

TASKS BASED ON AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

THE IMPORTANCE OF TASKS BASED ON AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN A  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM



By

Diana Yomaira Urbina Arboleda

Submitted to the School of Human Sciences  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
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DIANA YOMAIRA URBINA ARBOLEDA

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**NOTA DE RESPONSABILIDAD**

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**Nota de aceptación:**

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**Jurado A**

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## TASKS BASED ON AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

### **Resumen**

Existe una diferencia significativa en opiniones en cuanto a la aplicación de las de tareas basadas en materiales auténticos en el aula de idioma extranjero. El uso de materiales auténticos en el aula beneficiara a los estudiantes de la exposición a la lengua real que se utiliza en un contexto real. Además, el uso de estos proporciona resultados positivos en los estudiantes dado que ellos podrían estar muy motivados, y tener un sentido de logro cuando comprendan y desarrollen tareas relacionadas con el mundo real. Sin embargo, es importante el papel del profesor cuando se escogen los materiales auténticos para la asignación de las tareas, porque esto afectará el proceso de aprendizaje de los estudiantes.

*Palabras claves:* Autenticidad, Materiales, Materiales auténticos, Tareas.

## TASKS BASED ON AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

### **Abstract**

There is significant difference in opinions regarding the application of tasks based on authentic materials in the foreign language classroom. The use of authentic materials in the classroom will benefit the students from the exposure to real language being used in a real context. Besides, the use those materials provide positive results on the students given that they could be highly motivated and have a sense of achievement when understanding and developing tasks related to the real world. However, It is important the role of the teacher when choosing the authentic materials for the assignment of the tasks, because it will affect on the students' learning process.

*Key words:* Authenticity, Materials, Authentic Materials, Tasks.

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### **Introduction**

This research paper is intended to determine how the use of tasks based activities by employing authentic materials could be useful in an EFL setting classroom. The idea is that teachers realize that promoting an appropriate spontaneous spoken interaction among students through developing real activities, students will have major opportunities of language learning. Besides, to encourage teachers to a change of the old view of teacher-centered classes for a rather learner-centered one, in which learners will have the opportunity to work on the completion of a specific task, by engaging in real communication and becoming autonomous on their own learning is one of the other ideas. For this purpose, first of all, it is necessary to know what task and authentic materials mean, and how to apply them after having taken into account the students' goals and needs.

This paper provides an overview of materials development. It begins by defining the concept of materials development, followed by some current trends and principles. Then, materials definitions are presented. At this stage, some samples of materials are given, followed by some advantages and disadvantages when using them in a foreign classroom. After, clear aspects to be taken into account when choosing authentic materials are provided. An additional stage in which Task-based language teaching approach is shown, followed by task definitions and some samples of tasks based on authentic materials. Finally, arguments for the use of tasks based on authentic materials in an EFL setting such as Colombia will be summarized.

### **Materials Development**

The study of materials development had not been an essential concern for teaching a language; this was the main reason why some publishers did not pay much interest to them. Nevertheless, it was in the 1990s, when the development of materials was considered as an important part of the methodology, that publishers began to give more attention to them by distributing books about the principles and procedures of the development of the same. Consequently, the fact of giving the needed importance allowed teachers to understand and apply theories of language learning, as well as to reach personal and professional development by offering them a monitored experience of the process of developing materials (Tomlinson, 2001).

### **Materials Development Definition**

Tomlinson (2001) defined materials development as a field of study and a practical undertaking in which the main focus of the field of study is on the principles and procedures of the design and of the practical undertaking is on the production, evaluation and adaptation of language teaching materials, by teachers and by the materials writers. In this sense, materials development makes reference to anything which has being done by writers, teachers or learners so as to supply information about the experience of the language in ways designed to promote language learning.

According to what Tomlinson stated, it is really important to point out the work that many materials developers do, since what they do is considered as a really complex task. In other words the study that they carry out in order to provide appropriate input for the students is completely related with what they have to know about how a language can be effectively learned. As well, material developers or professional material writers have to know what the needs and the wants of the learners and the teachers are so that those materials become satisfactory for them in the process of learning a language.

Now, *who should develop the materials?* The reality is that nowadays most commercial materials are written by expert writers who are usually very experienced and competent, but who often lack energy and imagination, which leaves as a result irrelevant and appealing materials for the students. But according to Tomlinson (2001) teachers are the best designers of course materials, given that they have the knowledge of working with students, and as a result they know the students' needs, wants and goals. In other words, Tomlinson supported the idea that teachers are the most appropriate people in the materials development, which is considered as a long process because of its complexity, in which they will have to contemplate the main principles of language learning, so as to have a final material which contains quality and face validity for people who will use it.

**Current trends in materials development.** In the early 1990s, when the development of materials began to take a relevant place on teaching, many trends about the same began to appear too. This was due to the fact that material developers began to change their claims about their own materials. McDonough and Shaw (2003) referred to the topic by providing some extracts from the claims made by coursebook writers:

carefully structured multi-syllabus approach ... systematic development of all 4 skills ... emphasis on pronunciation, study skills and vocabulary learning ... authentic and semi-authentic reading and listening practice ... language for immediate communication.

thorough, communicative practice of grammatical structures ... coverage of all the 4 skills ... comprehensive coverage of the English tense system.

plenty of practice in 'core' grammatical structures and deals with language at a deeper level ... covers all the 4 skills ... makes students think about the language they are using.

focuses on the real English students will encounter and need to use in today's world ... regular Grammar sections focus on important grammatical areas at sentence level and above . . . wide cross-section of real texts promotes reading for pleasure, as well as developing functional reading skills ... word study ... encourages students to be selective in their vocabulary building.

combines thorough language work with real life skills to give students the confidence and ability to communicate successfully in English (McDonough and Shaw, 2003, p.42).

