

## Adapting and/or adopting non-authentic and genuine materials for an ERP context, towards a stereotype-free thinking English

### Résumé

Language teachers have understood that to enliven the classroom they needed to teach realism ; thus they needed real-life materials.

This is indeed what we want to teach our learners : how to do meaningful things inside and outside the classroom setting.

In the article, I discuss the different materials as non-authentic and how and when the practitioner has to use them so as to bring excitement and enjoyment in his class, to teach the student to understand the language he is learning, and to comprehend how native speakers construct the language they speak. The student has to understand, for example, funny remarks, not because he has been told that they are funny but that he thinks that they are so.

Likewise, with such materials, and with the teacher's expertise, our learners will move straightforwardly from one restricted context of communication to a broader and more natural one.

**N. LABED**

Département d'Anglais  
Université Mentouri  
Constantine, Algérie

### ملخص

لقد فهم اساتذة اللغة منذ أكثر من عشريّة إن إفعام الدرس بالحياة لا يكون إلا باستخدام المعدات الأصلية من شرائط سمعية وسمعية بصرية. وبالفعل ما نريده نحن لطلابنا هو أن يتعلموا كيف يتكلمون اللغة التي هم يتعلمونها داخل وخارج الحدود البيداغوجية.

أتحدث في مقالي هذا عن أنواع تلك المعدات السمعية (والسمعية البصرية الأصلية منها وغير الأصلية - أي المجهزة خصيصا للأغراض البيداغوجية وكيف ومتى يمكن ويجب

Teachers always wanted change. Indeed, some twenty five years ago, language teachers understood that to enliven the classroom, they needed real-life materials. They wanted to outstrip the traditional shibboleths that kept pedagogy and training go in a merry-go-round-stereotype fashion. They needed to teach realism. Today, it still holds true. Our students want to learn how to do meaningful things inside and outside the walls of the classroom. A setting in which the participant communicates what he considers important messages in time and space. Realism in the classroom became axiomatic.

An approach reflected in materials and materials design fuelled by experience and expertise came to the fore. Which materials do we have to use : non-authentic, genuine or both ? Would our materials simply teach a schemata of rules ; a schemata of sentences, or a perceptual schemata wherein the

إستعمالها بجدية حتى تصبح الدروس المقدمة تثير شهية الطالب إلى تعلم اللغة الأجنبية بشكل يجعله يفهم، على سبيل المثال، ما يضحك في النكتة لا لأنه شرح له كيف ولماذا تضحك، بل لأنه فهم من تلقاء نفسه لماذا هي تضحك.

وعلى هذا المنوال، فقد يتعد الطالب شيئاً فشيئاً من تعلم المقولب إلى تعلمه التعبير الشخصي حتى يتمكن من فهم اللغة التي يتعلمها عند سماعها وأن يتكلمها بطلاقة و عفوية أهلها.

student matches the in-coming data with the image he already has ? Or would we use materials to teach how to do things expertly and well ? To answer these questions and others, I will try in this article to explore tentatively the very nature of materials and their use in teaching English and Thinking English.

### I- Which teaching materials ?

Labeling materials as non-authentic or genuine is not the heart of teaching thinking English. What counts, in fact, is their practicality and their effectiveness. They have to act like a sugar-coated quinine for they have to be both delighting and instructive. They have, too, to be suitable and stimulating to rouse the student's desire to learn,

together with making him discover the particular characteristics of Anglo-Saxon thought that is embodied in the native speaker's morals, customs, and even their sense of humor. These materials should, so, consists of the varieties of English with which the foreign learners need to become familiar and 'it is a good idea for students to be exposed to what native speakers of the language they are learning actually say.' (McLean. 1981 :6).

In this attitudinal search for materials, many teachers find themselves caught in a crossfire, as on the one hand they are dissatisfied with the artificiality of language in EFL textbooks, and on the other hand they are well-acquainted with the difficulty of finding genuine materials whose linguistic level will be suitable for their students.

#### a) Non-authentic materials : simulation and suitability

A vast store of materials produced by institutions, organizations, and individuals is available. The teacher has to steep himself in these materials and be familiar with them, and he has to explore the nature and the settings of the materials.

