: Authentic Materials : Towards a Rational Selection and an EffectiveImplementation

الأستاذ : سقني العمري

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية

كلية الآداب و العلوم الإنسانية

جامعة محمد خيضر-بسكرة (الجزائر)

Abstract:

There is no doubt that the pedagogical materials, the textbooks, and the " sheltered " language they provide have their place in the classroom, yet they may hamper communication and create gaps reflected in the real language and the language proposed by such materials. In the classroom or in the language laboratory, teachers exploit various types of supporting materials in an attempt to enliven their classes and contextualize their teaching to go beyond the artificial classroom setting. But, do the materials we generally incorporate in our teaching really develop our learner's proficiency in using the target language? What other extra curricular sources could reinforce our learners' communicative competence and trigger the process of natural language acquisition?

The present paper discusses the benefits that could be derived from the incorporation of authentic materials into the EFL classroom. We believe that a substantial input of authentic materials adapted to the learners' levels and interests would increase their sensitivity to and competence in the target language. Furthermore, current authentic materials such as clips from mass media, movies, and cartoons, newpaper articles, plays, short stories, if properly selected and efficiently implemented will certainly enhance the process of language learning.

Key words:
 Authentic,non authentic,materials,selection,implementation,language,input,exposure

ملخص:

لا شك أن الوسائل و المعدات البيداغوجية سواء سمعية أو بصرية أو سمعية بصرية لها مكانتها داخل القسم إلا أنها من كثير من الحالات لا تفي بحاجيات الطالب لتعلم اللغة و استعمالها فى موطنها الطبيعي ولأغراض شخصية و في كثير من الأحيان يتفاجىء طلبة اللغات الأجنبية و بالخصوص الانجليزية بلغة الواقع أو الحياة اليومية التي لم يتعلمونها في القسم. فالسؤال المطروح إذن ما هي المعدات الأخرى ماعدا البيداغوجية التي يمكن استغلالها من أجل إفعام الدروس بالحيوية و تقوية قدرات الطلبة اللغوية

مقالي هذا يتناول أهمية و كيفية اقحام المعدات الأصلية من شرائط سمعية و سمعية بصرية من اجل الابتعاد تدريجيا من التعلم المُقلوب للغة إلى تعلم يمّكن الطالب من التعبير الشخصي وفهم اللغة و استعمالها بطلاقة و عفوية .

1-Introduction

The traditional examination driven- education system which overemphasises the teaching of isolated language items or structures have resulted in a flagrant lack of exposure to the realistic use of English in the main stream society. As a remedial measure, substantial input of authentic materials that are adapted to the learners' level and interests will certainly increase their sensitivity to and competence in the target language. Furthermore, authentic materials such as clips from mass media, movies, comics, and best selling essays, short stories have been found appealing because of their realistic, ready-to use language and relevance to learners' cognitive level and experiences. Any selected material should be regarded as how it is exploited and what pedagogic purposes it is meant to reach. From an evaluative point of view, teaching materials should be basically directed to meet our learners' needs and interests. Many types of materials were used, but in fact, they were neither attractive for students nor fruitful for their achievements. In fact, what is really needed is an objective and rational selection that takes into account the learners' communicative needs and their motivation.

This paper is mainly intended to shed light on authentic materials: their definition, the rationale behind their use, and the way they are selected and implemented; stating, of course, the advantages and the drawbacks of using such materials in the EFL classroom.

2-Kinds of Teaching Materials

Basically, there are two types of materials that are exploited in the classroom. Some writers such as

Widdowson(1990) and Harmer (2001) use the terms authentic and non authentic to distinguish between the two. But the point is not in the language materials themselves but rather on their outcomes and their effectiveness which can be measured only by the learners' observable and measurable performances. As a matter of fact, teachers are required to undertake the so essential task of identifying their learners' needs. It is only through objective needs analyses revealed through means such as questionnaires, tests and mainly close class contact that the teacher can really diagnose his students' weaknesses and strengths. He can also evaluate their attitudes towards the target language and the material exploited

It is equally important to know that learners take in and process information in different ways and through different sensory channels. Therefore, teachers should vary both the materials and the activities.

In any case, it is through needs analysis that the teacher defines clearly his/her objectives and this would certainly enable him/her to select and grade his/her materials.

