Does authenticity matter when it comes to teaching pragmatics and culture in L2 classes?

How relevant is the choice of teaching material in L2 language teaching?

Session: GIVING LEARNERS A MULTICULTURAL VOICE

M.Antonietta Marongiu, Ph.D. - Università di Cagliari
functional, communicative competence, and appropriate social and cultural performance
Vygotsky (1962): Children and adults learn first on the social plane, then internalize the social onto the psychological plane.

Lantorf (2000): Acquisition happens by placing cognition and the mind into the social.

An ecological perspective of language acquisition in the 1990s brought back the importance of context and the need to rethink the relation of language and other meaning-making practices.

Context is at the core of communicative language teaching (Ellis 1987).
A MULTICULTURAL perspective in EDUCATION takes into account differences in abilities, styles, preferences and cultural traditions.

L2 learning in the classroom goes from simply mastering the grammatical forms to the acquisition of functional and social use of these forms in the language community(ies).

Pragmatic competence, the ability to communicate and interpret meaning in social interaction, comes to be an essential component of L2 proficiency.

A CONTEXT for the teaching material and the use of REALIA create a direct link to CULTURE, allowing attention to subtle and not-so-subtle differences between the target culture and our own. (Berwald 1987).
In a post-methodology era such as the current one,

(a) is FLT driven by the underlying idea that the learning context, including the teaching material, should reflect the culture(s) of the language being taught?

(b) do teaching materials have cultural and pragmatic connotation?
I carried out a qualitative analysis of currently available ELT textbooks (TB), specifically for teaching EFL in Italy, to see if and how they provide material that has adequate socio-cultural connotation and that is pragmatically valuable.


CORPUS

General Analysis Results

ALL TEXTBOOKS provide PICTURES of:

- people with geographical/ethnic connotation
- famous people to represent their countries
- famous places to represent the country
- social issues: child labor, social illnesses, environment
- aspects of western life: shopping, teenagers, music
- Social aspects: family, work, sports, school, travelling
- cultural productions: films, theatre, literature
General Analysis Results

ALL TEXTBOOKS have ANONYMOUS DRAWINGS about:

- School environment
- The family
- The house, rooms, furniture
- Means of transport
- Giving directions
- Clothes
- Daily routine & the time
- Sports & leisure activities
- Jobs
- Food & drinks, recipes
- Body parts & illnesses
- The weather & natural disasters
ALL TEXTBOOKS have NON-AUTHENTIC TEXTS about:

- Famous people or places, or special events to represent a country
- Social issues: child labor, social illnesses, environment
- Aspects of western life: shopping, teenagers, music
- Social aspects: family, work, sports, school/university, travelling
- Cultural products: films, theatre, literature
ALL TEXTBOOKS are organized into UNITS around a SOCIAL / CULTURAL / FUNCTIONAL TOPIC

ONE TEXTBOOK only offers TEXTS ON CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES
### TOPICS of the CULTURE & CLIL Sections

**Geography** (the UK, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Borneo, Hong Kong, Brazilian uncontacted tribes, the Basque language)

**Famous cities** (London, New York, Dublin)

**Famous places/events** (markets in London, Glastonbury Festival, Universal Children’s Day, wildlife in India, life in the North Pole, the Carnival)

**Science** (math, physics, chemistry, astronomy, applications of new technology)

**History** (of British, American, of British sports, St Patrick’s Day, Monument Valley, the Royal Family, Gandhi, Hiroshima & Nagasaki, September 11, 2001, Eurozone crisis)

**Legends** (Loch Ness Monster)

**Literary productions** (Sherlock Holms, Funeral Blues by W.H. Auden, Gulliver’s Travels, etc.)

**Fiction** (Casablanca, Poirot, The Namesake, The Dead)

**Contemporary issues** (education in the UK & in the USA, The Internet, extreme sports, relationships, crime, violence at school, Money, microcredit, Summer jobs, old & present Migrations, religion & stereotypes, eating habits vs. disorders)

**Modern heroes** (Mark Zuckerberg, Steve Jobs)
Socio-Cultural Connotation

- To which country do data refer to?
- Can these figures be applied to Europe/the world?
- Which one is not true?
- Does the speaking activity stimulate interaction among students based on the questions placed?
- The activity lacks contextualization

