Jelena Josijević Mitić
Ivana Ćirković-Miladinović
University of Kragujevac
Faculty of Education
Department of Philology

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HOW TO USE AI TO FACILITATE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AESOP'S FABLES IN SERBIAN EFL CLASSROOMS? CASE STUDY: "THE LION AND THE MOUSE"

Abstract: The paper analyzes the challenges of using Aesop's fables in Serbian EFL classrooms and demonstrates possible solutions through a case study: "The Lion and the Mouse". Due to their universal fame, Aesop's fables can activate the *narrative popularity effect* (NPE) and the *linguistic context predictability* (LCP) and subsequently, facilitate comprehension and language acquisition (Safir 2024). The fable "The Lion and the Mouse" was selected as it is the mandatory reading material for Serbian first-graders based on the national curriculum. Such a choice ensures relatively equal background knowledge in all students. After a random Internet search, three fable versions were carefully read, and the simplest version was selected for further analysis since first-graders are EFL beginners. As this paper will further demonstrate, the discrepancy between the linguistic level required from the given age and the one present in the text is the prime obstacle to using fables. Consequently, a thorough linguistic analysis (lexical and grammatical) is just a first step toward a text adaptation that provides a comprehensible input needed for successful language acquisition. In addition, teachers can only employ fables with this student population through listening and speaking activities since first-graders are not expected to be literate in English (i.e., to read and write). The suggested solutions for overcoming all the obstacles may be discouraging for most teachers because a lot of effort must be invested in inventing activities and creating visual aids. This paper strives to encourage teachers by demonstrating how AI-based tools can facilitate the process.

Keywords: Aesop, fable, EFL, TEYL, AI, Serbia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Children learning a foreign language bring their unique experiences of acquiring their mother tongue, their world knowledge, and their cognitive development levels to the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms (Moon 2000).

jelena.josijevic.mitic@pefja.kg.ac.rs

Even though each language class involves students with different needs, expectations, abilities, and interests (Halliwell 1992; Slatterly, Willis 2001; Cameron 2008), most authors agree that there is a set of shared characteristics that make young learners (YLs) different from adolescents and adults. The knowledge of these characteristics is essential for devising the most suitable TEYL instructional methods, strategies, and techniques (Scott, Ytreberg 1990; Halliwell 1992; Slatterly, Willis 2001; Brewster, Ellis 2002; Pinter 2006; Shin 2007; Cameron 2008; Nunan 2011). The consulted authors agree that foreign language teachers should present the language in playful, meaningful, and purposeful contexts to support natural language acquisition and allow the integration of physical, cognitive, social, and emotional aspects because YLs are holistic (i.e. they tend to pick up language subconsciously) and kinesthetic learners (i.e. they learn by doing); moreover, they have short attention spans, get distracted easily, and crave movement. Finally, YLs remember slowly and forget rapidly, so they require profuse repetition and recycling. It is a real challenge to provide brief, motivating, and entertaining activities that would be a fruitful ground for repetitions, while still nurturing children's natural restlessness and need for physical activity. Fables, when introduced properly, can meet all the aforementioned requirements. It has been highlighted that literary texts can be utilized to promote all four language skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and different language competencies (i.e., vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation) (Ćirković-Miladinović 2022) with entertaining and authentic material (Gwin 1990: 7).

As the next section of the paper demonstrates, the list of general and language-specific educational merits of using literary texts in EFL classrooms is astonishing. Fables are not an exception. This paper highlights that it is also an extremely challenging undertaking since first-graders are a demanding student population. First, teachers most commonly have to adapt the text to make the language material suitable for their students. Second, the first two grades of elementary school revolve around developing literacy in the Serbian language. In other words, the development of literacy in a foreign language is postponed until grades 3 and 4. Hence, fables can only be used by relying on language reception via listening and language production via speaking. To scaffold the activities, teachers need audio and/or visual aids. To our knowledge, ready-made materials available online tend to surpass the linguistic competence of foreign language beginners, such as Serbian first-graders. Consequently, fables will most definitely require teachers to devise their own listening and speaking activities and design audio-visual supporting materials. Fortunately, AI-based tools, as will be seen from our case study, can be a priceless aid during this process.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Fables are brief literary pieces that integrate the elements of short stories and drama. Hence, it is important to highlight the merits of using both genres in TEYL classrooms before focusing on fables and their specific features.

