Authentic Language Models and Authenticity in the Foreign Language Classrooms

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Abstract: *The selection of discourse materials is an important part of the English textbook development process. It is essential to select discourse materials that have potential curricular value and are consistent with the characteristics of the English language discipline. Both authentic and artificial language models play a role in English language learning, but in general authentic language models are not used enough. The use of authentic materials in the classroom can be a useful tool to motivate students and enhance their interest and motivation in learning. When used properly in real-life learning environments, authentic materials can play a positive role in foreign language teaching. When training future foreign language teachers, learning environments that use authentic materials should be organized to set an example for future teachers to use authentic materials in their own classrooms. The purpose of this study is to focus on the importance and uses of authentic materials in foreign language teaching and learning in the hope of providing insights for teachers and students of English language learning to use authentic materials in their English classrooms to improve their teaching and learning skills.*

Keywords: Authentic Language Model; Artificial Language Model; Learning Motivation; Foreign Language Teaching.

1. Introduction

The promulgation of the New Curriculum Standards in 2022 set higher-level requirements for English language teaching and clarified the curriculum philosophy aimed at developing students' core literacy. The core literacies to be developed in English include language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability. Language ability is the basic element of core literacy, cultural awareness reflects the value orientation of core literacy, thinking quality reflects the mental characteristics of core literacy, and learning ability is the key element of core literacy development. The four aspects of core literacy interpenetrate, integrate and interact with each other, and develop synergistically. Therefore, teachers should infuse the goals and contents of core literacy into the selected teaching texts, so as to subconsciously cultivate students' knowledge and cultural awareness and enhance their thinking skills.

Authentic language models can significantly enhance students' comprehension and proficiency in foreign languages. Conversely, synthetic language models assist learners in grasping the fundamental rules and practical usage of a foreign language. Historically, educators frequently utilized synthetic language models within exam-focused curricula, leading to a prevalent issue where students excelled in reading and writing but struggled with listening and speaking, commonly referred to as "dumb English." Consequently, there remains substantial debate and ambiguity regarding the optimal application of these two language models and their effectiveness across various classroom settings.

In English language teaching, the choice of materials is crucial to students' interest and motivation. Among other things, the materials contain authentic language materials and artificial language models. Both textbook designers and classroom teachers choose artificial language models as teaching materials. These artificial language models are not the product of natural contexts, but rather are unnatural language parts that are processed through repetition and substitution for teaching purposes and do not occur in real life.

Such artificial language models achieve the goal of providing students with a certain level of grammatical knowledge and sentence patterns, which can be useful for test-taking education. However, students' core literacies such as language expression and cultural awareness are not exercised to a certain extent and do not meet the requirements of the new curriculum for English teaching. In the current research, most scholars are more inclined to increase the percentage of using authentic language models in teaching. Therefore, I believe that in English teaching, teachers should use artificial language models, with the assistance of real language models, to achieve the teaching goals, not only to help students gain learning knowledge and test-taking skills but also to strengthen students' language expression and reflection skills in real contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Authentic Language Models

The use of authentic materials in foreign language learning has a long history. Henry Sweet, for example, who taught and wrote at the end of the nineteenth century and is regarded as one of the first linguists, made regular use of authentic texts in his books. In addition, he claims that authentic materials are better than artificial language models in many aspects. The term authentic materials have been defined in different ways throughout the literature. Wilkins (1976) claims that 'authentic materials will be the means by which the learner can bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and an effective capacity to participate in real language events'. In other words, the language of the real world is what learners need to be exposed to because that language is uncompromising towards the learner and reflects real world goals.

Phillips and Shettlesworth (1978) clearly define authentic materials as referring to examples of 'real-life' language drawn from science contexts. Subsequently, other scholars have provided more specific definitions of authentic linguistic materials, not only in terms of their sources but also in terms

of the purpose of screening them and their creators to add and refine them. Nunan (1989) states that authentic materials are not always produced for the purpose of language teaching. Guariento & Morley 2001) declare that authentic materials are used for some social purposes in the language context where they are produced. Rogers (1988) stated "the authentic materials should be qualified in terms of objectives, learners' needs and nature of the meaningful communication". Bacon and Finnemann (1990) also state that authentic materials are those texts which are made by native speakers for non-pedagogical purposes.

