The Analysis of Reading Parts of English Course Books for the Primary School Learners

Katerina Hanzlikova, Ivana Simonova
Jan Evangelista Purkyne University, Usti nad Labem,
Czech Republic
CONTENT

- Teaching English at primary schools in the Czech Republic
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Teaching English at Primary Schools in the Czech Republic

Theoretical background - 4 main documents:

- Act No. 561/2004 Coll. Act on pre-school, primary, secondary, tertiary professional and other education (Education Act)
- National Foreign Language Teaching Plan
- Framework Educational Program for Basic Education
- Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)
Methodology

Two course books were analysed:
Happy Street 1 and Chit Chat 1 – both are most frequently used in the Czech Republic for young learners (third-graders, aged 9).

- **Happy Street** is the best-selling, two-level course for children who are ready for early reading and writing in English. In Happy Street, children explore the wider world of the familiar Happy House characters and also meet their new neighbour Greg and his dog Flossy.

- **Chit Chat** is a two-level course for children starting English in primary school. It offers a child-friendly introduction to listening, speaking, reading and writing, and is suitable for use either on first contact with English or after an introductory oral-aural course. It present and practices language in an innovative way, with the help of a young pop star character and a group of comical cartoon bugs. It recycles the language through an entertaining 12-part comic strip story, My friend is a monster.
Analysis of Course Books

4 criteria were applied:
(1) the structure and design of the reading section of course books;
(2) the length of the text/s and of single sentences;
(3) grammar and the vocabulary items used in the sentences;
(4) the content and message of the stories.
Results

Ad 1: the structure and design of the reading section of course books

Happy Street 1 is divided into 9 units in which the new vocabulary and grammar is presented. Every unit consists of 8 lessons which follow the same pattern. At the beginning new vocabulary is introduced by the song. In lesson 3 children extend their vocabulary and learn new grammar by the same technique as in lesson 1 by the song or chant. Lesson 4, 5, 6 and 8 consist of different exercises dealing with speaking, listening and writing tasks. Relating to reading, the interesting fact is that in each unit children meet with two different comic stories, they are placed into unit 2 and 7. Lesson 2 story does not have any title because it is a sequence of different life situations of the family living in the Happy Street. However, in lesson 7 there is a story called Colin in Computer Land, which is series where children follow a gripping and adventurous story about Colin. These episodes embrace and repeat both aspects – grammar and vocabulary. However, neither of them is tightly connected to the themes of the units so they are not included in the analysis.
Results

Ad 1: the structure and design of the reading section of course books

- Chit Chat 1 differs from Happy Street in a structural arrangement. The class book consists of a starter unit and 12 more coherent units, but they are shorter in lessons. There are only 4 lessons dedicated to speaking, listening, writing and reading sections. The story always appears in the last lesson. It is designed in a comic form, as mentioned above (My friend is a monster). Two main characters, a boy and a girl, accompanied by a funny, green monster go through different adventurous together.

- The comic form of stories is chosen because of its simplicity. It offers the compromise to include only short texts which are easily read by third-grade children and it covers the majority of vocabulary the lesson presents. The pictures in the background help with the understanding of the whole story and it also allows children to become the part of the story by provoking their imagination.
Results

Ad 2: the length of the text/s and of single sentences

Both class books’ stories are built up with approximately 7 windows on one A4 page. It differs in each story but the minimum is 6 and the maximum is 9 windows. Each of the windows consists of one or more speech bubbles where the text is placed. After the closer examination the number of speech bubbles in one story is between 9 to 14. In Happy Street the length of the sentences slowly enlarges. In units 1 and 2 we can see the tendency of one-word speech bubbles which consist of the simple words or short phrases. Starting from unit 3 there is a visible change in the length of the text written. Questions and sentences with the subject, verb and object appear in the story. This pattern stays almost the same till the last unit. Even though Chit Chat starts with the similar one-word structure, the growth of the length is more gradual and goes progressively until the end of the book. In the last story, speech bubbles of three sentences appear three times in contrary to Happy Street where those bubbles consist of two sentences only.
Results

Ad 3: grammar and the vocabulary items used in the sentences

For a better comparison of the grammar and vocabulary occurrence in the stories, the frequency is displayed in diagrams: results relating to grammar comparison are displayed in Fig. 1, those on vocabulary are presented in Fig. 2. Black colour represents Happy Street 1 and the grey colour refers to Chit Chat 1. The vertical scale represents the number of the windows in which the grammar and vocabulary occurs. The horizontal scale stands for the units.
Results

Ad 3: grammar items used in the sentences – Fig. 1

![Bar chart showing grammar items used in sentences with two conditions: Happy Street 1 and Chit Chat 1.](chart.png)
Results

Ad 3: vocabulary items used in the sentences – Fig. 2
Results

Ad 4: the content and message of the stories

Happy Street stories are based on the family events and different situation in which this family deals with some problem. One episode is not sequel to another which means that at the beginning of each story the reader is placed into a different environment with some of the family members. According to the research this strategy is effective in practise of the vocabulary and grammar because it enables the authors to build each episode on a base they need. Chit Chat uses the opposite approach in making the story adventurous and exciting for kids by waiting for what will happen in the next instalment. In this case the authors had to follow the story line and sometimes the vocabulary and grammar part was omitted. In the end of the book children finish the spectacular journey with the monster and his friend full of experiences which should evoke in them that they are as successful as the group of characters accompanying their own English journey.
kathan@seznam.cz
ivana.simonova@ujep.cz