

# The Use of "How Much" and "How Many" in TESL Textbooks

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## Original Problem

My original project was (1) to search textbooks used in teaching English as a second language to find uses of "how much" and "how many" which students might question because a singular form of "be" was used instead of an expected plural, and (2) how the texts used and explained these forms. An example of this is one suggested by Dr. Yao Shen of the University of Hawaii which she found in a text as an example of vocabulary in context: "How much is a cup of coffee and a piece of pie?" The "is" is singular but the subject "a cup of coffee and a piece of pie" is plural. Students could well question this pattern.

Basis for the study was the "TENES" Textbooks Used by Responding Teachers (Table 57). In addition to the forty-two books available from this list, fifteen other titles--single volumes and series--were examined, for a total of fifty-seven single volumes or series.

## References Non-Existent

References of the questionable type referred to were almost non-existent in these books--all but one of these elementary through advanced texts avoided anything which might be considered confusing. The only reference I found was ("How much is three dimes and a penny? Thirty-one cents." <sup>1</sup>) in Volume 3 of the most highly used reference on the TENES list. This was used without any accompanying explanation as the second of two examples in a review unit on "How much and the name of coins of the United States."

The research showed that (1) only one item was found in the texts searched, and (2) it was used as an example in the student textbook without explanation or additional exercises.

A page by page perusal of these texts revealed some surprising, if not startling, facts about the teaching of the common American expressions "How much" and "How many", particularly in combination with the very "be."

## Terms Ignored

Twenty-seven texts completely ignored these sentence structures without using any reference in unit studies, narratives, dialogs, examples, or exercises--only fifteen of these had "how many" or "how much"

conversation on a college campus contains frequent references to both quantity and price. Most students have limited funds and are vitally concerned with the cost of such items as books, supplies, food, and clothes; students from foreign cultures need to know how to pay for daily purchases, and should have instruction on how to ask questions about quantity and price, as these are fundamental to American culture. If English is being taught as a business language in a foreign country this is still an essential structure.

Viewed from a standpoint on the teaching of "how much" and "how many" with the verb "be", my conclusions agree completely with this last line from a student dialog taken from one of the texts surveyed, and titled "How I Learned English Back Home."

I learned words and phrases that aren't used any more. There should be a revolution in language-teaching books, I think.<sup>4</sup>

## Recommendation

Teachers should make a critical examination of their current texts, and if these do not contain a teaching unit on the very important "how much" and "how many" with the verb "be" they might introduce such a lesson. If there is a teaching unit but nothing more follows, they might supplement the text by incorporating some dialogs or review exercises in their teaching of English.

In our next issue there will be two suggested lessons of this type which have been developed for students on the intermediate level of learning English as a second language. Both are based on two single dialogs in which vocabulary items are limited so that focus is in the teaching points.

1. Charles C. Fries and Pauline M. Rojas, American English Series, 1952), III, p. 80.

2. Robert J. Dixon, Graded Exercises in English, rev. ed. (New York, 1959), p. 33.

3. Angela Paratore, English Dialogs for Foreign Students (New York, 1962), p. 46.

4. Ibid., p. 47.

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in any form. These used expressions with another verb such as "do" or "have". In two of these texts one or the other of these expressions was used only once, without any attempt to teach the sentence patterns. Once "how many" plus "do" was used as an example to illustrate another grammatical construction. In only sixteen of all the texts examined did the expressions "how many" or "how much" with "be" appear five or more times within the book. There were teaching units for sentence patterns with these expressions in only six of the texts examined: two contained

teaching units combining both "how much" and "how many" with reference to quantity, one had a single unit on "how many" alone, and another had a unit on "how much" with reference to price. Others had anywhere from a single sentence (three texts fell in this category) to a high of forty-five sentences or questions (one text had thirty-eight for "how many" plus seven for "how much"--both used for quantity items with nothing about "how much" and price in the text). The following is a breakdown on the texts regarding the number of times each pattern occurs.

