AUTHENTIC LANGUAGE INPUT IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING MATERIALS: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

YABANCI DİL ÖĞRETİM MATERYALLERİNDE ÖZGÜN DİL GİRDİSİ: AVANTAJLAR VE DEZAVANTAJLAR

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Abstract

Following the domination of the communicative approach in foreign language teaching, the idea that language development is possible through message-oriented input has resulted in discussions about the kind of input presented to individuals during language teaching, and the use of authentic language teaching materials (tools) by integrating them as input into language teaching processes has become one of the major arguments of the communicative language teaching approach. In line with this, the present study aims to examine the concept of authenticity, which has an ever-increasing importance in foreign language teaching, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of authentic language teaching materials as rich sources of linguistic input within the context of the literature on foreign language teaching following a formative research methodology.

Öz

İletişimsel yaklaşımın yabancı dil öğretimindeki hâkim anlayış olmasıyla birlikte, dilsel gelişimin mesaj amaçlı girdiyle sağlanacağı düşüncesi; dil öğretim süreçlerinde bireylere sunulan girdinin türü üzerindeki tartışmaları da beraberinde getirmiş ve bu kapsamda özgün dil öğretim materyallerinin (araçlarının), dil öğretim süreçlerinin bir parçası haline getirilerek girdi kaynağı olarak kullanılması iletişimsel dil öğretim yaklaşımının temel savunularından biri haline gelmiştir. Bu noktadan hareketle söz konusu bu çalışmanın amacı, yabancı dil öğretim süreçlerinde önemi giderek artan özgünlük kavramı ve zengin dilsel girdi kaynağı olarak özgün dil öğretim materyallerinin öğretim sürecinde sağladığı avantaj ve dezavantajları, biçimlendirici araştırma yöntemiyle yabancı dil öğretimi alan yazını çerçevesinde ele alıp irdelemektedir.

Introduction

Today, the proliferation of mass media parallel to the rapid development of information and communication technologies, and the resulting globalization create the necessity to learn at least one foreign language. As such, researchers working in the field of language education are confronted with the issue of designing language teaching materials (tools) that help increase efficiency through the development of suitable teaching methods and techniques required for effective foreign language teaching; and the importance of studies conducted in this field has increased.

Foreign language teaching is a complex process during which the use of phonetic, morphological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic components of the target language is taught in line with communicative goals. Foreign language teaching is a process which evolves from input processing towards output processing since during this process individuals also learn about the functioning of linguistic mechanisms in the target language that are necessary for language production (i.e. input processing, intake and restructuring; (Benati and Angelovska, 2016: 23). In this sense, language input plays a major part in second language teaching due to its role in the development of skills in the target language, and this fact is underlined in all theories and approaches aimed at explaining second language teaching. Especially following the domination of the communicative approach in foreign language teaching, Krashen's (2009: 98) idea that target language development can be achieved through message-oriented input which is at a level higher than an individuals' current language proficiency has resulted in discussions regarding the kind of input presented to individuals during language teaching. It is known that the main characteristic of the communicative approach is that all activities and applications used during the teaching process are based on communicative goals. In line with this, authentic language teaching materials are integrated into and actively used in foreign language teaching processes as rich sources of linguistic input. This is because during this process individuals need guidance not only about literal meaning of words but also the functioning of constituent components which refer to information about literal meanings as well as how the discussed events are to be defined, how they can be ordered by their type and subsequently linked based on the participants (Clark, 2009: 158, 159). Furthermore, individuals can develop strategies which will enable them to comprehend the true use of the target language in line with communicative goals only through authentic language input (Freeman-Larsen, 2000: 129-130). In this sense, language input indicates the language individuals are exposed to according to the communicative goal (Benati and Angelovska, 2016: 23) and provides individuals with the data they need in relation to the workings of the target language.

