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Authenticity of Text and Context in Reading and Speaking:
A CLT Perspective

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Abstract:

A number of studies in recent years show the use of authentic material which is regarded as a useful means of teaching and learning of English for communication. The authentic materials help the students use the target language in the real world and in real situations. Communicative language teaching approach changes the view of teachers and the syllabus designers towards English as a subject to be learned to a very important tool of communication in the classroom and more so outside of it. This paper aims to discuss what can be termed as authentic material for the communicative purpose of the students vis-à-vis graduate level students, the role of English teachers. The paper discusses the pedagogical implications of using authentic contexts beyond the classroom to develop the speaking ability of the learners. It also aims to study the limitation of such material for the all-round development of English of the students.

Keywords: Authentic material, Communicative Purpose, English Teaching, Pedagogical Implication.

Introduction

Interest in and use of authentic material has been a focus of discussion and debate with the English language teachers. The advocacy for authentic material has been long. Many language teachersfavored the use of authentic material and discussed their benefits. They believed that authentic materials are 'natural texts' which do 'justice to every feature of the language'(cited in Gilmore, 2004). After the Communicative Language teaching approach, one important aspect was discussed that communicative competence in English language does not mean to have knowledge of the language but the need for contextualized communication. This view is taken seriously by teachers of Communicative Language Teaching which has been widely used for the undergraduate and graduate level students in India and other parts of the world. Roger (1988) defines it as 'appropriate' in terms of its objectives, goals, learner needs and interest and calls it 'natural' in terms of its real- life and meaningful communication. Harmer (1991) calls them as 'real texts', designed not for language teaching purpose. Many language teachers (Shrum and Glisan, 2000; Richards, 2001; Kilickaya, 2004, etc.) believe that

authenticity has proved its beneficial role in language teaching.Kilickaya said, ' ..for using authentic material simply means using examples of language produced by native speakers for some real purpose of their own rather than using language produced and designed solely for classroom'. For Indian speakers learning to communicate in English from the materials drawn from England or America will not be of much use as the learners might not have the information where the language is used. If they lack situational reference, the students of this foreign language will be demotivated and cannot use them in their context.They need to be exposed to the materials that they relate to, which they have information about and which is part of their reality. What is common in these definitions of authentic material is 'exposure to real language' to be used in real situations. The teacher has to draw materials which are up-to-date or relevant at the time of teaching. There are some more materials that can be explored which have a timeless quality about them like folk tales, stories from mythology or culture, etc. which will not alienate the students from learning a foreign language.

Guariento and Morel (2001) discussed how authentic material increases students' motivation for learning.Nunan (1989) and Bacon and Finneman (1990) also voiced similar claim that authentic materials are not produced for the purposes of language teaching and is used for non-pedagogical purpose. Other researches like Peacock (1997) and Richards (2001) have pointed out the advantages of using authentic materials. To sum up;

- It has a positive effecton learner motivation.
- Uses culturalinformation so that students can relate more.
- It exposes the studentsto real language in real situations.
- The text is relevant tolearners' needs.

In contrast to authentic materials, non-authentic materials are specially designed for language learning purposes. The language used gives emphasis on form and is 'artificial' which are more useful for teaching of grammatical rules, whereas authentic materials are useful for improving the communication elements of the language. It may not havea complete sentence, may have a false or an abrupt start, but is termed asauthentic language as it is produced for real life communication purposes.

There are many definitions of authentic material/textand authenticity of context. What we gather from the definitions, authenticity is not a feature exclusively for the texts, but it is the way teachers and students work with the texts. Authenticity does not only reside in materials, but to create or expose the students to authentic situations taking into consideration different factors such as learners' perception, teachers' interference, the context of teaching and the uses of the teaching materials.Examples of authentic materialsare T.V commercial, news items, weather forecast, airport/train announcement, interviews, debates, any other real situation dialogues, hotelrecipes, advertisements, newspaper, brochures, application forms, instruction manuals etc.

