

USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN GRAMMAR TEACHING: SOME CONSIDERATIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract: *This article explores the role of authentic materials in grammar instruction within the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Using insights from recent research, it evaluates the advantages and challenges of incorporating authentic texts into grammar teaching. Authentic materials, such as newspaper articles, advertisements, and real-life dialogues, offer contextualized learning experiences and expose learners to natural language use, helping them develop a deeper understanding of grammatical structures in meaningful contexts. However, their implementation also presents challenges, including linguistic complexity, unfamiliar cultural references, and the additional time and effort required for teachers to adapt materials and design suitable activities. To address these challenges, the paper suggests a balanced approach integrating authentic materials with appropriate scaffolding techniques. By carefully selecting and modifying authentic texts to align with learners' proficiency levels, teachers can create an effective grammar learning environment that fosters accuracy and fluency.*

Keywords: *Authentic material, adapting materials, EFL context, grammar teaching, selecting materials.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Grammar instruction in foreign language teaching has long been a subject of continuous debate. Traditional methods of grammar teaching have primarily relied on memorization of rules and artificial examples, whereas contemporary approaches emphasize communicative competence and contextual learning. In EFL contexts, grammar proficiency remains a crucial indicator of language competence and a fundamental aspect of language instruction across educational levels and institutions.

Despite its importance, grammar learning often proves difficult and even frustrating for many learners. English grammar is challenging for learners because it combines structural complexity with numerous exceptions to its own rules. For example, students may find it hard to remember irregular verb forms or understand subtle distinctions in tense usage that often do not exist in learners' native languages. Additionally, the nuances of modal verbs and conditional structures require extensive practice to master. These challenges may become greater when learners must apply the rules in real-time conversation, where they have little time to consciously recall complex grammatical principles. As a result, they may make mistakes repeatedly, even with familiar grammatical rules or structures.

To address these challenges, various instructional methods have emerged, with the use of authentic materials gaining particular attention in recent years. Authentic materials offer a window into how grammar functions within real communication contexts and provide a dynamic way to integrate grammar instruction into meaningful language use.

This paper aims to investigate key considerations for EFL teachers implementing authentic materials in grammar instruction and provides some recommendations for effective classroom practice.

II. CONTENT

2.1. Defining authentic materials

The term "*authentic materials*" has been defined in various ways within language teaching literature. Martinez (2002) and many others characterize authentic materials as real-life texts written for native speakers of the language to fulfill some social purposes rather than for teaching purposes. We adopt the definition given by Gilmore (2007, p.4), which describes an authentic text as "*a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort.*" These definitions collectively establish that authentic materials are created for real-life purposes rather than for language learners, distinguishing them from artificial textbook materials that are designed or modified for language learning purposes.

2.2. Advantages of using authentic materials

2.2.1. Contextual learning

When teaching English as a foreign language, teachers often have to rely on certain required textbooks. However, teachers should not limit the teaching and learning tasks to the textbooks, but should try to incorporate materials from authentic sources into the lessons. According to Akbari (2016), teachers have positive attitudes toward authentic materials in foreign language classes, considering them important input for improving students' skills and exposing them to real language. Authentic texts, including literary works, news articles, and spoken dialogues, provide learners with real-world grammatical structures, enhancing comprehension and application. Contextual learning occurs when students observe grammatical rules used naturally within meaningful situations rather than in isolated drills. This exposure enables learners to understand how language functions dynamically across various communicative settings, promoting deeper retention and practical application of grammar rules.

Research by Javadi and Tajik (2021) emphasizes the need for authentic materials in communicative grammar teaching, particularly for learners who struggle to apply textbook-based grammatical patterns in real-life communication. Their study on Iranian high school students highlights the deficiencies of traditional grammar instruction, which often fails to cultivate practical language skills. They advocate for a curriculum that incorporates authentic texts to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

Strandberg (2025) observes that using authentic text when teaching grammar creates connections between grammar and language in use. According to Myhill et al. (2013), cited in Strandberg (2025), examples created specifically to illustrate grammar points are typically decontextualized and unrealistically simplified. Authentic texts, on the other hand, create a more accurate representation of language in use and support students in understanding how grammar operates in real language contexts. We strongly agree with Strandberg (2025) that authentic texts enable students to make connections between grammatical phenomena and their functions within texts, helping them discover how grammar functions across different contexts.

