

Using Authentic Texts in EFL Teaching and Learning

Mika Higuchi

1.0 Introduction

In this paper, I will discuss the benefits and problems when we use authentic texts in EFL classrooms. I will examine EFL coursebooks, short stories written by the native speakers of English, and a film and its scenario also produced in the target language. The latter three are considered as authentic written and spoken texts.

1.1 Authentic Texts

Authentic texts can be defined as those texts that are naturally produced by the interaction between native speakers of the target language. It also can be paraphrased by Willis as 'genuine language use' or '[being] typical of real English' (1990:26,127). Taking this viewpoint, it seems that the genre of authentic texts should be narrowly limited to spontaneous spoken discourse. However, as many recordings of spontaneous spoken discourse show, they are often ungrammatical. This is one of the most difficult points to deal with authentic texts. Advanced level students can recognise those ungrammaticalities in authentic texts as aspects of real spontaneous spoken texts. Language forms that are sometimes rather different from those in school grammar books, in other words broken forms for the learners, actually do not bother interactions among the participants; they even facilitate interactions to go smoothly, as Willis (1990:126) explains. Yet students of lower than intermediate level may not be able to learn enough from them to develop their skills (see sections 2.1 and 2.2). Another big problem is that authentic texts which can be utilised in classrooms are harder to get than other usual course materials in places where English is not the official language.

Considering these points, I will take stories and film scenarios written by English native speakers as examples of authentic language. Both of them are written texts, and written texts tend to show idealised forms of the language; however, they at least do not contain the strongly concocted flavour which EFL books do contain. Hence as a basis for comparison with them, I will take EFL coursebooks which are especially produced for language learners. We can see natural and real uses of the language in stories and scenarios. In the case of film scenarios, students can understand the functions of language that are taking place in front of their eyes, namely 'language-in-action' or the concept of 'shared knowledge' (McCarthy and Carter 1995: 209) between the speakers.

1.2 Viewpoint of Grammar

My previous comments may make it sound that authenticity and grammaticality are in conflict and that they never exist with each other at the same time. As Willis says, in developing their communicative skills learners need to become aware of the choices realised in genuine language use in order to create appropriate meanings (1990: 26). This opinion puts the learning focus on fluency. Brown says that "fluency and

accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques. At times fluency may have to take on more importance than accuracy in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use... A great deal of use of authentic language is implied in CLT [Communicative Language Teaching], as we attempt to build fluency. It is important to note,...., that fluency should never be encouraged at the expense of clear, unambiguous, direct communication" (1993: 245)

Grammar is helpful to develop accuracy. This holds true especially when we teach adults and young adults whose native tongue is so much different from the target language, that grammatical knowledge facilitates communicative exchanges. Owen tells that 'in these days of 'communicative' language teaching, [the majority opinion] is that conscious grammatical knowledge is indispensable for teacher and of considerable benefit to most learner under formal instruction' (1988:22)

1.3 Declarative Knowledge and Procedural Knowledge

Here we ought to reflect on Johnson's (1994) view of teaching and learning grammar. He presents two kinds of grammatical knowledge, DK (Declarative Knowledge, knowledge about) and PK (Procedural Knowledge, knowledge how to). DK can be taken as traditional grammar teaching/learning where students store the knowledge about the target language from grammar books. PK can be taken as internalising the knowledge about the target language through performing with the knowledge. Johnson discusses the learning pathway of DK to PK that through a process of automisation this knowledge becomes proceduralised, and so automatic that it is eventually indistinguishable in performance from the knowledge which Krashen (1982) calls 'acquisition'. (p.123) He also tells about the reverse pathway, PK to DK, and warns us that this pathway involves the very great danger that DK will never be achieved. (p123) Taking the example of present perfect and tenses, Johnson points out that since students at first do not have a data base or set of rules for generating the tense, the system cannot go beyond data already met. The need for 'generativity' is hence a strong argument in favour of DK. (p.122) Johnson's term 'generativity' indicates the learners' creativity in performing with the target language. As DK is the foundation of PK, which is important in spontaneous conversations, and PK apparently cannot lead to DK, DK is very important not only for writing tasks but also for spontaneous discourses as well. Thus, we ought not to underestimate the value of grammar.

