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► **To cite this version:**

Richard Duda, Henry Tyne. Authenticity and Autonomy in Language Learning. 2010. hal-00525058v1

HAL Id: hal-00525058

<https://hal.science/hal-00525058v1>

Preprint submitted on 11 Oct 2010 (v1), last revised 28 Jan 2011 (v2)

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Authenticity and Autonomy in Language Learning

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Forthcoming in: *VALS-ASLA Bulletin suisse de linguistique appliquée* 92 (L'exploitation didactique des documents authentiques audio et vidéo dans l'enseignement des langues étrangères)

In this article we propose to look at the use of authentic materials in terms of learning rather than teaching. The shift in practice at the CRAPEL centre for applied language research since the early 1970s concerning the use of authentic materials can serve to illustrate this change in the way we consider the relation between learners and authentic materials. The history of the use of authentic materials is characterised by an evolution towards total responsibility by learners for both the choice of materials and the type of use they put them to (accompanied by a shift in meaning whereby authenticity comes to apply more to what the learner does than to the origin of materials). The strategy of using exercises ready-prepared by teachers, whilst still in existence, can be brought into question, at least in part, according to the types of learner and the technological possibilities available, including Internet. We consider that the use of authentic materials can lead to the development not only of linguistic but also methodological autonomisation in learning.

Key words:

Second language learning, authenticity, autonomy, corpus, ICT

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Dans cet article, nous nous proposons d'aborder l'exploitation des documents authentiques en termes d'apprentissage et non en termes d'enseignement. L'évolution même des pratiques au CRAPEL (*Centre de Recherches et d'Applications Pédagogiques en Langues*), depuis 1970, concernant cette exploitation des documents authentiques peut illustrer le changement dans la manière d'envisager le rapport entre apprenants et documents authentiques. En effet, l'histoire de l'utilisation des documents authentiques se caractérise par une progression vers la totale prise en charge par les apprenants et du choix et de l'utilisation des documents authentiques grâce notamment aux questions de technologie et de disponibilité des documents authentiques (ce qui s'accompagne d'un glissement de sens dans la mesure où l'authenticité qualifie davantage ce que fait l'apprenant que le contexte de production du document original). La stratégie des exercices tout préparés par les enseignants, sans être révolue, semble en mesure d'être reconsidérée au moins en partie selon les publics d'apprenants et les possibilités technologiques actuelles dont Internet. Fondamentalement, nous pensons que l'exploitation par les apprenants des documents authentiques peut contribuer à leur autonomisation non seulement linguistique mais également méthodologique.

Mots clés:

Apprentissage de langues, authenticité, autonomie, corpus, TIC

1. Introduction

The use of authentic materials¹ (AMs) is generally considered standard practice nowadays in language pedagogy (Beacco 2007: 29). However, since the introduction of AMs in language teaching and learning, essentially from the 1960s² onwards, questions have been raised concerning the authentic nature of the materials themselves. Also, with the uptake of communicative and action-oriented methods, the idea of “learner centredness” comes to the fore,

¹ Unless otherwise specified, we use the term fairly loosely to cover all types of authentic materials for language learning: written, audio, etc. The basic definition which is used as our starting point here is materials which are produced for reasons other than language learning, i.e. occurring “naturally” and not for language teaching purposes (Abe et al. 1979).

² The idea of authenticity in teaching materials had, in fact, been considered long before the 1960s as Gilmore (2007) points out with a remark by Henry Sweet dating from the end of the 19th century: “The great advantage of natural, idiomatic texts over artificial ‘methods’ or ‘series’ is that they do justice to every feature of the language” (Sweet quoted in Gilmore 2007: 97). See also note 7 on the use of sound recordings.

giving us further cause to question AMs, in particular in relation to authenticity of task or purpose.

In this article, we first look at the context in which AMs came to be used before going on to deal with the subsequent areas of discussion and debate, looking at how the development of the use of AMs links through to the development of greater awareness of learning methodology as the learner engages with the target language. We conclude that a wide definition of AMs is required in order to take on board the many different considerations that surround language learning and language use at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

1. Language teaching and authentic materials

The origin of the use of AMs basically stems from the desire to give learners “real” language: although in the very early days this was highly limited (e.g. hearing authentic voices with the phonograph in the early twentieth century – see note 7), in terms of more recent practice, it has essentially been a case of preparing learners for real communication via materials that relate to the situations that they might experience in the target language. The recourse to AMs as a possible substitute to foreign language textbooks gathered pace in the 1960s. The main type of AMs up to then had been literary texts³ which were (and still are) “cannibalised” by textbook writers. The development of suitable sound and video recording technology in the 1960s⁴ helped to further promote the use of off-the-air recordings. The Nancy-based *Centre de Recherches et d'Applications Pédagogiques en Langues* (CRAPEL) experimented with American television advertisements (Duda et al. 1972), British news bulletins and French radio advertisements and news broadcasts (Duda et al. 1973), BBC radio programmes such as *Woman's Hour*, *Any Questions*, *Top of the Form* and *Parents of a Star* (CRAPEL 1970a) and songs, sketches, etc. (CRAPEL 1970b). For these early days, AMs were typified by authenticity of origin: they were seen as slices of “real” target language. Moreover, they came as a welcome alternative to existing materials, whether in the form of invented examples or highly edited or decontextualised samples.