From the discussion above, we believe that using authentic materials can significantly improve the process of grammar internalization for learners by providing real-life contexts for language use. Therefore, English language teachers need to make efforts in trying to employ some authentic materials in their grammar lessons.

2.2.2. Motivation and engagement

Students are more likely to engage with texts that are culturally and linguistically rich compared to contrived textbook examples. Literary texts offer compelling narratives that keep learners invested in the learning process. Tomlinson (2012) argues that "authentic materials can provide meaningful exposure to language as it is actually used to motivate learners and help them develop a range of communicative competencies and enhance positive attitudes towards the learning of a language."

Exposure to genuine language usage increases student interest and willingness to engage in learning activities. According to Saleh (2022), teachers report higher student participation when authentic materials are integrated into lessons. The real-world relevance of these texts helps students recognize the practical value of what they're learning beyond the classroom.

Javadi and Tajik (2021) observe that grammar instruction becomes more interesting and dynamic when authentic materials are used. These materials tend to be more motivating, up-to-date, and relevant than traditional textbooks. They prepare students for real communication by providing natural, unmodified language input, guiding them toward language needed for specific contexts, and building interest and motivation in the classroom.

We share the views of the authors mentioned above about the importance of using authentic materials in improving students' motivation and engagement in the classroom. From our own experience, students seem to be much more interested in the tasks that involve authentic texts such as excerpts from real articles, e-mails, or film reviews. They engage more in grammar tasks and more readily get involved in classroom discussions about the grammar points covered in the lessons.

2.2.3. Learning effectiveness

Using authentic materials helps to promote the simultaneous development of grammar, vocabulary, reading, listening, and writing skills. Using authentic materials allows students to encounter language holistically, helping them recognize the interplay between different language components.

In terms of grammar and vocabulary development, with authentic materials, students observe how grammatical structures function within meaningful contexts while expanding their vocabulary through exposure to varied word usage. Li (2023) demonstrates that text-based grammar teaching methods have a profound impact on grammar accuracy and facilitate a more comfortable understanding of grammar rules among English language learners. By using authentic and real-world materials, this approach encourages learners to apply grammar rules in context, generating more natural and communicative language use.

The complex reality of authentic grammar usage challenges learners in ways that simplified textbook examples cannot. Strandberg (2025) notes that authentic texts foster discussions about the function of grammatical phenomena rather than merely memorizing terms. By focusing on the complexities of English grammar in context, students develop a better understanding of how to construct coherent and grammatically accurate sentences and paragraphs.

It can be seen that when learners encounter grammatical structures in their natural context, they develop not only technical accuracy but also pragmatic competence. They understand better when, why and how certain structures are employed. Exposure to authentic texts also fosters critical thinking as students interpret meaning, infer grammatical rules, and apply them in new contexts. Therefore, we strongly believe in the effectiveness

of using authentic materials for grammar teaching. When analyzing authentic texts, students move beyond surface-level grammar exercises to explore meaning, style, and linguistic choices and therefore improve their interpretative and analytical abilities. With authentic materials, teachers always have opportunities to start meaningful and engaging discussions with students about certain grammar points. These discussions, in our view, will help students better remember the rules and understand more about the grammar choices that are available to them in certain situations. Students will gradually develop a better understanding of the integration principle in language learning, which will help them in the long term in the process of foreign language learning.

2.3. Challenges in implementing authentic materials

2.3.1. Text complexity

Although authentic materials are considered beneficial in many ways, the use of authentic materials may be challenging for both teachers and students. The first challenge of authentic materials lies in their inherent complexity, particularly for novice language learners. Authentic materials often contain advanced structures and idiomatic expressions that may overwhelm learners. When assessing newspaper articles as sources of authentic teaching, Strandberg (2025) acknowledges that "the complexity of authentic texts can complicate the instruction of a particular grammatical phenomenon" (p.115) and therefore language in use can become too complex to make the grammatical content comprehensible to students. Although these linguistic features are representative of natural discourse, they often exceed the current processing capacity of learners, leading to cognitive overload. Consequently, comprehension is impeded, and learners may experience some frustration. Therefore, simplifying material or selecting age- and proficiency-appropriate texts is crucial. According to Saleh (2022), EFL instructors frequently need to scaffold activities to ensure student comprehension. However, in our opinion, designing and conducting scaffolding tasks is not easy, especially when classroom time is limited. It might be more feasible to select the materials that are reasonably suitable for students' cognitive and proficiency levels.

