In Search of Authentic and Adapted Literary Texts in Textbooks for Young Learners of English as a Foreign Language

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∽   In Croatia, textbooks play a crucial role in shaping the linguistic and communicative competencies of young English as a Foreign Language learners. Incorporating authentic and adapted literary texts in textbooks is essential for enhancing language development. Authentic literary texts mirror real-world language use, providing learners with genuine language encounters in various contexts. Adapted literary texts, on the other hand, are modified versions of original texts tailored to meet the linguistic and cognitive abilities of the target audience. They serve to bridge the gap between learners' current language abilities and authentic materials, and thus facilitate language development. Integrating authentic and adapted texts of different forms into textbooks for young English as a Foreign Language learners offers numerous advantages. Exposure to real-life language enables learners to develop their language skills in a meaningful and relevant manner while working at the same time on their communicative and intercultural competencies, as well as visual and multimodal literacies. The present paper analyses textbooks designed for Grade 4 English as a Foreign Language learners, focusing on authentic and adapted literary texts. It explores the range of authentic literary texts (stories, cartoons, dialogues, poems, etc.) and investigates factors such as purpose, cultural relevance and engagement value (follow-up activities). The findings highlight the significance of including authentic materials that reflect learners' interests and experiences in textbooks. Educators, curriculum designers and textbook publishers can benefit from these insights to create materials that cater to the needs and interests of young English as a Foreign Language learners, fostering their language development in authentic and engaging ways.

Keywords: adapted literary texts, authentic literary texts, culture, textbooks, young English as a Foreign Language learners

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V iskanju izvirnih in prilagojenih literarnih besedil v učbenikih za mlajše učence angleščine kot tujega jezika

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∽ Na Hrvaškem imajo učbeniki ključno vlogo pri oblikovanju jezikovnih in sporazumevalnih kompetenc mlajših učencev angleščine kot tujega jezika. Vključevanje izvirnih in prilagojenih literarnih besedil v učbenike je bistvenega pomena za krepitev jezikovnega razvoja. Izvirna literarna besedila odražajo jezikovno rabo v resničnem svetu in učencem omogočajo srečevanje z jezikom v različnih kontekstih na pristen način. Prilagojena literarna besedila pa so spremenjene različice izvirnih besedil, načrtovane tako, da ustrezajo jezikovnim in kognitivnim zmožnostim ciljnega občinstva. Služijo za premostitev vrzeli med trenutnimi jezikovnimi zmožnostmi učencev in izvirnimi gradivi ter tako olajšajo jezikovni razvoj. Vključevanje izvirnih in prilagojenih besedil različnih oblik v učbenike za mlajše učence angleščine kot tujega jezika prinaša številne prednosti. Izpostavljenost jeziku iz resničnega življenja učencem omogoča, da razvijajo svoje jezikovne spretnosti na smiseln in ustrezen način ter da hkrati razvijajo svoje sporazumevalne in medkulturne kompetence ter vizualno in multimodalno pismenost. Ta prispevek analizira učbenike, namenjene učencem angleščine kot tujega jezika v 4. razredu, s poudarkom na izvirnih in prilagojenih literarnih besedilih. Raziskuje vrsto izvirnih literarnih besedil (zgodbe, risanke, dialogi, pesmi itn.) in preiskuje dejavnike, kot so: namen, kulturna relevantnost in raven zavzetosti pri učencih (dejavnosti po branju/poslušanju besedil). Ugotovitve poudarjajo pomen vključevanja izvirnih gradiv, ki odražajo interese in izkušnje učencev, v učbenike. Učitelji, načrtovalci učnih načrtov in založniki učbenikov lahko izkoristijo ta spoznanja za oblikovanje gradiv, ki ustrezajo potrebam in interesom mlajših učencev angleščine kot tujega jezika, ter tako spodbujajo njihov jezikovni razvoj na izvirne in za učence privlačne načine.

Ključne besede: prilagojena literarna besedila, izvirna literarna besedila, kultura, učbeniki, mlajši učenci angleščine kot tujega jezika

Introduction

English language teaching (ELT) materials cover anything presenting or informing about the language being learned, as defined by Tomlinson (1998) and McGrath (2013). Gray (2016, p. 95) categorises materials into three types: 1) published materials (such as textbooks, audio-visual aids, workbooks, dictionaries, guided readers and online courses); 2) authentic materials (such as newspapers, magazines, songs, etc., not originally intended for pedagogical use but brought into the classroom by teachers); and 3) teacher-made materials, a diverse range of practice materials designed by teachers. Textbooks, also known as coursebooks, are the most prevalent form of published material (Gray, 2016), sparking debates over their use. Nevertheless, they remain "an important parameter in education studies and textbook choice a relevant factor for education practice" (Japelj Pavešić & Cankar, 2022, p. 31).

Textbooks may offer crucial support to teachers by saving time in content creation and aligning with subject curricula. According to McGrath (2013), the advantages of textbooks can be summed up as reducing the time needed for lesson preparation; providing a visible, coherent programme of work; providing support; providing a convenient resource for learners; making standardised instruction possible; presenting material in a visually appealing way; presenting cultural artefacts; and offering a wealth of extra materials. Textbooks play a vital role in developing communicative and intercultural competence, and fostering student autonomy in language acquisition. Furthermore, they provide a perspective on both the target and source cultures, acting as starting points for acquiring content about the target language culture (Petravić, 2010; Andraka, 2020). Petravić (2010) emphasises that textbooks should be seen as a meeting point of cultures. They also serve as guides, especially when accompanied by teaching manuals, offering on-the-job training for novice teachers (McGrath, 2002; Richards, 2014).