2-1- Non Authentic Materials

Non authentic materials are materials that are prepared revised or adapted by native language specialists to serve pedagogical purposes. Generally speaking, these kinds of materials are carefully planned to meet some specific or general pedagogical purposes. They can be presented in different forms including audio and video cassettes, prose, recordings of conversations. In fact, they try to present real use of the target language in a simulated manner.

The common feature of such materials is the deliberate choice of language, situations and people to comply with communicative, structural or behavioural needs. So, the aspects of language presented in this kind of material are carefully selected and adapted to the learners. Features such as grammar, lexis, rhythm, intonation, speech delivery are simplified. As a result, many learners find it difficult to cope with real life situations where they are normally expected to both understand and speak the target language. What happened to many foreign learners of English including myself at first is the incapacity to fully understand native speakers in ordinary everyday situations.

Nevertheless, the value of non-authentic materials should not be completely discarded. As far as the foreign language teaching is concerned, non authentic materials are very useful in early stages as a preliminary preparation for the use of genuine authentic materials. This is due to the fact that we cannot let our learners go through any authentic material before they are sufficiently equipped to do so. These types of materials generally exhibit the following characteristics:

- Simulation: They present simulated situations and reactions resembling successfully at times real situations.
- Suitability: Carefully designed so as to be in accordance with the learners' level, age and motivation.
- Easiness: Language features such as structures, lexis, rhythm,

intonation and speed of delivery
are simplified.
- Limitation: limited in terms of content,
language and length.
- Appropriateness: Appropriate to the teaching
situation

2-2- Authentic Materials

The term "Authentic Material" has been widely used by
many theorists in ELT literature, but we think it is necessary to
refer to the definitions recorded in some dictionaries. The Oxford
advanced learner's dictionary by AS. Hornby (1981) refers to the
term authentic as genuine, known to be true e.g. authentic news,
or an authentic signature. The same definition is given by the
Webster's Dictionary (1990). Longman Dictionary of Applied
Linguistics suggests the following definition: 'The degree to
which language teaching materials have the quality of natural
speech and writing' (Richard et al1985:22)

Widdowson (1990) differentiates between the terms
authentic and genuine materials. Authentic materials are
designed for native speakers of English and used in the
classroom in the same way they were designed for. For
instance, a TV news report a movie, a newspaper, a magazine
article, pictures, and so on used as a basis for discussion.
Genuine are any kind of material exploited but not in the
way (purpose) it was initially meant for. For instance, a
news article may be cut and jumbled and students have to
reorder it.

For Harmer (1983:146) authentic texts -either written or
spoken- are those which are designed for native speakers:
they are real texts designed not for language students, but
for the speakers of the language in question Not far from

that, Gardner and Miller (1999:101) explained that :
'authentic materials mean any text (printed or digital) or
tape which was produced for a purpose other than teaching
the target language'.

   Another definition suggested by Peacock (1997) states
that authentic materials are materials that have been
produced to fulfil some social purpose in the language
community.Nunan (1989: 54) views authentic materials as
samples of spoken and written language that have not been
specifically produced for the purpose of language teaching.
In the same line of thought, Widdowson (1979:80) sees
authentic materials as language samples not constructed for
the purpose of language learning

   From what has been mentioned previously in section 2 ,
we can say that authentic language material is real or natural
speech used by native speakers in real contexts of
communication. Forman cited in Underwood (1989:58)
gave a clear definition of authentic materials when she said
that : 'Any text is 'authentic' if it was produced in response
to real life communicative needs rather than an imitation of
real life communicative needs. The term can be applied to
any sort of text, written or spoken '

   Thus, these kinds of materials represent real situations
with no pedagogical purposes but can be used for such
purposes. Therefore, we agree with Harmer (1991) cited in
Matsuta(n.d,para 1) when he says : 'Authentic texts are
materials which are designed for native speakers, they are
real text, designed not for language students, but for the
speaker of the language'. All those authors agree on a
common idea:'exposure'.In other words, the benefit learners

get from being exposed to the language in authentic materials.