The Chinese scholar Yu Hongzhen compares real language models with artificial language models by giving examples, and she argues that authentic textual material generally refers to that which is actually used in real life by speakers of native languages it is not prepared exclusively for instructional purposes such as newspapers, charts, timetables, audio and video clips, news reports and notices. Such material should not have been "cut" or "edited" and therefore be "original". The artificial language materials written for the purpose of teaching usually give priority to the standardization of language and highlight the features of language such as vocabulary and grammar. (Yu Hongzhen, 2010)

Even if we limit our description to real language from a real speaker or writer for a real audience with a real message, this still encompasses a huge amount of language variety. Teaching discourse in the classroom, mother tongue, international business negotiations between nonnative speakers and scripted television soap operas would all be classified as authentic. But all these types of authentic input can be expected to have very different surface discourse features, and some will serve as better input to stimulate language acquisition in our learners than others. Authenticity doesn't necessarily mean 'good', just as artificial language model doesn't necessarily mean 'bad'. As Cook (1997) points out, terms such as 'authentic', 'genuine', 'real' or 'natural' and their opposites 'fake', 'unreal' or 'contrived' are emotionally loaded and indicate approval or disapproval whilst remaining ill-defined.

In my view, authentic language materials refer to discourse in a real-life context created by native speakers. From the teacher's perspective, authentic language materials are not created in an altered way to achieve a certain pedagogical purpose. The authentic language materials we use are to help produce learners who are able to communicate effectively in the target language of a particular speech community, that is to say, learners who are communicatively competent. However, I do not dismiss artificial language materials in their entirety, but rather support the idea that artificial language materials and authentic language materials complement each other and work together to accomplish instructional goals. Whether it is an authentic language model or an artificial language model, choosing a language model that is appropriate to the pedagogical objectives in different lesson types is the only way to get more out of it.

2.2 Advantages of Authentic Language Models

The term pragmatic competence appears in lots of books. There exist various explanations to pragmatic competence held by different scholars. Savignon (1991) considers the second or foreign language pragmatic competence as part of communicative competence of the non-native speakers. Pragmatic competence is "the knowledge of the condition and manner of appropriate use" (Chomsky, 1980:224).

He Ziran (1997) provides us with pragmatic competence from the perspective of communication process. He puts forward that pragmatic competence can be explained as the ability to use language appropriately in practical communication, which focuses on the ability to produce proper and appropriate sentences and therefore to interpret the speaker's utterances correctly according to different speech contexts.

This division of pragmatics paves the way for pragmatic competence study. Since pragmatics falls into pragma-linguistics and socio-pragmatics, accordingly, pragmatic competence is composed of two elements: pragma-linguistic competence and socio-pragmatic competence. The former is the ability to use the linguistic resources available to convey particular illocutions while the latter is the ability to put these resources into adequate use in social contexts.

Pragma-linguistic competence is based on grammatical competence and related to contexts. In other words, it refers to the knowledge of language conventions and the ability to use the correct grammatical rules or language forms to make proper sentences to communicate in certain contexts. Socio-pragmatic competence is of high level and related to social values. It refers to the sensitivity to what constitutes appropriate linguistic behavior in a social context. For example, in China, people show their concern and care by asking for other's privacy, such as age, income and marriage status, which is considered rude by westerners. The awareness of these differences is quite helpful to enhance one's socio-pragmatic competence. Thus, just learning the language is far from enough; equal attention must be paid to cultural differences.

3. The Impact of Authentic Materials on FL Learning and Teaching

3.1 The Impact of Authentic Materials on FL Learning

3.1.1 The Positive Effect on FL Learning

The need for authentic materials in the field of language teaching and their usefulness have ever more acknowledged by the teachers and researchers. Many empirical studies have demonstrated the positive effects of authentic materials taken by learners who have opportunities to interact and deal with them. Studies, such as Miller (2005) and Thanajaro (2000), have shown the use of authentic materials which lead to aural language development. In addition, Otte (2006) studied the impact of aural authentic texts on listening comprehension abilities of adult ESL students of an American university. He found that exposure to authentic materials would lead to better listening comprehension abilities and motivation of the language learners. By the same way, the study of Herron and Seay (1991) showed that the language learners listening to authentic radio tapes as regular classroom activities had demonstrated greater listening comprehension than others.