An argument that has typically been used to back AMs in communicative language teaching is, perhaps not unsurprisingly, that they are more interesting (and more motivating) than invented materials (Little and Singleton 1991: 124). Regardless of the content – and even the richness (see below) – of the materials, there is a simple gain in terms of general attractiveness for

³ The question of how literary texts should or might be used in the foreign language classroom is still open to debate. Few satisfactory solutions have been proposed (see however Martin & Hill 1991a, 1991b).

⁴ In comparison with written documents, which were not easy for teachers to reproduce, listening material was relatively accessible and duplicable.

the learner: a newspaper cutting, for example, certainly looks the part inasmuch as it is clearly identifiable as a genuine sample of target language (and target culture); a radio programme complete with jingle certainly sounds the part, too. This feature, coupled with the diversity of materials (cuttings, news broadcasts, posters, etc.) can make accessing the target language more interesting. The “captivating” quality of authentic materials is important since learners who are stimulated by the input are more likely to be open to it, thus facilitating language acquisition (Krashen 1982). However, this of course does not mean all learners are interested in all AMs: in fact, some AMs may be quite boring in terms of content, or some learner groups (e.g. adolescent learners in a typical school setting) may not see the intended “interesting” or “captivating” side of AMs. They may, too, appear old-fashioned or “untrendy” to certain learners. Indeed, appreciation of AMs can be subject to changing aesthetics: for instance, music, dress sense, icons, etc. may go out of fashion or simply lose their appeal quite rapidly.

In the early days, AMs were basically input-oriented, being used for the development of listening or reading skills based on a bottom-up or “semasiological” model of comprehension: in listening, for instance, dictation-type exercises based on discrimination via word-for-word transcription of short excerpts of recordings were common in CRAPEL practice, as was, of course, the use of exercises such as multiple choice questions, polar questions, content or *wh*- questions and true/false statements, the still common staple of comprehension activities and exercises. However, the bottom-up approach to AMs for comprehension was found to be self-defeating since any AM of a reasonable length will generally display quite a complex collection of lexical and grammatical items which cannot fit into a progressive step-by-step approach as in a textbook whereby language is typically presented in relation to the stated or intended level of the learner.

2. Authentic materials are a rich source of target language input

AMs are typically considered to be a rich source of target language input. Gilmore (2007: 103), in his overview of authentic materials and authenticity in foreign language learning, opposes “contrived materials of traditional textbooks” which display a “meagre and frequently distorted sample of the target language” and authentic materials which “offer a much richer source of input for learners”. Tomlinson (2008: 3) is equally severe, claiming that “many ELT materials (especially global coursebooks) currently make a significant contribution to the failure of many learners of English [...] to acquire even basic competence in English and to the failure of most of them to develop the ability to use it successfully”. He goes on to argue that exposure to authentic language is crucial. Amongst the elements in teaching materials that he suggests facilitate language acquisition and development are those that

provide a rich input and those that promote discovery and independent learning (Tomlinson 2008: 6). Whilst richness can be interpreted as meaning diversity, it can also mean inherent richness, i.e. materials full of worth for learners (indeed, Gilmore 2007 goes on to mention that authentic materials can be exploited by learners in many different ways; see Boulton 2009 on the various applications of authentic spoken material for language learning).

However, for some experts, AMs were considered – and still are in some cases – too difficult for some learners, in particular beginners or lower intermediate learners (e.g. Coste 1970). For example, the nativist approach to second language acquisition developed by Krashen (see Krashen and Terrell 1988) has claimed that teachers should give learners “comprehensible input” (whatever that actually means) involving not only simplified language but also repetition and comprehension checks. The group of researchers at the CRAPEL, on the contrary, considered that, provided sufficient support is available for the learners, AMs can be used by beginners or lower intermediate learners⁵. For example, a CRAPEL beginners’ course for reading English (Abe and Duda 1975) comprised full length newspaper articles, complete with questions in French⁶. The basic idea was that a low level of mastery of the target language should not affect the ability to access AMs. Indeed, as Little and Singleton (1991: 124) have argued, AMs can be used with low-level learners “provided they are given the right kind of preparation”. For example, these authors advocate the use of a “chain of activities” leading into the AM. Elsewhere, Kamber and Skupien (2009), working with foreign students on listening skills in an academic context, demonstrate the importance of the order in which different activities are to be carried out. In terms of learning methodology, we could say, then, that getting learners to engage with AMs is about getting them to know just what they can gain from them and how, in what ways, promoting metacognitive strategies using their mother tongue (or another working language) rather than the target language (Duda 2006). The separation between materials and activities or exercises is interesting. Some might argue that clumsy questions in the target language might not be understood, even though the target document is. Some of the engineering students who used the CRAPEL beginners’ course for reading English suggested that questions in English could help them find the sections of the text wherein lay the answers to the questions. Questions in French posed the additional problem for them of accessing the AM since they had the extra task of figuring out what English words might correspond to the French words used in the questions. The court is still out on the issue. Obviously, if the class is

