What is authenticity?

What is Authenticity?

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Genuineness, realness, truthfulness, validity, reliability, undisputed credibility, and legitimacy are just some of the words that are used when we talk about authenticity. Frankly there is a lot of confusion connected to the idea of "authenticity". In his 1994 article in TESL-EJ, David Taylor summarized the inconsistent views surrounding authenticity. Although twelve years have passed it is worthwhile to revisit his arguments for reasons that will become apparent later in this paper.

Taylor's first point was "In many discussions it is not clear whether we are dealing with authenticity of language, authenticity of task, or authenticity of situation" Back in 1985 Michael Breen split authenticity into categories in which authenticity of language refers to authenticity of the texts used as input data for learners, and authenticity of the learners own interpretation of such texts. Authenticity of task is restricted to the tasks conducive to language learning, and authenticity of situation refers to authenticity of the actual social situation of the language classroom

Traditionally, authentic materials have been defined "as those which have been produced for purposes other than to teach language" (Nunan 1988, p. 99). Lee conjectures that "a text is usually regarded as textually authentic if it is not written for teaching purposes, but for a real-life communicative purpose..." (1995, p. 324). However Chavez (1998) echoes Taylor's earlier sentiment in claiming that these definitions are too broad and perhaps even immaterial to language teaching. In the case of texts designed for proficient speakers (or

readers) of the language, Widdowson (1978; c.f 1998) refers to them as possessing "genuineness" —a characteristic of the text or the material itself-and he claims that this is distinct from "authenticity" which refers to the uses to which texts are put. So the claim here is that texts themselves can actually be intrinsically "genuine" but that authenticity itself is a social construct. In other words, authenticity is created through the interaction of users, situations and the texts.

However, Taylor goes on to remark that the general confusion about authenticity and genuineness is compounded by idea of naturalness. What is natural? Does naturalness mean the same thing to everyone? Is naturalness in one context naturalness in another? He concludes that this is a hopeless debate and that we should concentrate instead on "the use and interpretation of texts, which alone can make them "authentic". He states that we should "acknowledge that there is no such thing as an abstract quality "authenticity" which can be defined once and for all. Instead we should acknowledge that authenticity is a function not only of the language but also of the participants, the use to which language is put, the setting, the nature of the interaction, and the interpretation the participants bring to both the setting and the activity.

But then that brings up the issue of "realness" and "reality" and "real-life" which is another facet of the authenticity conundrum. Many of us raised in the communicative language teaching tradition have been led to believe that real-life is "out there" in the outside world and that we must import reality into our classrooms. So we talk about using "realia" for our teaching materials. However Chavez (1998) argues that any text that has been taken out of its original context and away from its intended audience *ipso facto* becomes inauthentic, thus even the "realia" that we import into the classroom is inauthentic.

But if we unpack what is meant by "real" we notice that reality is experienced through the mediation of language. We cannot and do not experience reality "raw"—our thoughts (expressed in language of

some form) are always with us. Language does not distort or reflect reality—language is (to quote John Fiske and John Hartley, 2003) "the active social process through which the real is made." In other words, we create our own authenticity through social interactions, through our *use* of language. Which means the world outside the classroom is not intrinsically more "real"—it is the quality of our social interactions inside that classroom that may seem "unreal" when compared with the outside world. This duality reflects the two meanings of authenticity in philosophy: in one, authenticity refers to correspondence—where authenticity is a quality of realness and in the other, authenticity entails genesis—where authenticity is a product of quality interactions (Cooper, 1983, p. 15). MacDonald (2005, n.p) argues that "language teaching - and in particular perhaps English Language Teaching (ELT) -has clung too long to the first of these notions of authenticity at the expense of the other."

However, Taylor (1994) again seems prescient in his observation that "participants in the language classroom create their own authenticity there as they do elsewhere." Language classrooms are places to learn language and learners (with their teachers) authenticate this social interaction. Lee (1995) claims that "learner authenticity" is only possible if learners feel positive about the materials and react to them as was pedagogically intended. She cautions that learners will not automatically like materials just because they are "realia" or are "authentic"—the materials need to have communicative potential, be relevant to learner experiences and projected needs as well as a host of other factors.

