

An Analysis on English Adventure 5, Based on its Content, Related to Use of Contemporary Materials for Teaching of l2

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Abstract

This paper is based in the use of a textbook called English Adventure as a tool in the teaching of English as a foreign language in a university in Bogotá. English Adventure is designed for children. The goal of this study is to explore if this textbook is a useful material to teach English to the contemporary young generation and to analyze if its content presents a well-designed structure that follows the current linguistic parameters. Findings suggest that the textbook is appropriate for 12, especially because gender roles are presented in fair manner.

Key words: teaching, materials, gender, Communicative Approach, students' interest.

Resumen

Este artículo se basa en el uso de un texto titulado la Aventura del Inglés, como una herramienta en la enseñanza de esta lengua, como idioma extranjero en una universidad en Bogotá; este texto está diseñado para niños. La meta de este estudio es explorar si este libro es un material útil para la enseñanza del Inglés a la generación joven contemporánea, analizar si su estructura se encuentra bien diseñada y sigue los parámetros lingüísticos actuales. Los resultados sugieren que el texto es apropiado para la enseñanza de 12, porque presenta el modelo del género de la manera justa.

Palabras clave: enseñanza, materiales, género, estrategia comunicativa, interés de estudiantes.

Introduction

English textbooks are considered tools to implement learning in the classroom; nevertheless, teachers of foreign language, we must understand that they are simply tools to provide knowledge. According to Sheldom (1988), course books are considered as the basic instruments for teaching in the classroom and they can become either a success or a failure in the teaching and learning process; therefore, instructors have to take into account that learning and teaching should not be completely derived from the text book, but from creative skills that come from the teacher and her/his ability to adapt materials related to the culture, by identifying the local necessities and need analysis of the students. We, as Master's candidates in EFL, have come to realize that the over-dependence on text books in EFL classrooms is a paradigm that must be broken, and changed. Valencia (2006) proposes that textbooks have a main role in educational contexts all over the world, and he suggests that unfortunately the relationship between the text and pedagogical practices is not one of subordination neither to the textbook nor to the latest publication.

The following analysis from the textbook *English Adventure 5* that is used for children's English extension courses at a University in Bogotá is divided into three parts. First of all, we will identify basic details from the textbook such as: The author's background, content, teaching and learning supports among other factors. Secondly, three units from the text book will be analyzed by taking into account the methodology, the linguistic approach of the book and finally, some conclusions will be made on the light given to us by the Seminar of Materials Design.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis of the textbook was done taking into account the theory that describes it. Besides, this detailed view also requires an approach of teaching to be specified in such a process. English Adventure 5 was conceived based on the understanding of language as communication theory, which main goal as proposed by Hymes (1972) was the "Communicative Competence". The approach refers to the linguistic instruments that a speaker of any foreign language needs to know in order to be informative and competent by having the knowledge and the ability to communicate adequately in such a language. In other words, learning a foreign language requires not only knowing the grammatical structures of such language, but also been able to communicate in that language and having cultural understanding.

The Communicative Language Teaching Approach was derived from the desire of the European Common Market and the Council of Europe to teach adults the major languages spoken there. Wilkins (1976) proposed a main definition of language in order to develop communicative syllabuses for language teaching. According to Richards and Rodgers (2000), Wilkins' main contribution was an analysis of the communicative meanings that a language learner needs in order to understand and to express a foreign language instead of just knowing functions of grammar and vocabulary.

Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) in Richards and Rodgers (2000) highlighted the main characteristics of the Communicative Approach. Those authors mentioned that dialogues are based on communicative functions and not learned by

memory. Communication is the purpose of language learning and it should be effective. Finocchiaro and Bumfit also proposed that communication should start at the beginning of the course as well as reading and writing. They believed that translation should not be forbidden, it can be used according to the students' needs.

Wilkins (1976) contributions were also important because he designed the Notional Syllabuses which are relevant to the development of Communicative Language Teaching. Sánchez and Obando (2007) define syllabus as a public, comprehensive document containing an ordered list of what is to be taught in a course within a specific time frame. Additionally, the objectives, processes, materials, methodology and assessment tasks are listed. They agree that most of the time, books are the syllabus of the course. At the same time, they insist that a syllabus design will depend on the philosophy of teaching of each educator; this idea contains beliefs teachers hold about their individual definitions of language, learning and the methods and techniques they use to conduct courses while also doing assessment.

