

Essence of Authenticity and its Criteria in the English Language Classroom

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Abstract

The main goal of our research was to analyze students can sound authentic in the English language classroom. The theoretical analysis of scientific and pedagogical literature plus the analysis of the empirical experience of teaching foreign languages were chosen as the leading research methods. The results showed that most of the surveyed students expressed a wish to be able to sound authentic and improve their language skills. When the essence of authenticity in teaching and learning EFL is identified and approbated there can be chosen appropriate teaching techniques and learning activities which have the power of bridging the eternal divergence between two targets of L2 learners: sounding more like a native speaker or simply sounding more fluent. This frames the research goal of the experiment which is scheduled to be conducted at the second (final) stage of the research.

Keywords: Authenticity; EFL learners; Empirical teaching experience; Language and communicative competences: Teaching to sound authentic.



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1. Introduction

Lots of L2 learners wonder if it is possible to sound like a native speaker and ask their language instructors how long it might take them to learn to sound authentic in L2. Lots of language instructors ([Chickering et al., 2006](#); [Fahrutdinova et al., 2014](#); [Huda, 2017](#); [Nicaise et al., 2000](#); [Nosonovich and Milrud, 1999](#); [Nunan, 1999](#)). Search for a proper answer to these questions, too. The authors of this paper undertook a survey to find out what target students aim at when learning a second language. The questionnaire list was rather short and contained the following options:

1. To speak fluent, i.e. to speak and/ or write a foreign language easily and accurately
2. To sound authentic, i.e. to sound like a native speaker.

The results of the survey (95% of 180 respondents chose option 2) encouraged the authors to start their research in order to find the answer to the question “How to teach EFL learners to sound authentic?” It was both challenging and appealing to the authors.

The research began with the analysis of scientific and pedagogical literature. Authenticity in teaching foreign languages was scrupulously reviewed with the aim to open subtle nuances of this methodical category which gave new ideas of how-to perfect language and communicative competences of EFL learners so that they could sound like native speakers. The analysis of the personal international teaching and learning experience added definite value to the theoretical framework of the research ([Pearce, 2016](#); [Yarmakeev et al., 2016a](#)).

The set of training exercises offered by the authors can enhance EFL learners’ exposing to authentic language and help them sound authentic. The teaching materials presented in this study can be used by English language instructors in the English language classroom ([Yarmakeev et al., 2016a](#)).

2. Literature Review

Today, the emergence of the concept of a global village and the wider communication between different countries of the world, has required the learning of one or more languages. The increase in the growth of foreign language teaching has had a major impact on the educational system of many countries, and many countries have started formalizing foreign language education in the elementary period ([Abdollahzadeh and Baniasad, 2010](#)). On the other hand, with the advent of science and technology and increasing interactions between nations, the need to learn foreign languages is also increasing. The history of learning a foreign language and its training has always faced challenges and questions. Learners have always sought the best and most effective way to learn a language, and teachers have also sought a way to facilitate and speed this learning. In addition, in a world where mass communication has progressed, it has become a village, the need for a common language for communicating and advancing social sciences is felt more and more. Learning a foreign language that results in bilingualism is a

complex process that incorporates the dimensions and aspects of psychology, socio-cultural, linguistics and behavioral (Baleghizadeh and Motahed, 2010).

2.1. Foreign Language Educational Content and Cultural Incompatibility

Language is one of the most important ways of communicating human beings and has had a very important impact on the evolution of human beings and human societies, so it is essential that we learn the most important God-given means best. In learning a foreign language, there are four skills to hear, read, speak and write. Until a message is spoken, it is not heard and will not be read until a text is written. In this way, the stages of their emergence are in terms of speaking, hearing, writing and reading. The two skills of reading and writing are literally literate, so who can read and write literate (Gray, 2010).

Almost most of the world's languages are used in formal and interactive forms (Islas, 2017). The official language of the language is less applicable in everyday life of the people and is mostly used in official meetings such as radio news, television and official meetings, as well as text sources such as newspapers, magazines, books and internet sites. Interactive language is more commonly used in talking and hearing every day, and most people in interlaced languages need much more formal aspects than their formal aspect, although the official language is also of particular importance and should not be overlooked. Therefore, learning a spoken language has a higher priority, and the same should be spent to learn more. One of the reasons why children learn their mother tongue quickly is that their surroundings speak the language perfectly, and for this reason, if the mother tongue of one of the parents is different, or in the street and market, and language school Others can communicate quickly with other languages (Pearce, 2016).

