THIS IS THE FINAL DRAFT OF A PRESENTATION

Title: Defining Authenticity: Input, Task, and Output

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Abstract: This paper calls for an end to binary definitions of authenticity in language learning. Instead, it favors a multifaceted model better suited to capturing the complex realities of materials, activities, and learners' language production. It suggests that authenticity is best defined in terms of five types of input, three types of task, and two types of output and that each type has its own pedagogical value.

The use of corpus-based approaches in ELT has once again raised to prominence the issue of authenticity in language materials (Trappes-Lomax 2004: 152). Indeed, authenticity in materials design and learning activities has never been far from the thoughts of ELT professionals, perhaps chiefly because various positive effects have been claimed to flow from such authenticity, among them: increased student motivation due to face validity; provision of appropriate cultural knowledge; exposure to 'real' language; attention to future student needs; and support of more creative teaching (Richards 2001: 252-253).   Authenticity is an important feature of communicative approaches to language teaching, and there is often considerable rhetorical pressure on materials writers and teachers to provide authentic materials. As Clarke has said, the discourse of

authenticity is a normative one. He refers to the "elevation of 'authentic' materials to the level of what appears to be a categorical imperative, a moral *sine qua non* of the language classroom" (1989: 73). Mishan notes that "authenticity is a positive attribute, collocating with desirable qualities such as purity, originality and quality" (2004: 219).

Tomlinson states that there are typically two sides in this debate: "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: 5). Presenting a balanced position, he also says, "My own view is that meaningful engagement with authentic texts is a prerequisite for the development of communicative and strategic competence but that authentic texts can be created by interactive negotiations between learners…. I also believe, though, that for particularly problematic features of language use it is sometimes useful to focus learners on characteristics of these features through specially contrived examples…." (Tomlinson 2003: 6).

We might say that historically there have been three common positions:

1. The strong authenticity position: language is best learned if all input is authentic

2. The non-authenticity position: language is best learned if all input is specially written for the learners

3. The intermediate authenticity position: language is best learned if input is varied in degree of authenticity according to the learner's proficiency and the purpose of the lesson at that point in the curriculum.

Various definitions have been offered for authenticity, the most common being an over-simplified one that is based on the original intention of the writer or speaker: anything produced expressly for language learning is not authentic, while anything uttered for any other purpose is authentic. Thus, "Texts are said to be authentic if they are genuine instances of language use as opposed to exemplars devised specifically for language teaching purposes" (Johnson and Johnson 1998: 24).

Yet authenticity is not an easy concept to pin down. McDonough & Shaw note, "The issue of 'authenticity' has been somewhat controversial…." (2003: 45). Dunkel (1995: 98) points out that terms like "authentic language," "authentic discourse," and "authentic materials" are all defined in "holistic, vague, and imprecise ways." Widdowson early in this debate claimed that authenticity is not inherent in texts but is found in "the act of interpretation" (1979: 165). That is, it is a measure of reader or listener response. This claim has raised the issue 'authentic for whom' -- the teacher, the learner, or the materials writer?

Types of authenticity: a model

What follows is a way of imposing a kind of conceptual order where none presently exists. We propose a model that distinguishes input authenticity, task authenticity, and output authenticity. We also argue for several degrees of authenticity because we believe that it is not a binary concept and because in practice complete authenticity is impossible to achieve in the classroom – and here, by 'complete' we mean authenticity measured in terms of all three elements: input, task, and output, each of which can be complex in the classroom and in materials. There are types and degrees of each, and the types and degrees can be combined in various ways, creating overall

teaching episodes that are difficult to characterize in a simple way as authentic or inauthentic.

Before we present the model, we want to make explicit what is implicit in it. 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.

Types of Input Authenticity

'Input' is that 'text' (written or spoken) that is read or heard by the learner. We propose five types of input authenticity. We reject the word 'level' to avoid the implication that one type is better than any other. The five types are:

1. *Genuine input authenticity*: The input is created only for the realm of real life, not for the classroom, but is used in language teaching. No changes at all are made in the text. Examples: An entire movie watched without interruption and without consulting the script or a review article from the newspaper; copies of a newspaper are distributed in class and used as the basis of language exercises.

2. *Altered input authenticity*: There is no meaning change in the original input, but it is no longer exactly as it was because of changes like lexical glossing, visual

resetting, or changes in pictures or colors. Examples: A movie shown in five-minute segments, with vocabulary work and discussion following each segment, or a newspaper article that has been photocopied and annotated.

3. *Adapted input authenticity*: The input is created for 'real life' but adapted by the classroom teacher. Words and grammatical structures are changed, usually to simplify the text (e.g., difficult words are changed to synonyms or glossed). This category also covers the case of elaboration, in which a text is expanded to make it more comprehensible to learners. Paradoxically, adaptations may in fact have the effect of making the text more difficult because the original links between ideas may be removed in the process of simplification. Examples: Graded readers of *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield*.

4. *Simulated input authenticity*: The input is created for the classroom and attempts to copy the style and format of the genuine. It is written by the author or teacher *as if* the material were real and *as if* for a real audience. It may have many authentic text characteristics and is often indistinguishable from the genuine. Examples: An advanced textbook with readings typeset as newspaper articles, listening textbooks with written-for-classroom newscasts.

5. *Inauthenticity:* The input is created for the classroom with no attempt to make the materials resemble genuine authentic materials though there may be a few, possibly incidental authentic features. Here, we would emphasize that 'inauthenticity' does not imply that such materials are of lesser pedagogical worth than those that are genuine, altered, adapted, or simulated. Examples: Timed readings with apparatus for learners to time themselves and note their

progress; grammar exercises; input for pronunciation practice (e.g. minimal

pair words) and formal explanations of grammatical points.

