



WHAT IS AUTHENTIC TEXT AND HOW TO IDENTIFY IT

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ABSTRACT

The term authentic has been used as a reaction against the prefabricated patterns of the textbooks while authentic texts were the non-pedagogical texts used to help learners improve not only their communicative but also their cultural competences. The objective of the paper is to establish the relation between the use of authentic texts and the improvement of communicative abilities and to identify the types of authentic texts which facilitate the pupils' academic performances and the understanding of the target culture.

The choice of words in teaching a foreign language is limited by the context in which we use the language. Context plays an important role in the construction of meaning. Foreign language pedagogy advocates the necessity to teach language in context although it is not always clear how teachers relate language with its social context. According to Halliday's definition the context is "the total environment in which a language unfolds" that is its five dimensions linguistic, situational, interactional, cultural and intertextual are shaped by people in dialogue, in "a variety of roles and statuses"¹. Due to the complexity of meanings, contexts are not stable; they are constantly changed and recreated to fit the individual needs of the learners. The context can be shaped through

the foreign language so that the students explore, discover and exchange certain types of meanings, "the central code of 1 Kramersch, Claire.(2010).Context and Culture in Language Teaching,OUP.

another culture". Although, teaching a foreign language is done to a large extent by standardized texts, we take into consideration that improving one's language skills can be done in the classroom and outside it through the use of the authentic texts.

Language is a dynamic process which changes with demands of society migrations, popular culture, and even technological innovations. If teachers rely on traditional textbook for materials for class, teachers will be constantly providing outdated information. Students trained to



use the language as the native speakers do will find less need to alter their language later when using it conversationally. In addition, when given the opportunity to travel to places where the target language is used, the learner will not have as much difficulty in using it in different contexts.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The authentic text was defined as a text that was created to fulfil some social purpose in the language community in which it was produced². The term authentic has been used as a reaction against the prefabricated patterns of the textbooks while authentic texts were the non-pedagogical texts used to help learners improve not only their communicative but also their cultural competences. Authentic materials - also known as realia - can be described as anything created for native speakers of a language, we can use for our teaching purposes. With the changing linguistic boundaries, it is now widely known as materials that include ideas, words, phrases and expressions that are heard and read in real-life situations.

In accordance with the tendency to develop not only the communicative but also the cultural competences in language teaching, there was a need to clarify the notion of authentic text and communicative authenticity. It has been debated in Europe and The United States³.

According to Widdowson, authenticity does not lie in the text but in the way

² Little, D. G. and D.M. Singleton.,(2018) *Authentic Materials and the Role of Fixed Support in Language Teaching: Towards a Manual for Language Learners*.Dublin; Trinity centre for Language and Communication Studies

³ Nostrand, H.L.(2019) *Authentic Text-Cultural authenticity: An Editorial*, *Modern Language Journal* 73/1. Rost, M. (2012). *Teaching and Researching Listening*. London: Longman Pearson Education.

speakers and readers make use of it, namely in their response. Taking also into account that the link between a certain language and its social community can be very changeable, we believe that cultural and communicative competence means understanding the social conventions of the target language speech community while preserving one's own. Learners can mimic the behavioural patterns of that community derived from the authentic text to a certain extent since the first goal is to communicate and not to behave like someone else which means somehow losing one's social and linguistic identity. The learner can behave both as an insider and an outsider of the target culture if he understands the cultural situation. Consequently, teachers should be concerned more about authentic language learning which require communication and metacommunication in the language education.

Nostrand raised the issue of cultural competence which include to a certain extent the obligation to behave in accordance with the social conventions of a given speech community. Students should mimic linguistic and behavioural patterns observed in the authentic texts as a good way of understanding the culture of the target language. Additionally, and recommend separate knowledge about the culture and experience of the culture through what they called cultural competence and cultural performance.



