2004

Authentic materials in English as a Second Language conversation instruction

Xiangmei Zhang

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project

Part of the Education Commons, and the First and Second Language Acquisition Commons

Recommended Citation

http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project/2526

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the John M. Pfau Library at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses Digitization Project by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.
AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND
LANGUAGE CONVERSATION INSTRUCTION

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition:
Teaching English as a Second Language

by
Xiangmei Zhang
March 2005
AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND
LANGUAGE CONVERSATION INSTRUCTION

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

by
Xiangmei Zhang
March 2005

Approved by:

Sunny Hyon, Chair, English

Kimberly Costino

Ron Chen

2/17/05 Date
ABSTRACT

In the last ten years, a number of studies have focused on the benefits of using authentic materials to improve ESL students' communication skills and to maximize comprehensible input for learners. As Rogers and Medley (1992) have said, "If students are to use the second language communicatively in the real world tomorrow, then they must begin to encounter the language of that world in the classroom today..." (p. 467).

According to Wong and Kwok (1995), "Authentic materials are used in genuine communication in the real world, and not specifically prepared for the teaching and leaning of English" (p. 319). For instance, original unedited newspaper articles, written and audio-visual materials form the media can belong to this group. However, the foreignness and difficulty level of authentic materials can cause students to perceive these materials as unauthentic. Although there have been different views of authentic materials proposed in the scholarship, there has been little research done with ESL teachers as subjects to gain their insights and experiences on how to make authentic materials authentic to students.

In this thesis, I analyze how experienced ESL language instructors choose and design authentic
materials, and most importantly, make them authentic to second language learners. My findings from interviews with these instructors illustrate similarities and differences in their criteria for learner-authentic materials and activities. Furthermore, I apply these findings for ESL instructors, especially new ESL instructors, with a lesson plan that demonstrate what I have learned through this research on authentic materials.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the following people who have one way or the other helped me on this thesis: Dr. Sunny Hyon as the chair for my thesis with unfailing patient and pains-taking guidance; Dr. Kimberly Costino, and Dr. Ron Chen on my committee, who have taken great effort and put into valuable suggestions in reading and editing this project. My thanks also goes to the professors in English department and to CSUSB, especially to the Adult Reentry Center’s rocking Judy and Tamera, as well as computer number 8, which always was there for me.

From the bottom of my heart, my education could not be possible without the support and the love from my great family: Tang Keying, Zhang Peichang, Zhang Xianghong. My dearest friends also so deserve my thanks: Nathen and Nancy, Toshico, Ms. and Mr. Lou, Shuping, Kaoro, Gwen and Hamp, John, Little monkeys, Maggie, Beverly, Frank, Judi and Judy. I especially want to thank my mom, Tang Keying, for listening to my year-long complains with unfailing patient; and my boyfriend Tim Handley for always tolerate my ever-changing moods and on making this journey so much easier for me. I also want to thank my editor in chief,
Mr. Thelander, without his help and expertise, this thesis would not be looking so pretty and professional.
DEDICATION

For you, mom, Keying, who has given me life, confidence, and blessing; you have taught me and keeps on reminding me what means to be loved and how to love. Mom, I love you so much. This one is truly for you.
CHAPTER FOUR: APPLICATION

Instructors' Definitions of Authentic Materials ......................................... 56

The Benefits of Authentic Materials ......................................................... 58
The Limitations of Using Authentic Materials ..... 59
How Materials May be Modified ..................... 60
Application ............................................. 60
The Animals of Eaton Canyon ....................... 68
Conclusion .............................................. 70
APPENDIX A: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR
INSTRUCTORS ........................................ 74
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT-INSTRUCTOR ............ 76
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT (AUDIO) .................. 78
REFERENCE .............................................. 80
CHAPTER ONE
RESEARCH ON AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

In the last twenty-five years, communicative approaches have revolutionarily changed how ESL language instructors teach oral English. The emphasis has shifted to teaching students meaningful, purposeful language instead of simply contrived, grammatically correct sentences that native English speakers do not use in everyday life situations. Because communicative language teaching has emphasized giving students experience with real-life-like communication, the materials used in this approach are meant to reflect real world, “authentic” qualities. A number of scholars have discussed the usage of authentic materials in communicative language teaching. Breen (1980), for example, explains why a communicative approach is vitally important to ESL or EFL teaching and he further stresses how authentic materials can contribute to the betterment of students' communicative competence.

Although researchers like Breen have emphasized the benefits of authentic materials, there has been debate in ESL about how to define authentic materials. Some scholars view authentic materials as those with real-world origins, such as newspapers, movies, menus, or even television
shows (Nuann, 1980; Lee, 1995; Peacork, 1997; Wong & Kwok, 1995). Others emphasize relevance to the learner as a criterion for authenticity. Some work has also argued that authentic materials do not guarantee authentic utterances by the learner (Breen, 1985; Thomas, 1995; Arnold, 1991). One cannot expect students to produce authentic language just by staring at the front page of the *New York Times* or listening to a news report on the stock market.

This thesis aims to explore this complicated concept of authenticity in language teaching. In this chapter, I review research on authentic materials in several areas. I will begin by discussing how authenticity has been situated in ESL communicative teaching. This will be followed by a review of definitions of authentic materials and a discussion of criteria for selecting and designing learner friendly authentic tasks from authentic materials. I will conclude with my own interview-based study of ESL conversation instructors' approaches to authentic materials, the focus of the remainder of the thesis.

The Communicative Approach and Authenticity

Since 1980, traditional approaches to ESL/EFL teaching have been replaced or at least influenced by communicative approaches. In their book *The Communicative
Approach and Authentic Texts, Little, Devitt, and Singleton (1994) mention that whereas traditional approaches emphasize teaching language in terms of forms, grammar, repetition, imitation, drills and memorization, communicative approaches pay more attention to teaching language in terms of meaning, interactive communication, and real life applications. They summarize the principles and characteristics that underpin the communicative approach and that can benefit the learner. For instance, they explain that communicative approaches give learners more opportunities to actively interact with language instructors, negotiate meaning, produce real-life-like language and therefore, are more likely to increase students' communicative competence. The benefit of a communicative approach is that students in a communication-rich class are encouraged to speak up more often and are allowed to negotiate meanings through conversation to produce authentic utterances. They further explain and illustrate how communicative approaches and authentic texts can assist students in achieving real world communication and language skills.

One major important goal of communicative teaching is to develop learners' communicative competence, an important concept in the work of Hymes (1972). In his
theory of communicative language competence, Hymes emphasized the importance of different types of learner knowledge. On top of having correct knowledge of using proper grammar and forms, Hymes argues that it is also vitally important to have understanding of the social communication or culture for using language within the correct context. Therefore, Hymes' view of communicative competence for knowing a language "entails offer a much more comprehensive view than Chomsky's view of competence, which deals primarily with abstract grammatical knowledge" (p. 70). The different emphasis of communication over merely grammatically correct forms, therefore, is at the core of communicative approach.

Applying such a view to language teaching, we see that it is important for the instructors of ESL classes to understand what elements of communicative competence the learners need to develop. Canale and Swain (1980) have clearly defined the following four dimensions of communicative competence:

- grammatical competence refers to the domain of grammatical and lexical capacity;
- sociolinguistic competence refers to an understanding of the social context in which communication takes place; discourse competence refers to the interpretation of individual message elements in terms of their interconnectedness and of how meaning is represented in relationship to the entire
discourse or text; and strategic competence refers to the coping strategies that communicators employ to initiate, terminate, maintain, repair, and redirect communication (p. 71).

