

Online authentic texts in business English classes – a practical perspective

Online autentické texty vo vyučovaní obchodnej angličtiny – praktický náhľad

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Abstract: Foreign language teaching is common practice in all types of schools in today's globalized world to prepare students for active use of language in professional practice.

Using information communication technologies (ICT) to teach a foreign language in the tertiary level, can greatly contribute to students' better preparedness for the labor market, whether at home or abroad. The use of these technologies also contributes to reaching high effectiveness in the learning process, increases students' motivation to learn the language, leads to logical thinking and increases students' ability to express themselves in communication.

In this paper the authors focus on the practical use of authentic online texts for teaching English as a foreign language mainly at the tertiary level of education. The main purpose is to discuss the issue of authenticity in EFL classrooms and give a practical picture of the possibilities offered by the wide range of authentic online texts.

Key words: authentic texts, internet, communicative tasks, online texts

Abstrakt: Výučba cudzích jazykov je v dnešnom globalizovanom svete samozrejmosťou na všetkých typoch škôl. Vyučovanie cudzích jazykov na terciárnej úrovni by malo pripraviť študentov na aktívne používanie jazyka v odbornej praxi.

Používanie informačných komunikačných technológií (IKT) pri výučbe cudzieho jazyka v terciárnom sektore môže výrazne prispieť k lepšej pripravenosti študentov na trhu práce, či už doma alebo v zahraničí. Využívanie týchto technológií tiež prispieva k dosiahnutiu vysokej efektívnosti v procese učenia, zvyšuje motiváciu študentov učiť sa jazyk ako taký, vedie k logickému mysleniu a zvyšuje schopnosť vyjadrovať sa v komunikácii.

V príspevku sa autorky zameriavajú na praktické využitie autentických textov online vo výučbe angličtiny na konkrétne účely najmä v terciárnom sektore vzdelávania. Hlavným cieľom autoriek je prediskutovať otázku authenticity na hodinách anglického jazyka a poskytnúť praktický obraz o možnostiach, ktoré ponúka široká škála autentických textov online. Hlavným cieľom autoriek je dokázať, že použitím autentických on-line textov je možné dosiahnuť komunikačnú situáciu vo výučbe cudzieho jazyka, ktorú je možné transformovať na autentickú komunikačnú situáciu pod vedením učiteľa.

Kľúčové slová: autentické texty, internet, komunikačné úlohy, online texty

Introduction

Since learning a foreign language is an inseparable part of students' everyday life whether they realize it or not, teachers should use authentic materials based on the interests of the students. In this way, students have a chance to become familiar with authentic language situations in their field of study and be prepared for active use of the language in professional practice. By using ICT in a class, students are better prepared for the foreign or domestic labor market. It also increases students' motivation to work on the language independently, ability to think logically, and their ability to express themselves in communication more clearly. Moreover, ICT brings an infinite number of authentic updated articles on given topics. Using ICT is common in Western countries; however, Slovakia is behind in this realm. However, almost every student possesses a smartphone, tablet or a laptop with an internet connection and is tech-savvy, which brings new possibilities about how to integrate technology into the classroom and how to work with authentic online reading materials.

Authentic materials

Traditionally, authentic materials have been defined, as those which have been produced for purposes other than to teach language. Lee (1995, in Tatsuki, 2006) 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 ..." However, Chavez (1998, in Tatsuki, 2006) claims that these definitions are too broad and perhaps even immaterial to language teaching. In the case of texts designed for proficient speakers of the language, Widdowson (1978) 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 (in Tatsuki 2006) goes on to remark that the general confusion about authenticity and genuineness is compounded by the idea of naturalness. He suggests that this is a hopeless debate and that we should concentrate 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. (1994, p. 4).

Wallace (1992, in Berardo, 2006) defines authentic texts as "...real-life texts, not written for pedagogic purposes". They are written for native speakers and contain "real" language.

The problem arises when a teacher or material writer has to match what is happening in the classroom and what is happening in the real life. Task-based courses are the answer for that as "the more authentically the classroom mirrors the real world, the more real the rehearsal will be and the better the learning and transfer will be" (Arnold, 1991, p. 237).

