Designing an ESP textbook for Political Scientists

Proces prípravy špecializovanej učebnice odbornej angličtiny pre politológov

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Abstract: A shortage of suitable textbooks is well known in the ESP community. Many teachers thus have to design materials themselves. In this article the underlying principles and the process of designing a subject-specific ESP textbook for political scientists will be described and the textbook itself will be introduced.

Key words: ESP, textbook design, Political Science, needs analysis

Introduction

Any teacher assigned a new ESP group of students will probably immediately start looking for a suitable textbook. After all, there are many benefits of using a textbook. Most language teachers would probably agree with those listed by Parish (2004, p. 227) over a decade ago:

A textbook

- assures a measure of structure, consistency, and logical progression
- minimises preparation time for teachers
- allows learners to review material or preview other lessons
- meets a learner's needs or expectations of having something concrete to work from and take home for further study
- provides novice teachers with guidance in course and activity design
- may provide multiple resources: CDs, videos, self-study workbooks etc.

In addition to being a guide for lessons and home study, a good ESP textbook will be a source of subject-specific, technical vocabulary (Esteban,2002, Wisniewska, 2004, O'Neill, 1982), a useful linguistic source, and a significant motivating factor for students (Shamsaee S. and Shams M. A., 2010). As language teachers are typically not the "primary knowers" of the content, the ESP textbook also serves as the carrier of subject-specific information – although the ESP teacher should ideally "have some understanding of the subject area", along with a positive attitude to it (Vičič, 2011, p. 109).

However, in some cases, a textbook can prove to be a burden, both to teachers and to students. There are several reasons for this. Esteban (2002) lists lack of oral exercises, uninteresting topics, lack of grammar exercises, and, paradoxically,

too may grammar exercises. A level of English that is too basic is another frequently mentioned complaint (Khoshsima, Saed, Ghasemi, 2014), along with very simplified content, that is "school-level" (Lowe, 2009). Students may report that the textbook is too different from lessons or is difficult to use. Generally we can say that a burdensome textbook will simply not target the students' needs.

Vičič (2011, p. 122) quite correctly states that "the likelihood of finding suitable published materials is much higher" if the subject area is more general. Any experienced ESP teacher will probably confirm that if they are looking for textbooks that are more specific, the chances of finding a suitable one are significantly lower (unless the subject area is one of those not neglected by publishers because of a wider target audience, such as economy, business and law, which have a number of commercially available publications).

If the ESP teacher is assigned a group of students studying a subject that is not covered by commercially available textbooks, they are presented with a dilemma. Should general ESP materials be used? Should the mission of designing tailor-made materials be embarked on? What should be done to meet students' needs? And, indeed, what precisely are the students' needs? Can they be met when only limited time remains before the course begins? This is one of recurrent ESP dilemmas and, unfortunately, ESP teachers are still expected to solve it "with no, or very limited, preparation time" (Jones, 1990, p. 91). The ESP group is there, the semester has started and the teacher is expected to teach. This means that frequently ESP teachers do not have enough time to develop quality materials covering all the steps (needs analysis, materials research, materials development, verification, etc.) and end up in a limbo between preparing tailor-made materials on the go and using what is available commercially.

1   When no ESP textbook is available: a specific example

Among the students of various study programmes offered at the Faculty of Philosophy, Comenius University, students of Political Science are in a very specific position due to the demands placed on them by their department. Their command of English must be "sufficiently high to enable them to read and work with specialised texts in English"[1]. Authentic materials written in English form a substantial part of required reading material for most courses taught at the Department (however, instruction is in Slovak). Although students do know this in advance from the student prospectus and the home page of the Department of Political Sci-

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[1] The entry requirements on prospective students expressed by Department of Political Science specify the required level as "sufficiently high". The students should have "at least a good passive command of English". The European Framework of Reference for Languages is not used to specify which level exactly is expected of the students. See http://www.politologiauk.sk/chcemstudovat/ for more information.

ence, the first year in the Department in particular can present quite a challenge for many of them. Their secondary school English classes did not prepare them for reading a large number of (frequently) extensive specialised scientific texts. These texts are commonly written in a very sophisticated and complex language and can therefore be very problematic for students. For this reason the Department of Political Science requires a different ESP course from those offered to students of other subjects. This ESP course must precisely target the needs of their students as otherwise they will not be able to study Political Science successfully.