Ur (1996) adds that syllabuses are important because of the following reasons: they show professionalism and knowledge of what a teacher needs to entail, they give the learner a list of progress, and they account for an adequate sequence of contents in a course. They help teachers to become more organized and creative in their planning. Syllabuses can be used many times; they just need to be adjusted to the needs of new students. They are very useful to evaluate the course; moreover, they help teachers define what is essential in a course and what could be left out if necessary.

English Adventure 5 as Using Communicative Language Teaching Textbook

English Adventure 5 seems to be based on the Communicative Language Teaching Approach. This was established from the table of contents. Topics are organized in a sequence that directs the users into doing exercises that are arranged

from the least difficult tasks into those that are more complex. Following the textbook on unit 1 the main topic is hobbies, unit 2 is directions and unit 3 is summer vacations. It is noticeable that a clear connection can be found between the three topics, because unit 1 presents a list of vocabulary related to hobbies which is used in context by practicing those activities on daily basics. The hobbies learned in the previous unit are implicit in unit 2 by mentioning places related to where they are practiced. Unit 3 brings the activities practiced on the two prior units into enjoyable contexts for students to practice conversations about taking trips as vacations.

This textbook is presented under the Communicative Language Teaching Approach by presenting interacting games; furthermore, it comes with oral practices which are tools for communication. Dialogues give students the opportunity to practice pronunciation in communicative oral contexts which are designed for children, besides such dialogues let students interact with their own ideas rather than repeating the same information by memory. This textbook includes readings that allow students to perform their own role-plays. These role-plays are based on Disney characters which are appealing to children since they are part of everyday media (see annex 1). Adventures were conceived using regalia, which means authentic or taken from everyday life materials. Parents are advised to help their children keep a diary where they can include family pictures, personal objects, their own poems and other visual sources. This diary will help students identify themselves with the subject matter in order to support further communicative exercises.

English Adventure 5 descriptions

"English Adventure 5 makes learning English an enchanting, memorable experience by using the familiar, fantastic world of Disney characters that children know and love" (Morales and Hearn, 2006). This textbook is designed for children who are learning English as EFL. The authors are José Luis Morales and Isabella Hearn; it was published in 2006 by Pearson Longman, Publishing House in the United States.

The textbook is presented in the following way: the first part displays a content chart, which describes each unit and its main topic that is going to be covered. Then a character guide who gives an introduction to Pixar animation studios. The content charts direct students to a specific number of pages, 4, 19 and 23, where the topics of those units will be based on a Bug's life series. In the last part of the text book, songs and chants lyrics can be found. The book contains a picture dictionary, a grammar review, a common irregular verb chart and a word list. These materials are designed with aids for students and teachers which is accompanied by a student book, an activity book, the teacher's edition, audio CDs and cassettes, a reader book, videos, VHS or DVD, pictures cards, posters, a teacher's resource book and online support (www.english-adventure.net).

We must identify the difference between an approach and a method in order to have a starting point in this part of the analysis. According to Richards and Rodgers (2000), an approach refers to correlative assumptions related to nature of language teaching and learning. An approach focuses on the nature of the subject matter to be taught. Within one approach there can be many methods. Method is an overall plan for the orderly presentation of the language materials. It is procedural while an approach is axiomatic.

Analysis from Three Units of English Adventures 5

Procedures used in the book to develop each unit

A deeper analysis was done on three units of the textbook by the authors of this paper which each one was done by following the same layout: at the beginning of each unit, a picture showing children talking about the main topic of that particular unit is shown. First of all, students are requested to listen to the conversation on a CD and practice the brief dialogue. Secondly, practice exercises of listening and telling by identifying the pictures with vocabulary. Thirdly, the exercise is called "Listen then talk together". Students should listen and practice in order to

improve pronunciation (see annex 2). Fourth, "Read and say" is the title for this part of the unit, which involves grammar structures. These structures are presented in a concise words why using a chart that the students can infer and the instructor has the freedom to explain it in her/his own manner. This kind of grammar exploration gives the teacher a space for creativity. Fifth, "Listen and write" is the way the next exercise is called, where students must identify, name places and things mentioned in the recording. Sixth, "Ask and answer" consists on a communicative practice between peers reviewing the prior learned vocabulary. Seventh, "Listen and say" is the next section which contains a dialogue that students practice and then apply it to their life experiences.