With respect to authentic materials in communicative approach, researchers have discussed ways that authentic materials can be used in second language classes in order to help build different aspects of communicative competence. Richards and Rodgers in their book *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (1986) specifically provide three categories of instructional materials used in communicative teaching: text-based materials, task-based materials, and realia, which "might include language-based realia, such as signs and magazines, advertisements, and newspapers, or graphic and visual sources" (p. 80). This third group of materials in particular has authentic qualities in that they come from the real world and include "maps, pictures, symbols, graphs, and charts or objects" that can be used to build "communicative activities" (p. 80). So the power of authentic materials lies not only in that they are from the real world and have practicality for the students, but also in that they can be used to design communicative activities that aid students in learning, practicing language in meaningful ways.
Breen (1980) also discusses the importance of authentic materials for developing spoken discourse competence. He emphasizes being true to the media, meaning using the proper authentic forms of texts to match to the target language competence. He states,

For a text-type to be authentic it must obey the principle of verisimilitude—or truth to the medium. We mean by this that learners would be expected to act upon text-types in the appropriate medium: written texts would be read; spoken ones listened to, visual ones seen. Just as communication is governed by conventions, so we can see that the different media represent and obey conventions specific to them. Learning dialogue by reading, for example, may neutralize the authentic conventions of spoken discourse, and we may be asking the learner to become involved in using and applying knowledge in a distorted way. (p. 97)

The Benefits of Authentic Materials

Authentic materials have been praised for their many benefits. One of the assumed benefits is that authentic materials can motivate students more than artificial materials do. In his research, Peacock (1997) examines whether authentic materials can really increase EFL learners’ motivation. He observed two classes of Korean EFL beginning-level students in this study who were given instruction that involved using authentic materials one day and then artificial materials the next day, for a total of 40 hours of class over 20 days. The authentic
materials consisted of texts not designed for second language learners. For example, Peacock used "two poems; some television listings; two short articles; an advice column from a local English-language newspaper; an American pop song; and some English-language magazine advertisements" (p. 146). The daily activity consisted of small group discussion on a topic given to the learners. After each class, students were interviewed and reported their level of motivation in the classes through a questionnaire. Results indicated that students in the first 5 days of the research expressed that they were motivated more by artificial materials. However, as time went by, from day 6 to day 20, they reported to have been motivated more by authentic materials. This research suggests that authentic materials can be of great benefit to motivate EFL learners.

Authentic materials are not only able to stimulate students in classrooms to learn language texts, they are important for helping learners develop different types of language competence they need in their daily lives. Saito (1994), for example, studied the usefulness of authentic materials for training American MBA students to study Japanese for business careers. She states that traditional business curricular and foreign language instruction
cannot prepare American students to function in the real business world. Many graduates of traditional MBA programs with traditional curricula in Japanese are now facing difficulties in finding jobs. Students of traditional business curricula have complained that they have learned only how to write Japanese words or make correct Japanese sentences, but do not really know how to perform practical tasks, such as reading a menu and ordering food (Saito, 1994). Saito points out that the practical language learning program with the use of authentic materials has given the students many chances to get familiar with how Japanese is used in real life. She emphasizes, "The use of authentic materials in Japanese language training is essential from the beginning of instruction" (p. 37). The author further argues that it is necessary for business schools to make texts as authentic as the real business world in order to assist the students in achieving practical language abilities. One example of authentic materials she says instructors could use is a short airline commercial that can be played on a TV screen, presenting a list of destination countries in Japanese with a background voice clearly pronouncing all the words in Japanese. The author suggests this brief advertisement can give students listening and reading practice when they
are studying katakana, the phonetic system used for foreign words, which are common in Japanese business communication. She suggests “teachers can then expand this topic further by providing rules for how foreign words are pronounced in Japanese” (p. 37). By using this type of materials with real-world applications, the author argues that the learners are given preparations with how to function in Japanese real business world.

Different media besides commercials can also be used to bring authentic language into the classroom. Shih and Cifuentes (2000), for example, present a study to investigate if online communication with native English speakers can have a positive impact on Taiwanese ESL students’ language competency and writing skills. Each student was matched with a tutor to learn about American literature through emailing and on-line conversation. During the ten-week period of studying on-line together, students were required to report their learning progress to their tutors. By the end of the program, both the students and the tutors filled out surveys that indicated this mode of communication is valuable in motivating non-native speakers of English to produce English utterances. Most students considered the one-on-one online
conversation authentic and said it helped them with better understanding American language and culture.

Weyers' research (1999) also shows that authentic Spanish video increased American students' communicative competence level in Spanish, when compared with students who were taught without the video. Specifically his research investigates if watching recorded authentic video of a soap opera in Spanish can truly increases students' listening and speaking communicative competence levels. The first group was taught with authentic video named Maria Mercedes (1992) and the second group was taught with lectures only. Then after eight weeks of study, the researcher compared pre- and post- treatment tests measuring listening and oral conversation abilities. The results show that students from the group with the video were significantly more confident in speaking and generating conversation.

Definitions of Authentic Materials

Although scholars and instructors have praised the benefits of authentic materials, they seem to be unable to agree on a specific definition of authentic materials. According to Wong and Kwok (1995), "authentic materials are used in genuine communication in the real world, and
not specifically prepared for the teaching and learning of English” (p. 319). According to this definition, authentic materials are unedited or unmodified from their original purposes, and can include items such as original restaurant menus, unedited newspaper articles, and audio-visual materials from the media. Similarly, in their article “Language with a purpose: Using authentic materials in the foreign language classroom,” Rogers and Medley (1988) give examples of this type of authentic material: “both oral and written-that reflect a naturalness of form, and appropriateness of cultural and situational context that would be found in the language as used by native speakers” (p. 468). For instance, they discuss using TV programs in the target language, which offer the learners a “visual context that is reinforced with the sound element and, in many instances, the written word, all of which contribute greatly to better comprehension of the message” (p. 469).

On the other hand, others have pointed out that the foreignness and difficulty level of unedited original materials can cause students to perceive them as “inauthentic.” Researchers have suggested that authentic materials can only be useful and authentic to the students when “learner authenticity” is realized, meaning the
students must be interested and involved with the materials. For Breen (1985), in order to be authentic, materials need to be a good addition to students' knowledge or experience on this subject, that is, they should "engage the learner's prior knowledge, interest and curiosity" (p. 63). Similarly, according to Lee (1995), "authenticity can only be achieved when there is agreement between the material writer's intention and the learner's interpretation" (p. 324). In other words, materials are authentic if they can generate some schemata, interaction or agreement from the learner, so that the learner can understand what the materials are trying to convey. Based on this definition, authentic materials can be any materials that are perceived by the learner as useful, lifelike, and interesting. Such materials can include not only original untouched materials from the real world, but also materials created by language instructors, and materials co-designed by ESL teachers and students.

Some materials from the real world can have interesting topics for learners, and students may want to learn the content, yet, if the students are not equipped with the proper level of language skills, vocabulary, or cultural background, they simply cannot comprehend the content of the article. Such materials cannot be useful or
authentic to the learners. Thomas (1995) argues that we cannot mistakenly think authentic materials are equal to acquisition-rich input, since these materials do not guarantee students’ automatic comprehension. He states, “If the input is not comprehended, then it has no chance to be integrated into the learner’s language system” (p. 5). The author proposes a new definition of authentic material by emphasizing the importance of comprehension.

In addition, unmodified materials from the real world should not be considered as vehicles to automatic authentic interaction or response. Lee (1995) specifically argues that not all materials can promote “the learner’s interaction with the authentic materials, in terms of appropriate responses and positive psychological reaction” (p. 323). Arnold (1991) has also suggested in his article, “Authenticity revisited: How real is real,” that the use of authentic materials does not guarantee authentic interaction or authentic responses. For instance, when students are taught how to take notes in English with tapes of telephone recordings, these recordings are only set-forms of how conversations might start or end. Through this way of learning, although the tapes are recorded authentic language samples, the learners cannot really interact with the recorded tape or negotiate meanings.
After all, the tape is not a person who can initiate conversation or correspond authentically with the learner. So performing this task of taking note is considered authentic for the learner, the interaction is really not.

Selecting or Designing Authentic Materials

While selecting teaching materials or designing tasks, Breen (1985) argues various kinds of authenticities need to be considered, including the authenticity of the learner, the task and the classroom. For teachers, he provides four questions to consider about an authentic text: “1. What is an authentic text? 2. For whom is it authentic? 3. For what authentic purposes? 4. In which particular social situation?” (p. 61). The first two questions are designed to ensure that the instructor considers the students’ interest and perceptions about what is authentic to them. The last two questions are designed to make sure that tasks promote practical language usage among students. Only when the instructor considers all aspects of authenticity in preparing and executing language tasks, can students be expected to produce truly authentic utterances that are communicative.

Breen provides an interesting example of an authentic task around an application form for a separate income tax
assessment. Breen uses the following form, which is adapted from real-world application forms.

I hereby make application to adopt the special provisions for separate assessment to income tax and I declare that the following particulars are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Full name of husband

Full name of wife

Nature of trade, profession,

And the address or addresses where carried on

Private address of husband and wife

Date of marriage

Signature

Date

From Breen (1985) (p. 64).

This material could be very authentic to accounting students in a business department or to a husband and wife in the U.S. who must fill out one of these forms at the end of tax year. However, because of the purposes and the social background of this form, it could be very un-authentic to a teenage EFL student in China. Thus, following Breen’s guidelines, language instructors need to
consider what kinds of materials will be authentic to particular populations of learners.

