

**CREATING AN EAP/ESP CORE TEXTBOOK:
FOCUS ON ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE *IN ENGLISH*
RATHER THAN *ABOUT ENGLISH***

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Abstract. *This paper discusses some of the issues involved in creating an EAP/ESP core textbook, focusing especially on choosing textbook content as one of the main factors contributing to higher student motivation and better language acquisition. It further offers a reflection on EAP/ESP textbook titles and dwells on some other problems related to designing and teaching textbook material.*

Key words: *content-based textbook material, topic-specific vocabulary, textbook title, student motivation, make-believe, suspension of disbelief, acquiring knowledge in English rather than about English*

1. INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, when designing courses for our students (Faculty of Philosophy/Humanities, Belgrade University), and in accordance with the goals we set out to achieve, we tend to combine elements of EAP and ESP, though not necessarily always aiming for a balance between the two: for example, where lexis is concerned, more emphasis is placed on topic-specific vocabulary and developing vocabulary skills necessary for tackling subject-specific texts. Some other skills, naturally, belong more in the province of EAP, such as preparing and giving presentations, reporting fieldwork and research findings, taking notes, writing comments, writing summaries, building an argument, debating, etc. At these levels, EAP and ESP invariably overlap and attempting to draw a clear line between them makes for a futile and unproductive endeavor. The approach adopted when creating the curriculum again falls somewhere between the task-based (Ellis 2003) and text-based (Feez 2002), with elements of some other models included as well. While there is a general consensus on the above combined approaches, coupled with the awareness that no definitive model has been or indeed can be reached, each teacher retains the freedom to, within the agreed framework, further tweak the curriculum and plan the syllabus in accordance with his/her students' specific needs. After several years of teaching English to art history and archaeology students, it fell to me to create a core textbook for the course, which would, in combination with other, supplementary material, be specifically geared to meet the needs of the students of these two academic disciplines. Methodologically speaking, the textbook (first published in 2009 and revised a number of times since) is a reflection of the above-mentioned concerns and considerations – still evolving as, indeed, are the theories and values of our time.

Leaving the general theoretical framework aside, what I would like to do in this paper is share some personal reflections on the problems involved in creating an EAP/ESP book – the very same problems that virtually all EAP/ESP teachers undertaking a similar task have to deal with, in accordance with the methodological principles they support, the specificity of the EAP/ESP material they teach, the general circumstances in which they work, their own personality and affinities, etc.

2. INTRODUCTION

MAKING CHOICES: TEXTBOOK CONTENT, TEXTBOOK TITLE AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

In *Flaubert's Parrot* Julian Barnes (1990, 92) claims that the story of a louse may be as beautiful as the history of Alexander the Great and concludes that "everything in art depends upon the execution". This is a view that I whole-heartedly subscribe to when it comes to fiction/human creativity in general. Furthermore, as teachers of English we all know how important execution is: if we manage to motivate our students by employing the right kind of methodology, virtually any kind of teaching material will do. Nevertheless, over the years I have found that my students prefer the history of Alexander the Great to the story of a louse, no matter how well the latter may have been written or executed, as it were.

The above lines constitute my little *teaching manifesto*, an ESP/EAP teaching *credo* if you will, which, though perhaps not novel in itself, is based on purely personal experience and has evolved over the period of fourteen years, during which time I have worked with art history and archaeology students at Belgrade University. This *credo* has found its material expression in the textbook *English for Sailing on the River of Time: Art History and Archaeology Studies* (Stojanović 2009, 17), the concept and content of which (revised several times since and still undergoing changes) are the focus of this paper.

3. TEXTBOOK TITLE

With reference to the title of the textbook (*English for Sailing on the River of Time: Art History and Archaeology Studies*), allow me to quote a few lines from the introduction I wrote for the book: 'Our age insists on the deconstruction of stories, myths and tradition – yet they all need to be constructed first so they can be deconstructed/reconstructed at some later stage. I have adopted, as this book's motto, a sentence from a story by Ursula le Guin: "Story is our only boat for sailing on the river of time." And for language learning, I should add, too. If we manage to motivate our students by giving them a good narrative, something they can get their teeth into, and which happens to be the subject of their studies to boot, they will not mind having to acquire the tools and instruments that enable them to navigate this river of time and language more easily. After all, it is motivation and motivation alone that makes those conditionals in the Hatshepsut text more palatable, and even invests them with some urgency - for how else can we speculate about the enigmatic Egyptian queen's fate or deconstruct the myth surrounding her rule and personality, for that matter?' (Stojanović 2009, 18).