In terms of its quality, the linguistic input provided to individuals during foreign language teaching is divided into two categories as authentic and non-authentic. In this context, non-authentic language teaching materials are defined as simplified materials which contain less complex structures in the target language considering various factors such as the level of difficulty and complexity. On the other hand, authentic language teaching materials are defined as materials that are created by transferring items (i.e. books, periodicals and newspapers) prepared for native speakers into language teaching environments in a way to reproduce the real application levels of the target language. Furthermore, in parallel with the proliferation of methods and practices based on the communicative approach in foreign language teaching settings, the following definitions have been suggested in relation to authenticity which has become a complex and sophisticated concept associated with many terms such as discourse analysis, speech analysis and second language teaching (Gilmore, 1997):

1. Language produced to convey real messages from real users to real recipients (Swaffar, 1985: 17; Nuttal, 1996),

2. The form of the task chosen for language teaching and the social status of the classroom (Guariento and Moraley, 2001),

3. A concept about assessment which is linked to applied linguistics and teaching (Lewkowicz, 2000).

As mentioned above, the issue of designing language teaching materials that help increase efficiency by developing suitable teaching methods and techniques required for effective foreign language teaching is a major topic paid attention to by researchers working in the field of language teaching. After all, language teaching materials used constitute an important component of the foreign language teaching process, which aims at improving individuals' basic language skills in the target language, and the quality of these materials have a great impact on effective development of skills. As such, the present study aims to examine the concept of authenticity, which has an ever-increasing importance in foreign language teaching processes, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of authentic language teaching materials as rich sources of linguistic input within the context of the literature on foreign language teaching.

Authenticity and Language Teaching

The analysis of related studies suggests that the use of authentic language teaching materials in foreign language teaching has been mentioned in the literature for a long time. In his studies on this subject, Sweet (1899: 117) states that authentic texts should be

used actively in foreign language teaching processes due to their positive effects on student learning. Nonetheless, review of related literature indicated that studies on the use of authentic language teaching materials in foreign language teaching increased following the domination of the communicative approach, which emerged as a reaction to the constructivist approach, in foreign language teaching and studies on this subject in the field of applied linguistics started from 1970s onward.

Methods for foreign language teaching are based on the nature of the language and beliefs about learning (Nunan, 2003: 5). The communicative approach has paved the way for increased awareness of developing students' real world skills (Guariento & Morley, 2001: 347), and as a consequence of this, the materials used in foreign language teaching are now required to provide students with authentic input about the natural environment in which the target language is used. This is because, in line with the principles of the communicative approach, the development of strategies which will allow an individual to improve basic language skills and understand how the target language is used in real communication platforms is only possible with authentic language input (Freeman-Larsen, 2000: 129-130). Nevertheless, since every linguistic unit and block has a particular meaning and function in terms of sentence order and formation, the linguistic analysis individuals need to make is to a great extent based on an analysis of the forms and manners in which semantic formations and compounds occur (Clark, 2009: 21). For this reason, individuals who want to talk about situations they experience and/or situations they wish to convey must be able to decompose and analyze the constituent components of the language that they are learning. During this process, individuals need guidance about the workings of constituent components such as agent vs. patient and location vs. instrument in the target language (Clark, 2009: 21, 158). In this sense, authentic language teaching materials can, due to their structural features, provide guidance to individuals about the workings of the target language and the appearance of related units on genuine usage platforms.

The main reason for using materials which are produced to meet the daily communication needs of native speakers in language teaching is the idea that students' proficiency in the target language can only be achieved through the use of authentic materials. The main argument for this approach is that using authentic materials supports language teaching (Mishan, 2005: 9) and this can be observed in terms of the differences in learning outcomes (Harmer, 2001: 195). Another reason for using authentic materials in foreign language teaching is their positive effect on motivation to learn. As Ellis (2008: 508) argues, motivation to learn is the main factor affecting the success of foreign language teaching and this factor is a major reason for using authentic materials in foreign language teaching (Peacock, 1997: 152). The communicative approach prompted increased awareness of developing skills related to the real world where the target

language is used, and therefore, the use of authentic materials in increasing and maintaining the learning motivation of students has gained importance (Guariento and Morley, 2001: 347).