Short stories are central to everyday life and communication (Hughes 2010), so it is not surprising that many authors advocate for their inclusion in EFL curricula (Garvie 1990; Adair-Hauck et al. 1994; Shrum, Glisan 1994; Moon 2000; Brewster, Ellis 2002; Martin et al. 2004; Brewster et al. 2002; Ćirković-Miladinović 2022). Familiar contexts facilitate language acquisition because children can pursue or predict meaning (Garvie 1990; Brewster et al. 2004; Hughes 2010). Namely, stories provide authentic language material that is highly contextualized. Children's books abound in illustrations, and storytellers (when read) or characters (in a video) tend to use paralanguage (facial expressions, gestures, and mimes) to make the activity more entertaining for a young audience. Such paralinguistic elements are a valuable asset in building rich contexts. As already mentioned, YLs acquire language in chunks. They need frequent repetition to memorize such chunks and consolidate newly acquired knowledge. Short stories can facilitate this tiresome process because they present language in chunks and contain frequent repetitions of lexical and grammatical forms that is generally not perceived as dull. Since there is a wide spectrum of possible story-based activities that can be utilized on various occasions, a non-drill manner of repeating and recycling language material through short stories can be entertaining, motivating, and joyful (Hughes 2010).

Stories are not only read. According to Garvie (1990: 30), stories can provide a fruitful language-learning experience that all teachers should be able to offer: the stimulation of thought and feeling while training all four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Most authors agree that stories can be incorporated into any syllabus and lesson plan to integrate the four basic language skills around the story themes (cf. Garvie 1990; Wright 2000; Brewster et al. 2004; Martin et al. 2004; Cameron 2008; Hughes 2010; Ćirković-Miladinović 2017; Ćirković-Miladinović 2022). Since stories provide lots of opportunities for extension activities that can be organized as individual, pair, and group work, they can cater to a wide array of learner styles, abilities, multiple intelligences, linguistic levels, and interests (Hughes 2010).

With Serbian first-graders, short stories can be utilized through listening activities. It is crucial to note that listening is not a passive activity. It involves intensive cognitive processing of auditory stimuli (Hughes 2010). YLs get easily *wrapped up in a story*, i.e., the concentration needed to make links between verbal, linguistic, visual, and physical content is intensive (Martin et al. 2004).

On the other hand, listening is generally not associated with learning, so affective filters are expected to be at low levels; consequently, young learners are expected to absorb more than they would in a formal traditional learning setting (Krashen 1982). Entertaining, challenging, and motivating, short stories can arouse positive emotions and attitudes toward language learning (Brewster et al. 2004). According to Hughes (2010), children's natural eagerness and curiosity to comprehend the world that surrounds them can spark the desire to keep reading stories, even in a home setting.

Drama activities, such as mime, puppet shows, and role plays, draw their EFL potential from their playful nature. In addition to the general merits of using drama, as a literary text containing repetitive chunks of language, drama activities have many genre-specific benefits for young EFL learners. Role plays, simulations, drama games, guided improvisations, acting play scripts, and improvised drama plays are perceived as playing rather than learning. These activities relieve children of their inhibitions, so shyness and embarrassment are no obstacle to speaking in a foreign language (Scrivener 1994: 69). In addition to the encouragement to speak despite a restricted lexical stock, drama activities have many other cognitive and psychological benefits, such as the active involvement in a text (via personalization), cooperation (suitable for a wide variety of abilities, learning styles, and multiple intelligences), and boosting confidence (Philips 2007: 6). In sum, drama activities provide opportunities for practicing productive skills and boosting social and emotional development (Cameron 2008: 155).

Fables are a hybrid literary form in that they are short tales that contain a multitude of dramatic elements. Consequently, they draw their TEYL potential from the unique combination of both genres and their genre-specific general educational merits. The benefits of using fables for general education have been globally and historically recognized: they can be found in children's literature all across the globe and the national curricula for teaching a mother tongue at the initial stages of developing extensive reading (Iyanda 2019) due to their brevity, simplicity, and engaging content that fulfils two essential goals of education.[1] First, one of the primary goals of education is to teach children moral values (Kaur 2016). Fables are allegorical tales that exemplify an abstract moral thesis, i.e., the ethical principle, commonly made explicit by either a character or a narrator in the form of an epigram as a concluding remark (Abrams, Green 2009: 8). Hence, they can be used to instill ethical principles, standards, and norms. Namely, fables commonly depict animals that act as epitomes of two conflicting human traits, only to promote human virtues and positive attitudes. Characteristics, tempers,

