

Adaptation of Authentic Materials in English Listening Comprehension Classes

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Abstract—This paper examines the notion of authenticity in language teaching. Based on the definition of authenticity and related debates of the notion in the existing literature, this paper illustrates that authentic materials could be used in L2 listening classrooms by material adaptation. An example from a published L2 listening course book in the Chinese context is adopted as an example to illustrate this point. Implications for teaching are also discussed. Language teachers should understand the notion of authenticity, use authentic materials through graded tasks in class, and keep updated with the notion by learning from the existing literature.

Index Terms—authenticity, authentic material, material adaptation, L2 listening

I. INTRODUCTION

The teaching and learning situation went through a paradigm shift after communicative language teaching (CLT) came into existence in the late 1970s. Ever since then, the nature of the language classroom has changed dramatically from artificiality to authenticity with a view of developing language learners' communicative competence by linking language classroom to the reality of the outside world. Although the issue of authenticity has been debated in the field of linguistics, materials design, and pedagogy for at least three decades (Lynch, 2013), a consensus had not been reached on a precise definition (Lee, 1995). For some second language acquisition (SLA) and ESL scholars, this term may refer to texts and other materials used in class; for others, it might also include the type of tasks the students are assigned, the context the classroom interaction provides, and even different kinds of classroom interaction between students and teachers (Gilmore, 2007). Thanajaro (2000) suggests that among all these features, the most prominent one is the authentic material used or studied as the core of any classroom activity.

In the past few years, with the development of various technologies, the pedagogical world has witnessed a big change, offering more opportunities for language teachers to apply authentic materials in language classrooms. According to Mishan (2005), it is much more possible for language teachers to use authentic materials in the classroom currently than it was twenty years ago primarily because of the increased availability of the authentic materials via various means of technology especially the Internet. Due to the increased accessibility of the authentic materials, recently the use of authentic language input has been considered as a norm in language classes especially for listening comprehension courses (Burns, 1987). Although opinions towards the use of authentic materials are controversial, it is now a consensus in language teaching that authentic materials can be utilized in second/foreign language learning classrooms, and it is beneficial to the learning process as long as they are properly used (Guariento & Morley, 2001; Bahrani & Sim, 2012). When utilizing materials in language classrooms, teachers always have to adapt the material so as to meet the need of individual learners. Concerning how language teachers adapt materials in daily teaching, surprisingly little research can be found in the literature (Tomlinson, 2012). Therefore, this paper not only aims to review the controversial debate concerning the issue of authenticity in language teaching in the literature, but by presenting an adapted version of a piece of authentic material selected from one published listening textbook, it also aims to shed light on our understanding of how to utilize and adapt authentic materials in language classes so as to make them more approachable to intermediate learners of English.

This paper will firstly provide a broad view concerning the issue of authenticity in ESL/EFL teaching and learning and then concentrate on the controversy of the most prominent feature of authenticity, material authenticity. Following the discussion, based on the illustration of material adaptation in previous literature, a typical example of material adaptation will be presented to illustrate how to use and adapt authentic materials in listening classes. Finally, pedagogical implications for using and adapting authentic materials in ESL/EFL classes will be drawn.

II. AUTHENTICITY IN A BROAD VIEW

The issue of authenticity in foreign language learning has a long history, and its definition has been disputed ever since its existence. Initially, authenticity was considered to be an attribute only of the text used in the language classroom. It was widely accepted that, in the 1970s and 1980s, authenticity referred to samples of language used by native speakers for real communication, and not specifically devised for pedagogical purposes (Lynch, 2013). Later, it has been realized that effective language teaching lies not only in getting to use original text but also in helping students

use the language through various tasks. Widdowson (1979 cited in Lynch, 2013, p. 99) proposed two different aspects of language use to distinguish between 'genuineness' and 'authenticity'. He argues that a text is genuine if it contains the kind of language that is typical of that genre in actual use, while the term 'authenticity' refers to the appropriate learner response to the genuine text. The same point is made by Rost (2002), claiming that 'genuineness' refers to the features of colloquial style of 'real-time' planning characterizing everyday spoken discourse with and between native speakers, while 'authenticity', on the other hand, refers to any source of input and interaction that involves the learners' own purposes for listening or reading. Therefore, it is suggested by both of them that 'genuineness' is related to text while 'authenticity' is related to task. Guariento & Morley (2001) also emphasized the significance of task authenticity, commenting that 'authenticity' lies not only in the 'genuineness' of text, but also in the notion of task in language classes.

