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Authentic Texts as Pedagogic Tools in English Language Classroom

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Abstract: The paper argues the use of authentic texts/ materials in language teaching and learning keeping in view of the learners who are from rural background and socially disadvantaged sections of the society. It also discusses the benefits of exploiting these materials in ESL classroom in general and the advantages of using newspapers in particular.

Keywords: Authentic Texts, Newspapers, Exposure, English as Second Language.

Introduction

The 'relentless' push toward communicative approaches to language teaching since the mid 1970s has brought along with it a need to develop students' skills for the real world. Teachers, therefore, must simulate real-world situations in their English classroom. One way of doing is to incorporate the use of authentic materials like newspapers in language teaching/learning to make teaching/learning process to be more effective and interesting. Authentic materials are texts which are not produced for language teaching purposes (Nunan, 1989). Examples of such materials include newspapers, magazines, TV programs, radio talks, menus, brochures, comics, novels, short stories, weather forecasts, and recipes.

Researchers argue that lack of exposure to English in authentic situations is one of the problems that the learners face in learning a language. This can be some how achieved when the authentic materials are used in English lessons. Because, these materials benefit students by exposing them to the language used in every situations (Martinez, 2002; Morrison, 1989). In addition, they have a positive effect on increasing students' motivation and make learning more enjoyable (Peacock 1997). On the other hand, some researchers argue that authentic materials often contain difficult language, unnecessary vocabulary, grammar, and too many structures, so the lower level students might have a hard time decoding the texts. Students might be less motivated (Martinez, 2002; Peacock, 1997; Kilickaya, 2004).

One of the main ideas of using authentic materials in the classroom is to *expose* the learner to as much real language as possible. Even if the classroom is not a *real-life* situation, authentic materials do have a very important place within it. It has been argued that by taking a text out of its original context, it loses its authenticity:

“As soon as texts, whatever their original purpose, are brought into classrooms for pedagogic purposes they have, arguably, lost authenticity.” (Wallace 1992:79)

Advantages of Using Authentic materials in English Classroom

- Authentic materials provide exposure to real language and related more closely to students’ needs. Students are exposed to real world intercultural discourse (Kilickaya, 2004; Martinez, 2002; Morrison, 1989; Peacock, 1997).
- Incidental or improper English often is not included in textbooks and the same piece of material can be used in a different way if the task is different (Dumitrescu, 2000; Martinez, 2002).
- In the English language, changes can be reflected in the materials so that students and instructors both understand the changes (Martinez, 2002).
- Authentic materials can be used for practicing mini-skills, such as scanning, or micro-skills of listening, including listening to news reports, and identifying the names of people or countries (Martinez, 2002; Peacock, 1997).
- Authentic materials include a wide variety of text types and language styles not easily found in traditional teaching materials (Martinez, 2002; Peacock, 1997, Grundy 1993, Sanderson 1999).
- Authentic materials contain topics of interest to students and encourage reading for pleasure, and they are practical and real because they provide valid linguistic data (Dumitrescu, 2000; Martinez, 2002; Peacock, 1997).
- Authentic materials have an intrinsic educational value and keep students informed about what is happening in the world (Martinez, 2002; Peacock, 1997; Sanderson, 1999).

- Authentic materials provide an opportunity to transmit information and foster communication and understanding across culture (Gebhard, 1996).
- Authentic materials include resources and activities that instructors used in class and contextualize language learning (Kilickaya, 2004; Spelleri, 2002).
- Authentic materials are realistic, ready-to-use, relevant, and trigger the process of natural language acquisition for students.
- Authentic materials provide authentic cultural information and help facilitate cultural adaptation, language comprehension, and language use (Sanderson 1999, Grundy 1993, Duquette, et al, 1987).
- Authentic materials have a positive effect on increasing students' motivation and make learning more enjoyable (Little and Singleton 1991, Peacock 1997).
- Authentic materials provide valuable support (creative approach to teaching) and can be used for a specially designed curriculum. They are a bridge between the classroom and the real world (Peacock, 1997).

It is believed and observed that the use of authentic materials in English classrooms certainly beneficial and helpful in order to use language in real-life situations and enhance their language abilities. Moreover, they can be applied to multiple tasks i.e they are flexible, easily adapted to learning objectives, and are not bound by textbook format limitations. Using these texts in teaching/learning can be effective and efficient if they are exploited carefully and systematical so as to meet the objectives of the course.

Using Newspapers in English Classroom

Teachers' often complain about the lack of student motivation and interest in the materials used to teach them English. They also decry the dreadful lack of general knowledge of current events shown by the average secondary or university student. Lethargy can be dispelled to a very great extent if the teacher exploits the newspaper to supplement whatever aspect of the English language he/she is teaching.

