

AUTHENTIC MATERIALS AS A MEANS OF DEVELOPING READING SKILLS IN TEACHING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: SELECTION CRITERIA AND BENEFITS

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Abstract:

This article proposes a methodology for using authentic materials in teaching students a foreign language. The main criteria for selecting authentic materials in accordance with the purpose and objectives of training are identified, and the advantages of their use for developing reading skills in comparison with adapted texts and increasing the level of motivation for learning a foreign language are analyzed.

Keywords and phrases: authentic materials; teaching a professional foreign language; motivation of students; communication skills; extensive reading; intensive reading.

Introduction

One of the important goals of modern foreign language teachers is to prepare students for the use of a foreign language in real situations of everyday and professional life. In this regard, teachers are constantly in search of suitable materials that are effective in teaching a foreign language. Often this makes teachers think about the fact whether it is enough to use the materials of textbooks specially released for learning a foreign language in the classroom, or is there a need to use authentic materials to develop and improve various speech skills of students, especially reading skills. According to the definition of D. Noonan, authentic materials are “information in oral or written form, which is created in the process of natural communication, and not specifically for use in language learning” [4, p. 54]. These are “... original texts that were not created for pedagogical purposes” [8, p. 145]. Considering the expediency of using AM, H. Widowson notes that earlier, when learning a language, it was considered necessary to use simplified materials in the classroom in order to facilitate the perception and assimilation of the language. However, it is currently recommended that the materials be authentic [9]. According to Professor of the Institute of English at the University of Michigan D. Larsen-Freeman, authentic materials are an integral part of language learning [3]. If the authentic materials used in teaching a foreign language are related to the subject of the direction and profile of training, then the motivation of students to learn a foreign language increases. Authentic materials are more effective, interesting and stimulating [7]. In addition, they immerse students in the culture of the language being studied. Non-authentic texts, adapted for easier perception, focus on the information that

the teacher plans for teaching students, and often contain perfectly formulated sentences, correct structure, interrogative sentences, correct detailed answers. Specially edited lexical and grammatical structures of sentences make the language in non-authentic texts bear little resemblance to the one that students encounter in communication and that they will have to use in real life. Adapted texts are suitable for working out the studied vocabulary and grammar, but they are ineffective for improving reading skills, one of the main skills in learning a foreign language. Experts identified the main reasons that determine the need to use authentic materials in the classroom:

- with the help of AM, students learn the language for real communication;
- AM meet the interests of students, have a positive impact on the motivation of students;
- the effectiveness of teaching increases;
- AM introduce students to the culture of the language being studied [6, p. 144].

In other words, authentic materials help bridge the gap between the language taught in the classroom and the language people use in real life situations. Authentic texts are essential language learning materials for students to understand while traveling, studying abroad, attending international conferences, or other situations that require the use of the language. Taking into account the fact that authentic texts are created not for the purpose of learning a language, but for completely different purposes, it is necessary to correctly select authentic texts for teaching a foreign language. As a source of a "real" language, authentic materials may be unsuitable for learning and contribute to a decrease in the student's motivation to learn a foreign language. There are original lyrics taken from newspapers, magazines, television programs, films, songs and literary works. Also, materials from the global Internet are often used now, the undeniable advantage of which is regular updates, visual appeal and interactivity, which provides a different approach to reading. From a practical point of view, the Internet as a modern reality is accessible to most students and teachers and provides easy access to an endless amount of materials. Moreover, the purchase of authentic materials abroad often costs two to three times their normal cost, and sometimes the quality of these materials may be lower than expected. Nevertheless, searching and downloading resources from the Internet, especially with unlimited access to the network, are practically free and require only time costs. Authentic materials allow students to use living spoken language in communication, rather than formal, specially formulated phrases. When choosing materials from various sources, it should be taken into account that the purpose of reading them should be to understand the meaning, and not the form of presentation, especially when using texts of literary works. K. Nuttall defines three main criteria for choosing texts as materials for a lesson: compliance (appropriateness) of the content, the possibility of using the text in the lesson, and the presentation available for reading [5]. Content relevance can be considered the most important of the three named criteria, since it is the content that stimulates students' interest in reading, especially if it meets their needs. The ability to use text in the classroom implies options for working with text in order to develop reading skills. Text that does not correspond to the purpose and objectives of the lesson will be useless in

