AUTHENTIC LANGUAGE INPUT FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING IN EFL/ESL CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT
Various teaching materials are considered to be essential components in language learning/learning at all levels. In the same line, various textbooks accompanied with audiovisual materials which have been prepared for language learning serve as the basis for much of the language input learners receive and the language practice that occurs in the classroom. However, various sources of audiovisual programs from different technologies also have the potential to provide the necessary language input for language learning in-and-outside the classroom setting. Various audiovisual programs are considered as sources of authentic language input if they contain genuine instances of language use as opposed to exemplars devised specifically for language teaching purposes. In view of this, the present paper was set to shed more light on the concept of authenticity of language input by considering the potential sources of authentic language input currently available in English as a foreign language (EFL) context and English as a second language (ESL) context. Moreover, it underscores the benefits of utilizing authentic language input in language learning classrooms.

KEY WORDS: Authentic language input, Sources of authentic language input, Audiovisual programs

SOURCES OF LANGUAGE INPUT IN EFL/ESL CONTEXTS
Various sources of language input particularly authentic language input are available in EFL and ESL contexts. However, before the discussion on the sources of language input is started, the concepts of EFL and ESL contexts need to be considered.

An EFL context refers to an environment where English language is not the primary or secondary language spoken. According to Freed (1995), English is considered as a foreign language rather than a second language. Moreover, English language has no major role in society and is learnt in the classroom setting (Ellis, 2008). In contrast, an ESL context is an
environment where English language is spoken in society as the official language or the medium of communication among people from different countries. In fact, English language plays an institutional and social role in the community in ESL context (Ellis, 2008).

Considering the sources of language input in EFL/ESL contexts, it should be mentioned that in ESL contexts, people can have interaction with other people from different countries using the English language. English is then considered as a source of language input which can facilitate and pave the way for SLA (Gass, 1997). The social interaction in ESL contexts is one of the authentic sources of language input which can help language learners acquire the language in informal setting. In contrast, in an EFL context social interaction as a source of language input in an informal language learning setting is lacking. English is not used as a medium of communication or for other purposes in society in the EFL contexts. As a matter of fact, the use of English language is mainly limited to formal setting at universities, language institutes or language classrooms. However, various audiovisual technologies have proved effective in providing the language learners with authentic language input to learn the language in-and-outside the classroom.

AUTHENTIC LANGUAGE INPUT

The employment of authentic language input through authentic materials in foreign/second language learning has a long history. Henry Sweet (1899, cited in Gilmore, 2007) was one of the pioneers who utilized authentic texts in his books because he was aware of their potential advantages over contrived materials.

In order to determine the definition of authentic language input as precisely as possible, the term authenticity should be considered first. In this regard, there are a variety of definitions of this concept which relate to the foreign/second language (Gilmore, 2007; Taylor, 1994; Nunan, 1999; just to name a few). These varieties of definitions originate from the debate as to whether authentic materials in the foreign/second language are in fact authentic or not.

Considering to the concept of authentic language input, Gilmore (2007) defined authentic language input as the language carrying a real message which is created by a real speaker or writer for a real audience. Taylor’s (1994) also considered authentic language input as any material in English which has not been specifically produced for the purpose of language teaching. In fact, authentic language materials are spoken or written language materials that have been produced in the course of real communication and not specifically produced for the very purpose of language teaching (Nunan, 1999).

According to Nunan (1999), authentic language input can be drawn from various sources of audio-visual mass media technologies including TV. Linguistically, authentic language input refers to the use of authentic materials from the target culture which is presented in the target language such as different programs, for example, news, movies, songs, soap opera, and comedy as audio-visual mass media materials provided by various technologies. The
important point to be considered is that these materials are not initially made for language teaching purposes.

**SOURCES OF AUTHENTIC LANGUAGE INPUT**

There are varieties of authentic teaching sources and materials available to EFL/ESL teachers to employ for different needs for various teaching situations. While social interaction as a source of authentic language input is not available in EFL context, many other sources of authentic language input are available in both EFL and ESL contexts through various audiovisual technologies. The sources of authentic language input which are available in both EFL and ESL contexts can originally be extracted from different desktop technologies such as computers and non-desktop technologies such as TV. Accordingly, various audiovisual mass media materials can include different print materials followed by related video and audio, audiotapecs and CDs with accompanying textbooks, and videotapecs with textbooks.

Considering the integration of various audiovisual programs that provide authentic language input into language learning, many studies have been conducted (Martinez, 2002; Gilmore, 2007; Nunan, 1999; Gebhard, 1996; Brinton, 1991; Miché, 2002; Schön et al., 2008; among others). These studies all underscore the point that audiovisual materials are pedagogically valuable to be utilized for language teaching. According to Gebhard (1996), there are unlimited sources for authentic language materials from TV programs such as TV that language teachers and learners can utilize for the very purpose of language learning.

**BENEFITS OF UTILIZING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS**

There is an agreement among foreign/second language instructors that authentic language input can be utilized as an essential part of second language learning. According to many scholars (Martinez, 2002; Gilmore, 2007; Nunan, 1999; Gebhard, 1996; Brinton, 1991; just to name a few), there are many advantages associated to authentic language materials which make these materials pedagogically valuable to expose language learners to the target language. In this regard, Martinez (2002) provided a number of sound advantages for using authentic language materials for language teaching. An important advantage is that authentic language materials provide a wide range of language change of the target language. For example, by listening to songs and stories in the target language, language learner will be able to hear dialectal differences of various countries that speak the target language (Martinez, 2002). This can be used for a class discussion.