On the other hand, textbooks are not immune to criticism. Brumfit (1980, p. 3) particularly criticises textbooks for potentially deskilling teachers and positioning them as mere conveyors of content. Concerns also arise about their problematic status as educational tools and commodities. Furthermore, from the students' perspective, Rijavec (2015, p. 119) asserts that artificially constructed texts disregard learners' interests, underestimate their intellectual capacities, and present a simplified version of what adults consider a child's world should be.

In the Croatian context of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the relevance and reliance on textbooks is indisputable. In the ELLiE longitudinal study (2006–2010) (Enever, 2011), Croatia was listed first among

four countries in which coursebooks were widely used. This is not surprising if we take into consideration the fact that textbooks are available to both teachers and students, as opposed to authentic materials, which teachers and students might find challenging to obtain. Moreover, in terms of the limited time designated for English lessons in school (two or three hours per week) and the curriculum demands that must be met within this framework, textbooks seem to be a logical solution, as they cater to the curriculum (Cindrić & Milković, 2023). What is more, for teachers, stories in textbooks can be timesavers, as the texts are already adapted and accompanying materials and follow-up activities are provided (Dagarin Fojkar et al., 2013).

Textbooks published by national and foreign publishers generally align well with the competencies and learning outcomes stipulated in the Croatian curriculum for English. In addition to using textbooks and supplementary teaching materials, teachers can also incorporate adapted and authentic teaching materials, along with digital, interactive and multimedia content. As outlined in the curriculum, students should be active participants in the material selection process, thus encouraging their autonomy and responsibility for learning. The chosen teaching materials, whether selected by the teacher or with student involvement, should be meaningful and comprehensible, fostering the exploration and questioning of knowledge, assumptions, ideas and behaviour, thus positively influencing the development of critical and creative thinking (Kurikulum nastavnog predmeta Engleski jezik za osnovne škole i gimnazije, 2019, p. 158).

While it is important to bear in mind that "language and culture are mutually integrated" (Kirkgöz & Ağçam, 2011, p. 154), the use of literary texts is also important for developing communicative and intercultural language competence. Several formats of authentic literary materials for children are used by teachers, most commonly rhymes, which Opie and Opie (1967, p. 17) categorise into those that are essential to the regulation of games and children's relationships with each other, including dips and skipping rhymes, and those that are "mere expressions of exuberance", including jingles, slogans, nonsense verse, tongue twisters, scary rhymes and jokes. These are followed by various multimodal formats of children's literature (Bland, 2018, pp. 271–276), such as picture books, graphic novels, story apps, plays, chapter books, graded readers and others. This aspect has been recognised by textbook publishers and such texts are also included in textbooks for learning English as a foreign language. In textbooks, they appear either in their authentic form or as adapted versions, usually accompanied by illustrations provided by the publishers of the textbooks.

In the present study, literary texts are understood as "fiction written for children to read for pleasure, rather than for didactic purposes" (Ghosn, 2002, p. 172). Literature, then, offers "authentic language – works which have not been written specifically with the foreign learner in mind" (Elliott de Riverol, 1991, p. 66), but to engage native readers in genuine narrative experiences. Authentic literary texts encourage language development, reflect real language use and offer students authentic language experiences from various contexts. Adapted literary texts are often abridged and go through a series of language changes deemed necessary to provide learners with a text suitable for their needs, as well as for their cognitive and linguistic levels (Cindrić & Milković, 2023). Nevertheless, even adapted texts can contribute to students' language development, as they can represent a bridge between students' current language abilities and authentic literary texts, which could potentially be too demanding.

Research problem

Previous studies on the use of literary texts in teaching English as a foreign language have underlined teachers' heavy reliance on textbooks in the Croatian educational setting (Cindrić & Milković, 2023; Cindrić et al., 2024). Given the significant role of authentic literary texts in foreign language learning (Bland, 2018; Ghosn, 2018; Mourão, 2015; Narančić Kovač, 1999, 2019), the present study aims to investigate the extent to which Croatian EFL textbooks for fourth-grade learners incorporate authentic and adapted Anglophone literary texts. Specifically, the research addresses the following research problem: To what extent do Croatian EFL textbooks for fourth-grade learners incorporate authentic and adapted Anglophone literary texts, and how are these texts utilised in terms of genre, activities, cultural elements and pedagogical rationale?

Research questions

The research questions of the study are as follows:

RQ1:   What is the nature of the literary texts in terms of authenticity – are they authentic texts or adaptations?

RQ2:   Do the texts differ across literary genres?

RQ3:   What activities are associated with the literary texts?

RQ4:   Are the literary texts accompanied by tasks relating to cultural elements?

RQ5:   What are the possible reasons for including these literary texts in textbooks?

