

A Review of Language Learning Using Authentic  
Audiovisual Materials in Foreign Language Classrooms

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[研究論文]

# A Review of Language Learning Using Authentic Audiovisual Materials in Foreign Language Classrooms

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## Abstract

Many researchers have reported the positive effects of audiovisual materials on language learning, and their use in language teaching has broadened the possibilities of learning online. However, they have not looked at the scope of using authentic materials in learning a foreign language and its effects on learners' critical thinking abilities. The primary purpose of this study is to suggest that such materials are ideal for learning a foreign language online. The study examines the theoretical justification for using authentic language materials in foreign language teaching and goes on to show that it could further strengthen learners' critical thinking skills, which are crucial in developing language abilities, by employing different leaning applications.

Keywords: authentic language materials, online learning, audiovisual language materials

## Introduction

There has been a massive shift from face-to-face learning to online classes under the current circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. Instructors have changed the method of instruction to innovatively adapt to this new learning environment. Furthermore, the current growth of audiovisual technology has influenced the way foreign languages are taught. The steady development in audiovisual technologies, such as the Internet, CD-ROM, MP3, DVDs, computer-assisted language learning (CALL), e-mail, chat, and mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), have contributed to the transformation of learning styles. Today, language learners taking online courses can easily practice everyday conversations and the natural use of the language via Zoom or Skype.

Online learning is beneficial in educational settings. Through online classes made possible by information technology development, language learners can access up-to-date language materials through the Internet and engage in real-time communication with their instructors. While online classes contribute to distance education by facilitating learner-centered and personalized instruction, the shift from in person to online has posed an enormous challenge for foreign language teachers. When teachers interact with their students through the screen, they must pay attention to many issues taken for granted in a regular classroom (Palloff and Pratt xiv). Ronald Carter suggests that future classrooms are "taking shape with a particular emphasis on new technologies," and these new types of

technological classrooms require new teaching strategies:

The growth of distance learning courses supported by internet-based communication, video-conferencing, and new video-based technologies impart a different character to face-to-face communication and teaching. (120)

As Palloff and Platt suggest, "the online classroom is a potentially powerful teaching and learning area in which new practices and new relationships can make significant contributions to learning" (3). Instructors who want to use this format in education can utilize technology to develop a new teaching style.

An effective way of adapting to this online learning space is to use authentic language materials, which are available through the web and can be helpful in online learning. One of the most crucial advantages of authentic materials over materials written specifically for language learning is that they introduce native, everyday language use, which can capture the attention and interest of learners. When language learners communicate with others in the real world, they can engage in conversations in a non-instructional environment. Today, information from around the globe can easily be accessed through news, movies, and songs. These mediums are materials suitable for learning a foreign language and cultivating learner's motivations.

This study proposes new ways to carry out online learning more effectively, based on existing research

findings. The use of authentic language materials is ideal for foreign language learning. The first section explains the historical acceptance of authentic language materials. The subsequent sections introduce various audiovisual learning techniques, such as news programs, movies, and songs. The last section argues that songs are the most effective and suitable for cultivating language abilities. This study also highlights the challenges faced by foreign language instructors and students when it comes to online language study.

## 1. Authentic Language Materials

As authenticity is associated with several meanings, it is necessary to first define it. Some dictionaries define “authentic” as being originally made or traditionally done. Its definition is similar to that of “genuine,” which deals with the real thing, person, or feelings. However, in the context of language education, the definition of authenticity is limited to the original or genuine language written or spoken in actual communication.

There are several definitions used to describe the authenticity of language materials. D. Porter and J. Roberts define authenticity as the language “produced by native speakers for native speakers in a particular language community” (37). According to Morrow, authenticity relates to the language “produced by a real speaker/writer for a real audience, conveying a real message” (13). Regarding the concept of authenticity as “slippery,” Alexander Gilmore prefers the following criteria by Morrow, “An authentic text is 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” (13). D. Taylor defined authentic language material as any material that has not been written explicitly for language teaching. Similarly, D. Nunan described authentic language materials as spoken or written materials produced in everyday communication.