Reasons for using authentic materials

There are certain reasons that underline the use of authentic materials in teaching a foreign language:

- learning is enhanced by the use of texts based on students' interests
- in classes that use authentic material, diversity and spontaneity are increased
- students encounter diverse vocabulary and different structures
- students can later benefit from their previous cultural and schematic knowledge compared to target situations and genres with their own culture
- application of acquired knowledge into the practice – real life and supporting students' positive approach to learning (Leskovjanská, 2015)
- it has an impact on psychological factors of learning a language, such as attitudes (Bacon, Finnemann, 1990) and aspects of motivation (Peacock, 1997)

Sources

A rapidly growing amount of literature explores ways of incorporating authentic materials into the classroom instructions (Devitt, 1997; Repka, 1997; Guariento & Morley, 2001; Mishan, 2005; Gilmore, 2007; Berešová, 2015). The sources of authentic materials that can be used in the classroom are infinite, but newspapers, magazines, TV programs, movies, songs and literature are considered the most common ones. The Internet is taken as the most useful source. While newspapers and any other printed material date very quickly, the Internet is continuously updated, more visually stimulating and interactive, therefore it promotes a more active approach to reading rather than a passive one and provides easy access to endless amounts of different types of material. From an even more practical/economical point of view, trying to obtain authentic materials from abroad can be very expensive, an English paper/magazine can cost up to three to four times the price. Often by having unlimited access in the workplace, looking for materials costs nothing, only time. Authentic materials should be the kind of material that students will need and want to be able to read when travelling, studying abroad,

or using the language in other contexts outside the classroom. Authentic materials enable learners to interact with the real language and content rather than the form. Learners feel they are learning a target language as it is used outside the classroom.

Criteria for choosing the authentic materials

When choosing materials from the various sources, it is therefore worth taking into consideration that the aim should be to understand meaning and not form, especially when using literary texts with emphasis on what is being said and not necessarily on the literary form or stylistics. Nuttall (in Berardo, 2006) gives three main criteria when choosing texts to be used in the classroom suitability of content, exploitability and readability. Suitability of content can be considered to be the most important of the three, in that the reading material should interest the students as well as be relevant to their needs. The texts should motivate the students as well as. Exploitability refers to how the text can be used to develop the students' competence as readers. A text that cannot be exploited for teaching purposes has no use in the classroom. Just because it is in English does not mean that it can be useful. Readability is used to describe the combination of structural and lexical difficulty of a text, as well as referring to the amount of new vocabulary and any new grammatical forms. It is important to assess the right level for each student.

Criteria for choosing the authentic materials follow:

Suitability of Content	Does the text interest the student? Is it relevant to the student's needs? Does it represent the type of material the student will use outside of the classroom?
Exploitability	Can the text be exploited for teaching purposes? For what purpose should the text be exploited? What skills/strategies can be developed by exploiting the text?
Readability	Is the text too easy/difficult for the student? Is it structurally too demanding/complex? How much new vocabulary does it contain? Is it relevant?

Presentation	Does it “look” authentic? Is it “attractive”? Does it grab the student’s attention? Does it make him want to read more?
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Internet in the teaching process

The Internet has tremendous potential as a tool for teaching EFL. Sayers (1993) mentioned that network-based technology can contribute significantly to:

- **Experiential Learning.** The World Wide Web makes it possible for students to tackle a huge amount of human experience. In such a way, they can learn by doing things themselves. They become the creators not just the receivers of knowledge. Information is presented in a non-linear way and users develop more flexible thinking skills and choose what to explore.
- **Motivation.** Computers are most popular among students as they are often associated with fun and games. Student motivation is increased, especially whenever a variety of activities are offered. This in turn makes students feel more independent.
- **Enhanced student achievement.** Network-based instruction can help pupils strengthen their linguistic skills by positively affecting their attitude towards learning and by helping them build self-instruction strategies and promote their self-confidence.
- **Authentic materials for study.** All students can use various resources of authentic reading materials either at school or from their home. Those materials can be accessed 24 hours a day at a relatively low cost.
- **Greater Interaction.** Random access to Web pages breaks the linear flow of instruction. By sending e-mail and joining newsgroups, EFL students can communicate with people they have never met. They can also interact with their own classmates. Furthermore, some Internet activities give students positive and negative feedback by automatically correcting their on-line exercises.
- **Individualization.** Shy or inhibited students can be greatly benefited by individualized, student-centered collaborative learning. Highfliers can also realize their full potential without preventing their peers from working at their own pace.
- **Independence from a single source of information.** Although students can still use their books, they are presented with opportunities to escape from canned knowledge and discover thousands of information sources. As a result, their education fulfils the need for interdisciplinary learning in a multicultural world.

