

AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN THE PROCESS OF TEACHING SPOKEN COMMUNICATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TO STUDENTS OF UNIVERSITIES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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Abstract

This article is devoted to the theoretical grounds and development of a methodical framework for teaching spoken communication in foreign languages to students of universities of linguistics based on authentic assignments to authentic text materials. It is hypothesized, that the student's spoken skills in a foreign language are established based on authentic materials and a system of exercises to the same, which imitate an authentic communication environment during the learning process.

Key words: *authentic text, spoken foreign language, communicative competence, value and motivation area, self-development and self-actualization of a person, individual psychological features of students.*

1. AUTHENTICITY: ESSENCE, NOTION, CHARACTERISTICS

In order to form and develop the communicative competence of students, the teacher must first of all create communication situations, which are as close as possible to real life and which the students could use to develop new creative skills in applying various methods of working with foreign language channels.

One of the primary readily available sources of obtaining information on the foreign world-image are authentic materials. Their importance can be explained by the presence of the language skeleton, which serves as the base for all further learning of spoken and written speech.

What is understood under authentic material? Several scientific points of view on the essence of authenticity in general and in particular cases currently exist. Let us review some of them.

The traditional interpretation of authenticity within the framework of language teaching methods states, that authentic materials are materials created by a native speaker, which are further used "uncut and untouched" in the study process, oriented at a communicative approach to teaching a foreign language outside the linguistic environment.

Methods specialists also speak about other classifications of authentic materials, of which the following can be noted.

For example, K. S. Krichevskaya describes authentic materials as original literary, visual art, music works, real life objects, such as clothing, footwear, furniture, tableware, as well as their depictions.¹

A very similar classification is suggested by G. I. Voronina, who believes that authentic materials are represented by authentic texts borrowed from the communication practice of native speakers.¹ She divides texts into two types of different genres.

Functional everyday casual texts with the functions of giving instructions, explanations, advertising, warning. These include road signs, signboards, pictures, theatre playbills etc.

While information texts have an informational function and always contain updating information. Examples of informative texts include articles, questionnaires, announcements, news broadcasts, relevant information etc.

We believe, however, that the most comprehensive classification was suggested by D. G. Gebhard, a foreign researcher. His classifications looks as follows:

- *authentic listening-viewing materials*: TV commercials, movies and documentaries, TV shows, cartoons, clips, news etc.;
- *authentic audiomaterials* – audio books, songs, advertisements and radio broadcasts etc;
- *authentic visual materials* – paintings, photographs, slides, road signs, illustrations, postage stamps, greeting cards etc.;
- *authentic printed materials* – newspaper articles, sports columns, lyrics to songs, programmes, telephone books, tourist information brochures, comic books, cheques, tickets etc.;
- *realia (objects)* – coins, cash, masks, toys etc.¹

Based on the theoretical excerpts we can draw the conclusion that authentic materials are materials taken from original sources and featuring a natural character of their lexical contents and grammatical forms, situational relevancy of the used linguistic means, which are illustrative of authentic word use and, although not specifically designed for learning purposes, may still be used to teach a foreign language.

The advantage of including authentic materials in the process of teaching foreign languages is noted both by national and foreign methods specialists, particularly R. P. Milrud, G. G. Zhoglina, R. S. Scarcella and others.

Authentic materials are originally intended for native speakers, that is why they are characterized by the naturalness and authenticity of the situation described, reflection of the national, cultural and mental peculiarities of the country of the language studied, informativeness and the capacity to excite the interest of the reader and create an emotional response in him. Authentic materials let us imitate the immersion into the linguistic environment in a study situation and facilitate the use of the right speech samples, which makes the foreign speech of the students more authentic.

Methods specialists note that the language of the authentic materials serves as a means of real communication, reflects the actual linguistic reality, functional features of the language as a means of communications and natural environment.²

The importance of using authentic materials in the learning process is supported by the fact, that in such case the danger of distorting the reality of the country of the language studied is significantly reduced, since authentic texts reflect the actual events and beliefs observed in the population of the country at the time given.

Authentic material has the following inherent parameters:

Functional authenticity – a notion, implying that the authentic material is filled with linguistic means most relevant within the context of the topic and contents of such authentic material. Thus, familiarizing himself with the authentic material the student can view the real image of language use, which prepares him for using the vocabulary learned in the right way in real life communication situations.

Lexical and phraseological authenticity – a notion, suggesting that the authentic material for study must be chosen by selecting the lexical and phraseological items. The selection criterion in this case must be the authenticity of the items, the appropriateness of their use in speech, their frequency.

Grammatical authenticity – a notion, suggesting that the authentic material contains grammatical structures typical of the language studied.

Structural authenticity – a notion, characterizing the text from the point of view of its construction, logic, integrity of the text's form and contents, strength of the logical and grammatical connections between its parts.

¹Gebhard J.G. Awareness of Teaching through Action Research: Examples, Benefits, Limitations. JALTJournal, Vol.27, No. 1, May, 2005

Since authentic materials lack didactic intent, they are characterized by a high level of authority. The natural way, in which the information is presented stimulates, in its turn, the students' thirst for knowledge. Thus, the use of authentic materials has an advantage over the use of teaching materials, that are filled with fictional situations not always existing in the linguistic environment and, as such, firstly, fail to create an incentive for the students to learn new information, and secondly prevent the students from understanding the situation forming during a real life communication in the foreign language.