Similar to Breen’s approach, many instructors have proposed ways to design authentic materials tasks and that can increase students’ communicative competence in areas that are relevant to their own lives. In his book, *Designing tasks for the communicative classroom*, Nunan (1989) presents communicative classroom tasks that train students to produce language that is useful and practical in the real world. He gives an example of a real-world task in which “The learner will listen to a weather forecast and identify the predicted maximum temperature for the day. Or the learner will listen to a weather forecast and decide whether or not to take an umbrella and sweater to school” (p. 40). This material and task achieve learner authenticity in that they focus on helping learners to use language to make everyday decisions.

Not only can such tasks give learners a taste of what to expect in the real world under general social situations, they can also train learners for communication in a specific profession. Lee (1995), for example, discusses curriculum in a three-week social worker language program that illustrated how to teach authentic language that is required for social workers. Lee
illustrates how learner authenticity can be realized within the activities. She stresses the importance of letting the students understand why the activities are designed to mimic similar tasks in real life situations, so that they will be more interested and motivated to perform the tasks. For example, the learners are given tasks that resemble social worker’s real life language demands. Students are required to perform in a role-play involving a teenage suicide. The task reads as the following: "Role-play activity: the death of Yu Po-Shan has once again drawn the public’s attention to the problem of teenager suicide. You are the school social worker at Po’s school and your supervisor wants you to conduct an investigation into the causes of his tragedy. You decide to hold a meeting with the Principal, Po’s class teacher, and his mother. (Read the newspaper articles before doing this activity. They will give you ideas and some relevant vocabulary)” (p. 327). Because this task resembles a real life career job requirement, it can help the students’ to practice skills in a natural, meaningful, and relevant way. When students are given opportunities to practice speaking for the real-world, they will likely to deal with similar situations that happen in the future more readily. Lee therefore, suggests instructors check into the
students' careers choices and job requirements as task
guidelines in designing class tasks or activities.

Arnold (1991), in his article "Authenticity
revisited: how real is real?," provides language
instructors new ideas on how to teach ESL students to
perform communicative tasks in the real world outside of
the classroom. For instance, he designs a group project
that asks college students to "write letters to various
local companies, find out about jobs in the area, numbers
employed in various jobs, duties and remuneration of
various jobs, qualifications expected, and so forth"
(p. 242). He advocates the importance of "breaking down
barriers between the classroom and the rest of the world"
(p. 242). By writing texts for the real world, the
students are learning to be successful in their future
careers.

Making real world materials and tasks authentic to
learners also involves ensuring that they are
comprehensible to the learners. Authentic materials could
be difficult to read and listen to, especially for the
first time or the second time. All the information seems
to be new to the students. Swaffar (1985) presents a model
for helping students finish reading an authentic article
even though some of its language is unclear. The model
encourages student to skip the unknown vocabulary and just continue reading for the first and second time through a text. Then the teacher should activate students' schemata on their previous experience or knowledge to make intelligent predictions. Swaffer gives an example of reading a story on an unemployed and unskilled worker. He states it would be fine if the student did not understand every detail from the story. But if he could use previous knowledge or readings to predict that this story might be globally talking about negative feelings that are associated with a long job search, loss of possession and so on, then the student can get an overall impression of the worker having a hard time. By using this model, the student is advised to accept the difficulty level of an authentic text and get over the fear of unknown phrases or vocabulary.

Similarly, Nunan provides the related guidelines for designing effective reading tasks, "skim over it picking up key words and information on the basis of the above, anticipate the content and purpose, skim again, disregarding unimportant parts, and read again in more detail, checking you have all the information" (p. 35).
Summary

The goal of communicative ESL conversation instruction is to increase learner’s communicative competence, including not only linguistic accuracy or linguistic competence, but also discourse and socialinguistic skills needed for various social situations. One of the ways communicative approaches attempt to develop these different aspects of language proficiency is through the use of authentic materials. Since authentic materials are normally materials that come from real life contexts, they can help students to increase their understanding of language they need to use outside of the classroom. In order to increase any of the above-mentioned competence levels, the instructor must strategically select or design materials that correspond to the target competence or the correct form of media. For instance, a class is concerned with increasing students’ discourse competence in giving oral scientific presentations; the instructor should pay special attention to use materials that are written for spoken language in this specific discourse.

There has been much praise for the benefits of authentic materials in teaching oral English communication, including their ability to motivate
language learners, increase overall second language communicative competence, and prepare students for interacting in different professional situations. However, although scholars and instructors are positive about the benefits of authentic materials, they seem to not be able to agree on one specific definition of authentic materials. Some researchers agree with Wong and Kwok’s (1995) definition that “authentic materials are used in genuine communication in the real world, and not specifically prepared for the teaching and learning of English” (p. 319). However, although these materials can be very authentic to native speakers, their foreignness and difficulty levels can cause ESL or EFL students to perceive them as “inauthentic,” as they do not correspond to learners’ interests or proficiency levels, and as they may not lead students to produce authentic responses.

Real world materials may be abundant in quantity, but many instructors know that it is very difficult to select proper materials and design useful tasks that can increase the learners’ target competence. I would like to further explore issues related to authentic materials for ESL speaking classes by studying experienced ESL conversation instructors’ views on this topic. I hope this research will be of particular assistance to new ESL conversation
teachers, who may have very little knowledge about what makes material authentic for learners; the findings of this study may ultimately help them define authentic material on their own terms.

For my study, I conducted one-hour audio-taped interviews with four ESL conversation instructors at CSUSB and Chaffey College. The interviews focused on finding out different teachers' approaches to defining authentic materials, selecting materials, and designing effective communicative tasks to encourage authentic utterances. In addition, all instructors were asked to bring their favorite or most successful set of materials and lesson plan to the interview and to explain their rationale for their materials. From the interviews, I attempted to discover similarities and/or differences among the instructors' definitions of authentic materials and their approaches to creating materials and tasks that have real world applications.
CHAPTER TWO

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The goal of this research is two-fold: 1) to find out how ESL instructors define authentic materials and, 2) to examine how the instructors utilize authentic materials effectively in teaching conversation classes. In ESL research on authentic materials, most on-going projects are focusing on the debate on how to define authentic materials, and these definitions are mostly quite confusing to understand for new teachers. In addition, no research has been done to study professional ESL instructors as subjects, comparing how these instructors define authentic materials, and how they select proper materials and design authentic activities for specific group of ESL students. My project accomplishes this goal. I interview professional ESL instructors to examine how they define authentic materials on their own terms. In close relationship to the instructors’ own definitions of authentic materials, I also investigate how they have made these authentic materials into activities that can motivate and interest ESL students. To these ends, four professional ESL instructors were interviewed and studied. Due to the sample size of the interviewees, this
investigation is not representative of all the instructors in this subject. There are still many great instructors who can contribute to the further study of the relation with authentic materials, however, the interviews with these instructors provide a useful initial look at different approaches to authentic materials in the profession.

The ESL instructors chosen for this study included three instructors from CSUSB, and one from Chaffey College. Further information about the instructors is given in the next chapter.

Data Collection

In this study I was interested in exploring the following research questions:

1) What are the instructor’s definitions of authentic materials?

2) What do they perceive as the benefits of authentic materials?

3) How do they modify materials to meet the needs of their classes?

4) How do they effectively design tasks from authentic materials?

24
5) What do they perceive are the limitations of using authentic materials?

With respect to my first research question, I began the interview by asking: "What does the concept of authentic materials mean to you?" I also asked the instructors to offer examples supporting their definitions (see Appendix A for a complete list of the interview questions). I also wanted to investigate the advantages of using authentic materials, therefore, I asked questions such as: "From your own experiences, what are the benefits of using authentic materials?" "What do you think are the differences between authentic materials and non-authentic materials?" and "Do they have different effects on motivating students' interest?"

Authentic materials are sometimes derived from real-world sources, but because of their difficulty levels, sometimes the instructors need to adapt them. I was interested in finding out how instructors modify materials to match them with their students' language level or course relevance. Instructors were thus asked, "After selecting the materials, do you modify them? If so, how so? If not, why not? Can you describe any examples?" Eliciting examples of how instructors modify authentic materials could help uncover some similarity or
differences in instructor’s criteria for how to modify materials.

After selecting proper materials and maybe modifying them, it is also very important for the instructor to design tasks and activities that can motivate students to learn. In order to elicit instructors’ perceptions of how they approach such design, I asked the following questions: “How do you design tasks or activities around your materials?”, “In designing the tasks or activities from the materials, do you arrange the activities in different stages?” and “How do you make those activities real-world-like and perceived as practical and useful to the students?” By asking these questions, as well as asking each instructor to show his or her favorite lesson, I hoped to find out what the instructors do to design tasks that are motivating to the students.