- **Global Understanding.** A foreign language is studied in a cultural context. In a world where the use of the Internet becomes more and more widespread, an English language teacher's duty is to facilitate students' access to the web and make them feel like citizens of a global classroom by practicing communication on a global level.

Working with on-line texts

With the increasing technical progress, online text is becoming increasingly popular with both students and teachers. As Kunovská (2017, cited by Pavlíková, 2019) points out, the didacticization of online text takes place depending on the level of the foreign language, the type of subject taught, and the conditions for acquiring the language. The advantage of such online texts is that they are available anytime and anywhere. When using these online texts, the following types of approach can be adopted:

Pre-prepared online materials – online texts are easy to download, save, modify and print. This, however, is quite time consuming from the point of view of the teacher

Online materials in the classroom – these are those situations when the exact translation of the text is not so important. Strategies like skimming and scanning are used.

Online materials for homework – students use the internet as a tool for finding certain information connected to a certain topic.

Also, Zamborova (2020) adds that it is important to expose students to various online reading texts. As an example, new technologies and mobile reading apps might be a great part of it as they enhance language acquisition through involving students with authentic materials.

Typology of tasks used with online texts

The tasks we can use to work with texts and online texts can be divided into three groups. These tasks are the so-called pre-reading tasks, while-reading tasks and post-reading tasks. However, as Homolová (2003) states, this distinguishing is only formal, because some of the post-reading tasks require the student's work even during reading and cannot be accomplished without focusing on all phases of the work. Pre-reading tasks are important in preparing students for working with a foreign language, releasing tension, motivating students and creating a favorable atmosphere in the language classroom. The aim of these tasks is to attract the students' interest.

While-reading tasks must be predetermined. Depending on the objective of the lesson, the teacher sets the reason for reading in the form of a task. Tasks can be simpler or more complex, requiring a more comprehensible understanding of the text.

According to Homolová (2003), the post-reading tasks may be considered as a “springboard” for developing different language skills. By expressing opinions, students are given the opportunity to process the topic text.

Pre-Reading Activities

The purpose of pre-reading activities is to

- a) Introduce the topic and stimulate the students’ interest in it
- b) Give them the reason for reading the text, which may be based on application to real life
- c) Provide language preparation and support so they can understand the important points
- d) Help them become aware of what type of text they are going to read and give them strategies for understanding it
- e) Help them use their previous knowledge to make predictions about the text

To choose the most appropriate reading activities for working with an authentic online text, a teacher should ask a wide range of questions about both the text and the students:

1. *What do they already know about the topic?*
Its aim is to catch students’ attention regarding the topic and see their background knowledge
2. *How can I build on this knowledge and use it?*
Its aim is to include students’ personal knowledge or opinions that may color their reading.
3. *Why should they want to read this text?*
Its aim is to assess the potential relationship between the text and the students and to consider techniques to make them more interested in the reading if it is not naturally appealing.
4. *What lexical items are essential for understanding this text?*
Its aim is to make students feel confident about key vocabulary before they start reading, and increase their vocabulary.