⁵ The age of learners, however, can remain a problem. Primary school beginners are obviously not to be expected to be able to tackle certain kinds of AMs which would be used with adult beginners, and vice versa.

⁶ There were still beginners in English in French Higher Education in the 1970s. They had studied German and possibly Latin and Greek at Secondary School.

international and several nationalities and languages are present, the target language is unavoidable, perhaps with English stepping in as a *lingua franca* for instance in French as a foreign language classes (see Bailly et al. 2009).

In practice, then, it was found that AMs (whether written or spoken) could hardly be used exhaustively since to engage with them fully simply took too much time, with the risk of becoming a tedious and drawn-out exercise for the learner and also with the risk of over-complicating the learner's approach to the target language. Therefore, a more "globalising" (and perhaps somewhat superficial) approach to AMs was considered to be in order. This was, in a sense, more of an "onomasiological" or top-down approach, based on what the learners already knew (or thought they knew) about the topics in the texts. Gradually the bottom-up model of comprehension, especially in listening, was demoted to an occasional activity aimed at developing phonological discrimination and syntactic chunking. Learners were reminded that, when listening to a recording, even native listeners need not understand each and every word and that they have the ability to guess, predict, infer and hypothesise about what is coming up in order to construct their own comprehension (Harley 2001: 311-345). This approach was related to the theoretical/practical assumption that comprehension is primarily lexical, i.e. the more words you know and can recognise, the more you will understand (Nation 1990). Grammatical knowledge, in other words, was deemed less crucial in listening/reading than in speaking/writing. However, recent work on input-based grammar teaching (following VanPatten's theory based on selection of attentional resources – see VanPatten 2002) has shown how attention to certain meanings of formal features in the input (e.g. verb inflections) prior to exposure may be more beneficial than taking on a flood of language (in which learners see many examples of input forms which are not subsequently targeted) so as to speed up the progress in fixing form-function relations in interlanguage development (see Marsden 2005, 2006; also see corpus consultation and accessing concordance lines below).

Rich input can also be mediated or negotiated. In his work on the "interaction hypothesis" (following on from Krashen's original input hypothesis – see Krashen 1982, 1985), Long (1983) sought to show how the context of language production can be manipulated (e.g. promoting linguistic/conversational adjustments) to achieve input as a dynamic component in learning which can be acted upon by the learner (and teacher) to make it more comprehensible (comprehension checks, repetitions, clarifications, etc.). This is also the case in the study by Pica et al. (1987) in which negotiation is found to facilitate comprehension: these authors (1987: 753) mention the importance of "redundancy in input" (see also more recently Kamber and Skupien 2009 on redundancy in spontaneous spoken data as an

aid to comprehension). The work of conversation analysts on ordinary everyday conversation has shown how negotiation by native speakers is constantly required to achieve understanding (see Sacks et al. 1974). The implications of this are the following: we have an input that is authentic in terms of production (i.e. it is a real exchange that takes place and not something staged for the purposes of creating learning materials) and not “simplified” as such, but which may present negotiated features that are more or less useful for the learner to acquire the target language, whatever the objective “richness” or complexity of the actual material. For example, we could imagine an authentic document such as the video recording of a university lecture being delivered in an interactive manner, with checks for comprehension, requests from the floor for clarification, etc. Although this may not necessarily be intended for a non-native audience – indeed it may not involve any teacher-learner interactions of the type given in the studies mentioned above – it may well constitute a more “accessible” resource for an eavesdropping learner than a more traditional, monological one since s/he can pick up the interactive nature of how understanding is achieved. So, we can reasonably suppose that certain types of materials are more or less suited to learners solely on account of the type of input they display (there are of course many other factors that can be considered related to individual preferences, prior content knowledge, aims, learning style, motivation, attitudes, beliefs, etc.). Moreover, we can suppose that learners who know how (and why and when) to negotiate input are more likely to benefit from a wide range of authentic materials through the types of activities they implement in order to deal with input (Pica et al. 1987).

