

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF USING AUTHENTIC TEXT

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Abstract. Foreign language that is taught in the classroom should be authentic and the language involved should be naturally occurring just like the way natives speak. Authentic texts should be used when teaching a language in class and resources such as real articles, magazines, cooking recipes, real advertisements, and the like must be used as a source of reference and information. Authentic language refers to real language and its use in its own community. Of course, it has beneficial and negative sides of the usage of authentic texts, while advantages overweight disadvantages.

Key words: *authentic text, realia, advantages, disadvantages, communication, interaction, communicative competence, language.*

The authentic text was defined as a text that was created to fulfil some social purpose in the language community in which it was produced (Little and Singleton, 1988, 21). The term *authentic* has been used as a reaction against the prefabricated patterns of the textbooks while authentic texts were the non-pedagogical texts used

to help learners improve not only their communicative but also their cultural competences. Authentic materials - also known as *realia* - can be described as anything created for native speakers of a language, we can use for our teaching purposes. With the changing linguistic boundaries, it is now widely known as materials that include ideas, words, phrases and expressions that are heard and read in real-life situations.

Types of authentic materials are:

1. Documentaries
2. Online videos

3. Podcasts
4. Advertisements
5. Commercials

Teachers and students are naturally attracted to authentic texts. Finding that you can read something designed for a native speaker is motivating, and developing strategies to deal with ‘real’ texts enables students to read more confidently and extensively outside the classroom. But, teachers also need to consider just how helpful the authentic text we choose actually is for our students.

Authentic texts can be helpful at any level. Beginners need simpler types of texts as compared to advanced students who have previous knowledge. That is why teacher should be very critical and take into consideration issues like the difficulty, the interest and the topics. Many of the features of authentic texts are far more complex than we might realize at first glance.

There is an almost limitless supply of materials available online that come directly from the target cultures of the languages we teach. These resources provide "real life" linguistic input as well as valuable cultural information for our students. Students learn important topics through materials like audio, video, books, journals, magazines, newspapers and online resources.

Furthermore, multimedia technology affords the learner multiple ways of leaning a language from real-life material. It is a powerful blend of computers, video, photography, and sound.

Using authentic texts in the classroom are known to have the following advantages:

Firstly, when authentic materials are made available for students, they provide exact examples of how the language is used by its native speakers or of the vast majority of target language users.

Secondly, students feel more confident using the language when they know they are performing as expected. With authentic texts, learners are provided with words and

expressions used in real-life contexts. When students are confronted with similar situations, they manage better in informal, face-to-face communications.

Thirdly, real-life materials are more informal, socially-centered and widely used. They can be a valuable material to complete the rules and patterns of textbooks.

Fourthly, Authentic materials foster a more creative approach to teaching and learning.

The use of authentic texts in listening and reading skills instruction give students the idea they learn real language and see "the relevance of classroom activity to their long-term communicative goals" (Brown, 2007, 311). Rost (2002, 123) suggests that when it comes to listening comprehension, understanding "authentic language is the target of virtually all language learners". However, using authentic discourse texts can pose a number of problems in listening instruction since many of the texts produced specifically for use in listening instruction are often ungraded and very difficult, suitable for only the highest levels. Richards (1983) suggests another option for working with authentic (or any) listening texts: we can adjust the task itself to focus on the specific listening skill area that learners

need to work on. Many other features of the text itself may go unaddressed, but tasks can be designed (again with learner needs and current proficiency in mind) to focus on a specific skill area.

It is now generally accepted that literary and other authentic texts should not be simplified or modified in order to help students comprehend them. Rather, students should be provided with reading strategies and activities prior to reading the selection. In turn, these strategies and activities will help students comprehend the authentic material.

Generally, the strategies, explanations, and activities related to a reading selection fall into three categories called pre-reading, during-reading, and post -reading activities, depending on when they are used in relation to reading the selection which help students understand the text and the topic, review vocabulary or grammar structure. The grading of grammar in a text is usually more difficult to spot and easier

to forget about than the grading of vocabulary. A good rule is that most of the grammar in the text should be what they have already studied, and most of the more difficult grammar should be within one level and guessable from context. With the influx of language learners, it is of utmost importance that the educators have to utilize materials that are suited for their students’ interests and proficiency levels. One very good reason for teachers to consider using authentic texts is its accessibility.

However, there are some **disadvantages** of using an authentic text. The biggest disadvantage of using authentic materials is that they contain more unfamiliar language that learners can possibly cope with. Often, they are too long, dense and/or complex.

The next major disadvantage of authentic material is that it might reflect idiosyncratic and unusual native speaker usage. Another is that it might be copyrighted. Also, newspaper articles aren’t typically written at the A2 or B1 level. If you were to bring in a real newspaper article, students would not be able to handle it.

Furthermore, the information can quickly become out of date. This can be a problem both for student, for whom the language might fly out of their heads at the same time as the information gets replaced with something more important. It can also be an issue for the teacher, who might have spent lots of time preparing the pre-teach and comprehension questions only to have to throw the text away after a couple of days. This is mainly a problem for newspaper news stories, so there is no reason why you shouldn’t use more long-lasting formats like magazine articles, newspaper articles with more analysis, fiction or biography instead.

Additionally, the vocabulary is not graded in an authentic text. However easy an authentic text you have managed to find, it is unlikely that every word in it is one of those “most used words in English” that are marked in learner’s dictionaries. This is particularly the case with children’s books, which can be easy and fun for adults to read but often have a vocabulary that is more suitable for the under 10s, and in which the most useless words are often those which are repeated the most often. This can be yet another good opportunity for students to test their guessing vocabulary from context skills. Alternatively, you can provide a glossary to the words you are not expecting

them to know at that level but are vital for understanding that particular text, something that is sometimes given in graded readers and even test readings. Another technique is to underline the words that are probably new to them that you actually think are useful, so that when they get busy with their dictionaries in class or at home you know they will be somewhat guided in what they learn.

Final huge disadvantage for teachers is the fact that even when an authentic text is a reasonable length and level for students, lesson plans need to be written to turn it into something students can learn from. This often entails writing supporting material too. If you enjoy materials development, this can be a pleasurable experience, but if you're pressed for time, you'll want to opt for something ready-made.

To summarize aforesaid, it should be noted that authentic materials can play multiple roles in language teaching, enable learners to interact with real language and content rather than the form (grammar and vocabulary). In other words, the proper and systematic use of these materials at classes give students understanding that they are learning a language as it is used outside the classroom, prepare them for real communication.

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