After I interviewed the instructors, I listened to the tapes and took notes on issues related to my research interests. I then transcribed the interviews and further examined them for themes related to the research questions. The results of this analysis are presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER THREE
RESULTS

This chapter reports on the findings of the instructor interviews. I discuss each instructor in turn, beginning with their professional background, teaching philosophy and then discussing their perceptions on the following themes: definitions of authentic materials, the benefits and limitations of authentic materials, how materials may be modified, and how to effectively design tasks. In the second section, I will illustrate how these instructors' favorite lesson plans correspond with their teaching approaches and understanding of authentic materials. All of the instructors' names have been changed.

Instructor 1: Professor Adam

Teaching Philosophy and Approach

This part time professor has a MA degree in teaching English as Second Language, and has been teaching English at ACLP (American Culture and Language Program) at California State University, San Bernardino for one year. The students at ACLP are mostly international students in their late teens and early twenties, many of whom would like to increase their communicative competence so that
they can pursue their college education in America. Before this, Adam taught at a sister college in Japan for eight years and his goal was to educate students to speak English fluently, understand American culture and carry conversation with native speakers. Therefore, this professor focuses on teaching students to speak as natively as possible and on explaining to them the American culture behind the language.

Instructor’s Definitions of Authentic Materials

Adam mentioned that he has come to realize his definition of authentic materials has evolved over the years. First he thought authentic materials only meant materials that are made for non-teaching purposes.

He said, “Authentic materials, meant something real-life... Let’s say I recorded a conversation with a friend. That is authentic, right? Or something directly taken from the video, right?” This definition corresponds with Wong and Kwok’s (1995) definition of authentic materials as those that are “added in genuine communication in the real world, and not specifically prepared for the teaching and learning of English” (p. 319). According to this definition, authentic materials are unedited or unmodified from their original sources, and can include items such as original restaurant
menus and audio-visual materials as this instructor has mentioned above.

Adam’s definition of authentic materials over the years, however, goes beyond these materials; he came to the realization that personal participation or sharing personal information from the learners and the teachers, or among learners, can be considered as authentic too. He said, “Especially in conversation classes, if we are talking about ourselves, sharing personal information that came from me, I am talking about myself, and the students can do the same. Then I consider that authentic.” Therefore, to this instructor, authentic materials are not only recorded real-life conversations, video or TV shows that are not intended for ESL population, but also texts, such as personal conversations, that are designed for ESL students. For instance, it could be personal conversations designed for ESL students as well. Authentic materials he likes to use in the conversation classes are materials that can activate students’ interest to share their personal information, opinions or feelings. For instance, he likes to use “family pictures, with my three brothers that I can talk about.” By using these personal pictures in the class, the instructor can activate students’ curiosity and interest in how to introduce their own
family members by listening to their instructor’s modeling sentences or vocabulary.

The Benefits of Authentic Materials

One of the benefits Adam finds for authentic materials involving personal information is that they motivate students. He concluded that when he used personal stuff, it seemed the students were more interested to find out more information and ask more questions, and later spoke more often. This corresponds to Breen’s observation that authentic materials should “engage the learners’ prior knowledge, interest and curiosity” (p. 63). When students are encouraged to speak and share their own personal information or experiences, they are more likely to participate and learn. The reason Adam was interested particularly in using personal belonging or stories was to show the students what kinds of real language situations one would encounter if meeting a native speaker of English in America. For instance, he said he used pictures of himself and his brothers to teach students how to introduce their own family. He also modeled how to describe his family members’ physical features; for instance, he says, “My brother is tall.” So that students can use this model to make their own sentences.
In addition, Adam suggests that authentic materials can help model the functions and forms of language that native speakers use in different social contexts. For instance, when one introduces one’s family to his or her classmates, he would probably use very general information such as, “I have one sister, and she is a high school student.” However, to his close friends, he might need to give more detailed information and share stories, for instance, “my sister always gets herself into trouble with boys. One day, she ...” As Adam mentioned early in authentic materials should be as personal and practical for the learner as possible in the classroom, so that they can truly share personal information or handle real-life situation with others outside of the classroom.

How Materials May be Modified

Because of their originality, some unedited authentic materials from real-world contexts unfamiliar to the students could be very difficult for them to understand. Therefore, not every piece of authentic material will be automatically useful to the students. Adam mentioned that the most important and the most challenging part in dealing with authentic materials is how to edit or modify them to the interest or language level of the students in order to make them feel comfortable yet still sense that
the material is from the real world. He stated, "I would say, if not always, almost always modify the materials. There have been a few little disasters, because I did not modify or modify enough...I just took something in, and said it was interesting to me, and have not done enough to help them...They will need help with understanding." One way he modifies a text is to create a handout that are based on original text. The handout can be a re-written text that carries the main story of the authentic materials, but some difficult vocabulary can be changed to easier ones. By having an edited version of the original authentic materials with easier vocabulary, the students can spend less time trying to understand the text, and therefore, have more time to engage in speaking about the text, a shift in focus that may make sense in a conversation class.

How to Effectively Design Tasks from Authentic Materials

This professor emphasizes that it is important to educate students about the benefits of the activities and to help students to understand the social contexts around the materials. The instructor should stress why they should learn how to perform certain language tasks in certain situations and make sure that the students are
aware of the social situation that is attached to this language. This way, the students will be able to produce proper language for the right occasions. He usually provides “vocabulary experiences that are associated with the situation or context” to help his students to have a mental picture of the social situation and to gain knowledge of the functions of words in different social contexts. For instance, although “tall” and “long” can all describe physical features to indicate length. “Tall” and “long” however, need to be used in different situations. He would model how to use “long” in a sentence such as, “He has long hair”, and “tall” in “He is tall” to describe his brother’s physical feature to show the differences between these two words.

Favorite Lesson Plan

Adam’s favorite lesson plan reflects his approach of using personal information in his authentic materials. He presented me with a task sheet that requires learners to talk to each other and find out information about each other. The lesson also demonstrates Adam’s concern with adapting materials so that they are understandable and provide enough language support for students. The first task, for example, helps students think of people they could talk about by asking them to “write the names of
people you know, for example your friends and family. How many names can you write in 5 minutes?" Then the learners are asked to find a partner, "look at the names your partner wrote and ask about the people." Adam suggests phrases that the learners can use "Who is _____?" or "Tell me about______." Also the instructor provides two sets of examples of how the conversations might proceed, as shown in the following.

Example 1

A: Who is Nao?
B: She's my sister-in-law.
A: Oh. How old is she?
B: She is 27.
A: What does she do?
B: She works for an insurance company.

Example 2

A: Tell me about John.
B: He's my close friend.
A: Where does he live?
B: California.
A: How did you become friends?
B: We were roommates in college.
This handout models how native speakers introduce each other’s or their friends. Especially, they could be used for students to start a conversation. By practicing asking “What” “Where” “How” and “Who” questions that can ask about other’s name, age, occupation, relationship with the speaker or where he or she lives, the students can politely obtain personal information from their new friends.

Instructor 2: Professor Betty

Teaching Philosophy and Approach

This professor has been teaching ESL conversation part time in community colleges ever since she was in the M.A. English Composition-TESL graduate program at CSUSB several years ago. She was also a full time teacher at ACLP, where she taught beginning to advanced level conversation classes. After teaching pre-college students at ACLP, she started to teach ESL at Chaffey College where her students include immigrants from Mexico, Russian, China, Vietnam and other countries. Her students range in age from 19 to 70 and have various study goals. Although very few students can continue their education in college, most of the students just want to learn to speak the language a little bit better, so that the goal of speaking
classes is to focus on communicating in real life situations. For instance, Betty focuses on teaching them how to prepare for an interview, how to talk to one’s doctor, how to call 911, how to order in a restaurant, and how to buy an appliance, so that the students can do the same in real life situations.

Instructor’s Definitions of Authentic Materials

When asked about her idea of authentic materials, Betty mentioned that to her there are two kinds of authentic materials. Like Adam and Wong and Kwok (1995), she says that “one kind of authentic materials is truly authentic, realia,” (p.319) which can include magazines, newspaper, taped native-speaker’s conversations, movies, and radio-shows, and other things from daily life that have not been edited or modified for the purpose of teaching. This instructor has emphasizes realia in her classes, gathering phone books, bridal catalogs, car-selling books, magazines, newspaper and anything that she thinks the students will be using in daily life situations. Her reasoning behind this approach is that if the students can see how language is presented in real life materials, then they are more likely to recognize the same or similar language outside of the classroom. As discussed more fully in the section below, however, Betty,
like Adam, also regards edited work for ESL populations to be authentic sometimes because it may achieve a proper language level for better student comprehension. This type of authentic material matches Thomas’s (1995) definition, which involves texts that facilitate ESL student comprehension.

