THE USE OF AUTHENTIC SPOKEN MATERIALS IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

Learning a second language will be considered succeed when the learner is able to speak in the language s/he is studying (Nunan, 1999). Speaking is not merely about being able to pronounce the word correctly, using the appropriate stress and intonation, but more important is to survive in the different context where the conversation is taking place (Harmer, 1997). This paper offers to use authentic materials in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking classroom since authentic gives students “exposure to real language and its use in its own community” (Widdowson, 1990). Authentic materials are materials that we can use in the classroom and that have not been changed in any way for EFL students (Sanderson in Tamo, 2009). The use of authentic materials in EFL speaking classroom will give students chances to encounter the real world and how the language is really used. They are also said to be motivating, giving students sense of achievement when able to communicate as the native speakers do. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers use authentic spoken materials in EFL classroom audio visually to enable students to imitate native speakers of English in speaking, not only on how to pronounce the words correctly and using the appropriate stress in speaking, but also able to use correct body language to avoid cultural misunderstanding. However, both teacher and students also need to be aware of a few disadvantages of using different sources of authentic materials, especially when dealing with culture issues. Teachers are also encouraged to give pedagogical support for students when dealing with listening tasks and literary texts.

Key words: Speaking, teaching speaking, authentic materials, EFL classroom

Introduction

Learning a second language will be considered success when the learners are able to speak in the language he is studying (Nunan, 1999). So when someone is able to read in a second language, understand what he is listening to, but failed to give immediate and correct response orally, still, he is considered to not mastering the language. Richards (2008) argued that for many language learners, the ability to build a conversation in a second or foreign language is their goal in learning the language. Learners will consider an English course they were taken effective and they were success of their language learning based on how much they feel they have improved in oral skills. In other words, to communicate effectively using the language appropriately in the social interactions, students need to be exposed to how the language is really used. Widdowson (1990), when considering the use of authentic materials in a classroom said that, “It has been traditionally supposed that the language presented to learners should be simplified in some way for easy access and acquisition. Nowadays there are recommendations that the language presented should be authentic” (p.67).
Authentic Materials

Authentic materials as Peacock (1997) said are “....materials that have been produced to fulfill some social purposes in the language community.”. The examples are: newspapers, magazines, TV programs, and one of the most popular nowadays is internet. In contrast, the non-authentic materials are materials produced specifically for language learners. Authentic materials are claimed by many writers to be interesting and stimulating than the non-authentic materials (Allwright; Freeman and Holden; Little and Singleton in Peacock, 1997). Others (Swaffar; King; and Bacon and Finnemann in Peacock, 1997) argued that authentic materials are more motivating and enjoyable because it engage learners with the real life context of the target language. However, still as quoted by Peacock (1997), there are few authors said that authentic materials reduce learners motivation in learning the language since they are too difficult.

Lee (1995) proposed some factors to consider when selecting authentic materials to be used in the classroom, those factors are:

- Textual authenticity
- Suitability of content
- Compatibility with course objectives
- Exploitability

Textual authenticity means that the text must not change or simplify in any way because by simplifying, it will lose its authenticity. Suitability of content means that the materials should interest and motivate the students as well as meet the students’ needs. Compatibility with course objectives means that the authentic materials given to the students in the classroom have to be in line with the demand of the curriculum. Exploitability refers to how the material can be used to develop students’ speaking ability. Teacher need to be selective in choosing authentic materials because not all of the materials can be used in the classroom. Nuttal in Berardo (2006) add readability factor to consider while choosing an authentic material. readability refers to how complex are the grammatical structure used as well as the lexical difficulty. Teacher, again, needs to be careful in finding the material at their students’ level.

The Teaching of Speaking Using Authentic Materials

The teaching of speaking skill is getting more and more important along with the strengthening position of English as the international language. It is also important because lots of people learn English for communicative purpose. To be able to communicate learners need to be exposed to the real use of the language. The use of authentic spoken materials in the classroom can be done by having access to the internet, or by using other kinds of audio-visual media. A research on “Using Web-Based Language Learning Activities in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom” conducted by Son (2008) which involved students in ESL classroom in the University of Southern Queensland, Australia, found that students showed positive attitudes toward the use of WBLL, enjoy the activities and would like to use it during and outside the classroom.

