



SOUTH-WEST  
UNIVERSITY  
·NEOFIT RILSKY·  
BLAGOEVGRAD, BULGARIA

VOLUME 2  
2004



**SCIENTIFIC**  
*Research*

ELECTRONIC  
ISSUE

# Teaching of History in English in Bulgaria\*

*(Problems of the textbooks)*

**Kostadin Paev PHD**

During last decade, the learning of English in Bulgaria, acquired wide and strong positions. If before, we could count the English language schools in our country “*by the fingers of our hands*”, now, there are such classes in most of the Bulgarians towns – smaller and bigger ones. Many problems, concerning the preparation and the providing of the teachers in English, the school curriculums, textbooks and additional literature for English learners were solved. An aspect of this process is the teaching of different subjects in English in the school. One of the most preferred and popular for that among them is the history. It is explicable, because the history gives to the students possibilities to have too wide and detailed knowledge about the life and the society. Unfortunately, in this direction there are many unsolved problems and tasks. They concern the school curriculums, teacher’s preparation, and mainly the textbooks and the methodology of history teaching in foreign languages. Here, some of the problems of the textbooks are treated.

In many schools in Bulgaria, teaching history in English is already a tradition, but no one has ever measured and analyzed the results and the effectiveness of it. Usual practice is teaching of history in foreign languages in such manner, as it is taught in Bulgarian.

In the near past, for this purpose in the Bulgarian schools was used an edition, containing topics of different areas of the science and the social life – this is so called *A General Reader* [1]. Its first part is about the history. Some of the topics are e.g.: *How Historians Reveal the Past, The Primitive Society, The Revolt of Spartacus, Feudalism, The Crusades, Early Colonial Conquests*, etc. After each one, there are questions and tasks about the text. This book is not usable now, because of a few reasons. First, *the chosen topics are not the most important and basic, and do not give to the students whole and consecutive notion about the historical processes*. Second, *some of them are not topical nowadays*. Positive moments are the illustrations and the vocabulary. The terms and the specific words are printed in bold letters and their meaning is given at the end of the chapter, but the personal names are given below the text. This book was usually used in the preparatory classes and was taught by the teachers of English, but not by the teachers of the subjects. It has mainly the task to widen the students’ vocabulary, to acquaint them with the specific terms and the historical names.

At the beginning of 90s, in the book markets appeared a new edition - *Discovering Britain* [4]. It is dedicated to the British society and life, but naturally its first part “*Who are the British?*” is historical. [Ibid., pp. 12-23]. Although, it is not a typical history book, because a few moments of the British past are noticed only, the issue is very useful for the students. The terms and the historical names are printed in bold letters, but are not explained. There are tests, illustrations and pictures. As the

last book, it is recommended for the preparatory classes and is taught by the teachers of English.

The pretension for a classical historical book has probably a new edition called “*History*”, again intended for the preparatory classes and issued in 1999 [3]. In this textbook, there are 15 historical units, concerning different epochs and ages. The book is better structured methodologically, than the mentioned others. Each unit consists of text, divided into a few parts and depending on the chronology, the theme and the concrete events; test and questionnaire, other tasks for the students and test keys. At the end, vocabulary unit by unit is published and the text is adapted for the students’ level. Unfortunately, still the first look shows that the booklet topically is not professionally structured. The main historical principle - the *chronological one* is not observed. The book starts with *Aztecs* and then the author comes back to the Ancient Greece; after that, she “jumps” to the “Discovering of America”, and then is the topic of the Roman Conquest, etc. Nevertheless, if a professional historian orders the topics chronologically, the book can be used successfully in the school.

Not until 1998, one of the regularly used textbooks of *History for 8<sup>th</sup> class* was translated from Bulgarian into English [2]. We can say certainly, that this book does not response to the needs of the history education in English at the school. It is a literal translation of the Bulgarian original and stays too far away from the methodological requirements. Teaching History in English is a specific pedagogical work and requires combinative methods of the history and the language teaching. Therefore, the school textbooks of the different subjects in English, has to be adapted in grammar, in vocabulary, in structure, etc. for this purpose. Because of that, in my opinion, this book is not appropriate now for students, studying History in English.

This brief review of the Bulgarian textbooks, officially used or recommended by the Ministry of Education shows serious omissions and problems. The most acceptable attitude, as it was already mentioned above, is that the textbooks of History in foreign languages have not to be a literal translation of their Bulgarian version. This requirement comes from the methodology and the purposes of the History teaching in English: the effective methods of teaching cannot be put in practice, if translated Bulgarian books are used in class. Such a textbook has to observe the topical frames and the content of the National curriculum, but it has to have different structure of the text, different style and vocabulary, and has to be adapted for the student’s level. These textbooks have to contain rich additional working forms – questionnaires, test, tasks, special illustrations, pictures and drawing for the purposes of the methodology of teaching. Only in this case, the textbook would help the teacher to apply the specific methods and approaches of the teaching of subject in foreign language in practice.

---

\* The article is first published in *Forum for Across the Curriculum Teaching*, 2002, N 9, pp. 4-5.