

From Pizza Hut to Hazard: Some Authentic Materials to Motivate Students.

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Abstract

Students are more motivated to participate in class activities when authentic materials are used. One benefit of using authentic materials is that they encourage students to be responsible for their own learning, while promoting learner-centeredness. Authentic materials are rich in cultural background. The learning of cultures is essential for students, especially as they communicate with others from various cultures and customs. The researcher has designed some worksheets and activities from authentic materials and tested them in classes. These materials and activities have been proven to be interesting for secondary school and adult learners. In addition, a simple survey was distributed to eighty-three students. The students' feedback was gathered, in order to compare and examine if they were more motivated to learn when certain materials they consider interesting—for instance textbooks, handouts and authentic materials—were used in class. The findings and recommendations are also discussed.

Introduction

Authentic materials are generally defined as language materials meant for communication in a non-teaching situation. In a definition coined by Wong, Kwok and Choi (1995), authentic materials are used in the real world and not designed for the instruction of English in the classrooms. Some examples of authentic materials are maps, menus, catalogues, newspapers, songs, flyers, radio advertisements, Internet articles, magazines and many others. All in all, authentic materials are materials that are rich in culture, language and communicative qualities, which are used in a particular society and serve students' communicative and survival needs in that society.

Rationale for using Authentic Materials

Researchers have reported positive outcomes when using authentic materials in their classes. Students were motivated to learn when authentic materials were used in class (Guariento and Morley, 2001). Students have the perception that they are learning language that is used in the community through the use of authentic materials. In addition, students are motivated as they are able to associate and familiarize with the content of authentic materials. Students' confidence is boosted and the fear of losing face or making mistakes is lessened. They are no longer shy to voice their opinions and participate in class activities. Moreover, authentic materials are more appealing than textbooks, as they are more current and associated with everyday issues.

Authentic materials also promote learner-centeredness. As many communicative elements are richly embedded in authentic materials, a variety of activities could be

conducted in pairs or group work. Students are given an opportunity to explore, learn and experience the use of the language. The focal point is the students; the learning process is not teacher-centred.

The language used in authentic materials promotes positive learning among students. Linguists have indicated that all learners should be exposed to linguistic features that are one level beyond the students' knowledge of the language. The linguistic sentence structures and lexis used in authentic materials are generally complex and difficult. That is why it is important to know the students' level of language proficiency before selecting the right authentic materials to be used in the classroom (Guariento & Moley, 2001).

Most authentic materials are rich in culture (Kilickaya, 2004). Cultural elements of the target culture—for instance humor, cultural quotations, the usage of idioms, sayings, proverbs, phrasal verbs, language functions, pragmatics, pronunciation and many others—could be made known to students. The teaching of culture is very important in language teaching, as culture is embedded in the language.

Suggestions for Designing and Developing Activities or Handouts from Authentic Materials

Lee (1995) listed the following guidelines for teachers when designing activities or questions based on authentic materials:

- "In real-life communicative situations, it is common to use more than one language skill to achieve different communicative purposes, and for this reason an integrated skills approach is recommended.
- Contexts have to be provided for tasks, so that learners can practice the skills in a natural, meaningful, and relevant way.
- Tasks must have task validity, that is, the content and nature of the task should develop the language ability we want learners to practice.
- The task contents should be related to the authentic materials selected, so that learners can use them as springboards for their tasks.
- Whether the task is used as pre-activity, practice activity, or post-activity depends on the course objectives, the skill(s) to be practiced, and learners' preferences".

Examples of Using or Adapting Authentic Materials

A take-away menu (Pizza Hut) and a song (Hazard, composed and sung by Richard Marx) were developed for the purpose of this exploratory study. (Please refer to appendixes A and B). A skimming-cum-scanning activity and some grammatical exercises (comparative adjectives and superlative adjectives) were designed from the Pizza Hut take-away menu.

By contrast, Hazard was chosen because the lyric has a story line with an open ending; it depicts the target culture and it contains a strong message. An activity that could be developed from Hazard could be an oral or writing activity where students rewrite the story and predict their own ending.

Students' Feedback

A survey was conducted on eighty-three first-year, second-semester Business Undergraduate students from a private college. Their views and feedback were gathered