From the above extracts, it is possible to say that if those materials include all the claims already mentioned, students will find all that they need so as to learn a language successfully. Unfortunately, according to some authors and especially according to Tomlinson (2001), nowadays there is not anything new in materials development; on the contrary, there is a principle going back in the area of commercially produced materials. In relation to this, Soars and Soars (1996) stated that there is a return to the central place of grammar in the language curriculum. Then, if materials developers have made explicit claims about the value of incorporating grammar and vocabulary study in textbooks it will be necessary to ask about the placement of the needs and wants of the learners.

In this way, different authors have mentioned some of the current trends in materials development and those can be summarized as follows: there is a far greater prominence given in coursebooks to listening and speaking than to reading and writing, there is a tendency to underestimate learners linguistically, intellectually and emotionally, there is an assumption that learners do not want and would not gain from intellectually demanding activities while engaged in language learning, there is a neglect (or sometimes an abuse) of literature in coursebooks, despite its potential as a source of stimulating and engaging texts and despite the many claims of methodologies for the potential value and appeal of literature, there is a

predominance of analytical activities and a neglect of activities which could cater for learners with other preferred learning styles, and finally, commercial materials are designed in such a way so that they remove much of the teacher's burden involved in the process of creating or adapting teaching materials (Tomlinson et al., 2001).

In spite of the negative trends above mentioned, according to Tomlinson (2001), there are also some positive ones; thus Tomlinson declared that with the new materials a big students' investment is required so as to analyze the samples of language in use to make their own discoveries. Besides, students have the chance to personalize the learning process through the relation of topics and texts with their own lives, views and feelings. Moreover, materials are not just tools; they represent the aims, values, and methods in teaching a foreign language. Materials are the most powerful device in spreading new methodological ideas and in shaping language teaching and learning practice. Finally, with the materials development there is also an increase in the number of ministries and institutions which have decided to produce their own locally relevant materials.

In conformity with what Tomlinson stated; in our setting it will be very significant the materials development from part of a group of teachers who will only need a little training, experience and support from part of the government to become materials writers. Unluckily, although our teachers have the experience and the knowledge of what the needs, the wants and the goals of the students are and for instance they know which will be the most suitable materials for the process of learning a language, they do not see any kind of interest from part of the government to invest on the improvement of our student's education.

**Principles of materials development.** Regarding the current trends already mentioned in materials development, authors as Tomlinson (2001) and McDonough (2003) gave their version about what they would like to see as the future of materials development. They concluded that if the publishers do not take into consideration the main principles of

learning when producing a material, there will be a decline in customer satisfaction. So, what they recommended in order to increase the materials development is that publishers take into account some other aspects as: greater flexibility and creativity, more effectively engaging content, greater emphasis on multicultural perspectives and awareness, more efforts made to engage the learner in the language learning process as an experienced, intelligent and interesting individual, more opportunities for learners with experiential learning style preferences and of course more respect for the learners.

In this respect, authors as: Rutherford (1988); Canale and Swain (1980); Wenden and Rubin (1987) among others, provided a list of principles that should be included and reflected on the materials development. Thus, Rutherford and Sharwood – Smith (1988) stated that the need and facilitation of the learner self-investment should be reflected in the materials. As it can be seen this principle is much related to what Tomlinson (2001) said, about the student's encouragement to make discoveries about the language use. On the other hand, Canale and Swain (1980) argued that the materials should provide opportunities for learners to make use of the language in order to achieve communicative purposes.

Wenden and Rubin (1987) suggested that materials should consider that learners differ in affective attitudes' and as a consequence materials should offer variety and choice. In line with this, Oxford and Anderson(1995) declared that materials should take into account that the learners differ in learning styles' too, and because of this reason materials should ensure that they supply for learners who are mainly visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, studial, experiential, analytic, global, dependent or independent.

It is necessary to say that, although a variety of lists have been provided from different authors according to their perspectives of the process of language learning, the most important is not to mention which are the best ones, but what the material developers or publishers reflect on how good the materials are, and to what extend those are going to be

relevant for the learning of a language. It is real that because of the attractive appearance of the things, in this case the materials people tend to buy them. Of course appearance makes part of the characteristics of a product but this should not be the main focus of materials created for teaching, since in most of the cases the attractiveness of the material can disappear when people realize that its content is not really meaningful for the learning of a language and as a result the materials become useless and boring.

### **Materials Definition**

Once that materials development has been introduced, now it is necessary to know what materials mean. Thus, Tomlinson (2001) stated that materials include anything that makes it possible to learn a foreign language effectively. In other words materials make reference to anything which is used in the classroom by teachers and learners so as to facilitate the learning of a language, and as a result they also increase the students' knowledge and or experience of the language. In addition, Tomlinson declared that those can be linguistic, auditory, kinesthetic or visual and they can also be found in different forms; for example, in print, through display, internet, cassette, DVD and others. Moreover, those materials can be classified in terms of instructional, experimental, elicitive and exploratory material.

In line with this, Tomlinson (2001:66) and McGrath (2002:7), asserted that although materials as: textbook, workbook, computer software, recordings and newspaper articles, among others, have been designed for language learning and teaching, real objects such as: bags, pens, chairs and descriptions as drawings or photographs are considered as visual support for language teaching too. With respect to this topic and according to what Tomlinson stated, Demirel, (1987) provided a list in which *visual*, *auditory* and *audio-visual materials* are included.

Thus, concerning to the *Visual Materials* the following ones are included: Book, Text Book, Teacher's Book, Exercise Book, Blackboards, Chalk Board, Flannel Board, Magnetic Board, Bulletin Board, Pictures, Flash Cards, Figurines, Wall Paintings, Real Objects and Models, Projection and Graphics, Opaque Projector, Overhead projector, Slide projector and Slides, and Film Strip Projection Tapes. Then, Demirel referred to the radio, pick and plaques and tape and audio tape as *Auditory Material*. Finally, materials as the camera, the television, video, computer, and CD-ROM are said to be *Audio-visual Materials*.

Regarding to what the above authors said about the materials, and although a full list of the materials was not presented; it is possible to realize that nowadays there is a wide array of teaching materials available to teachers to accommodate their various needs and their unique teaching situations. Most of those materials can be used for reading, writing, speaking, listening, grammar, vocabulary-building, pronunciation, and cross-cultural communication, among others. Then, if those materials help to promote learning as the material developers say and do not require that teachers have a lot of money to gain access to them, why do not use them?