Method

Sample

The research sample comprises the corpus of all of the English language textbooks approved for use in the fourth grade of Croatian primary schools (the fourth year of learning English) for the 2022/2023 school year. As shown in Table 1, there are six textbooks in total: three compiled by local (Croatian) authors (A, B and C), and three global textbooks by foreign authors (D, E and F). All of the textbooks are published in A4 format (297 x 210 mm), or in slightly smaller dimensions (e.g., textbooks A and F are published in 270 x 210 mm dimensions). Although similar in format, the number of pages varies greatly, with two textbooks over 150 pages, two textbooks around 120 pages, and two textbooks with only around 80 pages. Nevertheless, all of the textbooks meet the standard and curriculum requirements and were consequently approved for the use in grade 4 of Croatian schools.

Table 1

The research corpus

	Title	Authors	Publisher	First published	Total no. of pages	Label
Croatian	*Dip in 4*	Suzana Ban, Dubravka Blažić	Školska knjiga	2021	152	A
	New Building Blocks 4	Kristina Čajo Anđel, Daška Domljan, Mia Šavrljuga	Profil Klett	2021	116	B
	Tiptoes 4	Anita Žepina, Suzana Anić-Antić, Suzana Ban	Školska knjiga	2021	159	C
Global	*Let's Explore 4*	Nina Laude, Suzanne Torres, Paul Shipton	Oxford University Press	2021	79	D
	Poptropica 3	Sagrario Salaberri, Viv Lambert	Pearson (Ljevak)	2017	80	E
	Smileys 4	Jenny Dooley, Virginia Evans	Express Publishing (Alfa)	2013	120	F

Textbook A is authored by Croatian authors and published in Croatia. It consists of 152 pages and contains six units plus a Special Days unit, which covers the topics of Halloween, Christmas and Easter. Each unit is divided into three to five lessons followed by a Reading Club topic, except the last unit. Each unit has a Language in Focus section as well as Revision Activities offered at the end of the unit. The textbook ends with a Word List and an abstract from the

Croatian Curriculum for English. It also provides codes for digital content (*e sfera*) and an access code for opening digital editions of the book (*mozaweb*).

Textbook B is also authored by Croatian authors and published in Croatia. It has 116 pages. The content of the textbook is organised into six units divided into four lessons, followed by assessment and self-assessment tasks. Unlike textbook A, textbook B has an introductory unit, a final unit and an appendix. The appendix includes two stories: *Ronnie's Christmas Pudding* and *The Little Red Hen.* It is followed by Ronnie's Grammar Den, which focuses on the grammar presented in the textbook, a tape script, a wordlist and an excerpt from the curriculum. Textbook B is also accompanied by digital content.

Textbook C is published by the Croatian publisher Školska knjiga and has 159 pages in total. The content of the textbook is divided into ten units, with the first unit being introductory and the last unit including holiday topics (Christmas and Easter). The units in between are further divided into five to seven lessons, followed by self-assessment tasks and suggestions for a project. In addition, all of the units focus on different topics and describe explicit intended outcomes of the lessons. The textbook ends with a wordlist, tape scripts, curriculum outcomes and project time cut-outs.

Textbook D is published by Oxford University Press. Its 79 pages are divided into six units, consisting of vocabulary, structures, and cross-curricular and cultural topics. The textbook has an appendix comprising festivals (Christmas, World Book Day), culture units (Triko Cirkus Teatar, Diocletian's Palace, Cities in Croatia, Sports in Croatia, and Schools in Britain and Croatia), an additional language unit on ordinal numbers, a proposal for a project on plastic (The Plastic Problem), cut-outs for each unit and a wordlist.

Textbook E is published by Pearson Education Limited and has 96 pages. The content of the textbook is divided into ten units, the first unit being an introductory unit. The units mostly focus on language and vocabulary, while the last unit (Wider World) is organised somewhat differently and contains four lessons in which children from around the world (Canada, South Africa, France, Mexico, Borneo, England, Kenya, Spain, Russia, Argentina, Ireland, China, Peru, United Kingdom) introduce a variety of intercultural topics (including how they spend their weekends, the kinds of wildlife parks in their countries, their heroes/role models and what brings them happiness). The textbook ends with an appendix that contains a Goodbye Lesson, festivals (Christmas, Mother's Day) and cut-out pages for each unit. The textbook also provides an access code to digital content.

Textbook F is published by the British/Greek publishing house Express Publishing and is brought to the Croatian market through an intermediary, the

Croatian publishing house Alfa. It contains 120 pages. The content is presented in five modules divided into eleven units (a starter unit and ten additional units). Each module is followed by Storytime and Checkpoints with revision tasks. Storytime lessons present five stories from different parts of the world: Denmark, Indonesia, Bulgaria, Jamaica and Russia. The textbook ends with an appendix that includes revision tasks (My Magazine for modules 1 to 5), special days lessons (Halloween, Bonfire Night, Christmas, St Valentine's Day and Easter), an eco-friendly lesson and a glossary.