1.4 Congruence between Authenticity and Grammaticality

Next we confront the question of how we can create congruence between authenticity and grammar teaching. In this paper I will mainly discuss the case with intermediate level students, who are still not ready to accept the real appearance of spontaneous discourse. They at first need to be taught with grammatically correct, well-formed, contextualised, genuine language. In this respect, stories and scenarios written in the target language for entertainment of the native speakers are suitable texts for them. These texts can be seen as 'raw data' of the target language. Johns said that the DDL [Data-Driven Learning],...., makes possible a new style of "grammatical consciousness-raising" (Rutherford 1987) by placing the learner's own-discovery of grammar at the centre of language-learning, and by making it possible for that discovery to be based on evidence from authentic language use(1991: 3) He also states that it is not surprising that even the best grammars are usually rather than exceptionally incomplete, partial and misleading (1991: 3) In next section, let us see both good and problematic points of unauthentic texts, in other words EFL coursebooks.

2.0 Particularities of Unauthentic Texts (or EFL Coursebooks)

In this section I will discuss both positive and negative sides of unauthentic texts, here EFL coursebooks. This attempt will also reveal beneficial and problematic points when we use authentic texts.

2.1 Beneficial Points in EFL Coursebooks

One big good point that EFL coursebooks contain is that most of the learning items, e.g., grammatical items, and other four skills (listening, reading, speaking, writing) are presented to students very systematically in an order from easy to difficult. This presentation makes learners feel it is easier to accumulate the knowledge about the target language, and the use of it. This can hold true on the teachers' side; teaching along with coursebooks, teachers do not have to be anxious as to whether the current teaching materials are much beyond the students' level or too easy for them, namely whether the current materials meet the Krashen's term, 'i + 1' (Brown 1993: 280) or not.

2.2 Core Grammatical Knowledge and Core Four Skills

As many researchers say, it is very important for students to be exposed to real spontaneous discourse in the target language. However, when the learners are adults or young adults, they would spend an enormously long time to draw out its rules from all those raw-data they meet in genuine language use, and internalise and recreate those rules inside them (Willis et al. 1996: 20) In other words, it is not a very appropriate way to master the core knowledge of grammar and four skills. Hence, it can be said that coursebooks are efficient to master core knowledge and skills within a limited time. However, there will still be an opinion that sentences in EFL coursebooks are too idealised, simplified, and artificial. I will talk about those problematic facets of coursebooks later, but here it is useful for us to reflect on the normal case where babies are addressed in 'motherese' (Owen 1988: 39) or 'caretaker speech' (Richards et al. 1985: 45) on their way to developing their skills in the mother tongue. Caretaker speech and sentences in EFL coursebooks are different styles of language, but they can be seen as nearly the same in the sense that they are simplified and artificial in order to be understood by those who in the infant stage of acquiring the language. In formal instruction, elementary and lower-intermediate levels may be seen as infant stages. These levels are very important to accumulate and internalise core knowledge of the grammar. Normally students at these levels still seems to have difficulty in drawing out the rules of the target language by themselves. It can be said that at these levels they are making preparation towards upper-intermediate and advanced levels where they will be able to draw out rules by themselves.

2.3 Problematic Points

In order to show the problematic points of EFL coursebooks, I will examine how they treat the use and grammatical explanations concerning the passive voice and contrary-to-fact conditionals.

2.4 Treatment of the Passive Voice

Examining several coursebooks, what is remarkable about the passive voice is that those coursebook writers never explain the semantic difference between the active voice and the passive voice. They make it appear as though sentences structured with these voices convey just the same meaning. Mostly the active voice is taught prior to the passive voice. So a common exercise in the unit is to change the active voice sentences into the passive voice automatically. In contrast, Swan (1980) explains rough distinctions between the active and the passive. For one thing the choice between active and passive constructions often depends on what has already been said, or what the listener already knows. Native speakers of English

usually like to start sentences with what is already known, and put 'new' information later in the sentence (1980: 457)

Here I take examples from a coursebook, *New Interchange book 2* (Richards et al., 1997) In the 'grammar focus' section, the coursebook writers show as below:

(1) Bartholdi designed the Statue of Liberty.

