

Authentic Texts: Their Advantages in Developing Students' Language Awareness in ESP

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Abstract

This paper is to discuss the advantages of using authentic texts in teaching English as a Foreign Language. It is based on my experience in guiding learners studying English for Specific Purposes in Language Training Centre - Andalas University. The aim is to share experience with other English teachers as well as to enrich English teaching materials which are really suitable for the specific learners. The purpose of using authentic texts in teaching is to realize that the functions of language are often best understood in a discourse environment so that exploring language in context helps us to improve our understanding about forms and meanings of language.

The discussion on this paper is divided into; the background, some principles on ESP, how to select materials, some limitation of published materials, and some advantages of using authentic texts. The focus on authentic texts can help learners to notice and analyze aspects of language usage which have gone unnoticed and untaught. It also provides them with insight of the real language use in the real situation. Furthermore, it helps the learners to recognize the role of aspects of culture in the texts since language and culture are inseparable. To conclude, real language use in a variety of natural occurring texts can help English teachers to develop students' language awareness.

Key words: authentic texts, language awareness, ESP, culture

The Background

Demand for the mastery of English language is increasing due to the Globalization. English is needed in enormous expansion in scientific, technical, and economic activity on an international scale. As Hutchinson and Waters pinpoint (1995), this progress causes a demand for an international language, that is English.

As the demand for English designed for specific learners grows, new ideas appear in the study of language. Traditionally, the aim of teaching English is to master the rules of English usage. The learners' receptive skills are developed through patterns and rules. As the result, the learners may have linguistic competence. Recently, it is realized that mastering the language usage only may not enable the learners to use language in real communication. Based on this, research was conducted to discover the ways in which language is used in real communication. It brings a new wave in teaching English. Learners are taught language use by developing their productive skills. To realize how language is used in real situation, the teachers are advised to use authentic text. This approach is expected to be able to build students' communicative competence (Harmer, 1991).

ESP emerges from the finding of research (Widdowson, 1978) that the language we use varies considerably from one context to another. The awareness that there are important differences between languages used in different fields, such as English for commerce and that of agriculture, increases. Candlin, Bruton, and Leather (1976, in Hutchinson and Waters, 1995), for example, conducted studies on doctor-patient communication and they found that the language features used in specific situations can be determined. It brings insight that the English needed by particular group of learners could be identified by analyzing the linguistic features of their specialist area of work or study. This finding creates and develops English courses for

specific groups of learners.

Some principles in ESP:

According to Hutchinson and Waters (idem), in ESP courses there are some principles that need to be considered: needs analysis, course design, material selection, teaching activities/methodology, and evaluation.

ESP is an approach to language learning, which is based on learners need. The course designer has to identify and analyze the reasons why the learners need to learn English. It is likely possible that the students learn English willingly if this foreign language fulfils their need. On the other hand, they may stop paying attention to the lesson if they do not feel that they get what they need. Based on this, course designer/teacher needs to find out the learners need. It is advisable to do a needs analysis at the beginning of each course, as each group of learners will have different language needs. To design an effective teaching-learning activities, teachers are advised to consider: the goal, the participants' need in English, time allocation, the learners' background, and their level of English.

As mentioned previously, a needs analysis is used to design an effective ESP course. Traditionally, the situational analysis has had a direct determining influence on the development of syllabus, materials, methods of teaching, and evaluation. To some extent, they are linear, segmental, and pre-determined. It is believed that a teacher, as a course designer may solve their own problems by beginning with what he/she makes sense. Course design depends on the reality and context the teacher face in the classroom. The process of course design follows that there is no hierarchy in the process and no sequence in their accomplishment. It can be unpredictable, challenging, satisfying, and frustrating process. As Hutchinson & Waters (idem) said that it is a dynamic one and a negotiated process. The teacher who is formulating objective of a course will start with a draft as she tries to articulate what she wants her students to achieve in the course, based on what she knows about her context. Once she teaches it at the first time, it is likely that the objective will change in some ways as she determines the appropriateness for her students. The next time she teaches the course, she will be 'testing' the modifications to the objectives because of proficiency level of the students or other different needs in the stakeholders.

Therefore, designing plans for an ESP course is a 'work in progress' in its whole, in its parts, or in its implementation. The approach used to maximize the potential of learning situation is called a learning-centered approach

Methodology refers to what the teachers do in the classroom. Nunan (1989a) states that one of the appropriate methods which is suitable for ESP class is *task-based language teaching* in which the learners are given more time allocation to practice (communicative function & communicative activities) linguistic features related to their job field (real world texts). Exercises are given integrately by using the four language skills; *listening, speaking, reading, and writing*. The learners are encouraged to participate (rehearsal task) through role play in group activities.

However, Hutchinson and Waters (idem) state, it is impossible to deal adequately with a methodology in a book because it has to be experience in the classroom. It is in line with what Wallace (1995) believes that whatever modes of teaching and learning is used, its success cannot be taken for granted. Even something which is very successful for one group of learners may not work with another group that seems to be very similar. Therefore it is important to evaluate the teaching and learning activities that is taking place. The teachers should consider how appropriate teaching activities are for the given context. The teachers who have come to ESP from General English might find that techniques used in ELT can be usefully applied in the ESP classroom. In short we can conclude that teachers need to be smart to integrate the methodologies.