Research instrument

All of the textbooks include narratives in various forms. Content analysis, which is considered to be the most appropriate method for analysing the content of a textbook (Mužić, 1977; Bognar & Matijević, 2002; Milković, 2023), was used to gather data from the corpus. An instrument designed specifically for the purpose of this research allowed the researchers to record narratives and their characteristics, and to categorise them appropriately. The instrument included categories such as the narrative's title, type, genre, authorship and accompanying tasks, as well as other relevant details. Furthermore, it was essential to classify the literary texts based on their cultural origin. For this study, the texts were categorised as belonging to the *target culture* (Anglophone), the *source culture* (in this case, Croatian) or *other cultures* (neither Croatian nor Anglophone). These categories facilitated the systematic recording and classification of a substantial volume of data related to the narratives. Consequently, it was possible to extract literary texts (in various forms) from the Anglophone and other cultures that were not authored by the textbook authors. The extracted literary texts included both authentic literary texts and adaptations. A number of changes to the authentic texts and adaptations were carried out by the textbook authors, but intertextual and cultural connections with a foreign (non-Croatian) culture were preserved.

Research design

All of the textbooks within the corpus were analysed according to the content analysis method. Accordingly, 23 literary texts (not authored by the textbook authors) in various forms (authentic texts and adaptations) were recorded, as shown in Table 2. Textbooks D and E do not contain literary texts that meet the criteria and were therefore excluded from further analysis, while the remaining four textbooks each incorporate five to seven literary texts in total.

Table 2

The number of recorded literary texts across the corpus

Textbook	Number of literary texts from the target culture	Number of literary texts from other cultures	Total number of literary texts
A	3	4	7
B	5		5
C	2	4	6
D			0
E			0
F	1	4	5
Total	11	12	23

The literary texts from Anglophone cultures and accompanying activities were further analysed with respect to the research questions.

The first two research questions required an analysis of the literary texts and their origin, including comparisons to their authentic versions in the case of adaptations. The remaining three questions focused on the accompanying activities in the textbooks, which were analysed in three steps. The first step was to identify which types of activities were associated with the literary texts. For this purpose, the accompanying activities were categorised as pre-reading, while-reading or after-reading activities and evaluated according to the following criteria: How many activities arise from the literary text? Are the activities designed to develop one or more language skills? Are the activities meaningful, i.e., affectively and cognitively engaging (cf. Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018, p. 133)? The number of activities associated with a literary text can provide valuable insights into the extent to which the text is used to promote language learning (skill development) and cultural understanding. In the following step, the activities (which were not necessarily in close vicinity to the literary text) were taken into consideration in order to decide whether the texts were used in connection with cultural elements. In the last step, answers to the set research questions were considered in order to deduce possible reasons for the inclusion of the literary texts in the textbooks.

Results and discussion

The total number of literary texts in the analysed textbooks is relatively small (23), and it is evident that the global (non-Croatian) textbooks contain fewer literary texts than the local (Croatian) textbooks, in some cases having no literary texts at all. Global textbooks D and E have fewer pages than the Croatian textbooks and do not contain literary texts. It seems that by aiming at an international audience and expanding the content of the textbook to fit a broad set of demands in order to enable wider use on an international scale, textbooks lose literary and cultural connections with the source and the target culture, in this case Croatian and Anglophone culture, respectively. The only explicit signal of the target culture is the language that is taught, which is in fact often part of the textbook authors' source culture (in the case of textbooks D and E). This finding is aligned with research by Rathert and Cabaroğlu (2022), who found that local textbooks provide materials that provide foreign language learners with opportunities to compare the target language and culture with their own, while global textbooks often need to be adjusted for a specific cultural setting.

Textbooks A, B, C and F contain a total of 23 literary texts, as shown in Table 2. Of these 23 texts, 11 belong to Anglophone culture (British, American and Australian culture), while 12 texts can be linked to other cultures. Texts from other cultures can be divided into two categories: well-known stories of European heritage (7) and stories from other cultures around the world (5). The European stories include fairy tales by Hans Christian Andersen (three fairy tales), from Aesop's fables (two fables), a story inspired by the fairy tale *Cinderella*, and another story inspired by the picture book *Palle Alone in the World* by Danish author Jens Sigsgaard. Stories from cultures around the world are usually explicitly linked to the particular cultures in their subtitles (e.g., *An Indian Tale* (A), *A Story from Bulgaria* (F), *A Story from Jamaica* (F)) as well as to the illustrations that accompany the texts. However, we could not confirm that these stories truly originated in the cultures proposed in the subtitles due to heavy adaptation and story elements that are usually repeated in different folk tales around the world (e.g., the character of Anansi the Spider, which originated in the culture of the Ashanti people in Ghana, but is also a part of Jamaican folk literature; or *An Indian Tale* (A), which is not linked to a specific tribe and easily falls into the trap of cultural appropriation and misrepresentation in the accompanying illustrations).

There are no texts originating in Croatian culture. However, some literary texts are international classics and thus also belong to the Croatian canon of children's literature. For example, stories inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales or Perrault's *Cinderella*, as well as the picture book *Palle Alone in the*

World, are well known to every Croatian child reader in the fourth grade. The inclusion of international literature in textbooks can be interpreted as an attempt to foster multiculturalism and intercultural understanding among young learners. On the other hand, textbook authors tend to include stories that are closer to Croatian culture and the experience of Croatian readers. This is often the case when including texts from other cultures in educational materials (Milković, 2023).

In order to answer the research questions, the 11 Anglophone texts were further analysed with respect to the story, language, genre (Table 3), and accompanying tasks and activities.