It is true that in our setting the economic situation of people is not so good, but it is not necessary to be rich people to make use of these kinds of materials, since most of them as Tomlinson (2001) stated can be real objects that can easily be found in our own setting, in our classrooms or our schools. So, what teachers only need is to have imagination and creativity in order to make use of them into their classes, of course do not leaving aside the goals of the students.

### **Authenticity**

In order to go into the focus of this research paper in more depth, it is really important to understand the meaning of authenticity. Nevertheless, because there is not a clear definition of Authenticity in the language classroom, people tend to confuse “genuineness” and “authenticity”. Thus, Widdowson (1979) made a distinction between the terms: genuine texts and authenticity. While genuineness of a text is defined as the quality of the text, authenticity refers to the congruence between the intention of the text producer and the interpretation of the reader or hearer.

In spite of this fact, there have been some authors who have talked about the notion of authenticity. Bachman (1990) supported the importance of authenticity of the interaction between learners, the material and the context. In defining authenticity, Van Lier (1996) proposed authenticity as “the result of acts of authentication” which means that this result embodies the learners and the teacher, the process of learning, and the language used.

In addition, Widdowson (1979) claimed that authenticity is not only found in relation to language, but it is also placed in a text by the response of its reader or listener. In other words the learner authenticity refers to the appropriate response that the “non-native” reader gives to the text. Thus, a respond is appropriate if it accomplishes the goals of the writer or speaker by reference to a set of common conventions. Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000) proposed that two aspects should be taken into account in the term “authenticity”. The first one, is the type of language used in classes and the second is the use of tasks to support the process of learning a language.

In this respect, Breen (1985) proposed four types of authenticity,

1. Authenticity of the texts which we may use as input data for our students;
2. Authenticity of the learners’ own interpretations of such texts;
3. Authenticity of tasks conducive to language learning and

4. Authenticity of the actual social situation of the classroom language. (Breen, 1985, p.61)

In contrast, Hutchinson & Waters (1987 as cited in Taylor, 1994) suggested that Authenticity is not only a feature of a text in itself, but it is a feature of a text in a particular context. This means that a text is really authentic if it is used in the original context it was designed. For Byrd & Reid (1995) “Authentic” and “authenticity” refer to some aspects of the process of teaching a language, some of them are: language, language teaching activities, text (materials and lessons), students/teacher interaction and students participation in activities.

What is possible to see with the author’s definition about authenticity is that this term remains ambiguous in most teachers’ mind. Then, in order to have at least an understanding of what authenticity refers to, some inter- related meanings given from different authors are mentioned. Thus, authenticity refers to: the language produce by native speakers for native speakers in a particular language community ( Porter and Roberts, 1981) ; the language produced by a real speaker/writer for a real audience, conveying a real message (Morrow, 1977); the interaction between students and teachers as a ‘personal process of engagement’ (van Lier,1996); the types of task chosen and the social situation of the classroom (Breen, 1985); assessment (Bachman, 1991); culture, and the ability to behave or think like a target language group in order to be recognized and validated by them (Kramsch, 1998).

It is important to say that although there is not a clear definition of authenticity, as we can see, this term can be taken from different perspectives. For example some of those definitions direct attention to learner authenticity, text authenticity and classroom authenticity. With relation to this, it is necessary for teachers to have a notion of what these terms refer to so as to help them to understand the influence of these terms in the process of

learning a foreign language and how teachers can work on it in order to provide learners the chance to learn a language successfully.

Once the meaning of some important terms for this research paper as: Materials Development, Materials, and authenticity are understood and now that those materials have been considered as an essential component in learning a language, it is time to talk about what authentic materials mean, samples of authentic materials and their use in a foreign language classroom.

### **Authentic Materials Definition**

There have been some authors who have emphasized on what authentic materials are and how effective their use is in EFL classrooms. Although there are several definitions proposed by different authors, it is relevant to know that some of those do not refer to the same meaning as the others. In spite of that, something general can be found in them: the exposure to the real language and its use in their own community.

In defining authentic materials, Morrow (1977) claimed that an authentic text is a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a true audience and designed to transmit a real message of any kind. Wilkins (1976) referred to authentic materials as those materials which are originally directed to a native-speaking audience. In the same way, Hwang (2005) defined authentic materials as those items which are not designed for language students, but for native speakers of English.

In line with this, Peacock (1997) described authentic materials as materials that have been produced to accomplish some social purpose in the language community. Thus, Harmer (1991) defined authentic texts as those materials which are designed for native speakers, they are real texts designed not for language students, but for the speakers of the language. In the same way Jordan (1997) referred to authentic texts as those texts that are not written for language teaching purposes. Likewise, Duquette, Dunnett&Papalia, (1987) claimed that

authentic materials were only produced by English native speakers for native speakers of English; Nunan et al. (1989) argued that spoken and written information were produced for a genuine communication rather than for pedagogy purposes.

In spite of these definitions, the following definitions have not been taken in the same sense. It is the case of Dumitrescu (2000); Maingay, (1980) and Rogers, (1988) who claimed that although authentic materials have not been produced for language teaching purposes, it is important for teachers to play the role of a guide who manages the language quantity providing real and comprehensible material to their students. Therefore, when using authentic materials it is important to take into account the learners' interests and needs.

For Chavez (1994), authentic materials play an important role for communicative and proficiency- oriented foreign language teaching, since they contribute to the learners' development of real-life linguistics. Thus, Filice and Sturino (2002) referred to authentic materials as those unmodified and genuine materials which enhance the learners' interest into the classrooms when learning a language. Guariento and Morley (2001) pointed out that authentic materials are important since they give learners the opportunity to be exposed to the real language, allowing them to increase their motivation in the language learning process.