2-3- A Comparison between Authentic and Non Authentic Materials

This is a comparison made by some teachers between a recording of natural speech among native speakers and a recording made for English language learners. These are the differences recorded:

AUTHENTIC LANGUAGE	NON-　　　　　　　　　AUTHENTIC LANGUAGE
- Variation in the speed of delivery often fast	- Slow pace with little variation
- Natural intonation	- Exaggerated intonation pattern
- Natural Features of connected speeches: elision	-Carefully　　　　　articulated pronunciation
- Variety of accents	- Received Pronunciation
- Any grammatical structures natural to the topic	- Regularly repeated structures
- Colloquial language	- More formal language
- Incomplete utterances	- Complete utterances
- Restructuring in longer more complex sentences	- Grammatically correct sentences
- Speakers interrupt or speak at the same time	- Speakers take careful turns
- Speakers use ellipsis (i.e. miss out parts of sentences)	- Ellipsis infrequent
Background noise present	- Background noise absent

A comparison between authentic and non authentic language.

(In Hedge. 2000: 240)

As can be seen in the above table many features distinguish authentic from non- authentic material.As far language is concerned,authentric materials provide a close contact with the target language since they display all the natural features of the language with all its variations in pronunciation,intonation,incomplete structures that are used to express meaning.Nunan(1997) believes that exposing learner to authentic material is indispansable because of the rich language input they provide.Exposing learners to such language features will certainly enable learners to cope with genuine interaction either inside or outside the classroom.

3- Sources of Authentic Materials

In a world globalized to an extent that would have been unthinkable only two decades ago, the source of authentic materials are abundant. The most common exploited sources are: newspapers, TV programmes, magazines, the internet, movies, songs, brochures, comics and literature (novels, poems, short stories and so on).

Now, let us see in some details some sources of authentic materials and their impact on the teaching learning process.

3-1- The Media

As a tool for language teaching media have always been used to facilitate the task of language learning. Media have been exploited in different ways depending on the methodology selected. But whatever the approach is, it is universally agreed that media can do a lot to enhance the daily practice of language teaching. From printed to

broadcast ones, media have always assisted teachers in their jobs, by bringing the outside world into the classroom and thus making learning more meaningful and challenging. Among the kinds of media that can be exploited are articles from newspaper and magazines, adverts, brochures, radio and television programmes collected in vivo with all the background noises

3-2- Literature

It must be made clear that while exploiting any literary text the focus should be on teaching the language not literature. In other words, any literary text should be handled as any other kind of text and should primarily aim at meaning and not form.

3-3- Computer Software

Software in general can be used in a way to enable students not only to interact with personal computers but with each other as well. Many games involve a great amount of reading and listening. They also involve a wide range of speakers from different accents of different ages. However, the use of such tools is very expensive and requires special computer literacy from both teachers and learners.

3-4- The Internet

In the World Wide Web, teachers have at their disposal a variety of materials that can be of great benefit to their students. Endless lists of materials such as texts, adverts, magazines, live radio and TV programmes, video clips. Websites contain sections where students can chat with native speakers. It is worth mentioning here, that it is useless to ask students to go to the web and just listen or read without a clear aim. There must be a task behind any activity of any kind. For example, the teacher can search for sites that focus on a

specific topic, make questions, and post them online. These online tasks can be performed by the learners themselves. In spite of the advantages it offers, the Internet cannot replace the hands-on three dimensional quality of real material brought by the teacher.

3-5- Recorded Materials

Over the last decades, recorded materials have received an immense interest to form the basis for listening and speaking activities. In addition to the already existing cassettes and tapes it is possible to use radio and TV programmes which can be recorded "off air". The VCR (the video cassette recorder) is becoming part of the standard equipment in many universities. It is a direct aid to many areas of language teaching, listening speaking and even reading and writing can be introduced through the VCR.

There are many advantages in using video recorded materials. The main ones are that:

1- Speakers can be seen, and so the listeners have all the non-verbal clues to decipher the message. They see speakers' facial expressions, their gestures and body movements.

2- The VCR helps students see the physical context in which speech is taking place

3- A variety of listening experiences can be brought to the students. Learners might listen or watch speeches, TV programmes, and news reports with different accents at different speeds.

4- They provide students with the opportunity to hear native speakers especially when the teacher's mother tongue is not English.

5- They are easy to operate and recording can be replayed over and over again.