(2) The Statue of Liberty was designed by *Bartholdi*. (p.67)

Borrowing Swan's explanation, the listener has already known Bartholdi, and *the Statue of Liberty* is new to him in (1), while *the Statue of Liberty* is known and *Bartholdi* is new to him in (2). This difference of the meanings inside the structures are neglected because these sentences are presented as remote from the context; these are shown only as an example of voice which is changeable at the surface level. This is one of the problems which are liable to happen as a result of the use of decontextualised sentences as in EFL coursebooks. This kind of exercise interferes with developing the students' sense of voice choice.

We can find some attempts where coursebook writers try to present seemingly contextualised passage. The example in Appendix 1 is taken from the reading section of *Side by Side Book 4* (Molinsky and Bliss, 1989). There are sentences which sound quite natural, but at the same time, using Owen's terms, this includes non-naturalness (1988: 23) as 'Construction was begun in 1845 and was completed in 1847... These ceremonies were attended by the mayors of several cities ... The store has been visited by the presidents ' (p.13) These sentences sound too artificial. If we use our normal sense of the English language, firstly there are not any clear need and reason to elaborately emphasizes the agents or action senders (the mayors of several cities, presidents) with 'by + a doer' forms. Secondly there are also no clear need and reason to put more importance upon action receivers(construction, these ceremonies, and the store) rather than action senders. This reveals that well-contextualised texts cannot be made up by coursebook writers. If students keep learning with such model sentences, they will never obtain naturalness (Owen 1988: 21) in the use of target language.

So far, I have talked about unsuitable treatment of the use of the passive voice, however, even though it is rare, we can find good short comments which tell the essence of this voice. Lodge and Wright-Watson explain in their coursebook, *Fast Lane Level 3*, that 'native speakers of English often use the passive when they do not know, are not interested in, or don't want to say who or what does something (the agent) (1997:81) Telling too much about a sentence structure and its meanings inside it only overwhelms the students. However it is a difficult and also important point in teaching the passive voice not to make it too simplified and yet to give its very essence.

2.5 Treatment of Contrary-to-Fact Conditionals

Next I will investigate how contrary-to-fact conditionals are treated in EFL coursebooks.

2.6 Formulae

It can be said that coursebooks well explain the basic formulae and meaning of contrary-to-fact conditionals. I will take examples again from *New Interchange Book 2*.

(3) If I found \$750,000, I wouldn't return so fast.

(4) I would have told her to leave. (Richards et al. 1997:93, 95)

They explain that unreal conditional sentences describe imaginary situations and consequences in the present. As in sentence (3) the if-clause shows an imaginary situation with simple past form, and the

subordinate clause shows an imaginary consequence in the present with modals *would*, *might*, or *could*. They continue to explain showing the model sentence (4) saying that learners are to use *would* or *should* + past participle to talk about imaginary or hypothetical actions in the past. In addition to these grammatical explanations, they give students several pseudo-real conversations with these contrary-to-fact conditionals. Though there still remains a strongly artificial, idealised flavour in them, the students often well understand the forms and the meanings of these conditionals, and even are able to produce sentences with these features in controlled practice. However, that too artificial and idealised flavour prevents them from recognising these language forms when they see them in ordinary novels and articles (namely authentic texts) In other words, the students cannot understand these forms and meanings when they occur apart from EFL coursebooks.