The Limits of Authentic Materials

When asked about the benefits or limits of using authentic materials from original sources, Betty, emphasized their limitations. She mentioned that authentic materials can often be too difficult or too easy for the learners to study specific grammar or language skills. Normally she has to search for five to six different sources in order to extract from them potential materials that are at an appropriate level for her students. For instance, Betty once had to search several department stores in order to find the most proper leveled materials in teaching about bridal registry and wedding invitation.

Above all, these authentic materials do change over time. Thus, she stated that authentic materials could create more work for the teacher to do. Because authentic materials seem to become more out-dated more quickly than traditional materials, the instructor has to take time to explain to students the context and the content related to
the materials may change. For instance, she mentioned that home prices in home-buying advertisements in the San Bernardino area a few months ago might well be a much different price range than they are currently and therefore, the teacher has to explain to the students that these housing advertisement may change its content according to the market up and downs as well as the interest rate.

How Materials May be Modified

When asked about modifying the materials, Betty stated that she almost always has to adapt her texts. For instance, when she wanted to use real life wedding invitations in the class, it seemed to be too difficult for her class, so she rewrote them using less complicated sentences and easier words. And her class had a wonderful time in learning about how to write an invitation. By modifying the materials this way, this instructor seems to focus on enhancing the learner authenticity of the materials, which resulted in increased students' interest and involvement. This corresponds with Breen's definition about learner authenticity, he (1985) mentioned that in order to make materials authentic, they need to "engage the learner's prior knowledge, interest and curiosity"
In order to elicit such interest, the materials should make sense to the students.

How to Effectively Design Tasks from Authentic Materials

I had an opportunity to intern with Betty, and I was very impressed with how she designs tasks from materials. Therefore, as an investigator I was interested to find out how the Betty makes her class activities. She stresses the importance of developing authentic tasks that assist students in producing useful language in the real world as she said, "I would design activities that duplicate real life situations, for example, giving directions." This corresponds with Nunan's (1989) reminder to instructors to design activities that help students to produce language that is practical in the real world.

Betty commented her language activities normally follow three stages: schemata, vocabulary, and language uses. Normally, to activate students' schemata or background knowledge, she would ask questions in the beginning of the lesson to see if the students have had experiences, feelings or opinions related to the topic. For instance, if the class topic is educating students on how to take safety precautions while visiting a national park, then she might ask the students questions such as:
Have you been in a national park before? Have you seen any snakes in there? Were you ever hurt during a trip? This strategy corresponds with Breen's (1985) approach to using authentic materials, which involves the instructor activating students' previous knowledge and experience to motivate their interests. If the instructor can somehow let the students brainstorm about what they already know in relation to the new materials, then the students may feel less intimidated than if they are just given this new set of materials.

After activating students' schemata, Betty believes that it is also important to prepare students to better understand the materials with vocabulary activities. She mentioned that any activity or materials should not have more than 30% unknown vocabulary. Otherwise, the students will have a very frustrating time.

In addition to activating students' schemata and editing the materials to achieve a proper vocabulary level, Betty always makes sure to design the activities with the interests of her class population in mind. For instance, she would design different activities for a class of teenage girls from Japan than for another ESL class, such as age and gender could be important. For instance, she mentioned that girls from Japan at ACLP
loved the activities of designing their own wedding invitations letters following with the model of this instructor’s own wedding invitation and thinking whom they should invite, where the wedding is going to be and so on. However, Betty notes that these kinds of activities probably would not be very interesting to a population of ESL males in their 50’s; therefore, it is essential to investigate the students’ background and interests before selecting and designing authentic materials and activities. Betty’s sensitivity to these issues addresses Breen’s second question that he suggests instructors to ask before making any activities: “for whom is it authentic?” (p. 61).

Betty also mentioned that it is very important to assess if the activities were helpful by requiring students to apply what they have learned from an authentic text to actual speaking practice, and practice using the language learned from a previously presented text. For example, she stated that after discussing an authentic dialogue, she normally plays authentic dialogues created by her husband and her, explains the conversation in respects to pronunciations, intonations, or different vocabulary, finally has the students create their own dialogue. By doing these follow-up activities, the
instructor can have a better understanding how much the students have mastered what was being taught and the instructor can adjust what can be taught next time.

Favorite Lesson Plan

The students are required to communicate one’s opinion and then agree on a plan to visit three places on a San Bernardino map. Before doing the activity, the students would have already been asked about their previous knowledge about visiting San Bernardino and also would have been given instructions on new vocabulary and grammar structures related to visiting a place. The goal of this activity is to assess if the students can use what they have learned to communicate with others in the class. For instance, they need to use verb constructions such as “be going to…” “be V+Ving” to communicate with others on their intentions and plans with the usages of authentic maps. For instance, both students of each pair need to find a place on the map that interest him or her, and then talk about wanting to visit that place with his or her partner. In addition, the students will need to use questions such as “what are we going to do?” “when are we going?” and “how are we going to get there?” to negotiate with others and come to an agreement.
Visiting San Bernardino

Work in pairs. Decide on the following information and complete the worksheet with complete sentences in the future tense (use be going to, will, beV+Ving, and present tense for the future).

Places to visit
1
2
3

When to visit
1
2
3

How to get there
1
2
3

The task requires students to discuss and negotiate their plans about where, when and how to visit a place using authentic maps. Both partners have to talk and interact with each other to accomplish the same agenda. Like Lee’s (1995) activities for social work students and Arnold’s job application letters for college students, this instructor’s lesson emphasizes practice-producing
utterances students will likely need to use outside the classroom. In this case, the students are practicing how to negotiate and come to an agreement, how to set appointments, and how to discuss getting to agreed upon destinations.

Instructor 3: Professor Charles

Teacher’s Philosophy and Approach

This professor has been teaching ESL classes for the last ten years. He has a M.A. in English Composition TESL, and has taught all levels of ESL conversation classes at ACLP at CSUSB. Now he is in charge of designing and teaching a speaking class for preparing pre-college ESL students for the new TOEFL speaking test, which to his students is very challenging. Most of them are not used to being tested on organizing their thoughts clearly and presenting their points in a short speech within a short period of time.

Instructor’s Definitions of Authentic Materials

Like Adam and Betty, Charles emphasized that authentic materials should be materials that encourage students to speak in the class and help students function outside of the ESL classroom. In order for any materials to be authentic, he said, these materials should “try to
have students participate in not too much of controlled type of speaking activities." Instead he believes in materials where students are negotiating meanings, about various subjects, like they would in a conversation in the real world.

In encouraging such authentic conversation practice, Charles uses materials that require students to go to the real world and speak with real native speakers. For example, he gives students in one conversation class a survey that requires them to talk with native speakers on campus in order to find out their opinions and thoughts on certain issues. Although the instructor controls the questions, the instructor gave the students freedom to ask questions and negotiate meanings with the native speakers authentically. Therefore, to this instructor, authentic materials should be something that encourages students to interact and produce communicative language in the real world. So that the students can provide authentic response and experience authentic interaction. Charles’s approach is like that of Arnold (1991) who stated that authentic materials should be materials that promote authentic response and interaction, not merely language.
The Limitations of Authentic Materials

Although authentic materials can give students some preparation for what to expect in the real world, they cannot possibly capture all communication possibilities outside the classroom. For example, because different social and language situations require different language responses, it could be almost impossible for students to master all types of authentic utterances in all kinds of situations. Even this instructor agrees: "a lot of students complain that when they go to an ESL classroom, it is an artificially controlled environment and after they finished their studies, they go down the street to ask directions, or they go to Stater Brothers to buy something, and they cannot achieve what they want. So I think the limitations of trying to make a conversation task authentic are that there are so many kinds of things the students have to do. I don’t know if the speaking tasks, or the speaking materials you have or going to use are going to meet all these."

How to Effectively Design Tasks for Authentic Purposes

The purpose of Charles’ TOEFL speaking preparation class is to train students to perform well on the exam, where the speaking tasks are designed to mimic college
class intellectual activities. In his class, Charles has to model what the TOEFL test requires and then develop similar materials and tasks on his own. Therefore, the goal for Charles is to teach students how to communicate their thoughts or opinions in an academic setting, which is also the goal of TOEFL tests. This professor states, "Well, when I was working on the TOEFL speaking tasks, I have to go to the TOEFL website and I have to figure out two things. I have to figure out what the new TOEFL speaking tasks are. Number two, how they are going to be graded in terms of TOEFL standards."