4- Advantages of Using Authentic Materials

In order to go beyond the limited classroom environment and to escape from traditional language classroom teachers make use of many aids. But soon their limitations are felt and teachers realize the necessity to expose their learners to true and real language. An "immersion" In real language would certainly motivate learners towards "thinking English". They will soon acquire some basic notions and functions necessary to fulfil their communicative needs in the target language. Feedback from students being exposed to authentic material indicated they felt gratified being treated as mature, intellectual individuals, since such types of materials were made for native speakers.

So, for an effective and practical use, it is important to use real   language and this for many reasons as stated in Underwood (1989:100)

> Authentic material allows the students to hear as much more real act of communication with all the interactional features which are not normally found in scripted materials. It gives them a true representation of real spontaneous speech with its hesitations, false starts and mistakes, which will make them more able to cope with 'Real Life' speech when they meet it outside the learning situation .

Our aim then, is to direct our learners towards

"Thinking English". This cannot be attained through English textbooks which are authored by educators rather than professional writers. Consequently the authors and their readers are not on the equal footing. Moreover, many textbooks create a climate for socially isolated learning and learners need more materials that help them become thoughtful participants in a socially rich environment for learning the target language. However, in a traditional classroom the main supporting material is primarily the textbook, written from the perspective of talking to a 'foreign' (namely, 'outsider') audience can hardly avoid contrivance. This has been explained by Shrum and Glisan (1994:28): 'Unfortunately, many language textbooks contain poorly, motivated and illogically sequenced texts and dialogues that do not reflect real –world language or situations, although they usually contain multiple examples of the grammar being presented'

This simply means that we should not only teach the target languagr but how its speakers think, react and behave in different situations. Accordingly, teachers are expected to intensify the use of authentic materials to help learners build their communicative strategies for their information, negotiation, discourse, interpretations, turn taking etc…

Another important aspect of authentic material is their significant impact on learners' motivation; with motivation defined here as the willingness to persevere in a learning task (A.Papalia, 1986). Indeed, as both traditional and more current methods fail to involve the learner in the learning process, authentic materials are believed to enliven the classroom, being a powerful motivating factor, by providing motivation through enjoyment (Karpova, 1999). It seems

that authentic materials are the perfect means that can create opportunities for learners' participation. the use of authentic sources leads to greater interest and variety in the material that learners deal with in the classroom. As a matter of fact, it increases their motivation and contributes in lowering their affective filter and soliciting their active participation in activities. Furthermore, successful comprehension of authentic texts can be confidence building and highly motivating , and gradually they pave the way to the learners' autonomy just like that described by Shrum and Glisan(1994):'Students process information in meaningful ways, take responsibility for their own learning, and become independent learners'

Another advantage is that listeners are exposed to how people speak, how they display hesitations, pauses, false starts, topic shifting, incomplete structures and the like. On such impact of the use of authentic materials Nunan (1997:36) argues that learners:"Should be fed as rich a diet of authentic data as possible, because ultimately if they only ever encounter specially written dialogues and listening texts, the language learning exchange will be made more difficult"

It is now clear that the characteristics of authentic materials are totally the converse of the non-authentic ones. True, genuine speech displays natural rhythm, i.e. the way people speak in real-life settings.

However, the use of artificial already prepared and overly simplified material engenders perverse effects on the learners' communicative competence. Students exposed to such kind of materials may be upset or completely lost when faced with the ordinary situations where only the genuine

language is used.

In addition to this, and as mentioned in Little et al 1989, the introduction of authentic materials serves three important functions, enhancing motivation, promoting language acquisition and contributing to language immersion. Moreover, authentic materials reflect the culture and sociolinguistic background of the target language. A Knowledge of such cultural aspects gives the learner an awareness in his communication acts. Communicative competence is not limited to the mastery of grammar rules together with lexicon it is knowing when and how to speak i.e. appropriateness. A sentence might be grammatically correct and acceptable but inappropriate to the context.

To sum up, we can say that authentic materials are valuable sources of instruction and information for the learners by keeping our students' knowledge updated. At any rate, the field of materials and materials development remains a challenging one because of the students' ever changing needs.