Researching the ESP textbooks available, I found there was no English language textbook available which would be designed specifically for students of Political Science. Therefore, a decision had to be made about what materials to use in the classes of English for Political Science. Commercially available ESP or EAP textbooks did not seem appropriate – they appeared either too general or too disconnected from the texts the future Political Scientists come across during their studies on a daily basis. One option was to select an introductory textbook to the field of Political Science as the source material and design some exercises, but this did not work very well. For the period of several years both approaches mentioned above were tried, mainly in combination. After some time, it became apparent that what was needed were tailor-made materials but preferably in the form of an ESP textbook with a logical progression that would ease the transition from *learning* English into *studying* in English, thus fulfilling the main requirement of the Department of Political Science: "We want our students to understand texts written in English".

2   Designing an ESP textbook for political scientists: procedure

Embarking on the mission of preparing a tailor-made ESP textbook (which, in the end, lasted more than 4 years) I initially decided to follow the three essential criteria outlined by Carter (1983). Hence the newly designed ESP textbook for Political Scientists should contain 1) authentic material, 2) purpose-related orientation, and 3) self-direction. The individual steps in the process of ESP textbook for Political Scientists are shown in Figure 1. Each of these steps is briefly discussed below.

2.1   *Needs analysis + teacher requirements + feedback from former students*

The first step was a thorough needs analysis. Respondents were mainly 1st year students of Political Science who completed a specially prepared questionnaire in the 3rd week of the winter semester. The time of the needs analysis is very important – during this time the 1st year students were beginning to have a very clear idea of what language requirements were placed on them. The questionnaire examined the 4 traditional competences – reading, writing, speaking and listening,
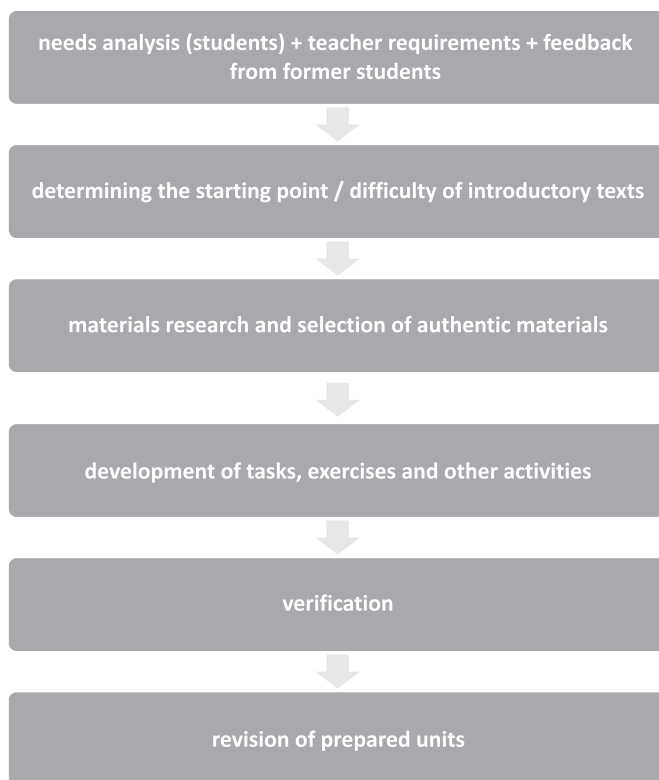
Fig. 1: *Individual steps in the design of English for Political Scientists textbook*

asking respondents about their problem areas (What do you need to improve in most? – i.e. **needs for success in their study of Political Science**) and their interests (What activity included in ESP lessons would increase your motivation? i.e. **influence on motivation**).

Tab. 1: *Some results from students' needs analysis.*

	I need to (%)	I want to (%)
read and understand subject-specific texts	**100**	45
participate in an informal discussion	45	88
write short academic texts	74	68
participate in a professional discussion / political debate	87	75

As can be clearly seen in Table 1 the awareness of the need to read and understand subject-specific texts is absolute. This is hardly surprising – after all, students consistently work with texts written in English. However, the awareness

of this need does not necessarily mean that students wish to spend most of the time developing their reading skills. The results of the needs analysis indicate that students would much rather develop their speaking skills. This corresponds to findings by Shamsaee and Shams (2010) whose data also indicate that ESP students prefer to spend more time on speaking. As a "mismatch between teachers and students' expectations from ESP courses can result in undesired outcomes" I have taken the students wishes into consideration when preparing the textbook (Shamsaee and Shams, 2010, p. 265).