However, the concept of 'authenticity' is not restricted to material and task only. Lee (1995) claims that textually authentic materials have to be learner authentic; that is to say, authentic materials have to be motivating, interesting, and useful with content that does not cause learners culture shock or discomfort. In similar lines, Joy (2011) argues that authenticity is a process of personal engagement, in which students must be genuinely interested. Adding more to the concept of 'authenticity', it is argued by Widdowson (1996) that the language that is real for native speakers is not likely to be real for learners for a lack of contextual conditions in which learners can authenticate the language. Two years later, Widdowson (1998) published another article, claiming that the authenticity of language can only be reached within a localized context. In similar lines, Shomoossi & Ketabi (2007) argue that authenticity is not to be applied to discourse samples only but also to be determined by context-dependent. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers should construct relevant classroom context so as to make the learning process real for learners (Nation, 2009). However, Joy (2011) argues that it is impossible to achieve context authenticity in language classes since the original context of the authentic material no longer remains the same when a piece of authentic material is recontextualized in classrooms. In support of this assertion, Chan (2013, p. 304) claims it is quite difficult for material writers and language instructors to 'identify local English-using situations in which a task can be authentically contextualized'. Thus, contextual authenticity is more likely to be another fundamental challenge as to the issue of authenticity.

The issue of authenticity has been debated and broadened to different types. Some scholars argue that authenticity can be viewed in a much broader perspective, thus leading to different types of authenticity. According to Kessler (1997), 'authenticity' includes the learner, the context of the classroom, the nature of classroom interactions, and the content of the material. Guariento & Morley (2001) listed four broad schools of authenticity depending on a genuine purpose, real world purposes, classroom interaction, and learner engagement. Gilmore (2007) also considers that 'authenticity' associates with a range of meanings and can be situated in the text itself, the participants, the social or cultural situation, the purposes of communicative act or some combination of these. Along similar lines, Joy (2011) defined four authenticity types: text authenticity, task authenticity, learner authenticity and classroom authenticity.

III. ROLE OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

Due to various efforts made by experts and scholars to define authenticity, on the one hand, the complexity of authenticity has been deepened, and on the other, its scope has been widened (Joy, 2011). Although the term 'authenticity' has been defined in many different ways throughout the literature, authentic language/material is considered to be the most prominent feature of authenticity and is regarded as the core of any classroom activity. The authentic language input is the one that serves as the fundamental role, thus receiving much more attention than the other features.

Some experts highlight the advantages of exposing learners to authentic materials. Results of the study conducted by Kim (2000) indicate that listening comprehension in language students improves with increased exposure to authentic speech. Weyers (1999) investigated the effect of authentic video on learners' communicative competence, making the claim that authentic television programming is a valuable tool in improving not only students' listening comprehension but also students' output. Rost (2002) argues that authentic materials can represent the real language use of native speakers, thus playing a role in making the connection of classroom activities and real-world situations. Authentic language is also considered to be pedagogically appropriate, interesting, and motivating especially for advanced learners (Guariento & Morley, 2001; Mishan, 2004). Tomlinson (2007) emphasized the advantage of utilizing authentic materials in listening comprehension classes by arguing that the genuine language input may represent the characteristics that the specially-devised pedagogical materials fail to capture, such as the phonological characteristics of natural speech. Chan (2013) argues that authentic source texts are relatively easier to locate and more interesting than specially written texts for pedagogical purposes. In contrast, some scholars are concerned about the feasibility of using authentic materials in language classrooms for they might be too difficult for learners to handle or impossible for teachers to provide (Rost, 2002). Richards (2006) criticized what he called the 'myth' of authenticity by arguing that it is neither realistic nor necessary to base second language instruction on 'authentic' texts especially in the case of listening materials because learners generally find authentic texts too complex for use in materials if without proper adaptation.