There are number of ways in which newspaper can facilitate and enliven language learning. The newspaper is a very popular form of authentic material. Its low cost and wide availability make it the most accessible medium of print that is so integral to modern life. While Cheyney (1971) points out that newspaper is used for teaching reading skills and content is also suitable for teaching purposes. Furthermore, Giudice (1980) agrees with Cheyney saying that the way how a newspaper report can be used for reading comprehension, filling-in a chart, drawing a diagram and writing a letter and so on. As Pearse (1980) sees students should be guided to reading newspaper by drawing their attention to some of the most common/favourite vocabulary and clichés, use of passive voice, structures of headlines and paragraph headings, advertisements to workout various problems.

Newspapers and Language Skills

Ryall (2005) suggests that newspapers are used as tools for development of accuracy in students' language rather than using them in more traditional approach. Bose's (1988) survey on teachers views on newspapers tells that all the teachers participated in a one day work shop agreed that the newspapers clippings can be used for developing all four skills(LSRW) and study skills such as reference skills, note- making and note-taking skills. In addition, Salama (1974) points out that overall reading ability will be improved if students are guided to develop the habit reading newspapers everyday. It helps students to familiarize the target language (English) and acquire it(Grundy 1993; Williams 1973). Use of newspapers can make a major contribution to the growth of ability and interest in reading. Students who can read and use them in their language classrooms will have a better comprehension and vocabulary than those who do not.

Newspapers can be used to develop language skills. Learners' reading and writing skills can be developed by number of ways such as 'learning about something', 'getting information for reading or main ideas', 'drawing materials for argument', and 'writing and reviewing reports based on their knowledge of the subject'.

Newspapers and Cultural Information

Language and culture are inextricably linked, and the newspapers of a given target community reflect its culture through the language they contain (Paul Sanderson 1999:2; Peter Grundy 1993:9). Familiarity with newspapers will also make it easier to understand radio and television programmes in other words newspapers offer a shortcut to acculturation. They are probably the best single source of information about the cotemporary culture of a country and their coverage from politics to personal problems, international to domestic minutiae all give them enormous potential for exploitation in the language classroom (Mishan 2005:154).

Newspapers and Currency

Currency [here used as a key word that includes ‘up-to-date-ness’ and topicality] is one of the greatest advantages of using newspapers in language classroom. Newspapers are ‘the freshest foods in the language classroom and at the same time those with the shortest shelf -life’ (Grundy 1993:8). If we open a paper, there can be no uninspiring as ‘yesterday’s news. They cover latest issues that take place in the learners’ own region and environment. Newspapers as other cultural products have a parallel existence on the Web. Online newspapers also contain breaking news sections, which mean that they have overcome the principle shortcoming of the printed newspaper. (Mishan 2005:156). Students are more comfortable when they carry the copy of the printed version of the newspaper. If students follow them regularly, they will find the relevant information about their local issues and relate their schema to the news item found in those papers. As a result they not only improve their language skills but develop their general knowledge of the surrounding world. (Mishan 2005; Tajino, A and Clive Pemberton 2003; Bose 1988; Salama 1974). Furthermore Lindsay and Duncan Foord (no year) point out those newspapers are much more current than course books and make an excellent spring board for lessons that contain a variety of language texts.

Newspapers and Variety

Newspapers contain a wide variety of text types which are not easily found in conversational language learning materials (e.g. general course books) and there must be a need for students to be familiar with such language forms. Newspaper provides a natural source of many of the varieties of written English that become increasingly useful and valuable

for language students as they progress (Sanderson 1999; Tajino A and Clive Pemberton 2003; Ray Sue 2004). They are often teachers' and students' source of learning in engaging with the new text available outside the curriculum.

Newspapers and Affect

One of the benefits of using authentic texts like newspapers for language learners is that they increase their understanding and affect their involvement. While engaging with these texts learners feel as if they deal with real people and in real situations (Mishan 2005) and this personal involvement arouses the natural curiosity and interest (Sanderson 1999; Baddock 1983). Another important factor that authentic text affects is motivation especially for the interactively motivated learner newspapers can offer a short-cut to acculturation' (Grundy 1993:9). This implies that familiarization and empathy with the target culture.

Newspapers and Communication

Newspapers by nature have a communicative function. They communicate news and information of various kinds. Now-a-days newspapers come to us with pedagogic reinforcement, since a lot of news reported by them is reported in advance in the electronic media as well as in various local newspapers in various languages. Therefore, the texts of important news items may be available in different translations, dialects etc., which can provide the language learner a large amount of reinforcement and chances for stylistic and other linguistic studies as well.

Conclusion

It is evident that the uses of authentic text like newspapers helps the learner develops their communication skills and stimulate their interest in engaging them with the classroom activities through which they develop confidence and enjoy leaning. Further, learners are more comfortable when the input is provided from their own culture and customs in order to relate the content/context to their own lives. As Tomlinson (2008) argues that the most of the course book materials do not provide meaningful input from the real world. As a result, majority of the learners do not have minimum knowledge of English and are not able to communicate in it in their day-to-day communication. Therefore, it is imperative that the English classrooms

in India especially in rural India should have a more number of authentic texts in their curriculum and incorporate real life situations through which learners will be exposed to real language used outside the classrooms and will become better language learners.

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