There are seven other activities involved as part of each unit. The eighth part is denominated "Listen and say" which involves matching, numbering or organizing pictures related to the topic that has been discussed. Ninth, it is called "Ask, answer and check" where oral production activities vary from guided to spontaneous communication, among classmates. Tenth, the activity is called "Role-play" where students listen to the stories from Disney characters while reading it along. Then students answer some questions related to the reading, and finally they perform interpretative activities as they understood the applications from the story. Eleventh, this part is called "Listen and read", this part presents its context in a more elaborated manner since it displays pictures of real life events and the readings are based on cultural issues. Twelfth is denominated "Ask and answer" students must make oral recognitions that are guided to students' interpretations of the reading content (see annex 3). Thirteenth, "Talk about" is an opportunity for students to express events of their life experiences in an oral manner. Fourteenth is denominated "Write about it" is a creative writing sample where students express their ideas on any particular topic. Fifteenth is called "Tell the class" which gives the instructor and students the opportunity to do an overall idea on the topics that were developed thought out the unit. Finally, a short evaluation is given to students using a listening activity.

Catalyst Test

Teachers have to be careful while selecting a textbook for their courses and they must take into account the students' population they are working with. According to Quintero and Troncoso, a textbook might be chosen by the following criteria to analyze its content and its viability to be adapted in the classroom. For this reason, they propose to use a catalyst test which will help the teacher to make the appropriate selection for her/his group of students. It is a fact that we, as instructors, need to make certain choices to select a textbook, since none of them is the perfect one; therefore, those researchers suggests to follow some useful advices in order to select the best book, these are the following. Relate the teaching materials to your aims and objectives.

- Be aware of what language is for and select teaching materials that will help equip your students to use language effectively for their own purposes.
- Keep your students' learning needs in mind.
- Consider the relationship among language, the learning process and the learner.

Castañeda agrees that a teacher must apply a catalyst test to any specific textbook that the instructor wants to use in her/his course. The following acronym could be helpful to follow such a process.

THE CATALYST TEST

The words in the mnemonic represent the key questions we should ask ourselves

- C ___ Communicative?
- A ___ Aims?
- T ___ Teachability?
- A ___ Available Add-ons?
- L ___ Level?
- Y ___ Your impression
- S ___ Student interest?
- T ___ Tried and tested?

Taken from: Castañeda kisi.deu.edu.tr/tarkan.kacmaz/courses/sertifika/materials/week3.ppt

Communicative

English Adventures 5 is a communicative textbook because as it was mentioned above, it was designed to follow the Communicative Language Teaching Approach. It means students will communicate in a meaningful manner by interacting with the exercises provided by the textbook.

Aims

According to rubrics of professors from this University, they established aims for the first three units for the English Course which are divided by using five skills as follows: *listening*, where students must understand recordings with directions to go from one place to another. The second skill used in the course aims to *written production*, where students are supposed to create clear and precise texts about routines and places. The third aim is *oral expression*. Students must explain in a proper and correct way how to go from one place to another. The fourth aim is *reading*, where students are supposed to read and understand texts related to hobbies, daily activities and abilities. The last one is related to a *grammar* aim that focuses on the use of the structures: like-ing, be good at, and prepositions.

Teachable

It was agreed by us that this textbook is teachable because aims are well organized and also this textbook was designed with a series of aids to help the teacher. The layout seems comprehensible and easy for the teacher to use. Grammar structures are presented in such a way that they give freedom to the instructor to explain them in her/his own words. The most important innovation in this textbook is that it involves parents in the learning process. Parents are given suggestions how to direct their children at home from a series of home drills that students can develop.

Available Add-Ons

This textbook is accompanied by a complete series of materials like songs and chants lyrics. It also holds a picture dictionary, four posters

for the classroom, a grammar review, a common irregular verb chart and a word list. These materials are designed with aids for students and teachers that contain a student book, an activity book, the teacher's edition, audio CDs and cassettes, a reader book, videos, VHS or DVD, pictures cards, posters, a teacher's resource book and online support: www.english-adventure.net. The materials are available at Panamericana, Books and Books, and Mr. Books. It costs around \$50,000. While trying the accompanied materials the researchers had trouble using the web-page.

