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Authentic materials & authenticity in Foreign Language Learning

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1. Historical overview

The use of authentic materials in foreign language learning has a long history. Henry Sweet, for example, who taught and wrote at the end of the nineteenth century and is regarded as one of the first linguists, made regular use of authentic texts in his books and was well aware of their potential advantages over contrived materials:

The great advantage of natural, idiomatic texts over artificial ‘methods’ or ‘series’ is that they do justice to every feature of the language [...] The artificial systems, on the other hand, tend to cause incessant repetition of certain grammatical constructions, certain elements of the vocabulary, certain combinations of words to the almost total exclusion of others which are equally, or perhaps even more, essential. (Sweet 1899: 177)

During the twentieth century, however, prevailing linguistic theories of the time spawned a multitude of methods such as the ‘New Method’ and the ‘Audiolingual Method’ (Richards and Rodgers 1986) which all imposed carefully structured (and therefore contrived) materials and prescribed behaviours on teachers and learners, leading to what Howatt (1984: 267) refers to as a ‘cult of materials’, where:

“The authority of the approach resided in the materials themselves, not in the lessons given by the teacher using them, a philosophy which paved the way for the replacement of teachers by machines such as language laboratories.” (ibid: 267)

Large-scale trials in the 1960s, comparing the merits of different methods in the classroom, not surprisingly, proved inconclusive since researchers were seriously underestimating the role of teachers and learners in the learning process and the profession grew disillusioned with the search for a 'perfect method' (Howatt 1984; Alderson & Beretta 1992).

The issue of authenticity reappeared in the 1970's as the debate between Chomsky (1965) and Hymes (1972) led to a realisation that communicative competence involved much more than knowledge of language structures and contextualised communication began to take precedence over form. This culminated in the approach which, at least in EFL circles, still holds sway today – Communicative Language Teaching – and paved the way for the reintroduction of authentic texts which were valued for the ideas they were communicating rather than the linguistic forms they illustrated. However, despite appeals for greater authenticity in language learning going back at least 30 years (O'Neill & Scott 1974; Crystal & Davy 1975; Schmidt & Richards 1980; Morrow 1981), movements in this direction have been slow.

The debate over the role of authenticity, as well as what it means to be authentic, has become increasingly sophisticated and complex over the years and now embraces research from a wide variety of fields including discourse and conversational analysis, pragmatics, cross-cultural studies, sociolinguistics, ethnology, second language acquisition, cognitive and social psychology, learner autonomy, information and communication technology (ICT), motivation research and materials development. Unfortunately, many researchers limit their reading to their own particular area of specialization and, although this is understandable given the sheer volume of publications

within each field, it can mean that insights from one area don't necessarily receive attention from others. With a concept such as authenticity, which touches on so many areas, it is important to attempt to bridge these divides and consolidate what we now know so that sensible decisions can be made in terms of the role that authenticity should have in foreign language learning in the future. This article attempts to do this although, given the scale of the undertaking, some areas of discussion are necessarily superficial.

2. Defining authenticity

There is a considerable range of meanings associated with authenticity, and therefore it is little surprise if the term remains ambiguous in most teachers' minds. What is more, it is impossible to engage in a meaningful debate over the pros and cons of authenticity until we agree on what we are talking about. At least eight possible meanings emerge from the literature:

- a) Authenticity relates to the language produced by native speakers for native speakers in a particular language community (Porter & Roberts 1981; Little et al. 1989).
- b) Authenticity relates to the language produced by a real speaker/writer for a real audience, conveying a real message (Morrow 1977; Porter & Roberts 1981; Swaffar 1985; Nunan 1988/9; Benson & Voller 1997).
- c) Authenticity relates to the qualities bestowed on a text by the receiver, in that it is not seen as something inherent in a text itself, but is imparted on it by the reader/listener (Widdowson 1978/9; Breen 1983).

- d) Authenticity relates to the interaction between students and teachers (van Lier 1996).
- e) Authenticity relates to the types of task chosen (Breen 1983; Bachman 1991; van Lier 1996; Benson & Voller 1997; Lewkowicz 2000; Guariento & Morley 2001).
- f) Authenticity relates to the social situation of the classroom (Breen 1983; Arnold 1991; Lee 1995; Guariento & Morley 2001; Rost 2002).
- g) Authenticity relates to assessment (Bachman 1991; Bachman & Palmer 1996; Lewkowicz 2000).
- h) Authenticity relates to culture, and the ability to behave or think like a target language group in order to be recognized and validated by them (Kramersch 1998).

From these brief outlines we can see that the concept of authenticity can be situated in either the text itself, in the participants, in the social or cultural situation and purposes of the communicative act, or some combination of these. Reviewing the multitude of meanings associated with authenticity above, it is clear that it has become a very slippery concept to identify as our understanding of language and learning has deepened. This raises the question, should we abandon the term on the grounds that it is too elusive to be useful? My own preference would be to limit the concept to objectifiable criteria since, once we start including subjective notions such as learner authentication, any discourse can be called authentic and the term becomes meaningless. To this end, I define authenticity in the same way as Morrow (1977: 13): ‘An *authentic text* is a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort.’ Using these criteria, it is possible to say whether a text is authentic or not (within these terms) by referring to the source of the discourse and the

context of its production. The concept also has validity since, as Porter & Roberts (1981: 37) point out (referring specifically to listening texts), native speakers are usually able to identify authentic text ‘with little hesitation and considerable accuracy’. Furthermore, by defining authenticity in this way, we are able to begin identifying the surface features of authentic discourse and evaluating to what extent contrived materials or learner output resemble it (see, for example, Trickey 1988; Bachman & Palmer 1996; Gilmore 2004).

How far does this more specific definition of authenticity take us? Not a great distance. Even if we limit our description to real language from a real speaker/writer for a real audience with a real message, this still encompasses a huge amount of language variety. Graded teacher-talk in the classroom, motherese, international business negotiations between non-native speakers and scripted television soap operas would all be classified as authentic. But all these types of authentic input can be expected to have very different surface discourse features and some will serve as better input to stimulate language acquisition in our learners than others. Authenticity doesn’t necessarily mean ‘good’, just as contrivance doesn’t necessarily mean ‘bad’ (Widdowson 1979; Clarke 1989; Cook 2001; Widdowson 2003). As Cook (1997) points out, terms such as ‘authentic’, ‘genuine’, ‘real’ or ‘natural’ and their opposites ‘fake’, ‘unreal’ or ‘contrived’ are emotionally loaded and indicate approval or disapproval whilst remaining ill-defined. I would argue that, from the classroom teacher’s perspective, rather than chasing our tails in pointless debate over authenticity versus contrivance, we should focus instead on *LEARNING AIMS*, or as Hutchinson & Waters (1987: 159) call it, ‘fitness to the learning purpose’:

‘The question should not be: ‘Is this text “authentic”?’ but ‘What role do I want the text to play in the learning process?’ We should be looking not for some abstract concept of ‘authenticity’, but rather the practical concept of ‘fitness to the learning purpose’.

The key issue then becomes ‘What are we trying to *ACHIEVE* with classroom materials?’

A logical response to this would be that the goal is to produce learners who are able to communicate effectively in the target language of a particular speech community, that is to say, learners who are *COMMUNICATIVELY COMPETENT*. To reach this goal, I would suggest that teachers are entitled to use any means at their disposal, regardless of the provenance of the materials or tasks and their relative authenticity or contrivance.

3. The gap between authentic language and textbook language

It has long been recognised that the language presented to students in textbooks is a poor representation of the real thing:

‘...even the best materials we have seen are far away from that real, informal kind of English which is used very much more than any other during a normal speaking lifetime; and if one aim of the language-teaching exercise is to provide students with the linguistic expertise to be able to participate confidently and fluently in situations involving this kind of English, then it would generally be agreed that this aim is not being achieved at the present time.’ (Crystal & Davy 1975: 2)

Although, in the intervening years since these comments were made, much has been done to redress the balance, there remain numerous gaps. Research into different areas of communicative competence through discourse or conversational analysis, pragmatics and sociolinguistics has exploded and, with our deepening understanding of how people make meaning through language, it has become clear that it is time for a fundamental change in the way we design our syllabuses:

‘...awareness of discourse and a willingness to take on board what a language-as-discourse view implies can only make us better and more efficient syllabus designers, task designers, dialogue-writers, materials adaptors and evaluators of everything we do and handle in the classroom. Above all, the approach we have advocated enables us to be more faithful to what language *is* and what people use it for. The moment one starts to think of language as discourse, the entire landscape changes, usually, for ever.’ (McCarthy & Carter 1994: 201)

What follows, is a review of some of the relevant research that supports the need for the paradigm shift, alluded to above. It is far from comprehensive but serves to illustrate how inadequate many current language textbooks are in developing learners’ overall communicative competence.

3.1 *Linguistic competence*

This area of communicative competence, as is well known, has historically dominated foreign language teaching but the linguistic knowledge imparted to learners was largely based on intuitions gleaned from examination of the written form and sentence-based, classical notions of grammar. With the introduction of audio recording technology and, subsequently, the development of procedures to transcribe and analyse authentic spoken language (through discourse, conversation & corpus analysis), much of the focus in applied linguistics has shifted to speech in recent years. It is not surprising, therefore, that the majority of work in this area of competence focuses on the lack of adequate models for spoken grammar in textbooks.

Holmes (1988) provides data on the relative frequencies of lexical items expressing doubt or certainty in written and spoken corpora and, surveying four well-known ESL textbooks, finds that the more common modal lexical items are often under-

represented in comparison to modal verbs (see also McCarthy 1991: 84). This could potentially have serious consequences for learners because of the important pragmatic function of this group of words. Altman (1990), using a ranking test of 7 common modal auxiliaries, found that low-intermediate learners were unable to accurately assess the relative strengths of 'should' and 'had better', judging the former to be much stronger than the latter. This he blames on a bias in textbooks towards linguistic, rather than sociolinguistic, rules. Tannen (1989) examines speakers' use of repetition in conversation and finds it to be a ubiquitous feature. She explains its presence not in terms of some kind of real-time performance limitation, but rather as an important affective tool for creating rapport between people. McCarthy (1991) agrees with this view and, in addition, illustrates how reiteration, or reworking, of previously mentioned lexical items (RELEXICALISATION), allows for coherent topic development in conversation. This has important implications for the teaching of vocabulary because it assumes that learners need to be 'armed' with a wide variety of hyponyms and synonyms to converse naturally in English, 'using a range of vocabulary that is perhaps wider than the coursebook or materials have allowed for' (ibid: 68). As McCarthy goes on to point out, other languages may not rely on relexicalisation in the same way as English does to develop discourse so learners need to be made aware of this feature. Williams finds, in her 1990 study, that native speakers of American English and Singaporean English both prefer an invariant SVO order in Yes/No questions when talking casually to close friends or family members. She sees this as a production strategy employed by both groups to avoid semantically redundant syntax and urges teachers and researchers to refer back to authentic data when making judgments on learners' performance, rather than relying on

prescriptive notions. Powell's (1992) analysis of spontaneous conversation from the London-Lund corpus finds high frequencies of evaluative, vague, intense or expressive language in informal contexts. This meets the interactional and affective needs of speakers in informal contexts and contrasts sharply with the 'safe, clean, harmonious, benevolent, undisturbed, and PG-rated' world presented to learners in textbooks (Wajnryb 1996: 1). Channell (1994), in her book 'Vague Language', provides the most comprehensive description of linguistic vagueness so far undertaken, arguing that it is a key element in the communicative competence of native speakers and, therefore, has important pedagogical implications. McCarthy & Carter (1994) focus on the evaluative role of idioms in natural language and, as a result, their high occurrence in specific types of discourse (problem-solution or narrative genres) and predictable parts of the discourse. As the authors claim, however, textbooks rarely deal with this language in a systematic way:

'In most cases, idioms are considered to be something to tag onto the higher levels or terminal stages of language courses, or are often left to the twilight world of (in publishers' parlance) 'supplementary materials'.' (ibid: 109)