2.7 Interference by L1

While we criticise the failure and misleading presentations in those books, we should also admit that students' difficulty in obtaining these forms and meanings are sometimes or even often strongly influenced by their mother tongues. Let me talk about a learner whose L1 is Japanese. Of course, there are conditionals in Japanese, nevertheless it appears that we do not have such clearly distinguishable concept of tenses (as English has) hence it is difficult to combine tenses and real or unreal, imaginary situations and hypothetical consequences. This sort of psychological trouble causes Japanese students to overuse the simpler sentence pattern of "'if-clause with simple present' + 'subordinate sentence in future tense' ", even in the case when they are to predict something under imaginary situations and hypothetical consequences. Thus, in order to be able to perform with contrary-to-fact conditionals after mastering the core knowledge from EFL coursebooks, the students should be provided with authentic texts where they see the genuine use of them and draw out the rules, and then internalise and recreate the rules, which will enable them to perform with those language forms (Willis et al. 1996:20; Westney 1994:83,88)

3.0 Using Authentic Texts

In this section I will investigate the beneficial points when we use authentic texts in classrooms.

3.1 Beneficial and Problematic Points - Written Authentic Texts

Let me first briefly talk about a problematic point of authentic texts. Concerning novels and short stories, the biggest problem is that every grammatical item shows up at anytime and in anyplace. Namely, from the grammatical viewpoint, sentences in a novel appear unsystematically as opposed to the case in an EFL coursebook. In order to deal with this, the students ought to have mastered a core knowledge of the grammar, and the core skill of reading in advance. Regarding this, it can be said that written authentic texts are suitable for the students whose levels are higher than intermediate.

3.2 How the Passive Voice is Used

Here I will examine a short story 'Adolf' written by D. H. Lawrence. This is written using first-person narration and the central character talks to the readers looking back at his encounter with a wild baby rabbit in his youth. The gist of the story is that one day his father picked up a rabbit and brought it home, and this caused a lot of trouble among the children including the narrator, who wanted to keep and look after it, and their mother, who was strongly opposed to it, and the rabbit itself. 'Adolf' is the name that the children gave to the little rabbit. Below is a passage from the short story;

(5) Once more the rabbit was wrapped in the old pit-singlet. (6) But now it was carried into the scullery and put under the copper fireplace... (7) The saucers were placed about, four or five, here and there on the floor... (8) After this my mother was allowed to take from the scullery what she wanted and then she was forbidden to open the door.
(p.64 } Numberings before each sentence are mine.)

There are no agents in all the sentences above. All the agents in the sentences (5) through (8) are children. The reason for this is that it is needless to clarify them because the readers quite easily identify them; they have read the previous story and well understand the context. Seeing (5) through (8) students can understand the essential point that in the passive voice sentences the writer or any other native speakers of English put more importance upon the action receivers than the action senders in passives (Spears 1991:13) i.e., the actions are to wrap in the old pit-singlet in (5) to carry into the scullery in (6) to place about on the floor in (7), and to allow and forbid in (8). The action receivers are the rabbit in (5) and (6), the saucers in (7), my mother in (8). The action senders are children in (5) through (8). Thus, the students can develop a clear distinction between 'action sender' and 'action receiver' in English.

3.3 The Passive Voice with 'By + Agent'

Next I will investigate the case where the passives are used with 'by + agent'. As all the coursebooks point out, someone or something that sends the action can be identified with 'by a doer'. We have seen that the agents need not or should not appear in the case where they are too obvious from the contexts. Thus we can ask in which case do native speakers tend to specify the agent. I will continue to quote sentences from 'Adolf'.

(9) We were enchanted by him [Adolf]. (p.64)

(10) There he [Adolf] was shooed off by our parents. (pp.65-6)

(11) Adolf was seized by his little ears by my mother. (p.66 } underlines mine.)

According to Swan (1980) the agent is only expressed when it is important to say who or what something is done by. In most passive sentences, there is no agent. Contrary to (5) through (8), the agents or the action senders have more importance than the action receivers in (9) through (11). This is the marked form of passive sentences compared to those without the 'by + agent' pattern as Swan points out. In other words, the passive sentence with 'by + agent' is used to emphasise the agent, or action sender. Students can smoothly understand this difference of the passive voices as quite natural features in English sentences when they see them well-contextualised in authentic texts such as this one.