Level

In this University, students' age range from ten to twelve years old. They develop projects on arts to relate the textbook to extracurricular activities to cover the syllabuses and to combine subjects in a meaningful manner with English. English Adventure 5 seems to be an appropriate level since students have completed covering the other four prior textbooks. It is an advanced text for children especially by following the readings for students who must be able to manage a great deal of vocabulary. The role-plays seem to be interesting; nevertheless, they handle a vast vocabulary.

Our Impressions

This textbook and the materials that accompany it will make learning fun for children since all the topics are geared to their age; at the same time, we found that involving parents in the process of learning English is a good and motivating experience for children. While children develop exercises at home like a diary. They can take advantage of the foreign language, since it won't be a difficult subject to them; nevertheless, it can become part of their lives. We also found that the textbook teaches values to children that can be emphasized at home by their parents. Learning about values can help children to become good citizens for the future. We believe that this textbook is an extension to learning since students are not learning English culture out of context, but it embarks other useful life experiences.

The layout for the textbook is the same for each unit; therefore, we found it repetitive where students already know what activity will follow next. It can become monotonous for them. The accompanied materials come with videos from Disney movies which can be used to practice the four skills. Showing and drilling the linguistic context of these videos to students, it could become a funny activity and this activity can become a change of pace for students. At the same time, the online support provides a series of games which are puzzles, and the book gives parents ideas about the development and reinforcement of English in different activities at home. The web-page contains a teachers' resource set of suggestions oriented to improve class activities; however, we found that the web-page does not work properly and some of the links are not useful. Puzzles are not interesting at this age.

Teachers' links only cover the intellectual and artistic part of the textbook; nevertheless, the layout never mentions how it implements the textbook in large classes; and this textbook does not take into account the socioeconomic class of students. This is a present issue in our Colombian School System. We assume that all the pupils have the same opportunities including having a computer, a DVD player to watch the Disney movies. The authors assume that all children enjoy watching those films. This is a preconceived assumption that comes from an imperialistic society. This is the reason why we consider that this textbook is not appropriate for all cultures such as Muslims, because they believe that those movies contain satanic messages.

We reviewed the three first units from English Adventure 5 and we found an underrepresentation of black and hispanic characters. Along the three units, we found one single picture with a black girl; meanwhile, white children are the main children characters in the dialogues. There are many pictures with Asian children. and we believe it is a commercial strategy to sell these materials in Asia. There is only one letter that mentions a Latin American name which is Juan. These children are mostly

the white Anglo race. They are shown performing activities that sometimes are too far and different from our local ones. Children in the textbook go to school by bicycles or other means of transportation. In our local context, many children still have to walk long distances to attend to school; therefore, they cannot be related to all those activities registered in contexts. In unit two and three, it is consecutively mentioned times that it is normal to travel to other countries on vacations; however, it is not the case for the majority of our children in Colombia.

We could say that the representation of women in English Adventures 5 is equally divided as men account. In some of the activities we could identify boys doing female traditional roles like cooking and cleaning the house. This is a plus for the textbook since it is geared to young children who are learning about gender roles in a different cultural environment, where boys are capable of doing such chores. The textbook is breaking a gender paradigm, this is positive because women roles are becoming equally accepted for the new generations. On the other hand, boys and girls are showing interacting behavior between them, because they talk about the same topics and share the same activities. This is a positive development of culture related to gender roles, because girls are displayed as having the same opportunities and capacities than boys. We consider that even though the book is about another culture, it sets an example for our Colombian traditional sexist ideologies, where young children can learn that it is perfectly acceptable to share and exchange gender behavior, roles, professions and sports among other activities.

Students' Interest

A student from the English level five was interviewed in order to make a deeper analysis of the textbook. According to L student who is studying English at this program for children, accounts that she enjoys the activities in the English course and that she likes the book a great deal, because it is colorful, it presents many pictures and photographs and besides, due to the fact that it includes the Disney characters.

She loves English classes which are enjoyable and meaningful to her. She considers that she has learnt about many new things since the book is an important tool to develop the class; in other words, the book is a basic element to conduct the class, but teachers also include diverse activities to promote language communication (see annex 4).

