

Getting real in the language classroom

Alex Gilmore Kansai Gaidai University Japan

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'Unicornio' Silvio Rodriguez (1982)



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Authentic materials...

- connect with learners' emotions & imaginations & are more likely to be retained in long-term memory.
- motivate learners to engage with & understand the target language.
- provide a richer source of input which better meets the varying interlanguage needs of learners.
- have the potential to develop a wider range of communicative competences in learners.

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Components of communicative competence model

1. **Linguistic competence** (lexical, morphological, orthographical, syntactical & phonological knowledge)
2. **Pragmalinguistic competence** (knowledge of speech acts; understanding or conveying communicative intent appropriately in a given context)
3. **Sociopragmatic competence** (knowledge of what is socially or culturally appropriate in a particular speech community)
4. **Strategic competence** (knowledge of how to repair conversation or compensate for linguistic deficiencies)
5. **Discourse competence** (knowledge of how to produce unified, coherent & cohesive discourse in different genres)

(Canale & Swain 1980; Canale 1983; Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei & Thurrell 1995; Gilmore 2007)

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The effects of rich input:



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Hypothesis: the richer input provided by authentic materials, combined with appropriate awareness-raising activities, would be better able to develop a range of communicative competencies in learners.

- 10-month quantitative/qualitative longitudinal classroom-based study, investigating how learners' communicative competence developed with authentic vs. textbook materials.
- 62 2nd year Japanese university students assigned to experimental group (N=31) or control group (N=31).
- Experimental/control treatment accounted for approx. 33% of formal English input over 10-month period.
- Learners' communicative competence & language skills measured with a batch of eight pre-/post-course tests.
- Participants' emic perspectives investigated through learner diaries & case-studies.

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The materials & tasks

- **Control group:** 2 ELT textbooks commonly used in Japanese universities, *Inside English* (Maggs, Kay, Jones & Kerr 2004) & *Face to Face* (Fuller & Fuller 1999).

Tasks: Those suggested in textbooks (predominantly lexico-grammatical focus).

- **Experimental group:** Extracts from authentic materials (films, documentaries, reality shows, TV comedies, web-based sources, home-produced video of NSs, songs, novels & newspaper articles).

Tasks: Designed to highlight & practise features of the discourse which could help learners' develop a wide range of communicative competences (communication strategies, discourse intonation, NVC, conversational strategies, reactive tokens, discourse markers, register, etc.).

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The quantitative tests

8 tests designed to tap into different aspects of learners' communicative competence or language skills:

1. IELTS Listening test (Hopkins & Nettle 1995)
2. Receptive pronunciation test (Rogerson & Gilbert 1990)
3. 'C'-Test (extracts from Headway series, Soars & Soars)
4. Grammar test (Murphy 1994)
5. Receptive vocabulary test (Schmitt 2000)
6. Discourse Completion Task (Schauer 2005)
7. IELTS oral interview with NS teacher
8. Student-student role-play

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Results

- One-way between groups analysis of covariance (ANCOVA)
- Independent variable = type of intervention (textbook vs. authentic input)
- Dependent variables = post-course test scores
- Covariates = pre-course test scores

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	Source	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2
	Listening	1	55.58	55.58	4.44*	.07
	Receptive pronunciation	1	114.28	114.28	11.84**	.17
	'C'-Test	1	116.37	116.37	2.69	.04
	Grammar	1	1.12	1.12	.022	< .0005
	Receptive vocabulary	1	922.82	922.82	14.81**	.20
	DCT	1	.02	.02	1.7	.03
	Oral interview (total)	1	.72	.72	6.84*	.11
	(pronunciation)	1	.16	.16	1.62	.03
	(body language)	1	1.26	1.26	8.93**	.14
	(fluency)	1	.86	.86	5.01*	.08
	(vocabulary)	1	.27	.27	2.02	.03
	(interaction)	1	2.29	2.29	10.25**	.15
	Role-play (total)	1	3.10	3.10	17.58**	.25
	(conv. behaviour)	1	3.44	3.44	17.74**	.25
	(conv.management)	1	3.15	3.15	14.65**	.22

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Eta squared: .01 = small effect .06 = moderate effect .14 = large effect

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Problems with DCT rating

- **NS DCT response:**

Scenario 5: You have to hand in an essay to the secretary. The secretary's office is closing soon and you are already running late. When you get to her office, two professors are standing in front of it. You ask them to let you through.

You say: *Excuse me could you please move aside so I could come in please?*

- **NNS (3 years in NZ) DCT response:**

Scenario 14: You have an appointment with a professor. When you arrive at her door, two of your friends are looking at her timetable and are blocking the door. You ask them to move aside.

You say: *Hey retard move your fucking arse.*

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Comments on DCT (experimental group)

SN: The computer test [DCT] I had today was terrible, I got disappointed at myself... I tried to show several skills I had studied through this course such as formal & informal way of speaking English, yet I could not. If I could take the test again, I'd love to!!

AO: I did the role playing and computer test. I wanted to use some expressions which I studied in your class, but when it came to say something, I could not do well. It was regrettable.

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Diary studies

- Participants asked to keep a diary record of classroom events (what they felt was the focus of lessons & their feelings about materials/activities)
- Diaries collected in (post-investigation) & 'significant events' identified (Bailey & Ochsner 1983; Bailey 1990)
- 'Recurring issues' identified & thematically organised (Krishnan & Hwee Hoon 2002)

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Recurring issues in learners' diaries

1. 'Noticing' aspects of the input
2. The learning environment
3. Motivating or de-motivating factors
4. Comments on tests or testing procedures

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Conclusion: Quantitative results

- Experimental materials & tasks allowed students to develop a wider range of communicative competencies
- Statistically significant differences between groups for:
 1. Listening skills
 2. Speaking skills
 3. Linguistic competence (receptive vocabulary & phonology)
 4. Pragmalinguistic competence (e.g. opening/closing conv.)
 5. Sociopragmatic competence (e.g. NVC)
 6. Strategic competence (e.g. hesitation & conversation repair)
 7. Discourse competence (e.g. conversation management)

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Conclusion II: Quantitative results

No statistically significant differences between groups for:

1. Reading skills ('C'-Test)
2. Grammar
3. Request speech acts (DCT results)
4. Productive vocabulary/phonology

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Conclusion III: Qualitative results

1. Learners in the experimental group ‘noticed’ a wider range of communicative competence features (authentic materials provide rich input)
2. Learners in the experimental group appeared to be highly motivated by ‘interesting’, ‘challenging’, ‘practical’ or ‘useful’ aspects of the input (the authentic materials encouraged greater engagement with the texts)
3. Social goals often override instructional goals in the classroom
4. Qualitative research can complement quantitative results in classroom-based studies by: a) allowing for data triangulation; & b) providing an emic perspective on events

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KM: Honestly I thought your class was boring in first semester because the class was mainly text activity. I thought “this is communicative English III so I don’t want to study the same way as high school or communicative English I and II”. I considered the class as easy class. Once I think so, it is difficult to keep high motivation to improve English skill in the class. I wanted more challenging and enjoyable class. In second semester, my mind was dramatically changed. Your class were based on discussion and video activity without textbooks. This was really enjoyable and challenging.

[KM changed from control to experimental group after 1st term]