5- Disadvantages of Using Authentic Materials

Over the years however, teachers and writers have come to realize that authentic materials have their drawbacks. The main criticism made to these materials is that they are sometimes too difficult for learners of a foreign language whose ears have been accustomed to an oversimplified and enunciated language. These difficulties lie in the speed of speech delivery, varying accents and background noise (cf table section 1-3) On the other hand, a mismatch between the material being presented and the learners' learning styles would result in a complete loss of interest and motivation. This is mainly due to the fact that

authentic materials contain less guidance, an infinite variety of new terminology and structures Moreover, learners whose level of proficiency is low or who favour more traditional methodologies may find authentic materials difficult, and irrelevant for their needs and motivations.

Another important disadvantage is that some authentic materials reflect certain cultural aspects which constitute taboos in the learners' culture. This too culturally biased situation may lead to a feeling of hatred or repulsion towards the target language It is also true that some teachers are reluctant to exploit authentic materials The main reason they give for not using them is that such materials are too difficult to be graded and adapted to the learners' levels or needs. In spite of this, teachers can achieve a certain grading by using criteria such as topic, number of speakers, accent, etc…

Nonetheless, teachers are still faced with the twofold task of finding the materials and selecting the ones that suit their learners best. On such difficulties we agree with Underwood (1997:100) as he posits that: "They may find the text with suitable language but spoken in a way which is difficult to follow, or they may have tapes on which the delivery is good, but the language is far too difficult".

To this, must be added that the use of authentic materials is time consuming because they require careful selection and special preparation to suit every teaching situation and objectives.

To sum up, we can say that it is essential that any kind of teaching materials should satisfy the learners' needs. It is equally important that these materials should serve a stimulus for learning the target language. As a matter of

fact, practioners can achieve certain grading by using specific criteria suitable to their teaching situations. Thus, even if authentic materials are time consuming and need special preparation that should include enjoyable and varied activities they can yield good results

6- Selecting and Implementing Authentic Materials

The situation we actually have is that practitioners are faced with rich resources of materials that need to be selected, adapted and possibly graded to match the learners' level, needs, age, culture and even their learning styles. Several questions should be asked before selecting the material. Does the material allow adjustment according to the need of different students? Does it encourage students' active involvement in the learning? Does it adequately allow the practice of the targeted skills? Does it permit the device of a wide range of activities? Does it really contribute to students' progress in the target language?

Indeed, many elements interfere in the choice and implementation of the material to fit the teaching situation and meet learners' needs and interests. The crucial question then, is how to adapt any material to our teaching situation.

Therefore, for the materials to be effective, some criteria have to be taken into account.

6-1- Criteria for Selecting Authentic Materials

1- Authenticity: The selected material should serve communicative
goals.

2- Accessibility: The material should be Easy for the learner to understand and suitable   for the teacher.

3- Appropriateness: It should suit the learner's age, level needs and interests.

4- Applicability: It should suit the teaching context and makes the objectives attainable

5- Adaptability: It   should be adapted to the learners' level, needs and interests.

6-2- The Role of The Teacher:

In section 5, we said teachers show reluctance to use authentic materials. This is mainly due to the fact that authentic materials require careful selection and special preparation to be used effectively in the classroom.

We all know that authentic materials are delivered in their natural and unsimplified state. It is up to the teacher to tame them and make them at the students' reach. As an input such kinds of materials need to be proceeded and refined. To do so, Spelleri.(2002) thinks that the teacher should perform the following roles:

-A Filter: He/she presents the language in a controlled manner and sufficient quantities to suit learners' level, needs and interests.

-A Culture Guide: His/her role here is to introduce and to clarify any kind of cultural information found in every authentic materials..

-An Objective Chairman : Sometimes authentic items may lead to clashes in some discussions on certain topics; the teacher must be a fair and sympathetic listener.

6-3- Hints for Selecting Authentic Texts

1. **Interest:**Is the clip or the text sufficiently interesting to the arners?
2. **Presentation:** Does it attract my learner's attention?
3. **Background knowledge:**

- Do the learners have some experience with the topic?

- What are the learners' own schemata for this text?

- What type of pre-activities will be needed?

4. **Language:**

- Is the degree of difficulty at, below, or slightly above the   learners' level?

- What is the percentage of known and unknown items?

5**. Text organization:**

 Is the text organized in a clear way?