McCarthy & Carter (1995) present early results on distinctions between spoken and written grammar found in CANCODE (Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English), a spoken corpus of around 5 million words collected between 1995 and 2000. They show how standard grammars fail to account for pervasive features in spoken discourse such as ellipsis or 'slots' at the beginnings and ends of clauses ('heads' and 'tails') for speaker orientation/evaluation and stress the importance of an interactive interpretation on verb-form choices in real data. Hughes & McCarthy (1998) argue that sentence-based grammars are inadequate to explain speaker/writer choices at the

discourse level. They show, for example, how *IT*, *THIS* and *THAT*, which are normally not taught together in language pedagogy, frequently operate as alternatives in real discourse. Whereas *IT* signals continued, ongoing topics, *THIS* marks new or significant topics and *THAT* has a distancing or marginalising function (see also McCarthy & Carter 1994: 91). The discourse grammar approach that they recommend has important implications for the classroom because it relies on learners being presented with longer stretches of text in order to interpret grammar choices made. Wray (2000) (but see also Willis 1990, Lewis 1993, Aijmer 1996) focuses on the importance of formulaic sequences (idioms, collocations and sentence frames) in language learning, stating that even proficient non-native learners have difficulties distinguishing what is natural from what is grammatically possible but non-idiomatic. She blames this on the lack of natural language models in the classroom (despite their common occurrence in television and film) and on the problems teachers have selecting the right formulaic sequences to present. She concludes:

‘It seems difficult to match in the classroom the ‘real world’ experience of language, whereby it might be possible for observation and imitation to lead the learner to prefer those sequences which are the usual forms in a given speech community’ (ibid: 468)

Perhaps this difficulty can most easily be overcome by presenting learners with carefully selected authentic language to work with in the classroom; at least until we understand more about the processes involved in sounding idiomatic in English. Basturkmen (2001) illustrates how learners are often misled by descriptions of questioning found in ELT materials and argues for authentic texts to be used with higher-level learners to give more realistic models. Shortall (2003) reports that the emphasis in textbooks on adjectival comparatives and superlatives underestimates the importance of nouns + *MORE* for comparing, as illustrated by frequency data from the British National Corpus. Carter &

McCarthy (2003) illustrate, with spoken corpus data from CANCODE, how *E-language* (the ‘external’ language of real-world communication) consistently differs from *I-language* (the language of introspection or Chomsky’s ideal speaker-listener). In spoken language, question tags, relative clauses and subject-verb concord often fail to conform to prescriptive descriptions. Their frequency data also highlight the pervasiveness of words such as LIKE, the morpheme –ISH, and response tokens such as RIGHT, which all play an important affective role in discourse but are rarely taught in ELT. These inadequacies in the way that language is presented to learners in textbooks are not only confined to English, similar results have also been found in French by Walz, cited in Herschensohn (1988), and O’Conner Di Vito (1991). The most comprehensive description of variation in authentic spoken and written English to date is Carter & McCarthy’s (2006) ‘Cambridge Grammar of English’. This will prove useful to teachers wishing to assess the extent to which their text or reference books conform to authentic, native speaker norms.

3.2 *Pragmalinguistic competence*

It is clear from the studies done so far that pragmatic norms vary around the world from one culture to another. This variation can include differences in the speech acts considered appropriate in a given situation or differences in the way they are realised linguistically. In the absence of a complete understanding of the target culture, learners, not surprisingly, fall back on the pragmatic rules of their L1 and although this strategy can be successful, it also has the potential to lead to serious misunderstandings.

Cohen & Olshtain (1981) investigate Hebrew speakers’ ability to apologise appropriately in English and find deviations from native speaker norms in some

instances, which they account for in terms of either negative transfer from the L1 or a lack of grammatical competence in the target language. Eisenstein & Bodman (1986) developed a written discourse completion task to assess learners' ability to use expressions of gratitude appropriately in advanced-level ESL classes. They found that NNS responses were acceptable only 30 to 67 per cent of the time, a surprising result given the students' high proficiency in traditional measures of language ability, and blame this on a lack of opportunities for learners to develop their sociopragmatic competence in the classroom (see also Loveday 1982). Beebe & Takahashi (1989) point out the great importance of face-threatening acts, such as disagreements, to learners because of the high risk of offence and cross-cultural miscommunication when performing them. They illustrate this with examples of Japanese students' use of questioning strategies to avoid direct disagreement with their American professors. Unfortunately, 'the very strategy that the Japanese used to help the American professor save face is the same strategy that made the professor feel that she had lost it' (ibid: 203). Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz (1990), using a written discourse completion task, find differences in the order, frequency and content of refusals of Japanese speakers of English when compared to American native speakers. They see this to be the result of negative transfer from the L1 and suggest that these differences reflect deeply held cultural values which learners may be reluctant to abandon. Bardovi-Harlig (1996) illustrates how learners can fail pragmatically by either the use of non-preferred speech acts or inappropriate choices of form, semantic formula or content in preferred speech acts. She sees this as a clear call for more pragmatically appropriate input in language materials and goes as far as to say, 'By and large, textbooks containing conversations or

dialogues do not present pragmatically accurate models to learners' (ibid: 24). Nakahama (1999) investigated high-imposition requests in Japanese by advanced American learners (in data elicited through role-plays), finding that their responses differed markedly from native speaker norms. In particular, all the American students provided a justification for the imposition made whereas the Japanese native speakers preferred to make a sincere apology with no justification. This she explains in terms of cultural differences in perceptions of politeness; providing excuses when apologising to higher status individuals is considered inappropriate in Japan. Nakahama attributes this pragmatic failure to the students transferring sociopragmatic rules from their L1 to the L2 and suggests pedagogical intervention is necessary to teach learners how to respond appropriately.

There is a substantial body of work available now which points to the lack of appropriate pragmatic models in textbooks:

'Textbook representations of speech acts and discourse functions often do not represent native speaker practises adequately and thus do not provide learners with the models and input they need.' (Kasper 2001a:1)

This is generally blamed on the fact that material writers have relied on intuitions about language rather than empirical data and have focussed on imparting lexicogrammatical knowledge at the expense of pragmatics.

Pearson (1986) (cited in Salsbury & Bardovi-Harlig 2001) notes that agreement/disagreement speech acts are frequently given equal emphasis in language textbooks, perhaps painting a misleading picture for learners since native speakers are more likely to agree with each other than disagree and frequently employ face-saving strategies when they do disagree. Williams (1988) compared the language used for

meetings in authentic business interactions with the language taught for meetings in 30 business English textbooks. She found almost no correspondence between the two, with only 5.2% of the 135 exponents presented in the classroom materials actually occurring in the genuine meetings. She criticises material writers for relying on introspection rather than empirical research when selecting which exponents to present in the classroom.

Bardovi-Harlig et al. (1991) surveyed conversational closings in 20 ESL textbooks and found that, despite claims of naturalness or authenticity, the models presented were often only partially complete, with the pre-closing or closing moves missing. They criticise the lack of pragmatic information available to learners in textbook materials. Boxer & Pickering (1995) assess the presentation of complaint speech acts in 7 EFL textbooks, finding that all deal with direct (Ds) rather than indirect complaints (ICs) (in Ds, the addressee is seen as being responsible for the perceived offence whereas in ICs they are not). This is despite the fact that, in normal conversation, ICs are much more common and play an important affective and discursal role. They give an addressee the opportunity to show rapport by commiserating with the speaker's complaint and open up the subject of 'what's wrong with X' to further topical development. The authors also criticise the lack of contextualisation in the textbooks examined, without which it is impossible for learners to know in what situations, and with whom, the target language is appropriate. They recommend that material writers rely on spontaneous authentic interaction rather than intuition when creating textbooks in order to better reflect the sociopragmatic norms of a culture. Bouton (1996) provides a useful overview of Nessa Wolfson's work on invitation speech acts in the 1980s in which she identified three types: UNAMBIGUOUS INVITATIONS which are direct and specify a time, place or activity;

AMBIGUOUS INVITATIONS in which the invitation is co-constructed through negotiation by the participants; and NON-NEGOTIABLE NON- INVITATIONS, along the lines of ‘We must get together some time’, which seem to function as positive politeness strategies rather than actual invitations. Bouton compares the distribution of these 3 types of invitation in naturally occurring language (from Wolfson’s data) with ‘Say It Naturally’ (Wall 1987), which, he believes, provides ‘one of the better presentations of this speech act (ibid: 16). The results are dramatically different:

	Wolfson data	Wall examples
Unambiguous invitations	26%	80%
Ambiguous invitations	41%	8%
Non-negotiable non-invitations	33%	0%

(Bouton 1996: 17)

The representation of invitations in the textbook clearly gives learners a distorted picture of reality, one that is likely to have serious repercussions on their pragmatic competence. Ambiguous invitations are used in situations where the relationship between speakers is still ‘under negotiation’- arguably the most typical scenario to be encountered by NNSs attempting to make friends in a new environment. Learners are also likely to misinterpret non-negotiable non-invitations as genuine if they have never seen them in the classroom, leading to disappointment or frustration when the offer is not realised. Bouton calls for authors to incorporate far more pragmatic information into their materials, using the wealth of data now available in the research literature. Wajnryb (1996) examines two

popular EFL textbooks for the pragmatic features of distance, power or face threatening acts (FTAs) between speakers – factors that effect what kind of language is appropriate in a given situation. She finds 67% of exchanges in the textbooks are between speakers where there is high social distance and this means that the language used tends to be explicit and textually coded because of the lack of shared knowledge between interlocutors. As a consequence, learners may be deprived of examples of the more implicit language used in low social distance discourse, affecting their ability to interpret implicature (see, for example, Bouton 1990). Wajnryb reports that, in terms of power, 89.5% of interactions are symmetrical in the textbooks and this limits the examples of negotiation in the scripts, since negotiation is more typical of asymmetrical relationships. Finally, she notes the very low incidence of FTAs in the textbooks and, even when they do occur, the learning opportunity for ‘facework’ they provide is rarely exploited. Bardovi-Harlig & Dornyei (1998) compared the ability of ESL/EFL students to recognise grammatical and pragmatic violations in 20 videotaped scenarios with one of three conditions: with grammatical mistakes; with pragmatic mistakes; with no mistakes. They asked subjects to identify whether or not the scenarios contained mistakes and, if they did, how serious they were. While the ESL learners (studying English in the United States) rated the pragmatic mistakes as more serious than the grammatical ones, exactly the opposite pattern was found with the EFL learners (studying in Hungary and Italy). The authors explain this greater pragmatic awareness in the ESL learners as stemming from the quality of their experience with the L2:

‘It seems likely, then, that the pragmatic awareness of the ESL learners may have come from the friction of their daily interactions: the pressure not only of making themselves understood but also of establishing and maintaining smooth relationships with NSs in the host environment.’ (ibid: 253)

They suggest that EFL students' pragmatic awareness could be improved by increasing the amount of pragmatic input in the classroom and by placing a greater emphasis on this area of communicative competence.

3.3 *Discourse competence*

Historically, FLT has principally been concerned with static, sentence-level descriptions of language and has paid scant attention to the social context in which it is produced. This resulted in such teaching practices as the Grammar-Translation Method where students were offered isolated sentences of dubious authenticity to learn from, such as Henry Sweet's favourite example, 'The philosopher pulled the lower jaw of the hen' (Howatt 1984: 145). Discourse analysis brought with it an awareness of the higher order patterns in text and an appreciation of the dynamic and interactive nature of language (McCarthy & Carter 1994), out of which the notion of discourse competence emerged. This ability to produce unified, cohesive and coherent spoken or written texts is a critical part of learners' overall communicative competence.

For students to learn how to manage conversation effectively in the target language, they need to have realistic models of proficient users doing the same thing, as Brown & Yule (1983: 52) pointed out over twenty years ago:

'...successful *teaching* of discorsal competence demands of the teacher that he should analyse the language which native speakers use in discourse, in order that he can ensure that reasonable and realistic models are presented for his students to imitate and base their own performances on.'