None	Other Verbs		Units			
	only	additional	Combined	Individual		
				Quantity		Price
				Many	Much	
27	15	20	4	0	1	1

References without units										Individual Ref.			
Combined		Individual								Quantity		Price	Both
less	5+	Quantity				Price (How much)				Much	Many		
		Many		Much		is		are					
		less	5+	less	5+	less	5+	less	5+				
1	0	11	12	1	2	3	2	5	0	14	1	2	4

The six texts with units on "how much" and "how many" with the verb "be" varied greatly in their teaching of these expressions. Many of these books had less student material than some texts without units,

and many taught the unit and then failed to use either expression again in the book as a review of the material learned. Information on the six books which included teaching units follows:

#### TEXTS WITH UNIT ITEMS

Type of Unit	Ratings as used by TENES				Number of References					
	Elem.	Second.	Adult	College	Quantity			Price		
					Comb.	Many	Much	is	are	comb.
Comb. quantity) and price )	2	10	12	13	0	0	4	10	0	0
	-	2	1	-	6	14	12	5	2	8
Quantity comb.) )	-	6	11	3	16	0	0	0	0	0
	-	-	4	1	20	3	0	0	0	0
Quantity-many	33	-	-	-	0	19	0	0	0	0
Price	47	13	3	3	0	0	0	14	20	0

One book (not included in the above list) had a combined unit on the use of "how much" and "how many" for quantity with explanations of count and mass nouns. It concluded with a statement "Note, further, that much and many are often combined with how to form the common interrogative expressions how much and how many." (Examples, How many students are there in your class? How much coffee do you drink every day?)<sup>12</sup>

The exercises that followed called for the student to put "much" or "many" before nouns in eighteen statements, and had twelve fill-in-the-blank exercises such as "There are many \_\_\_\_\_ . She spends much \_\_\_\_\_ ." after that. The example cited in the introduction to the unit was the only reference in the book to "how many" or "how much" with the verb "be" giving no follow-up of any kind on this sentence pattern.

### Conclusion

An examination of these representative texts has made me dissatisfied with much of the material used in the aural-oral approach to teaching English as a second language--particularly those which purport to be typical American conversation or dialog. I feel that there is a large discrepancy between the teaching and the conversational use of "how much" and "how many," particularly when these are used with the verb "be," for,

with the exception of six books in readings in English and three books on pronunciation, all the texts examined were directed toward the teaching of basic conversational English.

I realize that English teaching dialogs and conversations must be somewhat artificial because authors wish to cover certain structural patterns and limit vocabulary; however, I find this a reason to encourage the use of "how many" and "how much" with the verb "be" rather than to eliminate it, as these expressions lend themselves to essential structures and simple meaningful vocabulary. I think that at least one unit in every text should cover the basic "how many" and "how much" and their use with the verb "be", and that frequent reference should be made, by way of review, to be sure that students have both the needed recognition and production of such important structures.

Although the teaching of quantity, in relationship to its use, merits less attention in contemporary texts than the teaching of price, in occurrence it is far ahead. In the books examined I found the teaching of price using "how much" with "is" or "are"; to be woefully inadequate. An additional breakdown of occurrences of these items follows:

#### TOTAL REFERENCES TO HOW MANY AND HOW MUCH WITH BE

Elementary Level						Adult Level					
Quantity			Price			Quantity			Price		
comb.	many	much	comb.	is	are	comb.	many	much	comb.	is	are
0	77	0	0	20	22	42	185	21	6	52	21

Quantity total - 325

Price total - 121

I feel that it is very unrealistic to teach conversations about shopping without any reference to "how much is" or "how much are" -- a frequent occurrence in many of the texts. One book of one hundred English dia-

logs for foreign students had only this one statement using any expression of this kind: "How much is the rent?"<sup>3</sup> (Dialog 91 "Renting an Apartment").

From my observations, student