Materials can be tailored by native(or non-native) language sprcialists (as in Brown & Yule, Françoise Grellet, Derek Selem, Derek Davy, Maley & Moulding et al) and teachers according to the measurements of their teaching situations.

Audio/video cassettes ; films books, and the like that are made, graded, revised and designed to be used as teaching materials in ELT/ESP classes, for instance, are examples of autentic materials. These materials are simulated situations and recreations resembling successfully, at times, real situations. In making materials where the texts are not genuine : 'all the people, institutions, organizations, products, etc, (...) are entirely fictitious. (...) The only departure from this principle concerns a few people, institutions, organizations whose names are so well known. (...) They have been used in the interest of realism, as have the names of actual towns, places and geographical locations whenever possible.' (Davy. 1971 :v).

In these materials, language features (grammar, lexis, prosody, etc.) and language delivery are controlled. It is often scripted and normal orose, free from any language chaos as shifting, overlaps, noise, hesitations or interruptions. Language, so, remains solid and dehumanized, i.e ; language in vitro. Also, the texts may undergo easification

when the material designer thinks that the students' level falls far below that he expected.

In ESP, however, simplified texts are 'genuine like' for they are '« doctored » versions of original texts, (...) only vocabulary and syntax have been attended to, not the conceptual structure and the rhetorical patterning.' (Widdowson. In Robinson. 1991 :55) as journals magazines, books, and the like of vulgarized science.

#### **b- Genuine materials : real data**

When with the authentic materials the students' language activation and expansion are secured, the teacher can start using natural and genuine materials. One should never believe that it's difficult to use real data.

The source of the data for learning can be the actual language of real settings. A setting in which the student feels being engaged to comprehend language as it is used in realist genuine communication.

Genuine materials so are 'natural', generally unscripted or semi-scripted speeches ; news bulletins, interviews, conferences, passengers' talk, etc., collected in vivo with all the possible chaos as noise, caughs, overlaps, laughs, shifts, hesitations or incomplete utterances. These materials are initially never meant to serve pedagogic purposes but are designed for such a purpose, and by so designing them does not de facto turn them non-authentic

These materials represent different real situations (formal and informal) where the language settings are not approximations or simulations. Workspots ; in the home ; in the market place ; in a café, in a restaurant, etc., represent those different real situations.

Genuine materials offer better topic frameworks and better model of activated features of discourse in which the students will learn to negotiate the salient elements of 'what is being talked about', to know what is crucial and that is peripheral, and what is mere verbiage, or as Brown and Yule (1984) put it 'why the speaker said what he said in a particular discourse situation'.

Such materials can be collected and obtained from radio, television, films, or conferences. Yet, the teacher can hunt around, when the occasion permits, all the possible materials he can get. Telegrams, application forms, publicity leaflets, information leaflets about railway services, and many others are types of genuine materials. However, one has to bear in mind that most of publicity and informational materials are deliberately simplified into 'layman's' terms to serve general (public) foreign visitors.

## **II- Adapting and/or adopting non-authentic and genuine materials**

Jonathan Swift once said : 'You! Blow out, correct, insert, refine. Enlarge, diminish, interline. Be mindful, when invention fails, to scratch your head and bite your nails.' Indeed, adapting or adopting these materials is basically determined by, first, what we want the materials to do, second how we will do it, and third by their practicality vis-à-vis the rather authoritative and mercurial learners' needs.

For students of a tertiary level, for example, non-authentic materials are adopted for they have been largely worked out and authorally designed to serve one particular level and target.

Differently, teachers may want ‘materials to be more interesting and based on real life activities, and topics not necessarily to be too discipline-related.’ (Chamberlain and Baumgardner. In Robinson. 1991 :52). In effect, the teacher may choose a genuine material and make it fit his particular teaching task (adapt it). As an instance, for students of economics, a genuine text on silk can be used to teach the history of money and currencies, for pieces of silk were used as banknotes by the ancient Chinese. Similarly, another genuine text on silkworm smuggling and the sentence the then silkworm traffickers used to have can be used in a law class. In fact, the teacher departs from a text with a particular meaning, adapts it to arrive at his specific purpose. Actually, the thoughtful teacher ‘works as much’ by feel’ as by the application of a well-researched method (McArthur. 1983). It is important to know that language content of many genuine texts remains largely unexploited as many teachers seek tailored and ready-made texts.