Moreover, many experts of language teaching and pedagogy stated that applying authentic materials would improve the communicative ability of the learners. Gilmore (2007) studied the effect of using authentic materials compared to textbook materials on developing the communicative competence of the learners during one year experiment. Weyers (1999) worked on the influence of real-life video materials on university language learners, especially on listening comprehension and communicative competence. Hadley (2001) pointed out: use of real or simulated travel documents, hotel registration forms, biographical data sheets, train and plane schedules, authentic restaurant menus, labels, signs, newspapers, and magazines will acquaint students more directly with real language than will any set of contrived classroom materials used alone.

So, it seems that reading practices by use of different authentic materials is sensible for the students. It is also established that students of all language proficiency levels are able to manage the authentic materials. However, including authentic materials in foreign language classes has other advantages. Professors and experts of teaching language should maintain the enhancing power of the authentic materials (Gilmore, 2007). By using authentic materials students know how to use language in real world and improve their proficiency level in four skills of language learning.

3.1.2 The Negative Effect on FL Learning

The target language is used in a social context and its used is motivating for learning. Rivers (1987) proved that learners who work with authentic materials are more interested in language learning. Kim (2000) also pointed out that authentic materials provide a mean for overcoming the cultural and social barriers of language learning. While some experts do not trust the use of authentic materials. Clark (1983) stated that the media has no effect for learning language in any condition and so using authentic versus non-authentic materials is out of question. In the same way, Kienbaum and colleagues (1986) claimed that there is no significant difference in language learning of students who use authentic materials compared to others who learn language with traditional materials.

According to Martinez (2002) using authentic materials may be culturally biased. In addition, other researchers hold that lower-level learners may feel frustration and de-motivation when confronted with an authentic text. Guariento and Morely (2001) mentioned that "at lower levels, the use of authentic texts may not only prevent the learners from responding in meaningful ways but can also lead them to feel frustrated, confused, and, more importantly, de-motivated". Kim (2000) believed that at earliest stages of learning real-life materials do not have any impact on learning of the students. All in all, using authentic material in language teaching has been under debate for many years. However, the advantages of using authentic materials overweigh the difficulties. On the other hand, it is possible to overcome the difficulties by using proper task design.

3.2 The Impact of Authentic Language Models on FL Teaching

Although the use of authentic materials in the classroom has become general practice during the previous 30 years, the issue of authenticity has been one of the most debatable aspects in the ground. However, the need or usefulness of authentic materials has been increasingly recognized especially in non-native countries. Empirical studies have demonstrated the positive effects of utilizing authentic texts by language learners. With the development of the idea that the goal of learning English is to communicate with people in authentic situations, authentic language materials have been rationally introduced at this stage of teaching, which provides students with a good opportunity to gain in-depth cultural knowledge of the target language and thus improve their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in the long run. In addition, students' motivation to learn has been greatly enhanced.

Peacock (1997) surveyed 31 beginning learners and found that students may have preferred traditional listening materials at the beginning of their study, but their preference lasted only 8 days, after which their interest increased day by day with the use of authentic materials. He therefore concluded that authentic materials enhance students' attention and ability to process the activities in listening, making them more engaged in listening. Although most scholars have recognized that the use of authentic materials in second language teaching brings great benefits in terms of teaching outcomes, such materials are difficult to handle in the actual teaching process. If teachers use them improperly, they will cause students to lose their interest and confidence in learning a foreign language. Therefore, teachers need to accurately define the difficulty of authentic materials when preparing lessons in teaching. Authentic materials can be even used from the first week of the first semester; however, the materials must relate to learners' life experiences and contain appropriate features that enhance comprehension at this level. While other researchers suggest providing students with essential background knowledge and simple tasks to perform while listening.

Some scholars argue that students of all ability levels should be exposed to natural speech as a regular part of their listening practice. Even low ability students can understand and benefit from authentic text material, and Schmitt (2002) points out that it is crucial for teachers to help learners gradually approach fully authentic tasks, rather than trying to make them authentic at the outset. In other words, teachers should not prepare authentic settings for students in order to determine what needs to be done. Teachers should examine the practices and materials currently used in language classes so that teachers can determine what, how much, and how students listen. Moreover, implementing authentic corpus in classroom listening provides students with immediate and direct access to input data that reflects authentic communication in the target language. This is one of the advantages of including authentic materials in foreign language instruction and actually leads to increased motivation of learners. The use of authentic auditory texts increases students' motivation and self-satisfaction.