The teaching materials used in foreign language teaching programs play an important role in determining the content and methods of language teaching. Since one of the most important needs of any educational system is the planning, compilation, review, modification, deletion, modification or updating of educational content and training courses, they are always criticized by the researchers. In reviewing the texts, factors such as written and non-written content of the texts, the teaching method presented, the fit of activities and exercises, the organization and diversity of the content of the text, the type of language used, and the design of the text and template texts are sometimes evaluated (Yarmakeev *et al.*, 2016b).

Teachers and students are a large number of learners, consumers of foreign products, or copied products. The cultural and social incompatibilities contained in the content of these works, with the cultural and social beliefs and sometimes the relative lack of attractiveness or product performance, are the concerns of foreign language teaching. The preparation and editing of native language texts with a cultural approach is an appropriate alternative to commonly used books that requires research activities and appropriate applied actions. Another topic in the development and production of native textbooks is the production of texts based on regional characteristics and native lifestyles. In this regard, the emphasis is on the provision of educational texts based on the different cultural, social and cultural needs of learners of foreign languages (Baleghizadeh and Motahed, 2010).

The book-based teaching system and the excessive reliance of teachers to textbooks are one of the problems of the educational system in the world. Since, unfortunately, foreign language lecturers do not primarily see specific training in the preparation and development of classroom textbooks, the need to design training courses to educate and encourage teachers to develop and tailor teacher-centered classical texts in an innovative way, in keeping with the principles and educational needs One of the recent discussions has been raised (Nicaise *et al.*, 2000).

2.2. Foreign Language Curriculum

The foreign language is one of the courses that has the most drop in academic achievement especially in the middle school curriculum (Alviárez *et al.*, 2005). Most teachers and students, despite the fact that many hours are under the ceiling of the class, are involved in the learning process of this lesson, they have not had much success (Ballesteros, 2015). Regarding the teaching and learning of foreign languages, one of the things that makes students frustrated is the friction of teaching and learning strategies and the lack of use of key strategies for learning foreign languages. The educational institution faces problems in all four components of the curriculum including goal, content, organization and evaluation. In curriculum planning, the components to be considered include: needs assessment, status analysis and how to teach, define communication goals, design courses, select or formulate curriculum, organize effective teaching and assessment. While students spent hundreds of hours of their lives in school language classes, they still do not have the ability to learn, speak, read, and write at all to the desired level of ability, and basically between what is and what should be the distance is (Baleghizadeh and Motahed, 2010).

Also, the result of this investment and spending is the graduation of students who, after many years, do not get enough knowledge of language proficiency. Looking at the situation of those students who enter the university, we find that almost all of the students who are trained in private foreign language institutes are not as good as the others in terms of linguistic knowledge, which suggests that That the curriculum of extraterrestrial language is not effective (Chickering *et al.*, 2006).

If the educational system wants to do its job properly, it needs to change based on the new philosophy of education, revising and reproducing its basic concepts, including planning, setting goals, the role of teacher, student, parent, assessment of learning and Valuation. It seems that the education of our country has so far failed to achieve fundamental changes in the teaching of English. The reason for this failure is not entirely clear, since the curriculum consists of several elements and should consider all of these elements in a curriculum. Inappropriate design of educational environments, students' distraction, problems with teaching methods, lack of space in school are among

the weaknesses that are one of the most important factors in the education and training of students in teaching foreign languages to students (Abdollahzadeh and Baniasad, 2010).

2.3. Foreign Language and Native Pronunciation

One of the problems with learning a new language is that we have to practice the pronunciation of the voices that we have not done so far. It's not easy to do this in many cases (Almeida and Cuervo, 2016). One of the reasons for this is that the muscles of the mouth and larynx have not practiced this pronunciation, and in some cases, they cannot pronounce this pronounced due to weakness. In other cases, the cause of inability to pronounce, lack of knowledge of the technique of doing it or lack of exercise is enough (Nosonovich and Milrud, 1999).

Many of the problems with pronunciation of the words the learners encounter is due to the misuse of the sounds used in their native language. Therefore, spoken problems that suffer from suffering are likely to be similar to the problems that other language learners face (Esther and Cuervo, 2015). When a native English speaks that you (for example) have a Russian or Chinese accent, it actually confirms this point. Many of the accent reduction programs are based on research that identifies the specific sounds that each language group (eg French, Chinese, Spanish, Japanese, etc.) has when it comes to English words. For example, 70% of Spanish languages have difficulty pronunciation / st / in the word stick, while the Chinese language has no problems with its pronunciation (Huda, 2017).

