

VOCABULARY PRESENTATION IN ADVANCED EFL COURSEBOOKS

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine and evaluate five advanced English language coursebooks (English News and Views, face2face, Ready for CAE, Solutions, Upstream Advanced) from the viewpoint of the vocabulary selection and teaching techniques they employ. Based on content analysis, it outlines their strengths and weaknesses and makes suggestions for improvements. The results show that out of the five selected English language coursebooks, English News and Views is the only one which has been written by Romanian teachers for Romanian classrooms.

Key words: advanced coursebooks, teaching techniques, vocabulary

The purpose of this paper is to examine and evaluate the selected English language coursebooks from the viewpoint of vocabulary selection and teaching techniques they employ. The five books chosen are all advanced level coursebooks and they are listed below alphabetically:

- *English News and Views* (Bălan et al., 1998);
- *face2face* Advanced Student’s Book (Cunningham, 2009);
- *Ready for CAE* (Norris and French, 2008);
- *Solutions* Advanced Student’s Book (Falla and Davies, 2009);
- *Upstream Advanced* (Evans et al., 2010).

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1. The analysis of coursebooks

1.1. English News and Views

Part of the series *Pathway to English*, this coursebook has been written by Romanian teachers for Romanian classrooms. The book is divided into eight units, each containing seven lessons. Lessons 1-4 in each unit focus on the syllabus topics, with emphasis on different skills in each lesson. Lesson 5 in each unit is a round-up or review lesson, consolidating and extending what has been covered in Lessons 1-4. Lessons 6 and 7 are devoted to Culture and Civilization. The authors claim that “there is a continued focus on the four main language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing, with one lesson in each unit emphasising each skill in turn, though with attention to integration of all the skills throughout. A fifth important skill, translation, is developed through special exercises in every unit” (Introduction, p. 3).

The Student’s Book layout is enriched with coloured pictures, graphic designs, cartoons, diagrams, and charts. Vocabulary is developed through activities on different lexical relationships, such as synonymy, antonymy and collocations, and also through work on vocabulary strategies, including dictionary work, guessing meaning from context, cognates, prefixes, suffixes, etc. There are also activities focusing on idioms. The new vocabulary is presented at the end of the reading texts in vocabulary boxes which include phonetic transcriptions and Romanian equivalents.

The Teacher’s Book includes an overview of the organisation and methodological principles of the course, summaries of the aims and contents of each lesson, lesson-by-lesson notes, tapescritps of the listening exercises and sample test material.

Table 1. *Strong and weak points of English News and Views coursebook*

Strong points	Weak points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a variety of reading passages from different literary genres, followed by text analysis exercises; - it includes almost entirely authentic texts; - dictionary work with phonetic transcription; - the <i>Culture & Civilization</i> section; - emphasis on project work, leading to the preparation of a youth magazine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the high number of words introduced in the reading passages; - the vocabulary is not recycled enough; - not enough practice and testing activities; - not enough listening material

1.2. face2face

The Student's Book provides thirty lessons in 10 thematically linked units. Each unit also contains a *Review*, *Accurate Writing* and *Preview* section to revise and consolidate students' knowledge. The authors of the course state that "the *face2face* syllabus integrates the learning of new language with skills development and places equal emphasis on vocabulary and grammar." (Teacher's Book, p. 4). According to its authors, *face2face* "mainly uses a guided discovery approach to learning, first allowing students to check what they know, then helping them to work out the rules for themselves through carefully structured examples and concept questions." (Teacher's Book, p.4). All new language is included in the interactive *Language Summaries* in the back of the Student's Book and is regularly recycled and reviewed. The *Preview* sections are designed to give students an opportunity to test the vocabulary which they have probably already studied, before they go on to explore new aspects of that particular language area. There is a strong focus on listening and speaking throughout the book; it contains authentic listening texts which help students to understand natural spoken English in context and there are numerous opportunities for communicative, personalised speaking practice. The *Real World* lesson (lesson C) in each unit focuses either on the functional language students need for day-to-day life or on integrated reading and listening tasks which provide a stimulus for spoken and written communication.