According to Widdowson (1990), it is important to make a differentiation among "authentic" and "genuine materials". Thus, Widdowson referred as "authentic" to those materials produced for native speakers of English with the purpose of using them into the L2 classroom in the same way as they were designed for native speakers, for instance when a radio news report is presented to the students, they have to discuss the report on pollution in the city where learners live. With relation to "genuine materials" it makes reference to those materials that have not been used with the first purpose it was designed, in other words those

materials are used in a rather artificial way; it is the case when a news article is presented and learners have to put paragraphs in order, instead of discussing on the same.

For Kilickaya (2004) authentic materials consist on the exposure to real language and use in their own community. While; Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) referred to “authentic materials” as “the natural communication task”:

A natural communication task is one where the focus of the student is on communicating an idea or opinion to someone rather than on the language forms themselves. In such situations the speaker subconsciously uses the grammar rules acquired to convey the message. (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen, 1982, p. 247)

According to what the above authors stated, Sanderson (1999) provided a definition in which at least a few of each one of the other author’s definition is included; thus Sanderson said that, “Authentic materials are materials that we can use with the students in the classroom and that have not been changed in any way for ESL students. A classic example would be a newspaper article that’s written for a native-English-speaking audience” (Sanderson, 1999). Based on the authentic material’s definitions and on what it is said about the learning of a language, it will be really significant that teachers of our setting put into consideration that the English presented in the classroom should be authentic, since those authentic materials involve the language that naturally occurs as communication in the native speaker as some authors stated.

### **Samples of Authentic Materials**

Cullen and Sato (2000) suggested the use of practical techniques and a wide range of sources for using authentic materials in the EFL classroom. Nowadays, a variety of authentic materials can be quickly found and can be used in foreign language teaching thanks to the technological developments. Then, it is clear that teachers do not lack authentic materials to use in their classrooms. As Tomlinson (2001) stated authentic materials can include audio, visual and printed materials. Besides, multimedia materials involving audio, video and graphical presentations can also be included.

Thus, Gebhard (1996) made a classification of some authentic materials that can be used by teachers in their classrooms, they are classified as follows: *Authentic Listening Viewing*; such as TV commercials, movies, and quiz shows; *Authentic visual Materials* such as photographs, paintings, pictures from magazines and silhouettes; *Authentic printed materials*, such as news paper articles, brochures, bus schedules and advertisements. And Finally, *Realia* defined as the real world objects used in EFL or ESL classrooms to which learners and teachers are exposed to. Some of the examples are: phones, coins, wall clocks and dolls. In line with this, Jordan (1997) stated that authentic materials as newspapers and videos are good resources of cultural information; while they help students to be aware of what is happening around the world.

Now, taking into account the classification of authentic materials made by Gebhard (1996), a list of samples is going to be presented, in order to have a better understanding of what authentic materials are and which of them can be used according to what it is intended to be learned by their students. Then, into the *authentic audio materials* it is also possible to find: music, news and other audio materials available on the internet, TV programming, including cartoons, news and weather, radio including ads, music and sales pitches, taped or eavesdropped conversations, such as one-sided phone, conversations, meetings, talks,

announcements in airports and stores, professionally audio-taped short stories and novels. The *authentic visual materials* include: Images and graphs available on the internet, drawings, children's artwork, wordless street signs, pictures from magazines, postcards, wordless picture books, stamps, X-rays, coins and currency, clocks, phones, Halloween masks and other holiday decorations.

The following materials can also be found into the *authentic printed materials*: Web based printed materials available on the internet, newspapers including articles, movie reviews and advertisements, astrology columns, sports reports, obituary columns, advice columns, classified ads, lyrics to songs, restaurant menus, street signs, food product labels such as cereal boxes, candy wrappers, tourist information brochures, university catalogs, telephone books, maps, magazines including TV guides, comic books, catalogs, greeting cards, letters, grocery coupons and flyers, pins or T-shirts with messages, flyers, posters, billboards, and school notices among others. Finally, samples as TV, Video programmes of various kinds, podcasting on the internet web based programmes involving multimedia use make part of the *Authentic Multimedia Materials*.

As seen above, there are a lot of authentic materials that can be used by teachers in the classroom. However, in spite of this information some teachers continue thinking that trying to obtain them can be very expensive, and for this reason they continue working with the same materials that they have used along the years. So, it is important for teachers of our setting realize that it is not necessary to invest a big amount of money so as to make use of them and develop different tasks that will be very significant for their students' learning, because each one of those authentic materials can be easily found on the internet. Now, if some teachers do not know how to make use of this technology, it will be really essential for them to be trained in its use so that they are updated not only in the utilization of new

authentic materials but also in the new methodologies, approaches and learning styles, among others.

### **The Use of Authentic Materials in a Foreign Classroom**

Taking into account the previous information about authentic materials, now it is important to refer to the effectiveness of using them in a foreign classroom, since this will provide valuable information for the development of this research paper. In line with this, the following are some authors' points of view of the importance or advantages of using authentic materials in the classroom:

One of the relevant ideas is that through the use of authentic materials, learners have the opportunity to be "exposed" to a more real language. Despite the fact that authentic materials lose their authenticity when they are used out of their original context, as well as when the classroom is not a real-life situation, authentic materials play an important role in the process of language learning (Wallace, 1992). In this respect, Kilickaya (2004) suggested that the use of authentic materials do not only provide exposure to real language but they also focus on the students' needs. Moreover, learners have the chance to know the real world intercultural discourse.

Consequently, authentic materials allow students to be informed about what is happening in the world. Thus, authentic materials have an intrinsic educational value, and in this sense it is important to mention that the education and general development are part of the teachers' responsibilities (Sanderson 1999). For Guariento & Morley (2001), authentic materials not only expose learners to real discourse, but they also give students the opportunity to get real information and know what is going on in the world around them. Besides it is said that students produce a sense of accomplishment in the learning process and when students are presented authentic texts, they can get real information from them.

Furthermore, the students can increase their motivation for learning through the exposure to this kind of materials.

