

VOLUME 18  
ISSUE 1  
SPRING 2014

## FEATURED THEME: AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

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## Using authentic materials in the beginning language classroom

by Charlene Polio

In my work with preservice ESL teachers, I've seen both native speakers and international students find worksheets online that purport to teach students how to, for example, invite, compliment, or disagree in English. I have observed my student teachers give their students lists of expressions that most English speakers would never say. One particularly glaring example on a website for teaching invitations was "How do you fancy going to the restaurant for dinner?" One can only imagine the reaction an ESL student would get if he or she used this expression, even in the UK. Conversely, an ESL student may hear someone say, "How 'bout havin' lunch tomorrow?" and not understand that this is an invitation. When students' exposure is limited to textbook language, they miss out on learning how language is used in real life.

Several studies have shown how textbook language differs from authentic speech and writing. For example, Eisenchlas (2011) found that the range of language used in Spanish textbooks regarding giving advice was quite limited in comparison to what Spanish speakers actually use. Simpson-Vlach and Ellis (2010) compiled an academic phrase list from academic lectures in English. One of the phrases on the list was *blah, blah, blah*. This is an example of a phrase that international students are unlikely to have learned if they have studied English from textbooks using scripted academic lectures.

It is uncontroversial that language learning materials differ from authentic language with regard to vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. When and how to bring in authentic materials, however, is a matter of debate. Assuming that most teachers find it easier to use authentic materials with advanced students, I will focus here on how to use authentic materials in lower level classes.

### What are authentic materials?

Although there are various definitions of authentic materials, I am referring here to materials that were not created for language learning purposes. Instead, they were created with some real-life goal for, generally, native speakers. They include both spoken and written language samples. Some obvious examples include magazine ads, movie reviews, television shows, conversations between native speakers, train schedules, nutrition labels, and so on, most of which can be found on the Internet.

## EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Dear Readers,

What a winter – we're so glad to finally see some signs of spring here on the campus of Michigan State University! This will be a busy spring for us as we prepare to write a grant proposal for a new funding cycle. We certainly hope that we will be successful and that we will be able to continue bringing you helpful materials and professional development opportunities for another four years.

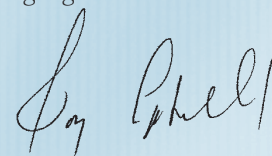
The main article in this issue of *CLEAR News* was written by Dr. Charlene Polio, a longtime CLEAR workshop presenter and project leader. Charlene, who is currently co-writing a book on authentic materials for the University of Michigan Press, addresses the use of authentic materials in the language classroom, especially at the beginning level. She gives plenty of concrete examples of how you can incorporate these materials to motivate students through the use of authentic, real-life texts.

We have four professional development workshops coming up in July, including some new topics as well as some popular encore offerings for the same low prices as in the past. Please visit our website to learn more about these four workshops, which will focus on the topics of

assessment basics, using technology in the language classroom, speaking activities for proficiency development, and the use of authentic materials.

CLEAR will be exhibiting at upcoming regional and national conferences, specifically the Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages in St. Louis in March and the annual conference of the Computer-Assisted Language Instruction Consortium in Athens, OH in May. We always enjoy meeting our constituents face-to-face, so please stop by to say hello! For those of you not on the conference circuit this spring, you can of course always find us at <http://clear.msu.edu>.

If you haven't done so already, you can "like" us on Facebook (search for our full name or visit [www.facebook.com/CLEARatMSU](http://www.facebook.com/CLEARatMSU)) to receive updates on current activities, upcoming projects, and links to helpful articles or sites for language teachers!



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This publication was produced with support from a Department of Education grant (CFDA 84.229A and P229A100002). The contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and one should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

### SUGGESTIONS WANTED!

We strive to publish *CLEAR News* articles that represent current topics in foreign language teaching, and we want to hear from you! If you have an idea for an article or would like to see a particular subject addressed, please let us know at [clear@msu.edu](mailto:clear@msu.edu). We will consider your idea for future issues of the newsletter.

