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EAP READING FOR PHILOSOPHY STUDENTS: SPECIAL EDITION

Abstract. In the past decades researchers discovered a mutual relationship between a student's academic reading skills and academic success. Teaching EAP to students of philosophy faculty made us aware of the need to review some EAP tenets to make them work in the classroom of this particular specialism. This article discusses which of reading strategies and sub-skills match well the academic context of English for philosophy students course at university.

Keywords: EAP, philosophy, reading strategies and sub-skills, authentic materials.

It might appear that students who read philosophy at university do not need explicit training in academic skills. The first time students of Kyiv National University are introduced to the academic skills course is in their third year when – after two years of General English – they are offered EAP course. While students seem to generally have mastered some of academic studies principles intuitively on their own in the course of their first two years at university, there is still room for improvement, particularly in what pertains to the skills connected closely with the English language. In our paper we look at possible adaptations of conventional approaches to teaching EAP reading skills to tailor them specifically to the needs of philosophy students.

The objective of this article is to discuss some EAP teaching strategies aimed at enhancing philosophy students' learning outcomes at higher education institutions. The major tenet of this article is that teaching EAP to third year students of the faculty of philosophy requires a selective approach to teaching them academic skills, and reading strategies, in particular. The focus on reading is grounded on the understanding that it remains philosophy students' main source of obtaining information as well as the established fact that students' academic success is directly related to their mastery of reading skills.

As Canadian researcher Julian Hermida points out, success at the university level mainly depends on existing pre-entry college attributes, including the mastery of some fundamental academic skills, including reading, writing, critical thinking, oral presentation, and media literacy [1, 20]. The present paper concentrates on teaching reading strategies and sub-skills (prediction, skimming and scanning, and guessing from context) normally taught in the English language university classroom.

EAP course for philosophy students understandably involves a lot of authentic philosophy texts. The reason for that may be a huge array of authentic texts

available in the internet that can cover any subject that third year students are interested in, alongside relatively fast outdating of the texts offered by coursebooks. As noted by Savka Blagojevic, although authentic philosophy texts are "highly demanding in terms of their language complexity and the intellectual requirements that have to be met to understand them, such […] texts can be successfully applied in teaching ESP" [2, 115].

Alex Gilmore emphasises another characteristic of the language complexity of authentic texts used in ESP courses: as authentic texts mirror the real-life language, they contain a great diversity of grammatical and lexical elements, which means that they are much more abundant in language forms than the texts constructed for language teaching purposes. This means that ESP teachers should provide a variety of short authentic texts which will allow their students to recognise and remember the lexis and structures easily [3].

Although these observations appear totally relevant, they cannot always be met. The format of optional course offered to third and fourth year students at Shevchenko University calls for a lot of initiative on students' side in terms of selecting texts to be discussed in classes. The texts that students find challenging and relevant for themselves are as a rule rather lengthy as well as contain unadapted grammatical and lexical material.

Language teaching methodologists maintain that comprehension of a foreign language text is achieved through the combination of bottom-up processing (knowledge of lexis and grammar), and top-down processing (knowledge of situational and cultural context, and background knowledge of the topic) [4, 41].

In this connection, the pre-reading stage is supposed to include teaching students prediction strategies, when they put forward assumptions as to the content of the text to be read and later check them against the text. This strategy forms the information gap by building up suspense, and further finding out the actual information in the text stimulates its better comprehension and boosts the retention of the information. Judging by students' feedback, they realize the value of this strategy, which as a rule in not explicitly taught to them at university level, and raising their awareness of this skill leads to a more effective reading and promotes their learner autonomy, as they can apply it to self-study.

As opposed to the above, practising skimming and scanning while reading a text normally does not find much appeal with the students. When asked if they had been taught these strategies at school or in the first two years of university they will as a rule say no. Despite it, however, they will normally have developed these strategies intuitively while reading huge volumes of texts they are given in the first two years of university studies. Ability to skim big amount of texts to see if they have pieces of information the students are looking for and scan them for particular answers to their inquiries is a necessary prerequisite of their success in philosophy disciplines. Thus, unlike the strategy of forming predictions about the text, skimming and scanning seem to be of a lesser appeal to the students.