Another research on using authentic audio-visual materials was conducted in a Hong Kong primary school English language classrooms (www.edb.gov.hk). The teachers in the school decided to use video as an audio-visual media because it gives ‘a slice of living language’ into the classroom. The people in the video act and communicate resemble to what students will find in the real life. From the interview with the students, it was found that the use of video in the classroom enhanced their interest in authentic English language audio-visual materials. It also raised their awareness towards differences between different culture, and the last, it helps improved students’ self-perception of English language proficiency. From the feedback from the teachers’, they said that by using video: students showed interest in English language authentic
videos; students were motivated to do tasks related to the audio-visual programmes; and students noticed cultural differences from videos.

Jones in Richards (2008) claimed that people speak and listen in order to get things done, explore ideas, work out some aspects of the world, or simply being together. Brown and Yule in Richards (2008) classify the function of speaking into three: talk as interaction; talk as transaction; and talk as performance.

a. Talk as interaction refers to conversation among people to maintain and sustain good relation between them, the central focus is on the speakers. People use this kind of interaction when they exchange greetings, engaging in small talk, etc. The following extract from Thornbury and Slade (2006:132-133) as quoted by Richards (2008), is an authentic example of a conversation where two women are asking the third woman about how she first met her husband

Jessie: Right. Right, and so, how did you - actually meet him?
Brenda: So we didn’t actually meet until that night.
Judy: Oh, hystercal. [laughs]
Brenda: Well, I met him that night. We were all, we all went out to dinner. So I had champagne and strawberries at the airport.
Jessie: And what was it like when you first saw him/ Were you really – nervous?
Brenda: - Well, I was hanging out of a window watching him in his car, and I thought “oh God what about this!” [laughs]
Brenda: And he’d combed his hair and shaved his eyebrows – and
Jessie: Had you seen a photo of him?
Brenda: Oh, yeah, I had photos of him, photos...and I’d spoken to him on the phone.
Jessie: Did you get on well straight away?
Brenda: Oh, well sort of. I’m a sort of nerfy person when I first meet people, so it was sort of...you know...just nice to him.
Jessie: - [laughs]

In the authentic example above, the conversation is interactive, with the listeners keep giving feedback and prompt the speaker to continue. There were also laughs casual conversational register such as “nerfy” and “hanging out of the window”.

b. Talk as transaction has its main purpose to convey message and facilitate the exchange of goods and and services. The examples are; asking for directions, ordering food in the restaurant, etc. The focus is more on the message to be understood clearly and accurately. Below is an authentic example about asking direction taken from Youtube (www.real-english.com).

A: “Excuse me, could you tell me the way to Southgate St., please?”
B: “Just go up there and turn left”
A: “O.K. Thanks very much”
B: “Up...? Sorry, Where?”
A: “Straight up to the traffic lights, and then turn left at the traffic lights. That’s Southgate Street.”
B: “Thanks.”

In the extract above, the speaker repeat the word ”up” and repeat the question to show that she did not really understand the direction. The second speaker then repeat the explanation in a more complete sentence.

c. Talk as performance refers to public talk, the purpose is to transform information to the audience, such as classroom presentation, news report and speeches. Below is the transcript from a news report about flood disaster in Australia
Australia’s worst flooding disaster, that’s how the situation in Queensland is being described. Three quarters of the Australian state of Queensland is now a disaster zone, and after 19 days - the human toll has risen dramatically.

Ten people have been killed and nearly 80 are missing in the worst hit area of the Lockyer Valley to the west of Brisbane.

And the crisis is far from over, with the state capital, Brisbane, being warned that a peak higher than the record 1974 flood is likely to hit in the next 48 hours.

From the authentic spoken materials above, learners of English will find differences between authentic and non-authentic spoken materials. In authentic spoken materials, people will speak in a normal or fast pace compare to the recorded conversation for educational purpose where the conversation is adjust to the level of the target learners. In the authentic spoken materials learners also will listen to hesitations such as “uh’s” and “mm’s” and there will be frequent turn-taking of speakers. On the other hand, in the non-authentic conversation one speaker will wait for the first speaker to finish his/her sentence before the other speaker is taking turn to speak. The sentences in non-authentic material are well-structured whereas in the authentic one speaker sometimes only repeat a word to show that s/he did not understand and need a more complete explanation (Peter and Roberts in Oura, 2001).