This paper will discuss the authentic materials to improve reading skills mainly with the text which has discourse qualities. It also discusses the selection of such material by the teachers. Ithighlights teacher's role in collecting and sorting the appropriate material, keeping the course goal in mind and also planning for the activities to reach the required objectives. The advantages of using authentic material have been discussed at length,

but not without the challenges and the limitations of such material without proper pedagogical support. The author has also discussed the authenticity of context which is relevant for learning drawn from personal experience to show how it works for improving students' communicative competence.

<u>Authentic materials for Reading</u>

One important aspect of authentic material is that it motivates the reader as the reader finds of easy to understand and thus encourages him/her to read further. There is a wide range of text types-from folk stories to professional or social dialogues which can be used in different ways to improve communication skills of the students. Berardo (2008) considers internet as the most useful source 'with large amount of varied materials being easily accessible'. One of the main reasons of using authentic material in the classroom is that the learner will use the similar language outside the classroom and how it is really used.

Reading is something that we do in our daily life either for survival or learning or for pleasure. The way we read depends on the purpose of our reading. When we want to find out any information, such as how to insert a mobile SIMcard or read a timetable for example, we read for survival. It depends on the day to day needs of the reader as the reader can respond to the situation. Reading for learning, in contrast, conceptually and linguistically always is goal-oriented and is much more a serious task. Reading for pleasure is something that does not have to be done.When the reader reads, the reader enters into an interaction with the text and also with the author. He/ She appliesthe experience and knowledge of theirsurrounding or world in processing which is known as schema theory (Bartlett 1932). Upon receivingnew information, the reader interprets the text on the basis of what is already known or what he/she can relate to, so that they can use their own existing knowledge to modify or add to the new information. Authentic material is the material which a reader can easily understand, relate to and which is part of his/her'schemata'. This material might not have perfectly formedsentence all the time, it might not have used proper grammatical structure, butnevertheless the students find it natural as theyencounter this in their real world.

<u>Selection of Authentic material.</u>

The sources for authentic material are many, varied and also increasing in number. The most common ones have been discussed in the previous page out of which the most practical ones are internet materials. They are always up-to-date and stimulate the reader with its audio-visual effect.It has the biggest advantage of havingunlimited access. Another important source of authentic material is theuse of myths, folk stories and local events.The source of these materials are abundantly available online.The teacher has to select and sort the materials carefully taking into consideration of the learning objectives. Nuttal gives three main criteria of selecting of such text. They are suitability, exploitability and readability of the text. The texts based on day-to-day activities or events, even cultural stories are always relevant to the students.Whilechoosing the material, it is important to note that the aim is to understand the meaning of the text and not to focus on the form of the language. Understanding these texts are easier as they are part of the student's schema. It is another debate whether the form of the language should be neglected or not in the process of learning to communicate. As teachers of language, we believe that form should not be sacrificed

to giveall supremacy to meaning.The form can also be practicedfrom the context by first making the students reflecton their own language errors. The pedagogies and practices to balance between form and meaning arenow being discussed and debated upon by several language teachers.

Suitability of the material must suit the existing proficiency level of the students. The text may put a challenge on the student's intelligence without making unreasonable demands linguistically.The teacher can weigh whether the material can be exploited and for what purpose which means by using that material, what learning can take place or else what communicative skill the learner can develop.The text can be made to look attractive and human with human images to get the reader's attention than to give only large chunks of words which might appear impersonal. The objective is to make the students wanting to read more. Putting an authentic picture or even animations, real-life dialogues, easily comprehensible passages and graphics, use of colours will make the reading materials visually appealing. An attractive looking reading material is more likely to appeal to the reader than a page full of meaningful words.

 As Krashen and Terrell (1983) state that we need to make the input comprehensible, but challenging, and added that the input should also be engaging, interesting and relevant.We, as teachers need to facilitate activities that promote a constant flow of comprehensible input and meaningful communication. The materials on arts, local custom, food, places, situations, events, tradition are relevant for local contexts apart from a variety of audio visual materials. Small translated works of literature from the native language to English can also a meaningful and relevant reading material. Usually, the students have the understanding of the context/ background through which these poems and short stories are written.To make it meaningful, the facilitator has to develop activities or tasks, without losing focus of the learning outcome. While planning for all this, consideration of the students' proficiency level is of importance. Readability, as we have already discussed, depends on how the material is presented to the reader-learner.