Charles notes that the TOEFL speaking tasks usually situate students in particular contexts. He includes activities that preset such contexts, for example, the student may be in a history class and he or she is required to read a short article very fast, and then he or she has to listen to a recorded lecture that are related to what he or she has just read. The speaking task could then require the speaker to compare the reading and the lecture and present his or her understanding of the topic in a speech. The goal of this kind of practice is to get students familiar with the text questionnaire structures and give them language skills to use in various typical
academic situations, so that they can score high in the TOEFL exam.

Favorite Lesson Plan

The new TOEFL test also makes sure the students know how to use proper language in social situations, maybe out of the classroom. Here is an example from this instructor’s lesson plan on training students how to introduce one’s self.

Question 1: Personal Experience

Narrator: Number 1, you will be asked to speak about a person, place, object, or event that is familiar to you. After you hear the question, you will have 15 seconds to prepare your response and 45 seconds to speak. (Day 8 speaking recording # 1 student listen to this.)

Preparation Time: 15 seconds
Response Time: 45 seconds

In this task, the students are asked to listen to the prompt, and then have a few seconds to prepare a speech to address certain issues. Although perhaps the immediate goal of this task is to prepare students to succeed on the TOEFL, it does corresponds to the instructor’s approach to that authentic materials should be materials that can encourage students to speak in the class and also, help
students function outside of the ESL classroom. This task does help the students to speak what is really interesting to them and also this task could be very functional in real life situations, therefore, the task is learner authentic and practical.

Instructor 4: Teacher's Philosophy and Approach

Instructor Don

This instructor has been teaching ESL classes for the last eight years. First he taught ESL in adult schools with mostly immigrant ESL students. Then he started teaching at ACLP at California State University, San Bernardino, where, he currently teaches an American Culture class. He uses materials, such as his own childhood video, through which he can share his background with his class. Right now, he is working on his Master’s degree, concentrating on teaching English as second language.

Instructor's Definitions of Authentic Materials

Like Betty, the fourth instructor, Don, emphasizes realia in his definition of authentic materials: "Things we use in life, outside of class, food items, or products, recordings, songs." For his classes, he has used: "newspapers, videos, audiotapes. Sometimes I would bring
in the actual objects that we were talking about." His
definition corresponds with Wong and Kwok's (1995) view
that, "authentic materials are used in genuine
communication in the real world and not specifically
prepared for the teaching and learning of English"
(p. 319).

The Benefits of Authentic Materials

According to the instructor, one of the benefits of
authentic materials is that they can sometimes serve as a
bridge connecting students with the real world. He says,
"Sometimes the students can get tired of the textbooks.
Authentic materials add a feeling of legitimacy and
practicality to the lesson, [students] feeling like this
is something I am going to use." Many researchers have
agreed that authentic materials can only be useful and
authentic to the students when the learner's authenticity
is realized, meaning the students must be interested and
involved with the materials. For example, Breen (1985)
mentioned in order to make materials authentic, they need
to be a good addition to students' knowledge or experience
on this subject, meaning to "engage the learner's prior
knowledge, interest and curiosity" (p. 63), so that the
materials do make sense to them or interest them.
In addition, Don stresses that some students need that extra kinesthetic connection that authentic materials can offer. For example, holding and checking out a "bingo game" kit can be better for some students than explaining the game without the actual set. As the instructor says, "some of them are visual learners, [and] gain extra help from this, I believe."

Although authentic materials can be used to motivate students and aid their understanding of the language, they also have limitations, and pre-made teaching materials may be more efficient for achieving class goals. According to Don, "authentic materials are not always available that you want to use, or they could be used in an unnecessary way that slows down the class. An example could be, if students are learning to identify fruits and vegetables, there is the Oxford Picture Dictionary that has the whole page of fruits and vegetables, so that we don't have to bring real bananas to the class. If you use too much material, you could slow things down." From this example, Don suggests that class time could be saved by using dictionary or picture books, rather than realia.

How Materials May be Modified

As the other instructors have noted, modifying materials can be necessary when the students are not at
the same level as the authentic materials. Don describes the way he adjusts the difficulty level and relevance of original source materials for his classes: "Sometimes, if I have some information, could be from a newspaper or restaurant menu, I might want to trim it down. For time constraint, I might make it easier. Maybe something is not as important to a lesson, so I might add something else."

For instance, the instructor once used a real restaurant menu as the basis of his text, but cut out some very specialized items, such as wine names. He instead put some very common American food items on the menu, so that it could be more useful for the students in real life. It seems that this instructor shares Adam’s and Betty’s technique of editing materials, so that they can comfortably interact with them and gain experience with language they will likely use outside the classroom.

How to Effectively Design Tasks from Authentic Materials

This instructor tries to design tasks to "mimic reality as much as possible." He says, "I try to think how the students will use the information from the lesson in reality, and try to make the actual lesson something that corresponds with that."
Don's focus on mimicking reality task gives learners a taste of what to expect in the real world under general social situations is similar to Lee's (1995) approach, that the students have to be exposed to languages and contexts that are real life and useful.

Favorite Lesson Plan

Although Don's chosen lesson plan is not one that involves a real-life type of task, it does reflect other ways that he uses authentic materials. In this lesson, the instructor is using a Norah Jones song, "Don't know why." This song qualifies as realia, which could be perceived as very popular and interesting to the young ESL population. By exposing the learners to the lyrics and the music, they are given a chance to appreciate American pop culture as well as English sentence structure. In this lesson, the instructor is using popular song to teach grammar. He specifically wants his students to listen and pay attention to the verbs in the lyrics, in the hope that they can identify verb tenses, such as past tense and present.

Activity for Students

We are going to listen to the song from Norah Jones. You are given the base verbs, but you are going to write down the correct verb forms like Norah has sung.
Don't Know Why - Norah Jones

I (wait) _______ 'til I (see) _______ the sun
I don't know why I didn't come
I (leave) _______ you by the house of fun
I don't know why I didn't come
I don't know why I didn't come

When I (see) _______ the break of day
I (wish) _______ that I (can/fly) ____________ away
Instead of (kneel) ___________ in the sand
(Catch) ___________ teardrops in my hand

My heart (be) ______ drenched in wine
But you (be) ______ on my mind forever

Out across the endless sea
I would (die) ______ in ecstasy
But I (be)__________ a bag of bones
(Drive) ___________ down the road alone

My heart (be) ______ drenched in wine
But you (be) ______ on my mind forever
Something (have) ______ to make you (run) ______
I don’t know why I didn’t come
I (feel) ______ as empty as a drum
I don’t know why I didn’t come (x3)

This activity on the surface is a good example of using pop culture to activate college international students’ interests in learning more about American’s music formation. However, this activity is also a clever way to lure students into learning and practicing grammar features that are associated with the difficult concept of “be.” Although identifying verb tenses in songs is not something students may focus on outside of the classroom, however, listening and identifying different tenses would be very important for the learners in real life situations.
CHAPTER FOUR
APPLICATION

The instructor interviews revealed different ways ESL conversation teachers view and use authentic materials. In this chapter, I summarize and discuss what can be learned from their responses. In addition, as an application of this research, I will explain a lesson (with materials, tasks) that is informed by the findings of my study.

Instructors’ Definitions of Authentic Materials

According to the instructors, authentic materials can include many things, including materials from the “real world” such as recorded natural conversation between two native speakers, TV and radio shows, or personal texts from the instructors’ own lives. Adam, for example, not only tries to use authentic materials as above, he specifically emphasizes the use of personal information or story to add more interest for the learners. His rationale is that he believes that students can easily relate to personal stories and may find the language knowledge in them will be useful in the real world.

Adam defines thus authentic materials based on the real-life-ness of their origin and their potential for activating students to learn about usable and personal
information. Betty and Don similarly categorize authentic materials into realia and sort-of-realia. Realia are things produced for real life for the general native speaker population and therefore fit Adam's and Wong and Kwok’s definition that realia are materials from daily life that have not been edited or modified for the purpose of teaching ESL. For instance realia include magazines, newspapers, taped native-speaker’s conversations, movies and radio-shows and other things from daily life.

Because the native-ness of these realias, they are sometimes very difficult to understand. Therefore, the instructor may want to change or modify the original materials a little or a lot depending on the level of the students' language skills. These edited materials are not normally used by native speakers, and are most likely to be found only in the ESL classroom. This group of edited or modified materials then is defined as sort-of-realia by Betty, because they are used mainly for ESL classes to teach the learners particular vocabulary or grammar features, without being too difficult for the students to understand.