However, despite a whole number of facts proving the effectiveness and expediency of using authentic materials in the learning process, such use may be limited for several reasons. Firstly, if the students lack sufficient language skills, this might be a limiting factor. Secondly, there may be difficulties of social and cultural nature involved, which arise due to redundancy of the visual, audio and verbal information in the source, as well as the multi-aspect nature of the material presented, which prevents the students from focusing on the topic currently being studied.

Taking into consideration such issues that may occur during the work with authentic sources, methods specialists admit the possibility for some adaptation of the material for the students' needs or for creation of a text, which would satisfy all the criteria of authentic materials. Methods specialists classify such materials as belonging to the authentic materials for study, that is, materials, developed with account for the authenticity parameters and intended for solving of a specific study task.

It also seems noteworthy, that some methods specialists, particularly H. Widdowson, do not view authenticity as a feature of the material only, but as a feature of the study process as well. In the context of his theory Widdowson draws a distinction between the notions of genuineness and authenticity, describing any cases of use of the language studied otherwise than for study purposes as "genuine". While authenticity, he believes, is a characteristic of the study process. Which means it would not be enough just to take an article with you for the class, you also have to facilitate an authentic way of working with it. By turning the work with the article into a communicative activity, the teacher stimulates natural interaction during the class.

Thus, from the point of view of teaching methods, authenticity is not as much determined by referring to authentic sources intended for native speakers, as it is by creating an authentic process of interaction between the teacher and the students and among the students themselves.

It must, however, be admitted that in a study environment, it would be impossible to avoid the conventionality of the study interaction, which can be explained as follows. Since the study environment suggests achievement of certain learning goals, in the process of interaction the teacher focuses not on the informative side of the student's speech, but on his mistakes, which does negatively affect the authenticity to some degree. In this case methods specialists recommend to resort to some kind of a more informal process of speech correction, like asking a question (Did you mean to say that...) or supporting the student while paraphrasing his thought in the correct form (Yes, you certainly mean to say that...). Methods specialists also advise to keep records of the students' mistakes and correct them at a later time.

Considering the results of the analysis of the existing points of view on the notion of authenticity, we may conclude, that the methods specialists currently have no global unified definition of authenticity. Authenticity combines a whole series of conditions, authenticity types, with varying possibility of existence of such types depending on the situation.

Each element of the learning process, such as a text, exercises, environment in the class, interaction between the teacher and the students has its own characteristic, that can be used to determine their authenticity. As such, the teacher faces the task to create a balance of all parameters of authenticity.

Our study is focused on the issue of using authentic text materials in the learning process, because text is the centre, around which the whole process of developing spoken skills in the foreign language and communicative competence in general is built.

2. AUTHENTIC TEXT AS THE CONTENTS AND THE MAIN MEANS OF TEACHING SPOKEN COMMUNICATION IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE

In the conditions, where immersion into the natural linguistic environment is unavailable or where no possibility of communicating with the native speakers of the language studied exists, the authentic text becomes a “window”, the main information source, thanks to which the students can grasp and comprehend the linguistic and cultural realities.

It is hard to disagree with the statement of researcher V. V. Krasnykh, who said that text, being a form of linguistic and extralinguistic activity, is a complex phenomenon and performs various tasks. It serves as a means of communication, as a form of information transmission, and as a form of a person's inner life, as a means of existence of culture, as a reflection of social and cultural events.²

Since the text is a result of speech production, a linguistic phenomenon, a product of the linguistic and thinking activity of a person, a means of learning, we should analyze the text from the point of view of psychology, psycholinguistics and methods studies.

The psychologic aspect of the text suggests, that the text serves as a means of affecting the recipient, that is, the text's reader. By affecting the recipient the text incites him to make an utterance. Therefore, the teacher's task is to cause linguistic and thinking activity of the student. The teacher must choose such a text, that would serve his purposes, level of intelligence and psychological peculiarities, then the student will more actively participate in the discussion on the sub-conscious level.

The psycholinguistic aspect lies in the fact, that for the text to be fully perceived, it must have such characteristic as cohesion, integrity and informativeness. Cohesion is characterized by a certain word order and logical connections between the phrases as well as the supra-phrasal unities, determined by their cause-and-effect relationship. The unity of the text's topic and the communicative connection between the sentences determines the text's integrity. The informativeness of the text manifests itself through the fact, that if the text lacks inner sense, the information that would be significant personally for the student, it is impossible to facilitate the linguistic and thinking activity. In order to create a complete text perception image it is also important for the text to contain an aspect of address, it must be addressed to the assumed conversation partner. The aspect of address can be identified in the text by rhetorical questions or quotations. The psychological impact of the aspect of address is the stimulation of speech activity as a response.

From the point of view of methods studies the text can be used for a whole number of teaching functions, such as: the functioning of linguistic units; a sample for implementing the linguistic intentions of the author; a model of a producing a speech utterance; a structure controlling the semantic perception; a structure controlling the learning activities during the study of types of speech activities in the foreign language (reading, speaking, listening comprehension, writing).² The text can also be used to make the students acquainted with particular examples of co-occurrence of lexical units, give them a story for discussion. Besides that, the text helps the students to enrich their vocabulary, make the words learned previously active in the memory etc.

Thus, the text is a source and a base for creation of authentic exercises, as well as problematic and emotionally intense verbal situations stimulating active speech behavior. However, authentic texts by themselves are not a recipe for successful learning process. The teacher's task is to create such an atmosphere of working with the authentic material, when the situation is perceived by the students as a natural communication. The work with the texts is based on the traditional principles and involves reading the texts and performing the exercises thereto at all stages of the work, but in this way a new psychological contexts is introduced, and, consequently, the process or learning to communicate becomes more convenient for the student.

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