The title metaphor is further developed through the meaning and symbolism of the very first item in the book (both textual and graphic, though the latter cannot be rendered well enough in this format), used in a kind of prologue to the Old Testament texts, and by extension, to the New Testament ones as well.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

Through a number of different associations, the ship has come to symbolize the Church of Christ. The ark of Noah, which floated safely in the midst of the deluge while everything else was inundated, was an obvious symbol for the Church. St Ambrose, in his writings, compares the Church to a ship, and the cross to a ship's mast. The miracle of the Sea of Galilee, when Christ calmed the waves and saved the vessel of the Apostles from disaster, likewise served to give the ship a symbolic religious meaning. The ship is also the attribute of a few saints. The best known are St Vincent and St Nicholas of Myra. Nave (Lat *navis*, a ship): the main space occupied by the congregation in a church, from the entrance to the choir, usually flanked on either side by aisles. The derivation from *navis* is partly because the nave is not unlike an upside-down ship but also because it is the Ark of Salvation. (Fergusson 1961, 181)



Fig. 1 The ark of Noah

Needless to say, the very first unit in the textbook is Noah's Ark (coupled with the symbolism of the olive).

Noah's Ark

GENESIS 6: 13-22

At the time of the Flood the six-hundred-year-old patriarch Noah and his family found favor in the eyes of God, who commanded him to build a huge ark and take into it one male and one female of every species of animal – clean and unclean, those that fly, walk and crawl. Made of cypress wood and coated with bitumen, the ark was three hundred cubits long (about 430 feet). When Noah, his family, and the animals were aboard, God let the waters fall from the sky.

It rained for forty days and the waters rose to fifteen cubits higher than the highest mountains. Then the ark drifted for one hundred fifty days before coming to ground on the peak of Mount Ararat (in the Armenian plateau of today's eastern Turkey). Three months later Noah released a crow from the ark, but it returned, having found nowhere else to alight. He next tried the experiment with a dove, but with no more success. Seven days later the dove was released again and came back with an olive branch in its beak. After several more weeks the earth was dry. The Flood and its aftermath lasted a year and ten days.

Painters have treated all aspects of this story and have been particularly drawn to the boarding of the ark, an occasion for the demonstration of a painter's virtuosity in drawing both the human figure and the figures of domestic and exotic animals. Thus, the viewer could derive rich and varied pleasure from contemplating these depictions. The dove with the olive branch became a symbol of good news, then, by extension, of a message of peace, which is how we know it today. (Debray 2004, 41)

Another reason why I opted for the title *English for Sailing on the River of Time, Art History and Archaeology Studies* was because I did not want it to be dry and unimaginative as some ESP textbook titles tend to be. After all, fiction writers (or their publishers) sometimes spend months working out how to come up with an original, creative and intriguing title, which will, hopefully, interest their readership and eventually,

sell their books. Why then should authors of ESP books not address the problem in a similar way? Aren't we underestimating our target audience when we plump for titles like *English for Bankers*, *Business English I*, *English for Students of Wooden Shelving*, *First Year English for Concrete Mixers*. etc. (the last two are a witty contribution by a dear colleague of mine from Novi Sad University). Having said that, it is necessary to point out that a somewhat literary and romantic title like the one currently under discussion may not be to everyone's taste. Archaeology and art history students are by definition adventurous and romantic. Naturally, they will have to learn how to curb the excess of their romantic sentiment and develop a scientific approach – though definitely not at the expense of the imagination. On the other hand, a classroom of bankers is probably an altogether different proposition (and we certainly do not want them to be too romantic or adventurous, especially if it is our personal finances that they are handling). That is not to say that the title of an English textbook for bankers should be dry and devoid of any wit. Creating a title is like creating a brand: it targets a specific group, appealing to its needs and interests – a concept to which bankers and business people themselves wholeheartedly subscribe.

There is even something paradoxical about the fact that while we try to hammer into our students the importance of a punchy, interesting and attention-grabbing title when teaching them how to write (and here we are not talking just about writing fiction), we ourselves keep churning out pretty dull and stereotypical titles for ESP/EAP textbooks. Is this due to the specific nature of the market in this region, where there is still little competition when it comes to EAP/ESP books? Or can this fact be accounted for by the prudish attitude of some academics who refuse to employ any kind of language that even remotely reeks of mercantilism or can perhaps be interpreted as non-academic and not serious enough? Perhaps, the reasons are market-driven after all: in an age when people have increasingly less time to peruse titles in bookshops, simple titles offer instantaneous – though not exactly intriguing or thought-provoking information. I, for one, would like to believe that our students deserve better, which is why I opted for 'the river of time' metaphor as a, hopefully, somewhat more memorable wording for a loose time framework within which various carefully chosen academic sources provide the basis for both archaeological and art history studies today. Incidentally, a colleague of mine (who teaches English to students of history and anthropology at the same department) has had her textbook published recently under a wonderfully engaging title "English – a Quest through History and Anthropology".