But no matter how communicative or interactional the activities are, the fact remains that the activities are still in a sense contrived or manufactured for the express purpose of making language learning more efficient. As Widdowson (1990) comments (cited again from Taylor, 1994):

> ...the whole point of pedagogy is that it is a way of short-circuiting the slow process of natural discovery and can

> make arrangements for learning to happen more easily and more efficiently than it does in natural surroundings. That is what schools are for, whatever subject we are dealing with. Pedagogy is bound to be a contrivance: that is precisely its purpose. If what went on in classrooms exactly replicated the conditions of the world outside, there would be no point in pedagogy at all. (p. 163)

Tomlinson characterizes this as a debate in which "One side argues that simplification and contrivance can facilitate learning; the other side argues that they can lead to faulty learning and that they deny the learners opportunities for informal learning and the development of self-esteem" (2003, p.5). So perhaps when it comes to the language learning classroom, we need to realistically look at our classroom practices—the activities that we do and what we make our learners do. We need to remember that learners may need "skill-getting" or "pre-communicative" activities before they can successfully do "skill-using" and "communicative" activities (Rivers & Temperley, 1978, p. 4; Littlewood, 1981, p. 8, 1992, pp. 43-44). According to Guariento and Morley (2001) authentic materials can be frustrating, confusing and de-motivating because they are too difficult for lower level learners to comprehend. Thus "the question...is not whether authentic texts should be used, but when and how they should be introduced" (Guariento & Morley 2001, p. 348) or as Cardew (2006) puts it "just because the materials are authentic, this is no guarantee that the lesson will be successful." Will the materials be taught 'well' by the teacher? Will the learners respond positively to the materials?

Brown and Menasche (2006) propose to distinguish between input authenticity and task authenticity by arguing for degrees of authenticity rather than positing that authenticity is a binary concept (authentic or not authentic). They state that the following is implicit in the model:

> While allowing that learners must be encouraged to process authentic language in real situations, we think the necessity

> of authentic materials at all levels of learning and for all activities has been overstated. Our view is that materials that are 'not authentic' in different ways are more than just useful; they are essential in language learning. Non-authentic materials are as valuable as authentic materials. Indeed, there are some situations in which authentic materials are useless-especially when the learners' receptive proficiency is low. (p.3)

Therefore input and tasks each can have degrees or levels of authenticity. They propose five levels for input from "genuine input authenticity", "altered input authenticity", "adapted input authenticity", "simulated input authenticity" and "inauthenticity" noting that in their estimation no type is better than the other. They define three types of task authenticity: "genuine", "simulated" and "pedagogical" noting that "there is probably no such thing as real task authenticity; that classrooms are by their nature artificial. The only genuine task authenticity for language learning may well be total immersion in the target language environment *without an instructor*" (emphasis added, p.5).

As a first step we need to consider the materials we use in our classrooms in light of these degrees of authenticity. If we think about some of the materials that are used in language classrooms some that come to mind are: textbooks, video, audio and broadcast media, "realia", charts, maps, Teacher prepared materials, Student created materials...among many others. We are under obligation to ensure that the materials that we bring into the classroom are acceptable and appropriate models of language-that they do not (even unintentionally) cause our learners to develop patterns of interaction that would mark them as strange or deviant or simply odd. To do that we need to consider: Whose language?—the expressions that are considered acceptable and appropriate vary according to the people who are speaking and depend on a range of factors such as age, sex, and the nature of their relationship. Also we need to consider, in which contexts? And for what purposes? — acceptable and appropriate

language can also vary according to where the interaction is taking place and reasons that the participants have for interacting. And finally, by what means?—the boundaries between written and spoken language are becoming more and more blurred—we send written email messages that at times resemble telephone calls, we leave phone messages that sound like written memos—yet there are expectations of what is acceptable and what is appropriate.

In joint research with Yuriko Kite, Midori Nishizawa, and more recently with Joyce Maeda we have been examining the authenticity or the "genuineness" or the "realism" of pedagogical materials such as Monkasho approved textbooks, Hollywood films and other broadcast media (Kite & Tatsuki, 2005; Tatsuki, et al, 2005; Tatsuki & Nishizawa, 2005; Tatsuki & Kite 2006a and b). To do so we have compared specific features in a large corpus of film speech data and a corpus of textbook dialogues to the "naturally occurring" data that has been reported in pragmatics research collected through ethnographic field work. In "ethnographic" fieldwork the researcher collects samples of naturally occurring language-usually by taking field notes. So even though the samples in some ethnographic studies come from natural sources, they are not always direct-they are filtered through the notes and memory of the researcher so it might not be accurate to refer to them as natural data. This point will become important later on.