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The US Department of Education awards grants through Title VI funding to a small number of institutions for the purpose of establishing, strengthening, and operating language resource and training centers to improve the teaching and learning of foreign languages. There are currently fifteen Language Resource Centers nationwide: the Center for Advanced Language Proficiency Education and Research (CALPER) at the Pennsylvania State University; the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota; the Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS) at the University of Oregon; the Center for Languages of the Central Asian Region (CeLCAR) at Indiana University; the Center for Educational Resources in Culture, Language and Literacy (CERCLL) at the University of Arizona; the Center for Language Education and Research (CLEAR) at Michigan State University; the Center for Open Educational Resources and Language

Learning (COERLL) at the University of Texas at Austin; the Language Acquisition Resource Center (LARC) at San Diego State University; the National African Language Resource Center (NALRC) at Indiana University; the National Capital Language Resource Center (NCLRC), a consortium of Georgetown University, the Center for Applied Linguistics, and the George Washington University; the National East Asian Languages Resource Center (NEALRC) at the Ohio State University; the National Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC) at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa; the National Heritage Language Resource Center (NHLRC), at the University of California-Los Angeles; the National Middle East Language Resource Center (NMELRC) at Brigham Young University; and the Slavic and Eurasian Language Resource Center (SEELRC) at Duke University.

Two other types of authentic materials that are worth mentioning are children's books and translated materials. Some students, particularly young adolescents, might like activities with simple children's books. For example, I have a book called *Les Contraires* that contains pictures with simple sentences and the opposite words in each sentence highlighted, such as *froid* and *chaud*. Some children's books, however, contain low-frequency idioms, puns, and inaccessible cultural information. These books would be less appropriate for beginners.

Some authentic materials are translations of English texts with which your students might be familiar. For example, if you are teaching a foreign language in a US high school or university, it's likely that your students have read the Harry Potter series in English. You can use a book in the series for a variety of activities. Given that the students already know the story and are likely interested in it, you can introduce it early on and have students do a variety of activities with parts of the books, such as having them skim Chapter 4 of the first book to find the part where Hagrid is first described (practicing descriptive language). Similarly, if there is a movie that your students like, you might be able to find a version of it dubbed in the target language, or if you teach French or Spanish, many DVDs have French and Spanish options. Although translated materials lack the benefit of providing students with information from the target culture, students often already have the appropriate background information for dealing with them.

### Some sample activities

Vocabulary is by far the easiest language feature to focus on when using authentic materials, particularly with beginners. This is in part because there are a variety of activities that you can do for which students don't need to use much grammar or don't need any listening comprehension skills. In the sidebar at right, I have included two examples. Both use authentic newspapers from the Internet and don't require students to understand the full news stories, only isolated words. Although teaching isolated vocabulary words is not the best way to teach vocabulary, the words are being presented in context. The first sample activity allows the teacher to take advantage of cognates while the second activity can be used with a character-based language like Chinese.

## SAMPLE ACTIVITIES FOR BEGINNERS USING AUTHENTIC NEWSPAPERS

### For cognate languages

Tell students to do the following:

1. Go to the website for *La Presse*, a French language Montreal newspaper:  
<http://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/montreal/>
2. Write down every word that looks like it might be a cognate with English.
3. Look up the word and then record it in a vocabulary notebook with the correct definition.

There are many cognates such as *sports*, *cinéma*, *international*, and *éducation*, but there is also a false cognate, *actualités*. Immediately, the students will learn a large number of vocabulary words.

Future assignments can involve students going to a specific section of the newspaper that interests them, whether it is sports or entertainment, and completing a similar assignment. As they progress, they can be asked to copy full sentences to translate.

### For languages with characters (e.g., Chinese and Japanese)

Tell the students to do the following:

1. Go to the website of the *People's Daily*:  
<http://www.people.com.cn/>
2. Print a copy of the page for today.
3. Circle every character that they recognize.
4. In the headings at the top of the page, choose five groups of words. Look them up and record them in a vocabulary notebook.

