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The Use of Authentic Materials in Classrooms

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A B S T R A C T

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 visually stimulating as well as being interactive, therefore promoting a more active approach to reading rather than a passive one.

A R T I C L E I N F O

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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. Authentic materials are materials that we can use in the classroom and that have not been changed in any way for ESL students. As a result of the researches carried out and the surveys conducted it has come out that there are many advantages in using the authentic materials. At the same time, there are a few disadvantages that teachers and students should be aware of when using different sources of authentic materials such as newspapers, TV programs, menus, magazines, the internet, movies, songs, brochures, comics, literature, etc. the paper shows how authentic materials can be used at any level in accordance with the students' needs and knowledge.

Authentic Materials: An Overview (2002) by Alejandro G. Martinez deals with the term authentic materials itself and with advantages and disadvantages of their use as well as possible sources of them. Authentic materials: *"Sometimes called "authentic" or "contextualized", real-life materials are those that a student encounters in everyday life but that weren't created for educational purposes. They include newspapers, magazines, and Web sites, as well as driver's manuals, utility bills, pill bottles, and clothing labels."*[1]

Martinez mentions Walker's differentiation between authentic and genuine materials. Authentic materials are materials created for native speaker of the language and use in a class in its original form and design. In other words, they are not changed in any way. Whereas genuine materials are authentic materials adapted for a class, e. g. jumbled paragraphs, cut out headlines etc.

Martinez listed following pluses and minuses:

Advantages:

[1] MARTINEZ, Alejandro. *Authentic Materials: An Overview* [online]. Mexico City: 2002. Available at <www3.telus.net/linguisticsissues/**authenticmaterials**.html>

- Students are exposed to real language
- There is factual acquisition from most of them
- Textbooks do not include inaccurate language
- Authentic materials may be inspirational for some students
- One piece of text may be used for various activities and tasks
- There is a wide choice of styles, genres and formality in authentic texts
- They can motivate students to read for pleasure

Disadvantages:

- Authentic texts may be difficult to understand because of a culture gap
- The vocabulary may be not exactly what the students need
- They are rather difficult for beginners
- Preparation of the texts and activities is often demanding and time consuming
- There are many various accents and dialects in listenings
- The materials become outdated quickly (news)

Sources of authentic materials Newspapers, menus, magazines, the Internet, TV programs, movies, CDs, songs, brochures, comics, literature (novels, poems and short stories), catalogues, leaflets, tickets, postcards, bills, receipts, wrappings, recipes, business cards, labels, stamps, etc.

Where to get authentic materials

- ✓ The Internet
- ✓ library

There is usually an English department in every city or university library. There can be found not only books, but also magazines and music. When visiting an English speaking country, one should think about the great opportunity to get authentic materials. Difficultness On British Council web pages, there are described some aspects of using authentic materials. One of them is difficultness of such materials. There is said that they are difficult, but that is the point. Moreover, the trick is to set the task according to the level of the students, not to choose the material according to the students' level.

However, for lower levels are suitable leaflets, menus, timetables, video and audio advertisements, short reports, short news. The tasks should be rather simple and vocabulary should be introduced in advance. Excessive materials for intermediate levels can be longer articles and news or reports, whole TV programs. The vocabulary should be pre-taught, too. With advanced students, any authentic material can be used. Pre-teaching is not necessary, but it is good to have some explanations and definitions prepared.

Claire Kramsch had a different view on authentic materials. In her book *Context and Culture in Language Teaching* (1996), she devoted one chapter to authentic texts and contexts. She agrees with Walker definition: *"It is probably better to consider authenticity not as a quality residing in instances of language but as a quality which is bestowed upon them, created by the response of the receiver. Authenticity in this view is a function of the interaction between the reader/hearer and the text which incorporates the intentions of the writer/speaker… Authenticity has to do with appropriate response."*[2]. As an example, she mentions a German menu, which would not be authentic text if it was used in an English lesson to practice reading prices or learning adjective endings. It would be an authentic piece of text if it was used as a German menu. Next she says that cultural competence does not include the obligation to behave according to conventions of given speech community and that we should not want

[2]Kramsch, Claire. *Context and Culture in Language Teaching.* OxfordUniversity Press, 1996. p. 178

our student to behave like somebody else or plagiarize behavioral patterns. Behaving like someone else is not a guarantee that the community that speaks the language will accept the person.

Teachers should choose textbooks according to following guidelines:

1. A new book should be examined carefully to check whether it provides sufficient cultural point of view.
2. The teacher should make a list of cultural aspects in each lesson and check whether they are positive or negative.
3. The teacher should look in detail at the exercises and consider whether they will support his intercultural activities.
4. He should check whether the vocabulary, examples, grammar structures etc. are placed on some meaningful cultural background.
5. Check whether the pictures and photographs are culturally related.
6. Examine dialogues for cultural context.
7. Re-examine textbooks that may be culturally biased. Check whether they are objective.

The use of authentic materials in an EFL classroom is what many teachers involved in foreign language teaching have discussed in recent years. there are persuasive voices insisting that the English presented in the classroom should be authentic, not produced only for instructional purposes. Generally, what this means is that authentic materials involve the language that naturally occurs as communication in the native speaker contexts of use, or rather in the selected contexts where standard English is the norm: real newspaper reports, real magazine articles, real advertisements, cooking recipes, horoscopes, etc. most of the teachers throughout the world agree that authentic texts or materials are beneficial to the language learning process, but what is less agreed is when authentic materials should be introduced and how they should be used in an EFL classroom. 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 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 easier access to endless amounts of many different types of material. From a even more practical/economical point of view, trying to obtain authentic materials abroad can be very expensive, an 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 work place, looking for materials costs nothing, only time.

Authentic materials 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 contexts outside the classroom. Authentic materials 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 choosing materials from the various sources, it is therefore worth taking into consideration that the aim should be to understand meaning and not form, especially when using literary texts with the emphasis being on what is being said and not necessarily on the literary form or stylistics.

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