[1] Fables have been recognized as a valuable educational asset by Serbian scholars, such as Todorov (2007), Stakić (2012), Cvetanović (2013), Čutović (2015), Čutović, Stakić (2016), Čutović (2017), and Tasić Ranđelović (2023).

moods, and social relations are presented through a black-and-white prism so even very young learners can comprehend the conflict between *laziness* and *diligence* as bad (unfavorable) and good (favorable) human traits, respectively. This brings us to the second crucial goal of education: critical thinking. Fables are *wisdom literary reading* (Maljković 2007). Children's thinking at some point has to be transferred from the literal meaning, referring to animal behavior, to the allegorical one, referring to human behavior and human social interactions (Čutović 2014; Čutović 2017; Tasić Ranđelović 2023). Hence, fables can be used to boost critical thinking and self-development.

Taking into consideration that children start reading fables even in the initial grade of elementary school, it is not surprising that many EFL experts advocate for their use in TEYL classrooms. As Geary (2012: 45182) claims, fables are "the most compressed and concentrated form of a story" and as such they can serve as an ideal initial step towards the inclusion of literary texts into EFL context and the promotion of extensive reading in a foreign language. From the perspective of foreign language methodology, fables can be a valuable asset not only in promoting reading but also in supporting listening, speaking, and writing. These entertaining stories that serve as agents for societal norms and ethos should be incorporated into children's EFL school curriculum also because they can help develop reasoning, aptitude, comprehension, and judgment (Iyanda 2019; Sahin 2019).

Aesopianisation is a neologism coined by Safir (2024) to explain the process of leveraging the global popularity of Aesop's fables to promote their implementation in EFL classrooms. Aesop's fables can be an ideal literary genre for foreign language classrooms due to their brevity, ostensible simplicity, and global appeal (Geary 2012: 184). These timeless narratives, fostering universal themes and relatable characters, have crossed generations worldwide (Handford 2010) and are now deeply rooted in our cultural consciousness (Meynell 2017). In addition to cultural and social significance, Aesop's fables can be a valuable teaching aid in language acquisition and reinforcing language proficiency (Goldman et al. 1984; Balla 2000). The linguistic landscape in fables abounds in vivid vocabulary, grammatical structures, and idiomatic expressions, but is also, in a way, simplified to match the cognitive and linguistic levels of young readership. Consequently, they are probably closer to the FL linguistic levels we generally find in TEYL classrooms than any other literary form, or at least easier to adapt to be age-appropriate. Additionally, due to the brevity of narrative passages and the emphasis on dialogues, these fables can be used to support listening and conversation skills.

According to Safir (2024), the universal familiarity with the content of Aesop's fables "unveils a golden strategy" based on four valuable linguistic tools for "FL learners all over the planet": (1) narrative popularity effect (NPE), (2) linguistic context predictability (LCP), (3) lexical interlingual cognates (LIC), and

(4) collocational patterns. Safir (2024) focuses on unlocking a foreign language through detailed analytical reading between related languages (originating from a common ancestor) to combine linguistic and cultural awareness. Only two of these linguistic tools will be relevant in our context: narrative popularity effect (NPE) and linguistic context predictability (LPC). First, the age group we target in this paper cannot read or is at the onset of learning how to read fluently in English. Also, English and Serbian are not related languages, as the former is a Germanic language and the latter is a Slavic language.

Narrative popularity effect (NPE) refers to the phenomenon that certain narratives, such as Aesop's fables, become widely accepted and influential.[2] As such, they have numerous benefits for foreign language learning, including increased motivation and engagement, contextual learning, improved vocabulary acquisition, cultural immersion, repetition and reinforcement, social interaction, and authentic language use (cf. Krashen 1982; Nagy, Anderson 1984; Tharp, Gallimore 1988; Elley 1989; Nation, Webb 20011). *Linguistic context predictability* (LCP) refers to the ability to anticipate or predict the meaning based on the surrounding context (Kintsch 1988). This concept is tightly related to NPE because learners can rely on their background knowledge of the setting, characters, and plots to predict meaning. Hence, with Aesop's fables, LCP plays a significant role in language comprehension and acquisition. In addition, when printed, fables are accompanied by illustrations that provide additional contextual clues. With students who cannot read, we must rely on listening. Whether they listen to audio, watch an animated short movie, or listen to their teacher reading, the context is always enriched with the elements of a dramatization, i.e., gestures, facial expressions, voice changes, mime, etc., since these elements may also be useful in deciphering meaning from the context. In addition to contextual richness, one of the key advantages of using Aesop's fables relies on repetitive structures that offer a predictable framework (Fallon 2024).