4. TEXTBOOK CONTENT

How did I choose the subject content for my art history and archaeology book? Rather than selecting miscellaneous subjects ranging from prehistoric man to modern art, and then just touching on these entirely heterogeneous areas without any in-depth exploration of the subject in hand (a somewhat obsolete concept in an age which tends towards increasingly greater specialization), this book focuses on four major areas of archaeological and art history study and brings the following *selection of 'stories'*: age-old archetypal Biblical stories (*iconography studies*), stories about ancient Egypt (*Egyptology*), stories about symbols (*iconography and symbology*), and stories about looking for the past in present-day London (*museum discourse*). These areas are relatively thoroughly explored,

whilst most other activities and exercises (including the grammar ones) are topic-related and built around them. Here, out of the total of thirty two units, by way of illustration are enclosed the contents of the first two (Old Testament - iconography studies) and the last two units (London, Past and Present - museum discourse).

4.1. Unit 1:

Noah's Ark

Symbolism of the *olive branch*

Talking points/writing and presentation topics

- historical/archaeological evidence which supports the Biblical story of the Flood
- cataclysmic theories (past and future)

Reading comprehension

Vocabulary: text-based vocabulary gapped exercise; synonyms, matching exercise; words/phrases to do with *flood*

Genesis: open cloze

Asking questions

Singular nouns ending in -s; error correction.

4.2. Unit 2:

The Tower of Babel

Symbolism of the *dove*

Talking points/writing and presentation topics

- types of fortification (ziggurat, oppidum, mediaeval castle, etc)
- origin, evolutionary purpose and development of language
- language and globalization

Reading comprehension

Vocabulary: word building exercise (verbs – nouns, adjectives); matching Serbian words and phrases to their English equivalents in the text

Asking questions

Pentecost, text; reading comprehension

Negation/sentences with negative adverbs and determiners, exercise; error correction



Fig. 2

LONDON, PAST AND PRESENT
The Lion and the Unicorn, coat of arms

4.3. Unit 30:**The British Museum****Symbolism of the *dragon***

Talking points/writing and presentation topics

- why civilizations decline and collapse
- are mythical beasts such as the dragon a figment of the imagination or rooted in the reality (and collective memory) of a world that perished a long time ago?
- symbolism of the dragon, Western versus Oriental tradition
- who is the rightful owner of Elgin's Marbles?

Reading comprehension

Articles, gapped exercise; error correction

Adjectives ending in -ly, translation into English, grammar focus

4.4. Unit 31:**Tate Britain and Tate Modern****Symbolism of the *unicorn***

Talking points/writing and presentation topics

- best exhibition/s you have been to (concept, display, impact, etc.)
- should contemporary art be exhibited in museums?
- *kitsch* and art
- construction and deconstruction in art
- future of the visual arts

Reading comprehension

Vocabulary: matching Serbian words and phrases to their English equivalents in the text; synonyms, matching exercise; *commonly confused words*, exercise

Question tags, exercise

Open cloze: 1) *The Tower of London* 2) *Exploring the V&A's Collections*

Let us take a closer look at the various tasks and activities in Unit 1 (Noah's Ark) organized around the core, content-based material, aimed at developing a range of skills and competences.

Reading comprehension.

1. The Flood started because Noah and his family had sinned and thus offended God. T/F
2. At the time of the Flood Noah was a nonagenarian. T/ F
3. First time it was released, the crow/raven returned to the ark out of loyalty to Noah. T/F
4. The second return of the dove marked the end of the Flood. T/ F
5. Immediately after the second return of the dove, Noah and his family were able to disembark. T/ F
6. The scene of the boarding of the ark provided painters with ample opportunity to demonstrate their artistic mastery as well as entertain the viewer. T/ F
7. The olive branch became a symbol of peace and, by extension, of good news in general. T/ F

Fill in the blanks with the appropriate word from the text above.