2.3.2. Preparation time

Another challenge of using authentic materials is that teachers need to invest considerable time in selecting and adapting them to suit learners' proficiency levels and learning objectives. Saleh (2022) emphasizes that while teachers recognize the value of authentic materials, they express concerns about the additional time required for lesson planning. Unlike textbooks with ready-made exercises, authentic materials require careful selection and preparation. We agree with Strandberg (2025) that "using authentic text is very time-consuming as teachers initially need to analyze the grammatical components within a text and subsequently select examples suitable for the students" (p.116). Therefore, the use of authentic texts significantly increases the workload for teachers in comparison to using textbook materials only. However, we believe that the benefits of authentic materials will make the teacher's efforts worthwhile. It might seem challenging in the beginning, but over time, and with the teacher's experience, the process will gradually become smooth and easy.

2.3.3. Student resistance

Some learners may struggle with authentic materials due to their unpredictability and unfamiliar vocabulary, leading to frustration and disengagement. The inherent unpredictability of authentic materials may overwhelm learners because of the amount of unfamiliar vocabulary, structures and cultural references. This struggle is particularly

pronounced for learners accustomed to controlled, textbook-derived content, where language is simplified and predictable. The resulting frustration can quickly turn into disengagement, as learners perceive the task as too difficult to fulfil. They may feel inadequate, questioning their language abilities and losing the motivation to persist. This may negatively affect their progress towards real-world language proficiency.

This factor is more prominent when applying to grammar teaching. Strandberg (2025) cites Van Rijt (2020), who observes that "language analysis is more complicated and rather ill-structured, which means that rules of thumb are insufficient when analyzing authentic sentences." This complexity may lead to student resistance, as students may find it difficult to apply grammatical knowledge when analyzing language in use. Therefore, in our view, it is the teacher's responsibility to select authentic materials that are appropriate for the students. For example, the materials chosen to teach a certain grammar point should illustrate the target forms, but should not contain too much difficult vocabulary. In terms of contents, the selected materials should cover the topics that are interesting enough to get students engaged.

2.3.4. Lack of teacher training

Although using authentic materials may be beneficial in teaching, many teachers lack experience in effectively incorporating authentic materials. Javadi and Tajik (2021) highlight the need for professional development to equip teachers with strategies for integrating these resources. Saleh (2022) also confirms that teachers need training in selecting and adapting authentic teaching materials to meet their students' needs. Therefore, we truly believe that classroom teachers need training or guidelines on how to select appropriate authentic materials and how to exploit them effectively.

2.4. Pedagogical implications

2.4.1. Gradual introduction

Considering the challenges that authentic materials may pose, classroom teachers should start with simpler materials and increase complexity gradually. Saleh (2022) suggests introducing authentic materials at the intermediate level before transitioning to more complex texts. This scaffolded approach allows students to build confidence and develop strategies for dealing with authentic language. In our opinion, teachers might start by selecting shorter authentic texts with transparent structures, familiar topics, and visual supports such as images or subtitles. Pre-teaching essential vocabulary and providing guided questions can further support comprehension of the materials. As students become more proficient, teachers may introduce more complex materials - longer texts, more complex sentence patterns, more specialized vocabulary, and culturally nuanced content. Therefore, it is the teacher's responsibility to consider the students' level of proficiency as well as their range of interests to make a suitable selection of teaching materials. Throughout this process, teachers should maintain a balance between challenge and accessibility, ensuring materials remain motivating while still stretching students' capabilities.

2.4.2. Task-based activities

According to Akbari (2016), when using authentic material in language teaching, it is possible to overcome the challenges through proper task design. Learning tasks should be designed to encourage learners to actively analyze grammatical patterns within chosen texts. Well-designed tasks can transform potentially overwhelming authentic materials into accessible and engaging learning resources. More importantly, the scaffolding principle should always be considered.