3. METHODOLOGICAL PRELIMINARIES

This paper analyzes the challenges to using Aesop's fables in Serbian EFL classrooms and demonstrates possible solutions. Aesop's fables are chosen for the analysis since they exist in both languages. Consequently, no translation is needed. In addition, Aesop's fables can activate the NPE (narrative popularity effects) and LCP (linguistic context predictability).

[2] It is believed that Aesop crafted over 300 tales that highlight human weaknesses and strengths (Singh 2015). Although there are no written testaments, Aesop's stories have been transmitted orally (McCafferty 2021) and have served as an inspiration for many notable authors such as Lewis Carroll and Rudyard Kipling.

To ensure equal background knowledge among students, we opt for implementing Aesop's fables included in the national curricula. Two such fables have been identified: "The Lion and the Mouse" and "The Tortoise and the Hare" (Grades 1 and 3, respectively).[3] This analysis shall focus solely on "The Lion and the Mouse", so the target group of students is first-graders.

The biggest challenge in introducing short stories in TEYL classrooms is to choose a suitable story. Hughes (2010) offers a set of criteria that must be taken into consideration while choosing a story: (1) language level, (2) cognitive level, (3) suitable content, (4) content relevance, (5) visual attractiveness, (6) adequate supportive illustrations, and (7) opportunities for extension activities. "The Lion and the Mouse" is a fable already included in the national curriculum (i.e., in teaching the Serbian language), so it can be considered cognitively suitable for the target student population. The content is expected to be entertaining because it involves animal interactions. Since first-graders do not read, the visual attractiveness and supportiveness of the fable are not an issue, especially if a teacher is willing to employ technology to create his or her material. Finally, the fable provides opportunities not only for extension activities, but also for the integration of different school subjects (such as the Serbian Language and Arts). With the selected fable, only the first factor is problematic.

The first serious challenge in TEYL classrooms refers to the linguistic level and language skills suitable for elementary school students in Serbia. First, the first grade is dedicated to developing literacy in the mother tongue, and young pupils are not required to develop literacy in a foreign language. In other words, language instruction must be focused on developing listening and speaking skills while reading and writing are postponed until Serbian children master both the Cyrillic and Latin alphabet of their mother tongue. The second problem is the discrepancy between the linguistic level present in the text and the one typically found in Serbian first-graders who are predominantly EFL beginners. Hence, the text, by rule, should be adapted to match the competence level of the target student population. The text adaptation requires a thorough linguistic analysis (both grammatical and lexical). The level of the vocabulary is determined based on the labels included in the *Cambridge Dictionary* (online edition). Namely, in this dictionary, lexical items are tagged as A1/2, B1/2, or C1/C2 vocabulary. The grammatical level is determined by analyzing the verb tense and the complexity of sentence structures.

Finally, it is important to note that the specific version of the fable used in this paper has been obtained through a random Internet search. The first three options offered by Google Search Engine have been carefully read, and the simplest version has been selected for the analysis:

[3] It should be noted that in addition to Aesop's fables, the selected readers include authorial and folk fables that are neglected in this paper.

A Lion lay asleep in the forest, his great head resting on his paws. A timid little Mouse came upon him unexpectedly, and in her fright and haste to get away, ran across the Lion's nose. Roused from his nap, the Lion laid his huge paw angrily on the tiny creature to kill her. "Spare me!" begged the poor Mouse. "Please let me go, and someday I will surely repay you." The Lion was much amused to think that a Mouse could ever help him. But he was generous and finally let the Mouse go. Some days later, while stalking his prey in the forest, the Lion was caught in the toils of a hunter's net. Unable to free himself, he filled the forest with his angry roaring. The Mouse knew the voice and quickly found the Lion struggling in the net. Running to one of the great ropes that bound him, she gnawed it until it parted, and soon the Lion was free. "You laughed when I said I would repay you," said the Mouse. "Now you see that even a Mouse can help a Lion."

4. LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

Even though the linguistic and cognitive level of fables is generally age-appropriate for young learners studying them in their mother tongue, young EFL learners are generally beginners, and their vocabulary stock is extremely limited to restricted sets of theme-oriented words, e.g., color, fruit, and animal vocabulary. Each text adaptation must rely on a thorough linguistic analysis targeting advanced linguistic assets that must be simplified.

The analysis of the lexical items included in the text indicates that the vocabulary surpasses the competence level of first-graders.

Table 1: The level of vocabulary in the fable

A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
catch, day, head, help, little, much, nose, now, please, poor, say, see, think	angry, even, ever, fill, finally, forest, great, kill, laugh, later, lion, mouse, soon	angrily, asleep, creature, generous, huge, lie, net, repay, rest, spare, tiny, unable	amused, beg, come upon, free, get away, hunter, let somebody do something, paw, run across, rouse, repay, surely, unexpectedly	fright, gnaw, haste, lay, nap, part, stalk, toil	bind, pray, roar, timid
13	13	12	13	8	4

The text contains 63 lexical items without the grammatical words (articles, prepositions, conjunctions, etc.). We can conclude that the amount of new vo-

cabulary is excessive for the capacities of 7-year-old beginners. In addition, only 26 words are acceptable for first-grade beginners (A1 and A2 level), especially with rich contextualization that enables learners to deduce the meaning from the contextual cues: e.g., images, facial expressions, and mime. A vast proportion of the lexical stock surpasses the proficiency level of the target group by far (with 25 B-level and 12 C-level words).

Another problem is that the narrative passages abound in past simple tense forms. More significantly, the text contains the verb forms *would* and *could*, which result from the sequence of tenses rule (back-shifted verbs *will* and *can*). Serbian students learn the sequence of tenses rule as eighth-graders. In addition, the *will* + infinitive form is also present within direct speech. The form is not expected to be learnt until the second and third grade.

Syntactically speaking, the text surpasses the level of the target group of learners. There are no simple sentences included. Three sentences are compound; all coordinated with *and* (e.g., 5, 7, and 9). Coordinated structures can be easily broken down into two simple sentences. Seven sentences are complex, with many including more than one subordinate clause (e.g., 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 12, and 13). Three sentences are compound-complex (2, 10, and 11) and all contain the conjunction *and*. Once again, compound structures can be easily resolved by transforming them into independent sentences.

5. PROPOSED TEXT ADAPTATION

The proposed text adaptation is presented below with subscript tags marking the level of a vocabulary item:

A Lion$_{A2}$ sleeps$_{A2}$ in the forest$_{A2}$. A Mouse$_{A2}$ comes$_{A1}$. The Lion$_{A2}$ catches$_{A1}$ the Mouse$_{A2}$.

The Mouse says$_{A1}$, "Stop$_{A1}$! Please$_{A1}$ don't eat$_{A1}$ me. One$_{A1}$ day$_{A1}$, I can help$_{A1}$ you."

The Lion says$_{A1}$, "Don't be funny$_{A1}$! A mouse$_{A2}$ can't help$_{A1}$ me!"

But, the Lion$_{A2}$ is not hungry$_{A1}$. So, he frees$_{A2}$ the Mouse$_{A2}$. The Mouse$_{A2}$ runs$_{A1}$.

Some$_{A1}$ days$_{A1}$ later$_{A2}$, the Lion$_{A2}$ is in a rope$_{B2}$ trap$_{B2}$.

The Lion roars$_{C1}$, "Roar!$_{C2}$ Roar!$_{C2}$ Roar!$_{C2}$"

The Mouse$_{A2}$ comes$_{A1}$ again$_{A1}$.

The Mouse$_{A2}$ says$_{A1}$, "You are in a rope$_{B2}$ trap$_{B2}$. I can help$_{A1}$ you!"

The Mouse$_{A2}$ runs$_{A1}$ to the rope$_{B2}$. He cuts$_{A1}$ the rope$_{B2}$ with his teeth$_{A1}$. The Lion is free$_{A2}$.

The Mouse$_{A2}$ says$_{A1}$, "Even$_{A1}$ a Mouse$_{A2}$ can help$_{A1}$ a Lion$_{A2}$."