This page includes characters for numbers and dates that even a beginner should be able to recognize. Looking up Chinese words is a skill that students need to learn, and this activity will reinforce that skill.

Have students go back to the printed text about every two weeks and circle more words, and look up more words. This will help them see their progress in reading authentic texts.

Another approach to using authentic materials with beginners is to assign a task that they can complete with the minimal language skills that they have. For example, you can send them to a clothing website and ask them about the prices of certain items. You can assign different students to different sites and have them then compare prices. Students won't need to understand the entire website to complete the task, and they will also quickly learn vocabulary related to navigating websites. On the Amazon France website, for example, it's easy to see that *rechercher* means *search* and *aide* means *help* not only because of the similarities to English but because these features are on English-language websites as well.

Another sample task might be a role play that is turned into an information gap activity using authentic materials. For example, one student might want to buy a train ticket with a certain set of parameters while the other student plays the role of the ticket seller who has a copy of a real train schedule. (This can be a brochure picked up on your last trip abroad, or simply a printout from the website of the main rail company of your target country.)

When you are teaching listening or reading, beginners might be able to understand only a small portion of a text. This should not discourage you from using the text with beginners. Instead, you can focus on a short activity that the students can accomplish and that will give them more confidence with authentic texts. For example, you might be able to find a video about a famous movie star with whom the students are familiar. You can explain that you are going to do an activity with a real story but that they will be able to understand only a small part of it. Next, show the video without sound and have the students write three sentences in the target language about what they think the video is about. These can be very simple sentences. After the group shares the sentences, play the video with sound and then compare their sentences to what they heard in the video. Finally, give the students a few very simple questions that can be answered by listening to the video and then go over the answers. You can return to the video later and have the students listen for different details that might be harder to understand.

### What about grammar?

Using authentic texts to focus on grammar is an important way to show students how various structures are used in real language. At the advanced levels, you can choose a text and do a reading or listening cloze by deleting, for example, prepositions or articles. The benefit of this type of activity is not only that students' attention is drawn to a structure that they may pass over when reading for the main idea, but also that they usually have to read or listen closely to the entire text in order to decide on the correct structure. With beginners, however, such activities are impossible because students will not be able to understand the entire text.

If you are going to focus on grammar using authentic texts with beginners, you need to find materials that contain the target structure as well as a text that is somewhat comprehensible, and this is not always easy. If you focus on a small amount of language, however, there are grammar activities that you can do with authentic texts in a beginning class. One simple activity is to take a text and have students scan for examples of a specific structure, such as different verb tenses. Have students, for example, find examples of the Spanish preterite and then copy the sentences. Another possibility is to ask students to read a text for homework and give them a list of some of the difficult vocabulary with translations or to look up. The next day, choose a few sentences that contain the target structure and give the students a dictation. Such an activity is preferable to giving students a dictation using an unrelated list of sentences because not only is the language real, but they have also seen it in context. They also, in theory, understood the meaning of the sentence when they read it for homework so that during the dictation, they can focus on the correct form.

### Practical problems

One of the most difficult aspects of using authentic materials with beginners is finding interesting and accessible materials. Furthermore, if you are using news stories, they can often go out of date quickly. Ideally, you should try to find materials that can be used for several years so that after you have put work into creating activities, those activities can be reused and shared. A good approach is to find materials related to topics in your textbooks so that they can be used each year.

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Another approach is to choose a text that is interesting to your students and revisit it several times during the year. For example, if you choose a high-interest news story, you can do a vocabulary activity in which students scan for known vocabulary. Later, you can take the same story and do an activity for which the students have to understand more of the text, such as a grammar cloze activity. I would expect that students will be motivated by seeing their progress understanding an authentic text.

Finally, copyright issues can be a concern. If you are using materials for students in your class only, it is likely that such use falls under fair use rules (<http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html>), but if you wish to publish your materials, you will need to get permission. You can also investigate which materials can be reprinted at no cost. Some useful websites include <http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html> and university websites such as the one at Stanford University (<http://fairuse.stanford.edu/>).