Program evaluation is carried out after teaching. Evaluation may be used for two purposes – assessment and feedback. Assessment functions to measure what the learners have achieved while feedback provides insights on the learning process and promote further

communication. Another kind of evaluation is given by the learners toward the program. The learners are given chance to fulfil evaluation sheet which are used to evaluate the teachers and the program.

Materials Selection

The ability to select appropriate material is very important in language teaching because the good materials may attract students' attention. According to Hutchinson and Waters (*idem*) there are some principles in selecting good materials:

- They provide a stimulus to learning
- They help to organize the teaching-learning process.
- They embody a view of the nature of language and learning help to organize the teaching-learning process
- They reflect the nature of learning task
- They can have a very useful function in broadening the basis of teacher training
- They provide models of correct and appropriate language use

In addition, Bloor (1995) states that in selecting good materials there are some criteria to be considered:

- They may create activities that engage the learners in language use and require them to be involved in context through English.
- They give opportunities for the learners to draw their existing knowledge and skills.
- They give opportunities for communicative methodology to be employed.
- They increase language awareness such as the use of grammar, vocabulary, the structure of texts, and convention of politeness.
- They provide activities to encourage learners to do self-study

Materials mean anything which is used to help teach language learners. Materials can be in the form of a textbook, a workbook, a cassette, a video, a photocopied handout, a newspaper, a paragraph written on a whiteboard or anything which presents or informs about the language being learned. Further, Hutchinson and Waters (*idem*) states that materials mean anything which can be used to facilitate the learning of a language (linguistic, visual, auditory or kinesthetic). These materials can be presented in print, live performance, on cassettes, DVD, or in the internet. These materials can be instructional, experiential, elicitive, or explorative. The material is instructional when it informs the learners about the language. It is experiential when it provides exposure to the language in use, elicitive when it stimulates language use, and explorative when it seeks discoveries about language use in natural settings.

Teachers usually use any textbook available to teach their students. What they can do is usually trying to evaluate the textbook they have to use to teach their students. In evaluating the textbook, teachers observe what works and what does not work and they add their own style/preference and interpretation to the textbook. If they think that the textbook is in line with the curriculum/syllabus, the textbook can be used to teach their students. Teachers will evaluate and select textbooks according to how appropriate they seem for the given context. Well-designed textbooks can support inexperienced teachers a lot because they act as training materials.

Inexperienced teachers usually rely on available textbook. However, gradually, they may find that there are unsatisfactory (unrealistic) features that need for remedy. Since it might be difficult to find alternative texts, one possible way to do is to change the exercises based on the texts.

Due to a limited time for ESP courses, the teaching materials should be as specific as possible to the learners' target needs so that the learners may achieve maximum linguistic benefit from the course. An observation of five published ESP Banking textbooks – Instrumental English: English for Banking and Finance (Stillman and Gordon, 1983), Bank on

Your English (McGovern, 1987), International Banking and Finance (Cobert, 1990), English for Banking (Radice, 1992), Banking Transactions (Radice, 1993), finds out that these published teaching materials are not really suitable for the service encounters between bank tellers and customers in Barclay bank, England. (Dharma,1996), Furthermore, a study of grammatical and lexical features of an authentic text (an English newspaper article) shows that the article consists of complicated sentences because almost each sentence contains multi embedded constructions which are reduced (Dharma, 2003). It seems that the writer has tried to compress the grammars so that a lot of information can be contained in a small space for the intention of being economical since newspaper spaces are provided for commercial purposes. It can be concluded that the ways the writer writes this text are influenced by the context and co-text. Learners may find that the grammatical constructions used in this text are difficult to understand because these constructions are different from what they learned from grammar book. On the other hand, the language teachers who only rely on a certain textbook during the whole teaching-learning activities, should now realize that enabling the learners to use and understand well-formed sentences only is not enough. Various language uses in various contexts should be exposed to the students from the early stage to enable them to understand and use language in the real life situation. Related to these, McCarthy and Carter (1994) advice language teachers to start teaching with texts and recognizing through them the forms of lexico grammar and phonology and how these soundings function in their particular patterns. They believe that all naturally occurring texts are of equal value.