In terms of conversation management, the kind of talk requiring the most work by participants, and therefore also providing the best model to develop this aspect of discourse competence, is casual conversation but this is largely ignored by textbooks, perhaps because it is seen as unstructured and, as a result, unteachable (Eggins & Slade

1997: 315). Language teaching materials tend to concentrate on monologues or dialogues where turn-taking is structured and predictable, with some kind of transactional goal. More interactional, non goal-oriented language, used to develop relationships, is much less common and it is hardly surprising, therefore, to find that learners experience more difficulties with this kind of talk. Belton (1988) found that advanced Italian NNSs of English displayed ‘virtually native speaker competence’ on transactional tasks but ‘striking dissimilarities’ with NS talk on interactional tasks and blames this on the predominantly transactional input and tasks of EFL materials. Authentic recordings of casual conversation are the most likely source of useful models to illustrate how proficient speakers effectively manage discourse and build relationships, employing a range of strategies such as recognising transition relevance places (TRPs) where they can appropriately make a bid for the floor (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974), employing ‘topic shading’ to ensure that their turns are coherent with preceding talk (Crow 1983; Bublitz 1988), making subtle topical moves which move the conversation in a direction to suit their own goals, using reactive tokens to empathise (Clancy et al. 1996) and discourse markers to signal how their turns relate to the ongoing conversation (Schiffrin 1987; Carter & McCarthy 2006). Once learners are aware of these strategies, they can practice using them in their own conversations, even recording and transcribing their own discourse and comparing it with NS samples – effectively becoming ‘mini conversational analysts’ themselves, something recommended by a number of researchers (Brown & Yule 1983; Willis & Willis 1996; Celce-Murcia & Olshtain 2000; Schegloff et al. 2002; Wong 2002). The process of transcribing speech is a critical step for exploitation of spoken discourse in the classroom because it allows us to ‘freeze’ the interaction and

highlight salient features for the learners that would otherwise be lost in the normal, transient flow of communication.

With respect to spoken genres in textbooks, a number of problems exist, the first of which relates to the RANGE of genres illustrated. In a principled approach, we would expect to see the relative importance and frequency of generic types (for a specific target context) reflected fairly in classroom input but this is often not the case. Eggin & Slade (1997), for example, identified five common generic types in their casual conversation data: storytelling (narratives, anecdotes, exemplums and recounts) (43.4%), observation/comment (19.75%), opinion (16.8%), gossip (13.8%) and joke-telling (6.3%). They claim that, despite the important role these structures play in establishing peoples' identities, they are largely unrepresented in language teaching materials.

A second concern is with the ACCURACY of spoken genres represented in textbooks since many researchers, such as Yule (1995: 185), have reported that model texts often give an incomplete or distorted picture of the target language:

'Despite the fact that more than two decades have passed since Henry Widdowson pointed out that 'there is a need to take discourse into account in our teaching of language'... there continues to be a substantial mismatch between what tends to be presented to learners as classroom experiences of the target language and the actual use of that language as discourse outside the classroom.'

Myers Scotton & Bernsten (1988) compared direction-giving in natural conversations with textbook dialogues and found that authentic interactions were much more complicated than the standard, three-step, model presented to students (request for directions – direction-giving – thanks). They typically included other elements such as: a) an opening sequence which could be a filler, a pause, a repetition of the question, an interjection or a comment such as 'It's really far'; b) a pre-closing where the direction-

giver provides a kind of CODA (an evaluative comment which brings the conversation back to the present) such as ‘It’s way, way on the other side of campus from here’; c) orientation checkers, parenthetical comments and confirmation checkers interspersed throughout the exchange; d) non-fluencies, particularly in the opening sequence (see also Psathas & Kozloff 1976 for more on the discourse structure of directions). The authors point out that this more complicated generic structure in the natural discourse places considerable interactional demands on the direction-seeker to ‘edit out’ essential from non-essential information and to respond to confirmation and orientation checkers. They suggest that learners be given authentic interactions in the classroom with awareness-raising tasks to highlight the discourse structure of direction-giving. Wong (2002) (but see also Wong 1984) examined model telephone dialogues in eight ESL textbooks and assessed their faithfulness to the canonical sequencing identified by the conversational analyst, Emanuel Schegloff, in *American English* (see, for example, Schegloff 1993). The opening segment is typically composed of four parts: a) a SUMMONS-ANSWER SEQUENCE, where the telephone rings and the receiver answers, typically with a ‘hello’, which provides the caller with a voice sample for recognition purposes; b) an IDENTIFICATION-RECOGNITION SEQUENCE, where the caller identifies him/herself with a voice sample such as ‘hi’ or by name, depending on the relationship with the receiver; c) a GREETING SEQUENCE; an adjacency pair, often ‘hi’ or ‘hello’, and d) a HOW-ARE-YOU (HAY) SEQUENCE, where the caller normally produces the first ‘How are you?’ inquiry (to which the receiver can reply with a neutral response, such as ‘fine’, that closes down the topic, or a plus/minus response, such as ‘great’ or ‘terrible’, that invites further topical moves), followed by a second ‘How are you?’ from the receiver. Wong found that none of the

textbook telephone dialogues she examined contained all four canonical sequences and concludes:

‘As routine, simplistic, or ritualistic as telephone openings appear to be, it is striking that they were not designed in a more authentic fashion by textbook writers.’ (ibid: 53/4)

The lack of realistic models in course books means that learners are unlikely to get a feel for the typical patterning of this genre, particularly how to enter and exit the talk naturally. This is exactly the kind of information that can instil a greater sense of control over TL interactions and engender confidence. Gilmore (2004) compared seven textbook service encounters with their equivalent authentic interactions and found considerable differences across a range of discourse features: length and turn-taking patterns, lexical density and the frequency of false starts, repetition, pausing, terminal overlap, latching, hesitation devices and back-channels. Similarly to Myers Scotton & Bernsten (1988), the authentic samples were found to have a more complicated structure than the regular A-B-A-B question-answer patterning displayed in the textbooks. Instead, the smooth flow of the discourse was frequently disrupted by the ‘information giver’ seeking clarification or further information from the ‘information receiver’. Thus, in authentic service encounters, learners may have considerably more interactional demands placed on them than they are given to expect by classroom models.

The final concern with respect to the presentation of spoken genres in textbooks is that, even when the model dialogues ARE accurate, material writers typically do not attempt to highlight key components of the generic structure. This contrasts notably with written genres where larger patterns, such as the introduction-main body-conclusion structure of discursive essays, are often pointed out. Presumably, noticing generic patterns in the spoken mode can be just as beneficial for learners’ discourse competence

as it appears to be in the written mode and, although little empirical research has been done to date on this question, a number of writers advocate awareness-raising activities. Interest has mainly focussed on oral narratives to date (see, for example, Slade 1986; Rintell 1990; Yule 1995; Corbett 1999; Jones 2001) but Hawkins (1985) (cited in Celce-Murcia et al. 1995) demonstrated that learners were able to complain more effectively after a focus on the generic structure of complaint scripts.

3.4 Implications for materials design

What emerges from this review of some of the literature comparing authentic and textbook discourse is that our deepening understanding of language has profound implications for syllabus design:

‘With a more accurate picture of natural discourse, we are in a better position to evaluate the descriptions upon which we base our teaching, the teaching materials, what goes on in the classroom, and the end products of our teaching, whether in the form of spoken or written output.’ (McCarthy 1991: 12)

The contrived materials of traditional textbooks have often presented learners with a meagre, and frequently distorted, sample of the target language to work with and have failed to meet many of their communicative needs (Schiffrin 1996). Authentic materials, particularly audio-visual ones, offer a much richer source of input for learners and have the potential to be exploited in different ways and on different levels to develop learners’ communicative competence.

A further point that becomes clear from the discussion above is how context-sensitive language is. Since the discourse created in any situation is so dependent on the unique set of characteristics (the place, participants, topic and mode) prevailing at the moment it is produced, how can we begin to help learners cope with all the variety and uncertainty they are likely to face during communication in the L2? The first step is to

present language solidly contextualised and to sensitise learners to the ways in which the discourse reflects its context. The kinds of contexts selected for inclusion will often mirror those most likely to be encountered by learners in their future lives, and the focus of tasks will need to take into account the differences between the learners' culture and the target culture. For example, learners from low-contact cultures such as Japan (who tend to touch and look at each other less: Argyle & Cook 1976), who wish to integrate into high contact cultures are likely to need more help adapting their non-verbal communication. Similarly, those from low-context cultures such as Norway (who rely predominantly on verbal means to communicate meaning) will need more help in interpreting subtle contextual clues when integrating into high-context cultures (Hall 1989; Christopher 2004). This suggests that each classroom is quite unique in terms of its students' needs – internationally marketed textbooks are unlikely to meet these needs adequately.

Finally, with the number of elements jostling for inclusion in the language syllabus increasing dramatically over the last thirty years but with no more time to actually teach students, we are clearly faced with a dilemma. What should stay and what should go? How can we structure the different elements into a coherent syllabus? These are questions which are yet to be addressed in the profession.

4. The English-as-a-world-language debate

The spread of English around the world and its success as the primary medium of global communication has considerably complicated the issue of teaching the language and the concept of authenticity in the process. There are now an estimated 329 million speakers

of English as a first language and around 422 million speakers of English as a second language, depending on the level of command of the language deemed acceptable (Crystal 2003). With its expansion across the globe, English has naturally diversified into a proliferation of forms, varying in pronunciation, intonation, grammar, vocabulary, spelling and conventions of use, as it has been adapted to suit new surroundings (Crystal *ibid*) so that ‘it becomes ever more difficult to characterize in ways that support the fiction of a simple, single language’ (Stevens 1980: 79). An estimated 1 billion people are learning English as a foreign language (Graddol 1997) and by 2010 it is predicted that there will be 50% more speakers of English as a foreign language than native speakers (Crystal 1997). Currently, it is believed that something like a staggering 80% of English used worldwide does not involve native speakers at all (Crystal 1997; Prodromou 1997). All of this has led to ‘doubts and anxieties among professionals and the general public alike’ (Stevens 1980: 78) as the concepts of ‘native speaker’ and ‘standard English’ become ever more difficult to pin down (Crystal 1995; Carter & McCarthy 2003). Issues raised in the literature which touch on the authenticity debate seek to answer the following questions: How can we define a native speaker of English and is it still a useful model for language teaching purposes? With so many varieties of English in existence, whose do we teach? Would a lingua/cultura franca or standard English best meet students’ needs?

4.1 *What is a native speaker?*

The term ‘native speaker’, although commonly evoked, remains difficult to define. Most of us probably imagine a prototypical American or Englishmen when we think of a native speaker but this model quickly begins to disintegrate under closer inspection. Davies

(1995) defines a native speaker as someone who: a) acquires the L1 in childhood; b) has intuitions about his/her grammar; c) has intuitions about the grammar of the standard language; d) can produce fluent, spontaneous discourse; e) has a creative capacity and e) has the capacity to interpret and translate into the L1. Clearly, under this definition, any speaker of any of the multitude of varieties of English used worldwide from Bermudian to Singaporean English therefore qualifies as a native speaker. Furthermore, if we question whether a language has to be learnt in childhood in order for someone to become a native speaker, as Davies (1995) does, even the distinction between native speaker and non-native speaker begins to blur:

‘Given the interlingual differences and the lack of agreement about norms that certainly occur among all such groups, it does appear that the second language learner has a difficult but not an impossible task to become a native speaker of a target language.’ (ibid: 156)

Since precise definitions of the native speaker remain so elusive, it has been suggested that some form of ‘expert’ or ‘proficient’ user of English be held up as the goal for language learning instead (Rampton 1990; Davies 1995; Prodromou 1997a), allowing us to specify more concretely the body of knowledge learners need to master and bringing in more accountability to the process. Even assuming that the term native speaker can be defined precisely as those speech communities in Kachru’s (1985) ‘inner circle’, the rapid development of ‘non-native’ varieties and the use of English as an International Language has called into question their ownership of the tongue (Alptekin & Alptekin 1984; Strevens 1987; Bowers 1992; Widdowson 1994; Nelson 1995; Graddol 1997; Seidlhofer 1999; Jenkins 2000; Modiano 2001; Richards 2003; House 2004; Kiernan 2005). Graddol (1997:10) criticises Kachru’s (1985) ‘inner, outer and expanding circles’ model because ‘it locates the ‘native speakers’ and native-speaking countries at the centre

of the global use of English, and, by implication, the sources of models of correctness'. This view is increasingly challenged 'by the growing assertiveness of countries adopting English as a second language that English is now *their* language, through which they can express their own values and identities, create their own intellectual property and export goods and services to other countries' (ibid: 3). Jenkins (2000: 9) suggests replacing the terms 'native speaker' and 'non-native speaker' with 'monolingual English speaker (MES)' or 'bilingual English speaker (BES)'. These treat both an English native-speaker proficient in another language and a non-native speaker proficient in English as equal to each other (both BESs) and superior to a native-speaker of English who speaks no other languages (MES), which is perhaps a fairer way of looking at things.