Although views towards use of authentic materials in language classrooms are controversial, there is now a growing consensus in language teaching that authentic materials can be utilized in second/foreign language learning classrooms, and it is beneficial to the learning process as long as it is properly used (Guariento & Morley, 2001; Bahrani & Sim,

2012). Thus, Rost (2002) suggests that a mediating factor in using authentic materials is task design. It is suggested that teachers can design various tasks when utilizing authentic materials so as to cater the need of learners at all levels such as previewing key vocabulary and discourse features, chunking the input into manageable segments and providing selective focus on its particular elements. To realize authenticity in language classroom, Mishan (2005) proposed the authenticity-centered approach in his book *Designing authenticity into language learning*, claiming that tasks and authentic materials should be closely interconnected with each other in language classrooms. Along similar lines, Chan (2013) claims that to achieve authenticity in language classrooms, a key component is the adoption of authentic texts and the design of tasks in teaching materials.

IV. MATERIALS ADAPTATION

Good teachers are always adapting the materials they are using to meet the need of the students, the context, the teaching objectives and the methodology (Nation, 2009). As Lynch (2013, p. 93) puts it, 'if a teacher decides that a particular set of listening material is deficient in some respect, it may be possible to adapt or supplement it'. Since authentic materials generally appear to be too complex for language learners, teachers always have to adapt either the text or the task to control the difficulty of the authentic materials. According to Nunan (1989 cited in Gilmore, 2007, p. 109), one of the ways to control the difficulty of authentic materials is to vary the task rather than the text. However, concerning how teachers adapt authentic materials systematically in everyday teaching, it is surprising that little research can be found in the literature (Tomlinson, 2012). One of the famous experts, McGrath (2002 cited in Lynch, 2013, p. 93), defined three types of material adaptation including extemporization, extension, and exploitation. 'Extemporization' refers to a teacher's spontaneous response to a particular problem, such as deciding to replace a difficult word in a text or an exercise with one that is within the learners' vocabulary, and these extemporizations are likely to be oral and immediate. 'Extension' involves giving students' further explanation by providing examples to help them understand a particular point, and these extensions might be either oral or written. 'Exploitation' stands for a teacher's creative designing of a set of tasks based on any published material to serve a different purpose rather than the intention of material writers. According to Wilson (2009, p. 47), exploitation material 'gives students a way into the recording, guides them through its difficulties and provides discussion points at the end'.

The following part, based on the notion of 'exploitation', is an illustration of an adapted version of an authentic material selected from one published listening textbook. Through 'exploitation', the original material is made to be more approachable to the students.

The listening textbook, *New Horizon College English—Listening and Speaking Book 4 (Second Edition)*, was published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press in 2008. The target learners of this textbook are normally second-year non-English majors in traditional universities and colleges in China. Although these students have learned English for more than ten years, their language proficiency is not so high, and most of them are intermediate English learners. This book has ten units with different topics, and each unit consists of four sections including listening, speaking, listening and speaking and homework. The listening section consists of four parts, understanding short conversations, understanding a long conversation, understanding a passage, and understanding a radio program. The first three sections are considered to be examination-oriented listening comprehension exercises, and the recordings are considered to be pedagogically designed rather than authentic materials, while the last section, understanding a radio program, is a piece of authentic material with features of natural speech. Miller (2003) claims that radios are perhaps the most difficult type of authentic materials because all non-verbal information is missing so that the learners have to focus solely on their listening skills to get the main idea. According to the guideline of the teacher's book, the objective of incorporating a piece of original radio program into each unit of this textbook is to develop students' listening skills of understanding natural speech, as well as raise their awareness of the phonological characteristics of authentic speech.

