USE OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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Abstract:

   The expressions or words that are taught to ESL student may not find their use in real life situations and students miss out on learning how language is used in real life. The article focuses on the use of authentic materials can be used in lower level classes. Authentic material comprises of print video and audio material which students encounter in daily life authentic material enable learners to interact with the real language and content. Authentic material to be used in classroom should be relevant to the content, readable and can used to teach textual features and grammar but it is rather difficult to find authentic materials that suits the needs of young learners as well as is interesting. Thus authentic material prepares the learners by providing necessary skills as to how language is used in real life.

 " It has been traditionally suppose that the language represented to learners should be simplified in such a way for easy access and acquisition. Now a days there are recommendations that the language presented should be authentic"
(Widdowson 1990:67)

 In my work with free service ESL teachers, I have seen both native speakers and international students find worksheets online that support to teach students how to, for example, invite, compliment it or disagree in English. I have observed my student teachers give their students list of expressions that most English speakers would never say. Conversely, an ESL student may hear someone say, **"**how about having lunch tomorrow" ? and not understand that this is an invitation . When students exposure is limited to text book language they miss out on learning how language is used in real life.

   Several studies have shown how textbook language differ from authentic speech and writing. It is an controversial that language learning materials differ from authentic language with regard to vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation . When and how to bring in authentic materials however, it is a matter of debate . Assuming that

most teachers find it easier to use authentic material with advanced students, I will focus here on how to use authentic materials in lower level classes.

What are authentic materials?

Authentic materials are print, video and audio materials that students encounter in their daily lives such as change of address forms, job applications, Menus , Voicemail messages, radio programs, And videos . Authentic materials are not created specifically to be e used in the classroom but they make excellent learning tools for students precisely because they are authentic.

There are two main categories of authentic materials - print and auditory. ESL students often use authentic auditory materials and find them useful. Some examples of the many types of authentic print materials include-

- Utility bills
- Packing slips
- Order forms
- ATM screens
- ATM receipts
- Websites
- Street signs
- Coupons
- Traffic ticket
- Greeting cards
- Calendars
- Report cards
- TV guides
- Food labels
- Magazines
- Newspapers

Examples of authentic auditory materials include

- Phone messages
- Radio broadcast
- Podcast
- E-Book
- Movies
- Videos and DVd's
- Television programs

Authentic materials and authenticity : sources and choices

Authentic text have been defined as " real life text, not written for pedagogic purposes" (Wallace 1992:145) they are therefore written for native speakers and contain "real" language. They are materials that have been produced to fulfill some social purpose in the language community. Peacock(1997) in contrast to non authentic text that are specially designed for language learning purposes. The language in non authentic text is artificial and unvaried , concentrating on something that has to be taught and often containing a series of " false text indicators " that include :
- perfectly formed sentences (all the time);
-A quation using a grammatical structure get a full answer;
- repetition of structures;
- very often does not "read" well.

The artificial nature of the language and structures used, make them very unlike anything that the learner will encounter in the real world and very often they do not reflect how the language is really used. They are useful for teaching structures but not very good for improving reading skills (for the simple fact that they read unnaturally) . They can be useful for preparing the learner for the eventual reading of "real" texts. If authentic texts have been written not for language learning purpose but for completely different ones, where do they come from and how are they selected ?

The sources of authentic materials that can be used in the classroom are infinite but the most common are newspapers, magazines, TV programs, movies, songs and literature. One of the most useful is the internet. Whereas newspapers and any other printed material date very quickly the internet is continuously updated more than visually stimulating as well as being interactive therefore promoting a more active approach to reading rather than a passive one.

From a more practical point of view the internet is a modern day reality, most students use it and for teachers, there is a easier access to endless amounts of many different types of material. From an even more practical economical point of view, to obtain authentic materials abroad can be very expensive and English paper magazine can cost up to 3-4 times the price that it usually is and sometimes is not very good. Often by having unlimited access in the workplace looking for materials costs nothing only time . authentic material should be the kind of material that students will need and want to be able to read when travelling, studying abroad, or using the language in other context outside the classroom. Authentic materials in enable learners to interact with the real language and content rather than the form . learners feel that they are learning a target language as it is used outside the classroom. When using materials from the various sources, it is therefore worth taking into consideration that the m should be e to understand meaning and not form, especially when using literary text with the emphasis being on what is being said and not necessarily on the literary form or stylistics. Nutall Gives 3 main criteria when choosing text to be used in the

classroom suitability of content, exploitability and readability. Suitability of content can be considered to be the most important of the three , in that the reading material should interest the students as well as be relevant to their needs. The text should motivate as well as. exploitability refers to how the text can be used to develop the students competence as readers. A text that cannot be exploited for teaching purposes has no use in the classroom. Just because it is in English does not mean that it can be useful. Readability is used to describe the combination of structural and lexical difficulty of a text, as well as referring to the amount of new vocabulary and any new grammatical forms present . It is important to assess the right level for the right students.