Professor Charles seems to promote authentic responses and interaction as he defines authentic materials. He emphasizes that authentic materials first
and foremost should be materials used to teach students about what to say or do in the English-speaking world. These materials must provide students chances to practice authentic responses and interaction; otherwise, the students cannot do well in the real world. This definition reflects Arnold's definition (1991) that authentic materials should be materials that promote authentic response and interactions, not merely language.

The Benefits of Authentic Materials

Authentic materials can be very interesting and, therefore, motivating for students to read or listen to. All the instructors have stressed that because of their appeal, authentic materials seem to be able to bridge the gap between using language in classroom and in real life. For instance, Adam mentioned that by using personal information in his materials, his students are more interested in studying about these subjects in English that are on a personal level, and practicing language that could be useful in the real world. For instance, Betty suggests that realia can be a great way to show students how language is used in the real world on a wedding invitation, a phone book, or a restaurant menu. Don also emphasizes that the physical part of a realia can be

58
appealing to the students who prefer visuals. For instance, it is so much easier to show a learner a real English Scramble game set than to explain how it should look or how to play it without it.

The Limitations of Using Authentic Materials

One of the main differences between non-authentic materials and authentic materials is that non-authentic materials for ESL classes are normally designed for different levels of learners, and emphasize teaching grammar or vocabulary in the context of a conversation class. However, authentic materials are made for the native general public and are not thus necessarily designed with the teaching goals for the ESL classroom. So inevitably, authentic materials can be either too difficult or too easy for a specific language learner group. The instructors I interviewed have also confirmed this difficulty. Most of them said that they almost always have to modify the materials to the level of their students.

Charles also stated that authentic materials could not guarantee automatic mastering of authentic responses and interactions. Because authentic materials are from a fast growing language and society, they are changing all
the time. This is also related to the fact that although one set of authentic materials suggests one aspect of the social context, it cannot reflect every situation the student might encounter in real life. Thus, students should be advised that the content or the context of the authentic material might be different in the near future.

How Materials May be Modified

When using authentic materials, Adam almost always has to modify them to match the study goals and language levels for the learners. Betty also emphasizes editing the materials to make sense to the learners, so that they know they are learning something useful and practical. There seems to be some common ground across the instructors about how to modify a text. For instance, one of the ways all the instructors have used to edit or modify a text is to omit words that are too difficult for their students and replace them with words that are familiar to them.

Application

In the remainder of the chapter, I offer an illustration of a lesson using authentic materials, applying principles from the four instructors and previous researchers.
The overall goals of the lesson are to familiarize students with nature centers in national forest or parks in the United States, and to help them use certain vocabulary and sentence structures in communicating with native speakers or each other on a field trip to a national park. I will discuss the lesson plan in three stages. First, I will start with how I selected the material, connecting with work of previous researchers and the interviewed professors from chapter three. Secondly, I will discuss activities I designed from the materials to prepare students for this field trip with useful vocabulary and sentence models. Lastly, in order to find out how well the students have mastered the vocabulary and sentence structure, I will present the homework to see if they can use the new language structures effectively to ask questions and find answers on their own.

The materials I have chosen are selected from the website of the Eaton Canyon natural park home page, see Appendix for the website text.

<<http://www.ecnca.org/Animals/Animals_of_Eaton_Canyon.htm>>. I have interned with Betty and have seen similar difficult level of materials being used in her intermediate adult ESL conversational class, therefore, I think the students of adult school intermediate level
should be comfortable in reading and speaking about the majority of the pages in this website. Considering that the goal of this field trip is to encourage the students to talk about nature, including the plants and animals in a nature park, I did not use every text of this site; instead, I chose the parts that have the most information about animals or plants as well as the parts that give students a well-rounded introduction to this park. Specifically, I selected "the Animals of Eaton Canyon" as the main text for this class, mainly because of its usability in introducing this national park and, basic information about its animals and plants. It not only offers students a good supply of key vocabulary, sentence structures, and language support, but also reflects very well what the students can be experiencing or learning on this trip. The information from this real world website should be useful and interesting for the students. This way of choosing materials corresponds with paying attention to learner authenticity; that is, I am selecting materials that are useful for learners' needs in different communicative tasks (in this case, visiting and conversing about a national park).

Besides paying attention to giving students materials that are useful for the actual field trip, for instance,
some of the plants or animals they learned from the website can be seen or touched on the trip; I purposely take out the local park historical events that happened in the last fifty years listed in the website because they would be un-touchable or un-seen on this trip, which would make them more difficult for the students to understand and to relate to. Therefore, I chose the parts that have more information on animals instead of the history. Thus, like some of the instructors I interviewed, my materials selection was shaped by my desire to encourage learners' general interest and motivate them to learn something that they will need to use in an upcoming life situation. In addition to choosing this part of the web because of its interest to the learners, I also selected this website because its level of vocabulary and sentence structures correspond with my target students' comprehension level. There are a few other websites linked to this home page that are a little bit more complicated with more technical words, which may very well slow down students' comprehension. Similarly, Professor Adam, Betty and Don have all emphasized the importance of using proper-leveled materials to aid students' comprehension.

My lesson plan consists of three stages: Schemata, Vocabulary and Grammar, and Homework, which correspond to
Betty’s lesson plan models. In the beginning of each stage, I will present a short description about how the activity should be executed and also present some reasons behind the activities with respect to the professors interviewed from this research.

Stage one: Schemata

In stage one, the students will be asked to answer the following questions:

Have you been to a national park in the States?
Who did you go with?
How did you get there?
What did you bring with you?
What did you see in the park? Animals? Plants? Can you list their names in English?
Was it fun for you?”

By asking these brainstorming questions, the students can start thinking about what they have done in the past that may be very relevant to this field trip and this class. These specific questions also give the students ideas about what the topic is for this field trip that can very well aid the students with comprehension of the website and also activate some level of interest and excitement.
Stage two: Vocabulary and Sentence Structure

As Adam, Betty, and Don have mentioned from this research, one of the most challenging parts for the learners in becoming conversational in English is to master new vocabulary and grammar features. Therefore, it is important to introduce some of these useful words and sentence structures before the actual tasks. For instance, before going to Eaton Canyon and conversing about the plants and animals, the instructor of this lesson could ask the students to underline 10 difficult words in the website text and discuss in small groups their possible meanings. Then, the instructor should give some explicit explanation on these words and model how to use them in different contexts. For example, if the students have a hard time with the word "invertebrates," the teacher should give a couple of examples of animals in this group, and may even model on how to use this word in a sentence such as "__ and ___ are invertebrates." In this way, the students are encouraged with ample instructor's language support to produce these useful words in the class. By going through the many stages of guessing, negotiating meaning in small groups, and getting ideas from the instructor, the students have repetitive chances to use this group of unfamiliar words, and by the end of this
process, many of them hopefully will not be so unfamiliar anymore. Adam, Betty and Don have all used this type of warm-up activity in introducing the words that the students need to learn about for bettering their understanding of the whole text or later performing well on this trip.

Another goal I have for this stage of the lesson is to have the students find out for the rules about this park. Many ESL students are from cultures that do not impose any restrictions on touching animals in the wild or running after a hare or a rat in the wild, so it is very important for the students to learn about the culture and the requirements of U.S. forest parks. In order to do so, I think it is important for the students to learn how to use the sentence structures "We cannot ___." or "We can ___." in this activity. Therefore, the instructor would need to explain what is a rule, give an example of a rule at the park, and then model how to use these two sentence structures. For instance, the instructor could say that in national parks, one is not suppose to touch any animals, therefore, one can say, "We cannot touch any animals in the park.

A related goal of this activity is to have students find out about animal and plant nouns that they are not
familiar with, and then use them in the sentence structures in "we can ___ or "we cannot__.” The instructor should have a list of nouns that the students might have difficulty with, especially the animal names and words that are related to them (e.g. invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, vertebrates, species, predators). The instructor should encourage students to guess the meanings, but can also offer explanations of each word. For example, the teacher should give specific examples to the word “mammals,” such as wolf, bear, and fox. By explaining this group of difficult words in details with examples, the students will have a better and easier understanding of these words, and therefore, can be aided with the comprehension of the whole text, and eventually be able to use them correctly themselves in different contexts. Lastly, the teacher gives the students the following tasks for them to practice, using the vocabulary and sentence structures they have learned in this part of the lesson. The following is the assignment for the students in stage two:

In Eaton Canyon, how many kinds of animal groups you think you will be able to see? Could you list a couple of animals you know for each category? Work with you partner and find out all the animals’ names you can find in the
text and list them here. You may use a dictionary ONLY if both of you do not have any clue of these words’ meaning.

