarily implies that there is no intervention of the students in the initial design of the project, in particular, no possible differentiation of projects by groups. The location of the project also indicates that it has the function of enabling the learners to reuse the language content of the unit in more or less free



language production and hence, as claimed by the teacher’s book, “encourages students to ‘own’ the language and topic knowledge they have gained throughout the unit...” (Copello, 2020, p.14).

### 3. (Mini-)project-unit

While in project-supported unit design the projects are placed at the end of the units as an attachment to the unit just as final tasks so that the students start doing the project after they complete the unit in order to reuse the language content of the unit, in (mini-) project-unit design, as implemented in the action-oriented textbooks, the textbook unit is actually a (mini-)project as a whole, so that the students can, initially, appropriate the planned project scenario with the possibility of modifying it, and then they can begin the project at the beginning of the unit, implement it during the unit and finalize the project at the end of the unit even if the project scenarios are placed at the end of the units. It should also be noted that the teacher must work on this scenario at the beginning of the unit, so that the students know what they will have to do at the end of the unit, why they will be asked to work on the relevant language content. While in project-supported unit design, the unit objectives at the beginning of the units are expressed largely in terms of functional notional objectives or can-do statements, in (mini-)project unit design the primary unit objective at the beginning of the unit is expressed in terms of the objective of the mini-project and hence the objective is an actional objective rather than a communicative objective. Action-oriented textbooks adopt such a (mini-)project-unit design.

(Mini-)project-unit design can be seen in the French textbook *Version Originale 4 - B2* (Barthélémy et al., 2003, Paris: Éditions Maison des Langues) edited and directed by Christian Puren. The title of Unit 5, for example, is *Live together* and the objectives of this unit are expressed at the beginning of the unit in terms of mini-projects as follows: *At the end of this unit, we will make an oral presentation on the theme of discrimination and/or write, stage and perform a humorous sketch on the theme of discrimination.* The scenario for developing the final production of the mini-project *we will make an oral presentation on the theme of discrimination* is given at the end of the unit as follows:

- A. Before you begin, you will decide on the criteria for evaluating an oral presentation. Complete the grid below by defining and describing the sub-criteria.
- B. Choose the subject of your presentation and collect the necessary information (through surveys, the internet, etc.)
- C. Prepare a detailed plan and give your presentation orally to the class.
- D. Your classmates will take notes, ask you questions and then evaluate and comment on the quality of the oral communication of your presentation.

The scenario for developing the final production of the alternative mini-project *we will write, stage and perform a humorous sketch on the theme of discrimination* is presented as follows:

- A. Read the definition of parody and comment on it among yourselves.
- B. Look at these two photos and explain why the second one is a parody.

- C. In groups, choose the discrimination you want to report. Write the sketch. You can parody a work if you wish.
- D. Work on the staging by adding stage directions to your text: indications about the places, costumes, intonations, gestures and mimics, etc.
- E. Do a dress rehearsal and then play in front of the whole class. Which sketch was the most successful? Why?

At the end of the unit, the students will make a presentation on the theme of discrimination and/or stage and perform a humorous sketch on the theme of discrimination. The whole unit prepares the learners for achieving these actions and hence the language and the cultural content function as resources for the students to be able to carry out the mini-projects.

## Conclusion

This article aimed to illustrate the difference between the implementation of projects in communicative textbooks and action-oriented textbooks. I argued that many communicative textbooks place projects at the end of the units as an attachment to the unit so that the students start doing the project after they complete the unit. I also argued that projects in many communicative textbooks function only or primarily as reuse activities, where the learners can reuse the language content of the unit in more or less free language production as in the final P stage of the PPP model. In communicative textbooks with project-supported units, the unit objectives are stated largely in terms of functions and notions or CEFR can-do statements (communicative objectives). Thus, project-supported units of these communicative textbooks are communication units but not social action units. In action-oriented textbooks, on the contrary, the textbook unit is actually a (mini-)project as a whole, so that the students can, initially, appropriate the planned project scenario with the possibility of modifying it, and then they can begin the project at the beginning of the unit, implement it during the unit and finalize the project at the end of the unit. Contrary to the communicative units of communicative textbooks, in the action-oriented textbooks, which adopt (mini-)project unit design, the primary unit objective at the beginning of the unit is stated in terms of the objective of the mini-project and hence the objective is an actional objective rather than a communicative objective. Thus, the units of action-oriented textbooks are social action units rather than communicative units.

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