Types of Task Authenticity

Theorists have tended to speak of task authenticity as an either/or proposition, and

while many of the tasks that are done in the classroom are seen as inauthentic, it has also

been observed that classrooms have their own authenticity (Taylor 1994). Thus, although

even the most realistic role play does not accomplish a real world task (train tickets do

not get bought in classrooms), the task is an appropriate learning activity.

Commonly accepted definitions of task have included Nunan's (1989: 10)

formulation: "a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending,

manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is

principally focused on meaning rather than form." Breen's (1987: 23) definition also

focuses on the classroom: "'Task' is therefore assumed to refer to a range of work-plans

which have the overall purpose of facilitating language learning – from the simple and

brief exercise type to more complex and lengthy activities such as group problem-solving

or simulations and decision-making."

We define 'tasks,' for purposes of this model, somewhat more narrowly as what

learners do with input. Tasks are differentiated from output in this model in that 'task'

refers to the process learners go through in producing some output, whereas 'output'

refers to the product, the language actually uttered or written. For example, a task might

be to compose a paragraph and its output is what is handed into the instructor; or the task

may be to select an answer from a multiple choice set and its output is the circled answer indicating the choice.

In offering the following typology of task authenticity, we admit 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. Nevertheless, we define three types of task authenticity: genuine, simulated and pedagogical.

1. *Genuine task authenticity* exists when learners engage in tasks in ways and for reasons they would in the real world.

2. In *simulated task authenticity*, there is some attempt to copy the real within the context of the classroom, but the focus is on language learning.

3. *Pedagogical task authenticity* occurs when there is no attempt to copy the real, but the task is useful within the context of the classroom.

Consider the example of reading a newspaper editorial. The *genuinely authentic task* would be to read the article silently and move on to reading something else without imposed discussion or language exercises. This would be considered inappropriate in a classroom, unless it was time assigned for sustained silent reading, and even then, if the learner would rather have read a magazine than the newspaper, the purpose is language learning and the task is not genuinely authentic. *Simulated task authenticity* would apply, for example, to an activity in which learners are paired and must imagine themselves to be roommates discussing the editorial. In this, there is some attempt to copy the real world. Another common task with simulated authenticity would be one in which the instructor requires the learner to write a letter to an editor to comment on an actual

editorial. *Pedagogically authentic tasks* include answering comprehension questions about the editorial, comparing two editorials on one subject and listing the similarities and differences, and writing a composition on the topic of the editorial.

Authentic Output

As defined above, output refers to the product, the language actually used or spoken. In the classroom, we differentiate two kinds based on a criterion of communicative reality. We feel that recognizing output separately begins to address the issue of individual response raised by Widdowson (1979).

1. *Genuine output* is that which is based on the learner's actual beliefs or personal knowledge, conveying what the learner thinks is real or true information. Examples*:* contributions to class discussion, essays.

2. *Simulated output* is essentially all the rest, in which the learner is not communicating information that is personally believed or known. Examples: performance of a role play or the repetition of a sentence in a pronunciation exercise.

Conclusion

Turning now to an overall view of a teaching episode including input, task, and output, it is clear that complex permutations of the types and characteristics of authenticity may occur. It is therefore worth thinking twice before claiming authenticity for materials or classroom activities. Consider the following three examples reflecting varied input, task and output authenticity:

Example: Genuine input (a bus schedule taken from the rack at the station) feeds into a simulated task (buying a ticket from another learner posing as a clerk), which leads to simulated output (if the 'customer' really doesn't want to go where the bus goes).

Example: Adapted input (a graded reader) is used for a genuine task (pleasure reading) and results in genuine output (a class discussion in which learners express their own opinions).

Example: Inauthentic input (a pairwork task in which learners fill in the blanks with information about imaginary people) leads to a pedagogically authentic task (the task is appropriate to the learners' levels) using simulated output (negotiated understanding of the task).

Additional examples are given in the Appendix as Table 1, in the form of a two-dimensional grid showing input type and task type.

We have presented a model of authenticity that we consider useful, and we hope it promotes discussion towards a more consistent and precise use of the term. We need to stop thinking about authenticity as a moral imperative and as an either/or quality and rather think of it as multifaceted and applicable to different phases of language classroom processes.   (2140 words)

Appendix

	Genuine task	Simulated task	Pedagogical task
Genuine input	Learners watch an L2 movie or read for pleasure.	Learners use a newspaper to role-play roommates discussing the news.	Learners outline an article in a newspaper.
Altered input	Learners watch an L2 movie or read for pleasure, but with supporting glosses to explain idioms.	Learners watch an L2 movie with supporting glosses for idioms, then role-play the characters.	Learners answer comprehension questions about an annotated, photocopied article.
Adapted input	Learners read simplified *A Tale of Two Cities* for pleasure.	Learners all read the same simplified *A Tale of Two Cities* and discuss it.	Learners answer comprehension questions in simplified *A Tale of Two Cities*.
Simulated input	Learners read a simulated article in a textbook because they are interested in the topic.	Learners decide which restaurant to eat at, based on simulated advertisements in a textbook.	Learners answer questions in a reading textbook containing simulated readings.
Inauthentic input	Inauthentic material does not lend itself readily to genuine tasks.	Learners do pronunciation practice in the context of a scripted dialogue.	Learners complete a pairwork activity about imaginary people.

Table 1 Typical classroom events characterized by input and task. In principle, Output will vary by individuals.

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