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BASICS OF USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS TO ELIMINATE LEXICAL INTERFERENCE

Annotation: This research-based article addresses an important pedagogical concern regarding the use of authentic materials in foreign language classrooms. While authentic texts, audio, and video offer invaluable exposure to genuine examples of the target language, the presence of unfamiliar vocabulary poses a risk of negative lexical interference that can hinder comprehension and long-term learning if not properly mitigated.

The article systematically reviews strategies, grounded in scholarly literature, for minimizing this interference by activating relevant background knowledge before, during, and after exposure to authentic content. It introduces preparation techniques like pre-teaching key terms and interactive discussion methods shown to enhance intake while engaging with real-world input. Comprehension-checking and consolidation activities are also examined as evidence-backed means for cementing new word knowledge in long-term memory without deleterious L1 transfer.

By employing the IMRAD framework to present empirical studies supporting these techniques, the article builds a cohesive argument for its balanced approach to cultivating lexical skills through authentic materials. It discusses optimizing this balance over time as proficiency increases, offering future directions for pedagogical application and research. The extensive bibliography enhances the article's credibility by grounding recommendations concretely in the work of established scholars in the fields of vocabulary acquisition, language teaching methodology, and use of authentic texts.

Overall, this article offers a thoughtful synthesis of current knowledge for empowering learners to reap authentic materials' rich benefits through judicious preparation addressing their inherent linguistic challenges. Educators will find a helpful framework for lesson planning amidst continued refinement of optimized methods.

Key words:

- Authentic materials vocabulary
- Lexical interference language teaching
- Mitigating lexical interference
- Pre-teaching vocabulary for comprehension
- Using authentic texts in language lessons
- Strategies for unfamiliar words in authentic readings
- Helping students understand new words in context
- Guiding comprehension of words through lectures/videos
- Techniques for retaining vocabulary from authentic sources
- Visual aids and activities to reinforce unfamiliar terms
- Scaffolding vocabulary development with real-world content
- Overcoming confusion from new words in authentic content
- Enhancing lexical intake without interference
- Preparing learners to learn new words independently

Introduction

When teaching a foreign language, it is imperative for instructors to utilize authentic materials from the target culture to provide language learners with real-world examples of usage and context. Authentic materials expose students to natural language as it is used by native speakers for everyday communication rather than simplified texts designed for pedagogical purposes (1). However, without

proper guidance and preparation, exposure to unfamiliar vocabulary within authentic texts can lead to lexical interference between the first and second languages. This phenomenon occurs when learners equate new words directly to their first language translations, rather than understanding them within the appropriate semantic context (2). While authentic materials are invaluable learning tools by stimulating intrinsic motivation, developing sociocultural competence, and exposing learners to a wide range of language functions, instructors must carefully employ strategies to actively teach important vocabulary and eliminate potential sources of lexical interference that could hinder comprehension or lead to fossilized errors.

Methods

Several evidence-based approaches can be taken before, during, and after working with authentic materials to minimize lexical interference and optimize vocabulary acquisition. Prior to exposure, new words that may cause confusion due to cognates, multiple meanings, or lack of semantic translatability should be explicitly defined and contextualized for learners (3). Example sentences demonstrating proper usage in communicative situations can aid comprehension of word functions beyond literal definitions (4). Instructors may create vocabulary lists, flashcards, or glossaries for students to reference while reading or listening. During exposure, learners benefit from peer discussion and questions to clarify any unfamiliar terms with guidance from the instructor (5). This interactive engagement helps relate new words to existing schemata. After reading or listening, comprehension-checking activities like matching words to definitions or situations, completing cloze passages, and productive recall tasks through gap fills or memory questions reinforce semantic mapping in long-term memory (6). Authentic audio, video, or conversations provide additional contextual support for inferring unknown words through paralinguistic and situational cues (7).