The use of authentic language in the classroom has often been challenged because it is typically seen as the discourse produced by those in Kachru's inner circle:

'So if you give authenticity primacy as a pedagogic principle, you inevitably grant privileged status to native-speaker teachers, and you defer to them not only in respect to competence in the language but also in respect to competence in language teaching.' (Widdowson 1994: 387)

However, when the definition of 'native speaker' expands to include all proficient speakers of English, of whatever variety, this argument ceases to be valid. The question then becomes: 'Whose authentic English should we use as our model, if any, or is some form of contrived *lingua/cultura franca* more appropriate in the classroom? There are cases to be made for either choice although the pedagogical consequences are quite different.

4.2 *Is a lingua/cultura franca model more appropriate in the classroom?*

In its original meaning, *lingua franca*, from the Arabic 'lisan-al-farang' (House 2004), was a mixture of Italian, Spanish, French, Arabic, Greek and Turkish used as an

intermediary language between traders in the ports of the Mediterranean but it has today come to signify, more generally, ‘a language used for communication among people of different mother tongues’ (McLeod 1984: 655). This is not something that can be readily codified but for the purposes of ELT it is most likely to mean a reduced form of English, incorporating what textbook writers perceive to be the most relevant features of the language for communication between non-native speakers in international contexts. This may include a pronunciation syllabus which only models the core phonological distinctions necessary for intelligibility, as proposed by Jenkins (2000). It will also tend to be a more standard, formal variety of the language devoid, as far as possible, of its cultural associations and set in ‘cosmopolitan’ contexts like international airports and hotels (Strevens 1980; Brown 1990; Prodromou 1996). This has several potential advantages for the learner. Firstly, it maximises their chances of learning a variety of English which can be understood by a wide range of nationalities and can be put to immediate, practical use in what we have seen is the most likely scenario: one non-native speaker talking to another non-native speaker. Secondly, it avoids culturally loaded language, which is often difficult to understand once removed from its context of use, and may, in any case, be perceived as irrelevant by learners:

‘What is ‘real’ and interesting (whether spoken or written language) to the native speaker as a member of a particular speech community may be utterly boring to the non-native speaker. Indeed, the meaning of such ‘real’ samples of language may be difficult to recover if you are not a member of the particular linguistic and cultural community which gave rise to these samples of language in the first place.’ (Prodromou 1996: 88)

Prodromou (1997) illustrates this point in a simple experiment. He compared the ability of students to complete two gap fill exercises with vocabulary items, one using made-up

sentences taken from a traditional dictionary, the other real examples taken from a corpus-based dictionary. He found, not surprisingly, that learners had considerably more difficulty completing the real examples than the more self-contained, contrived ones. Furthermore, 76% of the teachers polled believed the made-up samples were more appropriate for the classroom. In this sense, contrived language would appear to be better suited to the learning process (see Widdowson 2003, Ch. 8 & 9 for a detailed discussion of this issue). Thirdly, by avoiding ‘inner circle’ varieties of English in textbooks, the balance of power shifts from native speaker to non-native speaker teachers (Seidlhofer 1999); something many are keen to see after the accusations of linguistic imperialism put forward by the likes of Phillipson (1992a/b) and Pennycook (1994).

Many researchers see problems with using some type of lingua franca as the model for language teaching, however. Firstly, this approach, generally though not necessarily, relies on the textbook writer’s intuitions about language and these are notoriously unreliable:

‘...rules of speaking and, more generally, norms of interaction are not only culture specific, they are also largely unconscious. What this means is that native speakers, although perfectly competent in using and interpreting the patterns of speech behavior which prevail in their own communities, are, with the exception of a few explicitly taught formulas, unaware of the patterned nature of their own speech behavior.’ (Wolfson 1986: 693)

This means that writers often run the risk of presenting a distorted view of the language to learners (Sinclair 1991; Biber, Conrad & Reppen 1994). O’Connor di Vito (1991: 384) points out that students naturally assume, unless otherwise indicated, that the language presented to them in course books is ‘equally generalizable, equally important communicatively, and equally productive in the target language’ so any distortions in the

materials will have serious knock-on effects for learners' use of the target language. By limiting ourselves to authentic samples of discourse, researchers argue that we are less likely to fall into this trap. A further problem with the lingua franca model is its emphasis on more formal varieties of English. This limits students' exposure to the more evaluative, interactional features of the language which tend to be associated with informal, spoken English (Brown & Yule 1983; Richards 1990; Carter & McCarthy 1996; McCarthy & Carter 1997) and may therefore affect their ability to 'be friendly' in the L2.

4.2.1 *Cultura franca?*

A third issue, related to the topic of 'cultura franca', is to what extent it is possible or advisable to separate a language from its cultural associations. Pulverness (1999: 6) points out that many modern ELT textbooks try to side-step the issue of culture altogether by presenting their target language in 'international contexts' outside the domain of any particular country:

'One way out of the culture trap has been the attempt to detach language learning from its cultural moorings by internationalising it. Coursebook writers who rightly feel wary of appearing to endorse the values of heritage culture or to jump on the bandwagon of pop culture, and who are striving to reach as international a market as possible, may opt for an approach which is driven by a view of English as an International Language (EIL). Wishing to avoid snapshot images of either high or low culture, they attempt to deny the culture underpinnings of the language altogether by contextualising international encounters in international settings – the airport departure lounge, the hotel lobby, the international conference.'

But these attempts are doomed to failure for a number of reasons. Firstly, the materials generally consist of contrived dialogues written by native speaker authors who, despite feigning to represent other nationalities, cannot possibly dissociate themselves from their own cultures sufficiently to do the job justice and reflect the lexicogrammatical, topical

or interactional choices natural for people from different cultures (Dissanayake & Nichter 1987; Alptekin 1993). This is exemplified by the fact that, despite the veneer of internationalism, most of this ‘cosmopolitan English’ continues to embrace a western, materialistic set of values (Brown 1990). Even if textbook writers could realistically portray international encounters, they are still not culture-less; for example, Japanese and Saudi businessmen at a meeting in New York carry their own cultural expectations to the table. It would seem, then, that culture-free language is an impossible goal (see, for example, Valdes 1986; Byram 1991, 1997; Kramersch 1993; Nelson 1995) but, if this is the case, what choices are available to material writers? Cortazzi & Jin (1999) suggest that there are three types of English language textbook on the market: those that teach the students’ own culture (C1); those that teach the target culture (C2); and those that teach a wide variety of other cultures that are neither source nor target cultures (C3, 4, 5...).

There are potential advantages and disadvantages for all three of these options, which are worth examining in more detail.

Teaching the target language through the learners’ own culture may help to reinforce their national identity in a world increasingly dominated by western paradigms: ‘Being at the receiving end of a virtually one-way flow of information from Anglo-American centres, the host country runs the risk of having its own culture totally submerged, and thus imposes restrictions in educational and cultural domains to protect its way of life.’ (Alptekin & Alptekin 1984: 15)

However, this view has been challenged more recently for being rather patronizing, underestimating, as it does, the non-native speakers’ ability to take from the language materials only what they consider useful, and to appropriate English for their own needs, or in Kramersch & Sullivan’s (1996: 210) words, ‘the unique privilege of the NNS to poach on the so-called authentic territory of others, and make the language their own.’ (see also

Byram 1991; Bisong 1995; Siegal 1996; Seidlhofer 1999; Gray 2000; Carter & McCarthy 2003). The desire to impose restrictions on cultural input from abroad is, in any case, more likely to emanate from political institutions within the country seeking to maintain control over the population (see McVeigh, 2002 for a discussion of the Japanese context). While working on a series of in-house textbooks in Saudi Arabia, for example, my colleagues and I in the Materials Development Department were forbidden to include any content relating to music, relationships or politics, despite the students' obvious curiosity in these topics. Materials based on the C1 do, however, allow learners to practise explaining about their country in English (Cortazzi & Jin 1999) and, because they start from familiar content, provide greater support, allowing for more top-down processing (Richards 1990) which may be particularly beneficial at lower levels of proficiency. Furthermore, in Widdowson's (2003) opinion at least, C1 language input better suits the social reality of the classroom because it is real for the learners and therefore more effective in activating the learning process. The disadvantages with these kinds of materials are that they fail to exploit the language learner's natural curiosity in other cultures and, in the absence of information to the contrary, students are likely to assume that other cultures operate in the same way as their own:

'To teach culture without language is fundamentally flawed and to separate language and culture teaching is to imply that a foreign language can be treated in the early learning stages as if it were self-contained and independent of other sociocultural phenomena... The consequence is that learners, rightly unable to accept this isolation, assume that the foreign language is an epiphenomenon of their own language, and that it refers to and embodies their existing understandings and interpretations of their own and the foreign cultures. Where this arises, as it does frequently in the early years of secondary education, the pupils cannot be said to be learning a foreign language in the proper sense; they are learning a codified version of their own.' (Byram 1991: 18)

Also, although the intention may be to reinforce the learners' national identity, paradoxically, they may be prevented from doing this because they have nothing to compare their culture with (Cortazzi & Jin 1999); true understanding of our own culture can only come from seeing how other societies operate. Finally, restricting the cultural input to the C1 limits the marketability of textbooks, rendering them less cost effective for publishers (Alptekin 1993).

4.2.2 Which TL culture?

Materials which teach the C2, the target culture of a speech community where English is used as a first language, are the traditional fare of the ELT industry and, although historically they may have included as much contrived as authentic discourse, are the obvious place to exploit authentic texts. For many languages, such as Japanese or Danish, it would seem natural to introduce the target culture and language concurrently in this way, since the destinations of the learners and the communities they will need to operate in are more predictable. As we have already seen, however, the situation with English is much more complicated because of the wide variety of cultures which call the language their own. Even superficially similar English-speaking cultures such as America and Australia can hide quite fundamental differences: Renwick (cited in Smith 1987) found in his research that while Americans tend to like people who agree with them, Australians prefer people who disagree with them on the basis that disagreement stimulates conversation. Diverse sub-cultures can also exist within the same country, as Brice Heath (1983) illustrated in her well-known ethnographic study of two communities, Roadville and Trackton, which despite existing only a few miles apart from each other in the Piedmont Carolinas of the United States, showed dramatic differences in their styles of

communication, leading to problems in schools and workplaces. Decisions over whose culture to represent in language teaching materials are likely to vary from place to place. Prodromou (1992), in his survey of Greek students' attitudes to English-speaking cultures, found a marked preference for the British over the American model which he accounts for in terms of the historical tensions between Greece and the United States, but this is likely to be the reverse in Japan where students tend to have a far greater affiliation with America. There is, of course, no reason why a wide variety of English-speaking cultures cannot be represented in language textbooks and this might be more fitting to its international status, while at the same time rendering publications more marketable worldwide. In my own opinion, it is essential to include the target culture (or rather cultures) within language teaching materials in order to serve the broader educational goal of developing learners' intercultural communicative competence (Byram & Fleming 1998). In modern urban societies, characterised by their social and cultural heterogeneity (Schiffrin 1996: 313), successful communication depends on much more than a superficial command of a target language, it also requires an ability to see the world from different perspectives:

'What is at issue here is a modification of monocultural awareness. From being ethnocentric and aware only of cultural phenomena as seen from their existing viewpoint, learners are to acquire an intercultural awareness which recognises that such phenomena can be seen from a different perspective, from within a different culture and ethnic identity.' (Byram 1991: 19)

Authentic materials, such as television sitcoms (Scollon 1999) are uniquely placed to bring about this shift in awareness and to heighten learners' understanding of both their own and the target culture. This kind of approach sees learners as comparative ethnographers (Byram 1991; Cortazzi & Jin 1999; Pulverness 1999), forced to re-

examine their own culture-specific schemata by comparison with other patterns of behaviour.

The risk with introducing the target culture(s) into the classroom is that we disenfranchise learners:

‘When both the material we use and the way we use it are culturally alienating then, inevitably, the students switch off, retreat into their inner world, to defend their own integrity.’ (Prodromou 1988: 80)

It can also disadvantage NNS teachers, undermining their confidence (Prodromou 1996; Seidlhofer 1999). Materials such as these therefore, obviously, need to be selected carefully, with the specific needs of the learners in mind, and handled intelligently, allowing students to move from the familiar to the unfamiliar in a way that keeps them engaged in the learning process. They also need to provide teachers with sufficient support to confidently deal with the syllabus.