This example of the radio program represents a very natural use of language with natural speed, hesitation, self-correction and repetition. Although it does not involve much off-list vocabulary, it does contain non-linguistic interference in the form of music throughout the program, which becomes a distractor for listeners. In the original textbook, two tasks are provided in this section. During the first listening, students are asked to complete Task 1, a matching exercise in which students have to match the sentence fragments in the left column with those in the right. In the second listening, Task 2 is provided, and students are required to imitate the speaker to the best of their ability. Regarding the features of this piece of authentic material mentioned above, it might be challenging for the students to complete these two tasks by only listening to it twice. Thus, the original tasks have to be adapted so as to guide the students through its difficulties, help the students better understand the content of the program, and raise students' awareness of the features of natural speech. In this sense, exploitation of the material could be an effective way to guide the adaptation.

According to Nation (2009), when teachers perceive that one piece of material might be difficult for students to handle, teachers can assist learners by providing them with support when they do activities. This kind of support can serve as a temporary bridge that students can use to reach the target. Over time, as long as learners develop their own expertise to meet the target, the bridge then can be removed. He argues that there are four main ways of supporting listening.

1. By providing prior experience with aspects of the text (i.e., with language, ideas, skills or text type).

2. By guiding the learners through the text.
 3. By setting up cooperative learning arrangements (for example, shared reading approaches).
 4. By providing the means by which learners can achieve comprehension by themselves.
- (Nation, 2009, p. 46)

Listening instruction mainly falls into three stages, including pre-, while- and post-listening. Based on the above four ways of supporting listening, an adapted version of the original listening material is presented as follows (See Table 1).

TABLE 1
TABLE 1 ADAPTED VERSION OF THE ORIGINAL LISTENING MATERIAL

Pre-listening (to activate schemata and vocabulary)
1. Students discuss these two questions in groups of four: 'who is Bill Gates?' and 'what do they know about Bill Gates?'
2. Students work in pairs to match a word from A with a word from B to make collocations. A: make throughout shrewd under have a bunch of B: faith businessman the years contributions leadership nerds
3. Discuss in pairs to anticipate the main idea of the radio program based on the above collocations.
First listening (to get the gist of the material)
While listening to the radio program, students have to find the answers to the questions "What kind of contributions did Bill Gates make?" and "What is the man who is speaking?"
Second listening (to get more detailed information)
While listening to the radio program for the second time, match the sentence fragments that follow. After that, please check the answers with your partner.
1. The Windows Operating System A. became a business tool. 2. The average computer B. was not fit to comment on innovation. 3. A basement computer C. was the plaything of herds. 4. Due to Gates' faith, the computer D. made it a wish to dominate like Gates. 5. IBM E. became Bill Gates' greatest contributions. 6. A person who studied history F. makes use of Gates' system.
Third listening (to achieve a complete understanding)
During the third time of listening, you are required to fill in the following blanks. When you finish, please check the answers within your group. Bill Gates has made many _____ ur... throughout the last 25 or 30 years, most of all, of course, the Windows Operating System, which more than 90% of all computers in the world use today. He was a very _____, ur, business person at a, at an early age, almost as a _____ in fact, and he was one of the few people who could see a hobbyist market, that is, a bunch of nerds sort of playing with computers and chips in their _____ and how that could become a _____ business. And one of the interesting things that Microsoft under Bill Gates' _____, was able to do, is in fact... ur... take on some of the biggest computer companies, _____ IBM... ur... at... you know, at a very early stage when IBM wasn't quite sure if the microcomputer was a toy or a _____ business tool and Gates had faith that it was a business tool, he could see ahead, he has always been, a, a fairly _____ thinker and uh... that in turn... let him in fact, you know, _____ the computer industry that IBM would still like to be able to do. Will Microsoft _____? – That's a question that I usually answer by saying, I'm a _____ so I live in the past and there are lots of people who are, sort of some expert in _____ the future, so I think I'll just leave it, leave it at that.
Post-listening (to apply to speaking)
Students are guided to work in pairs to discuss "Which personality of Bill Gates attracts you most?" and "What can you learn from his story?"