Our decision to examine Monkasho textbooks is based on the fact that textbooks continue to be for many teachers the central element in classroom teaching in junior high schools in Japan. Because of the Ministry of Education centrally controlled curriculum, textbooks are subject to Ministry approval and also tend to define much of what takes place in classrooms. Therefore, it is important to regularly examine ministry approved textbooks and assess their contribution to the communicativeness of the classroom.

A logical next question is "Why analyze films?" Why should we even care about the use of films in language teaching? Well, the

simple answer is that the use of films, television and other broadcast media in language teaching is widespread and quite popular. (Sherman, 2003). However teachers usually give an uncritical acceptance of film. Films are assumed to be natural and authentic yet there has been very little validation research on film/broadcast materials to determine if they are accurate representations of natural discourse, or if they are feasible supplements to course texts, or even if they are pedagogically appropriate materials. So we decided to consider the differences and similarities between naturally occurring data-Film/broadcast data-and Textbooks. Our research questions addressed things like: What are the similarities/differences? Do the differences matter? Could the differences be pedagogically beneficial?

In general our results and those of other researchers indicate that the pragmalinguistic or form oriented features of dialogues in films and in television interviews, resemble naturally occurring data. (Manes & Wolfson, 1981). For instance, we found that the syntactic forms of compliments (e.g. Your hair looks nice/That is a great hat), the topics of the compliments and the ways the compliments were reacted and responded to tended to occur with the same frequency in films as they did in ethnographic data. The same was true for apologies; the syntactic-semantic patterns of apologies, The types of offenses that sparked an apology and the apology strategies (such as whether to offer to repair or fix the problem, or to promise not to let the offense happen again, or to just explain why the offense happened) were all similar in terms of frequency when compared with ethnographically collected naturally occurring data. Also, films generally provided complete sequences—in the case of telephone dialogues, they usually started with a ringing phone and ended with a hanging up action and they also usually showed coherent, plausible sequences in between.

However, there were also differences: One sociopragmatic difference was gender distribution—who compliments or apologizes to whom differed significantly between film and the ethnographic data.

Table 1. Authenticity validation studies to compare film, textbook and 'natural' data

Study	Data Sources	Findings	
		Convergent	Divergent
Apologies			
Kumagai (1993),	TV drama,/ films, ethnographic	Apology Strategies, Offense Types, Syntactic-Semantic Patterns	Gender Distribution
Kite & Tatsuki (2005)	Films, ethnographic (Holmes, 1989;1990)	Apology Strategies, Offense Types, Syntactic-Semantic Patterns	Gender Distribution
Compliments			
Rose (2001),	Films, ethnographic data (Manes & Wolfson, 1981; Miles, 1994)	Syntactic formula, response strategy, topic	(ethno vs other) Gender Distribution, Adjective Choice
Tatsuki & Kite (2006a),	Films, ethnographic data	Syntactic formula, response strategy, topic	(ethno vs other) Gender Distribution, Adjective Choice
Tatsuki & Nishizawa (2005)	Films, ethnographic data, TV interviews	Syntactic formula, response strategy, topic	(ethno vs other) Gender Distribution, Adjective Choice
Nishizawa, Tatsuki & Kite (2005)	Films, TV interviews, ethnographic data, EFL textbooks	(all) Syntactic formula, response strategy, topic	(ethno vs other) Gender Distribution (ethno data / textbooks vs film/TV Interviews) Adjective choice
Kishimoto (2006)	Films, ethnographic data, EFL textbooks	Syntactic formula, response strategy, topic, Adjective Choice	(ethno vs other) Gender Distribution (ethno data / textbooks vs film/TV Interviews) Adjective choice
Requests			
Fernandez-Guerra, & Martinez-Flor, (2003).	Film, ELT textbooks		Request strategies (ELT uses more imperatives, direct strateg)
Closings			
Grant & Stark (2001) Bardovi-Harlig, et al. (1991). Myers-Scotton & Berstern, (1988).	TV soap operas, ESL textbooks	Rarely closed topics or conversations	More variety in components of closing sequences (TV interv)
Telephone Dialogues			
Wong (2002)	CA literature, EFL textbooks (Hong Kong)		Summons-Answer Sequences, Recognition-Identification, How-are-you
Tatsuki & Kite (under review)	CA literature, Films, EFL textbooks (Japan), (Hong Kong)	(CA data & Films) Summons-Answer Sequences, Recognition-Identification, How-are-you	(textbooks vs all others) Summons-Answer Sequences, Recognition-Identification, How-are-you
Tatsuki, Kite & Nishizawa (2005)	CA literature, Films, TV Interviews, EFL textbooks (Japan), (Hong Kong)	(CA data & Films) Summons-Answer Sequences, Recognition-Identification, How-are-you, Closings	(textbooks vs all others) Summons-Answer Sequences, Recognition-Identification, How-are-you, Closings
Initial Conversations (first conversation with a stranger)			
Tatsuki (1992a&b)	Films, natural data (Kellerman et al, 1985), ELT videos	(film & natural data) topic choice, topic sequence	(ELT video vs others) topic choice, topic sequence (Natural data vs others) closings
Grammar/Syntactic Patterns			
Shimakawa (1995)	3 Indiana Jones films, HS EFL textbooks	Films offer full coverage of grammatical forms found in textbooks	
Eken (2003)	Film, ESL textbooks	Unsubstantiated claims/ assertions	
Takahashi (1995)	Film, EFL textbooks	Unsubstantiated claims/ assertions	
Michaelides (2002)	Film, EFL textbooks	Unsubstantiated claims/ assertions	
Trombly, (1999)	Film, textbooks	Unsubstantiated claims/ assertions	
Sherman (2003)	Film, textbooks	Unsubstantiated claims/ assertions	