Based on these, another possible way to provide teaching materials, especially for experienced teacher is by selecting some authentic texts from various sources, designing, and writing them for teaching. Materials writing are one of the most characteristic features of ESP in practice. Authentic texts are advantageous for teaching materials because they are informative, realistic and as mentioned above they are explorative, experiential, and elicitive. From these texts, many activities can be designed for the students. The materials design model can be seen in the following diagram,

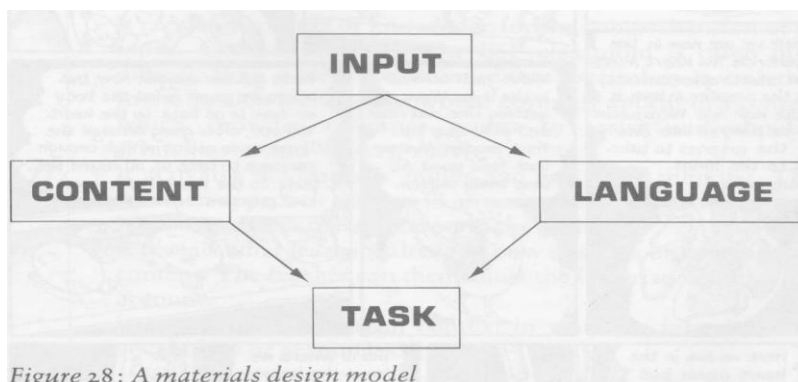


Figure 28: A materials design model

Diagram 1. A materials design model
(Hutchinson and Waters, 1995: 109)

Some Advantages of Using Authentic Texts

Commonly, many traditional language course books emphasizes language teaching on single sentences or minimal units of language and on practicing forms of language for analytical purposes. Their aim is to isolate bits of language so that students can concentrates on it. According to Harmer (idem), artificial nature of the language makes it very unlike anything that they are likely to encounter in real life. However, as language is a means of communication in a society, language should also be viewed from its social function. Understanding a language involves not only having knowledge of grammar, phonology and lexis but also sociocultural

rules of language (Canale and Swain, 1980). To achieve this, using authentic texts for teaching materials are really advantageous.

Authentic texts are texts designed for native speakers, they are 'real' texts designed not for language students, but for the speakers of the language. Power (1981) says that authentic materials are excellent source of teaching materials because:

- they provide linguistic input in specific context
- the students may get an idea of how the language is used by native speakers in various social contexts
- they can possibly attract the students' interest
- they can prompt class discussions better than anything else

Moreover, Harmer (1991) states that through authentic texts there are various communicative activities can be created. Through these activities, teachers may encourage the learners' desire to communicate, and to decide their purpose in communication. Teaching is focused on content not form however learners are made aware of variety language used. During the activities there will be no teacher intervention and no material control

Based on this, McCarthy and Carter (1994) agree that authentic texts are appropriate teaching materials because 'a particular aspect of language use we explore in detail is the way in which meaning are not wholly stable, that they vary according to the context, purpose and audience for the communication and that the same forms of language can have different meanings in different contexts' (xii). This perspective is supported by Holme (1996:4) who believes that the ESP course cannot ignore the very obvious point that one language point is often better understood when viewed in varied context and situations,

The following are examples of authentic texts.



WANTED!

Fred and Winifred Visitor

- Seen leaving food unattended
- Seen 'baiting' a bear with peanut butter for cute photo
- Seen leaving garbage at picnic areas
- Seen leaving food overnight in their car

These careless, thoughtless and dangerous actions are
RESPONSIBLE FOR THE KILLING OF A BEAR
PLEASE

- * store your food properly
- * put garbage in the trash cans
- * enjoy all wildlife from a distance



The Giant Panda needs your help to survive

ONCE every eighty to a hundred years the bamboo forests in China's Sichuan Province burst into flower and then die off. And that's bad news for the Giant Panda, which depends for its survival on huge amounts of bamboo.

But that's just one of the problems facing the Panda.

To ensure that it has a future it

is vital to preserve the complex eco-system in which it lives, to carry out research into its dietary needs and investigate possible alternatives, to discover the reasons for its low reproduction rate, to study the problem of internal parasites – all these factors and many more which threaten its survival.

These texts are interesting because they contain important issue – destruction of environment. The first is a poster from a forest in California while the second is an article about an animal that risk becoming extinct in China. These materials can create enjoyable activities which engage learners' thinking capacities. From the first poster the learners can be asked to work in small group to find out the purpose of the poster and the reasons why the actions are 'careless, thoughtless and dangerous. The class may also discuss various meanings of the word *wanted*. The learners are then encouraged to collect data from various sources about cruelty to animals in Indonesia, write a paper, present in in front of the classroom, and conduct interesting discussion.

The second article may create another communicative activities by asking the learners to work in small group to:

- choose any animal which is at risk
- collect as much information about it as they can
- find out the causes of the risk
- find out the possible solution to save the animal
- prepare a short talk to persuade people to protect environment.

These few examples represent a sample from a wide range of possibilities of creating communicative activities. From various communicative activities learners' language awareness will be developed.

Conclusion

In this discussion we have looked at the views on language teaching approaches that teaching language usage will develop one's linguistic competence while teaching language use will develop one's communicative competence. Furthermore, from some principles on teaching ESP we know that some consideration need to be taken on: learners' need, course design, material selection, methodology, and evaluation. The discussion is focused on what kind of teaching materials are appropriate for a specific group of learners. The result of discussion shows that authentic texts are advantageous because they are informative, realistic, explorative, and experiential. As the result the learners are aware of the content and the language use.

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