Evaluating authenticity in spoken discourse: the case of the bestselling textbook *Português XXI 1*

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Presentation overview

1. Authenticity – the challenges of a multi-dimensional concept

2. Portuguese material analysis – the spoken discourse in *Português XXI 1*

3. Proposal for adaptation of material

Authenticity – the challenges of a multi-dimensional concept

- Authentic texts were originally defined by their origin as "any material which **has not been produced for the purposes of language teaching**" (Nunan, 1989: 54)

- Material's authenticity depends on its "naturalness of form, and an appropriateness of cultural and situational context that **would be found in the language as used by native speakers**" (Rogers and Medley, 1988: 468)

Authenticity
is the word.

Authenticity – the challenges of a multi-dimensional concept

- Materials' authenticity <u>also</u> depends on:
  - The task
  - The level of the student
  - The learning language environment

Task authenticity

- Breen (1985: 66) advocates the choice of tasks "which are authentic to how people best undertake learning and, simultaneously, engage the learner in authentic communication (...) conducive to both learning and communicating."

What´s the student´s role?

- The learner needs to authenticate the material presented, by responding appropriately and positively to them (Lee, 1995; Widdowson, 1980)

Language environment and the teacher

- The language learning environment is capable of generating its own authenticity (Clarke, 1989)

- Teachers can implement **motivational strategies** to influence the quality and type of motivation that drives foreign language learning

What are authentic materials?

- Authentic materials are those which allow **engaged students** to develop their L2 language skills, in order to **communicate** with others, in any situation.

Portuguese material analysis – the spoken discourse in

Português XXI 1

- Text book: *Português XXI 1*
  - Aimed at beginner students of Portuguese
  - Designed for young adult learners
  - It is the most used commercially-produced material in this area.
  - Published by LIDEL, the leading publisher of PLE
  - **The author proclaims** a <u>communicative approach</u> and highlights the fact that the book favours the development of listening comprehension and oral production in situations of <u>real verbal communication</u>.

Aural text analysis

- Short and oversimplified version of speech acts (text 1 and 7)

- Acceptable in written form but artificial when seen as an oral performance (text 5 and 9)

- Aim to raise extended awareness of a particular grammar construction (text 5)

- Exchanges with distinct turns and uniform pace

- Most of the dialogues concentrate on knowledge of the language rather than its use

- Modelling or didactic exposition of the language is not always to be avoided, as long as the textbook author is able to provide rich language samples and help develop authentic interpretation but…

- Absence of spontaneous speech features

  - Impact on students' receptive ability: students can't understand speakers outside of the classroom

  - Impact on students' production ability: production of similarly implausible language use

Task analysis

- In most cases, there is simply the indication to listen to the text and then read it(!)

- A significant number of texts is used as language input (texts 1, 2, 3 and 10)

- Some aim to assess comprehension (texts 4, 5 and 9)

- Others aim to focus on grammar structures (texts 5, 9 and 10)

- There are no pre-listening tasks and the post-listening activities concentrate on knowledge of language (texts 5, 6 and 9)

Proposal for adaptation of material

- There is a need "for **transactional materials** which, while not in themselves authentic, **can be authenticated by the learner**." (Clarke, 1989: 84)

- Material and task should be tailored **according to learner's needs**.

- It is crucial to assist beginner students to **approach fully authentic texts and tasks progressively**, instead of making them lifelike from the start (Schmitt, 2002: 206)

Final comments

- There is a **strong case for pedagogical processing of materials** and, in particular, **semi-scripted dialogues** for low ability students.

- An **authentic aural text** for a beginner's class would not necessarily be a recording of a conversation between two native speakers unaware of the recording device but **one that engages the students, develops their listening skills, mirrors the target language and serves as a plausible model for oral communication**.
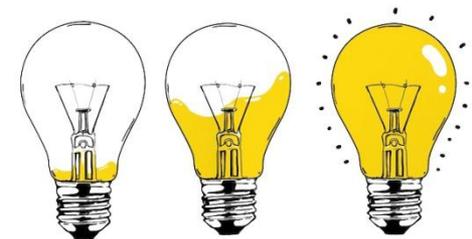
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