



The Nature of Authenticity in English as a Foreign Language: A Comparison of Eight Inter-related Definitions

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Abstract

This paper aims to gain a better understanding of the concept of authenticity by asking language teachers and students to what extent they agree with eight inter-related definitions (Gilmore, 2007). The eight definitions were converted into a questionnaire survey with both Likert scale items and open-ended questions, further triangulated by teacher/researcher journals and observation data. The questionnaire was administered to Japanese university students (both English and non-English majors) and Japanese high school English teachers. This study aims to find out what authenticity means to two of the main stakeholders in English as a foreign language context, namely, students and teachers for whom English is a foreign language. The results show that none of the definitions is satisfactory on its own, and there was little or no overall consensus about the definitions. This finding serves to prove that authenticity is in need of an updated understanding which is more inclusive to speakers of English as a second or foreign language.

Key Words: Authenticity, Native-speakerism, Teacher and student perceptions

Introduction

Authenticity is an important issue in language learning and teaching. It is also an emotive term and a controversial topic. This is especially true of recent years, in light of the growing body of research into English as an international language and ‘non-native speaker’ teachers (‘NNSTs’). In a state-of-the-art article for the journal *Language Teaching*, Gilmore (2007) compiled a comprehensive review of authenticity, a concept which has been central to English language teaching for over a century. Important developments such as English as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF), Global Englishes and the empowerment of L2 speakers or ‘non-native speakers’ have had an influence on the concept of authenticity in language teaching, which was for a very long time grounded on assumptions about the nature of culture and especially believed to be the sole domain of the problematic notion of the ‘native speaker’.

Whilst the academic literature on authenticity has of course been the main realm in which discussions about the ownership of English and the position of the ‘native/non-native speaker’ teacher has been debated, to what extent have these discussions permeated the real experiences of students and teachers of English? Such individuals are arguably the two main stakeholders at the centre of what Mishan (2005) calls the ‘authenticity debate’. In order to understand more about how these stakeholders conceptualise and experience authenticity, I devised a questionnaire adapted from Gilmore (2007). I also collected other qualitative and quantitative data in a mixed-methods study which focused on both teachers and students. For this study the participants were Japanese university students and Japanese high school teachers of English. I will also explain the need for further inquiry and outline how such studies might best be conducted in the future, with particular emphasis on the complex and dynamic nature of authenticity. I will

briefly outline the need for a flexible framework for understanding the concept from a contextually situated position which encompasses both the individual and social aspects of authenticity in language learning.

Authenticity

Authenticity is a complex issue. In language learning and teaching, there are two main strands to the discussion, which are largely and perhaps confusingly often combined into one. The first strand is a continuation of the existential aspects of authenticity, and in particular the way that the self is implicated in terms of a process of ‘authentication’ (Mishan, 2005; van Lier, 1996; Widdowson, 1978, 1994). Here, authenticity is not something absolute or an inherent property of a text (as in a newspaper article from an English-speaking country) but rather authenticity is relative, and belongs to a process of personal engagement with the language (van Lier, 1996). This strand of discussion on authenticity is primarily theoretical and as a result may seem rather abstract to many practicing teachers or to bear little practical relevance to the daily reality of teaching. The second strand to discussions of authenticity in language teaching relates mainly to language learning materials, which may also include the tasks utilised to engage learners (Breen, 1985; Gilmore, 2009, 2011; Mishan, 2000, 2005). Generally, these discussions tend to take a more practical view of the ‘authenticity debate’ and quite often they favour the definition that authentic materials should be “real language produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message” (Morrow, 1977, p. 13).

However, although the ‘real’ definition remains useful, it is rather unsatisfactory for two reasons. Firstly, it tends to assume that there exists a reality from which authentic materials can be extracted (Widdowson, 1994), what Hung and Victor-Chen (2007) pejoratively name *extrapolation techniques*. Furthermore, extrapolation techniques tend to gravitate towards contexts where English is the first language, with the ‘classic’ example of an authentic text being simply a newspaper from a target language speaking community (Harmer, 2008; Hedge, 2000; Richards & Schmidt, 2013). Therefore, the problematic notion of the ‘native-speaker’ is implied as the originator of authentic language, albeit indirectly. Nevertheless, this type of definition is clearly unsuitable for English as an international language, and even more problematic for teachers who speak English as their second language. Secondly, and equally concerning, is the notion that by defining authentic materials as being ‘real’ there is an inference that the classroom learning context is not ‘real’. This seriously impedes the validity of language learning in institutional settings, and undermines the act of teaching with authentic materials.

