

The Role of Authentic Texts in Vocabulary Development

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Abstract: This research work is an attempt of a beginning EFL teacher to prove the effectiveness of using authentic materials in the development of vocabulary proficiency in English. To reach the central goal of the investigation, the researcher experiments authentic materials in a practical language-teaching context (Vocabulary in Context). The subjects of the research are two groups of first-year UWL students. During two months of actual teaching, which was a significant step of the research for it provided the researcher with reliable data, the groups were exposed to two different types of course materials-authentic (materials form mainly certain types as newspapers and magazines) and course book texts. Specially designed Pre- and Post-Tests were used as tools of comparing the effect of both types of materials on the subjects' vocabulary ability. In addition, the subjects' attitude toward the authentic materials used during the course was thoroughly studied by the means of Questionnaire. The research found authentic texts to be more effective in the development of subjects' vocabulary proficiency in comparison with their traditional course book materials.

Key points: authentic, material, native; non-native, production.

Statement of intent

According to the contemporary requirements of educational system traditional teaching style is ineffective and cannot warrant itself, it became obvious in teaching vocabulary in context, too. Three years ago we have been taught the very discipline and our instructor who conducted that aspect was up against serious troubles and difficulties on making it interactively. She tried to include quite different interesting innovations during each lesson, she aroused our interest in this aspect, but it looked always like she had difficulties. Thus, the occasion that we have faced with was the main cause of choosing this topic. By my teacher experience I have already recognized that any authentic materials might interact and amuse learners' attention. So, my investigation lies in opening opportunities to English learners to comprehend meaning of words in its place through authentic materials (mainly newspaper and magazines) instead of using only traditional books.

As I took interest mostly from unusualness, I decided to delve surroundings of effective authentic materials into theoretical discussions, and to apply them practically into academic process for learning vocabulary, and this hard effort have amused me.

In my research I will prove that itemized authentic materials for teaching vocabulary stand to be impactful among language learners from University area. This study investigates the effect of authentic materials on vocabulary recall for 2nd year students. The participants of the study will be groups of UzSWLU; the study process will be in progress for two months. Therein, in practical procedure I try to respond the following questions: *Is there a significant increase in teaching vocabulary I when authentic materials including magazines and newspapers are used? Is there a noticeable difference in learning vocabulary I through traditional textbooks, as compared to those who learned vocabulary with interactive authentic materials?*

Vocabulary stock of language is very important for learners to achieve success in target language, especially when it is taught through authentic materials, even students who have very little or no fluency in the target language can draw bits of authentic cultural information from foreign language

newspapers. Since there is no universally one accepted way of teaching vocabulary interactively I shall confine myself to a brief survey of the topic as it is viewed in Modern Methodology both in our country and elsewhere.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As the president of our republic I.A.Karimov said: “Today we are standing on such threshold of the world development, that it cannot be mistake if we say now that we reached altogether, both knowledge and enlightenments (as an example of national staff preparing program), opportunities and success (as an example of the program on development strategy)”.

One of the big functions of the higher institutions is to educate and bring morally mature personnel and the worthy generation up to our well-known ancestries. The title of the present Qualification paper was chosen according to the requirements of the national staff preparing program and its core has been included to the plans and programs which The Higher Education Institutions intend to fulfill them during the education system. The theme of the given qualification paper is “Using authentic materials (magazines, newspapers) in teaching vocabulary I”. It presents analysis of effectively usage of non-traditional materials, and also considers elementary and deeply investigation of vocabulary mechanisms.

Authentic materials have many advantages compared with inauthentic materials. However, it means that choosing and using appropriate authentic materials in vocabulary teaching can really improve students’ vocabulary stock. According to many researchers (Anderson & Lynch, 1988; Berado, 2006; Brown & Yule, 1983), there are following ways of using authentic materials:

A. Integrating target culture with language teaching

Language and culture are closely related with each other. Language is a part of culture and plays an important role in it. On one hand, without language, culture cannot be transmitted. On the other hand, language is influenced and shaped by culture. Language and culture interact with each other and the understanding of one influences the understanding of the other. In the teaching of vocabulary comprehension, we can find that teaching materials, especially authentic materials, often have much cultural content that is closely related to the knowledge of American and British culture, society, and economy. If students lack this kind of knowledge, there will be difficulties in their vocabulary comprehension. Even if there are some new words, we are able to guess their meanings from the context. However, if the materials are unfamiliar to us, or too culturally based, we may feel very difficult. Even if there are no new words in the materials, we can only get the literal meaning. We don’t understand the meaning in depth, because of the lack of cultural information.

Bassnett (2001) maintains that no single textbook can provide information on a culture, as no culture is homogenous. Also, cultures are “dynamic and ever-changing”. Therefore, when teaching culture teachers should refer to other sources in addition to textbooks.

Literature/ Literary readings. Historically, literature was the main source for teaching culture. As a result of the growing interest in social sciences, the role of literature has declined. It is also sometimes thought that literature of the past cannot be used as a source to interpret contemporary society. Valdes, however, claims that most objections to using literature are “linguistically based” and they do not deny the fact that literature is a useful medium for teaching culture. Many scholars support the same idea.

The main argument for using literary texts is literature’s ability to represent the particular voice of a writer among the many voices of his or her community and thus appeal to the particular in the reader. Literary texts (drama, fiction, poetry) do not only offer a broad ‘state of the nation view’ but can also give students myriad insights into the sensibilities of the British and the texture of life in contemporary Britain. Due to this they offer learners the opportunity to explore both the multiplicity of language and culture. Valdes (1986) warns that literature should not be used for only presenting “cultural slices of life”. She adds that to ignore the whole wealth of literature is to deprive students. She sees the tasks of the teacher as making clear what values lay under the behavior of the

characters so that students could understand them. Therefore, teachers must have “a broad awareness of the values in literature as well as a depth of understanding”.