In this respect, Karpova, & Katchen (1999), suggested that authentic materials have an important and positive effect on increasing learners' motivation and it also makes the process of learning more enjoyable. The use of authentic materials not only gives students valid linguistic information, since they are practical and real, but they also involve topics of students' interest so that those materials encourage them to reading for pleasure (Dumitrescu et al., 2000). Like this, Kelly et al. (2002) suggested that authentic materials increase learners' comprehension skills and oral and written language performance; moreover, they stimulate the classes since they expose students to cultural features, and produce understanding and interest in the topic.

According to Gebhard (1996), the use of authentic materials consists on the contextualization of language learning. For example, when a menu or a TV weather report is presented to the students, they tend to focus on content and meaning rather than the language itself; in this way learners will have the chance to be exposed to a different language rather than just the language presented by the teacher and the text. The more authentic the materials are, the more opportunities learners have to practice English, to gain confidence in their English ability, to be exposed to cultural differences and customs, and it also gives them the ability to find significant information in an effective way (Kelly et al. 2002, as cited in Chin, 2009).

In the same way, Duquette et al. (1987) claimed that authentic materials provide authentic cultural information and help to the comprehension of language, cultural adaptation and language use. It is said that authentic printed materials give learners the option to make use of non- linguistic clues, such as pictures, colors, symbols, in order to help learners to discover the meaning in a simple way. Besides, that authentic language found in those

materials offers students the opportunity to deal with a small amount of material which, at the same time, contains complete and meaningful messages.

Authentic activities which are developed in constructivist learning environments, allow students to become thinkers and problem solvers through the active participation on the development of these activities. Likewise, they supply teachers with some structural basis and the appropriate linguistics which help them to create a suitable teaching atmosphere (Taylor et al. 2004). The use of authentic materials provides some advantages not only for learners but also for teachers. First of all, they allow learners to be exposed to real language, they present cultural information about the language studied. In almost all the cases these types of materials are more related to learners' interests, and at this time, they give a positive effect on students' motivation. In the second place, it helps teachers to follow an approach to teaching but involving more creative materials, in order to foster learners' interest on learning a language (Philips et al. 1978, as cited in Kilickay, 2004).

Richards (2001) argued that the use of authentic materials provide the learners with authentic cultural information about the target culture, and as a consequence students can learn some culturally based practices and beliefs. Besides, Richards said that those authentic materials not only expose the students to the real language but they also relate more closely to the learners' needs and support a more creative approach to teaching, since teachers have the opportunity to develop activities and tasks that are better related to their teaching styles and to their students' learning styles.

At the same time that Richards (2001) presented some advantages when using authentic materials, he also talked about the possible disadvantages of the same. he stated that although those authentic materials can be motivating for learners, the fact that those authentic materials contain difficult language and unnecessary vocabulary items, will also give problems for teachers and learners and as a result they will feel a little uninterested in

the language. Respecting to this, Martinez (2002) also pointed out that authentic materials contain many structures mixed which bring some trouble for students when they have to decode the texts, and these materials may be culturally biased.

Regarding to the information provided by the authors about the use of the authentic materials in a classroom, and sharing the point of view of Dumitrescu (2000) who stated that authentic materials can be applied to multiple tasks, it is possible to say that in our context, the use of authentic materials will be very effective and efficient, given that students will be directly addressed to their critical needs. Besides, their use will help students to contextualize the language learning, and have a higher interest in the language. In other words, students will have a sense of achievement if they realize that they understand and develop different real tasks assigned by the teacher.

**Aspects to be taken into account when choosing authentic materials.** Considering the disadvantages of the use of authentic materials mentioned above, some authors have presented their suggestions with the aim of trying to avoid those disadvantages to take place into our classrooms and as a consequence into our students. In this way, Spelleri (2002) said that teachers should consider the authentic materials' level of language complexity, according to the learner's ability; otherwise, the effect of those authentic materials will be negative on the students. In other words, those authentic materials will decrease the learners' motivation, awareness, and curiosity to learn and so on. In addition, Spelleri (2002) stated that every input presented to the students should be comprehensible, applicable and adaptable. Thus, students will see those authentic materials as relevant for their learning.

In choosing authentic materials Nuttal (1996) provided three factors: *suitability*, *exploitability*, and *readability*. The first one makes reference to the idea that authentic texts must be chosen based on students' interest and needs; the second one is related to the way through which students' competence as readers may be developed. Finally, in relation to the

third one, Nuttall explains it as the fact of choosing text's difficulty based on the students' language level. Although the source and purpose for the selection of authentic materials are important, other factors such as quality, appropriateness, and naturalness of the language should be considered by teachers (Rogers and Medley, 1988). In respect to this, Shomoossi et al. (2007) advocated that the context of needs, and the students' goals and interests should be considered in the selection; in the same way Paltridge (2001) pointed out the importance of the students' needs, proficiency level and interests.

Viewing the importance of the aspects that teachers should follow in the use of authentic materials; the following list of criteria was provided by Karpova (1999):

1. Content: the content of authentic materials has to be appropriate for learners' age, interest, needs and goals.
2. Tasks: tasks must be "sequenced and differentiated" and must include "communicative and cognitive procedures" so that the learners' background and new knowledge can be integrated.
3. Teacher-learner relationship: the materials must be structured in a way that a "reciprocal" interaction between the instructor and the learner takes place.
4. Learning strategies: cognitive abilities of the learners must be improved by paying attention to learning strategies.
5. Learning environment: the environment provided must in a way encourage "risk taking and idea sharing".
6. Social values and attitudes: authentic materials must be a reflection of social values and attitudes.
7. Culture issue: authentic materials must further learners' "cultural, sociolinguistic, and paralinguistic awareness.

When talking about the materials' language level, it is also necessary to emphasize on the students' level when choosing authentic materials to be applied. Thus, Guariento and Morley (2001) stated that the authentic materials can be used at post – intermediate level, but if those materials are applied at lower levels, they will lead to demotivation, confusion and frustration. Nevertheless, according to the findings of a survey conducted by Kilickaya (2004), students enjoy working with authentic materials as they give the chance of interacting with the language used in real life, but what students need is that those authentic materials are provided with pedagogical support. Similarly, Dunkel (1995) claimed that teachers must be aware of finding appropriate levels of authentic texts concerning the students and the activities that will be developed in the classroom.