Cortazzi & Jin’s third and last type of textbook are those that teach a wide variety of other cultures that are neither source nor target cultures. The advantage of these kinds of materials is that they meet the needs of the increasing number of learners who want to use English as an International Language to speak to other non-native speakers around the world. Similarly to the arguments made above, they can also be exploited to develop students’ inter-cultural competence by exposing learners to unfamiliar behavioural patterns or instances of cross-cultural miscommunication but ONLY WHEN THE DISCOURSE IS AUTHENTIC, NNS-NNS INTERACTION (see, for example, Firth 1990; Newman 1996). Contrived dialogues written by native speakers of English are unlikely to capture the true flavour of NNS-NNS interactions so we should be wary of textbooks that embrace internationalism only superficially in an attempt to make themselves more marketable.

One disadvantage of materials such as these is that non-native speakers of English are often unable to express their thoughts as precisely in the L2 as they can in their mother tongue. We therefore run the risk of providing learners with ‘dumbed down’ models of English which, although perhaps meeting their transactional needs, fail to illustrate the true expressive potential of the language. Carter & McCarthy (1996), in a series of articles debating authenticity with Luke Prodromou, argue that we should never hold back information about the language because it disempowers learners (see also Phillipson 1992; Sinclair 1997).

Only a small number of researchers have bothered to ask the learners THEMSELVES what they think about these issues. One of the few who has is Timmis (2002), who received responses to his questionnaire on teacher and student attitudes to ‘native’ vs. ‘standard’ English from respondents in 14 different countries. He found a continued preference for native-speaker models in his sampling, concluding that: ‘There is still some desire among students to conform to native-speaker norms, and this desire is not necessarily restricted to those students who use, or anticipate using English primarily with native speakers.’ (ibid: 248)

5. ICT & corpus linguistics

5.1 Information and Communications Technology

Only seventeen years ago, Nunan (1989: 138) commented on the difficulty of accessing authentic input to use in the classroom, particularly for teachers working in a foreign language context. Today, anyone with an internet connection has more spoken and written authentic data at their fingertips than they could possibly know what to do with and this has had the effect of ‘impelling the issue of authenticity of texts and interactions

to the fore in language pedagogy' (Mishan 2005: ix). Information and Communications Technology (ICT), which deals with the application of digital technology to all aspects of teaching and learning, has exploded and EFL, perhaps less constrained than mainstream language education, has often been at the cutting edge of innovations in our field (Crystal 2001). The Web is commonly seen as having three possible roles in language learning (see, for example, the WELL project <<http://www.well.ac.uk>>). Firstly, it can act as a *DELIVERY MEDIUM*, providing easy access to authentic resources such as newspapers, literary texts, film scripts, song lyrics, video and audio samples from the target culture. Secondly, it can act as an *INTERACTIVE MEDIUM*, allowing learners to take a more active role in their own learning through search engines, on-line dictionaries and encyclopaedias, database search facilities, translation software, language analysis tools, or grammar/vocabulary tasks provided by language learning web sites. Lastly, it can act as a *COMMUNICATION MEDIUM*, giving learners the opportunity to locate and communicate with like-minded people in the target language through e-mail (for example, eTandem), Internet Relay Chat (IRC), discussion lists and telephone or video-conferencing. The potential advantages of Web-based resources are therefore enormous, including: a) unlimited access to authentic materials to suit all proficiency levels, learning styles and interests (Wilson 1997; Kramsch, A'Ness & Lam 2000; Hogan-Brun 2001; Mishan 2005); b) greater learner autonomy (Warschauer 1996; Warschauer, Turbee & Roberts 1996; Mishan 2005) in the 'virtual self-access centre' of the Web (Little 1997: 235); c) a real audience of native or non-native speakers to communicate with in other parts of the world (Janda 1995; Warschauer 1996; Warschauer & Whittaker 1997); d) up-to-dateness (Piper, Watson & Wright 1999; Hogan-Brun 2001; Mishan 2005) and e) the development

of transferable electronic literacy skills (Warschauer & Whittaker 1997; Mishan 2005).

However, these potential benefits are often not realized in practice for a number of reasons. Without a peer review or editing process to pass through, materials on the Internet can be of poor quality and a number of writers have specifically □criticized□ Web sites designed for language learning in this respect (Eastment 1996; Lamy 1997):

“The learner is faced with a technologically advanced, consumer-friendly version of his textbook from the sixties, with Web pages created by designers who know more about Web design than about new methodological approaches in language learning” (Vogel 2001: 139)

Learners therefore need to acquire (arguably valuable) new skills in assessing and selecting Web-based material – skills unnecessary in the classroom where the teacher performs this role (Vogel 2001; Mishan 2005). The interactive nature of the Web gives learners more autonomy and control, but the ease with which they can skip from one site to another often results in superficial learning (Piper, Watson & Wright 1999; Trotman 2000). Similarly, attempts to link students together around the world through e-mail have often led to disappointing results because teachers have lost sight of pedagogy in their enthusiasm to apply the technology:

‘Simply put, there is no more reason to (expect) a significant educational outcome from simply creating a pen pal connection than there is from simply bringing two students into a room and asking them to talk.’

(Warschauer & Whittaker 1997: 28)

Web-based resources therefore need to be carefully integrated into classroom activities and students need teacher support to focus their learning and get the most out of the new technology (Warschauer & Whittaker 1997; Piper, Watson & Wright 1999; Hogan-Brun 2001; Vogel 2001).

5.2 *Corpus Linguistics*

The ability of computers to provide new insights into authentic language use was first demonstrated by Kucera & Francis (1967) in their classic book ‘Computational Analysis of Present-Day American English’. They based their analysis on what was also the first corpus ever to be created, the Brown Corpus, a one million-word compilation of American English texts held at Brown University, USA. Since then, the number and variety of corpora have increased dramatically and they are having profound effects on our understanding of language and, consequently, the language teaching profession (see, for example, Kennedy 1998 or David Lee’s useful site <<http://devoted.to/corpora>> for an overview of some of the most commonly available corpora).

Corpora can be seen as having two possible roles in language pedagogy: a) an *INDIRECT ROLE*, informing decisions on the content of textbooks (for example McCarthy, McCarten & Sandiford 2006), reference books and tests or, b) a *DIRECT ROLE*, being used by learners in the classroom as a reference tool or source of communicative tasks. Their impact, so far, has mainly been restricted to the former role, where they have often demonstrated linguists’ and material writers’ intuitions about language to be unreliable (Sinclair 1991, 2004; Owen 1993; Biber, Conrad & Reppen 1994, 1998; Aston 1995; McCarthy & Carter 1997; Carter 1998; Widdowson 2000; Gavioli & Aston 2001; Stubbs 2001). Collocation and colligation have been shown to be far more important than earlier suspected with words frequently co-occurring in regular patterns, known under a variety of terms: ‘prefabs’ (Bolinger 1976), ‘lexicalized stems’ (Pawley & Syder 1983), ‘lexical phrases’ (Nattinger & DeCarrico 1992), ‘lexicalised chunks’ (Cook 1998), or ‘highly recurrent word combinations (HRWCs)’ (De Cock 2000). Sinclair (1991) explains this

tendency for regular patterning in texts with his ‘idiom and open choice principles’. These state that language is processed, both receptively and productively, in chunks wherever possible since this is much more efficient than handling it word by word. Only when this strategy is unsuccessful does the interpretive process switch to the open choice principle, and then only for short periods of time (see also Pawley & Syder 1983; Aston 1995). As a result of work such as this, lexical phrases have increasingly found their way into language textbooks (see, for example, Lewis 1993, 1997, 2000).

Corpora have also been valuable in providing specific information on the frequency of different words and word senses in the language, allowing lexicographers, material writers and test designers to refer to empirical data rather than just gut instinct when deciding what lexical items to include in their work. The first corpus-informed dictionary, the ‘American Heritage Dictionary’, appeared in 1969, only a few years after the completion of the Brown Corpus and today, all of the dictionaries produced by the major publishers are based on corpora (Kennedy 1998). According to Willis (1990: vi), the most frequent 700 words in the English language account for about 70% of all spoken and written texts produced and the most frequent 2,500 words around 80% of texts. This information has been used to provide a more principled approach to the organization of lexical content in textbooks, notably, in the lexical syllabus of the Collins COBUILD English Course (Willis & Willis 1988). In testing, frequency lists have been used to help design placement and diagnostic tests such as the ‘Vocabulary Levels Test’ (Nation 1990; Schmitt 2000), which give estimates of learners’ vocabulary size at different frequency levels. Frequency counts have also shown that the most commonly occurring word senses in English do not always match our intuitions, as can be seen, for example, with the word

‘back’. Sinclair (1991: 112) comments that most dictionaries list the body part as the first meaning of this word and that this also concurs with most native speakers’ understanding of core meaning. However, the COBUILD corpus shows the adverbial sense of the word, as in ‘go back’, to be far more common across the language as a whole. Biber et al. (1994) go further than this, pointing out that the distribution of the senses of ‘back’ vary across registers in the Longman/Lancaster Corpus, where the body part meaning is more common in fiction but the adverbial sense is more common in social science texts. This illustrates the dangers of applying descriptions from large corpora directly to language teaching without any kind of pedagogical mediation:

‘For language teachers the issue remains as to what the principles for selection, idealization, and simplification should be... an item may be frequent but limited in range, or infrequent but useful in a wide range of contexts. Or it may be infrequent but very useful, or appropriate for some pedagogical reason. These are factors beyond mere description.’ (Cook 1998: 62)

Grammatical descriptions of the language have also come under criticism as a result of the large body of corpora-based research that has been built up over the last thirty years (see, for example, Braun’s useful bibliography <<http://www.corpora4learning.net/resources/bibliography.html>>). As Biber et al. (1994) point out, the remarkable consistency in the grammatical descriptions traditionally offered to learners in textbooks and reference books gives the illusion that what is being presented is incontrovertible fact. In reality, however, decisions over what structures to include have been based on more subjective notions of teachability or difficulty, reinforced by years of consensus within the profession:

‘While beginning L2 students need to master certain core grammatical constructions, they are not necessarily the ones that have been traditionally emphasized in pedagogic grammars. That is, most textbooks focus exclusively on concerns of difficulty and teachability to decide which grammatical

constructions to emphasize and how to sequence the presentation of topics. However, an equally important consideration is whether beginning students will ever need to produce or comprehend the construction in question outside the language classroom, and, if so, how frequently that need will arise.’ (ibid: 174)

More recent grammar reference books, such as ‘Collins COBUILD English Grammar’ (Sinclair 1990), ‘Exploring Grammar in Context’ (Carter, Hughes & McCarthy 2000), ‘Natural Grammar’ (Thornbury 2004) and ‘Cambridge Grammar of English’ (Carter & McCarthy 2006), all attempt to reflect authentic language use more accurately by reference to corpora data, although this does not automatically guarantee their success from a pedagogical perspective (Owen 1993; Westney 1993; Shehadeh 2005).

Although no one seems to vehemently disagree with the idea that corpora *do* have a role to play in language pedagogy, the extent of that role is hotly debated. Proponents of the hard position, such as Willis (1990), Lewis (1993), Stubbs (1996) and Sinclair (2004), tend more towards the COBUILD position that materials should be ‘corpus driven’ (Stubbs 1997). This has been harshly criticized □ by a number of writers:

‘Trusting the corpus data to the exclusion of one’s intuition about what is possible in the language may have been a necessary antidote to hidebound convention in linguistics and language teaching. But it is possible to take even this too far. In its own way, it also leads to irrelevance, oversight and misrepresentation. The grammarian and the language teacher need the corpus as servant, not as master.’ (Owen 1993: 185)

‘Here is the belief that what is perceived as a linguistic revolution necessarily constitutes a pedagogic one. Very often writers are carried away by a single insight into *language*, taking it illogically to be sufficient to change *language teaching*.’ Cook (1998: 62)

Researchers taking a less radical stance, such as Owen (1996), Prodromou (1997); Biber et al. (1998), Carter (1998), Cook (1998) and McCarthy (2001), tend to favour the Longman policy of ‘corpus-based, not corpus-bound’ pedagogical materials (Summers &

Rundell 1995, cited in Stubbs 1997: 242). The essential difference between the two positions relates to how far we are willing to ‘trust the text’ (Sinclair 2004) over our own intuitions. Both strategies followed to the exclusion of the other can lead to flawed judgments, it seems. Corpora can be misleading because they: a) Represent only a small quantity of total language used around the world; b) Emphasize frequency above all else; c) Often collapse different contexts of use into single categories and therefore fail to reflect variations in language across different registers, dialects or time; and d) Reflect the language that native-speakers use in their own specific discourse communities, which is not necessarily the language that best meets learners’ needs (Cook 1998).