The vocabulary selection has been informed by the *Cambridge International Corpus* and the *Cambridge Learner Corpus*. There is a lexical input in most lessons, all of which is consolidated for student reference in the interactive *Language Summaries*. The areas of vocabulary include: collocations, sentence stems (e.g. *There's no way I'd...*), connotation, informal and formal language, phrasal verbs and phrasal nouns (e.g. *go down with, onset*), word building, fixed and semi-fixed phrases (e.g. *hit and miss, in phases*). When students meet a new vocabulary area, they are often asked to tick the words they know before doing a matching exercise or checking in the *Language Summaries*. This is usually followed by communicative practice of the new vocabulary. They are also encouraged to deduce the meaning of new words, either from the context or from the prefix, suffix, etc. In addition, each unit includes at least one *Help with Vocabulary* section, designed to guide students towards a better understanding of the lexical systems of English. The information in these sections is in the *Language Summaries* for students to refer to. Phonemic transcriptions are available in the *Language Summaries*, and a list of phonetic symbols is provided on the CD-ROM. Attention is also drawn on word stress throughout the coursebook.

The Student's Book layout is enriched with coloured pictures, graphic designs, and cartoons, which makes it appealing to students.

The Teacher's Book contains methodological suggestions for all the activities, ten photocopiable *Progress Tests* and one *Vocabulary Plus* worksheet for each unit. These worksheets introduce and practice new vocabulary that is not included in the Student's Book. There are also 33 Class Activities worksheets (pp. 133-168) which can be used as extra practice at the end of each lesson or as review activities in the next class or later in the course.

The free CD-Rom that accompanies the book is an invaluable source for students, with over 200 exercises in all language areas, plus video, recording and playback capability, a link to the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, customisable *My Activities* and *My Test* sections, and *Progress* sections where students evaluate their own progress.

Table 2. *Strong and weak points of face2face coursebook*

Strong points	Weak points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the <i>Quick Review</i> section at the beginning of each lesson is an excellent way to get the class to speak immediately and to review what students learnt in previous lessons; - the <i>Help with Vocabulary</i> sections which encourage students to work out the rules of form and use of new vocabulary themselves before checking in the interactive <i>Language Summary</i> for the unit; - the <i>Real World</i> sections which focus on the functional language students need for day-to-day life; - the <i>Songs</i> section which contains fun activities based on popular songs appropriate for advanced students; - students find the reading texts and the authentic listening material appealing; - the phonemic transcriptions given only for particularly problematic vocabulary in the <i>Language Summaries</i>; - a wide range of pair work and group work activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - not enough focus on formal language; - not enough guidance and practice in the <i>Writing</i> section

1.3. Ready for CAE

The Certificate in Advanced English (CAE), Cambridge Level 4 Examination coursebook consists of fourteen units, and each unit, structured around a theme, is divided into seven sections. The first two sections cover *Language Focus* and *Vocabulary*, whereas the remaining ones are organized in a way to cover all five papers to be graded in the exam: Reading, Writing, Use of English, Listening, Speaking. At the end of every unit there is a two-page Review section, containing revision activities and exam-style tasks, which enable students to practice the new language they have encountered in the unit, and, as the course progresses, in previous units. The information for the “Certificate in Advanced English Examination” is provided at the beginning of the course book (pp. 4-5) to guide the students in studying for all five paper-types, each explained in line with the parts comprising the papers. In every unit of the coursebook there is at least one section devoted to vocabulary which is relevant to the theme or themes covered in the unit. Throughout the book there is a strong emphasis on word building, collocations and phrasal verbs.

The vocabulary from the units is reproduced in the *Wordlist* at the end of the book (pp. 209-215), where it is grouped according to the unit in which it appears, together with further relevant words and collocations. Vocabulary activities in the Workbook both revise the topic vocabulary presented in the units, and provide practice of the additional items from the *Wordlist*. Moreover, students are provided with relevant vocabulary to help them perform specific speaking and writing tasks using a wide range of language. In some cases this vocabulary appears in *Useful language* sections accompanying the tasks; in others, students are referred to the *Wordlist* at the end of the book. Students are also encouraged to notice vocabulary, especially collocations, in the texts they read and to record this language systematically in their notebooks. Many of the *Self help* boxes are aimed at helping students increase their vocabulary store.