Language Teaching Materials and Authenticity in Material Development

Language teaching is a skill-oriented teaching process aiming at an optimal level of basic language skills development and a major component of this process is the teaching materials used. It is known that any element which facilitates foreign language teaching is accepted as language teaching material, and to this end, many elements such as DVD, e-mail, video sharing websites, workbooks and dictionaries are extensively and effectively used as language teaching materials (Tomlinson, 2011: 2) in foreign language teaching. However, the number and variety of instruments that could be used in foreign language teaching processes creates the question of what principles and criteria will be used in developing and preparing such materials? At this point, the studies on second language acquisition which offer a versatile perspective on foreign language teaching provides multi-faceted descriptions as to the principles and features in which authenticity appears as one of the principles associated with the selection and design of foreign language teaching materials. Freeman-Larsen (2000: 129) argues that individuals can only develop strategies which will enable them to understand how the target language is used on real communication platforms of the target language through authentic language teaching materials.

The approach to use authentic materials in foreign language teaching is material-centered at its core (Mishan, 2005: ix) and the teaching materials can ensure that students are exposed to authentic language input through instructions on activities as well as speaking and writing models included (Tomlinson, 2011: 14). Furthermore, relevant studies indicate that authentic materials have a positive impact on the students' learning motivations, task behaviors and concentration (Peacock, 1997:152).

It is crucial to motivate students through language teaching materials and, thus, include them in the teaching process. This is because high level mental skills such as deduction, association, prediction and assessment are needed during this process and skills in the target language can only be developed by including these elements (Tomlinson, 2013: 12). Therefore, language teaching materials should provide information about pragmatic features of the target language in order to create a communicative effect by means of containing real and implied information as to how the target language is used (Tomlinson, 2013: 12; Nation, 2011: 533, 537). In this case the use of authentic teaching materials in the teaching process becomes crucial. In this sense, one of the major considerations in the selection and preparation of texts included in foreign language teaching materials is authenticity (Hyland, 2003: 92).

Similar to first language teaching, foreign language teaching also aims at skills acquisition and a large part of the materials used during the teaching process are designed based on texts. Furthermore, the main factor determining the authenticity of a language teaching material is whether authentic texts are used (Khashbakht and Gorjian, 2017: 50). In this sense, another important issue in the use of authentic materials is the selection of authentic texts. Authentic texts are texts that are created and used by native speakers within the context of culturally authentic usage (Kramsch et al. 2000: 78) and such texts are crucial since they provide individuals with natural language input that reflect the pragmatic characteristics of the target language. After all, authentic texts are true reflections of the target language since they are designed to convey genuine messages from genuine speakers or authors to genuine recipients (Morrow, 1977: 13). A further crucial point in this issue is the criteria according to which authentic materials, which will contribute to the development of communication skills of students in the target language, are to be selected. Swaffar (1985: 18) argues that selected materials should help students improve their lexicon and grammatical knowledge according to their interests and educational needs and be appropriate to the content being covered in the classroom at a given time. On the other hand, McGrath (2016: 103) determined the below criteria for the selection of authentic texts to be used in foreign language teaching:

1. Fitness to the content of teaching materials and the needs of students

2. Topics included in the text are interesting

3. Cultural fitness

4. Cognitive demands

5. Linguistic demands

6. Logistical consideration

7. Quality

8. Exploitability

Berardo (2006: 62) proposes two criteria for the selection of authentic texts that are variety and presentation. According to Berardo (2006: 62), variety in texts renders reading more interesting whereas presentation is considered as elements which facilitate reading (i.e. pictures and diagrams).