teaching. In other words, the material cannot be useful just because it is presented in English. Accessible reading implies a combination of stylistic and lexical complexity of the text, the number of unfamiliar words and the presence of unknown grammatical forms. It is very important to correctly assess the level of complexity of the materials in accordance with the level of preparedness of students. Variety and presentation also influence the choice of authentic materials. Reading materials becomes more interesting with the use of a variety of texts. It is not uncommon for students to get bored of working with texts on only one specific topic. When teaching students professional English, we face this. There is an advantage in using texts on the same topic: this allows students to practice already familiar vocabulary, use it more confidently in other types of speech activity. Specializing in a particular topic does not always allow students to expand their vocabulary in another area. The way the text is presented to students is also very important. Authentic presentation of the text, including original photographs, graphics and drawings, helps to more effectively assimilate the proposed information (not only the meaning of the text itself, but also to understand the possibility of further use of the content). A more "attractive" presentation of the text encourages more students to read it. The visual form of information presentation is what the student pays attention to first of all, it is the "appearance" of the text that can draw the student's attention to the content, or maybe push him away from reading this material. The following is a table of criteria for selecting authentic materials for teaching students reading skills, along with questions that, according to the specified criteria, help determine whether authentic materials are suitable for the purpose of the planned lesson.

TABLE 1. Criteria for selecting authentic reading material

Criteria	Key questions
Appropriate content	Does the text fit the needs of the student? Is the text interesting to students? Does the text contain material that the student will use outside of the classroom?
Possibilities of use	Is the text suitable for use in the educational process? For what purpose will the text be used? What skills/strategies can be developed with this text?
Accessible Reading	Will the text be too easy/difficult for the student? Is the structure of the text complex? Does the text contain a large number of unfamiliar words? Is the vocabulary relevant, meaningful?
Presentation	Is the presentation "authentic"? Does it grab students' attention visually? Will students want to read the text further?

The experience of practical use of authentic materials in the classroom with students of intermediate English proficiency (B1) was to prepare an intensive reading course for engineering students. The course lasted 36 hours (2 hours per week). The only requirement

was that students be able to read and understand articles in English related to their area of specialization by the end of this course. One of the objectives of the course was not only to use authentic materials, but also to introduce students to reading skills that they can use when reading texts in a foreign language. Entrance testing with checking the reading of authentic text and performance of content comprehension tasks showed that the average rate of correct answers in the group was 52%. Initially, when using the Oxford English for Computing textbook (authors K. Beckner and P. C. Brown) [1] in the classroom, it became clear that the students were not very motivated by the proposed materials. From the point of view of the students, the texts in the textbook did not stimulate them to read, because they did not contain the vocabulary and lexical expressions, the knowledge of which would help them to freely read and understand articles about the latest research in the field of their professional interests. For materials taken from the Internet, tasks were developed to develop skills in various types of reading: extensive (reading for content coverage), intensive reading (for understanding detailed information), skimming and viewing reading. All this was due to the need to read large amounts of information, which is facilitated by extensive reading, and to obtain a detailed understanding of the texts, which is aimed at intensive reading. Skimming and scanning were used in the exercises prior to reading the text, both to get the general idea of the text or its key points, and to find specific information. Authentic texts for reading were also used when performing tasks in pairs and groups. Preparation for the lesson included the search for suitable material and the development of assignments. The role of the teacher in the class after explaining the task was reduced only to observation, consultation and subsequent comments and evaluation of the results of the students' work. Students showed a high level of motivation development and expressed preferences in favor of working with authentic materials, finding them more interesting and stimulating than textbooks. In addition, students came to the conclusion that the reading skills they used when working with texts from textbooks are not suitable for reading authentic materials. The ability to quickly read a text with a general content coverage, i.e. extensive reading and the ability to read intensively, translating each word. At the exit testing, the average rate of correctly completed tasks, similar to the tasks of the entrance testing, was 78% versus 52% at the entrance testing with the same complexity of the tasks. Obvious progress has confirmed the effectiveness of the use of authentic materials in teaching the reading skills of professional articles to future engineers. In the process of using original texts in teaching the course "Professional Foreign Language", there was an effective development of reading skills among students, which allowed us to confirm that authentic materials are one of the important resources for effective teaching of a foreign language, which has a number of advantages compared to specially prepared teaching materials. Firstly, they contain words and expressions commonly used in real life situations. Secondly, they encourage students to memorize such vocabulary for further use. Thirdly, they help students feel more confident in the case of communication in a foreign language, since they contain information that most or completely meets the requirements of real life. Among the variety of sources of authentic materials, the Internet resources are the main and most actively used, especially when it

comes to the development of reading skills, since any information presented in printed form must first be read and comprehended, then it will be assimilated and analyzed. In addition, some researchers note the motivating role of authentic materials, which is one of the main factors affecting success in the study of any discipline in general and in the study of a foreign language in particular [2]. As the experience of the authors of this article shows, students study original, unadapted articles with more enthusiasm than textbook texts, considering authentic materials as a source of "real" language. Taking into account the above, the positive effect of the use of authentic materials in teaching a foreign language and in its study is obvious, provided that they are correctly selected in accordance with the purpose of the lesson and the needs of students.

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