As evident, the first intervention refers to reducing narrative sequences and extending dialogues. Narrative and descriptive elements in the passages serve to describe the events and reveal the emotional states. Where possible, the events described can be transformed into dialogues to promote oral exchanges, avoid ambitious vocabulary, and simplify sentence constructions. For example, instead of a complex sentence with indirect speech (*"Spare me!" begged the poor Mouse*), we can use a simple sentence *Please, don't eat me!* Concurrently, two vocabulary items too advanced and abstract for young learners (*spare* and *beg*) are avoided.

As evident from the labels, most lexical items are classified by the *Cambridge Dictionary* as A1 and A2 vocabulary:

Table 2: The level of vocabulary in the fable

A1	A2	B2	C1
come, catch, say, stop, please, eat, one, day, help, hungry, run, some, again, cut, teeth	lion, sleep, forest, mouse, funny, free, later, even	trap, rope	roar
15	8	2	1

Most vocabulary is labelled as A (A1/2) level. 15 words are marked as A1, and only 8 as A2 vocabulary. Finally, the proposed text adaptation reduces the number of individual words in total (from 79 to 26, without grammatical words). One of the reasons for such an extreme reduction in the quantity of new vocabulary stems from our attempt to promote repetition, especially when it comes to newly introduced vocabulary. The repeated words include: *mouse* (11), *lion* (8), *help* (4), *say* (4), *roar* (4), *rope* (3), *come* (2), *day* (2), *forest* (2), *free* (2), *run* (2), and *trap* (2).

Morphology-wise, the main focus is on verb-tense forms. Past tenses are generally associated with storytelling, retelling, and telling anecdotes and jokes. However, English allows the use of present tenses in narration for stylistic reasons. The so-called dramatic immediacy is very favorable in this context because it brings stories to life by creating illusions that the events are taking place in real time. In the adapted text, the present-simple forms are the most dominant: *sleep*, *comes*, *catches*, *is*, *frees*, *says*, *runs*, *roars*, *are*, and *cuts*. There are three predicates with the modal verb *can* and imperatives in both affirmative and negative forms: *can/can't help* and *stop* versus *don't eat/be*, respectively. Both the verb *can* and imperative forms are included in the first-grade EFL curriculum.

The sentence structures are simplified, so now eleven sentences are simple and five sentences are complex. All complex sentences are nominal clauses, exemplifying direct speech with subordinate clauses being simple.

Finally, the mouse is referred to as *she* in the original text. In the adapted text, we use the pronoun *he*. The main reason behind changing the gender is to avoid confusion. Namely, the Serbian noun *miš*, meaning *mouse*, has a grammatical gender (as all Serbian nouns do). This particular noun is masculine. Hence, to explain that English nouns such as *mouse* are generally neuter but that they can be referred to as *she* if they refer to a female specimen would be difficult without using grammatical terminology and concepts that children are not required to understand even in their mother tongue.

6. STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE ADAPTED TEXT

The linguistic analysis and the subsequent text adaptation are just the first step toward the successful implementation of fables in Serbian TEYL classrooms. As already mentioned, the first-graders in Serbia are not expected to read and write in English because their mother tongue classes are predominantly oriented toward developing literacy skills in the Serbian language. Hence, teachers must rely on listening and speaking activities that, as will be seen, require a lot of effort.

Listening is a demanding task when it comes to fables since ready-made audio and animated material available online surpass the proficiency levels of Serbian first-graders. Consequently, teachers must read the adapted text or rely on AI-based technology to design their custom-made video material. Either read or animated, the story requires an abundance of visual aids to reinforce comprehension and promote language acquisition.

For instance, one C1 word is integrated into a dialogue as an onomatopoeic expression: *roar*. Sound imitations are not only entertaining for children to mimic, but they can also transform advanced vocabulary into easily memorized words. However, to scaffold the activity, a teacher may find it useful to have a flash card or a digital image portraying a lion roaring:



Image 1: Visual aids for facilitating C1 vocabulary (created in ChatGPT)

The adapted text contains only two B2 words referring to concrete objects whose meaning can be deduced if a teacher uses flashcards or other visual aids. AI-based technology can once again be a convenient facilitator since it can generate pictures based on simple instructions:



*The Lion gets in a **rope trap**.*



He cuts the rope with his teeth.