Table 3

Anglophone literary texts in EFL textbooks for the fourth grade in Croatia

	Title	Author	Culture	Genre	Authenticity	Textbook	Note
1	Old McDonald [sic!] had a farm	traditional	British / American	Rhyme/ song	Authentic	A	One verse of the poem containing "moo-moo" (cow)
2	Jingle Bells	traditional	American	Rhyme/ song	Authentic	A	All three verses – fill in words
3	Humpty Dumpty	traditional	British	Nursery rhyme	Story adaptation	A	One of five presented verses is authentic
4	Goldilocks and the Three Bears	traditional	British	Fairy tale	Language adaptation	B	Story in the present tense
5	Kookaburra	Marion Sinclair	Australian	Nursery rhyme/ Song	Authentic	B	
6	The Animal Fair	traditional	British	Rhyme	Language adaptation	B	Modern version of a traditional song
7	Miss Polly has a Dolly	traditional	British / American	Rhyme/ Song	Language adaptation	B	Present simple
8	The Little Red Hen	traditional	British / American	Story	Partial language and story adaptation	B	
9	The Three Kind Wolves and the Big Bully	traditional	British	Fairy tale	Story and language adapted	C	Story presented in two lessons through reading and listening
10	The Story of a Hat	Dr Seuss	American	Picture book	Story and language adapted	C	Story conveyed through reading and listening
11	The Yellow Giraffe	popular	British / American	Rhyme/ Song	Authentic	F	

The first research question requires categorising the Anglophone literary texts into two categories: authentic texts and adaptations. The textbooks contain four authentic literary texts: *Old McDonald [sic!] had a farm* (A), *Jingle Bells* (A)*, Kookaburra* (B) and *The Yellow Giraffe* (F). All of these authentic literary texts are rhymes presented as songs and sing-alongs. *Old McDonald* [sic!] *had a farm*, a traditional rhyme in which the name *MacDonald* is abbreviated (it is unclear whether it was abbreviated on purpose to establish a connection to the McDonald's fast food chain, which is presumably well known to Croatian children) is presented through one five-line verse about a cow, but can be expanded in the following task, which includes other farm animals presenting singular and plural forms. *Jingle Bells*, *Kookaburra* and *The Yellow Giraffe* are presented in full and in their original form with authentic language.

The remaining seven literary texts underwent certain changes in comparison to the original (authentic) texts. These changes fall into two categories: linguistic changes and changes of the story. The latter is perhaps expected with fairy tales and picture books, where logic demands practical changes regarding the length of the story in order to maintain coherence. However, the stories are also adapted to fit an educational purpose and to offer a moral that is absent from the original. *The Three Kind Wolves and the Big Bully* (C) is a modern adaptation of the traditional British fairy tale *The Three Little Pigs*. The three little wolves represent three possible types of children today: the first little wolf is lazy and listens to music all day long, the second little wolf is always tired because he plays Minecraft (a popular video game) all night, and the third little wolf is patient and hard-working. They built houses in accordance with the traditional version of the story, but the big mean Bully Pig came and blew their houses down. In the end, Bully Pig got stuck in the chimney and the wolves helped him to freedom, followed by a happy ending in which the bully changed for the better. Not only does this story deal with bullies, it also offers a happy ending entangled with a difficult modern topic.

A similar didactic happy ending is offered in *The Story of a Hat* (C), which is actually an adaptation of the picture book *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* by Dr Seuss. Written in the author's recognisable nonsensical and light tone, the original story features a young boy, Bartholomew Cubbins, who was unable to remove his hat in front of the King: the moment he removed one hat, there immediately appeared another. It was decided that the boy should be punished by being thrown from the highest tower. As they started to climb to the top of the tower, the boy frantically tried to get rid of his hats faster and faster, and each time the next hat was more and more extravagant. The last, 500th hat was filled with gems, feathers and gilding, so the King decided to buy all of the hats. In the end, the boy

not only saved his own life, but also went back home rich. In the adapted textbook version, the story is abridged and the nonsensical and humorous features are removed, thus turning it into a moral tale. At the beginning of the adaptation, the King is greedy and mean. Bartholomew Cubbins has the same problem as in the original story: he could not take off his hat in front of the King because the next hat magically reappeared. However, when the King kindly asked the boy to sell all of these beautiful hats, the hats stopped reappearing and the whole experience turned the King into a kind and friendly king.

Adaptations that fall into the category of linguistic changes include changes from past to present tenses, omissions and changes of some expressions. For example, in the rhyme *Miss Polly* (B), the language is almost completely authentic, except that all of the past tenses are substituted with the same verbs in present tenses. Thus, the line "Miss Polly had a dolly" is changed into "Miss Polly has a dolly". Consequently, all of the subsequent verbs follow the same logic. The same kind of tense shift is present in *The Animal Fair* (B), *The Three Kind Wolves and the Big Bully* (C) and *The Story of a Hat* (C). Partial language adaptation is also present in *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* (B) and *The Little Red Hen* (B). In the latter, the verbs throughout the story are limited to present simple tense, which breaks down the narrative and creates the effect of describing the accompanying illustrations. However, in the next to the last scene, the Little Red Hen's famous monologue is authentic: "You didn't help me plant the wheat. You didn't help me cut the wheat. You didn't help me take the wheat to the mill. You didn't help me make the bread." The rest of her monologue is didactically adapted to fit in with the topic of Easter: "But it is Easter today, and you can eat it." (B, p. 89)

