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English teaching methods

THE USE OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Key words: authenticity, authentic materials, communicative competence, communicative language teaching, ESP, real-life language use, skills, vocabulary development.

Բանալի բառեր՝ վավերական նյութեր, հաղորդակցային կոմպետենցիա (իրազեկություն), ESP (անգլերեն հասուն նպատակների համար), հաղորդակցական խոսքի ուսուցում, բարապաշարի զարգացում, հմտություններ:

Ключевые слова: аутентичность, аутентичные материалы, коммуникативная компетенция, обучение коммуникативной речи, навыки, развитие словарного запаса.

I. Ղարախանյան

Վավերական նյութերի օգտագործումը անգլերեն լեզվի ուսուցման մեջ

Վավերական նյութերի օգտագործման գաղափարը օտար լեզուների ուսուցման համատեքստում պայմանավորված է իր ֆունկցիոնալ լինելով: Ռացիոնալ եւ խելամիտ օգտագործման պարագայում այսպիսի նյութերը կարող են ակտիվացնել ուսանողների հաղորդակցային գործունեությունը, բարձրացնել ուսուցման փորձը, եւ ստեղծել ներքին մոտիվացիա ուսանողների մոտ: Հոդվածում քննարկվում է վավերական նյութերի դերը հաղորդակցային կոմպետենցիայի ձևավորման գործընթացում և վավերական նյութերի օգտագործման հնարավոր առավելություններն ու թերությունները, որոնք նպաստում են ուսանողների հաղորդակցային կոմպետենցիայի ձևավորման եւ ճանաչողական գործունեության զարգացմանը:

Л. Караханян

Использование аутентичных материалов в обучении английскому языку

Понятие аутентичных материалов в контексте сегодняшних целей обучения иностранному языку связано с его функциональностью. При рациональном и продуманном использовании аутентичные материалы могут активизировать коммуникативную деятельность учащихся, разнообразить процесс обучения, создать внутреннюю мотивацию учащихся к изучению иностранного языка. В статье рассматривается роль аутентичных материалов в процессе формирования коммуникативной компетенции, а также возможные преимущества и недостатки использования аутентичных материалов, способствующих формированию коммуникативной компетенции и познавательной активности студентов.

The notion of authentic materials within the context of contemporary objectives of foreign language teaching is indispensable due to its functionality. Given the rational use the authentic materials can activate the learners' communicative activity, variegate the learning process, and help learners enhance the proper motivation for the language learning. The article aims at reviewing the role of authentic materials as part of communicative competence formation, as well as discusses the possible benefits and disadvantages of applying authentic materials in learning contexts.

Given the insufficient level of the English language proficiency among the students enrolled in a number of non-philological courses, teachers are constantly concerned with finding effective adequate materials that will contribute to the students' language development. In contemporary language teaching a lot of weight is given to the use of authentic materials.

In this article we discuss the possible benefits that the incorporation of authentic materials in language classroom can have.

The emphasis on the use of authentic language in language instruction is generally associated with communicative approach as with the inception of communicative language teaching the focus from English as a system to be studied changed into English as a means of communication. Therefore, selection of syllabus content was based on learners' communicative needs (Carter & Nunan, 2001). Henry Sweet (1899) was one of the first who believed that natural texts “do justice to every feature of the language” while artificial materials include “repetition of certain grammatical constructions, certain elements of the

vocabulary, certain combinations of words to the almost total exclusion of others which are equally, or perhaps even more essential”.

ESP as one of the most significant areas in language teaching field is designed to build up students’ skill in order to enable them to communicate in English language and the materials that are included are basically chosen based on the learners’ area of professional expertise (Tarnopolsky, 2009).

In preparing and choosing materials for ESP learners, Palmero (2003) introduces different challenges that can arise. According to her these include the authenticity, simulation of real situations, flexibility on the part of topics used, and relevance to the discipline they aim to destine. One of the sources of materials for designing ESP is, as she calls authentic materials, which have no limit. Authentic materials include “instruction leaflets, journals, manuals, advertisements, internet links, inscription forms, demonstration videos, statistics, and job offers”.

The definitions of authentic materials vary slightly in literature.

Taken from Peacock (1997), the definition of authentic materials is the materials that have been produced to fulfill some social purpose in the language community. Martinez (2002) defined that ‘Authentic would be material designed for native speakers of English used in the classroom in a way similar to the one it was designed for’. Morrow relates it to “a stretch of real language produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to carry a real message of some sort.”(1977)

The main idea that is common to all these definitions is summed up by the words of Widdowson (1990) who stated that it is exposure to real language and its use in its own community. In other words, the use of authentic materials, including both the written and oral sources, helps to bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and “a student’s capacity to participate in real world events” (Wilkins, 1976). So, it’s undeniable that students can benefit from being exposed to a language that is naturally occurring in social communication.