According to ethnographic data, women compliment each other the most—a whopping 54%. In films women compliment women the least. But of even greater interest, men compliment women and other men significantly more in films than they do in "real life" according to ethnographic studies of naturally-occurring speech. (Holmes, 1989; 1990).

Now this could just be evidence of a Hollywood conspiracy to create the perfect man—the man who is sensitive, caring—the man that women will buy tickets to see. However, this difference could point to a fundamental research design flaw in the ethnographic studies that collected the naturally occurring data. If one considers that most of the data was collected by graduate students, most of whom were women, it becomes apparent that these women likely did not have access to situations and conversations where men complimented or apologized to each other. (... locker rooms, men's gatherings, private moments...) Additionally, they would not be privy to private conversations between other men with other women. Furthermore, even if men complimented or apologized to these women, perhaps they did not recognize the utterances for what they were. So it is possible that these female grad students unwittingly underreported compliments and apologies made by men. It may be that men really do compliment and apologize more than ethnographic research suggests. Incidentally, according to our research Monkasho textbooks have men complimenting men the most and men complimenting women the least (Nishizawa, Tatsuki, & Kite, 2005; Tatsuki & Kite, 2006b).

Therefore on the one hand, there appears to be a lot of similarities between film and naturally occurring data—and these similarities likely influence our perception of their realism. On the other hand there are differences. Yet from a pedagogical perspective, are these differences really a bad thing? To answer that question, let's consider adjectives. According to American research on compliments in naturally occurring data, there are five adjectives that account for two thirds of all adjectives used: Good, Nice, Beautiful, Great, and

Pretty. (Miles, 1994).

In a comparison of adjectives used in compliments in films, TV interviews and in ethnographic data, the "big 5" adjectives only accounted for about one third of the adjectives used in films and TV interviews. Pedagogically speaking, this finding can be interpreted two ways. First, it looks like a small range of adjectives will cover a lot of complimenting situations. So learners encountering compliments in natural conversations will likely hear these 5 adjectives the most. Therefore if the pedagogical aim is to prepare learners to take part in everyday interactions, it is safe to limit models to these 5 adjectives, at least at first. And according to the textbook data, it looks like this is what textbook writers are doing. But what if one of our pedagogical aims is to increase adjective vocabulary? For richer exposure to contextualized vocabulary, films and TV interviews look like a better choice. So it seems that our pedagogical aims are very important in determining which materials are acceptable and appropriate.

So now it seems appropriate to turn our attention to classroom practices—the activities that we do and what we make our learners do. To do that I would like to return to a comment made earlier about classrooms and reality. The world outside the classroom is not intrinsically more "real"—it is the quality of our social interactions inside that classroom that may seem "unreal" when compared with the outside world. It is interesting to note that concerns about the apparent artificiality of classroom discourse were first expressed in ESL contexts. The world outside the ESL classroom holds infinite opportunities and resources for interactions in L2 so some may feel that the EFL classroom is deficient by comparison.

However, what about the EFL context? In some cases the classroom is the major or even sole source of input and the only opportunity for interaction. And being such, it is even more incumbent upon teachers to make the best use of class time. But it is also important for teachers to find ways to make out-of-class hours

conducive to language learning. One way is through the promotion of activities for the building of language awareness, first in L1 and then in L2. This is especially important to encourage pragmatics development. Even in our native language, we tend to be very pragmatically unaware and the rules of socio-pragmatics are infinite and therefore impossible to fully describe.

