



MODERN REQUIREMENTS OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN EFL/ESL CLASSROOM

Kaljanova Gulmira Barlikbai qizi

Teacher, Uzbekistan State World Languages University,
Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Abstract

The present article discusses demands of today on authentic materials to implement for ELT classes. Authentic materials and their usage in communicative teaching is stressed in the paper relatively. ELT is effective when it is obtained in communicative approach, which is based on the premise that language first and foremost is a tool for communication. From this perspective, to assess student proficiency designed tests can be tailored to include items which possibly measure the students' communicative ability in all levels of language.

Keywords: communication, context, authentic material, pragmatics, assessment

Introduction

Most times, real and effective material is the best method to establish interconnection and collaboration of congenial atmosphere. According to Brown (1987), a communicative test has to meet some rather strict criteria to meet the TLU domain requirements. To be more specific, it has to test for grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and illocutionary competence as well as strategic competence. It has to be pragmatic in that it requires the learner to use language naturally for genuine communication and to relate to thoughts and feelings, in short, to put authentic language to use within a context. It should be direct test rather than indirect one. Moreover, it should test the learner in a variety of language functions and the results are usually marked qualitatively rather than quantitatively. In testing communicative performance, test items should measure how well students are able to engage in meaningful, purposeful, and authentic communicative tasks. Students must have a good performance linguistically and communicatively. That is, they must have a good command of the components involved in communication. The best test in this communicative era, according to Madsen H.S. (1983) comments, are those that combine the various sub-skills necessary for the exchange of oral and written ideas. He asserts that communicative materials need to measure more than isolated language skills. They need to comprehensively indicate how well a person can function in another language.





After that, material designers can establish scales and criteria in assessment procedures to measure exactly the stated features of students' performance. Bailey K.M. (1998) provided an example that even though conveying and capturing meaning while maintaining accuracy are two important elements in communication, if the tester focuses on checking the test takers' ability to convey meaning, then accuracy will not be put into the scoring criteria. Therefore, it is unfair for students if authentic material designers take into account other unstated objectives when grading tests and tasks, which also negatively affects the test's validity. Concentration on content is the second principle in designing a communicative language lesson. The content here refers to not only topics but also tasks that will be implemented. Appropriate content matches or fits learners' age, proficiency level, interests, and goals/needs.

According to Carroll A. (1983), the tasks that students are expected to perform in their future community of language practice should guide material designers in setting the tasks for the tests. In other words, tasks should be constructed based on the students' relevant needs. The tasks should aim to be authentic and have clear reference in reality. These tasks match students' proficiency level and their age. Children are supposed to be able to do the tasks because what they do is what society, at least based on opinions of experienced teachers and advisors, expects of them in real life (1983, 25-26).

Methodology

Analysis of scientific literature on methodology of assessment showed that Methodists made an attempt to define requirements for communicative materials design. According to Brown J.D. (2005, p.21), there are five requirements for setting up a communicative test. These include: 1. Meaningful communication; 2. Authentic situation; 3. Unpredictable language input; 4. Creative language output; 5. Integrated language skills. First, the test needs to be based on communication that is meaningful to the students, that is, it meets their personal needs. It should promote and activate language which is useful for them. Making use of authentic situations can increase the likelihood that meaningful communication will be achieved. More importantly, –language cannot be meaningful if it is devoid of context (Weir C.J, 1990, p. 11).

Furthermore, communicative materials also offer students the opportunity to encounter and use the language receptively and productively in authentic situations to show how strong their language ability is. By putting emphasis on –unpredictable language input and –creative language output, || Brown J.D. (2005) referred to the fact that, in reality, it is usually impossible to predict what speakers will say (i.e.,





language input) or to prepare for one's reply (i.e., language output). This natural way of communication should be replicated in a communicative lesson.

The last characteristic of a communicative material is that it will elicit the students' use of combined language skills, as is the case in real life communication. Tasks in communicative language lessons are based on features of communicative materials and components of communicative competence. Brown J.D. (2005) concluded that performance assessment and task-based assessment are two appropriate ways of designing communicative materials. Both are important in language learning environment, however, in this part the focus is on task-based assessment as it was described in the work of Norris J.M et al, (1998).

The researchers offered the following definition of task-based language activity (as cited in Brown, 2005, p. 24): In task-based material, then, we are interested in eliciting and evaluating students' abilities to accomplish particular tasks, or task types in which target language communication is essential.

Such assessment is obviously performance assessment because a student's second language performance on the task is that which gets evaluated. In the work by Herman J.L. et al, the following steps in assessment are suggested:

1. Investigate how the assessed discipline defines quality performance;
2. Gather sample rubrics for assessing writing, speech, etc. as models to adapt testing purposes;
3. Gather samples of students' and experts' work that demonstrate the range of performance from ineffective to very effective;
4. Discuss with others the characteristics of these models that distinguish the effective ones from the ineffective ones;
5. Write descriptors for the important characteristics;
6. Gather another sample of students' work;
7. Try out criteria to see if they help you to make accurate judgments about students;
8. Revise your criteria;
9. Try it again until the rubric score captures the quality of the work (1992, 67).

As with other kinds of tests, steps in developing the scoring criteria for tasks used to assess learners' ability to perform in the target language requires plenty of responsible and cooperative work, agreement on the application of rubric, and trials before it is applied.





Conclusion

The authentic material makers will have to cope with many difficulties if they want to reduce the effects of elements other than language communicative ability in test performance because some factors are in the activity writers` control but others are not. This issue deserves further research to help material designer take the most advantage of their ability when accomplishing tasks. Language learning, as its specific purpose, is considered a gateway to education, employment, moving from one country to another and making decisions on the placement of students on particular courses (McNamara T., 2000).

It is important that language material developers and teachers should think of new types of intensive tests to measure real language competence and performance to make the tests more reliable.

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