Method

Design of the Study

The main aim of foreign language teaching materials is to support the enhancement of an individual's language proficiency to the highest level possible through the input on the workings of the target language. Therefore, determining the qualities of language teaching materials to be used in foreign language teaching settings is crucial in terms of reaching the desired goal. In this context, formative research method, which is a qualitative research method, was adopted to determine whether authenticity is a feature that foreign language materials need to have. Although it is a method which aims to develop principles that enable teaching practices and designs which provide explicit guidance to allow individuals experience an effective and efficient learning process (Reigeluth, 1999: 59), the formative research method is also suitable for studies which involve determining the components of design and development processes (Merriam, 1998: 68).

Findings

Advantages of Authentic Language Teaching Materials

Individuals can only internalize linguistic features and make them part of their language system through meaningful and comprehensible links. As such, second language acquisition occurs when individuals comprehend linguistic forms that are at a higher level than their current instincts (Benati and Angelovska, 2016: 24). For this reason, it is evident that -in foreign language teaching- individuals need to be exposed to authentic materials which contain the target language's appearance in real communication contexts, independently of their current language level and in line with the communicative goals so that their proficiency in the target language can be improved.

Development of pragmatic skills involves much more than learning how to act in a pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic way in suitable contexts; it also involves learning how to interact in the target language, how and in what form to organize a comprehensive speech system, what communicative strategies and the narrative structure are (Ellis, 2008: 192). From this perspective, it becomes clear that all this knowledge can be acquired through authentic language teaching materials. As such, authentic texts used in language teaching materials play the most important part in the teaching process. This is because designing a text artificially to be used as a teaching material causes it to disrupt other features of the text in favor of emphasizing a particular feature, and as a result students fail to see how textual units are joined and work together to create the form of the text (Hyland, 2003: 92). Furthermore, the simplification

process, which is adopted to decrease the difficulty of the text and increase its readability, damages the rhetoric structure (Hyland, 2003: 92). Swaffar (1985: 17) stresses that abridged texts lack the basic characteristics of the original message and authentic materials should be used in foreign language teaching. Furthermore, Nuttal (1996) argues that linguistically challenging texts contribute to the improvement of students' reading skills. Therefore, it is clear that authentic texts should be used in foreign language teaching settings for effective development of skills.

Another reason for using authentic materials in foreign language teaching is linked to motivation to learn. The studies conducted on this subject, contrary to common belief, state that authentic materials have a positive effect on students' motivation and concentration since they are used to depict genuine situations for genuine users (Nuttal 1996) and contribute to improving communication skills (Khoshbakht and Gorjian, 2017: 50).

A further advantage of using authentic texts relates to access to information. Since the analysis of authentic texts requires the use of different information schemas, such texts contribute to the potential cognitive development of individuals, which is a feature that sterilized texts lack (Swaffar, 1985: 18). In addition, students use their existing perception schemas to give meaning to possible conclusions drawn from messages because authentic texts create a comparative situational content between two languages. The studies on the schema theory indicate that such associations are effective on reading comprehension (Swaffar, 1985: 18). Furthermore, since authentic texts are linguistic units produced for genuine discourse situations and reflect genuine discourse situations of the target language, they enable individuals to control their own message systems during the teaching process, which is also stated by Swaffar (1985: 17).

Language input has a critical function in second language teaching due to its crucial role in development of skills and proficiency in the target language; for this reason, processes related to second language are defined as processes that evolve from input processing towards output processing (Benati and Angelovska, 2016: 23). Therefore, for effective language and skills development it is important that individuals are exposed to language input which allows for the development of strategies which will guide them about the structure and constituent components of the target language as well as enable them to comprehend the genuine use of the target language. At this point, teaching materials which contain authentic language input can provide individuals with effective guidance regarding the workings of the target language (Freeman-Larsen, 2000: 129-130). Therefore, the use of authentic materials in foreign language teaching is significant for effective development of skills.