3. Authentic materials are not reality

Hymes (1972), in his classic SPEAKING model, identified a number of elements that enable us to consider language in relation to the context of production: Setting, Participants, Ends, Acts, etc. In other words, language is inextricably linked to the context in which it is produced. This can be a problem insofar as it becomes difficult to expect learners to cope with the many context-bound features of language which, precisely because they have been lifted from the original situation of production, have, in a sense, lost their authenticity. Widdowson (1998) has famously tackled the difficulty of connecting learner with context. Arguing that AMs can only be incomplete accounts of reality, he questions the suitability of this “partial description” for pedagogical use. For example, a newspaper article is generally written with a particular discourse community in mind and the writer typically makes assumptions about who the readers will be and what they will know and understand. How can this article be ratified by learners who do not meet these criteria for understanding? On these grounds, Widdowson actually argues against the use of AMs for learners:

I would, on the contrary, argue against using authentic language in the classroom, on the fairly reasonable grounds that it is actually impossible to do so. The language cannot be authentic because the classroom cannot provide the contextual conditions for it to be authenticated by the learners. The authenticity or reality of language use in its normal pragmatic functioning depends on its being localised within a particular discourse community. Listeners can only authenticate it as discourse if they are insiders. But learners are outsiders, by definition, not members of user communities. So the language that is authentic for native speaker users cannot possibly be authentic for learners.

(Widdowson 1998: 711)

In fact, Widdowson goes on to argue that language has to be recontextualised: he suggests some appropriate ways for making language become real (rather than importing outside realness) within the classroom by focusing on authentic output in carrying out specific tasks (Widdowson 2000: 8).

However, as Chambers (2009) stresses, in dealing with the issue of authenticity in materials, a lot depends on what we make of the notion of “context” in attempting to follow this type of argument: if we restrict our approach to the close contextual conditions in which the material was produced, we are bound to exclude much material as “non-authentic”, including for the most part the reading of all literary texts, even by native speakers! The debate on the authenticity of context of production bears some resemblance to that pertaining to the “naturalness” of data in sociolinguistic enquiry: “the aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain these data by systematic observation” (Labov 1972: 209). We find the same basic conclusion in both cases: “realness” cannot be extracted from the field. In the case of sociolinguistic enquiry our inability to capture realness is due to the presence of a researcher; in the case of AMs it is due to the impossibility of gathering all the contextual features with the sample⁷ (and the subsequent problem of re-using the material elsewhere). Just as the observer’s paradox has been played down in more recent years (see in particular Cameron et al. 1992; Mondada 1998), the authenticity debate has become less polarised (e.g. see Adami 2009 mentioned below). And although the fact that the learners are not the intended audience of the original productions can be a problem, this is by no means a novel type of situation in communication as Bell’s (1984) classic “audience design” model has shown: “unratified” receiving or “eavesdropping” is a genuine means of accessing

⁷

However, for language teaching purposes, it could be argued that different levels of language are more or less “extractable” in relation to the relative complexity of the original context of production. For example, as Salaberry (2001) shows in his retrospective on technology in language learning, the beginnings were typified by the presence of a particular kind of authentic material in the form of simple sound recordings (use of the phonograph documented in an article published in 1918) which would serve as a model for learners in a way that the teacher could not.

language in which, typically, very little contextual information is available to go on. Obviously, the more the receiver is distanced from the elements that allow him/her to gain understanding, the more difficult the task becomes. This, of course, does not only apply to learners: an outsider in general will not share the appropriate codes and information for gaining understanding.

Moving on from the idea that authenticity has to do with the conditions in which materials are gathered and in turn re-used out of context, we can focus on authenticity elsewhere, for example in terms of the degree of appropriateness of the material for a given purpose. Adami (2009), working with immigrant learners in France, proposes varying degrees of authenticity, along a continuum, with creation of materials being seen as a legitimate and often necessary task. For this author, the simple dichotomous approach (authentic vs invented) is not tenable for certain practical, pedagogical, cultural and linguistic reasons: he pleads for a graded approach. This stance is backed by the fact that the learners in question are immersed in “authenticity” the day long and so materials need not always be seen as crucial vectors of “realness” in input. In fact, documents can be created more or less based on what typically happens in authentic situations following detailed study of these. As Beacco (2007: 30-31) stresses, the creation of realistic materials implies knowledge of what typical texts usually contain⁸: we can look at certain parts of authenticity (e.g. distribution of forms) based on a sound linguistic description with a view to studying these or recreating certain “realistic” materials, examples or explanations (corpus informed material). And, as Carter (1998: 52) suggests, this option, which involves modeling materials on authentic patterns in corpora, represents a “middle ground between authentic and concocted data”. McCarthy (2004: 9) also addresses this issue in the creation of teaching materials: “the Corpus informs the textbook writers, who then use the information to create familiar activity types with authentic language that reflects the natural contexts of the Corpus” (see following section). Obviously, recreation is a delicate issue and must not be considered synonymous with the more controversial act of “cleaning up” data for learners (see discussion in Duda et al. 2009). Recreation can go beyond the linguistic level. In the case of the bilingual LANCOS⁹ corpus (see Debrock et al. 1999), pedagogical concerns constituted the starting point for the recreation of various scenes supposed to be evocative of everyday situations (Debrock et al. 1999: 48). The comparative approach allowed researchers working with learners of French in Flemish-speaking Belgium to hone in on elements of “naturalness” in typical