Image 2: Visual aids for facilitating B2 vocabulary

In reality, the whole story can be illustrated easily with AI tools. One such ChatGPT-generated sequence is presented below:



A Lion sleeps in the forest.



A Mouse comes.



The Lion catches the Mouse.

Image 3: AI-generated visual aids depicting the story scenes (created in ChatGPT)

It is important to note that technology can facilitate the implementation of fables with much-needed text adaptations. If AI-generated images are arranged in a logical sequence and an audio recording is added, a compilation of images can be easily transformed into compelling video material:

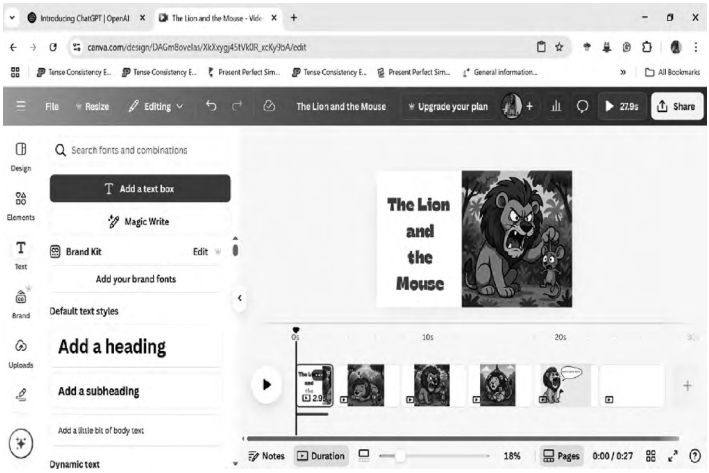


Image 4: The animation made in Canva

Speaking is a more demanding task. With first-graders who have an extremely limited vocabulary stock, it seems unreasonable to expect any independent and productive speech performance or conversation. However, simple question/answer conversational pairs can be done with success. One such example is the *True/False* game. Due to the age of the students and their attention spans, the use of flashcards depicting the scenes is highly recommended. For instance, a teacher can show the flashcard with the lion sleeping in the forest and say, "The lion plays a video game". The children should then say: "False! The lion sleeps!" If a teacher says "The lion sleeps" children are expected to answer: "True!" and then repeat the correct statement ("The lion sleeps!"). In this way, the repetitions needed to memorize the key vocabulary and grammar are performed in a non-threatening, entertaining way. If teachers decide to use True/False activities for drills, they may find it useful to include bodily movement. For instance, thumbs up/down accompanying oral production may be practical because they do not require additional space, are not expected to result in havoc, and need no additional props other than children's hands.



Image 5: Thumbs up and thumbs down (made in Canva)

Such activities, especially when children are encouraged to use facial expressions, may be a first step towards the development of communicative competence, since paralinguistic means accompanying speech are valuable assets in natural communication. To add additional entertainment, children may be encouraged to also mime sleeping.



Image 6: Gestures used to mimic sleeping (made in Canva)

With gestures and facial expressions, even silent students can participate. At least in this way, teachers can gain insight into their comprehension. Before pupils feel confident to respond independently, they can answer in a choir manner. A group speaking together can give pupils sufficient time to build up confidence to speak up alone. Finally, the most crucial element of the recommended activity is for a teacher to model language and gestures he or she expects children to produce and scaffold the activity as long as the group seems unprepared to respond without support and guidance.

Due to the drama-like structure of a fable, dramatization may be used to practice conversation. Dramatization must be used as a follow-up activity because students must be exposed to listening to memorize the lines. In comparison to the original text, the dialogues are extended in the adapted version to allow for more interaction between the characters, i.e., the students who impersonate them. Young learners can listen to the dialogues and then prepare to perform them using puppets, toys, or even self-made box costumes.