L student says that the course is divided in three parts: the first part consists on working with the textbook. Students develop most of the activities proposed there, in extra time. They interact together and they get ready for the next activity. The second part, is developed in order to fulfill the main objectives of the syllabus that includes emphasis on art. In that class, students join together in order to reinforce the subject studied in the book. The last part involves making creative works such as crafts and paintings, where students have the possibility to express their feelings by themselves in an original manner, the product of the prior activities. She also mentioned that teachers plan ahead of time a cinema activity which involves seeing the movie by groups and then writing down their opinions about the drama from the film, and finally they discuss it among the groups. According to the description that L student made we concluded in our analysis that this textbook could be used to develop project work.

We decided to show to L student the advantages and disadvantages that were found in the textbook and the accompanied materials. To her surprise, she told us that her book was acquired in the University. She was not aware that it came with a CD, and many other materials. Her teacher told her about the existence of a CD that is not available at present. She expressed disappointment, upon us showing her the activities that can be performed with the supporting materials. This report was completely new to her and she never knew that her parents were supposed to be involved in her learning process.

We decided to ask L student what does she think about the book's cover? Is it in any way meaningful to her? She thinks that her book is

interesting because it is colorful and reflects an adventure in the planet earth. According to her, the teacher told them the first day of classes that English Adventure 5 was going to be a new waking up to the English language approach, because it was going to be an exciting and innovative adventure.

Conclusions

- Dendrios (1992) cited by Valencia (2002) points out that teachers may have a limited choice of texts, because they are not provided with enough and appropriate training, information, guidance and facilities. Some English teachers believe that classes are a success because we follow a textbook without having confidence in ourselves by believing in our creativity and our input in each specific activity. A creative instructor can produce the most interesting class by having a board, a piece of chalk and a bright mind.
- The marketing of textbooks by commercial publishers and the cost of books are external factors that limit a right selection of books. This gives us, the instructors, the opportunity to create our own materials that will not have those excessive costs that entitles to buy textbooks.

- Nowadays, students are obliged to buy the textbook because photocopies are not allowed in the classroom. We concluded that because of respecting the authors' rights this policy is imposed on students; unfortunately, in our context books are expensive and not everyone can buy them. For that reason, English textbooks are not available for everyone.

- English Adventure 5 is an example of modern textbooks, where the authors tried to bring the representation of both genders in its context. Besides they go a step further proposing that both genders are capable of doing the same activities.
- Textbooks analysis is a complicated task which requires a great deal of objectivity. For us, researchers, we must leave our biases about learning English behind and concentrate on giving an analysis to new publications that are breaking old paradigms.
- We learned from doing an analysis of this textbook, that learning does not take place only in the classroom; nevertheless, parents can be an active part of the process as well. There are ways in which parents can be involved in these processes that make learning even more meaningful to the whole family. Language becomes useful when students learn about it in context, because they learn about life along with English.

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Annexes

Annex 1

Listen. Then read and write. Role-play.

1 Nani is home from work.
Hey, Lilo. What did you and Stitch do today?

2 We danced the hula and Stitch knocked over the lamp. It was fun!
Well, we did a lot of things. Let's see...

3 Nani is looking worried.

4 We listened to music. Stitch was really noisy!

5 I played the guitar and Stitch jumped on the sofa. It was great!

6 Nani looks at the living room.
Too bad you didn't clean the house!

7 And we watched TV and Stitch was a monster! He was scary!

Annex 2

Ask a friend and write.

Did you clean your bedroom today?

No, I didn't. I played computer games.

	✓	X
today	played computer games	clean his bedroom
yesterday	cleaned	did his homework
last week	had lunch	
last weekend		

Annex 3

Listen and read.

Milo and the Empire under the Sea

1 Milo Thatch likes studying about Atlantis. Atlantis is a lost empire under the sea. Milo wants to find Atlantis.

2 Milo has a book that can help him. He's good at reading old languages. He goes under the sea in a big ship.

3 Atlantis is beautiful. There's a big waterfall around it.

4 Princess Kida lives in Atlantis. "How do we get to the market?" asks Milo. "Go straight and take the first right," answers Kida.

5 They walk around the market. The people in Atlantis are hard-working.

6 Milo wants to help the people in Atlantis. He wants to make Aile a great empire again!

Annex 4

Opinión del libro de Inglés

Me gusta porque:

- Me parece bonito por:
- los dibujos.
- los temas interesantes.
- los colores se alegres.
- No solo es ilustrado con personas si no con dibujos animados.
- Es agradable y no es aburrido para nada.

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