⁸ There is an issue here insofar as invented or simplified sources (which may be considered “typical texts” in some cases) can in turn be used for enquiry: for example, what should be made of a corpus of invented examples or a corpus of simplified novels for language learners (Allan 2009)? See also the study of authentic and simplified reading texts by Crossley et al. (2007) in which the merits and limitations of each are brought to the fore through linguistic analysis.

⁹ <http://bach.arts.kuleuven.be/elicop/>. (07/12/09)

interactions as they were spontaneously played by native speakers of each of the two languages (French and Flemish). In the 1980s, the CRAPEL developed listening materials for French as a Foreign Language (see Carton et al. 1986). Some AMs were re-recorded with the help of actors and members of the CRAPEL to improve sound quality and avoid exorbitant replication fees, particularly for a television weather forecast! (It is to the singer Renaud's honour that he waived all fees for the use of one of his songs). Recreation is routinely used, for example, in the film industry in the technique known as post-synching: realistic sounds (including effects as well as lip-synched voice dubbing) are added to the film post-shoot and these may be carefully selected so as to reinforce certain desired effects or reactions (see Szarkowska 2005 on the issue of recreation and authenticity in film translation). Cinema-goers typically do not question these sounds although they are not the actual sounds that were heard as the film was being shot. In fact, in most cases, if the actual sounds were to be used, then the audience would probably be quite disappointed.

4. Corpora and data-driven learning

As Gilmore (2007) argues, the findings from corpus studies (in particular McCarthy 1991; McCarthy and Carter 1994, 1995) suggest that learners must have access to contextualised language insofar as this forms a part of communicative competence. Having dealt with sociolinguistic context in the previous section, we would insist here upon the importance of the *linguistic* or "collocational" context which is brought to the fore through corpus studies: "know a word by the company it keeps" (Firth 1957: 11). By looking at large collections of linguistic data, teaching/learning materials can be produced that reflect the typical frequency, saliency or patterning of given items (this is, of course, in turn linked to the sociolinguistic context: in situation X we can expect to find feature Y – see Bilger and Tyne 2009). For example, the importance of attending to linguistic context for observing word use in the target language is pointed out by McKay (1980), who stresses the usefulness of a computer corpus for accessing representative samples of given items so as to help provide useful information in order to better predict more general patterns in language use.

In the corpus-based paradigm known as "data-driven learning" (DDL), Johns (1991a, 1991b) proposes to get learners engaging directly with corpus data: "cut out the middleman [...] the underlying assumption being that effective language learning is a form of research" (Johns 1991b: 30). In this approach, an inductive, "research-first" method is used: learners look at the data in order to see what emerges. This has been termed "authenticity of methodology" (Mishan 2004: 225). For example, in the case of *soy* vs *estoy* (see figures 1 and 2), a well-known "problem" for learners of L2 Spanish, we see

concordance lines¹⁰ giving a list of occurrences in the target language from which it is possible for a detective learner to derive rules of usage looking at the ways in which these words occur and the forms they typically occur with.

.. que... yo hubiera deseado tener ese talento musical. Yo soy músico. Pero... el talento musical que tiene ese niño, o
la gente seguirá haciendo lo que le da la gana. Entonces, yo no soy partidario de... de la fuerza por la fuerza misma, soy enemigo
... que a pesar de lo se... lo setentón que soy , pues... estoy trabajando cada vez más, cada vez más porque
en... entendiéndome, en el sentido peyorativo del término... Soy ecologista en la medida en que respeto mucho la naturaleza y me gusta admirar la
... estudios y tal, de acuerdo, es decir, yo no soy un hombre, hoy por hoy, todavía preparado para esto; pero sí soy
Amargura, ¿ no? Inf. - No soy hermano, no. No soy hermano de ninguna cofradía de Sevilla. Sin embargo me gustaba mucho, cuando pequeño
la vida sevillana. ¿ Usted ha vivido siempre en Sevilla? Inf. - Soy sevillano y, aunque he viajado mucho, pero siempre mi residencia ordinaria ha sido
esto se convierte en mi trabajo y - dejé de estudiar definitivamente y ahora pues soy esto, ¿ no?. Pero la verdad es que él no me ha
empiezo por decir, yo no vengo aquí a defender a los defraudadores. Yo soy de los españoles que con ese señor que está allí, creo que no somos
ha monopolizado a Calderón. Pero Calderón no pertenece a la crítica literaria. Yo soy enemigo de la crítica literaria aunque estoy en ese campo, ¿ no? por