However, some scholars do not favor the use of authentic materials. For example, Clark (1983) argues that authentic materials do not affect learning at all. Kilickaya (2004) further

states that authentic texts are random in terms of vocabulary, structure, function, content, and length; therefore, they pose a problem for teachers. Teachers sometimes do not have access to authentic materials, the cost of purchasing them, and the time required to find appropriate authentic texts. Such problems often make it difficult for teachers to successfully incorporate authentic materials into their courses.

In conclusion, the benefits of authentic materials to the FL classroom greatly outweigh the challenges. As the present generation of learners gets the opportunity of using numerous sources to learn any subject, the use of authentic materials seems to be a great help for them to improve their learning skills. The teachers can use the authentic material as additional material to develop the overall skills of the learners' learning. With the help of the authentic material, the teachers can reinforce the learning items and can give additional tasks to the learners. Furthermore, these authentic materials create interest among the learners since the teachers select them with proper care by taking the needs and interests of the learners. As a result, the learners can participate with more enthusiasm in the given tasks and try to perform the tasks with utmost care and concentration. Authentic materials are abundantly used in the teaching of English by the teachers to attain better results while teaching the learners in the English language classrooms.

A successful classroom requires the teacher to have full control over the completeness and challenge of the task. If the task is too easy, students' ability will not be improved; if it is too difficult, students' motivation for listening will be greatly discouraged. Therefore, in a real teaching situation, teachers need to carefully design teaching objectives and appropriate teaching activities according to students' abilities and authentic materials. Xu Wenli (2010) argues that traditional English textbooks, after linguistic processing and typesetting, cannot be called authentic in a sense. At the same time, she argues that authentic English materials available to Chinese students should come from a wide range of sources, be rich in subject matter, and be diverse in style. For example, original English novels, original English movies, media resources, and public terms in life are all effective sources of authentic materials. Liu Mei (2009) clearly points out that the ultimate goal of English teaching is to cultivate and improve learners' language use and communicative competence, which means that learners should not only master the language knowledge in the classroom, but also be able to use it skillfully in real life and achieve communicative purposes. Ruan Quanying (2004) argues that inappropriate selection of authentic materials can discourage students from learning English and points out the potential problems of authentic materials and the corresponding solutions. Zhou Jianjian (2008) discusses "authenticity" in five aspects: material authenticity, task authenticity, learner authenticity, actual teaching environment authenticity, and teacher factor, and defines the meaning of "authenticity" in a comprehensive manner. According to Miao (2011), most teachers believe that the use of source language materials (or texts) is beneficial to language acquisition, as it gives learners access to authentic language content, which helps them better understand the target language culture and enrich their knowledge of the target language society.

Based on these findings, I recommend that EFL teachers try

appropriate authentic materials in their classrooms, as they may increase learners' levels of on-task behavior, attention, and engagement in the target activity more than artificial materials. However, they may reduce the level of learner interest elicited by the materials used. It is important that the materials chosen for the classroom motivate learners, so one criterion for choosing materials should be their impact on motivation.

4. The Principle About the Selection of Authentic Language Models

It has long been recognized that the language presented to students in textbooks is not representative of the real situation. The artificial language models in textbooks are far removed from the kind of real, informal English that is used more than any other in a normal person's lifetime. Although much has been done recently by textbook writers to redress this balance, many gaps remain stayed.

Phillips & Shettlesworth (1978) discuss the problem of maintaining specific features of cohesion and coherence in rewritten texts (artificial language patterns), without which the information structure of the text is distorted accordingly, so that the rewritten text cannot be seen as a useful stage for processing authentic material, and this distortion makes the rewritten text potentially more difficult to understand rather than more difficult to comprehend. Therefore, the selection of authentic language materials should also be based on certain principles to avoid the problems mentioned above.

First, when to introduce authentic materials is a controversial issue in language teaching. Kilickaya (2004) and Kim (2000) argue that teachers should only use authentic materials in intermediate and advanced language classes. According to Guariento and Morley (2001), authentic texts should not be used with low level students because it will lead to frustration, confusion, and de-motivation. However, other researchers have argued that learners should be exposed to authentic materials at the initial stages of language learning, claiming that exposure to these texts at the initial stages will lead to the development of useful strategies to deal with complex tasks later on. I believe that authentic language materials can be used at the very first stage of instruction, thus creating an authentic language environment at the very beginning. This way, both basic and non-basic students can initially increase their interest and engagement in learning.

