

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF AUTHENTIC TEXTS IN ESL

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This article examines the distinction between authentic texts (ATs) and pedagogical texts in the context of second language (L2) instruction, within the framework of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Pedagogical texts, designed specifically for L2 learners, are often critiqued for their failure to represent real-life language use. In contrast, ATs are created for genuine communicative purposes and exhibit natural language use. The article explores the key difference between "language usage" and "language use," and discusses how pedagogical texts often focus on teaching formal language structures, whereas ATs emphasize real communicative interactions. It also highlights the importance of socio-cultural contexts in defining the authenticity of texts. The study concludes that authentic texts are those written to achieve specific communicative intentions within a community, rather than being exclusively produced for language learning purposes.

Key words: Authentic texts (ATs), pedagogical texts, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), second language (L2) instruction, language usage vs. language use, socio-cultural context, real-life language.

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The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, which emerged in the 1970s, emphasized the importance of teaching language as used in real-life communication. This led to a critical examination of whether the language presented in second language (L2) textbooks could be considered authentic [13]. Traditionally, the texts found in L2 textbooks, designed specifically for language learners, were referred to by various terms such as "contrived texts" [1], "invented texts" [5], "doctored texts" [4], and "pedagogical texts" [14]. In this context, we will adopt the term "pedagogical texts" [14].

The language used in pedagogical texts is often criticized for not truly representing real-life language use. A key distinction between pedagogical texts and authentic texts (ATs) lies in the concepts of "language usage" and "language use". According to Widdowson, "language usage" refers to a learner's understanding of the formal structures of a language, while "language use" refers to how these structures are applied in real communicative situations [13]. Pedagogical texts typically focus on teaching language usage through controlled examples, whereas ATs emphasize language use in natural communication.

For example, in pedagogical texts, certain linguistic forms may appear with unnaturally high frequency, especially in textbooks that follow a graded structure. These texts are designed to introduce new language elements while reinforcing previously learned ones, often at the expense of natural communication. Furthermore, many pedagogical texts employ contrived dialogues that lack the spontaneity and features common in real-life exchanges, such as repetition, redundancy, and pragmatic nuances.

In contrast, ATs are created with the primary purpose of conveying a message to a real audience. When composing ATs, writers prioritize clarity and efficiency in communication, selecting language devices that suit the context and audience [13].

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Morrow provided one of the most widely accepted definitions of ATs, describing them as stretches of language produced by real speakers or writers for real audiences, with the goal of communicating a genuine message [8]. This definition emphasizes the role of ATs in conveying meaning rather than serving as instructional tools. However, Pinner raised the question of what constitutes "real" in Morrow's definition, as language produced by native speakers is traditionally considered more authentic [9].

The debate over whether only texts produced by native speakers should be considered authentic has been influenced by the view of English as a lingua franca, although this discussion primarily focuses on L2 speaking rather than reading. Within the CLT framework, later definitions of ATs have continued to emphasize their communicative nature. For example, Swafar noted that the primary intent of ATs is to communicate meaning, regardless of whether the audience is composed of native speakers or L2 learners. The critical factor is that the text serves a communicative function [15].

Another important perspective comes from Little et al., who highlighted the social function of ATs and their connection to the communities from which they originate [5]. Kramsch, A'Ness, and Lam further expanded this view by asserting that ATs are texts used by native speakers in culturally authentic contexts [4]. This focus on the socio-cultural aspects of language use aligns with the broader trends in L2 teaching that emerged in the 1980s, which increasingly recognized the importance of context in language learning [10].

Through this literature review, authentic texts can be defined as those created to fulfill specific communicative intentions within a community, rather than being exclusively for L2 teaching purposes.

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