Word recognition and comprehension is the main operand leading the comprehension process; for this reason, improving individuals' word recognition skills and lexicon is a point of

focus in both first and foreign language teaching. However, non-authentic language teaching materials have a limited impact on individuals' context-based vocabulary development due to their limited context and vocabulary. In addition, researchers working in the field of foreign language teaching focus on the target language's appearances in different contexts, which are determined based on a particular communicative goal, and argue that teaching should take place by taking into account these different contextual appearances since context has an important role in creating meaning and having a restricting effect on the selection of vocabulary in foreign language teaching (Ciornei and Dina, 2015: 275). In this sense, it is evident that individuals will benefit from materials, which have been prepared to meet the daily communication demands of native speakers, as rich sources of input and not from non-authentic language teaching materials which have restricted vocabulary and limited linguistic context.

Another important advantage of using authentic language teaching materials in foreign language teaching is the diversity of resources (Berardo, 2006: 62) and easy access to these resources. In this regard, various elements, especially newspapers, periodicals, television programs and the Internet can be used as authentic teaching materials in teaching environments and rich language input about the structure and use of the target language can be offered to individuals through such materials. Moreover, it is known that language is a living entity and has a dynamic structure which changes and evolves constantly especially through the demands and needs of the society, but also through factors such as popular culture, technological developments, immigration and so on. For this reason, using authentic texts -which have been prepared to fulfill the daily communication needs of native speakers and adapts, through immediate reactions, to the changes and transformations in the target language- will make it possible to provide individuals with up-to-date language input about the language they are learning. On the other hand, using traditional course books, which have static structures, in foreign language teaching settings will result in exposing individuals to outdated language input (Ciornei and Dina, 2015: 275).

Considering the above arguments which advocate the use of authentic language teaching materials in foreign language teaching settings, it is possible to summarize the potential benefits of using authentic language teaching materials as follows:

1. They fulfill all the demands of individuals regarding the use and structure of the target language and provide the necessary guidance;

2. Contrary to the common belief, they have positive impact on the motivation to learn and contributes to achieving better learning outcomes;

3. They contribute to authentic knowledge transfer about the culture the target language is used in;

4. They contribute to expanding vocabulary and context knowledge;

5. They help expose individuals to up-to-date language input about the use of the target language since they allow immediate reactions to linguistic changes that result from various factors.

Disadvantages of Authentic Language Teaching Materials

The main justification of the approach advocating the use of non-authentic simplified texts in foreign language teaching is that authentic texts are complicated and difficult in terms of structure and content and go beyond the reading-comprehension levels of especially beginner and intermediate level students. Based on this, Widdowson (2003: 62, 116; 1998: 711) argues that using authentic materials and texts in foreign language teaching have negative effects and thus opposes the use of authentic materials. According to Widdowson (1998: 711), a language which is authentic for native speakers cannot be authentic for those learning it as a foreign language since the validity and authenticity of that target language only apply for a specific discourse community. As a consequence, using authentic texts in foreign language teaching classrooms is far from supporting linguistic development of students and it is necessary to move gradually from simplified texts towards authentic ones (Widdowson 2003: 103).

Another argument presented by the approaches that advocate the use of simplified or adapted texts and materials in foreign language teaching settings instead of authentic texts which have been prepared for native speakers is that authentic materials display complex appearances that are above the existing competencies of individuals and thus offer a low level of readability and comprehensibility which results in loss of individuals' motivation to learn the target language.

Considering the above point, the main arguments of the approach which opposes the use of authentic texts in foreign language teaching are summarized by Berardo (2006: 65) as follows:

1. Authentic texts are culturally biased to a great extent. Therefore, it is considerably difficult and complicated to understand such texts outside the language community in which the language is spoken.

2. The aim of authentic texts is not teaching the language. For this reason, the vocabulary in such texts may not correspond to what students need during the language teaching process.

3. Authentic texts inherently contain many linguistically complex sentence structures and this creates a problem for students at beginner and intermediate levels in terms of interpreting such texts.

4. Adapting authentic texts to language teaching settings as teaching materials requires preparation by teachers which is a limitation in terms of time.