Secondly, according to Berardo (2006), the selection of authentic texts must be based on the suitability, availability and readability of the content. He argues that content is appropriate if it arouses students' interest and is appropriate to their needs and abilities. Bacon and Finneman (1990) also assert that authentic texts should be relevant to students' cultural experiences. In addition, the way authentic texts are used to develop students' competencies and how they can be broken down for instructional purposes is referred to as accessibility. Finally, the language as well as the structural and lexical difficulty of the text refers to readability. The selection of authentic language materials is also not done in a boundless and aimless manner. Both authentic language materials and human and linguistic models should serve the goals of the classroom, so the selection of authentic language

materials should be both original and natural language created by native speakers in real contexts and language materials that are close to what students understand in their daily lives. In addition, the selection of materials should help improve students' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills from the side, and meeting these criteria is what makes a successful language model. However, from the teacher's point of view, material selection as well as writing poses certain difficulties.

Third, the sources of authentic materials (both oral and written) are endless. The most common sources are newspapers, magazines, television programs, videos, radio, literature, and the Internet. Although radio is easy to use, the comprehensibility of its input is the most difficult for language learners because of all the non-verbal information that is missing. Television and video with their pictures, movements, colors, and body language, unlike radio, allow learners access to nonverbal information; therefore, television and video are easier for language learners to comprehend. However, it is the Internet that is considered to be the most useful source. Since print is updated very quickly, the Internet is always up to date, is interactive, and provides visual stimulation. In addition, the Internet is more useful compared to other sources. This is because, teachers can obtain articles, audio clips, podcasts, and videos from the Internet.

5. Conclusion

Currently, authentic language materials are widely used in teaching as a comprehensible input. The use of such materials improves students' communicative competence and increases their motivation to learn. However, it is undeniable that authentic language materials are filled with a range of features that are present in authentic improvised conversations. This type of material creates difficulties for students' comprehension due to a lack of certain cultural background knowledge, so some experts believe that authentic language materials are not suitable for students in the early grades. At the same time artificial language materials, although they cannot be used in exercising students' communicative skills.

Based on the above discussion, several implications can be derived for teaching contexts and objectives. Firstly, educators should select appropriate language models to align with students' learning needs, considering the type of lesson and specific teaching goals. Secondly, it is crucial to emphasize both the enhancement of students' communicative competence through authentic language exposure and the grammatical and lexical precision fostered by artificial language models. Additionally, teachers should employ these language models flexibly as supplementary instructional tools to provide personalized instruction and feedback, thereby aiding students in mastering a foreign language more effectively. Finally, there is a need to develop a teaching model that integrates the strengths of both approaches, offering clear and practical guidance for instructional practices.

However, it should be remembered that the use of authentic materials does not necessarily lead to performance-based activities, which can be produced without the use of authentic materials. Moreover, the discourse being taught must provide relevant, purposeful language learning activities in meaningful contexts that reflect real-world language use. While most modern textbooks strive to achieve at least an aura of authenticity, it should be noted that much of their content still focuses on language knowledge rather than language use. Seemingly authentic material is utilized to develop "general understanding" or to expand knowledge of particular structures, while meaningful contexts are often not established, and information gaps and task-dependent principles remain just that: principles. Of course, it could be argued that the aura of authenticity has motivational value in its own right, but little research supports this position. While there has been a great deal of creativity in how material is presented and "used" in the classroom, it cannot be assumed that this creativity will necessarily lead to effective learning. In many cases, the task of creativity is more complex than the source material itself.

Therefore, in response to the above-mentioned problems, some foreign classics of more appropriate difficulty should be preferentially selected in the development of English textbooks, so that students can have access to the purest English materials and experience the culture of English-speaking countries. In addition, as the times are constantly evolving, textbooks should also keep up with the times to ensure that the facts in the books are correct and up-to-date. Textbook writers should keep their materials up to date so that outdated information does not have an indelible impact on students' perceptions. It is also important to consider regional differences in the coverage of textbooks, and to reduce the difficulty of the textbooks and the appropriateness of the text adaptations, rather than changing them at will. In conclusion, both authentic and artificial language models possess unique advantages, disadvantages, and suitable teaching scenarios in the realm of foreign language education. The judicious application and integration of these models can significantly enhance the potential and benefits of foreign language teaching and learning.

Acknowledgements

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