Of course, as the number and variety of corpora expand and they begin to include more information on context of use (for example CANCODE gives details about the relationships between speakers), differences between dialects (for example the International Corpus of English) or even non-native speaker discourse, many of these disadvantages will disappear. Biber et al. (1994: 174) suggest that for intermediate and advanced students who have already mastered the rudiments of the language, an ESP approach is more appropriate, whereby learners focus on the linguistic features of language from the specific target registers they are likely to need to operate in. Corpora that can distinguish between different genres and registers could therefore be extremely useful in tailoring classroom input to meet learners’ needs (see, for example, <<http://www.edict.com.hk/concordance/WWWConcappE.htm>>).

Relying on native-speaker intuitions can, however, be just as misleading as relying on corpus data. It has been well established that although people are very good at noticing *UNUSUAL* patterns when they occur in their mother tongue, such as incorrect or

inappropriate language, they are highly unreliable when it comes to being aware of *TYPICAL* speech patterns (Labov 1966; Blom & Gumperz 1972; Wolfson 1989; Sinclair 1991; Biber et al. 1998). This means that if we want to provide learners with input that reflects what people actually say, as opposed to what we think they SHOULD say, in any given context, reference to computer corpora is indispensable.

Widdowson (1991, 2000, 2003) probably goes furthest in his objections to the use of corpora in language teaching. His position is that, since the classroom creates its own reality, there is no reason for us to be obliged to refer to real discourse at all:

‘Language descriptions for the inducement of learning cannot be based on a database. They cannot be modeled on the description of externalized language, the frequency profiles of text analysis. Such analysis provides us with facts, hitherto unknown, or ignored, but they do not of themselves carry any guarantee of pedagogic relevance.’ (Widdowson 1991: 20/21)

This view has also had its critics (Carter 1998; Stubbs 2001):

‘Learners should not be patronized by being told that they do not need to bother with all this real English. They should not be disempowered, and syllabuses should not be deliberately impoverished.’ (Carter 1998: 51)

Corpora have had a much more limited direct role in the classroom as resources for the learners themselves. When they are used in this way, it is generally to provide students with sample concordance lines to analyse so that they can generate their own rules about grammar patterns or vocabulary. This inductive approach, known as Data Driven Learning (DDL), is most commonly associated with its originator, Tim Johns (since retired) (see, for example Johns 1986, 1991a, 1991b or visit <<http://www.eisu.bham.ac.uk/johnstf/index.html>>). He believes that the close analysis of concordance data by learners creates the necessary psycholinguistic conditions for ‘noticing’ (Schmidt 1990) or ‘Consciousness Raising’ (Rutherford 1987) to occur and, by

making these discoveries for themselves, learners are more likely to retain the insights in long-term memory. Many textbooks also adopt an inductive approach to learning but, typically, students generate their rules from ‘enriched input’ contrived to give numerous examples of the target language, rather than from concordance lines so an important question is whether the perceived benefits noted by Johns originate in the materials or the methodology. Gavioli & Aston (2001: 242/3) are also convinced of the benefits of using corpora in the classroom:

‘Discussing corpus data enables learners to develop their own descriptive frameworks, and to question and critique those of teachers, textbooks, and reference materials... This may help them to view such descriptions in less prescriptive terms, and to interact with them more critically in establishing their own views of language reality’.

Encouraging learners to examine material critically and develop their own language descriptions sounds like a very good idea but DDL is a time-consuming process so there is a trade-off to be made between the quantity of material covered in a course and the depth of understanding achieved as well as its retention in long-term memory.

There are a number of problems associated with using corpus data as classroom input. Firstly, as Mishan (2005: 257) points out, DDL is ‘divergent learning’ in that students may come to different conclusions about the target language under investigation, something which might not appeal to lower level learners with less confidence or learners from cultures with Confucian traditions who are used to a more prescriptive approach. Next, the fact that learners are faced with fragments of decontextualised authentic language in concordance lines means that the challenge of trying to re-contextualise these extracts, difficult even under normal circumstances, is exacerbated or just impossible (Aston 1995; Widdowson 2000) and may prove overwhelming or demotivating (see, for

example, Gregory Hadley's web site describing his attempts to use DDL in Japan: <http://www.nuis.ac.jp/~hadley/publication/jlearner/jlearner.htm>). Teachers could select the concordance lines to be analysed themselves to facilitate learning but this is a time-consuming process and runs the risk of generating a sample that is not representative of either the corpus as a whole or the particular genres of most relevance to the students. Gavioli & Aston (2001) believe that, in the future, the effective use of corpora in the classroom will rely on three key criteria: a) access to corpus data from different sources or genres in the class, b) more user-friendly software and c) more research into the design, selection and grading of corpus-based tasks. It should be remembered, however, that this is not the first time that technology has been enthusiastically embraced by some members of the language teaching profession; language laboratories proved themselves to be both hugely expensive and hugely disappointing in the 1960s (Howatt 1984: 283) illustrating how easy it is to get carried away. More empirical research is needed in this area before we can say for sure that corpus data is as useful to learners as it is to teachers, material writers and lexicographers:

'The fact that concordancing has proved a useful tool in formulating descriptive generalizations by linguists is no guarantee that it can be usefully transferred to the classroom'. (Aston 1995: 260)

6. Authenticity & Motivation

Claims that authentic materials are a motivating force for learners are widespread through the literature (Cross 1984; Deutsh 1984; Hill 1984; Wipf 1984; Swaffar 1985; Freeman & Holden 1986; Keinbaum, Russell & Welty 1986; Little, Devitt & Singleton 1989; Morrison 1989; Bacon & Finnemann 1990; Gonzalez 1990; King 1990; Little & Singleton 1991; McGarry 1995; Peacock 1997). This opinion appears to be mirrored in

the language teaching population at large, since authenticity is frequently used as a selling point in the marketing strategies of publishers. Various justifications have been put forward to support these claims, the most common being that authentic materials are inherently more interesting than contrived ones because of their intent to communicate a message rather than highlight target language (although contrived materials aren't only produced to focus on form) (Swaffar 1985; Freeman & Holden 1986; Hutchinson & Waters 1987; Little, Devitt & Singleton 1989; King 1990; Little & Singleton 1991). This position is rejected by others, however, who argue that the difficulties associated with authentic texts (because of the vocabulary used or the cultural knowledge presumed), demotivate learners (Williams 1983; Freeman & Holden 1986; Prodromou 1996; Widdowson 1996, 1998, 2003). Cross (1984) suggests that showing learners that they can cope with authentic materials is, in itself, intrinsically motivating which introduces the idea of motivation as the result, rather than the cause, of achievement (Ellis 1985; Little et al. 1989; Skehan 1989). Some attribute the motivating nature of authentic materials to the fact that they can be selected to meet students' specific needs, unlike textbooks which cater to an international audience (Morrison 1989; McGarry 1995; Mishan 2005), but this would appear to be an argument for more selection, adaption or supplementation of coursebooks rather than the exclusive use of genuine texts. Finally, some see the fact that students perceive them as 'real' as being the motivating force (Hill 1984; Peacock 1997). The fact is, however, that researchers and teachers are largely unaware of learners' true motivations for learning a language (Oxford & Shearin 1994) and empirical research in support of any of the claims outlined above is scarce (Gonzalez 1990; Peacock 1997). This is not altogether surprising given the problems associated with establishing a causal

link between authenticity and motivation. The first difficulty relates to the definitional ambiguities surrounding the term 'authenticity' in the literature (see section 2) since, before we can make any claims about the effects of authentic materials, we need to ensure that we are all talking about the same thing. Most researchers use the term to refer to cultural artefacts like books, newspapers & magazines, radio & TV broadcasts, web sites, advertising, music and so on but this kind of discourse, which is often more considered, or even scripted, typically has very different surface features from that produced in spontaneous conversation between native speakers. Produced by talented communicators to entertain a wide audience, it is also often much more interesting than the humdrum discourse of everyday life (Porter Ladousse 1999):

'Most conversations are appallingly boring. It is the *participation* in conversations which makes us such avid talkers, the 'need to know' or 'the need to tell' or 'the need to be friendly'. You can listen to hours and hours of recorded conversation without finding anything that interests you from the point of view of what the speakers are talking about or what they are saying about it. After all, their conversation was not intended for the overhearer. It was intended for them as participants.' (Brown & Yule 1983: 82)

Some researchers (for example Swaffar 1985) classify any text with a true communicative objective as authentic, which could include much of that written for language learners, so we obviously need to be very careful when we compare the results from different trials. The second problem is that the success of any particular set of authentic materials in motivating a specific group of learners will depend on how appropriate they are for the subjects in question, how they are exploited in the class (the tasks) and how effectively the teacher is able to mediate between the materials and the students, amongst other variables (Kienbaum et al. 1986; Omaggio 1986; Rings 1986; Rogers & Medley 1988; Gonzalez 1990). Where the effects of authentic materials are

compared with those from a control group using a 'standard textbook', the results will depend as much on the quality of the control text chosen as the experimental materials. Since many modern course books contain a lot of authentic texts anyway, researchers may end up comparing like with like. These influencing factors are seldom mentioned in research reports and are, in any case often very difficult to judge objectively, all of which poses a serious threat to the internal validity of this kind of classroom investigation (Brown 1988). A further consideration is that the learners' location and goals are likely to affect their attitudes towards authentic materials. Those with integrative motivation (Gardner & Lambert 1959), typically second language learners, are more likely to react positively to authentic materials than those with instrumental motivation, typically foreign language learners, (Dornyei 1990; Oxford & Shearin 1994; Mishan 2005), although this is not always the case; medical students, for example, studying ESP with no desire to integrate into a native-speaking community, may respond more enthusiastically to authentic medical texts than contrived textbook material. Another issue that may influence the research results is the learners' familiarity with authentic materials prior to the study. Gonzalez (1990) and Peacock (1997) both detected a time effect in their research with students' motivation increasing as they became more familiar with using authentic materials. The length of time over which motivation is measured may therefore be important. Lastly, there is the problem of how to accurately measure learners' motivation in classroom-based studies. Most empirical research of this type has relied on student self-report data, which runs the risk of being contaminated by the 'approval motive':

'The respondent may answer an item not with his true beliefs, attitudes, etc, but rather with the answer he thinks will reflect well on him, i.e. the respondent works out what the 'good' or 'right' answer is, and gives it.' (Skehan 1989: 61/2)

In summary then, it is clear that there are many dangers inherent in this kind of research (Duff 2005). This does not mean, of course, that we should give up on our attempts to establish a link between motivation and authenticity; after all, a consensus amongst researchers on this issue could have major implications for materials design. However, meaningful results will depend on carefully conceived experimental designs that attempt to account for all of the variables outlined above. To my knowledge, only three empirical studies have so far been conducted into the effects of authentic materials on motivation (Keinbaum et al. 1986; Gonzales 1990; Peacock 1997). Keinbaum et al. hypothesised that a communicative methodology used in conjunction with authentic materials could increase students' motivation towards studying German, French and Spanish as a foreign language. 29 American college students received either the control or experimental treatment over a period of 30 weeks and, although no statistically significant differences were found between groups at the end of the trial in terms of language performance, they report that their qualitative data indicated that students were well motivated by the use of authentic materials. Unfortunately, they do not establish whether this was as a result of the materials or the methodology used in the experimental group. Keinbaum and associates used an attitude survey to try and quantify differences in motivation between the control and experimental groups but only 3 items out of 23 on the questionnaire actually focussed on the method or materials employed so their results are far from convincing. Gonzales (1990) investigated whether exposure to authentic materials (but only as textbook supplements) would have any effect on Spanish-language

learners' attitude, motivation and culture/language achievement. 43 students at an American college, assigned to either control or experimental groups, received the treatment over a period of 10 weeks but no statistically significant differences in either 'levels of satisfaction' (ibid: 105/6) or achievement were found. Unfortunately, the learners' feelings towards the use of authentic materials were only measured by one item on a self-report Foreign Language Attitude Questionnaire. Some of the qualitative data in the study from student feedback and instructors' logs did indicate a positive reaction towards the authentic supplements but to what extent this is due to the materials themselves and not just a desire to do something other than the assigned textbook is impossible to determine. Peacock (1997) provides the most convincing empirical results on authenticity and motivation available to date. He used a more sophisticated model of motivation (interest in and enthusiasm for the materials used in class; persistence with the learning task, as indicated by levels of attention or action for extended periods of time; and levels of concentration or enjoyment: Crookes & Schmidt's 1991: 498-502) to investigate the effects of authentic materials on beginner-level, English language university students in South Korea over a period of 20 days. He found highly significant ($p < 0.001$) increases in both on-task behaviour and overall class motivation when students were using authentic materials, as judged by an external observer. Student self-reported motivation also increased significantly with the authentic input ($p < 0.05$) but only after day 8 of the study, which Peacock attributes to a period of adjustment to the experimental materials. However, although students found authentic materials more motivating than contrived ones, they also found them *LESS INTERESTING*, suggesting that

interest and attention to task or persistence with learning tasks are ‘separate components of classroom motivation’ (ibid: 152).