While there are no changes to the story *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, it is conveyed through present tenses: "This is Goldilocks. She is a little girl, but she is very curious. [...] 'I'm so hungry!' Goldilocks says." (B, p. 21) However, at the end of the story there is no way around using present perfect tense, still accompanied by the illogical use of the present tense: "Someone has eaten Baby Bear's porridge!' says Daddy Bear." (B, p. 21). It seems that in order to avoid past tenses, which are perhaps omitted due to being perceived as too difficult for young learners, while at the same time employing a complex structure such as present perfect, the result is an illogical mix of tenses not inherent to narration, which is "essentially related to the past tense" (Narančić Kovač & Milković, 2015, p. 110.)

Similar to the previous example, the rhyme *Humpty Dumpty* (A) is expanded from its authentic form of a riddle into a sing-along. The first three verses are in the present (simple and participle), followed by just one authentic verse containing the past tense of the modal verb – "All the king's horses / And

all the king's men / Couldn't put Humpty / Together again." – only to finish with the verse: "Humpty Dumpty was / A funny eggman! / Humpty Dumpty's gone now / Forget him if you can!" (A, p. 147) The result is somewhat illogical and hardly translatable into any kind of story, since "narratives concern the past" (Martin, 1986, p. 74). Since one of the benefits of authentic literature in EFL concerns exposure to authentic language expressions, it seems incomprehensible to change simple past tenses into present tenses, only to leave more complex language structures such as present perfect. The result is an "unnatural English for language instruction" (Narančić Kovač & Milković, 2015, p. 111). Ghosn (2018) finds this delay of past tense verbs in Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) courses at lower levels troubling, as it does not reflect language in use. She exemplifies this with the finding from a brief search of the British National Corpus (www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk), which yielded 195,306 instances of *said*, but only 67,135 of *say* (p. 385). According to Escott (1995), "the absence of the past verb tense also denies children the opportunity to talk about things meaningful to them, such as interesting experiences they had or stories they have heard, which would enable them to 'create their own personal history' in the new language" (p. 20). Furthermore, Ghosn (2018) claims that "although we know that children's L2 development occurs in a sequence, with past-tense forms emerging after present, it does not follow that we should not expose them to past-tense verb forms early on" (p. 385). The author provides the example of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, where 'ate' is used frequently, while 'eat' is absent. This observation aligns with the experiences of many L2 teachers, who note that children can pick up past tense verbs like 'ate' even when unfamiliar with the present tense form.

The second research question was "Do the texts differ across literary genres?" Seven of the eleven recorded literary texts are rhymes, including nursery rhymes, poems and songs. The other literary texts are classified as fairy tales (two texts), a traditional story (one text) and a picture book (one text). It is evident that the authors choose mostly songs and rhymes, which are short, easy to remember, well known and often accompanied by music, making them easy to remember and sing along to. García Conesa and Juan Rubio (2015) suggest that introducing rhymes and songs into Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) for young children enhances enthusiasm for learning, and that rhymes and songs are a great teaching resource that provide "good insight into the English culture" (p. 98). Stories and fairy tales need to be abridged and adapted to fit the allotted space in the textbook and not to burden young learners with too much text. The latter goes hand in hand with different ways in which stories are delivered, i.e., through a combination of written and audio

media, sometimes occupying two or even three lessons. Such texts are also burdened with didacticism underlining some of the important thoughts or messages for young learners, changing a whimsical picture book or a traditional fairy tale into a moral tale.

In response to the third research question ("What activities are associated with the texts?"), 40 activities were recorded in total. Some activities were compound tasks containing more than one instruction for the learner, e.g., a pre-reading task appearing before *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* ("Look at the title. What is the story about? Circle the correct answer." (B, p. 20)), where the task consists of several activities in which the learner is guided in making predictions about the story. Every literary text is accompanied by at least two activities connected to the text, with the exception of the song *Jingle Bells* (A), which is incorporated into the Christmas topic: the only activity connected to the song is simply the words "Sing along" (A, p. 146). However, it is actually a compound task: it is also a fill-in activity with missing words offered next to the text.

Not all of the texts are accompanied by pre-reading activities, as there are only nine pre-reading activities in total. Six of these activities introduce vocabulary used in the texts that might be unknown to learners or is further used in the lesson, as is the case with the names of animals used for teaching singular vs plural nouns next to *Old McDonald* [sic!] *had a farm* (A). Three of the pre-reading activities are literature-oriented, as they are aimed at introducing either the topic or the main character of the text, e.g., "Look at this funny eggman. His name is Humpty Dumpty." (A, p. 147), which is a visual cue that can spark students' curiosity and encourage them to ask questions about the main character and the rhyme.

All of the texts have while-reading (or while-listening) activities (15 altogether), which rarely include any actual learners' activity. Usually the instructions are simply to "sing along" (A, p. 33, p. 146, p. 147), "listen and sing" (B, p. 44, p. 80) or "listen and read" (B, p. 56, p. 88). However, this category also includes examples of activities aimed at language skills, e.g., "Listen to the end of the story and put the sentences in the correct order" (C, p. 22), which is, according to Brewster et al. (2002), a type of "Listen and sequence activity" intended to "improve memory and concentration span" as well as "to encourage mental activity and problem-solving" (p. 104). Moreover, several of the while-reading activities are used to separate a lengthy story into two parts by inviting students to make predictions ("What do you think happens next?" (C, p. 64)) and to focus on understanding the story ("Read the story and fill in the gaps" (C, p. 65)).