According to Brinton (1991), authentic materials and media can strengthen the direct relationship between the language classroom and the outside world for students. Gebhard (1996) considered authentic materials as a way to contextualize language learning. When lessons are focused on comprehending, language learners tend to concentrate more on content and meaning rather than the language itself. This offers the language learners a valuable source of authentic language input, so that they are not exposed only to the language presented by the text and the teacher.
In the same line, Brosnan et al. (1984) put forth that by simplifying the language or changing it for teaching purposes, the task may become more difficult. According to Brosnan et al. (1984), authentic language offers language learners the opportunity to deal with a small amount language input which contains complete and meaningful messages. Moreover, authentic language materials help language learners to notice the immediate relevance of what they do in the classroom to what they need to do in the real world communication. It is essential for language learners to listen to and read different kinds of authentic language material because it helps motivate the language learners by bringing the content and the subject matter to life for them, and enable them make the important connections between the classroom world and the real world outside the classroom setting.

Another advantage of using authentic materials is the comfortable environment that these materials create for young children. Authentic language materials are more appealing to the language learners than non-authentic language materials because of their objective to communicate a message rather than emphasize particular aspects of the target language (Gilmore, 2007). Another advantage of using authentic language material is the focus on every feature of the language (Gilmore, 2007). In contrast, the artificial language materials tend to cause continual repetition of certain grammatical constructions, certain elements of the vocabulary, or certain combinations of words.

Regarding the use of authentic language materials, some researchers have focused on the use of songs as authentic language input and language learning (Miché, 2002 & Schön et al. 2007). According to Miché (2002), songs are multipurpose resources of authentic language material for different foreign language lessons. Both communication and entertainment are combined as songs provide communication skills entangled with hobby. In addition, pronunciation skills can be strengthened through listening to different songs. Pronunciation variations are provided through authentic language input from songs as well as various dialects of the target language (Miché, 2002). Accordingly, authentic language input from songs is a great way to make language learners aware of the dialectal variations from one target language speaking country to the next. Authentic language input from different songs can provide repetition in conjunction with rhythm which leads learners to remember not only the pronunciation, but also the vocabulary (Miché, 2002).

**DRAWBACKS OF USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS**

In relation to the drawbacks of utilizing authentic materials, Martinez (2002) underlined the problem associated with the use of authentic language materials in the classrooms with different language proficiency levels. According to Martinez (2002) authentic language materials which are used may be too culturally biased and the vocabulary may be irrelevant to the language learners’ needs. More importantly, low level language proficiency or beginner level language learners may have a hard time interpreting what they hear or read because of the mixed structures that are used. Accordingly, much of the difficulty language learners
experience is related to their lack of familiarity with authentic language input and the processing strategies required for comprehending it.

In short, the majority of researchers agree on the pedagogical value of authentic language materials and the integration of such materials in language learning.

WHAT TYPE OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS TO SELECT?
Access to a wide range of audiovisual mass media programs is getting very easy for all the people around the world with everlasting technological developments. In the same line, many researchers have highlighted the pedagogical values of various audiovisual mass media programs to be incorporated into language learning. Among various programs, films, cartoons, news, songs, and documentaries turn out to be effective teaching devices to develop the language learners’ language skills and stimulate their imagination simultaneously. Their capacity to arouse the learners’ motivation and their potential to engage the learners in a variety of fruitful activities related to aural perception in the target language can scarcely be denied.

One of the essential factors to be considered in utilizing various audiovisual mass media programs as sources of authentic language input is the choice of the programs that should be based on some criteria that can serve the purposes of the teacher. Accordingly, some important criteria for selecting the appropriate segments of various programs can be:

1. The students’ language proficiency should be considered.
2. Choose stories that are relevant to students’ lives.
3. Ask the students about their preferences regarding different types of audiovisual programs.
4. Choose stories that motivate the students.
5. Use various broadcasts that provide exposure to various accents and cultures.
6. Choose stories that are proficiency-level appropriate; political and science related stories are often too difficult for many students to understand.
7. Use stories that lend themselves to many learning activities and the integration of the four skills.

HELPFUL TEACHING TIPS
After outlining some of the criteria for selecting and preparing various audiovisual programs, the following several teaching tips that will help make teaching with various authentic materials easier and more enjoyable for both the teachers and the language learners should be taken into consideration:

1. Offer students a choice in the content of the materials you show in class. Take an inventory of their interest.
2. Prepare extension activities to fill the space between the first and last students’ finishing an activity.
Get feedback from the students. It is important for teachers to get feedback from students regarding their comfort level on the various four skills assignments, processes, and procedures used in conjunction with the stories.

Ask your students regularly about their feelings about activities in class. You could give them a formal feedback form to fill out or ask them informally to give you a thumb up or a thumb down.

All four skills activities should include opportunities for students to play an active role in their own learning. When preparing for a task, help students become aware of any relevant strategy, from their own language, that might help them to perform the task successfully.

CONCLUSION
Authentic materials refer to the use various materials including video and audio and other resources that are not specifically prepared for pedagogical purposes. Authentic materials may have positive effect on learner motivation because they are intrinsically more interesting and motivating than created materials.

There are various reasons why authenticity may be regarded as important. One is that it presents learners with language exposure similar to that enjoyed by native speakers, including all the characteristics of natural language which may be necessary for the learner properly to interpret texts. In addition, there is motivational attraction for insisting on authentic texts, created as a means of communicating content and not for some pedagogic purposes.

REFERENCES