However, an adapted text is a text modified for a pedagogic purpose. It is no more of the same context (decontextualized) and it is thus no more a genuine piece of communication (cf. Mead. 1978). Again, the accomplished teacher who had his fingers burnt too often knows well what to do with his materials. He is an expert to make what the text actually exemplifies, illustrate what he wants it to illustrate, without necessarily the text losing its original subject value (see the above examples on silk). In fact, an ‘adapted text’ is not totally a decontextualized text but rather a text re-contextualized as we do not use it in a completely alien (new) context. To my sense, the context of a text lies within the text itself, and by text I mean a stretch of language, not a mere series of individual words, and thus ‘context’ goes with the whole not with the particles.

In a speech, for instance, by only connecting up the needed passages to use them for a particular pedagogic purpose, we will, by so doing, safeguard the integrity of the speech context. If, on the contrary, we pick up some passages from a speech, work them out, mount and edit them, then will surely impair the context value of our text, and we will most certainly make it say what it never says just like what some publicity people do in election campaigns when they want to alter and tarnish the reputation of an opponent, turning him from a ‘do-gooder’ to someone supping with the devil.

So, to be meticulously faithful, we have to be aware of such language manipulations that would also make us turn a genuine text (which genuinity is what interests us) into a non-authentic one.

At any rate, in all this enterprise, an awareness of language and language learning in relation with materials has to be inculcated in our students at every instance of training so that they will truly achieve what we are after : teaching thinking English.

### **III- Towards a stereotype-free thinking English**

Actually, the great majority of our students never visited (and probably will never visit) the community where they are to practice the language they are learning. The students practice has been restricted to their ability ‘to function in a ‘foreign’ (non-English) situation’ (Lowe. 1981 :34), a context that Lowe identifies as ERP (English for Restricted Purposes) that could well be a form of EFL or ESP, so, in this restriction, where does thinking English stand ?

By thinking English is meant : think as the English (and the Anglo-Saxons) think, body and soul. Then, in teaching thinking English, at which end do we start :

communicative or (purely) linguistic ? According to me, it's both. We move to and from, a linguistic familiarization (and description) to discourse interpretation, information negotiation and discrimination (Top-down and Bottom-up processes). Thus, by a constant exposure of students to easy and then moderately severe materials we would prepare them to acquire the language with all its possible body and paralinguistic features. This would encourage entice the student in his involvement towards thinking English. He will start to participate in native people's lives, and try to understand their desires and fears. He will acquire notions and functions : he will learn how the native speakers think, speak argue, support and refute an argument. How they describe, compare ; how they scold and pun. How they make funny remarks, and 'the conversational funny remark(...) needs to be taught. Understanding such remarks will depend upon being able to think in the same way as the native speakers if English thinking does not occur, then understanding will only exist because the hearer has been told that something is funny, not because he thinks that it is.'(Lowe.1981 :36).

Yet, in an example he gave, Bill Lowe says : 'In a taped lesson which I recorded part of a dialogue went :

« How do you know the family will be on holiday ? »

« The milkman told me. » (op cit.p35).

Yes, the native speaker knows, according to regularity and (world) normality that the milkman stops delivering milk to families who go on holiday, and thus what he says is a reliable information. Knowing such a thing means possessing a social knowledge our students do not have. They speak an English that is not genuine, free from (all) its social constituents.

The proviso here to help our learners practice their different skills such as decoding, information negotiation, and the like and in relation with that ERP is not the level of attainment sought, is to look for, as Widdowson puts it, 'a model of language use which does not simply atomize the user's knowledge of competence but which accounts for the essential features of discourse process (...) to lend support to the concepts of training and education.'(1983 :34).