3.4 Use of Contrary-to-Fact Conditionals

Here I examine how contrary-to-fact conditionals are used in short stories. As I mentioned in the previous sections, understanding the use of contrary-to-fact conditionals is often interrupted by somewhat psychological issues for students whose L1 is Japanese because of the rather different concept of the tenses in their mother tongue. The idea of 'imaginary situations and hypothetical consequences' is obviously easier to understand in contexts rather than in decontextualised and independent sentences. The following two examples are from 'Enoch's Two Letters' by Alan Sillitoe. Enoch, an elementally school boy, was left alone by his parents. The parents have gone away separately on a same day without any notes to the child. Enoch still does not know what happened while he was at school.

(12) If they didn't come back tonight he wouldn't go to school in the morning. (p.44)

(13) If it happened again, he would take her [his grandmother's] advice. (p.50)

These sentences apply to the formula "'if-clause with simple past tense" + "subordinate clause with modals *would, might, or could*", which describes "imaginary situations and consequences in the present" (Richards et al.1997: 93) Because the context is very clear in stories, such as this case, students can easily grasp what an 'imaginary situation' is and what an 'imaginary consequence' in present is, and how the tense functions. The next example, quoted from 'Corruption' by Penelope Lively, applies to the formula of "'would have or should have + past participle", which describes "imaginary or hypothetical actions in the past" (Richards et al. 1997)

(14) The judge carried their suitcase and the Wine Society carton in and set them down by the reception desk. The proprietor, bearing the carton, showed them to their usual room. As she was unpacking, Marjorie said, 'I think you should have left that stuff [the Wine Society carton] in the car.' (p.68 ¶ underline mine.)

The sentence pattern we are now discussing is underlined. In this context students easily understand that the hypothetical action there is the judge's not bringing the Wine Society carton into the room, which is contrary to the present real situation (he actually let the proprietor bring that carton into the room). Learners need contexts that contain the genuine uses of the language in order to accord a language form with its own meaning and function.

4.0 Using Films

In this section I will discuss some good points when we use ordinary films and their scenarios as teaching materials. It is true that films and scenarios are artificially produced written texts. However, examining their particularities, these texts are very close to real spontaneous discourse as I will show in some examples later. Films and scenarios can be used in classrooms as spoken texts that have pseudo-real conversations which are very close to authentic spoken texts.

4.1 Language in Action

The most useful point of a film is that learners naturally acquire the sense of 'language in action' (McCarthy and Carter 1995: 209) in the target language. McCarthy and Carter explain that "'language in action' involves participants in using language to refer to action in an easy and unproblematical way because they are taking place before their respective eyes" (p.209). Learners who are watching a film are not actually involved in the language interaction in the film; however, since the learners are watching and hearing what is going on in the film, they can be seen, in a sense, as pseudo participants in the language interaction in the film. Here I will quote some lines from the film *Purple Rose of Cairo* produced in 1987 in the United States; its scenario was written by Woody Allen. In the scene below, Cecilia, a waitress, drops a plate.

(15) MALE CUSTUMER: Can we have a check?

CECILIA: I'll be right there. Oh...Oh...

DINNER BOSS: That's it, that's it, Cecilia. You're fired. Get out!

CECILIA: But I- I'll pay for it. I'll be more careful.

DINNER BOSS: Out. Out. Take off your apron, go home. You're fired!

(p. 15) (underlines are mine.)

There are no spoken words which refer to Cecilia's dropping a plate, but students see the picture and hear the sound of it and easily know what happened there. Moreover, they will hear and understand the current relationship between Cecilia and the boss from the underlined sentences by the boss as well as his body language.

4.2 Shared Knowledge

McCarthy and Carter mention that "there is ... no need for elaboration; a lot of knowledge is shared, and a lot of referents can be mutually taken for granted" (1995: 209). In *Purple Rose of Cairo* (1987) the story is situated in New Jersey, in the 1930's. America was suffering from economic depression in those days and people found it very hard to get jobs. In this film, Cecilia's husband, Monk, closed down his factory so Cecilia must work outside the home and the boss is very haughty to her. Besides, Cecilia is so fond of films that she is always thinking of them, which makes her very careless in the restaurant. Thus, shared knowledge is in other words understanding the context. In the case of novels, all the things which relate to a particular scene are normally clearly written. In contrast to this, in films sometimes things related to a particular scene are not clearly spoken; viewers recognise them from watching the previous scenes. The latter case is nearer to our everyday life. The concepts of 'language in action' and 'shared knowledge' are so natural in our life in the mother tongue that it is hard for us to realise them. Learning a foreign language and learning it with films, we can realise these concepts afresh in order to facilitate developing performance skills in the target language.