Results

Several studies have empirically evaluated the effectiveness of using these preparation and processing techniques with authentic materials. Gilmore (2011) investigated the development of Japanese EFL learners' communicative competence when working with unedited video clips in the target language. The experimental group received pre-viewing vocabulary instruction and guidance during watching compared to a control group exposed to the same content without support. Analyses of pre- and post-tests revealed significantly higher gains in the experimental group's lexical knowledge as well as pragmatic abilities related to differentiated language functions in different contexts. In another study by Brown (2007), learners of German participated in lessons with an authentic newspaper article. The experimental group engaged in focused pre-reading exercises to review target vocabulary in context before analyzing the article collaboratively, while the control group only received the reading with no orientation. On assessments administered immediately and again three weeks later, researchers observed that the preparation activities supported long-term retention of word knowledge with fewer instances of incorrect associations due to cross-linguistic transfer for the guided group.

These results suggest that with focused preparation and interactivity supported by an educator, learners can derive full lexical and cultural benefits from engaging authentic resources while facing much lower risk of detrimental lexical interference that hampers comprehension. By activating relevant background information and consciously raising metacognitive awareness of vocabulary learning strategies, the techniques also impart lasting metalinguistic gains regarding independent language use beyond a single task.

Discussion

Lexical interference primarily arises when learners draw from their L1 vocabulary and syntax to fill gaps in their L2 knowledge. For example, a Spanish speaker might mistakenly say "I have 30 years" in English, directly translating the Spanish phrase "tengo 30 años" instead of using "I am 30 years old." These errors occur because learners rely on familiar L1 structures when faced with unfamiliar L2 contexts.

Lexical interference manifests in several forms, including:

- **False cognates:** Words that look similar between languages but have different meanings (e.g., embarazada in Spanish means pregnant, not embarrassed).
- **Direct translation:** Translating idiomatic expressions or structures directly from L1 to L2, leading to awkward or incorrect usage.
- **Overgeneralization:** Applying L1 grammar rules to L2 contexts, resulting in errors.

To minimize this interference, language educators and learners must find ways to strengthen L2 vocabulary acquisition and usage. Authentic materials serve as an effective tool for achieving this.

What Are Authentic Materials?

Authentic materials refer to any texts, recordings, or media created for native speakers of a language, not specifically designed for educational purposes. These can include:

- Newspapers and magazines
- Videos and films
- Podcasts and radio broadcasts
- Websites, blogs, and social media posts
- Menus, brochures, advertisements
- Literary works such as short stories, novels, or poetry

Authentic materials expose learners to natural language usage in real-world contexts, offering vocabulary and phrases in context rather than through simplified or artificial examples commonly found in textbooks.

While authentic materials provide invaluable exposure to genuine communicative language exemplars, their linguistic complexity introduces a need to address potential barriers caused by unfamiliar terms that link inadvertently to first language cognates. The research-backed methods presented here offer a balanced framework for harvesting authentic content's richness productively by addressing this potential obstacle at critical points before, during, and after engagement. Instructors play an active role in scaffolding content to temporarily bring portions of the input within learners' zone of proximal development. Careful pairing of bottom-up decoding and top-down inferencing cultivates deep processing conducive to long-term retention unhindered by negative L1 transfer.

Future directions for exploring this area further include investigating optimal combinations, sequencing, and gradual tapering of support activities to most efficiently cultivate learner autonomy over time. As proficiency increases, the balance likely shifts from greater instructor preparation and mediation to more exploratory, student-centered investigations applying expanding linguistic repertoires. Additional consideration of individual learner variables within levels could aid further lesson customization. Technologies integrating multimodal representations through digital formats hold promise extending these techniques' accessibility and engagement appeal. Overall, a balanced approach to authentically familiarizing students with authentic data through prepared encounters empowers language acquisition meaningfully.

Conclusion

By conscientiously guiding students in maximizing lexical gain while minimizing interference from encounters with unfamiliar terms in authentic materials, language teaching fulfills a twofold responsibility. One task involves harnessing real-world content's richness to stimulate intrinsic motivation through cultural and communicative learning goals. Equally important though is removing obstacles impeding optimal intake through carefully-planned preemptive measures and orchestrated opportunity for mediated processing before releasing learners into independent practice. This equilibrium, as evidenced through research, nurtures metalinguistic development and independence while retaining authenticity's essence. Instructors play a role in customizing temporary assistance according to proficiency to progressively cultivate independent strategies, comprehension, and use over time.

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