# THE USE OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

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*Abstract*

*This study mainly concentrates on four important points. The first point is the purpose of using authentic material in foreign language classrooms. The second one is the role of authentic material use in the second language classroom. Advantages and disadvantages of using authentic material also have been discussed in this paper. Another point of this study will help us to analyse why and how authentic materials could be more effective to develop the language skills of second language learners. Previous experience and thoughts of some authors and academics will support our research. Differences between published and authentic materials will also be the points of our discussion in this study.*

***Key words:*** *Authentic materials, second language, communicative approach*

# İKİNCİ DİL SINIFLARINDA OTANTİK MATERYAL KULLANIMI: AVANTAJLAR VE DEZAVANTAJLAR

*Özet*

*Bu çalışmada dört önemli noktaya değinilmektedir. Öncelikle, yabancı dil sınıflarında otantik material kullanımının maksadı, ikinci önemli noktada yabancı dil sınıflarında otantik materiallerin rolü tartışılmaktadır. Otantik material kullanımının avantaj ve dezavantajlarıda bu çalışmada yer almaktadır. Yapılan bu araştırmanın diğer bir önemli tarafı yabancı dil sınıflarında otantik material kullanımının neden ve nasıl öğrenciler üzerinde daha etkili olabileceğini anlamamıza yardımcı olmasıdır. Uzman ve akademisyenlerin geçmişte edindikleri tecrübe ve düşüncelerde yapılan bu çalışmayı desteklemektedir. Otantik materyaller ile yayınlanmış materyaller arasındaki farklarda yapılan bu çalışma çerçevesinde incelenmektedir.*

***Anahtar kelimeler:*** *Otantik materyaller, ikinci dil, iletişimsel yaklaşım*

## Introduction

There is an ongoing debate about the value of using authentic materials in language teaching lately. Many academics express their thoughts about how beneficial those materials can be. On the contrary, there are some disadvantages of using authentic material in language learning. So the assessment will concentrate on two significant questions: Why and how could authentic materials be more effective to develop the language skills of second language learners? This essay will define authentic material as well as discuss its advantages and disadvantages in student learning and motivation, therefore, the question arises: What are the advantages and disadvantages of using authentic material on student learning skill and motivation? The main roles of authentic materials in the classroom and reflections of those materials to students will be our focus points. The role of the teacher in choosing the right materials is our concern as well.

## Purpose Of Authentic Material Use

First of all, William Guariento and John Morley describe authentic text as:

"…one 'created to fulfil some social purpose in the language community in which it was produced' With the onset of communicative movement a greater awareness of the need to develop students' skills for the real world has meant that teachers endeavour to simulate this world in the classroom." (Guariento, W. & Morley, J., 2001, p: 347)

Both academics claim that the purpose of using authentic materials is to prepare students for their social lives. In other words, the authentic materials are used in order to close the language gap between classroom knowledge and real life (p: 347). Maria Spelleri (2002) supports this analysis, which has been accepted by Guariento and Morley. Similarly, Spelleri thinks that the language used in text books are only valid in a classroom environment whereas the requirement of real life English is different and this difference has not yet been closed by the use of text books because, as we all know, learners have to deal with the language of brochures, office work, application forms and so on (p: 16). The author also thinks that the role of the teacher is crucial; it is the teacher's responsibility to filter materials through selection of the learning objectives. It is the teacher's responsibility to identify the items and their adaptability as well (p: 17)

Spelleri looks for two criteria while selecting authentic materials. Especially one of these criteria is important. The materials need to give new information to help the student. A small booklet about poisonous animals in the place where the student lives might be a good example. At the same time, the material needs to reflect an

economic reality. The second criterion is how those materials are adaptable so they should not contain complicated words. The materials need to have either some pictures or clear separation of text like bullets or numbers (p: 17).