In *Pragmatics in Language Learning Theory and Practice,* Yuki Kakiuchi (2005) suggested that we train our learners to do language variation analysis. Learners can be encouraged to pick one speech act or conversational function that interests them. They can begin by studying their own native language. Learners record every available instance in which they hear native speakers use a specific word or expression. In recording the data, learners are also asked to collect information such as the speaker's gender, approximate age, social standing, and context in which the expression was used. Next, the learners analyze the data by counting the frequency of selected expressions categorized by selected variables. Finally, they report the results to the class and share their findings. This then can be repeated but for the purpose of collecting L2 data. In a foreign language setting, learners can be encouraged to collect instances of the speech act or conversational function from films or broadcast media. Once that is done they share their findings and then do some comparisons with the L1 data.

However, these kinds of language awareness building activities are supplementary to the real work of interaction in the classroom. We need to "get real" about interaction and one way to do that is to promote integrated skills approaches such as whole language, cooperative learning, task-based learning, content-based learning or multiple intelligences. The advantage of integrated skills approaches is that: It exposes English language learners to authentic language; It challenges them to interact naturally in the language; Learners rapidly recognize the richness and complexity of the English language; Learners see that English is not just an object of academic interest nor merely a key to

passing an examination; instead, English becomes a real means of interaction and sharing among people; It allows teachers to track students' progress in multiple skills at the same time; It promotes the learning of real content, not just the dissection of language forms; It can be highly motivating to students.

Instead of studying **about** English in order to **learn** it, our students should study **in** English in order to **acquire** it. If as mentioned earlier, language is "the active social process through which the real is made" and if we create our own authenticity through social interactions, through our use of language, a huge burden falls on the teacher. Even with the poorest, most unnatural sounding textbook or supplementary materials in the world, a skillful teacher can find a way to create authenticity through social interactions. But even the best, most brilliantly crafted textbook or infinite supplementary resources are useless in the hands of an unskilled teacher. Therefore it would make imminent sense to spend at least as much on teacher training and professional development as is currently spent on textbook development. In the meantime, research currently being done by observing classrooms and compiling examples of "Best Practices" such as the work by Yuri Hosoda and David Aline (see the May 2006 issue of JALT Journal for one example) will contribute much to the future professionalism in English Language Teaching.

In summary—Authenticity? So what? As curriculum reformers and syllabus designers, we may need to re-think what we mean by authenticity in terms of appropriateness. Richard Day (2004) writes. "The use of authentic materials is a major preoccupation in English language teaching (ELT). Teachers often try to ensure their students use authentic materials; publishers proclaim proudly that their materials are authentic. The assumption, of course, is that authentic materials are to be preferred over other types of materials."

But maybe we are missing the point—maybe appropriateness, pragmatic and pedagogic, should be the primary consideration. Pragmatic appropriateness takes into account the identity of the

interacting people and the context in which they are communicating. So we need to think in terms of speech communities and communicational contexts. For example, in a medical context, what would be the differences in how a request is performed by a doctor to a nurse, or a nurse to a doctor, or a doctor to a patient? We also need to consider the effects (or perlocutionary force) of what is said to whom, when or whether the effect of what was said was intentional or not.

To take another example, in a film like E.T., the screenplay depicts children who use vulgar, rude language to each other and to their mother. One reason for this was entertainment—from the point of view of the audience who is a ratified over hearer, the more outrageously these kids spoke in the opening scenes, the funnier the scenes and more poignant the later drama. Whether the screenplay was capturing a legitimate "slice of life" in the America of that time is debatable. What is clear though, is that I would never want my own children to imitate the verbal behavior of those kids—no matter how fluent and grammatically perfect they are as speakers of general American English. Yet, E.T. remains a popular choice among language teachers in Japan according to ALC Cinema Scenario Series ads.

This is related to pedagogical appropriateness. In terms of sequence we need to prioritize what is taught, when. We also need to think of the big picture—what are the range of communicational situations and speech acts that our learners will encounter. To do this we will need to think more in terms of English for Specific Purposes. We will need to define the context of use, rather than continue teaching English with no particular purpose other than surviving entrance exams. To do that we need to place pragmatics (and the learner) and teacher professionalism at the center of an educational and curricular revolution-as the organizing principle (Rose & Kasper, 2001). That is the "so what."

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