Any student can improve their speaking skills, but it takes a lot of time. Students often seek immediate results, and they are soon discouraged and discouraged by the effort. There should be patience along with the high motivation for progress. Only in this way can one become a person who speaks foreign languages as a native speaker's dialect (Gray, 2010).

3. Research Goals and Methods

The main goal of our research was to analyze and theoretically prove that students can sound authentic in the English language classroom when the essence of authenticity and its criteria are identified and approbated. The authors started their research with elaborating the definition of authenticity as a methodical category. For this, the theoretical analysis of scientific and pedagogical literature plus the analysis of the empirical experience of teaching foreign languages were chosen as the leading research methods. In this study, a survey as a research tool was also implemented (Syunina et al., 2016).

4. Results and Discussion

It is generally acknowledged that any research should start with a well-grounded theoretical framework which includes literature overview. It provides the accurate conducting of an experiment which traditionally takes place at the final stage of the study.

The first thing that caught our eyes, when over-viewing scientific and pedagogical literature, was that some researchers acknowledge the beneficial effects of the focused pronunciation practice that, for sure, can yield great results and perfect pronunciation, and believe it to be *the only way* for L2 learner to sound authentic. The authors of this paper do not share this viewpoint and consider the named phenomenon "authenticity" to consist of three aspects:

- 1) Pronunciation patterns: rhythm, intonation, pausation, fluency.
- 2) Contemporary speech vocabulary: up-to-date realia, collocations.
- 3) Grammar accordance: ellipses, sentence structure.

No doubt, the English rhythmic structure is different from the Russian one because all the notional words are stressed and the form-words are fitted in between the stressed ones, while in the Russian language almost all the words of an intonation group are stressed. To acquire a good English speech rhythm we should arrange sentences first into intonation groups, and then into rhythmic ones. All weak and unstressed words and syllables hide the vowels in them, thus making the stressed syllables with some other very important nuances:

- *Connecting words* is used to raise students' awareness that in the English language words within a sense group tend to link together to sound more natural and smooth.

e.g. black coffee. If two words end in two consonants of the same sound, we usually pronounce just one letter.

What do you do? If two words end in two different consonants, the word with a voiced consonant is just pronounced. It will sound as follows [wa de ye du].

Not at all. If a vowel precedes a consonant, the latest is obscured.

- *Squeezing words.* Native speakers tend to clench words rather than stretch them.

e.g. comfortable. We do not pronounce the second letter "O", thus, the letter "F" is connected to the letter "R" [comftabl].

- *Squeezing letters.*

e.g. country. The last three letters are pronounced as [chree].

The word *hundred* will be [hanjred].

Maintaining a regular beat produces the effect of monotony. Therefore, we have to admit the great role of pausation to sound authentic. However, taking into account the versatility of pauses, we emphasize the importance of syntactic and emphatic ones in producing authentic speech. Proper intonation and pausation are not conceivable without fluency. There are countless definitions of what fluency is, but, every man should make up their own personal definition. Here are some prompts to borrow:

- speaking or writing in a natural manner;

- (of a language) used easily and accurately etc.

Students must be aware of the fact that fluency demands communication, a lot of practice and experience.

Let's move on to the second aspect of authenticity that requires the selection of up-to-date realia to sound authentic. According to Nunan realia is defined as "objects and teaching props from the world outside the classroom that are used for teaching and learning". Under this statement, realia is considered as real objects, which are used to aid in practicing a new language, as a way to present meaningful examples from the real world. Realia helps students perceive and master language more naturally like his native one.

The competent user of collocations is one more step forward to sound like a native speaker. Students must not be taught words in isolation but as part of collocations.

Occasionally, students encounter emails, newspaper articles dotted with ellipses that make them frustrated about the meaning they eager to convey. Ellipsis is the omission of one or more words that are obviously understood but that must be supplied to make a construction grammatically complete; a sudden leap from one topic to another. For example:

- Without the ellipsis: "After much deliberation, I decided yesterday that it was time for me to retire from this sport, hopefully leaving me enough healthy years to pursue my passion for writing", said the seven-time champion.
- With the ellipsis: "I decided ... it was time for me to retire from this sport", said the seven-time champion.