There is one more question that needs to be answered: how is the role of authentic materials in the classroom important? Jeannette McGregor is a lecturer in the field of English Language Teaching Department at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia. McGregor (2007) looks at the topic from another aspect. She thinks that text types make sense if they exist in a cultural context because they are the cultural forms of beliefs and social practices. When we learn a language, the real assumption in that language is culture. For example, English speaking people might believe that bargaining is very difficult in a country where bargaining is quite acceptable and a part of the social life (p: 7). Hence, the class activities and materials need to be organized by the teacher according to students' needs and their cultural variety.

Little and Singleton (1988) of Trinity College Dublin accept that there has been a rapid increase in the use of authenticity in second language learning. Both scholars suggest that the rise of authentic texts is associated with the development of communicative approaches to language teaching (p: 1). The same authors continue their argument by saying that the chief concern is to provide input materials from literary culture. It is also thought by the same authors that learners find such materials more interesting than course books prepared by the teachers (p: 1). There are broad varieties of materials such as a computer, video, DVD player and even different materials from all around the world in public libraries for writing, speaking, listening and reading tasks. As Sacha Anthony Berardo (September, 2006) thinks the sources of authentic materials are infinite. Print and visual publications like magazines, newspapers, TV programs, movies and especially the Internet are the useful for instructors (p: 62).

**Advantages Of Authentic Material Use**

The author, Jane Crawford (1995) explains the importance of effective teaching materials in her article, 'The Role of Materials in the Language Classroom: Finding the balance'. According to Crawford, language is functional and must be contextualised. The author believes that it is impossible to understand the real meaning of any interaction without knowing who the participants are or their social distance from the event referred to. For instance, a video drama needs to assist language in a meaningful way. Hence, the teacher is responsible for the balance achieved between input and reapplication (p: 28). The second point is language development which requires learner engagement with the purpose of use of the language. The focus of input and output materials needs to be on whole texts. For example, the

study of grammatical structure shows us how to use language forms in a meaningful context. The teacher's role is again to decide whether those materials are suitable for learners or not and can be used as a reference by students in the future (p: 29). The next key point is that the language should be realistic because it is hard to find accurate material which satisfies student needs. At the same time it is also hard for teachers to obtain materials that are really appropriate quality lawfully (p: 29). For many learners those materials will be model for a specific topic in their future education. Materials need to be flexible for students in order to develop new skills and strategies as well. Those strategies need to be applicable in other contexts (p: 30). Students will attempt to integrate their knowledge from the language they have learnt. Teachers need to take extra care about students' background and learning abilities in class activities therefore they adapt materials to the context in which learning takes place. There must be an open interaction between students and teachers to understand the cultural values of both teachers and students (p: 31).

Daniel Linder has written an article about similar issues. Linder (December 1999/January 2000) thinks that authentic materials are used as teaching tools effective in classrooms because authentic materials seem more complementary to the lesson content and more understandable for students (p: 17). The author develops a method for using authentic material containing five ingredients. The first one of those ingredients is the authentic texts for input. Authentic texts serve as texts in their own right. The authentic menus are analyzed first as texts then they are used as output models for writing exercises (p: 17). His second view is tasks for text analysis. The author's point is that classroom tasks must be organized for classroom use according to students' ages, interests and levels (p: 17). The third important point according to the author is the tasks for language practice such as vocabulary, grammatical structures and pronunciation. In his article, Linder recommends that first the teacher needs to select language features for the practice task and then the teacher needs to select appropriate grammatical items such as countable and uncountable nouns (p: 17). The output task is the forth one which is a role-play. The teacher's responsibility is to give clear instructions for the output task making the task suitable for students' age, interests and so on (p: 17). The last point is the students' output as input, which is an exercise where student output is used for an additional exercise. The author gives an example. He says the content recognition exercises could be repeated with the student generated texts and those texts could be used for display or exchange with other classes (p: 17).

Authentic materials are mostly accepted as beneficial in language learning. Ruth E. Larimer and Leigh Schleicher (1999) focus on the advantages of authentic materials as below:

"Learning is enhanced by the use of texts of particular interest to a class.