Fig 1. Concordances for *soy*

ciclos Lim por mucho tiempo? - Cualquiera sabe, pero yo desde luego no estoy ni cansado ni aburrido. Además, siempre se pueden renovar las cosas y buscar
. bueno... Enc. 1 - - Yo estudié Filosofía, me estoy graduando de Letras, y soy lingüista... Inf. - - Está
yo recuerdo que en la época, también vuelvo a hablar, desde luego no estoy defendiendo a Juan Vicente Gómez, porque pa... para mí es una
¿ cómo va a resolver el asunto del inglés? Inf. - Yo ya estoy estudiando. Enc. - ¿ Ah, sí? Inf. - Ah,
. - Sí. Inf.b. - Bueno, ahora, en este momento estoy yendo aquí a Miami Beach. Inf.a. - Claro, y..
de alejamiento en eso, y... en ese sentido sí yo no estoy de acuerdo. Enc. - Pero ahora que sus hijos ya están grandes por
mujer que necesita liberación en Bolivia? Inf.a. - Pero, yo no estoy de acuerdo, con esa... diremos con ese cambio radical de cierta
otro y no se puede trabajar en esa forma, ¿ no? Y yo estoy de acuerdo que realmente en la época de Banzer ha habido mucho progreso. Enc
Absolutamente, completamente la empleada. O sea que yo directamente, no, no estoy incluida en eso ¿ ya? Yo no, yo no participo de nada en
limitado que cada cual tiene, sin duda alguna, quiero situarme en ella y estoy convencido de que es la mejor. No estoy diciendo que los chicos de la

Fig 2. Concordances for *estoy*

Is this authentic material or not? In terms of the context of production-exploitation there is, of course, the inherent problem if we follow the type of argument developed by Widdowson (see Widdowson 2000) which, as Cappeau and Gadet (2007) maintain, holds as far as our understanding of the original productions is concerned. There is another problem which is to do with the presentation of the data: when we think of more traditional AMs

¹⁰ Selection of 100 random examples extracted from Mark Davies' online *Corpus del español*. <http://www.corpusdelespanol.org/>. (10/12/09)

(authenticity at the level of the production), we generally think of images, articles, programmes, etc. i.e. materials that have some overall form and can be recognised as a whole. This is not the case for concordance lines. Indeed, as Stubbs (2001: 152) points out, this type of presentation is characterised by repetition: “it makes visible, at the same time, what frequently co-occurs syntagmatically, and how much constraint there is on the paradigmatic choices”. In other words, as Stubbs goes on to observe (2001: 153), patterning is brought to the fore through computer-assisted presentation: there is no way an individual can gain access to these patterns by physically trying to look through the whole corpus (which may contain many millions of words). Kettmann (1999) sees the use of concordance consultation as “input enhancement” since not only are typical patterns brought to the fore in genuine language samples, but also certain areas of uncertainty or prejudice (e.g. in teaching grammar) are avoided.

So, whilst we may have what is essentially authentic data (i.e. it is not produced for language teaching purposes), we necessarily have a presentation of this in a highly “inauthentic” manner, i.e. lines of concordances are not text and speakers of the target language do not actually produce them as such (cf. Mishan 2004). However, what is importantly brought to the fore in this instance is the frequency of occurrence of certain items, of the collocational constraints on given words, etc. For example, as Frankenberg-Garcia (2005) demonstrates with the example of *auburn*, a corpus-based approach, targeting real occurrences, allows the learner to see that this word is only used in relation to hair colour: therefore there is no need for him/her to register *auburn* as being a freely available word meaning reddish-brown, potentially available for describing any object of that colour in the target language. In terms of language acquisition, we could argue that this type of approach, whereby learners come to notice certain constraints on forms, could constitute an effective means of speeding up the processes of reorganisation and restructuring in the development of interlanguage (Ellis 1985; McLaughlin 1990). This type of approach also allows learners and teachers to acquaint themselves with variation in data and the distribution of forms according to register (Conrad 1999).