To sum up, and regarding the literature review about authentic materials certainly, it can be said that teachers are surrounded by a big variety of authentic materials, and as a consequence challenging activities should be applied for the teaching and learning of a foreign language. Then, having in mind some aspects mentioned by the authors to be considered when choosing the authentic materials for our classes, it is possible to say that they should not be chosen randomly, since, that selection will affect in a negative way to students of different levels in the language learning process.

So, it is really important that teachers of our setting are informed about the importance of when and how to apply those authentic materials into their classrooms; so that, teachers begin to fit those authentic materials into the teaching and learning process properly. In other words, teachers of our setting should choose authentic materials according to their students' needs, interests, goals, background, and so on. Finally, according to what some authors said about the authentic materials use and its relation to the students' level, teachers should consider that at lower levels, materials such as leaflets, timetables, or headline type reports

can be used having in mind that the task should be simple too. But, that only depends on the teachers' methodology, creativity and imagination.

### **Task-Based Language Teaching**

In order to provide a better understanding about the focus of this research paper, it is essential to talk about one of the most important approaches: *Task-Based Language Teaching*; which because of its links to Communicative Language Teaching methodology, syllabus design and materials design, has gained a big value to different language researchers in the process of learning a language.

Task - Based Language Teaching in a nutshell, is an approach to teaching a second or foreign language which developed from communicative language teaching approaches (Ellis, 2003). Besides, TBLT is an approach of teaching which focuses on task activity, provides contexts to activate learning acquisition processes, and promotes language learning. In line with this, Estaire and Zanon (1994) claimed that the main emphasis of TBLT is on tasks and language. In other words Tasks Based Language Teaching focus on the notion of a "task" as a central unit of planning and teaching, it means that tasks done by the students in the process of learning are so important that the same learning process viewed as a set of communicative tasks is directly linked to curricular goals.

Now, when talking about TBLT, and before deciding to implement it in the classroom, teachers should be aware of some principles proposed by Nunan (2007). Thus, seven principles of TBLT are summarized as follows: "*Scaffolding*", "*Task dependency*", "*Recycling*", "*Active learning*", "*Integration*", "*Reproduction to creation*" and "*Reflection*". The first principle, *Scaffolding*, states that the chosen lessons and materials have to guarantee that learning can take place. The second one declares that each task has to be connected with the one before so that the sequence of the same shows how each task has been built.

The third principle, *Recycling*, makes reference to those opportunities that students have for an effective learning. The fourth, *Active learning*, focuses on the idea of "learning by doing". Thus, students are the main and most important characters in the learning process and in the development of the tasks; therefore, teachers should play a more passive role as far as possible. The fifth principle, *Integration*, asserts that linguistic form, communicative function and semantic meaning have to be integrated into the learning process. By this means, the students will be able to recognize the relationship between function and form and meaning.

The sixth principle, *Reproduction to creation*, claims that firstly students should reproduce the teachers' language models, then, when doing creative tasks, the students will have the chance of using similar language items more creatively. Finally, the seven principle *Reflection*, suggests that once that students have learned something, they should be given the opportunity to know how well they are doing it.

In line with the statements above, and in order to sum it up, on one hand, it can be said that TBLT is greatly related to the use of authentic materials, since the implementation of them promote task- based learning on the students. On the other hand, this approach will be really feasible in different contexts, and surely in our context, given that the implementation of this approach leads to focus on the tasks as some as Nunan (1991) said, and as a result those tasks will help to the teachers to make a suitable presentation of target language samples to their students and they will have better comprehension and production of the language.

**Task Definition**

Taking into consideration the information previously mentioned about TBLT and the significance of the role of “task on it, now it is important to look at some definitions of task. However, instead of beginning with the definition of what a task is, first of all it is relevant to know what the difference between pedagogic and real world tasks are, the first one makes reference to such tasks that learners will complete in the classroom during the instruction and the second one refers to those that students need to achieve beyond the classroom (Nunan, 1989). Then, as mentioned above the term “task” has been considered as another important aspect in the process of learning and teaching a foreign language. In this respect, Nunan (1989) defined task as a piece of meaningful focused work, in which students need to comprehend, manipulate, produce and interact in the target language.

On the other hand, Long (1995 as cited in Nunan,1989) suggested that tasks are all the things that people do in their everyday life, for example dressing a child, buying a pair of shoes, taking hotel reservation and other activities. According to what Long says, Nunan (1989) claimed that those types of tasks have a non linguistic outcome. Besides, these types of tasks do not encourage learners to use the target language at all. Likewise, Prabhu (1987) suggested that a task is related to cognitive processes. As a consequence, a task is defined as an activity where learners have to achieve an outcome by activating some processes of thought, so that teachers can manage and regulate that process. In addition Prabhu stated that in those types of tasks learners should be involved in reasoning, deducing and evaluating information.

Ellis (2003) claimed that a task is a work plan in which learners have to make use of the language pragmatically, so as to accomplish an outcome. In this way learners have to be careful with that, because they are going to be evaluated according to the correct or appropriate production they have conveyed. In addition, Ellis suggested that learners have to

make use of their own linguistic resources and focus on meaning, while the tasks have to engage cognitive processes and productive oral and written skills.

In the same way, Skehan (1998) referred to a task as an activity especially focused on meaning, which involves certain communication solving problems. This means that those tasks should be related to the real world; furthermore, the completion of the task is an important aspect since the assessment of the same depends on the learner's outcome.

Willis (1996) has been considered as another important author who has supported the value of using tasks in language classrooms. As a result of this, Willis described task as an activity in which learners have to accomplish an outcome through the use of the target language. Elsewhere, in terms of TBL an approach that demands the teacher to organize classroom activities around practical tasks, Willis suggested that those tasks should promote the development of a real purpose of the use of the language, by supplying learners with a natural context for the study of the same.

As it can be seen these kinds of definitions belong to the real world tasks, it means that the classroom tasks developed by the students should be closely related with what the learners are supposed to be able to do with the target language in the real world tasks, which at some term are going to be very beneficial to the students in terms of improving students' motivation and consequently promoting learning.