As for post-reading activities practised with philosophy students, based on extracts from two unadapted articles discussed in our recent classes, the following activities could be offered as an example of tasks designed to enhance text comprehension:

If there's anything we philosophers really hate it's an untenable dualism. Exposing untenable dualisms is a lot of what we do for a living. It's no small job, I assure you. They (the dualisms, not the philosophers) are insidious, and they are ubiquitous; perpetual vigilance is required. I mention only a few of the dualisms whose tenability we have, at one time or other, felt called on to question [5].

The above text calls for pre-teaching a few adjectives crucial for the text comprehension: *untenable, insidious, ubiquitous*, as well as the noun *vigilance*, all of them having Latin roots which are worth emphasizing (accounting for the fact that the students had a course of Latin in their first year).

On the level of syntax, the last sentence could be challenging to work out, with the present perfect

construction split by an extra phrase 'at one time or other', and with the forms of past participle *called on* and to-infinitive *to question,* which could theoretically be misidentified by Ss as other word classes and therefore inhibit the right understanding of the sentence.

On the level of the discourse, the students will have to feel the text leaning to a more informal register, while both the choice of lexis and syntax result in its ironical tonality. It is best felt in the third sentence when the author corrects his seemingly vague reference of the pronoun 'they', then characterizes dualisms as insidious, by which granting them some human features, and then the declaration 'perpetual vigilance is required' sounds too assertive here with the noun *vigilance* conveying some comic intonation due to its excessive seriousness and 'heavy-weight' that contrasts the otherwise more light-weight intonation of the text.

As for the strategy of predicting the meaning of words from context, this may also turn out rather problematic. In his BALEAP 2013 conference talk, Russell Mayne quotes research by Gough and Wren, according to which "when L1 students guess words from context they are accurate only 14 to 45% of the time" [6].

The strategy of guessing the meanings of words from the context also has its particular reservations in case of philosophy texts. These texts are normally rich in terms that come from Greek and Latin, and in this case often quite guessable because a lot of them were borrowed by the Ukrainian language as well. Unlike this vocabulary, the words of Anglo-Saxon origin, although in many cases their meaning could be worked out from the context or it is familiar to the students from their general English course, could acquire additional connotations rendered to them by a certain author. To illustrate these points, a text from our recent class could be cited, in which Reiner Schuermann explains how the terminology used by Martin Heidegger should be interpreted:

In order to avoid misapprehensions about his [Heidegger's] very starting point, he writes, "after Being and Time (my) thinking replaced the expression 'meaning of being' with 'truth of being'. And so as to avoid any misapprehensions about truth, so as to exclude its being understood as conformity, 'truth of being' has been elucidated as 'locality of being' – truth as the locus-character of being. That presupposes, however, an understanding of what a 'locus' is. Hence the expression topology of being [7, 77].

Apart from words like *misapprehension* and *elucidate* that could be pre-taught in pre-reading stage or approximately guessed from the context, there are other terms – *locus, locality, topology*, which at first glance are completely understandable, but need to be further studied in the context of Heidegger's philosophy in particular. Without deeper investigation into Heidegger's interpretation of these concepts one risks misunderstanding these seemingly familiar notions. The same point could be proved further down in the text, whose first page only offers words and collocations like *the sum total of entities, presence and presencing, ontological difference, presencing as "loci", poietic character*, etc., which, although seem understandable on the surface, should be studied in terms of their concrete meanings in the context of Heidegger's works.

To sum up, an authentic text used in an EAP class can be a valuable stimulus to immerse students in their subject matter in the target language and bring the classroom closer to the real-life challenges that students are likely to face in their future professional life. To enhance their academic reading skills, philosophy students are offered training in reading strategies and sub-skills which should be tailored to their particular specialism and account for their academic background and skills they develop in other university classes. In that case their improved reading skills will boost their overall learning outcomes, while their English classes could work in synergy with other subjects on their curriculum and not be viewed as separate from each other. Further research can be connected with working out efficient tools for teaching other skills and systems to students of particular specialisms, in our case for students of philosophy faculty.

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