In summary, despite the widespread belief in the motivating potential of authentic materials, very little empirical support for the claim currently exists.

7. Text difficulty & task design

Widdowson (1978, 1983, 1996, 1998, 2003) has argued consistently that learners are unable to authenticate real language since the classroom cannot provide the contextual conditions for them to do so. Instead, he sees simplified texts that gradually approximate authentic ones as more pedagogically appropriate. In Widdowson (1998: 710), he gives the following example from The Guardian newspaper to illustrate his point:

‘IT TAKES BOTTLE TO CROSS THE CHANNEL

Bibbing tipplers who booze-cruise across the Channel in search of revelry and wassail could be in for a rough ride. Itchy-footed quaffers and pre-Christmas holiday-makers are being warned not to travel to France, widespread disruption continues despite the lifting of the blockade on trapped British lorry drivers.’

This does, without doubt, show the potential dangers of introducing authentic texts into the classroom: the high lexical density, idiomatic language, low frequency vocabulary used for satirical effect, and opaque cultural references all combine to make it ‘pragmatically inert’ (ibid: 710) for most learners. However, Widdowson chooses a particularly extreme example to make his case and many researchers disagree with his point of view, believing that all levels of learner can cope with authentic material if the texts and tasks are carefully selected.

Rating a text’s difficulty is not an exact science and is, to some extent, dependent on the learning context in which it is used. Anderson & Lynch (1988: 81), for example, point

out that low frequency words are generally assumed to be difficult but whether they are or not depends on how common the lexis is in the target community (the word ‘stalker’, for example, despite only a handful of hits on the British National Corpus, is widely understood in Japan), the context in which the word occurs, the learners’ knowledge of the topic and whether there are any cognates in the L2 (see also Wallace 1992: 76).

Similarly, rating text difficulty on grammatical criteria is not straightforward either, since it will be influenced by the degree of similarity between the L1 and L2 grammatical systems. In addition, SLA research has shown that just because a grammatical point, such as 3rd person ‘s’, is easy to analyse doesn’t necessarily mean that it is easy to learn (Nunan 1988, 1989). However, it has long been recognized (see Sweet 1899) that authentic texts are naturally graded and some general guidelines can be offered. Brown & Yule (1983) mention a range of factors affecting text difficulty:

- a) Different spoken genres can be represented on a cline of increasing inherent difficulty (description < description/instruction < storytelling < opinion-expressing), depending on whether they represent static, dynamic or abstract concepts.
- b) The number of elements in a text and how easily they can be distinguished from one other, so that a short narrative with a single character and a few main events will be easier to comprehend than a long one involving more characters and events.
- c) The delivery speed and accents used in spoken texts.
- d) The content (grammar, vocabulary, discourse structure and presumed background knowledge in a text).

- e) The visual support offered in conjunction with listening texts (video images, realia or transcripts).

Anderson & Lynch (1988) report on a range of other factors that have been shown in experimental research to affect listening comprehension (although mainly with young native-speakers), such as the way in which information is organized, topic familiarity, and degree of explicitness. Bygate (1987: 16) points out that spoken text is generally syntactically simpler than written text because of the performance pressures speakers operate under. Rather than producing complex sentence structures, they tend to employ ‘parataxis’ to string simple clauses together with coordinating conjunctions, leading to less dense text with a lower lexical density (Ure 1971; Stubbs 1986), which can ease the task of comprehension. Text length is mentioned by Nunan (1989) as a further factor affecting difficulty because it can lead to reader/listener fatigue, but, as Anderson & Lynch (1988: 85) citing Wallace (1983) note, there is not necessarily a one-to-one relationship since, ‘the longer someone speaks on a topic the more chance there is of understanding the point of what he is trying to say’.

A second way to control for difficulty in authentic materials, which has become increasingly important since the 1980s and the emergence of the ‘strong’ version of the communicative approach (Howatt 1984: 279), is to vary the task rather than the text (Prabhu 1987; Nunan 1989; Willis 1996). This approach allows for only partial understanding of texts by learners on the basis that even native speakers typically operate with less than total comprehension (Willis 1996; Guariento & Morley 2001; Widdowson 2002):

‘Even native speakers do not impose a standard of total comprehension on themselves, and tolerate vagueness. For example, on the BBC weather forecasts for shipping, millions of listeners may hear that a

wind is 'backing south-easterly'. To a layman, 'backing' will mean 'moving' and he is quite content with that, though aware that there is probably a finer distinction contained in the term. His comprehension is partial, but sufficient for his needs, and in proportion to his knowledge.' (Porter & Roberts 1981: 42)

From this perspective, authentic materials are seen as both encouraging a tolerance of partial comprehension and enhancing learners' inferencing skills (Morrison 1989; Brown 1990; Duff & Maley 1990; McRae 1996; Guariento & Morley 2001). Many writers have demonstrated how it is possible to adapt authentic texts to different levels of learner by varying the tasks associated with them (Windeatt 1981; Wipf 1984; Swaffar 1985; Nunan 1988, 1989; Morrison 1989; Little & Singleton 1991; Devitt 1997). They do not, however, provide any empirical evidence that this approach is more effective than adapting the texts themselves.

7.1 Text modification, comprehensibility and SLA

Studies investigating the effects on language acquisition of modifying input have produced mixed results which suggest that, if there are benefits, they may vary with factors such as learner proficiency, mode (spoken or written), type of modification (linguistic, syntactic, articulation rate, pauses etc.), approach taken (simplification or elaboration), text characteristics (rhetorical style, lexical density etc.), topic familiarity and so on. In addition, comparisons between studies are frustrated by differences in the method of assessment (multiple choice questions, recall, self-assessment, dictation, cloze tests etc.) and the time of assessment (during or after exposure to the text) (Leow 1993; Yano et al. 1994; Young 1999). Yano et al. (ibid) summarize the results of fifteen studies into the effects of simplified and elaborated input on non-native speaker comprehension, concluding that text modification tends to have a positive effect. They note, however, that

many of these trials do not adequately distinguish between simplifying and elaborative changes and often generalize from small samples. In their own study, they therefore sought to determine the relative effectiveness of these two approaches on learners' reading comprehension in Japanese college students. They found that both types of text modification improved learner comprehension compared to the unmodified NS versions and conclude that text elaboration is 'a viable alternative to simplification' (ibid: 214). Although this result may seem to disfavour the use of authentic texts, it is important to remember that elaboration is likely to occur in the classroom anyway, even when it is not explicitly designed into the materials. Teachers naturally clarify, rephrase, and make connections explicit to mediate between the materials and learners and learners also negotiate meaning between themselves in order to comprehend input (Hammond & Gibbons 2005).

Other researchers have tried to simplify spoken texts by altering the delivery rate or by inserting pauses into the discourse, again with mixed results. Griffiths (1990) observed that above average speech rates led to a significant reduction in comprehension (as did Conrad 1989) but slower than average rates had no significant effects (see also Blau 1990; Derwing & Munro 2001). Blau (ibid) and Derwing (2006) both noted improvements in learners' comprehension when pauses were inserted at sentence, clause or phrase boundaries or after key lexical items respectively. However, Derwing (1990) found that increased total pause time had an inhibiting effect on learner comprehension. These results do not appear, therefore, to favour contrived over authentic listening texts as long as the authentic recordings are selected carefully to filter out above average articulation rates. Pauses, even if they are found to be beneficial, can easily be introduced

mechanically in the class by the teacher. However, much more research is needed in this area before we can come to any reliable conclusions. How, for example, does varying the lexical density affect comprehension and can learners cope with higher articulation rates in authentic speech which, as we have seen, tends to be more ‘spread out’ (Bygate 1987: 16)? Does slowing articulation rates or inserting pauses benefit different proficiency levels to different degrees? What difference does inclusion of visual support through the use of video make to learner comprehension?

Writers who dispute the benefits of text simplification often do so on the grounds that: a) it makes the task of reading more difficult by reducing the number of linguistic and extralinguistic cues (Grellet 1981; Johnson 1982; Clarke 1989; Willis & Willis 1996); b) it can cause unnaturalness at the discourse level (McCarthy 1991); and c) it can prevent learners from looking beyond the most obvious meanings of words and from acquiring the ability to interpret representational as well as referential language (Swaffar 1985; Vincent 1986; McRae 1996). In terms of empirical evidence against text modification, the evidence is rather limited, however. Allen et al. (1988) found that high school foreign language students coped well with authentic texts compared to modified texts, even though the teachers involved in the trial had judged them to be too difficult for the learners. Young (1999), investigating reading comprehension in Spanish language students, noted a tendency for better recall scores on authentic, as opposed to simplified, versions of texts and concludes that simplification is not necessarily more effective.

Leow (1993) disputes the results of studies such as those mentioned above on the basis that they assume a causal link between comprehension and language acquisition. The rationale is that, by simplifying input, it becomes more comprehensible and this, in

turn, eases the cognitive demands on learners and allows them to pay more attention to forms in the input that are not part of their current interlanguage system and, thereby, acquire more language (Krashen 1982, 1985, 1989; Long 1985; McLaughlin 1987).

Leow, instead, looked at learners' *INTAKE* (elements of the input that are noticed by the learner, and become available for acquisition) of selected linguistic items from authentic and simplified texts and found that, although the simplified versions were significantly more comprehensible, they did not facilitate greater levels of intake. He concludes:

'Consequently the findings of this study appear to provide empirical support for proponents of unedited authentic written materials in the classroom. If we consider the rather small increase in intake in this study by learners exposed to the simplified passage and the amount of time, effort, and expertise needed to modify texts for the classroom, it can strongly be argued that the use of authentic texts provides a more practical alternative to simplified texts.' (ibid: 344)

We will, therefore, need more empirical evidence before we can make any strong claims about the relationship between authentic or modified input and language acquisition.

Leow's work is particularly interesting though, because it grounds itself firmly in SLA theory. He hypothesizes that it is probably the learners' own internal language system that determines what is taken in so that 'external manipulation of the input may not only be haphazard but also inadequate to address what may appropriately facilitate learners' intake' (ibid: 342). This concurs with constructivist theories from developmental psychology that see learning as a process of actively selecting out the data necessary for personal development from the overwhelming range of stimuli we are constantly exposed to:

'In contrast to more traditional views which see learning as the accumulation of facts or the development of skills, the main underlying assumption of constructivism is that individuals are actively involved right from birth in constructing *personal meaning*, that is their own personal understanding, from their experiences. In

other words, everyone makes their own sense of the world and the experiences that surround them.’