It can be noticed that pair work and group work are utilized frequently in the adapted version since working in pairs or groups can allow for negotiation to occur during the activities. In this way, these listening exercises are turned into communicative tasks in which students are involved in listening, comprehending, producing and interacting in the target language with each other in the class. In addition, peer and group work can help those who are getting behind to keep up with the pace of the teaching and learning.

V. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

As communicative language teaching coming into existence, and with the development of various technologies especially the Internet, currently using authentic materials for teaching has been a trend in language classrooms especially for listening comprehension courses. Based on the discussion in the previous parts, some pedagogical implications are drawn as follows for language teachers.

Firstly, language teachers should understand the concept of authenticity and its various definitions, as well as be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of utilizing authentic materials in English listening classes. Although the use of authentic listening texts in classrooms might inevitably present the English teachers with a range of problems, there is consensus that using language models that are authentic could help students' raise their awareness of the natural speech, develop their interest of the real use of the target language, and help them make connections between classroom contexts and situations in the outside world (Schmidt, 1994). As long as teachers understand the concept, realize the potential difficulties of using the authentic materials can they overcome these problems while having faith in the advantages of using them.

Secondly, when utilizing authentic materials in listening classes, language teachers could make use of graded tasks to guide the students through its difficulties. A sequence of designed tasks, from simple to complicated, is more likely to help the students comprehend the authentic listening material, develop their awareness of natural speech and help them

understand the phonological features of the real target language. Since in most situations, the existing listening textbooks cannot meet the individual need of students with different proficiency levels, it is the teacher's job to do needs and analysis, make adaptation of original teaching material so as to make it more approachable for the learners. Exploitation could be an effective way of making full use of a piece of authentic material, leading students to fully understand the content, as well as develop their language skills, thus building their confidence to learn.

Thirdly, language teachers should always keep learning from the literature, getting informed of what is happening in the pedagogical world. Sometime in the future, there might be another type of authenticity adding to the literature, or there could be a perfect way to interconnect authentic material and task in language classroom. Thus, apart from the teaching job, English teachers should develop a habit of reading the latest literature in second language teaching, trying to find possible answers to particular problems encountered in teaching via authentic materials. Only in this way can teachers improve their teaching skills gradually, thus develop their expertise in teaching and researching.

VI. CONCLUSION

The purpose of the paper is to review the controversial issue of authenticity in the field of language teaching and learning. It also aims to shed light on our understanding of how to use and adapt authentic materials in listening comprehension classes so as to make it more approachable to intermediate language learners. Concerning the notion that authentic materials might be too complex for most language learners, special attention was guided in this paper to the adaptation of materials especially the exploitation of materials that served as a bridge of students' comprehension of the original material. With a typical example illustrating the adaptation of a piece of authentic listening material taken from one published listening textbook, it is suggested that proper adaptation of authentic is more likely to be needed in everyday teaching practice to make authentic materials more approachable to learners. Pedagogical implications were offered to language teachers regarding the use of authentic materials in language classes, such as understanding the concept of authenticity, being aware of its strengths and weaknesses, making use of material adaptation and keeping learning from the literature.

This paper has some limitations. The most obvious limitation of this paper is that only one piece of authentic material was examined and adapted, which might probably prevent a clear generalizability of the study. Additionally, since little research concerning the adaptation of authentic materials could be found in previous literature, this paper failed to provide the principles of adapting authentic materials, while if this part was included, the paper would be more logical and convincing. Therefore, recommendations for further research could be focusing on the principles of adapting authentic materials and how teachers adapt materials they are using in their daily teaching. In addition, further research should also consider the comparison of the effects between adapted authentic materials and original texts on a particular group of learners.

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