Gilmore outlines the historical use of authentic materials in foreign language learning. He introduces Henry Sweet, who wrote at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “the use of authentic materials in foreign language learning has a long history” (97). Sweet was one of the first linguists to become aware of the advantages of original materials over artificial materials. Sweet suggests that “the great advantage of natural, idiomatic texts over artificial ‘methods’ or ‘series’ is that they do justice to every feature of the language” (177).

During World War II, however, authentic materials gradually disappeared when an approach called the “Audiolingual Method,” or “New Method,” was used to train military soldiers in disparate languages. This training method focuses on grammatical competence, so the instructors impose pattern practices where utterances are repeated as soon as they are heard. Language materials specially written for language teaching are preferred over authentic materials when using this method.

The issue of authenticity reappeared when the communicative approach became prominent in the 1970s. In this approach, language acquisition becomes successful when learners are involved in authentic communication. Learners’ competence is developed by communicating in

real situations, and accurate materials have become helpful for language learning. Therefore, authentic language materials can benefit language learning because they teach learners common everyday expressions.

## 2. Audiovisual News Materials

The input of audiovisual news programs is valuable and helpful for foreign language learners. Critics have researched the effects of listening and watching audiovisual news programs since the 1970s. These studies focused on audiovisual news broadcasts, which could be helpful as a source of authentic language. Some researchers, such as Brinton and Gaskill, revealed that listening to or watching audiovisual news programs can effectively enhance learners’ listening skills. Similar research conducted by Poon focusing on audiovisual news programs, revealed that audiovisual news materials significantly improve listening skills. Baker also focused on the pedagogical value of audiovisual materials.

Contrastingly, in the 1990s, Mackenzie refused to accept the idea of using news programs without providing experimental evidence. The reasons behind his refusal were the speaking speed of newscasters, multifaceted content, and complex vocabulary used in news programs. Nevertheless, Mackenzie suggested that audiovisual news items can be practical for strengthening the abilities of lower proficiency level language learners if the news reports are carefully selected. Teachers must deliberately select news content based on the learner’s interest and background knowledge to make these items effective. However, it is assumed that audiovisual news materials are not appropriate for the lowest levels of learning situations because the speaking speed is too fast, and the content and vocabulary are too complicated. Mackenzie rejected this assumption and emphasized the availability of news materials at all language learning levels with different teaching practice techniques. Mackenzie believed that, although news programs are not the most effective materials, they can still benefit lower proficiency learners under certain conditions.

Bahrani and Tam measured the effectiveness of listening to and watching audiovisual news programs on improving the language proficiency of intermediate-language learners. They conducted research to suggest the efficacy of exposure to audiovisual news materials in improving the speaking proficiency of language learners:

The research was carried out with 60 intermediate language learners who were assigned to two groups. During the experiment, the participants in the first group were exposed to authentic materials from audiovisual news, whereas the second group participants were exposed to non-news materials. The findings indicated that exposure to audiovisual news promotes intermediate language learners’ speaking proficiency more than exposure to non-news materials. (2)

When language learners are interested in news materials, they discuss the subject with great enthusiasm. Furthermore, they use diverse vocabulary, complex

sentences, and different structures when talking about news topics. Thus, exposure to audiovisual news materials facilitates learners' authentic language input.

### 3. The Effect of Watching Movies

Movies are authentic materials that can enhance the effect of learning foreign languages because they provide learners with examples of natural language uttered in real settings. These examples include various types of speech used by children and non-native speakers. One of the main advantages of watching movies is that they help improve listening skills. As the actors or narrators speak in different accents, tones, and styles in film, it can be difficult for language learners to listen to the conversation precisely or understand the narration. However, the captions in a film can help improve both listening skills and vocabulary recognition.