In the syllabus, small and contemporary pieces of literature can be added to create interest in the students in the form of a popular lyric, short story or biography, travel literature, coffee table literature or even some translation works from the native language to English, as discussed in the previous paragraph. The aim should be to understand the meaning or what is being expressed therein, not to focus on the form of the literacy pieces, nor the techniques or stylistics of the text. The point is not to burden the students with unnecessary linguistic or structuraldemands, but to enhance communicative competence of the students.

One of the main objectives of using   authentic materials in the classroom is to 'expose' the students to real or genuine language not artificial language introduced for pedagogic purposes. Although a classroom is not a real-life situation, the materials can be used for real discourse. The readers will get real informationand also get to know what is happening in and around their lives. The variety and the reality of the text will also motivatethe readers to participate in the activities. The example of a newspapercan be discussed which contains many types of authentic texts such as editorial, political, social, interviews, debates, films, local news, sports, business and so many. The students sometimes can be given the autonomyto choose their own   reading

materialfrom the newspaper. They can be made into pairs/ groups of 3-4 and be given the freedom to select their own text of their own interest, especially from a newspaper or a magazine, thus it will have a positive effect on their motivation. The same can be applied to listening using the online resources- from TV, YouTube, news, debates, announcements, mock or real interviews, advertisements, dialogues, recitations, public speech, recipes, running commentary and many more of such relevant materials.

Selecting authentic material is not easy. The material should not have too much of cultural overtone or biases, or should not contain elements which are either linguistically, or stylistically demanding and complex   but locally relevant andcomprehensible materials. The important thing the teacher has to keep in mind is to makethe material look realso that the students can relate totheir reality. Apart from having textual interactionsat the ticket counter, with the doctor, the receptionistin a hotel or restaurant, ordering, menu andmany more in a dialogue form, there should be images of people in the said surrounding.The students can also be given popular and contemporary audios, videos for speaking purpose and then can be asked to summarize, paraphrase or simulate whatever they read, saw and listened. The students in the process not only learn to communicate through different contexts, but also learn to know how to frame questions in different situations, use question tags, learn reported speech, and also tense forms. In essence, the learners get to communicate aboutthings they know, which are part of their world. Here, the teacher must reflect on the students' understanding and use of formsofthe languageand also their vocabulary standard notto correct them at that point, but to think of strategies and innovative pedagogical approaches to better the students' grammar and vocabulary, never losing focus on the primary objective of the course.The challenge iswhether theteacheris trained to be a facilitator and to use the authentic material with respect to improving the communicative standard of the students.

Every classroom is different and so also the challenges. What might work in a particular class might not work in another. But some topics have universal appeal like food, film, local and national news, politics, sports, college life can be fun as well as enjoyable as stated by. The students can be made to work in groups where they bring different perspectives.

<u>Teachers' role with the use of Authentic material</u>

When the teachers bring authentic texts into the classroom, they should be clear about the learning purpose and outcome. As Senior (2005) state that,'we need to have a clear pedagogical goal in mind; what, precisely, we want the students to learn from these materials'. For the purpose of comprehension, vocabulary building, for discourse and dialogues, and for the purpose of reading for scanning and skimming, the teacher need to sort out the materials for different purpose. They have to be organized in selecting and sorting the materials for each class. There is nothing as bad as using disconnected materials that are not linked to other aspects of language teaching. One material might be good for speaking practice and the same material might not work for quick reading skills of the students. When the students get the appropriate pedagogical support, they feel confident and more comfortable in using the material. While selecting the material, the teacher should keep in mind the student's ability and interest so that he/she can develop activities in accordance to that. Another factor a teacher should take into

consideration of the presentation of a text through the use of pictures, diagrams, photograph, etc. which help convert the textinto a real context. The teacher has to see that the text does not contain too many difficult words and linguistic structures. In that case, the teacher has to first simplify the text to make it understandable, and relevant to the students' needs It is highly important to be aware of the students' existing schema or knowledgeon the topic and also to see if the material can create any interaction between the reader and another. While encouraging the students to read, it is important to see if there can be dialogues and discourses between the students, between the teacher and the students or not. Apart from the basic discourse qualities, age and educational background of the students are to be kept in mind.