6-4-   Special Considerations for Audio and Video Materials

1. How long is the clip or segment?

2. How is the sound quality? The rate of delivery? The register?

3. How many speakers are involved?

4 .Do the visuals support the audio? Do they give everything away?

5. Is this a timeless clip, with a universal topic?

6-5- Basic Principles of Receptive Skill Lesson Development

1.We do not necessarily simplify the text, we simplify the tasks.

2.We should always define the task before reading/listening/viewing, so that   students can look/listen for and find vs. look at/listen to and get lost.

3.We should bear in mind that most tasks require a separate reading/listening, since our purpose for reading/listening determines how we read/listen.

4. We should design a hierarchy of tasks: pre-activities - global activities - specific information activities - linguistic activities - post activities.

Conclusion

Using authentic language resources has become more and more widespread over the last decades. As a matter of fact, many countries have emphasized the use of ample authentic materials. The increase in use of these materials in the FL classrooms can be explained by their effectiveness in providing valuable sources of real language input that enables learners to interact with the real language and its content rather than its form. Considering this, it may not be wrong to say that authentic materials when appropriately selected and implemented can meet learners' needs and improve their communicative competence in the target language, which is a common problem among non native speakers.

Moreover, using authentic materials facilitates the shift from the classroom language learning to real language use outside the classroom. Learners are exposed to natural and real language with all its phonological paralinguistic and cultural features which our learners are likely to encounter in real life.

Nonetheless, for authentic material to be efficient and fulfil their task a careful selection of materials, activities and procedures is required. So, the selection of such materials should be based on some specific criteria such as linguistic complexity, amount of information, length, speed of delivery, varieties of English accents and the objectives to be achieved. We also know that different authentic materials lend themselves to different types of tasks; therefore,

practioners should be cautious in designing tasks and activities that will eventually develop learners' communicative competence.

<u>References</u>

Dulay,H,Burt,M;,& Krashen,S (1982). <u>Language Two.</u>
Oxford   .   University Press.

Gardner,D& Miller,l.(1999) <u>Establishing Self</u>
<u>Access</u>.Cambridge   .
University Press.

Harmer,J.(2001).<u>The Practice of English Language</u>
<u>Teaching</u>.
London.Longman.

Hedge,Tricia. (2000). <u>Teaching and Learning in the</u>
<u>Language Classroom.</u>
Oxford..

Hornby,A.S (1981). <u>Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary</u>
<u>of Current</u>
.   <u>English</u>.Oxford University Press.

Karpova.L.(1999). <u>Consider the following when selecting</u>
<u>Authentic</u>
.   <u>Materials</u>.TESOL Matters.April-May
1999,pp.18.

Little,D.et al (1989). <u>Learning Foreign Language from</u>
<u>Authentic</u>.
<u>Texts</u>:Theory and Practice.Dublin A
language
learning Resource .

Matsuta,k.(n.d) Applications for using authentic materials in the second

　　　　　　　language classroom.From Asia University Cele

　　　　　　　Department Web site:(HYPERLINK "http://www.asia

　　　　　　　u.ac.jp/english/cele/articles/Matsuta Authentic_Mat.htm")

Nunan,D. (1989). Designing Tasks for the Communication Classroom.

　　　　　　　Cambridge. Language teaching Library.

Nunan.D. (1997). Listen In. International Thompson Publishing.

Papalia,A .(1986). A Research report on Motivating the Language.

　　　　　　　Learner.NYSALFT.Language Association Bulletin

　　　　　　　38,pp23-24.

Peacock, M. (1997). The effect of Authentic Materials on the Motivation .   of EFL learners .ELT Journal Vol51,N°2,pp144-156.

Richards,J.P. et al (1985). Longman Dictionary of Applied.
　　　　　　　Linguistics.Harlow:Essex,Longman.

Shrum,J.& Glisan,E.(1994). Teaher's Handbook:Contextualized language
                  Instruction. America: Heinle & Heinle.

Spelleri,M.(2002).From Lesson to life.Authentic Materials Bridge the
                  gap.ESL Magazine.April, 2002.

Underwood,M.(1989). Teaching Listening. London.Longman.

Widdowson,H.G.(1990)   Aspects of language Teaching .Oxford.
                  University Press.