It is encouraging that some of the authentic literary texts found their way into the textbooks solely for the purpose of enjoyment and relaxation, as in

the case of *Jingle Bells* (A) and *Humpty Dumpty* (A), which are not followed by any particular post-reading activities. The post-reading activities identified in the textbooks usually focus on reading comprehension (e.g., "Are the sentences true (T) or false (F)?" after *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* (B, p. 20); "Put the sentences in the correct order" after *Miss Polly has a Dolly* (B, p. 81)) or practising grammar (e.g., matching singular vs plural forms after *Old McDonald* [sic!] *had a farm* (A, p. 3). The former is a step towards understanding the narrative, as well as towards encouraging memory and logical thinking, as suggested by Brewster et al. (2002, p. 169) in connection with the use of *Miss Polly had a Dolly* in ELT lessons together with added movement and dramatisations. While it certainly is a viable option, it is not clear from the textbook instructions themselves whether learners are actually encouraged to accompany the text with movement while reciting or singing.

A notable exception aimed at developing imagination and critical thinking is an activity following *The Little Red Hen*: "What would you do if you were the Little Red Hen? Why?" (B, p. 89). Although there are two suggestions explicitly stated as possible answers to these questions ("I would let my friends eat the bread" and "I wouldn't let my friends eat the bread"), it is still a good example of literature-aimed activities and dialogic reading in which learners "use language for thinking, make connections to things they already know, […] and give reasons for what they say" (Waugh et al., 2016, p. 12). However, activities aimed at critical thinking, diverse interpretations and exploration of learners' attitudes are scarce. Another good example of extensive activities that follow a literary text is provided in the textbook containing the stories *The Three Kind Wolves and the Big Bully* and *The Story of a Hat*. In the former case, learners are prompted to change the ending of the story and to make a comic. The task is feasible and clear, as task achievement is precisely defined: "Draw three pictures and write a couple of sentences" (C, p. 23). The learners are then encouraged to use the comic to tell their version of the story to the class, with the added prompt "You can even act it out" (C, p. 23). Aiming at writing and speaking skills, learners are gradually guided to employ their creativity and accomplish the task before them. Finally, they are challenged to venture into speech production by stepping away from the written prompt (which comes in handy as a safety net) and acting out their own version of the story. This activity exemplifies tasks that young learners find potentially enjoyable.

Although empirical evidence confirms that authentic literary texts can help students to learn languages in a meaningful and relevant way regardless of their cultural background (Ghosn, 2013), it seems that even when authentic literary texts are included in textbooks, there is an evident lack of meaningful

activities. More precisely, the analysed activities in most cases fail to engage learners on an affective and cognitive level and are more similar to closed exercises (cf. Tomlinson, 2015). Puchta and Williams (2011) emphasise two reasons for using meaningful activities with young learners: the first highlights learners' cognitive engagement and their need to be adequately challenged with the activity, while the second concerns language itself, which is used naturally in meaningful communication, for real-life purposes. Instructions such as *sing along*, or *read and listen* might be somewhat meaningful if learners are actually interested in the literary text, but do not offer adequate cognitive or affective enjoyment.

  In order to answer the fourth research question ("Are the texts accompanied by tasks relating to cultural elements?"), the analysis considered activities from both the preceding and subsequent lessons that accompanied the literary texts. Interestingly, in addition to the fact that a literary text, particularly an authentic text, inherently represents the source culture and has cultural potential (cf. Milković, 2023), all of the analysed texts are further explicitly connected to cultural topics, with the exception of the song *Old McDonald* [sic!] *had a farm* (A), which focuses solely on vocabulary and grammar exercises. Connections to cultural elements appear in two similar ways: either the literary text appears as part of a specific cultural topic (e.g., *Humpty Dumpty* (A), *The Little Red Hen* (B) for Easter, *Jingle Bells* (A) for Christmas) or it is connected to a broader cultural topic (e.g., *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* is followed by a Culture Corner about the British Royal Family (B); *The Animal Fair* is followed by a Culture Corner focused on animals from around the world (B); *The Yellow Giraffe* is followed by a segment entitled Our World, containing short texts about children from Australia and Italy (F); *Miss Polly has a Dolly* is followed by a Culture Corner about "Doctors without borders" (B), etc.). The song *Kookaburra* (B) is also followed by a Culture Corner about Australia, which is similar to a suggestion by Brewster et al. (2002): *Kookaburra* is an example of employing songs, rhymes and chants from around the world to learn about the world and to develop "world knowledge and sensitize children to different rhythms and tunes" (p. 170). Although some teachers might not always make the connection between literary texts and culture, as was evident from a comparative study of Slovenian and Croatian teachers and their use of stories in TEFL (Cindrić et al., 2024), it is obvious that textbook authors are aware of the cultural potential of literary texts. Since Croatian teachers rely heavily on textbooks in teaching, it is safe to assume that they will make use of these activities and add the (inter)cultural dimension to their teaching.