Incidentally, the wish "to speak" was repeatedly expressed in personal interviews with 2nd year students and former students, at that time already graduate students, all of whom participated in the general ESP courses offered by Department of Languages. Speaking, albeit in the form of political debates, was one of the activities mentioned by teachers of the Department of Political Science, who were approached with the question about their expectations and requirements on their students, as well as their opinions and recommendations about what in particular students could find useful later on in their studies (or when working in the field) – see Table 2.

Tab. 2: *Some results from the analysis of teacher requirements*

I need my students to be able to	(%)
read and understand subject-specific texts written in English	**100**
write (in Slovak) short academic texts based on English reading material	50
prepare (in Slovak) a brief written summary of assigned English reading material ("konspekt")	90
participate in a professional discussion / political debate	90

On the basis of the results we obtained and analysed (using quantitative as well as qualitative analysis, where appropriate), we determined 3 different areas for the syllabus: 1) topics and issues relating to the subject of Political Science (content syllabus), 2) technical, subject-specific vocabulary and selected grammar issues (language syllabus) and 3) development of skills, such as compensation techniques, discussion training, writing an abstract, conducting a survey, etc. (skills syllabus).

2.2 Determining the starting point / language difficulty of introductory texts

Introductory texts to each unit begin at the B1 level in the earlier units with progression to C1 of the Common European Framework for Languages. The starting level and progression through several levels during the 4 semesters of study is based on several years of practical experience with this particular group of learners. When joining the Department of Political Science students' competence in English varies greatly and tends to be between levels B1–B2 (sometimes lower, occasionally as high as C1). The selected texts are rich in subject-specific terminol-

ogy and although written in clear, simple English thus provide sufficient learning material for students of all levels.

The introductory texts are longer than in most ESP and EAP textbooks – 2 pages on average. This is in accordance with Lowe's belief (which I completely agree with):

> Most authentic texts are NOT short. Short texts are harder to interpret than long texts because short texts lack discourse clues and they lack redundancy. Our objectives are to train students to handle authentic texts, which are usually … at least two pages of written text. (Lowe, I. 2009, p. 3)

a) **Materials research and selection of authentic materials**
Most of the material used in the textbook is formed by authentic texts from the field of Political Science. Only some of them had been adapted (purposefully – reading material for other seminars and lectures from Political Science are also authentic, and in accordance with the belief that students need exposure to authentic texts in multiple genres within their speciality). Special attention was paid to appropriate language level and terminological richness of the selected text. Content-wise, those texts with the potential to stimulate and hold students' interest were given a priority and Department of Political Science staff also had an input in this selection.

b) **Development of tasks, exercises and activities**
Chosen authentic materials (extracts from scientific articles, textbooks, manifestos, statistics, infographics, electoral billboards, charts, newspaper articles, etc.), are supplemented with specially designed exercises. The focus is on developing reading comprehension and mastering subject-specific vocabulary, along with other skills, such as speaking and writing. Many are aimed at developing critical thinking and allow students to apply their knowledge in political analysis.

c) **Verification**
All materials prepared for the textbook were verified and field-tested in the classroom over a 4-year period.

d) **Revision**
Prepared units were processed according to the feedback received from students in informal discussions and through a questionnaire the students completed at the end of each year. Subsequently units were revised and significantly extended, before copyright holders were approached with the request to grant permission to use copyright materials. In several instances (no grant of permission), whole units had to be changed, re-designed and repeatedly verified. The final step involved reviewers, and adaptations were made based on their reviews, before the manuscript was handed over to the publishers. *English for Political Scientists* consists of two volumes, covering the needs of

students in the 1stand 2nd year of bachelor degree, i.e. throughout 4 semesters of study at Faculty of Philosophy, Comenius University (10 units in Volume 1 and 6 units in Volume 2).