5. Various kinds of authentic texts (i.e. news, newspaper articles) become outdated easily.

Conclusion and Discussion

Belonging to one of the research areas of applied linguistics, studies on second language acquisition address and investigate the capacity of individuals to learn another language in addition to their mother tongue within the context of various research questions. In this context, one of the questions which the studies on second language acquisition seek answers to is which factors cause the differences observed in learning outcomes in relation to second language learning (Ortega, 2011: 117). In foreign language teaching, foundations of which involves skills teaching, one of the main reasons for the differences in learning outcomes at the end of or during teaching is the differences in the language input presented to individuals during the teaching process. As known in all other domains of learning, the most significant element in foreign language teaching is the linguistic input itself and its type. Language input, which is provided through teaching materials to a great extent, is divided into two categories as authentic and non-authentic language input. As such, transferring materials -which have been produced for genuine users to meet their communication needs- into foreign language teaching environments and thus exposing students to input -which possesses genuine usage characteristics of the target language- will naturally contribute to the development of individuals' skills in the target language. In relation to this, the guidance individuals need about the constituent components of the language they are learning can be provided through natural language input which reflects the usage characteristics needed in daily life outside the classroom. In addition, despite the fact that authentic language teaching materials are not inherently designed and produced to meet a certain teaching goal, their diversity and accessibility facilitates the widespread and efficient use of such materials in foreign language teaching settings, while allowing teacher and students to create activities and materials in a spontaneous and creative way throughout the teaching process.

Authentic materials, and more specifically authentic texts, can be above students' language level in terms of structure, content and grammar since they are produced for the communication needs of native speakers. However, since language development starts when individuals start to comprehend linguistics forms that are above their existing language competencies (Benati and Angelovska, 2016: 24), individuals need to be exposed to message-oriented input that is above their current linguistic competence (Krashen, 2009: 98). As such, it is clear that authentic materials and texts need to be used in foreign language teaching.

As stated earlier, the fundamental understanding of communicative language teaching is the active use of authentic language teaching materials as rich sources of input in foreign language teaching processes by building all activities and practices on communicative purposes. In this sense, using authentic language teaching materials by integrating them into foreign language education processes will make a positive contribution to all skill areas of individuals in a target language as it provides them with input support above the linguistic competences they currently possess regardless of their skills and levels. Furthermore, considering their variety and ease of access, it is possible to use them extensively and efficiently in language teaching contexts by finding authentic teaching materials suitable for all skill areas and levels.

A further factor effecting learning outcomes is the motivation to learn and, contrary to the common assumption, authentic texts have a positive and reinforcing effect on the motivation of individuals who learn a foreign language, and authentic texts provide individuals with language input regarding the use of the target language in real discourse situations (Nuttal, 1996: 177). Moreover, individuals who are trained to use the target language at the same proficiency level as a native speaker need to make less changes to use the language they learned in daily life and experience no difficulty in using the target language in different contexts as needed (Ciornei and Dina, 2015: 275). For this reason, it is evident that authentic language teaching materials contribute to the development of individuals' language skills.

While enhancing intercultural competence is a feature that language teaching materials need to possess, the idea of cultural bias attributed to authentic materials and texts is far from being a scientific or pedagogic justification. Whether authentic or not, cultural bias is not a phenomenon related to teaching materials, but completely to the attitude of the person producing those materials or texts. In this sense, it is highly probable to encounter a case where an authentic material or text used for language teaching is not culturally biased, on the other hand, a material produced for language teaching is.

In a nutshell, the use of materials which are produced to meet the daily needs of native speakers by integrating them as linguistic input into foreign language teaching settings is crucial for enhancing the proficiency of students in the target language effectively. Also pointed out by Tomlinson (2011: 14), for an effective language development, individuals need to be exposed to rich and diverse language input at every level, and therefore, authentic language teaching materials, which provide individuals with such rich input, play a significant role in second language teaching.

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