From this example we can see the effect ellipsis can produce, i.e. they make the language sound more smooth, natural and authentic, and giving oneself time for hesitation pauses. Looking closer at the example we can note the ability of a speaker to "juggle" with the words and the relevant grammatical constructions to make themselves clear for the audience. The advanced user finds no difficulty to resort to a number of proper grammatical sentences that concord with the conversation itself.

4.1. Sample Material

The authors of this paper share their hand-on experience of mastering English, specifically the ways of how to sound authentic. As it has already been mentioned previously, we have divided them into three categories: pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar.

4.1.1. Pronunciation

- Shadow Reading.* A teacher plays a video (YouTube, FluentU) twice, turns on the subtitles. On the first time, students watch silently. On the second time, students say the words along with the clip paying attention to the pronunciation, intonation and fluency.
- Tongue Twisters.* First, a teacher pronounces the tongue-twister slowly, then gradually accelerates. It is recommended to record your pronunciation and analyze it afterwards.
- Silent Film.* Students watch a video with muted sound and removed subtitles and try to predict what the people are saying by the way their lips move. Then, they form little groups and act out an episode from the video trying to fit in the conversation and be silent when there are pauses. Finally, turn on the sound and subtitles to check your predictions.

4.1.2. Vocabulary

- Song Games.* A teacher asks students to listen to the song and try to sing along with it. There are some words in these songs that sound ridiculously just for the sake of rhythm, e.g. "benene" instead of "banana". This task practices the ability to adjust your listening skills as well as vocabulary knowledge and get the meaning of the words.
- Role play.* A teacher creates a scenario, in which learners have to perform accordingly. Such tasks promote and encourage communication in a real-like setting.
- Drilling.* Students sit in a circle and pass on object to the partner on their left. One should say the name of the object, another a collocation used with it, the third the situation this object might be used in, the fourth the idiom, etc.
- Translation contest.* Students are given a piece of writing to translate from Russian into English using contemporary lexis, relevant grammatical structures. In the end, each student reads aloud its passage with the correct authentic intonation, pausation and fluency.

4.1.3. Grammar

- TubeQuizard.* These videos contain a large number of examples of target grammar and vocabulary and automatically create listening quizzes that allow learners to practice catching this language in authentic speech.
- Supplementary reading.* Systematically students are made to read books of different genres to analyze and memorize the grammar structures. For example, the Oz books by L. Frank Baum, the Narnia stories by C. S. Lewis, the Pooh tales by A. A. Milne, Sister Carry by Th. Dreiser, and others.
- Grammarly.* Students use an app Grammarly that automatically detects potential grammar, spelling, punctuation, word choice, and style mistakes in their writing. This application suggests context-specific corrections for grammar, spelling, wordiness, style, punctuation, and plagiarism.

One problem with learning how to sound like a native speaker is that the idea of ‘native’ is so fluid, especially if you’re learning a language that has many regional variations. In our study, we adhered to Standard English. Standard English refers to that which is generally accepted by speakers of all standardized Englishes (Merriam Webster dictionary).

5. Summary

“If you want to accomplish something, you must first expect it of yourself.” This statement of an American writer and philosopher doesn’t sound strange as it raises questions to yourself: “What do you expect of yourself? “Do you expect to be able to perform miracles?” These very questions were addressed to our students mastering skills of authentic English. Since most of the surveyed students expressed a wish to be able to sound authentic and improve their language skills, it motivated us to come up with some approaches to the investigated problem that might be beneficial for our learners in the way of overcoming difficulties with the language authenticity. It is important to mention that all the three aspects and their categories have been chosen not in vain as they represent visible obstacles for the students. Apart from that we assume that a number of the presented tasks can boost students’ motivation and as a result acquaint them with up-to-date realia (Dyer, 2012).

It is relevant to say that all these data will serve as a start to carry out an experiment in the near future to prove that the selected aspects might serve as a tool to sound authentic.

6. Conclusion

This study has been intended to discover beneficial approaches to mastering EFL learners’ language and communicative competences with their concern to sound authentic. When the essence of authenticity in teaching and learning EFL is identified and approbated there can be chosen appropriate teaching techniques and learning activities which have the power of bridging the eternal divergence between two targets of L2 learners: sounding more like a native speaker or simply sounding more fluent. This frames the research goal of the experiment which is scheduled to be conducted at the second (final) stage of the research.

The materials of the research can be utilized by English language instructors in EFL class.

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