(Williams & Burden 1997: 21)

Nunan (1996) uses the metaphors of building a physical structure or growing a garden to describe these different views of learning. The traditional view sees language acquisition as a linear, step-by-step process, like laying bricks in a wall, where we can only move on to building the next level once the previous one has ‘solidified’. This is the model that the PPP methodology in language teaching aims to serve, presenting learners with ‘graded’ linguistic items to digest one at a time, but as Skehan (1996) says, it has now largely been discredited in the fields of linguistics and psychology. The garden metaphor, on the other hand, sees language learning as a more organic process:

‘Learners do not acquire one thing perfectly one at a time. Rather, they learn lots of things imperfectly all at once, they forget things and their IL is destabilized when a newly acquired item collides with a pre-existing item.’ (Nunan 1996: 370)

A text-driven approach to learning (Mishan 2005) is more in tune with this model of language acquisition. Providing learners with ‘rich input’ from (authentic) texts, allows them to take different things from the lesson to suit their own particular developing interlanguage systems. As Allwright (1984), Slimani (1992) and Bygate et al. (2001) point out, this is what learners do anyway, even when we force them to march lock-step in the classroom:

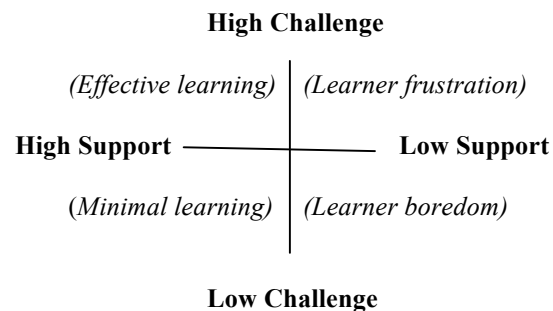
‘... even when a task is chosen (or imposed by a teacher), there is still the issue of what the learner makes of that task. Learners are perfectly capable of reinterpreting tasks, in such a way that the carefully identified pedagogic goals are rendered irrelevant as a learner invests a task with personal meaning, and takes it away from the teacher’s expected path (Duff, 1993). It can even be the mark of a good task that learners are pushed into this type of reaction.’ (Bygate et al. *ibid*: 7)

Another concept emerging from SLA studies that is having an increasing impact on materials selection and task design is ‘*NOTICING*’ (Schmidt 1990; Batstone 1996; Skehan 1998). Schmidt & Frota (1986) and Schmidt (ibid) challenge Krashen’s (1985) view that language acquisition can proceed without any attention to form, claiming that a degree of awareness is important before items can be incorporated into the developing interlanguage system, or as Ellis (1995: 89) puts it, ‘no noticing, no acquisition’. Intake does not necessarily become part of the developing IL system but it is seen as making it as far as the learner’s short/medium-term memory, from where it can interact with, and reshape, information stored in long-term memory in a process that Piaget termed ‘assimilation’ and ‘accommodation’ (see Williams & Burden 1997: 23). Schmidt (ibid) sees six influences operating on noticing, which Skehan (1998) incorporates into his information processing model: a) Frequency of forms in the input; b) Perceptual salience of forms in the input (how much they stand out); c) Explicit instruction; d) Individual differences in processing abilities; e) Readiness to notice; and f) Task demands. Schmidt & Frota (ibid), expanding on an idea first put forward by Krashen, propose a second process that can enhance the acquisition of intake, which they term ‘noticing the gap’. This means learners seeing a difference between their current competence and the information available to them as intake. Ellis (1995: 89) incorporates both of these processes into his ‘weak-interface’ model of L2 acquisition.

What impact do these models of information processing and language acquisition have on the authenticity debate? Authentic material is likely to expose learners to a wider variety of forms but with less frequency than contrived input specifically designed to highlight particular target structures. Ellis (1999), in his summary of studies looking at

the effects of ‘enriched input’, concludes that it can help learners acquire new forms so this may favour contrivance *IF* we are able to accurately predict when learners are ready to notice something. On the other hand, it could be argued that exposing learners to a wider range of forms increases the likelihood that there is something in the input that they are predisposed to acquire, which would favour authenticity. A second difference relates to what exactly learners are able to notice in the input they are exposed to in the classroom. As we saw in section 3, authentic discourse is typically very different from the language presented to learners in textbooks and this will inevitably impact on the way their IL develops: learners can’t notice things that aren’t made available to them in the input. Recently, a number of authors have exploited the concept of noticing with authentic materials to raise learners’ awareness of features not normally brought to their attention in textbooks. For example, Hall (1999) and Basturkmen (2001) both highlight typical features of interactive speech and Jones (2001) focuses on the linguistic realizations of oral narratives. Gilmore (forthcoming), in a one-year quasi-experimental study at a Japanese university, compared the potential of authentic versus textbook materials to develop learners’ communicative competence. He found that the experimental group, receiving the authentic input, made statistically significant improvements over the control group on six out of eight tests designed to measure different types of competence. This result was attributed to the fact that the authentic input allowed learners to focus on a wider range of features than is normally possible (interaction patterns, discourse markers, communication strategies, etc.) and that this noticing had beneficial effects on learners’ development of communicative competence.

In terms of designing tasks to use with authentic materials, we will want to ensure that we do not overload learners' language processing systems by asking them to analyze input for meaning and form simultaneously. This is typically done by allowing them to focus on meaning first before shifting attention to language forms (Batstone 1996; Willis 1996). Mariani (1997) sees the whole issue of text difficulty and task design from the very practical standpoint of providing *CHALLENGE* and *SUPPORT* in the classroom. He argues that all pedagogic activities can be described along two dimensions in terms of the level of challenge and support they provide, and that different combinations of these two factors have different learning consequences:



The effects of challenge & support in the classroom

The most effective classrooms are seen as those where learners have both high challenge and high support, a view which is consistent with both Bruner's (1983) model of 'scaffolding' and Vygotsky's (1978) notion of learning only taking place when learners are working inside their zone of proximal development (ZPD). This is where the

challenge of a task is just beyond the learner's level of competence so that it can only be achieved with support. Hammond & Gibbons (2005) see scaffolding as operating at both macro and micro levels in the classroom: at the 'designed-in level', careful planning, selection and sequencing of materials and tasks ensures that learning opportunities are created where students can operate within their ZPD while at the 'interactional level', teachers and learners engage with each other contingently to jointly construct meaning from those opportunities (see also Swain, Brooks & Tocalli-Beller 2002).

These constructivist and interactionist views of learning to some extent push any distinctions between authentic and contrived discourse to the periphery since, as long as materials and tasks allow learners to operate within their ZPD, it could be argued that their origin is irrelevant. However, we might speculate that authentic materials are often superior because they provide rich input that is more likely to cater to the different stages of development and individual differences that exist within any classroom population.

Skehan (1998) summarizes research which suggests that task design can have different effects on the accuracy, complexity or fluency of learners' output. In the future, then, we can expect task design to be more in tune with information processing models from second language acquisition research.

8. Conclusion

Although much of the research reviewed above points to the inadequacies of current language textbooks and often makes specific recommendations on ways to improve them, change has been slow to take place. Indeed, Tomlinson et al. (2001) identify a growing resurgence of grammar-based syllabuses by major British publishers of ELT courses.

Where change has occurred, it generally takes the form of 'bolt-on activities' added to a

more traditional, structural syllabus (see, for example, the Headway series) and an evolution into a ‘multi-syllabus’, rather than a complete break with the past (Yalden 1987; McDonough & Shaw 1993). There are a number of possible reasons for this rather conservative approach:

- a) With all the wild pendulum swings our profession has been subjected to over the last fifty years or so, there is an understandable reluctance to embrace yet another fashionable trend.
- b) The division of applied linguists and language practitioners into two distinct, and at times hostile, bodies (for a discussion of this issue, see Strevens 1980; van Lier 1984; Allwright & Bailey 1991; Shaw 1992; Hopkins & Nettle 1994; Cook 1998; Judd 1999; Lightbown 2000; Clemente 2001; Thornbury 2001a, 2001b; Widdowson 2003) leads to what Clarke (1994) calls a ‘dysfunctional discourse’. Poor communication between researchers and teachers means that potentially useful findings from research often ‘linger in journals’ (Bouton 1996) instead of making it into the classroom.
- c) Publishers are reluctant to take risks with innovative materials or to change the status quo, given the enormous costs involved in developing global textbooks (Tomlinson 1998/2001). As Thornbury (1999: 15) says, ‘Form is safe. It sells books’.
- d) There are practical difficulties that discourage teachers or institutions from abandoning textbooks in favour of authentic materials, even when this is seen as desirable. Finding appropriate authentic texts and designing tasks for them can, in itself, be an extremely time-consuming process (Crystal & Davy 1975; Kienbaum

- et al. 1986; Kuo 1993; Bell & Gower 1998; Hughes & McCarthy 1998) but to be able to exploit authentic materials to their maximum potential also requires a familiarity with the kind of research literature reviewed in section 3. Few teachers have either the access to these studies, or the time (inclination?) to read them (Judd 1999) and, even if they did, the sheer volume of work available would make it difficult to identify areas with the greatest pedagogic significance. Admittedly, teacher friendly resource books are quickly spawned from new ideas arising in the literature (for example, the 'Resource Books for Teachers' series from Oxford University Press) and these help to bridge the gap between theory and practice.
- e) Teaching learners and testing their progress becomes considerably more complicated once a discrete-point syllabus is abandoned. As Skehan (1998: Ch.5 **page???**) remarks, the 3P's approach 'lends itself very neatly to accountability, since it generates clear and tangible goals, precise syllabuses, and a comfortably itemizable basis for the evaluation of effectiveness'.

Woodward (1996) notes a growing dissatisfaction with current practices within the language teaching profession and suggests that there are signs of an imminent paradigm shift, although, as yet, there is little in the way of consensus as to what exactly we should shift *to*. One possibility is a text-driven approach (Tomlinson 2001; Mishan 2005) which, rather than starting from a predetermined list of lexicogrammatical items to be taught, focuses on teachers (or students themselves) selecting and exploiting authentic materials appropriate to their own particular contexts and needs, using a task-based methodology (Prabhu 1987; Nunan 1989; Bygate, Skehan & Swain 2001; Willis 1996). The syllabus is arrived at retrospectively, from what is made available for noticing in the

input, and in this sense it is more in tune with constructivist theories of language acquisition. Although the text-driven approach would address many of the criticisms cited in this paper, it lacks any real control over the language learning goals since the curriculum is randomly shaped by whatever features happen to occur in the texts selected. It therefore runs the risk of becoming a mishmash of, albeit interesting, materials, deployed without any clear sense of direction. With its emphasis on authenticity, this approach also encourages the notion that authentic texts are automatically superior to contrived ones, something called into question here. By placing learners, rather than authenticity, back at the centre of the debate, and asking what it is they should be able to do by the end of a course, a second way forward presents itself along the lines of van Ek's (1986) 'framework for comprehensive foreign language learning objectives' and Celce-Murcia, Dornyei & Thurrell's (1997) 'principled communicative approach'. This would use current models of communicative competence to structure the syllabus, an approach that often favours authentic materials because of their ability to illustrate a broader range of competencies, but does not discount contrivance. Noticing features in the input would continue to be crucial in this kind of approach, but rather than limiting ourselves to predominantly lexicogrammatical items, the focus would broaden to encompass all aspects of communicative competence. The fundamental question facing us, then, is: *WHAT SHOULD WE GET LEARNERS TO NOTICE IN THE TARGET LANGUAGE?* With an ever-expanding number of features vying for inclusion, but no more class time to teach them, curriculum design is destined to become increasingly complicated and solutions are more likely to be found at the local level rather than through globally published textbooks.

9. Future directions

Suggestions for future work include the following:

- a) More classroom-based empirical research on the effects of text-driven or communicative competence-centred approaches since few longitudinal studies exist at present.
- b) Improved communication between researchers, material writers and teachers to ensure that theoretical insights with pedagogic significance find their way into language teaching materials (Tomlinson 1998: 343).
- c) Improvements in pre- and in-service teacher training to ensure that teachers are up-to-date with developments in the wide range of fields that influence our profession. At present, teacher-training courses, such as the Cambridge CELTA, still tend to emphasize linguistic competence at the expense of the other areas that contribute to learners' communicative ability, thus perpetuating the current bias within language teaching. As we have seen, authentic materials are rich sources of information on different aspects of communicative competence but if teachers are themselves unaware of these insights, they are likely to remain unnoticed in the classroom.
- d) More research into practical ways to test students' performance with communicative competence-centred approaches. Although methods for testing linguistic competence are well established, studies into ways of effectively assessing learners' strategic, pragmatic and discourse competences are in the early stages (Kohonen 1999; Johnson 2000; Shohamy 2000; Young 2002).

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