From Insight Intermediate p.58
Vocabulary providing

**EVERYDAY ENGLISH**
At the chemist’s

1. Match a word in the box with a picture. Write the words in the correct column.

   a comb  suncream  aspirin  shampoo  
deo*odorant  some plaster s  toothbrush  
conditioner  soap  toothpaste

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Things for your hair</th>
<th>Things for your teeth</th>
<th>Things for your skin</th>
<th>Things for your health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

New Headway Elementary p.105
These activities DO NOT allow students to practice a MEANING-MAKING SOCIAL EVENT

They DO NOT ACTIVLY INVOLVE STUDENTS

The sequence provides vocabulary, dialogue modeling, but fails on its pragmatic purpose.

The PRACTICE with the partner would be PURPOSEFUL if it took place before the modeling.
The reading text provides a real picture of present eating habits in the UK, and a comparison to the past.

Then a traditional dish recipe

Cottage pie: a traditional British dish

Here's the recipe for this traditional British dish.

**Ingredients:**
- 1 kg potatoes
- 6 tablespoons milk
- 150 g butter
- A little salt and black pepper
- 2 onions, chopped
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 450 g minced beef
- 350 ml beef stock
- A few white mushrooms, chopped
- A little parsley
- 1 tablespoon flour
- Some Parmesan cheese

**Preparation:**
These activities make students think/talk about:

1) personal preferences,
2) cultural differences,
3) good/bad eating habits.

Performer B1, p. 50-1, Zanichelli
A British citizen
- A British poet
- A contemporary poet
- A multicultural representation of the British society
- A message of reciprocal tolerance

Performer B1, p. 53, Zanichelli
The activities guide the students’ interpretation of the poem with:
- Aspects of **stylistic analysis** (metaphors),
- **Sociolinguistic distinctions** (colloquialisms),
- **Socio-cultural connotation** of language features (ethnicities & nationalities),
- **A pragmatic approach** (ingredients for a better society).

Performer B1, p. 53, Zanichelli
BURGER QUEEN

She's 109 years old, and she only eats junk food.

Yesterday was Mary Alston’s birthday. She is 109 years old, and she is one of the oldest people in the world. And she only eats junk food.

Mrs Alston had a party with six generations of her family. Her daughter, Jenny Morgan, who is 85, said, ‘My mother loves chocolate, and eats only popcorn, pizzas, and burgers. She never eats fresh food. She says she doesn’t like it.’

Mrs Alston lives in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. She was born on a farm in Pennsylvania, and worked as a teacher. In 1915 she married James Henry Alston. He died in 1983.

Her granddaughter, Annie, who is 65, said, ‘Grandma gets up every day at six o’clock, and goes to the hairdresser every Friday.’

Annie asked her grandmother what she wanted to eat on her birthday. Mary said, ‘I’d like a cheeseburger and fries!’
What is the socio-cultural purpose of this not contextualized reading?

Is it implying that:

a. all British people eat junk food?
b. eating junk food is good for your health?
**Pragmatics** extending beyond grammar, involves knowledge of forms, of their functional possibilities, and contextual requirements that determine form-function mapping. (Taguchi 2011)

**Pragmatic development** entails acquisition of both language resources to perform communicative acts and discerning social perceptions of these acts, accordingly, teaching material needs to provide social contexts, occasions for functional language use and interaction.

More than 50% of the teaching material analyzed lacks adequate contexts where to perform the linguistic resources, yet they are used in public schools, in private English schools, and in University Language Centers. WE HOPE TEACHERS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE IN THE CLASSROOM.
CONCLUSIONS

In an **ecological perspective of language acquisition as socialization** the learning **context** is very important.

In a **multicultural society** the classroom should be a **community of practice for socialization**, and not an aseptic, neutral environment where to pretend that differences do not exist.

In our **post-methodology era**, language teaching has to consider **pragmatics** more than ever, since the meanings constructed in FL classes convey **cultural views**, influence the learners’ opinions, can create **prejudice or misconceptions** rather than **tolerance**.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

M. ANTONIETTA MARONGIU
marongiuma@gmail.com