Harding (2007) emphasizing the use of authentic materials provides some guidelines for ESP teachers for the approach they need to take and some dos and don’ts as follows:

- Think about what is needed.
- Understand the nature of your students’ subject area or vocation.
- Spend time working out their language needs in relation to the subject.
- Use contexts, texts, and situations from the students’ subject area.
- Exploit authentic materials that the students use in their specialism or vocation
- Make the tasks authentic as wells as the texts
- Motivate the students with variety, relevance, and fun.
- Try to take the classroom into the real world that the students inhabit, and bring their real world into the classroom.

However, ESP as a learner centered approach to teaching English, which is mainly based on learner needs and purposes for studying English, seems a very suitable platform for the implementation and introduction of authentic materials. The selection of authentic materials and the topics can be based on the assessment of learners’ needs. Thus without losing time which is a very important issue in ESP courses the learners will be directly taught the materials they need in the real world which also includes the learners’ job settings.

Modern technology puts at teacher’s disposal a wide array of Internet resources. Teachers can easily create lessons from news that is literally a few hours old as well as it enables teachers to tailor lessons to students’ needs and interests. Internet resources can beneficially complement other areas of the curriculum. Such timely lessons may foster a sense of appreciation from students.

There are many reasons why so many researchers and teachers get involved in exploiting and using different authentic materials in classrooms. Here is the list of major advantages:

Authentic materials have a positive effect on student's motivation to learn. This may be considered as the most important benefit that authentic materials offer. Guariento and Morley (2001) wrote ‘...the use of authentic texts is now considered to be one way of maintaining or increasing students’ motivation for learning. They give the learner the feeling that he or she is learning the ‘real’ language; that they are in touch with a living entity, the target language as it is used by the community which speaks it’. Students can get the sense of achievement using authentic materials. Real discourse is presented, as in video interviews with famous people where intermediate students can listen for gist. They provide exposure to real language.

Textbooks often do not have examples of incidental or improper English.

The use of authentic materials leads to a more creative approach to teaching.

Authentic texts can encourage reading for pleasure because they are likely to contain topics of interest to learners, especially if students are given the chance to have a say about the topics or kinds of authentic materials to be used in class.

“Reading texts are ideal to teach/practice mini-skills such as scanning, e.g. students are given a news article and asked to look for specific information (amounts, percentages, etc.), basic students listen to news reports and they are asked to identify the names of countries, famous people, etc. (ability to detect key words)” (Martinez, 2002).

The same piece of material can be used under different circumstances if the task is different. Books, articles, newspapers, and so on contain a wide variety of text types, language styles not easily found in conventional teaching materials. Language change is reflected in the materials so that students and teachers can keep abreast of such changes.

However, there are drawbacks to using authentic materials in their raw form without adaptation or support. Gardener and Miller (1999) mentioned several disadvantages.

The first disadvantage is the complexity of the language. Authentic materials may be too culturally biased or too difficult to understand outside the language community thereby making them inaccessible to beginners or elementary learners. The second disadvantage is the learning burden. Authentic materials may contain items, particularly vocabulary, which are of low frequency and of peripheral use to the learner and may never be encountered again. The third disadvantage is that in learning contexts where authentic target-language materials are not readily available, obtaining them can be time consuming and frustrating.

Martinez (2002) also mentioned two other weaknesses of using authentic materials. One is that some authentic listening materials have so many different accents that it is very hard for the learner to understand. The other is that the materials can become outdated easily, such as news in newspapers or magazines. Due to these reasons, some teachers may be frustrated by selecting and preparing these authentic materials for their learners.

The advantages and disadvantages can be summarized as follows. Among advantages are:

- Students are exposed to real language
- There is factual acquisition from most of them
- Textbooks do not include inaccurate language
- Authentic materials may be inspirational for some students
- One piece of text may be used for various activities and tasks
- There is a wide choice of styles, genres and formality in authentic texts
- They can motivate students to read for pleasure

The disadvantages are:

- Authentic texts may be difficult to understand because of a culture gap
- The vocabulary may be not exactly what the students need
- They are rather difficult for beginners
- Preparation of the texts and activities is often demanding and time consuming
- There are many various accents and dialects in listening
- The materials become outdated quickly (news)

Despite the limitations, if teachers are enthusiastic and take advantage of the benefits and use them properly and in sufficient quantities, it may motivate the learners as it presents them with the real language they encounter outside the classroom.

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