Image 8: Props that can be used during the performance

The design of the props can be transformed into a joint creative project that all students can participate in. In addition, it allows for the integration of other school subjects, especially the Arts. The inclusion of young learners in the performance-preparation process may not only be highly motivating and entertaining, but it can also boost their creativity and cater to different learning styles. Through the dramatization, i.e., the dialogues, children can practice their communication skills in a stress-free environment that resembles playing more than traditional learning. In contrast to traditional drills that tend to be dull and repellent, the frequent repetition of entertaining performances can be even more motivating and entertaining for some students than participating in their own performance. Finally, the abundance of dialogues offers a rich input in terms of different communication styles. Hence, Aesop's fables are not only expected to be useful for linguistic competence but also for enhancing communicative competence in young learners. The main obstacle to successful dramatization lies in the fact that narrative and descriptive statements may be too complex for first-graders to memorize. Hence, a teacher may opt for playing the role of a narrator or select multiple YL narrators. Each single sentence can be uttered by a different child. Shy and introverted students and those who do not exhibit talent toward acting or willingness to participate in such activities may find it more convenient to take the role of one of the narrators, performing as a group, than taking a leading role.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As presented in the paper, the implementation of fables is an extremely challenging, demanding, and time-consuming task. Teachers need to invest a lot of time and effort into text adaptations needed to provide a comprehensible input. This paper exemplifies the possible text adaptation of the fable "The Lion and the Mouse" targeted at avoiding complex vocabulary and grammatical forms, including the verb tense and syntactic structures. In addition, the paper proposes strategies for using the adapted text by promoting listening and speaking skills. As seen above, listening and speaking activities require the use of different aids. Such resources will most likely have to be made by a teacher, or at least as a joint activity with young learners.

However, fables are also a highly rewarding task. The utmost goal of teaching a foreign language at an early age is to instill the idea that language learning is a happy experience (Slatterly, Willis 2001; Brewster, Ellis 2002; Cameron 2008). The proposed strategies abound in ideas for including audio-visual material that not only facilitates understanding but also creates a playful learning environment that our students will enjoy. It is true that teachers must invest additional effort, but the process of material design is significantly facilitated nowadays when diverse AI-based technologies are available free of charge.

Instead of giving up on fables, well-known for their educational, cultural, ethical, and social values, teachers can join their forces through their communities of practice and teacher networks and create materials together that they can later share and use in their own classrooms. Even if one decides to engage in this undertaking alone, the effort put into creating all the material is a one-time investment that will most definitely pay off in the years to come.

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Јелена Јосијевић Митић
Ивана Ћирковић Миладиновић
Универзитет у Крагујевцу
Факултет педагошких наука у Јагодини
Катедра за филолошке науке

КАКО КОРИСТИТИ ВЕШТАЧКУ ИНТЕЛИГЕНЦИЈУ КАО ПОДРШКУ У ПРИМЕНИ ЕЗОПОВИХ БАСНИ У НАСТАВИ ЕНГЛЕСКОГ КАО СТРАНОГ ЈЕЗИКА У СРБИЈИ? СТУДИЈА СЛУЧАЈА: „ЛАВ И МИШ"

Резиме: У раду се анализирају изазови са којима се наставници могу сусрести приликом примене Езопових басни у настави енглеског као страног језика у Србији и даје могућа решења кроз студију случаја: „Лав и миш". Због своје универзалне популарности, Езопове басне активирају ефекат популарности наратива (енгл. *narrative popularity effect*) и предвидивост лингвистичког контекста (енгл. *linguistic context predictability*), што олакшава разумевање и усвајање језика (Safir 2024). Басна „Лав и миш" изабрана је за анализу јер представља обавезну наставну јединицу у настави матерњег језика у првом разреду основне школе. Оваквим избором осигурано је релативно уједначено предзнање код свих ученика. Након насумичне претраге интернета изабране су три басне које су пажљиво ишчитане како би био изабран најједноставнији текст за даљу анализу јер су ученици првог разреда почетници у настави страног језика. Рад је показао да највећу препреку за примену басни у настави страних језика представља јаз између лингвистичког нивоа који се очекује на датом узрасту и оног који је присутан у тексту. Детаљна лингвистичка анализа (лексичка и граматичка) представља стога само први корак ка адаптацији текста, а која треба да обезбеди разумљив унос (енгл. *comprehensible input*) неопходан за усвајање језика. Уз то, наставници могу да користе басне са изабраном старосном групом само кроз активности слушања и усмене продукције јер се од ученика првог разреда не очекује писменост на страном језику. Решења која су предложена како би се превазишли сви изазови могу деловати обесхрабрујуће наставницима јер се много труда мора уложити у планирање активности и израду визуелног материјала. У овом раду покушали смо да охрабримо наставнике кроз практичну демонстрацију како ВИ алатке могу олакшати читав процес израде помоћних средстава.

Кључне речи: Езоп, басна, енглески као страни језик, настава енглеског језика на млађем узрасту, ВИ, Србија.