Moreover, to make sure our students would avoid stereotype thinking that could be embodied in a schemata of sentences, the teacher has to present to his students-everytime-new and original texts and topics, or train them how to have personal yet original approach towards different topics that is to put them on the alert and on the defensive so that they will not see a routine in what they do, and to make them avoid having a routinistic stereotype behaviour with the texts, for they all would say almost the same things. Topics as Pollution or Overpopulation are overused and have become dull. A (new) thought-provoking question as: 'What would happen if scientists, one day, would invent an engine that works with water ?' A question like this will prepare the atmosphere for students to think differently about pollution. They would not go to say (what everybody knows) that pollution is a bad thing, and the like. Rather, a new answer would spring up and would go something like this. 'if such an engine would be made, pollution would decrease and at the time this would endanger severely the future of the oil exporting countries since no one would buy buy oil anymore...' Students will develop their perceptual schemata, that is they will match the new information they get with the (social) image they already have. Something similar can be done with any other topic as Overpopulation.

Inviting our students to have personal (subjective) thoughts would certainly sharpen their skills, intelligence and sensibility. This will activate (or re-activate) their motivation. They start to move from a mere perception of the woods (Top-Down process) to become part of the woods (Bottom-Up process) which is discourse interpretation and turn taking, i.e., thinking English. The materials with which they behave would serve as a springboard to take them from one context of communication, namely ERP (English for Restricted Purposes) to a broader and a real one : ENRP (English For Non Restricted Purposes) where 'topics are not fixed beforehand but are negotiated in the process of conversing. (Brown and Yule. 1984 :89).

N moving towards his ENRP, the learner builds up his own communicative abilities, viz his oralex. « Oralect. » is a metalanguage of some sort that starts in the aural/oral classes (as well as in the other classes) and grows 'out-there' during the student's different speech exchanges inside and outside the narrow classroom situation. The 'oralex' is an authentic language which is expected to be spontaneous and idiomatic growing (hopefully) towards near-nativeness to become 'genuine' of its own.

In this respect, using genuine materials and a good technical back up as good language 'practitiatories' (where students practice, not laboratories) helps in putting the student in the right linguistic bath (that he can get only if goes there) to allow him develop spontaneity because 'if we abandon the idea of using...) authentic conversations as basic texts, then we must also abandon our attempt to achieve spontaneity, because obviously as soon as people start thinking about how they are going to sound about the words they are using, they will not be quite spontaneous., (Ur. 1984 :23).

In ESP, (as well as is ELT) the student is not a tabula rasa. He has had enough academic English before he got on to study the English of his specialism. His communication needs of his past education can be stretched to his new communication needs.

For us teachers, making our course fit our learners' needs is a paramount, so, whether we use materials for their authenticity or for their genuinity ; for the immediacy of their use or for their substantial communicativeness, they have to be appropriate and yielding, not puzzles that would stop or impair any progress in communication. We are not seers of vision, and our materials are not of the 'blue-ribbon' type, we must so 'be ready for compromise, adaptation, supplementation, and the like. There could well be a time for authority, and a time for democracy, a time for rules and a time for relaxation'. (McArthur. 1991 :105).

## CONCLUSION

Our students are not passive recipients to be filled by us. They have a dormant competence that our materials should awaken and re-activate. Our materials should also serve as booster to lift up our learners from one context of communication (ERP) to change it with another broader and more natural one ; although some people still think that this might be true of a pedagogic and scientific paradise.

Materials and materials design represent sometimes a real skein. I have attempted here, and with no zealotry, to suggest a panacea purposefully, though, avoiding to open the materials Pandora box.

### References

1. Brown G., and G. Yule, "Discourse Analysis", C.U.P., (1984).
2. Davy, Derek, "Advanced English course the linguaphone institute", (1971).
3. Lowe, Bill, "Thinking English" in MET modern English teacher, John Corah Ltd. Louhborough ,vol. 8, n°3, (1981), pp.34-36.
4. McArthur A., Foundation course for language teachers cambridge language teaching library, (1983).
5. McLean, Alan, "Authentic speech" in MET Modern English Teacher, (1981), vol. 8, n°3, pp. 6-9.
6. Mead, Richard, "Students needs and the authenticity of ESP materials", in ESP Journal, (1978), pp 17-22.
7. Robinson, Pauline, "ESP Today". A practitioner's Guide Prentice Hall, (1991).
8. Ur. Penny, "Teaching Listening comprehension", C.U.P., (1987).
9. Widdowson, H.G., "Learning purpose and language use Oxford": O.U.P., (1983). □