  Finally, to answer the last research question, which concerns the rationale behind including literary texts in the textbooks, the analysis considered the

insights gained from the answers to the previous research questions. Since literary texts appear exclusively in the local textbooks (with an exception of *The Yellow Giraffe* (F), which is used for grammar purposes), it would seem that Croatian authors of EFL textbooks are aware of the linguistic and cultural potential of literature. It is a valuable starting point for compiling interesting, meaningful and challenging textbooks, since coursebooks do "not challenge the learners to negotiate meaning or engage them affectively or cognitively" (Bacha et al., 2008, p. 286) in the way that children's literature in TEFL does (Ghosn, 2010). Although there are some literature-based activities, literary texts most frequently appear in textbooks for the purpose of practising language expressions, as is evident from the example of *The Yellow Giraffe* (F): the rhyme appears at the beginning of a new lesson and serves as an introductory exercise for animal vocabulary and for practising the modal verb *can*; it is short, consisting of eight lines forming four couplets; it is written in the present simple tense; and it can be sung to a catchy melody. The next possible reason for the inclusion of literary texts is vocabulary expansion, which is often connected to special topics destined to be used on special days of the week, e.g., *The Little Red Hen* (B) before Easter, or *Jingle Bells* (A) at Christmas time.

Literary texts are sometimes connected to other cultural topics from the source culture (Croatian, e.g., Easter) or other cultures (e.g., the topic *Clothes around the World* after *The Story of a Hat* (C)). However, it is textbook authors who can recognise the potential of literary texts and use their potential for exploring various cultural topics.

Conclusion

The study focused on authentic and adapted literary texts in textbooks (both local and global) designed for Grade 4 EFL learners in Croatia. Literary texts that originated in the Anglophone culture were further analysed with regard to their authenticity, text genre, activities associated with the texts, related cultural elements, and possible reasons for the inclusion of such texts in the textbooks.

The study revealed significant differences between local and global textbooks regarding the number of literary texts from Croatian and Anglophone culture. In aiming at an international audience, global textbooks indeed include a variety of cultural elements from cultures around the world, but at the expense of the target Anglophone culture and authenticity. Croatian EFL textbooks incorporate Anglophone literary texts as well as texts from other cultures, which suggests an awareness among Croatian authors and publishers of the importance of such texts in textbooks. This is particularly noteworthy considering

Croatia's tradition of teaching English in lower primary grades and the wealth of academic literature on the topic.

The authentic literary texts identified in the textbooks are rhymes presented as rhymes and/or songs, which is convenient with respect to their length, their possible use of a catchy melody, and their potential for enabling the memorisation of bigger chunks of authentic language. In contrast, stories and picture books are more likely to be adapted. Two types of adaptations are present, sometimes overlapping: linguistic adaptation and changes to the story. While story adaptations in the sense of shortening the length of stories is logical due to space restrictions, explicit didacticism and moralistic stories might not always be the best choice, as they might have a negative impact on learners' enjoyment in reading. Linguistic changes in the adaptations are even less feasible; they usually appear in textbooks as a consequence of the shift from past tense, which is naturally associated with stories and storytelling, to present tense, which is often considered more appropriate for young learners. However, the fact that the authenticity of such language is irreversibly lost should not be easily dismissed.

Literary texts in textbooks are almost always also connected to Anglophone culture and occasionally to other cultures around the world, which might be one reason for their inclusion in the textbooks. Among the other reasons is their potential to develop and practise language skills and simply offer students enjoyment and relaxation. This latter goal of fostering a love for reading in a foreign language is certainly commendable. While avoiding unnecessary adaptations remains crucial, activities following literary texts should be designed to provide enjoyment and exploration of literature, to invite multiple interpretations, and to promote meaningful language interactions. The basis is already established by choosing authentic literary texts, but well-designed activities can unlock their full potential.

Finally, it is clear that publishers are trying to meet the curriculum guidelines, and indeed, some include literary texts, both original and adapted. However, the experience of reading an original text in a textbook can hardly satisfy the needs of teachers and students in terms of reception and reading experience to the degree that an actual picture book or book can. This leads us to the conclusion that, whenever possible, the original text should be an artefact. In this way, it is possible to achieve the reception of the story and illustrations, and to encourage students to reflect, question, be creative and use their imagination, which is proven to have a significant impact on learners' comprehension and enjoyment (Batič & Haramija, 2015). Making contact with a book is an important step in the child's realisation that reading is not only enjoyable but

also beneficial. On the other hand, teachers should recognise authentic picture books or books as valuable and rich teaching materials.

The present study focused only on fourth-grade English textbooks in Croatia and therefore limits generalisation. In order to understand how literary texts are included in textbooks across primary school grades, future research should analyse textbooks for various levels. This comprehensive approach would provide valuable guidance for textbook authors and publishers on integrating literary texts effectively. However, regardless of its limitations, the study is useful for both future and present teachers of EFL in terms of shifting the focus to textbook elements such as literary texts, which are frequently easily overlooked. Shedding light on this matter contributes to raising awareness of the linguistic and cultural potential of literary texts in EFL textbooks.

Ethical statement

The research study was approved by the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb Ethics Committee.

Disclosure statement

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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