The *Use of English* section provides students with extra practice on word formation, gapped sentences, multiple-choice cloze, open cloze and key word transformations. A systematic approach to word building is adopted, with special emphasis on affixation. In addition, the Workbook contains a *Word formation list*, a reference containing all the words which are taught and tested in the Word formation sections of the coursebook and Workbook, together with further examples. The Listening scripts, which appear at the end of the coursebook, can be particularly useful for checking answers, raising students’ awareness for distractors or focusing on useful words and expressions used by the speakers.

The Coursebook is designed in a consistent layout that integrates texts with a variety of colourful pictures, cartoons and graphic designs. The Teacher's Book contains detailed methodological notes for each activity in the Coursebook. It offers further suggestions for lead-in and follow-on activities, further ways to extend vocabulary and maximize speaking. At the end of the Teacher's Book there are photocopiable exercises and five photocopiable progress tests.

Table 3. *Strong and weak points of Ready for CAE coursebook*

Strong points	Weak points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the topic-based <i>Wordlist</i> at the end of the coursebook; - special emphasis on word building, collocations and phrasal verbs; - authentic texts from a variety of sources (magazines, newspapers, brochures etc); - students are encouraged, and shown how, to notice and record language when reading texts, both in and out of the classroom; - different accents and colloquial language in the listening tasks; - Writing section provides useful examples and adequate practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there is no phonetic transcription for new words; - no special attention is paid to new vocabulary items from the reading texts

1.4. Solutions

This advanced coursebook is divided into ten topic-based units, each covering 8 lessons: Vocabulary & Listening, Real English, Culture, Reading, Grammar, Speaking, Writing Analysis and Writing task. There are five *Language Review/ Skills Round-up* sections, providing a language test of the previous two units and a cumulative skills-based review. At the end of each unit there is a *Get Ready for your exam* lesson, providing typical CAE tasks.

The Student's Book layout is enriched with coloured pictures, graphic designs, cartoons, diagrams, and charts. The Vocabulary column of the "Contents Chart" presented in the Student's Book covers the following vocabulary issues all through the units: word building; compound adjectives; words with similar meanings; similes; idioms; phrasal verbs; easily confused words; suffixes; order of adjectives; collocations; prefixes; synonyms and antonyms; formal and informal language; literal and figurative language.

- Lesson A, *Vocabulary and Listening* introduces the topic of the unit, presents the main vocabulary set, and practises it through listening and other activities. This lesson links to the *Vocabulary Builder* at the end of the book, which provides extra practice and extension (pp.131- 141).
- Lesson B, *Real English* focuses on features of natural spoken English and presents and practises more advanced areas of vocabulary. New language is presented in a meaningful context through either a listening or reading text, and often a combination of the two. The lesson always finishes with a speaking activity which brings the language from the lesson together.
- Lesson C, *Culture* has a reading text which provides cultural information about Britain, the US or other English-speaking countries. New vocabulary is clearly presented with links to the *Vocabulary Builder*.
- Lesson D, *Reading* contains the main reading text of the unit. The texts are interesting and relevant to students and link to the topic of the unit. Important new vocabulary is highlighted in the text and practised in a follow-up activity, and in the Workbook. Literature is present in sections C (*Culture*) and D (*Reading*), through excerpts from Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, William Golding's *Lord of The Flies*,
- Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. The reading texts are accessible and provide students the opportunity to enrich their vocabulary. At the end of each text there is a *Glossary*, in which the more difficult vocabulary items are explained.
- Lesson F, *Speaking* includes extra vocabulary and structures; useful functional phrases are taught and practised. The step-by-step approach of 'presentation, practice and production' is suitable for mixed-ability classes and offers achievable goals.