(Holden, Nobre, 2018, pp. 45–46)

Examples of pre-reading activities:

1. Headings
 - A. Predictions – Based on the title, students can predict what the text is going to be about
Examples:
 - According to the title, what is the article going to be about?
 - What do you think an XYZ abbreviation stands for in the title of an article?
 - B. Definitions of the words: Students are asked to define a word in the article in their own words;
 - C. Creating new headings – after reading the article, students are asked to come up with some variations of the headings. They should defend their reasoning with help from the text.
2. Questions before reading – before the reading itself, specific questions are presented from students to look for in the text

KQED (2020)

While-Reading Activities

While the students have already focused on the topic and identified potential language problems, they may work with the text *during* reading. The teacher can encourage them to see the purpose of reading to

- Understand the writer's aim
- Understand the language
- Clarify the content and ideas
- Analyze the text based on its type, purpose, and the social context in which it was written

To choose the most appropriate during-reading activities for working with an authentic online text, a teacher should ask a wide range of questions about both the text and the student:

1. *What is the purpose of this text? Why did the author write it like this?*
Its aim is to focus on the writer's purpose and remind students that it is a written communication between the reader and the writer, so it is important for them to understand the text organization and structure.
2. *How is the text organized? What style does the writer use?*
Its aim is to encourage students to look for the language clues.
Examples in reading for gist:

Where would you find this text? Do you think the writer is a man or a woman?
Does the text convey a positive or negative message?

Examples in reading for detail:

Write a subtitle for each paragraph.

Are the following statements true or false?

3. *What reading skills can we practice with this text?*

Its aim is to distinguish between detailed reading, reading for the gist, or intensive and extensive reading. (Holden, Nobre, 2018, p. 47–48)

Examples of while-reading activities:

1. Highlighting – old method but still efficient – students highlight the unknown words; the next stage will be to highlight the verbs in blue or nouns in green. KQED (2020).
2. Working with key words – based on the students' choice of key words, they are asked to create sentences using them or to write a short report
3. Summarize – students are asked to summarize the text in one or two sentences either after each paragraph or the whole text.

Post-reading activities

The purpose of the post-reading activities is the following:

- discuss both the content and form of the text
- synthesize what they have read
- relate the content to the students' own ideas and experiences
- stimulate further activities

To choose the most appropriate post-reading activities for working with an authentic online text, a teacher should ask a wide range of questions, about both the text and the students:

1. *Can the students suggest 'what happened next?'*

Its aim is to give students opportunities to respond imaginatively to the text.

2. *Do they know of similar situations or events? Can they suggest where to find out more about this topic?*

Its aim is to link the text to the students' own lives.

3. *How does the text make the students feel? Do they agree with what they have read? Do they think the information is real?*

Its aim is to raise awareness of the importance of critical thinking when reading.

(Holden & Nobre, 2018, p. 49)

Examples of post-reading activities:

1. Foreword – students create a new beginning for the article, they put extra ideas what happened before the main text itself.
2. Thought bubble – students get extra worksheets with a bubble of dialogue and they need to write what specific people think about the dialogue
3. Fly on the wall – have students comment on how they feel/think about the text from a fly's perspective. They take a very close look at the ideas and word choice.

Further examples for working with authentic reading materials:

Street signs

Working with authentic material in authentic situations may happen when students encounter new surroundings in a foreign country where English is an official language, e.g. they can happen to be in a language course or on a trip in an unknown city where they have to read everything closely – every sign, every street name. In this case, ***the reading activity is intensive*** as students have to really go deep in the information and pay a very close attention.

Timetables

Students are asked to work with certain webpages for timetables of buses, trains and planes. They look for specific information based on their requirement. They have to look for special signs concerning transportation operating on the work-days/weekends or when taking extra luggage for example. ***This activity is an example of detailed reading*** as students look for specific details provided on the specific information.

(Adapted from Holden & Nobre, 2018)

Conclusion

In the last few decades, the internet has influenced all our lives. Children are becoming more and more skilled in using modern technologies. Because of this technological progress we are facing higher expectations in all parts of our everyday life. At the same time, the development of information and communication technologies places new demands on educational systems, but also offers a wide range of its application. Implementing the World Wide Web in teaching foreign

languages enables the teacher to bring the real world into the classroom. The internet and various applications offer an immense amount of up-to-date authentic material that can be interesting and motivating for students as it depicts real stories, real people, and current events in the world. By using appropriate texts and tasks we can increase students' interest in learning a foreign language and develop their language skills.

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