Disadvantages of using Authentic materials

There are challenges of using authentic material, not only in selecting the appropriate material which should be compatible to the course objective, but also at what stage and for what background, they can be used. It has been a debate for many years as to whether authentic materials can be used for the lower level learners. While some language teachers are of the opinion that they can be used for intermediate and graduate level students, others feel that primary and secondary level of students can also get exposed to authentic material. They feel that it might not expose the students to comprehensible input at the earliest stage of language acquisition. Authentic material might also contain difficult vocabulary items and complex language structures which might demotivate the learners specially lower level students. It is also time consuming for the teachers to collect, select and sort the materials for the course objectives. Materials might get out dated soon.   Authentic materials sometimes might have culturally biased texts(Guariento and Morley, 2001, Martinez, 2002, Kim, 2000).

Authenticity of Context: Personal experience

With the aim to enhance the speaking ability of the graduate level engineering students of Centurion university of Odisha, the facultymembers from the Department of Englishintroduced a course called Project-based communication course, which meant the students would work in groups of four or five on live projects in and around their surroundings. Although, the students were good in their engineering subjects, they still were not ready to speak in English and feared to take part in GDs and interviews as part of the campus selection process. Out of anxiety and fear, the students did not participate in mock GDs, presentations and even interviews even after the students were given scripts for practice. Since all these efforts were not working out the way we expected, this project-based course was experimented. During the course, the studentshad to give four presentationsin groups on their respective project plan, project reviews and final project presentation with the submission of a final project report. This gave the students a lot of opportunity to speak with different people – other students, HR staffs of the university,engineers, faculty members, people from the neighboring area and even with the authorities and also higher management. They prepared questionnaires, had group discussionswith their peers as well as seniors. They did the survey, took interviews, had discussions. All these gave them ample opportunities to interact with people from different backgrounds and for different reasons. Their communicationwasreal with the use of real language. When they gave presentations, they essentially spoke what they had seen and done in the course of their project. They did commit language errors,

butthat did not stop them from expressing what they wanted. They had not drawn their speaking materials from any book or prepared script, but from their own experience. What interested them and kept their motivation till the end was that theywere speaking from their reality, trying to bring a solution to the issues andmoreover, they were doing things in a team. They were making grammatical errors when giving presentations, but it was a conscious decision on the part of the teacher cum guide not to correct them. They were asked to reflect on their own mistakes. The students learnt to prepare charts, graphs, tables etc. to present their data and found immense pleasure in explaining the result through the chart and graphs they had prepared.

At last, the students were asked tosubmit written reports on their projects with the given format. Apart from enhancing their spoken communication, the students showed a remarkable difference in displaying confidence. More importantly, the students showed problem solving abilities and critical thinking abilities apart from learning to work in teams. Authenticity was not limited to the text, but the authenticity of context, the context through which the studentstried to find solutions to their issues. The problems, challenges and solutions were located inthe their own surroundings. They used the native language wherever it was required, but they were giving presentations in English communicating mostly what they saw, observed, found. The communication of the students was authentic as it was based on authentic context.

Conclusion

The use of authentic material in Communicative Language Teaching class has been discussed in the paper with the students benefitting from it. The students' exposure to real or authentic texts motivates them to read and speak. Since such material has wide variety, the students feel encouraged to engage in language learning activities in contrast to non-authentic material which are syllabus-bound and which are used for pedagogical purpose. The role of language teachers is not to insulate the students from real language, but to prepare them to use the language outside the classroom for real communication. In this age of the internet, the authentic materials are easily accessible and the students will show interest inthe material which stimulate them and their imagination. They are far from the monotony of a conventional curriculum. Teachers do not only play the role of material developers, but also the facilitators in the class who know which materials to be used and for what purpose and have planned the activities accordingly.

Since, there has been a discussion of authentic and authenticity of learning, authenticity is not limited to the authenticity of material, but also the context through which learning of language takes place. If the students learn to communicate through real contexts, language is more natural and communication more free-flowing.

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