Besides, all through the book, students are encouraged to use the dictionary: there are extracts from the *Oxford Advanced Student's Dictionary*, followed by various exercises. The Student's Book layout is enriched with coloured pictures, graphic designs, cartoons, diagrams, and charts.

The book also contains a MultiROM, described by the authors as "an interactive self-study tool designed to give guidance, practice, support and consolidation of the language and skills taught in the Student's Book". All target vocabulary is consolidated with crossword, word-search and gap-fill activities. The MultiROM also gives access to free interactive practice exam at www.oxfordenglishtesting.com.

Moreover, *Solutions iTools Advanced* provides a set of digital resources for Interactive Whiteboards. It can be used for different stages of the lesson and classroom activities, such as vocabulary presentations, feedback, games and pronunciation exercises. It also contains pre-selected course content from the Student's Book and other course components, chosen for its interactive potential.

The Teacher's Book includes full methodological notes, ideas for tackling mixed-level teaching, optional activities throughout for greater flexibility, additional structured speaking tasks to get students talking confidently, as well as 20 photocopiable pages to recycle and activate the language of each unit in a fun, communicative context. The Solutions Test Bank MultiROM includes progress tests, short tests and cumulative tests.

Table 4. *Strong and weak points of Solutions coursebook*

Strong points	Weak points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - besides the <i>Vocabulary and Listening</i> section, vocabulary is present in the <i>Real English, Culture, Reading, Speaking</i> and <i>Writing</i> sections throughout the coursebook and recycled in appropriate exercises; - there is a strong emphasis on <i>Listening</i> and <i>Speaking</i> activities; - the reading texts are interesting and appealing to students; - the <i>Culture</i> and <i>Reading</i> sections include literary texts; - it encourages students to acquire good vocabulary learning habits, by using a dictionary; - the Teacher's Book offers many useful methodological suggestions; - the iTools, MultiROM and Test Bank MultiROM provide invaluable extra materials for classroom use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the Writing section does not provide sufficient examples and practice; - the Grammar section is not sufficiently developed²

² Although our main focus was teaching vocabulary, as teachers of English we cannot ignore the practice of the other skills when choosing one coursebook or another.

1.5. Upstream Advanced

The Coursebook is divided into ten theme-based units and five modules. At the end of each module there is a Self-Assessment section. The units cover the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and also focus on vocabulary building and language use, following out a study plan that is parallel to the “Certificate in Advanced English Examination” paper requirements.

The cyclical content page indicates that the units are divided into six frames, namely Language Focus, Reading, Use of English, Listening, Speaking and Writing. The Progress Check Modules contain multiple-choice exercises, key word transformations, reading, listening, speaking and writing exercises.

The Student’s Book is designed in a consistent layout that integrates texts with a variety of colourful pictures, graphic designs, drawings, and cartoons. Although there is a separate section in every unit for vocabulary study, words and phrases are given emphasis also in other sections by listing, underlining, and checking in exercise format such as matching definition and filling-in-the-blank exercises. New vocabulary items are introduced mainly in the Reading and Language Focus sections of the units, under the sub-headings *Words often confused*, *Collocation*, *Fixed Phrases*, *Phrasal verbs*, *Idioms*. They are presented in the form of matching exercises, followed by practice. Distributed among the frames, there are several sub-headings related specifically to vocabulary, namely *Vocabulary practice*, *Word formation*, *Keyword transformations*, *Phrasal Verbs*, *Words often confused*, *Build Up Your Word Power*. In the first two units there are also Vocabulary sub-headings in the *Writing* frames, focusing on formal language and vocabulary used in reviews.

The general approach to vocabulary building all through the coursebook is to have the students first guess the meaning of the new words from the context of the reading passages. After each reading text, there is a “Discussion” exercise, meant to offer students the possibility to express their ideas and use the newly-acquired vocabulary.

All in all, the level of vocabulary is highly advanced all through the coursebook, there is a high number of vocabulary items and the scope of vocabulary is considerably extensive. The main approach is to have the students try to guess the meanings from the context and then consult their dictionaries to check the meanings. Unfortunately, the vocabulary is not recycled enough and students are not given enough practice to reinforce their meaning and use.