3 Main features of the prepared textbook

The main characteristics of the textbook are:

a) focus on handling authentic texts and extracting meaningful information from them

b) introductory texts are longer than the general norm

c) units use content that students (partially) know and add something new and interesting

d) authenticity is the basis of language learning activities

e) subject-specific vocabulary is consistently introduced and practiced

f) focus is mostly on Britain, with no specific focus on Slovakia, therefore the textbook can easily be used in international context

g) useful for students starting from around the B1+ level (indeed, in the context of ESP teaching it is sometimes claimed that there is no obvious progression from B1 level – see Lowe, 2009)

h) content is written fully in English – it is recommended for teachers to consider using translation as a scaffolding for mastering subject-specific vocabulary

Taking into account the fact that the world of politics is changeable, topic areas for each unit were selected with particular care, taking into account the potential to hold students' interest as well as its relevancy for the field of Political Science. Those covered in Volume 1 can be taken as a general introduction to the study of Political Science, while Volume 2 introduces more controversial and original topics, as shown in Table 3.

4 Structure of each unit

All units follow the same structure and consist of one long introductory text (approx. 2 pages), tasks and exercises, and a glossary. Additionally, both volumes contain *Supplementary material*, enabling possible extension during lessons and *Check what you have learnt* section which offers students the chance to revise or monitor their progress. Introductory textintroduces the topic area and relevant terminology and serves as the starting point for exercises and other activities. Lexical exercises practice subject-specific vocabulary from the field of Political Science.

Tab. 3: *Content syllabus*

VOLUME 1		VOLUME 2	
UNIT 1	Defining the terms: politics, power, authority	UNIT 1	Voting Behaviour
UNIT 2	Dictatorship and democracy	UNIT 2	The Mass Media and Democracy
UNIT 3	Left and right: political ideologies	UNIT 3	Politics in Music
UNIT 4	Political systems	UNIT 4	Immigration
UNIT 5	Political parties	UNIT 5	Political Advertising
UNIT 6	Pressure groups	UNIT 6	Twitter and Politics
UNIT 7	New social movements		
UNIT 8	The European Council		
UNIT 9	The European Commission		
UNIT 10	The United Nations		

Selected grammatical structures are practiced in grammar exercises[2]. Reading competence is developed in special exercises which work with multiple sources of authentic reading material from the field of Political Science commonly used in the British – American academic environment. The level of difficulty of these texts is intentionally higher (sometimes significantly) than that of the introductory texts as it corresponds to the level of texts students of Political Science regularly come across from Day 1 of their study at the Department. Their primary purpose is to help develop reading comprehension, introducing students to various strategies for successful reading. Students also learn to produce academic and scientific texts of various lengths, such as definitions, comparison/contrast texts, survey report and abstract. Debates, negotiations and discussions form an integral part of the course, although only a few of them are covered in the textbook itself due to copyright restrictions. Students practice expressing and justifying their opinion, participate in simple political negotiations and simulated discussions. A list of relevant terminology – the glossary – completes each unit.

Conclusion

With a gap in the ESP market, *English for Political Scientists* was prepared out of necessity. Although it was tailor-made to suit the needs of students of Political Sci-

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[2] As the expressed requirements of the Department of Political Science for the designed course and textbook were specifically to focus on reading comprehension, and incoming students are expected to start the course with a certain command of English, relatively little attention in the textbook is given to grammar (the lesson time allocated for the course also seriously limits what can be done during classes). Depending on the level of students in a given year, grammar (and indeed any other aspects of language the teacher sees fit) can be practised in additional materials given to the class to study and work on at home. This presents no problem as there is a huge number of publications available that focus specifically on grammar.

ence studying at Comenius University and following the requirements expressed by the staff of the Department, ESP teachers at other institutions may find it useful, too (apart from political scientists, it may be suitable for example for students of foreign relations, journalism and sociology).

With the students possessing the knowledge of subject-specific vocabulary and suitable reading skills, teachers form the Department of Political Science are now more readily able to incorporate the latest publications from the field in their classes, which is essential for a field as changeable as the field of Political Science.

The skills acquired in the course will also make it possible for students to share their research using English, attend discussions with English speaking experts visiting the Department and participate in various student exchange programmes (for example ERASMUS, etc.)

For ESP professionals, the experience gained in the process of designing the textbook is useful on two levels. One, to the author herself providing an extensive background to fall on when designing materials for other groups of learners. Two, for teachers of ESP generally, who are just embarking on the mission of designing their own materials or textbooks, showing them a possible course of actions which they may or may not find useful or applicable. What is essential though is the awareness of the many different factors that come to play when preparing and ESP textbook and the fact that there are many methodological tools available for the teacher to choose from.

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