Some example activities :

Lexical is by far the easiest language feature to focus on when using authentic materials , particularly with beginners. This is in part because there are a variety of activities that you can do for which students don't need to use much grammer or don't need any listening comprehension skills.

Both use authentic papers from the internet and don't require student to understand the full news stories, only isolated words. Although the teaching isolated words is not the best way to teach lexical, the words are being presented in context. The first sample activity allows the teacher to take advantage of cognets while the the second activity can be used with a character based language. Another approach to using authentic materials with beginners is to assign a task that they can complete with the minimal language skills that they have. For example you can send them to a clothing website and ask them about the prices of certain items. You can assign different students to different sites and have them then compare prices. Students wan't need to understand the entire website to complete the task and they will also quickly learn lexical related to navigating websites.

Another sample task might be a role play that is turned into an information gap activity using authentic materials. For example one student might want to buy a train ticket with a certain set of parameters while the other student plays the role of the ticket seller who has a copy of a real train schedule. (this can be a brochure picked up on your last trip abroad or simply a printed from the website of the main rail company of your target country.) When you are teaching listening or reading beginners might be able to understand only a small portion of a text. This should not discourage you from using the text with beginners. Instead you can focus on a short activity that the students can accomplish and that will give them more confidence with authentic texts. For example you might be able to find a video about a famous movie star with whom the students are familiar. You can explain that you are going to do an activity with real story but that they will be able to understand only a small part of it. Next show the the video without sound and have the students write three sentence in the target language about what they think the video is about. These can be very simple sentences. After the group shares the sentences play the video with sound and then compare their sentences to what they hear in the video. Finally, give the students a few very simple questions that can be answered by listening to the video and then go

over the answers. You can return to the video letter and have the students listen for different details that might be harder to understand.

What about grammar?

Using authentic text to focus on grammar is an important way to show students how various structures are used in real language. At the advanced level you can choose a text and do a reading or listening close by deleting, for example prepositions for articles. The benefit of this type of activity is not only that students attention is drawn to a structure that they may pass Over When reading for the main idea but also so that they usually have to read or listen closely to the entire text in order to decide on the correct structure. With beginners however such activities are impossible because students will not be able to understand the entire text.

If you are going to focus on grammar using authentic text with beginners ,you need to find materials that contain the target structure as well as a text that is somewhat comprehensible, and this is not always easy. If you focus on a small amount of language however there are grammar activities that you can do with authentic text in a beginning class. One simple activity is to take a text and have students can for examples of a specific structure such as different verb tenses.

Another possibility is to ask students to read a text for homework and give them a list of some of the difficult vocabulary to look up. The next day choose a few sentences that contains the target structure and give the students at dictation. Such an activity is preferable to giving students a dictation using an unrelated list of sentences because not only is the language real, but they have also seen it in context.They also in theory ,understood the meaning of the sentence when their read it for homework so that during the dictation, they can focus on the correct form.

Practical problems

One of the most difficult aspects of using authentic materials with beginners is finding interesting and accessible materials. Further more if you are using news stories ,they can often go out of date quickly. Ideally you should try to find materials that can be used for several years so that after you have put work into creating activities, those activities can be reused and shared. A good approach is to find materials related to topics in your textbook so that they can be used each year.

Another approach is to choose a text that is interesting to your students and revisit it several times during the year . For example, if you choose a high interest news story you can do a vocabulary activity in which students scan for known vocabulary. Later you can take the same story, and do an activity for which the students have to understand more of the text. Such as a grammar close activity. I would expect that students will be motivated by seeing their progress understanding and authentic text.

One of the main reason for using authentic materials in the classroom is once outside the "safe" controlled language learning environment the learner will not encounter the artificial language of the classroom but the real world and language how it is really used. The role of the teacher is not to delude the language learner but to prepare him, giving the awareness and necessary skills so as to understand how the language is actually used. Some teachers have said that using authentic materials takes up too much time. Indeed, if you are expected to cover a certain amount of material in textbook authentic materials will slow you down. For teachers who do not have control over what material is covered this is an issue you that will have to be worked out with supervisors. Although it will take some work to find an incorporate authentic material and take class to time to help the students through the material, you are students will benefit from exposure to language as it is really used . In the last it is worth taking into consideration Davies who wrote: " It is not that a text is understood because it is authentic but that it is authentic because it is understood. Everything the learner understands is authentic for him."

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> **"He who is not contented with what he has,**
>
> **Would not be contented with what he would like to have."**