Learners of English also will get other benefits by having a chance to watch conversation of native speakers of English visually. They will not only learn to say things, but also learn the culture of the native speakers. Learners will learn the appropriate gesture and body language used during the conversation. In this way, they are not only learning how and what to say in a specific context, but also they will learn how to behave the appropriate attitude in a specific situation. However, teacher and students must also aware of the cultural content found from the authentic materials, since some of the contents might not relevant with the students’ norms.

The advantages and disadvantages of using authentic materials as summarized by Berardo (2006) and Tamo (2009) are as follows:

Advantages of authentic materials
- Students are exposed to real language
- Have a positive effect on learner motivation
- Students are informed about what is happening in the world
- Textbook rarely include incidental or improper English
- The same piece of material can be used for different tasks
- Books, newspapers, etc. contain a wide variety of text types, language styles not easily found in conventional teaching materials
- Encourage reading for pleasure since it contain topics of interest to learners
- Support a more creative approach to teaching

Disadvantages of authentic materials
- Can be too culturally biased, difficult to understand outside the language community
- The vocabulary might not be relevant to the students’ immediate needs
- Too many structures are mixed so lower levels have problems decoding the text
- Special preparation is necessary which can be time consuming
- Too many different accents can be heard which can cause some confusion
- The materials can become outdated easily, e.g. news

Realizing that using authentic materials in the classroom not only give advantages but also can cause some disadvantages for the students as well as for the teachers, Guariento and Marley (2001) suggest to use authentic material at post-intermediate level. It is because students
at this level will have already acquired a wide range of vocabulary needed and already mastered the structures of English. Based on the survey carried out by Chavez in 1998 as cited in Tamo (2009), learners in lower-level classes did not consider authentic materials innately difficult. They said to enjoy the materials since they feel like interact with the real language and its use. However, they also said to need pedagogical support especially when dealing with listening situation and reading literary texts.

Martinez (2002) gives suggestion to the teacher in helping the students dealing with authentic materials, teacher should have a variety of materials. Matsuta in Tamo (2009), said that audio-visual materials is beneficial in aiding the comprehension of the beginners of English. Guariento and Morley (2001) said that the authentic materials given should be at the learners’ level and where the total understanding is not important. According to Jordan in Tamo (2009), when giving authentic materials to the lower-levels of English, teacher could introduce the material taken from the students subject area.

Applying Authentic Spoken Materials in the Classroom

Below are sample tasks on how to use authentic spoken materials in an EFL classroom.

**News reading**
Teacher reviews the students’ homework on following the latest news on flood disaster in Queensland. Teacher asks several students to give their comment and opinion regarding the disaster. Teacher then grouped the students in small groups. The students are asked to watch a news report about the disaster. The teacher will play the video 2-3 times. While watching, students need to answer some questions prepared by the teacher, such as when and where did the flood happen, how worst does the disaster, how large the area affected by the disaster, etc. One student from each group then report their answers to the questions orally. Students then will be able to compare their answers with the other groups. Teacher will play the video again to check the correct answer. Students then, in group, are asked to prepare a news report where the report need to give detail information such as the questions given by the teacher before. At the end, two students from each group will report their imaginary news, one student will be reporter in the studio, the other will act as the field reporter.

**Asking and giving directions**
Teacher asks the students their experience in finding an address. Students will need to share their experience as well as the difficulties they found. Teacher then asks students to watch a video about asking and giving direction. While watching, in pair, students need to list as many as words to show direction they find from the movie. Teacher will only play the video once or twice. Students then ask to write the words on the board, there will be a competition in this part. The pair who can list the most words will be the winner. Teacher can give a kind of reward such as ask the class to give applause for the winner team, or give candy for the winner or other kind of small reward. Students then need to ask direction to the other 2-3 students. Teacher can limit the theme such as only asking their friend’s home address. Several students then ask to report to class on how to find an add.

**Conclusions**
The experts of Teaching English to the Second/Foreign language (TESL/TEFL) learners still in debates about whether to use the authentic materials in the classroom or not. Those who
support to use the materials argued that students should be exposed to the real language and its use. However, they have different opinions on when to start to expose students to the authentic materials and how to use it in the classroom. Despite lots of advantages of using authentic materials, especially audio-visual materials to aid students to improve their communication skill, there are also some disadvantages need to be aware either by the teacher or the students. The experts of TESL/TEFL suggest teachers to use a variety of materials, and to choose the material at their students’ level to avoid the difficulty in interacting and understanding the material.

References