When teachers decide to implement tasks into their classroom, they should consider the following framework of TBL proposed by Willis (1986) that consists of three main sequences of tasks that provide rich learning opportunities to fit different types of learners, those are: *pre-task*, *task cycle* and *language focus*. In relation to the first one *pre-task*, teachers have to explore the topic with the class and give emphasis to supportive words and phrases that will help students to understand the task instructions and that will be useful during the performance of the main task.

The second one *task cycle* makes reference to the learners' development of the task in pairs or small groups. Once, students have completed the task then they have to prepare a report for the whole class on how they did the task and what conclusions they reached. Finally, they have to present their findings to the class in spoken or written form. In the last step, *language focus* students and teachers highlight and work on specific language features from the task, and finally teachers provide feedback on the learners' performance in order to make learning more significant.

Regarding the framework shown by Willis (1996) it is possible to say that if teachers of our context give the needed importance to these three stages when designing a task based lesson, in which the learner's needs and goals should be included, students will not have many problems when doing the tasks assigned by the teachers. Besides, the use of these tasks will require that teachers change that traditional method of grammar translation in which the main focus is on form and in which students are not viewed as the most important part of the learning process. then, if teachers do not overlook these three aspects, students will have more opportunities and be more encouraged to communicate in the foreign language without fear of failure and public correction, since they will have active control on their own learning.

**Types of task.** Following the TBL framework proposed by Willis (1996) in which a lesson should be a series of tasks, and the goals and objectives should be stated in terms of language use rather than linguistic forms as seen above, Willis and Willis (2007) also stated that all the communicative tasks are the vehicle of communication. As a result of this, he says that the best way to integrate a task-based approach is by going from topics to tasks, since topics are considered as relevant to the students' lives. Thus, Willis recommended that teachers can not only choose the topics of the tasks from the textbooks or other related sources but teachers can also ask their students to suggest their own topics. Then, once teachers have chosen the topic, teachers can set up different types of tasks.

In line with this, Willis (2007) provided a list of six tasks which have been classified according to cognitive processes. These six types of tasks can be seen as follows:

**Table 1.0**

*Six types of Tasks*

| Tasks                        | Specific tasks' samples   |
|------------------------------|---|
| Listing                      | Individual or group brainstorming<br>Fact finding<br>Reading<br>Games based on listing: quizzes, memory and guessing. |
| Ordering and sorting         | Sequencing<br>Ranking<br>Classifying  |
| Comparing and contrasting    | Matching<br>Finding similarities ( in texts, diagrams, pictures , etc.  |
| Problem solving              | Logic problems, puzzles and responses to different complex cases  |
| Sharing personal experiences | Story telling<br>Anecdote<br>Reminiscences  |
| Creative tasks and projects  | Creative writing<br>Recording a news report or interview<br>Producing a brochure or video                             |

Prabhu (1987) was another author who made important contributions when talking about tasks, he distinguished three general types of tasks: *Information-gap activity*, that refers to the transfer of some information from one person to another or from one form to another, for example, in the classroom when students are involved in an authentic communication task they will have to talk to each other in order to obtain the needed information, so as to achieve the goal of the task assigned. The second general type of task is *reasoning-gap activity*, in which students are involved to drive some new information from the information already

given. They can make it through the process of inference, deduction, practical reasoning, or a perception of relationships or patterns.

The final one is named *opening-gap activity*, in which students are required to identify and give a personal preference, feeling, or attitude in response to a given situation. one example of this type of task is when students have to complete a story or take part in a discussion. Another final type of tasks has been provided by Pica, Kanagy, and Folodun (1993) this type of task is well known as *Jigsaw activity*, in which students of a classroom are divided into two groups, each one of them containing only part of the information, then each one of these parts has to practice with the language so as to share and collocate the information altogether and finally accomplish the task's goal.

### **Sample of Tasks based on Authentic Materials**

Having an overview of the meanings about the most important key terms comprised into this research paper, now it is time to focus on some samples of tasks based on authentic materials or in other words classroom activities in which the use of authentic materials takes place. Currently, considering the information above mentioned, teachers can develop different tasks using the considerable amount of authentic materials. But the samples provided in this researcher paper have been taken from authors as Porter and Roberts (1981) and Tomalin and Stempleski (1998), who have worked on some authentic listening and authentic listening viewing activities. However, this does not mean that other skills as reading and writing are overlooked.

In relation to Porter and Roberts' contributions on authentic listening activities, they suggested that the authentic listening experience is a good way of exposing learners to certain features of real language. Thus, Porter and Roberts (1981) provided some examples of activities in which authentic texts can be used by teachers in their classes, in order to recreate authentic listening experiences and output among their students. Some of the activities that

Porter and Roberts proposed are: Listening to the radio, Listening in face-to-face conversational interaction, listening to greetings, listening to administrative requires, listening on the telephone, watching t.v., seeing a film, listening to recordings of songs , eavesdropping and others. It is necessary to say that each one of the activities proposed has its own process and its own output.

Particularly concerning the *eavesdropping activity*, Porter and Roberts (1981) explained it as follows: in the classroom the teacher tells their students they will play the role of guests at a party and that they can eavesdrop on conversations. They will have the chance to listen to short segments of real-world party conversations and will have to complete a worksheet in which they will write down what topic the people are talking about, on the same worksheet they will also point out if they are interested in the topic or not.

Another sample provided by Porter and Roberts is the *listening of a tape recording of a song* .Here the students are allowed to hear a song in the background. Then, the teacher supplies them with a piece of paper containing an incomplete text in which they can write down the words and try to predict the content and form of the text. Thus, they will guess the meaning of some words that they do not know. The teacher plays the song until students complete the text, discuss about the same and finally they have the chance to sing the song.