Gilmore’s Meta-definition

When Gilmore (2007) surveyed the literature he did allude to some of the contradictions of authenticity as a term, even going so far as to ask whether authenticity in language teaching was “too elusive to be useful” (2007, p. 98). He points out eight inter-related and overlapping definitions of authenticity, which are:

1. the language produced by native speakers for native speakers in a particular language community (Little, Devitt, & Singleton, 1988; Porter & Roberts, 1981);
2. the language produced by a real speaker/writer for a real audience, conveying a real message (Benson & Voller, 1997; Morrow, 1977; Nunan, 1989; Porter & Roberts, 1981; Swaffar, 1985);

3. the qualities bestowed on a text by the receiver, in that it is not seen as something inherent in a text itself, but is imparted on it by the reader/listener (Breen, 1985; Widdowson, 1978);
4. the interaction between students and teachers which is a 'personal process of engagement' (van Lier, 1996, p. 128);
5. the types of task chosen (Bachman, 1991; Benson & Voller, 1997; Breen, 1985; Guariento & Morley, 2001; Lewkowicz, 2000; van Lier, 1996);
6. the social situation of the classroom (Arnold, 1991; Breen, 1985; Guariento & Morley, 2001; Lee, 1995; Rost, 2002);
7. authenticity as it relates to assessment and the Target Language Use Domain (Bachman, 1991; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Lewkowicz, 2000);
8. culture, and the ability to behave or think like a target language group in order to be recognized and validated by them (Kramsch, 1998).

(adapted from Gilmore, 2007, p. 98)

These eight definitions could be taken as a meta-definition which illustrates the evolution of the concept of authenticity since the 1970s, particularly encompassing the 'authenticity debate' (Mishan, 2005) which arose along with communicative language teaching. It is clear from this meta-definition that ideas of authenticity have been evolving as the world looks upon English more and more as its second language. Important developments such as ELF, Global Englishes and the empowerment of L2 speakers (or non-native speakers) have evidently had an influence on the concept, which was for a very long time grounded on assumptions about the nature of culture and especially believed to be the sole domain of the native-speaker. Many of these shifts are indeed particular to the English language as it became 'hyper-centralised' (de Swaan, 2001). However, it is also clear that no single definition is sufficient, and the concept remains elusive.

Despite identifying eight inter-related definitions, many of which are overlapping and many of which contrast with other definitions, Gilmore states his own preference for the 'real' definition because it is the one he finds most workable. In this study, I wanted to ask other groups about these definitions and to examine how they are perceived by the main stakeholders in the 'authenticity debate'.

Methodology

The literature on authenticity, as Gilmore's definitions show, has offered multiple perspectives on authenticity. However, this study's purpose was to examine to what extent these discussions have permeated the lives of the main stakeholders in the authenticity debate, in other words, teachers and students. In order to understand more about how students and 'NNSTs' experience authenticity, I devised a five-point Likert scale questionnaire adapted from Gilmore's eight inter-related definitions. I also collected other qualitative and quantitative data in a mixed-methods study which focused on both teachers and students. I administered the questionnaire to five classes of students with whom I was in direct contact as a teacher at two Japanese universities in Tokyo (n=103), and to Japanese high school English teachers who attended a one-day training workshop I conducted focusing on authentic materials (n=37). The workshop is one of several offered by University A, accredited by the Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT) and participants are awarded credits towards the renewal of their teaching licence, which needs to be renewed every 10 years under Japanese law. Participants need to renew their licence but they can choose

which workshops to attend based on personal interest. The total number of participants (students and teachers) was n=140 after some participants opted out of the study. See Table 1 for a summary.

Table 1: Summary of participants in definition comparison study

Group	Class Name	Students	University, Department and Class focus
Students	Academic English (AEi)	First to Third Year All non-English majors, mixed majors.	University A, General Foreign Language Studies, English for Academic Purposes
	Academic English (AEii)	This course was available to all departments through a lottery selection.	
	Integrated Skills (INS)	Second to Fourth Year English Literature majors	University A, Department of English Literature, English Skills
	Writing Skills (WS)	First Year English Literature majors	
	Discussion on Contemporary Topics (DCT)	First to Fourth Year English Language majors	University A, Department of English Studies. Global Issues
	Applied Language and Communication (ALC)-	Second Year All foreign language majors but no English majors	University B, General Foreign Language Studies, Sociolinguistics
Teachers	Using and Adapting Authentic Materials to help Motivate Students	Japanese high school teachers of English, with a minimum of 10 years' experience	MEXT Accredited teaching licence renewal course

Gilmore's definitions were changed into statements which could then be used to create a five point Likert scale response questionnaire (5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = not sure, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree). Please note that the questions are necessarily simplified and do not convey the same level of depth as the original definitions (see Table 2). Also, the question relating to Assessments has shifted the original focus from language assessment authenticity to something which would be more relevant to the students themselves in terms of test preparation. In the original definition, authenticity as it relates to assessment is concerned with the "degree of correspondence of a given language test task to the features of a [target language use/real world] task" (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 23); however, it was altered slightly here, in line with Gilmore's own more practical reworking of the criteria (Gilmore, 2009).