5. Authentic purpose, tasks and incidental learning

Learners may access data which, for them, become meaningful simply by virtue of being included in their particular activity or learning programme (which may be ratified or quite unofficial, informal – “incidental” even). Chambers (2009: 19) gives details of a study (see O’Riordan 2009) in which language samples from classroom teaching situations are used as a corpus for trainee teachers. This type of material is gathered with the intention of being studied in relation to a particular task or with a particular activity or aim. Elsewhere, Tyne

(2009) gets learners to embark on fieldwork that will ultimately give rise to a spoken corpus for study. He places the emphasis on the students' responsibility at the level of the processes (involving tasks such as defining the field, participant observation, recording, transcribing) rather than on the product (the data that is eventually analysed). These types of approaches, in which the pedagogical concerns of the task impinge upon the data, would probably not have been considered authentic by the pioneers of communicative language teaching for whom the timeless nature of the "documents" or "materials", seen as slices of target language and culture (a reaction to the contrived language used in teaching manuals), was paramount (Duda et al. 1972; Duda et al. 1973).

In terms of output-oriented activities (i.e. producing language), the accent in communicative language teaching is placed on doing meaningful things in the target language. Such output-oriented tasks carried out in the target language, whilst laudable, are notoriously difficult to "authenticate" (cf. Widdowson 1998) – for example, learners in a classroom will typically already be used to communicating with one another in their mother tongues and target language communication will probably seem quite unnatural. However, many studies report favourably on the use of technology such as CMC and forum exchanges, for example¹¹, thereby enhancing learner involvement in the use of the target language (cf. the point made by Kenning 2007 about the continuum of practice mentioned below). For example, Roed (2003) finds that the written mode of communication allows introverted learners to participate more willingly in exchanges. Nguyen and Kellogg (2005) come to similar conclusions. For Coniam and Wong (2004) learners are not only motivated, but they are also able to produce language beyond their supposed level of mastery as they attempt to deal with complex interactions. And for Potts (2005), the "purposeful action" of learners is seen to arise within the community that develops within the on-line learning space. In these cases, what we can observe is that the technology involved brings about a useful combination of factors typically associated with both distance and proximity (see Koch and Oesterreicher 2001). This is commented on favourably by Weininger and Shield (2003) who find that learners, just like natives, display elements of proximity in their synchronous written productions in the target language.

As Kenning (2007) points out, there is an important issue when considering modern technology which is that the same devices and activities we use for pleasure/leisure/work, etc. in our everyday lives are also used in learning: they are part of a continuum of social practice (they can be contrasted to the use of

¹¹ We do not have space here to deal with other activities such as blogging, Skyping, texting, e-tandems and e-twinning, etc.

language learning manuals, say, which are typically rooted in the classroom learning context). Kukulska-Hume (2009), in her study of “mobile learning”, stresses the importance of “everyday opportunities to access resources” brought about by mobile technology. Obviously, the pedagogical context can serve to bring given practices into line with a specific learning programme. However, the personal use of ICT can also lead to so-called “incidental learning”, i.e. learning that is essentially unintentional¹² (Marsic and Watkins 1990). Internet provides us with many examples of this. A study in progress by the present authors has revealed, for example, how people come into contact with foreign languages via Web activities such as gaming (interactive role play) and Facebook pursuits. Admittedly, these activities concern the use of English and one could argue that it would be difficult to imagine the same approach to many other languages currently learned around the world. We will concentrate on the case of Facebook here. Our case-study subject is a native French-speaker aged thirty (we will call her Anne) with a typical level of mastery in two foreign languages at the end of compulsory schooling (roughly B1 on the Common European Framework of Reference). Interestingly, she does not claim to be a language learner. Anne uses English (approximately two hours per day) in the following areas: playing online Scrabble, running a virtual restaurant and keeping a fish tank (games requiring the use of English), and accessing song lyrics. Anne points out that, whilst she enjoys playing Scrabble in French, she finds that she can derive a “different” kind of pleasure when playing in English: namely it brings new opportunities and motivations for winning (not only does she win, but she does so in another language!). Also, Anne reports favourably that she learns new words by doing this. For the restaurant and fish tank activities, which are roughly comparable to Tamagotchi (i.e. the player is responsible for virtual beings), the motivation is in the interplay between Facebook friends: so-and-so has a nicer fish tank than I do so I’ll put some more fish in mine; so-and-so’s restaurant is bigger than mine so I’ll do something about it. Whilst Scrabble and virtual environment management only really involve contact with isolated words in English (according to Anne’s account, although we do not have feedback on any accompanying interactions with other players), accessing song lyrics (i.e. listening/reading comprehension) involves other levels of language. If we were to look closer, we might also find “everyday” examples of authentic output: our case-study English user Anne, say, who requests information concerning the booking of a holiday using English or who leaves feedback for sellers on eBay, etc.