It is very important also for you to understand that we will be visiting a nature center and its park; therefore, we need to learn the rules about them. Read the text and discuss with your partner what you CAN do in the park and what you CANNOT do in the park. Then you can both write down your responses. After reading this text, do you have any specific questions you might want to ask the guide? Write them down on a piece of paper and keep them for later use.

The Animals of Eaton Canyon

There is a wide variety of animals in the canyon for you to experience and enjoy. Although some birds and lizards are fairly easy to spot, most of the species are secretive and try to avoid contact with humans. Unlike plants, which cannot move, animals will hide in underground burrows, under rocks, in trees - in short, anywhere they feel safe from people and predators. Because they have much more acute senses of sight, smell, and hearing than we do, you would be well-advised to walk slowly and quietly, keeping your eyes open to any sign of movement and your ears ready to pick up any sounds. With a
little practice, you will learn what to look for and when. Take your camera or binoculars with you into the canyon, but please LOOK ONLY - touching or even trying to touch the wildlife can stress them and cause illness or death, upsetting the balance of nature.

We have divided our local wildlife into six major categories. The first is the invertebrates, whose numbers far exceed all the others combined. The last five - fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals - are vertebrates and are listed in the order in which it is believed that they evolved. Just click on a name at the left to find photos and information about the animals in that group. [http://www.ecnca.org/Animals/Animals_of_Eaton_Canyon.htm](http://www.ecnca.org/Animals/Animals_of_Eaton_Canyon.htm)

We cannot ____________.

We can ____________.

Stage Three  Homework

This stage, the final stage in preparing students for the trip, asks them to re-visit a few things they have learned from the authentic materials from the web. In order to help them to review vocabulary, ideas, and sentence structures, the homework stage can be used to assess how well they have obtained to practice using them.
one more time before the real trip. The instructor wants to explain to the students that they should use vocabulary, ideas, and sentence structures from previous stages or website as much as possible. In addition, the instructor should remind students to think and write down any personal questions or concerns for their field trip. The assignment is as follows:

Reread the articles we have learned in the class and please read through the official Eaton Canyon website on your own. Write down briefly what you have learned about two animals in Eaton Canyon on one card. For instance, what do they eat? What kind of animal are they? Where do they live, in the tree or on the ground? Also write a couple of questions that you might have for the guide.

Conclusion

As I have described on how I could select authentic materials and design tasks, bear in mind that these ideas and the structure of this lesson are just one of many ways one can construct authentic lesson plans for effective authentic ESL communicative tasks and activities.

From my interviews and previous research, I have discovered some useful principles in regarding how to
select authentic materials, as well as how to design effective activities in the following three stages.

In the first stage, all the instructors interviewed mentioned that it is important to find out about the students' interests and previous experience. Only when the students are interested in what is being taught, they can be motivated to learn. Like Breen (1980) has suggested in his research, teaching materials need to "engage the learner's prior knowledge, interest and curiosity" (p. 63).

Also in this early stage, the instructor will need to find out an authentic topic, or an authentic text that is useful, practical and real-life-like, so that it generate "students' language skills for the real world" Guariento and Morley, 2001, (p. 347).

What I consider in the second stage, the instructors I have interviewed all stressed the importance of modifying materials to the level of the students. With the language level of the students in mind, the teacher can increase or decrease the difficulty level of the text. One of the most effective ways is to alter vocabulary or sentence structure to encourage comprehension. In addition to modifying the text to the level of the students, modeling and giving detailed instructions on doing vocabulary and sentence structure or any other activities
are regarded as essential. For instance, Betty and Adam always explain what they want the students to learn first, and then they always give detailed modeling of possible phrases and structures to use in the task before letting the students to perform any task on their own. By giving direction and authentic utterance modeling, learners can engage in authentic responses, or interactions, which are crucial in comprehending and functioning in the classroom, as Peacork (1997) stressed to “not cause them culture shock or discomfort” (p. 224) later out of the classroom.

As far as the third stage of the lesson, the instructor should construct tasks to encourage students to use what they have learned in stage one and two to produce their own authentic utterances. The instructor needs to design task in which the learners can use what they have learned to produce useful authentic language in real life situations on their own. For instance, if the students have learned about how to use animals’ names in stage two, then the instructor in stage three design activities that lead students to use these words in conversations outside of the classroom with native speakers, such as on a field trip to a national park in my proposed lesson. Like Arnold (1991) has said authentic tasks should be used to achieve
"breaking down barriers between the classroom and the rest of the world" (p. 242).

Overall, this lesson plan, as well as this thesis, is just a little stone for knocking on the door of effectively designing authentic tasks and activities for other ESL instructors. It is important to understand that more research on how to effectively use authentic materials is needed in this area of ESL communicative teaching to better our understanding different approaches to using authentic materials.
APPENDIX A

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR INSTRUCTORS
Authentic Materials in ESL Conversation Instruction
Sample Interview Questions for Instructors

1. What level of students and types of classes have you taught?
2. What kind of materials do you use for your speaking classes? (e.g. Textbooks, handouts, other...)
3. How do you select materials for a particular lesson?
4. What level of students and types of classes have you taught?
5. What does the concept of authentic materials mean to you? Examples?
6. From your experience and observation, what are the benefits or limitations about using authentic materials?
7. What do you think are the differences between authentic materials and non-authentic materials? Do they have different effect on motivating students' interest?
8. Would you say that you use authentic materials?
9. After selecting the materials, do you modify them? If so, how so? If not, why not? Can you describe any examples?
10. How do you design tasks or activities around your materials? In designing the tasks or activities from the materials, do you arrange the activities in different stages?
11. How do you make those activities real world like and be perceived as practical and useful to the students?
12. Now, let us look at your favorite lesson plan. Would you tell me why you have chosen this topic?
13. Where did you obtain these materials? Why did you select them?
14. What are your objectives of using this material?
15. While you were searching for potential material, what other places you have looked and why not use them?
16. In selecting the materials, were you thinking about your students' cultural background, personal interest, study goals or something else?
17. Do you use materials that are slightly difficult for the students? If yes, why? If no, why not?
18. When you are designing the tasks around materials, what criteria you have in mind to make the materials more effective and meaningful the students?
19. What are the goals of your designed tasks?
20. What are the benefits of each task for the students?
21. Why do you think it is important to use authentic materials in this case?
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT - INSTRUCTOR
Authentic Materials in ESL Conversation Instruction
Informed Consent-Instructor

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate how ESL conversation instructors select, design and define authentic materials. This study is being conducted by Xiangmei Zhang under the supervision of Dr. Sunny Hyon of the English Department, California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

In this study you will be interviewed once by the investigator. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes and will be taped-recorded. It will focus mainly on your experiences in teaching oral communication English, with particular attention given to your experiences with selecting, designing, and defining authentic materials. You are also asked to bring to the interview materials from one favorite lesson or unit and will be asked to comment on how you selected and used these materials. Your name will be changed in my thesis and in any presentations or publications resulting from this study. Please be assured that all of your data will be held in the strictest of confidence by the researcher.

You participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time during this study without penalty. The investigator does not anticipate that the study will present any foreseeable risk to participants. Regarding benefits, the investigator hopes that the results of this study will provide useful information and reflection for the ESL instructors about how to apply the benefits of authentic materials in classrooms.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Professor Sunny Hyon at (909) 880-5465 shyon@csusb.edu.

By placing a check mark in the box below, I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and that I understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. I also acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

Place a check mark here  □  Today's date: ________________________________
APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT (AUDIO)
Authentic Materials in ESL Conversation Instruction
Informed Consent (Audio)
For Non-Medical Human Subjects

As part of this research project, we will be making an audiotape recording of you during your participation in the experiment. Please indicate what uses of this audiotape you are willing to consent to by initialing below. You are free to initial any number of spaces from zero to all of the spaces, and your response will in no way affect your credit for participating. We will only use the audiotape in ways that you agree to. In any use of this audiotape, your name would not be identified.

- The audiotape can be studied by the researcher for use in the research project.
  
  Please initial: ______

- The audiotape can be used for publications and presentations.
  
  Please initial: ______

I have read the above description and give my consent for the use of the audiotape as indicated above.

The extra copy of this consent form is for your records.

SIGNATURE __________________________  DATE __________________

79
REFERENCE