Viewing movies with captions motivates learners to strengthen their vocabulary. On one hand, Yunski concluded that "viewing the movie clips reinforced the learners' vocabulary knowledge regardless of captions' presence or absence." However, Yunski did not have the concrete results to prove the effectiveness of such clips. Nevertheless, Huang and Eskey's research considered the effect of watching captioned movies on language learners' listening comprehension and showed that captions indeed improved their listening comprehension skills. Similarly, Markham concluded that captions significantly helped language learners develop their listening word recognition skills.

Movies are authentic language materials that motivate learners to enhance their language learning, particularly their listening skills. While learners may face difficulties comprehending the language spoken in movies, movie subtitles could serve as pedagogically valuable materials to facilitate their vocabulary input.

### 4. Song Lyrics as Authentic Texts

Song lyrics could be the most effective material for learning authentic languages. Instructors utilize songs to enhance literacy, such as vocabulary, grammar, listening, or reading comprehension. Moreover, language learners find songs memorable and enjoyable because the melody and rhythm make learning and remembering song lyrics easier. Nowadays, the use of songs in the classroom is a common practice. Listening to various songs is made more accessible through music platforms, such as YouTube, Apple Music, and Spotify, and information about favorite songs can be obtained from websites or related links.

There are many advantages to using songs in language education. Jayne Halsne Abrate defines these benefits as follows:

They include: 1) holding the attention and interest of students; 2) introducing native and everyday use of the language; 3) presenting cultural phenomena and points of view; 4) providing a mnemonic device and context for learning; 5) furnishing an

entertaining alternative to textbook study. (8)

Among these, the most important benefit is "introducing native and colloquial use of the language." There is a close relationship between song and speech; the qualities of songs are not very different from those of speech. Megiddo Zola and Joachim Sandvass therefore regarded songs as "linguistically authentic and culturally reliable texts" (73), which emphasize the validity of using them as teaching materials:

Song and speech are both produced in some form, structure, or organization, through time, with rhythm and tone, and express and communicate some content through language. (73)

There are logical grounds for regarding songs as "authentic" and "reliable text." Similar to any other form of speech in an aural-oral program, a song serves as a good material for language study and is a suitable medium for language learning.

The effectiveness of using songs in language education is related to the efficacy of music for language acquisition. "Music can mark a memory," as Coats suggests, "and can be recalled from the recesses of the mind at an unexpected moment" (4). Although there is concern that music might be a supplemental activity with little instructional value, songs could be used as a vehicle for language acquisition. When verbal information becomes available through music, the language can be learned simultaneously to retain the memory. When language learners are impressed with the melody of songs, they repeatedly hum or sing them. Medina demonstrated that "language acquisition results when the target language is heavily laden with meaning" (7). We memorize meaningful information more effectively than meaningless information. Song lyrics without music are written words that have no taste or order of impression. However, when played with music, they bring to mind various images beyond the written texts, thereby transforming the message conveyed in the lyrics into meaningful information.

Another advantage of utilizing songs while learning foreign languages is that they benefit "rote memorization" (Abrate 9). Georgia Coats suggests that music is "a powerful tool for recursive exposure and memorization of authentic language" (4). While repeatedly speaking and listening to the lyrics of a favorite song is an effective strategy for memorizing song lyrics, it is not common practice in society to repeatedly listen to and learn plain prose. This kind of memorization typically only applies to actors who need to memorize lines for a play or to religious participants who must learn portions of sacred texts (Coats 4). However, when learning a new language, students rely on repetition and memorization to acquire new linguistic information.

Repetition is the best way to memorize song lyrics. Iwasaki et al. found that song lyrics aided vocabulary development, as they are learned through repeated listening (138). When we want to remember every line in the lyrics, we repeat it many times and try to recall it without listening. We can memorize song lyrics by listening to our favorite songs even while doing unrelated

tasks, such as doing the laundry or driving.