Table 5. *Strong and weak points of Upstream Advanced coursebook*

Strong points	Weak points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a multitude of lexical exercises practising and activating all essential vocabulary areas: collocations, idioms, phrasal verbs, fixed phrases and word formation; - the <i>Build up Your Word Power</i> exercises, teaching students how to use adjectives in order of increasing intensity; - an adequate number of new vocabulary items introduced in the reading texts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the new vocabulary words are not repeated in subsequent lessons to reinforce their meaning and use; there isn't enough practice for the new vocabulary items; they are not given their phonetic transcription either; - the reading texts are too long and intricate; - the Student's Book does not include a transcript of the recordings or a vocabulary list at the end of the book; - the Teacher's Book does not offer methodological suggestions or extra materials to be used in class

2. Conclusions and discussions

Out of the five selected English language coursebooks, *English News and Views* is the only one which has been written by Romanian teachers for Romanian classrooms. Although it is a good textbook and it includes a wide variety of literary texts, it has lost ground to the new, CAE-oriented coursebooks from English publishers.

Upstream and *Ready for CAE* are specially designed courses to prepare students for the CAE examination and are more suited for intensive English classes (4 hours/ week). Both students and teachers feel that *Upstream* is over-loaded with information and there is too little time left for recycling it, that is why we suggest *Ready for CAE* should be used with intensive English classes. *Solutions* covers all the exam topics and task types required at CAE level, but it also incorporates culture and literature lessons. Based on the communicative approach, *face2face* focuses more on real communication and natural, up-to-date use of the language. From my teaching experience, both *Solutions* and *face2face* coursebooks are more appropriate for classes that study English 2 or 3 hours/ week.

Each of the above-mentioned courses has its strong and weak points. *Ready for CAE* offers excellent support for writing: planning, paragraph organization, useful language, appropriate register and tone, model answers. *Upstream* focuses extensively on lexical exercises and vocabulary building, but it does not provide enough practical exercises.

Solutions puts more emphasis on listening and speaking tasks and it also includes a “Culture” section. *English News and Views* has regular lessons on “Culture and Civilization” and a systematic development of translation skills. There is a wide range of literary texts, covering all literary genres. *face2face* should be noted for its up-to-date and natural use of the language. Most students find the content in *Solutions* and *face2face* very appealing and appreciate the extra materials on the CD-ROM, MultiROM and iTools and teachers find them very useful, together with the photocopiable progress tests and supplementary materials provided by the Teacher’s Book.

Vocabulary games should be used more often, and they could also include exercises such as jumbled letters, key word (one student looking at a card with a word on it and his/her partners trying to guess the word by the associate words they hear from their colleagues), anagrams, as well as vocabulary revision games: pyramid game, (to check lexical sets) common features, noughts and crosses, pelmanism (to check partial synonyms), questionnaires, all of them suggested by Gairns and Redman (1991, pp. 163-167).

Furthermore, although the textbooks are made of topic-based units, there isn’t sufficient recycling of vocabulary in the textbooks and workbooks to consolidate the learning. Due to the fixed syllabus, many teachers have to rush to finish teaching the texts, piling up the problems of vocabulary throughout the term.³ What is more, due to the hypothesis that receptive vocabulary is less class-time-consuming than productive vocabulary, most teachers tend to focus more on receptive vocabulary under time pressure, thus leaving a large gap between the transfers from receptive vocabulary to productive vocabulary.

Once teachers become aware of a coursebook’s strengths and weaknesses, they should select what they want to use and bring in supplementary materials. The textbook should be seen as an aid and not something to be followed slavishly. It can be a fine source of useful, exploitable material provided teachers adapt and vary the activities to the needs of a particular class. Teachers

³ Especially with *Upstream* Advanced.

have the freedom to choose the coursebook and the supplementary materials depending on the level of the students and their interest.⁴

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⁴ There are cases when for two different advanced classes (XIth grade, for example), the teacher might have to choose two different coursebooks in order to suit students' needs.