Tomalin and Stempleski (1998) provided a series of approaches to develop activities through the use of video into the classroom. One of them is through the silent viewing of video clips in which the students watch the video and have to pay attention to what is happening and guess what the characters of the video are saying. Another one is that the teacher plays a video, and allows their students to watch the first part or the beginning of the same, so that students predict what will happen next. In the following listening- viewing activity Tomalin and Stempleski (1998) also showed a different approach from the last mentioned.

The activity has been called *narration*. It consists of students working in pairs, the A's sit facing the TV screen and the B's sit with their backs to the screen, the A's will have to narrate to the other what they see happening in the film sequence. Once they have finish with the narration, all the students will have the chance to see full video, so that they can check their classmates' narration. Having into account that the story line has a closed relation with their particular context or at least with a particular theme in their classroom students will have to discuss on it.

A final sample about task based on authentic materials for reading, has been named *resolving conflicts*. In this activity the main topic of the reading is about a specific problem during the Civil War period to a contemporary event. Students are given a problem that is related to both focus questions. The problem is: "Did economic differences between the North and South lead to conflict over the expansions of slavery?" (Lapp et al, 2004, p. 203). In this first part of the task the students examine reasons, results, and solutions to the problem from different perspectives. Once they have placed this problem and its solutions into a historical context, students are asked for their own solutions.

Then, when they have achieved this part of the task, students have to identify the lessons that can be drawn from these events. Finally, students are asked to apply their lessons to a contemporary event of their choice. In this part, students are required to research the contemporary event and discuss how the lessons from the past can be applied to it. As it can been seen, in each one of the samples mentioned, teachers play the role of a guide, and the students have to be totally immerse on them, so as to accomplish the goal of the task.

### **Conclusions**

Regarding the review of literature about tasks and its closed relation to authentic materials in the process of learning a foreign language, it can be concluded that the use of tasks based on authentic materials in an EFL setting such as Colombia will be suitable and beneficial for our students. Since they will provide students with real information about the world, and they will feel a sense of progress given that they have to work on tasks that are likely to happen in real life situations. In this way students may increase their motivation in learning a language seen that they are given the opportunity to interact and use the target language in order to complete some tasks that are more related to their needs.

However, teachers of our setting must be aware of the fact that those authentic materials usually include difficult vocabulary and expressions which students may find difficult to understand. For this reason, the teacher must first identify the students' needs and goals, so as to devise appropriate tasks according to the students' proficiency level so that they fit the students' current developmental stage. With this, it is meant that teachers have to be cautious when choosing the materials that will be presented to the students because the use of authentic materials with low proficiency level students may be demotivating for them due to the complexity of the language they are exposed to.

In an EFL setting such as Colombia, it is very common to encounter, in most public schools, classes where the major focus is on the learning of structures of the language in isolation without a specific and meaningful context. Most of the times teachers do not realize that language is a complex system, that should be studied as a whole because inside real speech there are different grammatical structures mixed together in order to convey the intended message. In other words, it is almost impossible to find information about a defined topic with the effective use of a specific structure since grammar features do not occur separated in real life contexts.

The teaching of a language following purely traditional approaches, such as grammar translation has resulted in boring lessons, sometimes with learners capable of mastering grammar structures and filling exercises and tests, but unable to use those structures properly when participating in real communicative exchanges. This is due to the lack of authenticity in the materials and activities supplied by teachers who rely firmly on the principles of the grammar translation approach.

Then, if teachers continue with the use of the obsolete methodologies which are not updated and do not fit current students needs, how will they pretend that students of our context at eleven level, who are required to take the “Pruebas Saber” get a high score, knowing that from the beginning of their studies they have only been exposed to artificial language and for instance artificial tasks as filling grammar exercises and translating texts from English to Spanish which is worst?

Maybe, what teachers could explain about this fact, is that they do not have another option. First, because the conditional situations through which they teach their students are not really good, in terms of classroom conditions, lack of availability to access to educational materials, and maybe, they would claim that the size of the classroom do not let them to develop different activities from former methodologies, since it will imply them discipline problems. Unluckily, the second reason could be that since teachers are not well paid, they think that making use of authentic materials into their classroom represents the investment of a big part of their salary, since they believe that those authentic materials are very expensive to get.

Actually and unfortunately, from this point of view the educational situation in our country is not the best for the process of learning and teaching a foreign language, but, this does not mean that teachers should continue with the same teaching style, on the contrary they should make an effort in order to start changing this condition at least in the teaching

process. Thus, with what they can start is with the implementation of tasks based on authentic materials, in order to foster the learning of the target language among their students by allowing them to accomplish real tasks.

If teachers start doing this, they will realize that those tasks based on authentic materials, will provide better environments in the classroom for teaching and learning a language. In addition, if they make an appropriate use of these kind of tasks, they will notice that discipline problems will not increase, due to the fact that students will be focused on the development of the tasks assigned by the teacher and as a consequence there will not be chance for discipline issues to originate.

Other two important aspects to be pointed out, at this level, and that teachers in our context complain about almost all the time are: the difficulties of managing the classes since they usually have to face large-size classes and the short time devoted to English teaching classes (one or two hours per week). Viewing this, more reasons for the use of task based on authentic materials arise. Thus, if teachers of our context follow the suggestions presented in this paper, it could be possible that they do not have to face these different problems anymore. First of all, because when they make use of these tasks applying at least one of the types of tasks provided by some authors already mentioned above (for example: *Jigsaw activities*) the management of big groups will not be a really big problem. Regarding the another aspect about the hours devoted to English classes, it is needed to say that when teachers assign a real task with its specific goals to be achieved by the students, there will not be any problem with time management because students can complete the activity out of the classroom and present it in the following class.

To sum up, the use of tasks based on authentic materials can be valuable as long as they are comprehensible. This is the reason why teachers play a significant role in creating an authentic learning environment where students can benefit from the tasks the teacher supplies to them; and in this way allowing their students to become autonomous on their language learning, having as a result a more learner centered class and not a teacher centered class. In this respect, it may be necessary for teachers not only to have a clear understanding of what authentic materials are, but they also have to know how to use them adequately in the classroom having in mind the students' needs, goals, and level, among others, so that students are encouraged to use the target language through the completion of a determined authentic task.

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