Table 2: The eight definitions adapted into questions

Question (adapted from Gilmore, 2007)	Short Q.
Authenticity means the language produced by native speakers for native speakers.	Native
Authenticity means the language produced by a real speaker/writer for a real audience, conveying a real message.	Real
If I think something is authentic, that makes it authentic. Each person decides how authentic they think something is.	Self
The interaction between students and teachers is authentic.	Classroom
Authenticity is the types of task chosen. It is not the texts we use in class but the way we use them in class.	Task
The social situation of the classroom affects how authentic things are.	Social
Things are authentic if they help me prepare for my assessments.	Assessments
Culture is authentic, and the ability to behave or think like a target language group in order to be recognized and validated by them.	Culture

Results

Questionnaire data

Cronbach's alpha for the 8 items was 0.537 (n=135 because some outliers were removed automatically by SPSS). I also ran Cronbach's alpha on the questionnaire using only the students' responses and then the teachers' responses separately, to see if this arrived at a higher value for internal consistency. However, even using the responses from one group yielded a low coefficient, with .535 for the students' responses and .612 for teachers. The reliable coefficient for such a questionnaire is generally considered acceptable at 0.80, so the questionnaire based on Gilmore's eight definitions has a below standard internal consistency. Usually questionnaires with more items will score higher on the internal reliability tests, but even if we modify our standard slightly for the smaller scale and the fact that there is a great deal of variety in the eight definitions, if the scale "does not reach 0.60, this should sound warning bells" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 207). Using a modified standard for the smaller scale, we could consider the teachers' responses to be (barely) reliable but not the students' responses. This is not in any way a criticism of the definitions themselves, and it may be due to the way I worded them in the questionnaire. However, the results of the Cronbach alpha coefficient suggest that one of the basic assumptions about the questionnaire's reliability is wrong. This may be explained by the fact that, although attempting to describe one thing (authenticity), the definitions do so in such a varied way that a reliable standard of internal consistency is not possible because there is too much variation among them, and the respondents' answers were also too varied to reveal a pattern of general agreement. However, this actually proves the point about authenticity which I would like to make, since a Cronbach's alpha coefficient only reflects the overall reliability of a set of variables, and my argument is that authenticity is individual and heavily contextually dependent, as I will discuss at the end of this paper.

Despite the lack of internal consistency of the questionnaire, I decided to evaluate the differences between the responses from teachers and students by first comparing the means of each group's

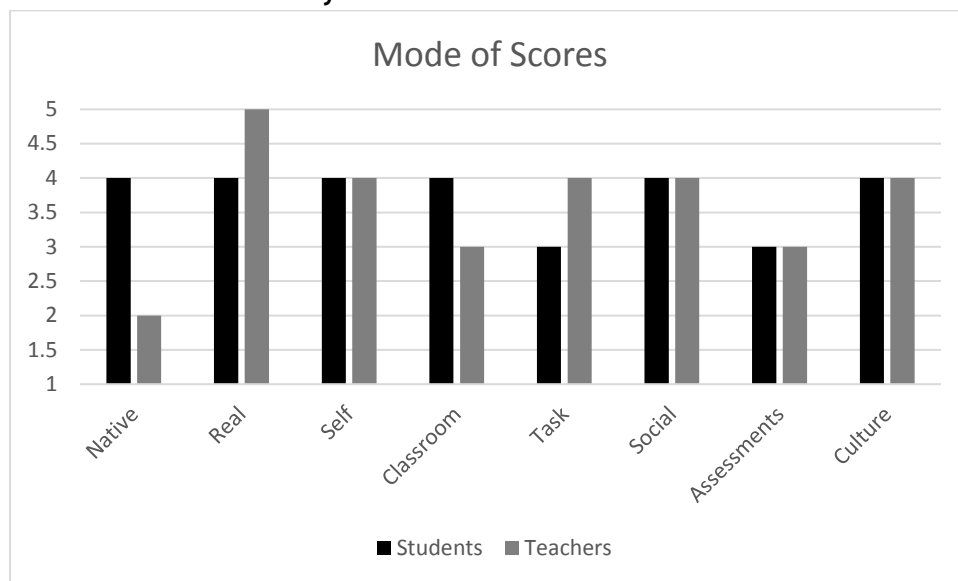
answers. I ran an Independent Samples T-Test between the students' and teachers' responses (see Table 3).