There will be an increase in variety and spontaneity in classes that introduce authentic materials.

Exposure to a variety of vocabulary and structures will occur.

Students will capitalize on their prior cultural and schematic knowledge to contrast target situations and genres with those of their own culture." (Lamier, R.E & Schleicher, L, 1999, introduction section)

Elizabeth Hanson-Smith has written an article about the importance of new technology use and describes the computer use in English teaching as part of authentic materials. Hanson-Smith (2001) believes that when text is read on the computer, learners' motivation and learning skills improve. Another claim is that the computers can determine whether students' answers are right or wrong after each test. It is believed that computers can provide lectures and tutorials a lot better than teachers in four major areas including phonology and phonetics (p: 109, 110) Susan Cornish (1994), a curriculum officer, supports Hanson-Smith's opinion. She thinks there are great advantages of video use in class activities. She implies videos can model spoken language as well as developing listening skills without making demand on reading skills. Students can hear crucial information, pauses and even understand emotions by watching (p: 25)

Larimer and Schleicher (1999) experienced that students need exposure to samples of everyday authentic culture presented on television. Therefore, both authors believe that television commercials are excellent sources because they are short, focusing on music, family relationships and colloquial English (p: 21). The authors' second observation is about newspapers and magazines. As they explain, these materials are ideal sources for students to discuss current issues while broadening their vocabulary limits (p: 52). Other documents such as maps, mail and brochures can be used as authentic materials in the classroom. These materials let students understand the language of materials written for tourists (p: 102). In addition, not only the use of authentic materials is important but work sheets, overhead projectors and transparencies at undergraduate level are vital for those who take courses in a foreign language. This third point is briefly about getting information from student questions in academic lectures. Here, the authors advise that international students misunderstand native speakers of English when information is exchanged therefore both authors believe international students need to be able to questioning sequences for salient information (p: 148). These problems do not only exist between students but also between lecturers and students. Teachers' major concerns are to identify how much their students understand the given data. Here, as described by the editors, students misunderstand what a teacher looks for in the exchange of information so the main aim should be to focus on vital information in

questioning sequences. Work sheets, overhead projector and transparencies help students comprehending a subject better (p: 158, 166).

One of the academics from the National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, Erica Garvey (2007) ends this discussion by illustrating the importance of authentic materials in language teaching in her lecture notes. She points out that the first advantage of teacher-made materials is that they may be customized with a particular group of students in mind (p: 2). According to the lecturer, the second advantage of those materials is their effect on student motivation (p: 2). She also accepts that those materials provide a model of handwriting and layout so students can evaluate their own work (p: 2).

**Disadvantages Of Authentic Material Use**

On the other hand, there are some significant disadvantages of using authentic materials in comparison with textbooks. Guariento and Morley (2001) remind us that the use of authentic materials makes especially lower level students confused and demotivated by the complexity of language and performance conditions unless the simplest authentic texts are carefully selected by the teachers. Hence, the selected material should maintain sense of learner's response and it should engage the learner's interest. As mentioned by both authors, it appears to be hard while simplification of any text is justified (p: 348, 351). It is also believed that while some texts lend themselves to competence training, all textual inputs need to be successfully done by teachers because it may reduce opportunities for students' comprehensible input and cause frustration between lower level learners (p: 349). So, the preparation stage often demand time consumption for instructors (Martinez, A.). Ruddock (2000) gives an example about when to use authentic texts in teaching the grammatical structure of Japanese. The author says authentic texts are only used when students reach intermediate level in the teaching of grammar. Because it is considered that authentic texts are difficult for beginners (p: 1, 2).

**Conclusion**

Finally, in this essay we discussed the role and the importance of authentic materials as well as the teacher's role in choosing the right materials. Other vital points were the advantages and disadvantages of authentic materials for students' motivation and participation. Here, as important factors, instructors should consider how suitable the content of given task for students. It is also the instructor's responsibility to choose exploitability high materials, and presentation of authentic texts is another point that should grab the student's attention in the second language classroom.

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