Ultimately, Breen, speaking about the ability of the learner to behave both as an insider and an outsider to the speech community whose language he/she is learning suggests that “the learner will re-define any text against his own priorities, precisely because he is a learner”. Such critical understanding becomes an educational issue of pedagogic effectiveness while he concludes that “perhaps all other questions of authenticity in language teaching may be resolved if the potential of the classroom is fully exploited”.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There is an almost limitless supply of materials available online that come directly from the target cultures of the languages we teach. These resources provide "real life" linguistic input as well as valuable cultural information for our students. Students learn important topics through materials like audio, video, books, journals, magazines, newspapers and online resources.

Furthermore, multimedia technology affords the learner multiple ways of leaning a language from real-life material. It is a powerful blend of computers, video, photography, and sound. The materials available on the internet can meet all demands, according to level and interest in language teaching:

- Music

Mama Lisa's World of Children and International Culture: A neat site with children's songs, nursery rhymes, stories and other materials from around the world. The site can be viewed in English, French and Spanish, but the songs lyrics are available in many languages⁴.

Languages Online: Series of well-organized lessons, games, songs and other teaching/learning materials for beginning ESL and other languages.

Youtube:collection of songs and lyrics.

- Television and Videos

LangMedia: features video clips of interviews and discussions with people from many different countries and of many different ages and walks of life. Some interviews and discussions are in English; more are in the language(s) of the countries involved. Translations and/or transcripts are given for all non-English video clips. Topics include family, food, education, religious and cultural customs, work, art, sport, travel, and more.

WWITV: a huge collection of free live internet TV stations streaming online.

A portal to watch live and on demand TV broadcasts from around the world.

- Podcasts and Radio

OMNI Radio: search for all live radio stations of the world by country.

Foreign Internet Radio: online news radio, talk, information programs, and music programs featuring music in many languages.

Using authentic texts in the classroom are known to have the following advantages:

4 Brown, D. H. (2017). Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy. White Plains, NY: Longman

First, when authentic materials are made available for students, they provide exact examples of how the language is used by its native speakers or of the vast majority of target language users.

Second, students feel more confident using the language when they know they are performing as expected. With authentic



texts, learners are provided with words and expressions used in real-life contexts. When students are confronted with similar situations, they manage better in informal, face-to-face communications.

Third, real-life materials are more informal, socially-centered and widely used. They can be a valuable material to complete the rules and patterns of textbooks.

The use of authentic texts in listening and reading skills instruction give students the idea they learn real language and see "the relevance of classroom activity to their long-term communicative goals". Rost suggests that when it comes to listening comprehension, understanding "authentic language is the target of virtually all language learners". However, using authentic discourse texts can pose a number of problems in listening instruction since many of the texts produced specifically for use in listening instruction are often ungraded and very difficult, suitable for only the highest levels⁵. Richards suggests another option for working with authentic (or any) listening texts: we can adjust the task itself to focus on the specific listening skill area that learners need to work on. Many other features of the text itself may go unaddressed, but tasks can be designed (again with learner needs and current proficiency in mind) to focus on a specific skill area

It is now generally accepted that literary and other authentic texts should not be simplified or modified in order to help students comprehend them. Rather,

students should be provided with reading strategies and activities prior to reading the selection. In turn, these strategies and activities will help students comprehend the authentic material.

Generally, the strategies, explanations, and activities related to a reading selection fall into three categories called pre-reading, during-reading, and post-

5 Wallace, Catherine.(2012) Reading. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

reading activities, depending on when they are used in relation to reading the selection which help students understand the text and the topic, review vocabulary or grammar structure. The grading of grammar in a text is usually more difficult to spot and easier to forget about than the grading of vocabulary. A good rule is that most of the grammar in the text should be what they have already studied, and most of the more difficult grammar should be within one level and guessable from context

CONCLUSION

Regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the authentic materials, the advantages were: materials easy to find, students become acquainted to the current language and issues, they become more confident in their language abilities, they develop a sense of cultural belonging. Among disadvantages, they listed: texts are too high level, texts are not graded (easy grammar but difficult words), and texts contain many useless words they are unlikely to use.

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