Some teachers have said that using authentic materials takes up too much time. Indeed, if you are expected to cover a certain amount of material in your textbook, authentic materials will slow you down. For teachers who do not have control over what material is covered, this is an issue that will have to be worked out with supervisors and district officials. Although it will take some work to find and incorporate authentic materials and take class to time to help the students through the materials, your students will benefit from exposure to language as it is really used.

Eisenclas, S. (2011). On-line interactions as a resource to raise pragmatic awareness. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43, 51-61.

Simpson-Vlach, R. & Ellis, N. (2010). An academic formulas list: New methods in phraseology research. *Applied Linguistics*, 31, 487-512.

Charlene Polio is a Professor in the Department of Linguistics & Germanic, Slavic, Asian, & African Languages at Michigan State University. She has done workshops for CLEAR on a variety of topics and this summer will be conducting one on using authentic materials. She is currently writing a book with Eve Zyzik (University of California, Santa Cruz) for the University of Michigan Press on using authentic materials.

## FURTHER READING

### **Academic articles on using authentic materials**

Bueno, K. A. (2009). Got film? Is it a readily accessible window to the target language for your students? *Foreign Language Annals*, 42, 318-339.

Gilmore, A. (2007). Authentic materials and authenticity in foreign language learning. *Language Teaching*, 40, 97-118.

Gilmore, A. (2011). "I prefer not text": Developing Japanese learners' communicative competence with authentic materials. *Language Learning*, 61, 786-819.

Goodall, G. (2010). Input from Spanish textbooks: Two case studies of poverty/richness of the stimulus. In C. Borgonovo, M. Español-Echevarría, & P. Prévost (Eds.). *Selected Proceedings of the 12th Hispanic Linguistics Symposium* (pp. 260-269). Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.

Maxim, H. (2002). A study into the feasibility and effects of reading extended authentic discourse in the beginning German language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 86, 20-35.

Weyers, J. R. (1999). The effect of authentic video on communicative competence. *The Modern Language Journal*, 83, 339-349.

### **Books with examples of how to use specific types of authentic materials**

Larimer, R. & Schleicher, L. (Eds.). (1999). *New ways in using authentic materials in the classroom*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Sanderson, P. (1999). *Using newspapers in the classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sherman, J. (2003). *Using authentic video in the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taylor, E. (2000). *Using folktales*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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## 2014 Summer Workshops

This year marks CLEAR's eighteenth year of offering summer professional development workshops! Teachers of all levels and languages have come to Michigan State University's campus for these informative, hands-on courses. Visit our website for more information about the workshops, discounts, and registration. We hope to see you in July!

### **The Basics of Creating Assessments: From Principles to Practice**

**JULY 14-16, 2014**

*Workshop Leader: Margaret Malone, Associate Vice President, World Languages and International Programs, Center for Applied Linguistics and Co-Director, National Capital Language Resource Center*

This workshop is for language instructors who want to learn the basic principles of developing assessments for classroom use. Workshop participants will be asked to respond to an online survey prior to the workshop to help plan activities. Participants will learn about the basic concepts of language assessment, including national standards for foreign language assessment, reliability, validity and practicality and how these principles apply to their own classrooms. Each participant will complete a needs assessment to determine their most salient assessment needs. Based on the results of each needs assessment, participants will work to conduct online searches for existing assessments. Then, participants will work together and in small groups to create assessment activities to meet their specific classroom needs.

### **Rich Internet Applications for Language Learning: Introductory Techniques**

**JULY 17-19, 2014**

*Workshop Leader: Angelika Kraemer, Executive Associate Director of the Center for Language Teaching Advancement, MSU*

This workshop is for language teachers who want to learn how to use CLEAR's free tools for creating interactive web-based multimedia language materials. The only computer skills that these tools require are point and click, copy and paste, and drag and drop. You get to concentrate on teaching, and don't have to worry about programming, uploading, downloading, or installing. The tools can be used with any language, any textbook, and any level. Learn how to make web pages where your students can record audio files that are automatically uploaded to your virtual dropbox. Make a "mashup" that combines your text, pictures, video, and interactive language exercises into one web page. Create virtual conversations for your students where they listen to questions, and the program captures their responses automatically. All of these functions are available to you from within a web browser, with no special hardware or software needed. Come and experience the next generation of web-based language teaching!