Different literary genres can evoke empathy and develop understanding of certain aspects of the other culture. Marquardt sees literature as ideal for developing empathy as “creators of literature receive their basic motivation from a desire to explore the feelings of others and communicate these feelings to the readership”. He thinks that reading books will help readers to understand that one’s behavior is conditioned by culture. Pulverness (1997) concludes each paragraph of their book *British Cultural Identities* with Cultural examples, which include films, books, and TV programmes connected with the topic under discussion. When no such list of books for teaching a particular culture exists Valdes suggests using Allen’s *Cultural Checklist* (1973), which gives a list of elements to search for in any literary work to determine its cultural value.

Besides determining the cultural value of a book, there is another concern when literature is used for teaching culture- the language proficiency of students. In Valdes’ opinion literature that is suitable for upper-intermediate students has to “be relatively simple in structure and style, be free from abstruse vocabulary, and contain valuable cultural content.” She still thinks that all genres lend themselves to study by upper-intermediate and advanced students. A well-chosen piece of literary writing not only gives students a good insight into the culture but also leads to better understanding and appreciation of literature.

Films offer learners opportunities to observe behaviors that are not so obvious in texts. They also provide a more current and comprehensive way of a culture. Stempleski calls films “an authentic window on foreign culture”. Film connects learners with language and cultural issues simultaneously. Therefore, the inclusion of film in cultural studies is highly desirable.

The internet. The development and spread of the World Wide Web (WWW) has created many new possibilities for teaching culture. Zhao (1993) claims that “by engaging in web-based activities students can gradually become members of the community of English language speakers, in the same way that they might through other forms of immersion in a culture”. Students, however, need instruction in computer-assisted activities. Internet-based activities should be complex enough to allow interaction, collaboration and autonomous decision-making. They also have to be well structured so that learners achieve the objectives without getting lost. Two internet-based projects the WebQuest and CultureQuest serve as good examples of taking advantages of the possibilities the Internet provides.

Songs are often used in foreign language classes for teaching vocabulary and grammar, but they can also be a vehicle for the study of culture. According to Chastain (1988), the lyrics and music can be related to people’s moods, interests and way of life. Songs that reflect the daily life of the target society will be the best for health. They think that the societal problems treated in a song should be the main concern of the class. Songs work better if students are actively involved, either in discussing the lyrics or participating in singing. For the teaching of British culture, songs by *Billy Bragg* offer ample opportunity for discussion.

Realia. Objects from real life or from the real world, as opposed to theoretical constructs or fabricated examples; especially, used as instructional or classroom aids. Here are some great ways to take full advantage of the possibilities offered by the use of realia in the classroom: *5 o’clock tea*. This is by far the best way to teach table manners, requests, or expressions related to ordering or serving tea, coffee, or any meal in a home setting.

Simply bring a children’s tea set (it’s a lot easier to bring to class) complete with tea cups, saucers, spoons, teapot and/or coffee pot, sugar bowl, creamer, etc... And have students practice offering and serving each other coffee or tea. You may also choose to add cakes, pies, cookies, or anything that will make your 5 o’clock tea truly unforgettable. You can make it as simple or as complete as you wish, or as time allows.

The use of realia brings a welcome change in the class, a break from typical class activities like reading and writing. The unexpectedness of having to suddenly interact with real objects will keep

students on their toes; it will create excitement, and they'll have fun. Students have the chance to practice real life situations like using maps and asking for directions in a foreign language, but with the guidance of someone who speaks fluently and will help them get it right. Once they hit the street, they will feel more confident in speaking the language with the locals.

Students will clearly understand the reason they're learning a particular ESP component. Instead of wondering when and where they might have use for a particular language element, they'll know the reason. When it comes to using realia in the classroom the sky's the limit! The best part is that your students will learn, have fun, but you'll also enjoy your classes all the more.

B. Introducing background knowledge

Some vocabulary materials are too culturally based, thus not easy for students to understand. A good suggestion for teachers is to introduce some background information before listening. If the materials are on western customs, the possible way for the teacher is to ask students to search the relevant information in advance and then share what they have found with the whole class. If teachers prepare original English films for students, it's wise for them to introduce the characters, the settings, and the general plot and tell students how to watch these original films. In this way, students may feel easier to listen to the authentic listening materials.

C. Explaining idioms

Idioms are important in any language. They are often hard to understand and hard to use appropriately. We know that it's usually impossible to understand them without the context. Some English idioms mean much more than the literal meanings. Authentic materials are likely to contain many idioms, especially in newspapers. The teacher should explain the idioms and ask students to accumulate them. Students can benefit from this in the long run.

Newspaper and magazines are important for both their narrative and factual content. Everybody can find good cultural insights from newspaper headlines, advertisements, editorials, sports pages and weather reports. If possible, newspapers should be available in language classrooms for browsing or for classroom assignments. The advantage of doing activities using newspaper texts is that students are exposed to authentic language. According to Bassnett (2001) "even students who have very little or no fluency in the target language can draw bits of authentic cultural information from foreign language newspapers" (p.3). Seelye (1993) posited that before making any cultural generalizations students should generate some hypotheses. These hypotheses should be based on empirical evidence. In Seelye's opinion, "adverts and illustrations in foreign language newspapers serve as an ideal source of authentic empirical evidence" (Seelye, 1993, p.13). However, Durant (1997) warns that "mainstream media represents only *a selected range of images and conventions for interpreting the realism, irony, offensiveness or quality of such images must be shaped accordingly*" (p.21). In other words, Seelye thinks "teachers need some training in how to develop students' skills that are necessary "to penetrate the mass media"" (Seelye, 1993.p.21).

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