For grammar teaching, noticing tasks are of great importance. Learners need to recognize the target language items in real use and see how they are used in real contexts. Authentic materials provide a great opportunity for this noticing task. For example, when teaching verb tenses, teachers may ask students to read a short story and underline the verb tenses used in that story. After that, they may try to explain the specific meanings of those verb forms in the context of the story. Later on, teachers may develop tasks with increasing difficulty for learners to practice using the target language items. For example, answering questions or discussing issues related to the topics covered in authentic materials might be useful. Encouraging students to infer grammatical rules from authentic examples before explicit instruction may also be beneficial.

In short, with appropriate scaffolding tasks, teachers will be able to use authentic material effectively for teaching language in general and grammar in particular.

III. CONCLUSION

It can be seen that authentic materials offer significant benefits for grammar instruction. However, they may also cause several challenges for teachers and students. The effectiveness of using authentic materials depends on the teacher's careful selection and pedagogical strategies. However, incorporating authentic materials requires thoughtful preparation and scaffolding. When done effectively, this approach transforms grammar from an abstract set of rules into a living system that empowers meaningful communication. Teachers should balance authenticity with accessibility to ensure optimal learning outcomes, making use of appropriate scaffolding techniques and gradual exposure to real-world language use. EFL teachers generally favor authentic materials, but acknowledge the real need for structured guidance and training in exploiting authentic materials effectively.

As authentic texts do not necessarily conform to every grammatical rule, they illustrate the complexity of language in use and help learners to realize the fact that grammar is not static and formal but rather dynamic and constantly changing. The use of authentic texts in grammar instruction offers a compelling alternative to traditional methods, promoting contextual understanding, engagement, and real-world language application. However, effective implementation requires careful text selection, appropriate scaffolding, and teacher training. As research continues to highlight the advantages of authentic materials, the issue of how to effectively incorporate them into grammar lessons needs to be considered and explored not only by classroom teachers, but also teacher trainers and researchers in the field of English language teaching.

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MỘT SỐ VẤN ĐỀ VỀ SỬ DỤNG TÀI LIỆU THỰC TẾ TRONG GIẢNG DẠY NGỮ PHÁP TIẾNG ANH VÀ ĐỀ XUẤT CHO GIÁO VIÊN

Tóm tắt: Trong bài viết này, tác giả tìm hiểu vai trò của tài liệu thực tế trong môi trường giảng dạy ngữ pháp tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ (EFL). Dựa trên những nghiên cứu gần đây, bài viết đánh giá những lợi ích cũng như những thách thức của việc đưa các văn bản thực tế vào giảng dạy ngữ pháp. Các tài liệu thực tế như các bài báo, quảng cáo và các đoạn hội thoại đời thực sẽ cung cấp cho người học trải nghiệm học tập thông qua ngữ cảnh, giúp người học tiếp xúc với ngôn ngữ tự nhiên, từ đó phát triển hiểu biết sâu hơn về ý nghĩa của các cấu trúc ngữ pháp trong ngữ cảnh cụ thể. Tuy nhiên, việc áp dụng tài liệu thực tế cũng gặp phải những thách thức như: độ phức tạp về ngôn ngữ, các yếu tố văn hóa có thể xa lạ với người học, và thời gian, công sức mà giáo viên cần bỏ ra để điều chỉnh tài liệu và thiết kế hoạt động phù hợp. Để khắc phục những khó khăn này, bài viết đề xuất một cách tiếp cận cân bằng, tích hợp tài liệu thực tế với các kỹ thuật hỗ trợ giảng dạy phù hợp. Bằng cách lựa chọn và điều chỉnh tài liệu thực tế phù hợp với trình độ của người học, giáo viên có thể tạo ra một môi trường học tập ngữ pháp hiệu quả, giúp phát triển cả độ chính xác và độ lưu loát cho người học.

Từ khóa: Điều chỉnh tài liệu, giảng dạy ngữ pháp, lựa chọn tài liệu, ngoại ngữ tiếng Anh, tài liệu thực tế.