### **Speaking Activities for Oral Proficiency Development**

**JULY 21-23, 2014**

*Workshop Leader: Julie Foss, Assistant Professor in the Department of Modern Foreign Languages, Saginaw Valley State University*

We want our students to become proficient speakers of the target language, but what exactly is proficiency, and how can we help students achieve it? In this workshop, we will begin answering these questions by identifying what speakers at different levels and sublevels of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines can do, and how the Guidelines can be used to set realistic oral proficiency goals for your learners. After exploring considerations for developing and implementing speaking activities for Novice to Advanced levels and evaluating a variety of sample activities, you will create activities that target your learners' oral proficiency goals.

### **Using Authentic Materials in all Levels of Foreign Language Classes**

**JULY 24-26, 2014**

*Workshop Leader: Charlene Polio, Professor in the Department of Linguistics & Languages, MSU*

This workshop will show you how to supplement your classes with a range of authentic materials. We will try examples of activities that can be used to supplement textbooks and look at ways to create thematic units around authentic materials. We will discuss principles for choosing materials to increase student motivation. A large focus of the workshop will be on tasks involving authentic materials that can be used with lower level students. For the more advanced levels, we will focus on fully exploiting materials to maximize a focus on language. Participants will be encouraged to bring materials from the languages that they teach.

Learn more about all of these workshops and find information about accommodations, costs, and discount plans by visiting our website. Go to <http://clear.msu.edu> and click on "Professional Development." You can apply right online!

**Early application deadline: May 16, 2014**

**Regular application deadline: June 1, 2014**

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## Welcome Aboard!

Chris Howie joined CLEAR as a web developer in January 2013 to work on various projects, such as our Rich Internet Applications. Chris has over fourteen years of application development experience and has spent the last five years focusing on developing applications for the web. He's CLEAR's go-to guy for managing all of our web-based projects and products, so if you've emailed or called with a technical question in the last year, odds are you were working with Chris. His prior work experience included developing online membership management systems focused on non-profit associations, developing applications and data management systems to support sales activities, and developing reporting mechanisms to support sales, customer service and fulfillment activities. In his spare time, Chris enjoys spending time with his wife, playing the guitar and experimenting with new technologies. We're happy to have him on CLEAR's team!

## Congratulations!



CLEAR's Executive Associate Director, Joy Campbell, celebrated ten years with CLEAR in January 2014. As CLEAR's only full-time employee, Joy manages the Center's day-to-day activities—keeping track of projects, managing the budget,

coordinating professional development, and fielding questions from language teachers and other constituents. Her fabulous organizational skills and dedication keep things running smoothly and we hope we can look forward to another ten years with her! When she's not running CLEAR, Joy can be found chasing her kindergartener and two-year-old or planning trips to take with her husband when the kids are in college.

## NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

### ***CLEAR advocate list***

Every now and then, we are contacted by organizations (typically our funding agency or an organization contracted by the US Department of Education) who would like to speak to people who have benefitted from CLEAR's products or workshops. We are trying to build a list of CLEAR "advocates" who can be contacted for this sort of request. If you would be willing to talk to researchers or funders about your CLEAR experiences (it's rare, so this would not become a regular burden), we'd love to hear from you. You can let us know by emailing [clear@msu.edu](mailto:clear@msu.edu) and giving us your name, best email to use, and which products you use and/or which workshops you've attended. Thanks in advance for being a CLEAR ambassador!

### ***Beta testers needed***

We've heard from a number of you (thanks!) on this, but in case you missed it in our last issue: In the coming months, we plan to launch a newly designed RIA home page with improved user interface and documentation. If you are interested in helping us beta test the new environment and provide feedback, we would love to hear from you. Please email [clear@msu.edu](mailto:clear@msu.edu) and let us know if you're willing to be a technology guinea pig!



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# CLEAR N e w s

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