1. Spiders don't walk, they c _____ .
2. The raven was one of the s _____ of birds and animals that Noah took on board.
3. If a ship is g _____ , it means it can not move because it has hit solid ground.
4. When the Flood started the level of the water r _____ above that of the mountains.
5. They never broke up, they just slowly d _____ apart.
6. 'P _____ ' is another word for the top of a mountain.
7. Throughout history, artists have been d _____ to this subject.
8. The family get-together was a wonderful and memorable o _____ .
9. Thus the cross became the symbol of Christ, and b__ e _____, the symbol of Christian faith.
10. Caravaggio's mastery and v _____ were unsurpassed by any other artist of his time.

Match the words/phrases on the right with their synonyms on the left.

Match the words/phrases on the right with their synonyms on the left.

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 1 flood | a <i>land</i> |
| 2 alight | b <i>deluge</i> |
| 3 bitumen | c <i>embark (on)</i> |
| 4 go aboard/board | d <i>black sticky substance such as tar or asphalt used for making roofs, roads etc.</i> |
| 5 dove | e <i>large shiny black bird with a shiny beak</i> |
| 6 raven | f <i>a kind of small pigeon, often used as a sign of peace</i> |

Ask questions about the Flood using the words given below.

1. Who _____ ?
2. Who _____ with?
3. When _____ ?
4. Why _____ ?
5. How long _____ ?
6. Which animal _____ ?
7. What _____ with the raven?
8. What _____ the dove _____ become the symbol of?
9. How old _____ Noah _____ ?
10. Which scene _____ painters particularly _____ ?

Out of twelve sentences given below, six refer to a flood/flooding.

Tick the ones that DO NOT.

1. The harbour silted up over the years.
2. After a week of relentless rains, the Avon burst its banks.
3. Locks with gates were built so that the level of the water could be changed to raise or lower boats from one level to another.
4. With so much precipitation, it may soon overflow its banks again.
5. This drawbridge was raised to permit passage of watercraft.
6. The whole area was submerged.
7. The rain deluged the plains.

8. The water receded after two months.
9. The drought caused most of the rivers to dry up.
10. Further pollution was caused by the factory discharging its waste into the lake.
11. If the dam breaks it will inundate the whole area.
12. Second only to the country's enormous agricultural riches in the form of the alluvium deposited annually by a generous river, was its wealth in stone.

Genesis: open cloze

In the text below, some words have been erased and replaced with blanks. In each blank, write the word that you think should go there.

The _____ of the world is described in Genesis. God created the world in _____ days, and _____ on the seventh. On the first day God separated light from _____. On the sixth day he created land _____ and man. According to John in the New _____, in the beginning was the _____.

Grammar focus

Singular nouns ending in -s

I Study the following sentences

1. a) The tiger has been declared **an endangered species**.
b) One hundred **species are** said to be dying out every day.
2. a) For him, it **was just a means** to an end.
b) What **are** the most effective **means** of advertising our campaign?
3. a) It **was a** strange **series** of events that led to his death.
4. a) The BBC has launched **a** new comedy **series**.
b) **Two** new period **series are** coming up in December.

Write sentences using the nouns listed below:

species, means, series, crossroads

**For more on nouns see Unit 12*

Error correction

Some of the following sentences contain mistakes. Find them and correct them.

1. The "great white" will soon become protected species.
2. During the Ice Age many species died out.
3. It's great series and I love watching it!
4. So, you think the plane is a safe means of transport?
5. At some stage in your life you'll reach crossroads and will have to make up your mind about which way to go.

My favorite group of exercises are *Biblical collocations (iconographic themes)* as well as *ancient Egypt-related collocations* (not presented here due to lack of time and space) because they demonstrate how, in spite of our knowledge of general English, most

of us are often rendered helpless when faced with specific subject matter/topic-specific vocabulary: what is required here is a more specialized kind of knowledge – as EAP/ESP teachers are only too well aware.

Biblical collocations (iconographic themes)

Complete these Biblical collocations with ONE of the three words offered below.

1. The _____ of the Virgin Mary in/at the Temple.
Introduction Meeting Presentation
2. The _____ (of Christ)
Nativity Delivery Bearing
3. The _____ of the Virgin
Dormition Ascension Sleep
4. The _____ of the Magi
Bowing Adoration Worship
5. The _____ into Hell/Hades
Precipitation Descent Going-down
6. The _____ (to the Virgin)
Annunciation Declaration Good News
7. The _____ from the Cross (Deposition)
Descent Taking Stripping
8. The _____ into Egypt
Flight Escape Running-away
9. The _____ of the Cross
Climbing Ascent Scaling
10. The _____ of Christ
Mourning Grieving Lamentation
11. St Peter's Triple _____
Refusal Denial Negation
12. The _____ of the Apostles
Invitation Invocation Calling

Some of the usual arguments given by advocates of an EAP/ESP content-based approach (which, in the opinion of the author, should almost always allow for some combination with a skills-based approach), are the following: it better equips students for their future careers because it focuses on the major areas of their study and on the topic-specific terminology rather than on the so-called facilitative language; it bridges the gap between input and output; it is more interesting and therefore more motivating. Way back in 1995, when talking about subject content-based courses Kasper claimed that subject content-based courses "are designed to increase language proficiency and to facilitate academic performance" (Kasper1995a). Similar arguments were put forward by Benesch (1988), Krashen (19820) and other linguists, whose insights traced a path to the future of EAP/ESP.

5. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

When speaking about designing and teaching EAP/ESP textbook material I should like to add a few personal reflections based on my own teaching experience. In teaching, as in many other areas of life, there is always an element of *make-believe*. Our students collude with us in the creation of this make-believe world (after all, during the period of one hour and a half, which is an academic convention and a kind of time construct per se, it would be perfectly natural for us to discuss, for example, Byzantine iconography in Serbian, yet we all agree to speak English) and they choose to participate in this game for various reasons. Most students do it because they are, hopefully, interested in the topic and see it is a way of expanding their knowledge, both of English and of the subject-matter itself, whilst also realizing that this knowledge may serve them in good stead in their future professions; some do it in order to humour the teacher and in anticipation of the exam. No matter what the reason, we often find that the more fully we are involved in this make-believe, the more we enjoy it and the better the final outcome. After all, fiction writers and theatre/film directors aspire towards the same goal as we do, only they call it *suspension of disbelief*. So, is there anything that we can do to, perhaps not reverse the Platonic notion of (a classroom) reality which is at a remove from the real world – because this would probably be too ambitious a goal, but to at least achieve a *higher quality of the suspension-of-disbelief situation*?

In reply to this question, and without wishing to sound prescriptive, I would like to share the following thoughts and observations. Firstly, teachers who acquire relatively extensive background knowledge of their students' specialist academic disciplines/subject areas will certainly find it useful both when designing teaching material and in the teaching process itself. The element of make-believe is better sustained, or is, perhaps, even supplanted by a fleeting sense of reality, if the students perceive the teacher as their equal - someone with whom discussing an issue may present a challenge, or from whom they can learn things other than those of purely linguistic interest, instead of seeing him/her as someone who they, at best (methodologically speaking), find themselves explaining things to (and the new generations of students, who often speak relatively fluent English and are increasingly more self-confident, are often not willing to condescend in this way). Thus, the traditional view according to which the teacher does not require in-depth knowledge of the subject area seems to have been rendered obsolete.

Secondly, students unmistakably recognize content-based, subject-specific textbook material (provided it is well presented and organized) as relevant to their core studies and consequently, to their reality (make-believe → suspension of disbelief). This adds significantly to their motivation, makes them more willing to engage in classroom activities and generally enhances their enthusiasm in class.

And another important thing to bear in mind when it comes ESP/EAP textbooks today: a textbook is a collection of set materials and as such can only serve as a loose matrix for student learning. With so much information readily available from various sources nowadays, students must, naturally, be encouraged to build on the core material through their own research, the results of which they should be invited to present in writing, share with class through presentations, and use in various other skill-building activities.

On a final note, when designing teaching material, a good balance should be struck between the familiar and unfamiliar. This way, rather than just regurgitating the old familiar stuff (e.g. familiar definitions most students find boring because they have to know them by heart anyway), students will be challenged and intrigued by what they still do not know, and more motivated to explore the subject.

6. CONCLUSION

Theories concerning designing teaching material, just like those concerning teaching methodologies, abound in the English teaching world. Like numerous other academic theories, they are occasionally subject to fad and fashion, and do not always withstand the test of time. Irrespective of the guiding theoretic principles to which one has adhered in creating a textbook, in practice one often opts for some combination of the existing theories and models/approaches, and progresses through trial and error: all teaching material is best first tested in class, preferably before the completion of the textbook's final version, so that in the final stages, it remains intact, is reworked, or even discarded if needs must. Besides, in a world where so much high-quality academic and specialized material is readily accessible on line and in other ways, any textbook provides but core material (which, naturally, has to be regularly revised), around which numerous learning activities (some of which involve using supplementary and, by no means, always set materials) are planned. The abundance of all this material, carefully selected and utilized by teachers so as to best fit their students' specific needs, merely helps create a student-centered environment in which students acquire knowledge *in English* rather than *about English*. This process should, eventually and hopefully, result in the acquisition of a better knowledge *of English* as well.

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