¹² It should be noted that all learning environments include a degree of “unintended” learning, i.e. the observed learning outcomes in comparison to the intended learning outcomes. However, in the present discussion, we go on to look at those activities that are connected to leisure rather than to a classroom exercise environment, involving people who may not claim to be language learners as such.

6. Discussion

We have reached the opposite end of the spectrum from that of our starting point: we set out from the idea that authenticity in materials is essentially about the conditions in which they are produced (i.e. typically by native speakers for non-language teaching reasons); we arrive at the idea that authenticity can also be about the conditions in which they are used (and it probably is no longer relevant to refer to “materials” in these cases) or indeed the conditions in which they are created. The meaningful experiences of the learner within a constructivist learning environment are considered foremost. We have referred to incidental learning, i.e. learning seen as a by-product of another activity (see Marsic and Watkins 1990). We typically do not know exactly how much is gained from purely incidental learning since it is difficult to monitor (see in Marsden 2005). However, “by-product” learning (or other similar very “informal” language learning contexts – Kenning 2007: 1) can feasibly be targeted by individuals who wish to take charge of their own learning. And whilst language teaching still has an important role to play, the development of autonomous learning techniques as a life-skill is increasingly appealing (Duquette 1999: 308). For example, we saw how Anne, who is not a language learner in the conventional sense, spends a number of hours per week doing activities for her own pleasure which imply foreign language use of some kind. By applying certain techniques (e.g. self-regulated learning strategies to aid in effectively searching for patterns, raising questions, etc. – see Chang 2005) she could well learn more English if she wanted, still deriving pleasure and motivation from what she does. Indeed, increased motivation has been found to enhance effective strategy use (Oxford and Nyikos 1989), which in turn reinforces autonomous learning (Macaro 2003: 110-111).

In this discussion we have moved away from the classic guided learner situation in which groups of learners are expected to reach certain levels in all aspects of language. Here, we are looking at how activities can lead to gain in specific areas according to given aims and motivations, etc. However, as Macaro (2003: 251) stresses, research into second language learning and teaching has tended to focus on learners in the university setting (whatever their level) since that is where researchers are generally based. Indeed, much of the work carried out by the CRAPEL over the years has involved university learners or learners of a certain age (i.e. not young adolescents in schools). So, many of the points and issues raised here could benefit from greater research in school or classroom settings where the notion of autonomy, for example, comes up against the perceived roles of teacher and pupil: the teacher is there to teach, but also represents a form of authority and discipline, and the pupil is there to learn but also to obey. These are roles which clearly sit uncomfortably with the notion of autonomy as studied in other

environments. This does not mean autonomy is not possible in these contexts (for a recent CRAPEL-based study on autonomous learning in a French Further Education college see Bailly forthcoming-a, forthcoming-b). However, it may require reworking or redefining according to local circumstances.

7. Conclusion

In the 1990s, the CRAPEL went on to produce teaching material for German based on authentic German TV programmes. Two formats were used: VHS tapes (CRAPEL 1994) and subsequently a CD-Rom (CRAPEL 1998). This led on to a more sophisticated concept, named *Ecouter pour Comprendre* (EPCO), supported by the European Commission, which was geared towards both the development of listening comprehension in the less taught and less commonly spoken languages of new member states in the European Union (Polish, Czech and Hungarian – CRAPEL 2005) and the comprehension of French for speakers of these three languages. One of the key features of this concept is that there are no exercises on offer: learners are encouraged to develop their own exercises and activities based on the given AMs, in keeping with the contention that the use of AMs will help forge greater autonomisation, ultimately contributing to autonomy of language (doing or saying what one wants) through autonomy of learning (taking responsibility of learning procedures) and autonomy of choice (choosing what to do and why). Whilst autonomising approaches to learning have come in for some criticism over the years, whether on the grounds of cultural inappropriateness of methods and resources (e.g. Jones 1995) or over-insistence on constructivist principles (e.g. Kirschner et al. 2006), what we have tried to show here is that there comes a point where exposure to various sources of language input is rendered almost inevitable in many modern contexts (in particular via technology) and, whereas in the 1960s and 1970s, say, classrooms or self-access centres were typically the primary source of contact with foreign languages, nowadays most learners in the Western world have immediate access to a host of different materials at all hours of the day. Also, language learners are an increasingly varied public to try to target: differing aims and motivations, differing target languages, differing occupations, ages, cultures, etc. Thus teachers (and teaching materials) cannot continually be expected to mediate an increasingly vast and unpredictable input (cf. Landure and Boulton 2010). This is where the development of the learner's ability to take charge of his/her learning comes in, i.e. autonomy in terms of the methodological choices for learning when confronted with authentic materials. Modern technology and web-based learning environments would seem particularly suited to the development of such an ability (Duquette 1999; Chang 2005).

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