4.3 Stream of Speech

Two points that are remarkable in spontaneous discourse are reduced sounds of phrases and stammering. These are not well-formed sentences and I think that EFL students need not produce these sentences consciously even though they are really natural forms of the language. I suppose that as far as reduced forms and sounds are concerned, students will come to unconsciously produce such sounds as they gain naturalness in their speaking performance. However, in order to spontaneously deal with real conversations in the target language, students can obviously benefit from trying to understand these forms in the receptive phase, namely in listening. Films that have both sound and pictures can provide the situation of 'language in action' (McCarthy and Carter 1995: 209) so that students can smoothly understand such utterances without many problems. This can develop students' skills in listening and grasping the stream of speech. I quote sentences below, again from *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1987).

(16) MONK: Oh, no, c'mon, c'mon [come on], I was going to tell your fortune. (p.19)

(17) MONK: Well, you're gonna [going to] go babysitting, get paid in cash. (p.33)

(18) GIL [a lawyer and a press agent]: Oh, Cecilia, look, I gotta [got to], I gotta speak to you. (p.67)

(19) CECILIA: I shoulda [should have] left a long time ago. (p.102) (underlines are mine.)

We realise that they are not unusual forms and sounds; we ought to admit that such forms and sounds much more frequently appear than grammatically correct forms and sounds in everyday, authentic conversations.

4.4 Colloquial Speech

Next, I will examine colloquial speech looking at examples of stammering and the phrase 'you know'.

(20) CECILIA: ... and she- she- has some, you know, I don't know, some like ... I think it was a uh, uh, k-

social club meeting or something she wanted to go to... (p.32)

Stammering often happens in our everyday conversations in the mother tongue so it is quite natural to hear this kind of utterance also in the target language. Since EFL students mostly learn the target language with coursebooks, they are too familiarised with the idealised forms of the language. Hearing this kind of sentences in films is a good opportunity for them to recognise that stammering can often happen to native speakers; it is not only a problematic aspect of foreigners' way of speaking. In (20) we find the phrase 'you know'. This phrase normally does not convey the meaning that the hearer knows something the speaker is about to say, as it literally shows; it just indicates the speaker's making the other listen to him or her (Quirk et al. 1995: 785) or the speaker's uncertainty about what s/he is talking about or what s/he is going to say next (Sinclair et al. 1995: 924) Students usually have met these explanations concerning that phrase. However, it is hard for them to grasp its role in real conversations. Hearing it in 'language in action' (McCarthy and Carter 1995: 209) in a film and grasping the context, students understand what role this phrase plays in genuine language use. It can be said that we need contexts to understand colloquial expressions, namely phrases used in authentic spoken texts. Films can provide good situations to learn this aspect of genuine language in EFL classrooms.

5 Conclusion

I have argued several beneficial points of authentic texts in EFL classrooms showing the examples of three short stories and a film. The stories are valuable for students to raise their grammatical awareness, and internalise the language rules again and recreate them as their own rules. In this way learning with stories can lead them to more profound proficiency in understanding the target language. With respect to films, this can give students exposure to highly pseudo-real spoken interaction in the target language. This can initially improve their skills in receptive phases and eventually bring them higher skills in productive phases. Both stories and films are well-contextualised so that students can smoothly understand the reason why all those particular language forms appear.

There is another issue of grammar teaching. This is rather underestimated these days, though we ought to admit that proficiency in EFL can never be realised by any means without solid core knowledge of grammar. We should try to present more contextualised and authentic model sentences and more appropriate explanations about the sentence patterns in coursebooks, paying attention not to make it too simplified and also not to make it overloaded with more than sufficient particulars. Authenticity and grammaticality are two essential aspects in EFL teaching/learning.

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Appendix 1

READING**A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK**