Gu and Johnson criticized strategies that focused solely on repetition. They suggest that the pedagogies focused on repetition create a “shortcut” in the learning processes, which negatively affect language learners’ vocabulary size and overall proficiency (643). However, as Coats suggests, learning based on repetition, such as when memorizing song lyrics, is effective for strengthening learner’s skills:

Consequently, memorizing song lyrics by repeated aural and visual exposure is an authentic, culturally and socially acceptable way to experience meaningful language. Moreover, repeated listening to song lyrics while intentionally acquiring the needed vocabulary for comprehension positively affects the retrieval process in the memory. (4)

Instructors have long regarded songs as recreational devices with little instrumental value, even when they recognize songs as viable language acquisition vehicles. Furthermore, songs in the language curriculum play a prominent role in broadening learners’ perspectives. Coats suggests that music is “useful for language learning because it provides relevant social and cultural information” (4). Therefore, songs used as teaching materials in foreign language instruction are not merely pedagogical tools but also “represent a literary genre in themselves” (Abrate 11). Songs represent themselves as a subject of literary study since their lyrics exist within the realm of real-world language use.

## 5. Theory of Online Education

The most significant pedagogical merit of using audiovisual language materials is the enhancement of language abilities. The current development of audiovisual technologies enables educators to utilize efficient learning materials. However, as Clark claims, technologies are merely vehicles that do not influence learners’ achievement. While online learners can gain significant learning benefits from audiovisual media, these are not due to the quality of the media, but the educational strategies of instructors who utilize them. As instructors and learners occupy different spaces in online learning, the former must develop appropriate course designs and provide adequate support to learn. The goal of the technological online learning system is not to develop media technologies, but to facilitate learner’s education.

Instructors should understand the learning principles for the construction of effective online learning. As A. P. Rovai suggests, “the delivery medium is not the determining factor in the quality of learning per se; rather, course design determines the effectiveness of the learning.” To develop online learning, a combination model that integrates different theories is necessary; existing learning theories can be combined with new ones that continue to evolve (Ally 18). According to G. Siemens, “we now need a theory for the digital age to guide the development of learning materials for the networked world. Educators should be able to adapt existing learning theories for the

digital age.” Online learning is not influenced by the type of technology, but by the instructor’s teaching method. Thus, we should develop an effective model of online instruction by incorporating applicable educational theory: “The development of effective online learning materials should be on proven and sound learning theories” (Ally 18). Educational theories, such as pedagogical or learning ideas, explore the most effective teaching practice strategies. These theories could be used to teach authentic materials in an uncontrolled environment in authentic settings.

Studying authentic language texts is challenging not only for language learners but also for educators. They might encounter information they are not familiar with or have not yet learned in language learning settings. Some instructors hesitate to use authentic texts for language learning when they feel they cannot be experts in the text field. According to Coats, using original texts for language learning could bring “a certain amount of ambiguity and unanticipated challenges” (18). When they are unaware of the background information of authentic texts, they feel that they are unqualified to use them. However, instructors do not need to be experts in the field. They do not need to have perfect knowledge to explain the background of the language of authentic materials. Instead, they should identify the area where they can improve. This can lead to better learning opportunities for both instructors and students.

## Conclusion

When educators understand pedagogical theories, they can develop critical thinking skills that could be used to guide students through a text’s ambiguities. In addition, by identifying what they do not understand, they can better interact with their students. This interaction also influences the learner’s critical thinking skills for strengthening their language ability.

While there are many advantages to using authentic materials like news programs and movies, using songs for language learning has a more significant effect because they provide “an authentic experience for students to use language for cultural discovery within and beyond the confines of the classroom” (Coats 20). Moreover, as songs represent “both a pedagogical tool and a subject for literary study” (Abrate 11), we can regard them as authentic literary texts that contribute to developing learners’ thinking abilities.

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