Table 3: Results of the T-Test between students and teachers

	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Native	Student	3.087	1.0489	.1033
	Teacher	2.811	1.1015	.1811
Real	Student	3.408	1.0236	.1009
	Teacher	4.270	1.1937	.1962
Self	Student	3.282	1.2712	.1253
	Teacher	3.270	1.3468	.2214
Classroom	Student	3.524	.9166	.0903
	Teacher	3.541	1.1449	.1882
Task	Student	3.446	.8885	.0884
	Teacher	3.811	.8768	.1441
Social	Student	3.689	.8521	.0840
	Teacher	3.514	.9013	.1482
Assessments	Student	3.020	.9796	.0975
	Teacher	2.757	.9547	.1569
Culture	Student	3.696	1.0511	.1041
	Teacher	3.568	1.1436	.1880

The T-Test revealed that none of the differences in responses to items on the questionnaire were statistically significant (below 0.05) except for the answers to the 'Real' question, which returned a Sig (two-tailed) value of .000 (very significant) and the Task question (.034). Although Assessment also looks to have received different results from the participants, it was not statistically significant at .159. This means that, despite the lack of internal consistency of the questionnaire, the students and teachers amongst the respondents' varying answers did not show any statistically significant differences when viewed as two separate groups, except in terms of Real and Task. However, if we momentarily ignore the statistical tests and use 'eyeball estimation' (Hurlburt, 1998) to look at the graph below (See Figure 1), a different picture emerges. Because of the slightly skewed distribution and lack of central tendency, it is useful to compare the mode as well as the means. The graph shows the mode of responses, meaning this graph shows the most common response rather than the average, in an attempt to wrestle some kind of pattern into these asymmetrical results. Generalising very broadly, it seems that students agree with the Native definition but teachers disagree with it, though not strongly and not in a way which is statistically significant. Assessments were "don't know" for both groups, and teachers felt a stronger need for authenticity to be 'real' although students also agreed. Teachers felt the tasks were an important aspect, whereas students were unsure.

Figure 1: The mode of students' and teachers' responses to a questionnaire based on Gilmore's 8 definitions of authenticity



The quantitative data were useful in demonstrating that even to those who had not previously given much thought to the question of authenticity in language learning, each participant had his/her own unique set of beliefs about the topic. These beliefs were not even generalizable between two groups, such as students and teachers, but rather they were different for each individual. In some ways this is unfortunate because it means that statistical tests will not yield any interesting or conclusive patterns for analysis, but in other ways it is exciting, because it means that each individual has his/her own interpretation of authenticity in language learning. Therefore, an understanding of each individual's response is essential if we are to understand more about the nature of authenticity.

Qualitative data

Overall, the picture that arises from the quantitative figures is one of confusion. The most useful piece of data seems to be the graph of the mode of scores, because at least here we can see where there was general agreement or disagreement between the participants, particularly on the 'native' question. I also collected qualitative data from the questionnaire participants in the form of two open questions in the questionnaire. The first question was:

- Do you think authenticity is a good or bad thing in the language learning classroom? Why, why not?

Many of the students spent much of this question attempting to define authenticity in their own words, probably as a result of the previous questionnaire and Likert items. The second question simply asked the participants if they had any other comments relating to authenticity and the content of language lessons. In addition, teacher participants were asked to write a short reaction paper explaining their reaction to authenticity based on the workshop. The prompt for teachers asked:

- In your opinion, how can we define authenticity in language learning materials? What does authenticity mean? What are some of the problems with authenticity? What are some of the advantages?

Based on the data from questionnaires, informal interviews during class and my own field journal reports taken from the study, it seems that students had not previously given a great deal of thought about how to define authenticity in language teaching, although the term was certainly familiar to them. On the other hand, the high school English teachers had often contemplated the issue of authenticity, generally viewing it as something desirable and yet rather elusive.

Students' perceptions

'Correct' English

When attempting to define authenticity in their own words, students' responses ranged from "dictionaries" and "the combination of good grammar book and the chance to use English" to "communicating with native [speakers]." This was particularly surprising, as it contrasted sharply with my own views on authenticity. The students' understanding of authenticity was tied closely to prescriptivism and correctness. For many students, authentic English meant 'correct' and 'standard' English. In some ways, this definition is perhaps a result of the Japanese word 正真正銘 [shōshinshōmei], a synonym of authenticity which also translates as genuine. In this way, perhaps the students understood genuine to mean 'correct'. Another possible translation of authenticity from the Japanese is 本物 [honmono], which literally means 'real thing'. A further five students commented that they felt studying authentic language would lead them to acquire 'correct' language. Many students expressed confusion about the term, and asked me to explain it to them before they would offer their own explanation.

Native English

Several students were very much drawn to the native-speaker ideal for their definition, for example, Sami commented:

Non-native English speakers should know real English at first. I don't know what is real and what is not, though (Sami of AEii, non-English Major, 2012)

The use of the term 'real' is interesting because it echoes Morrow's (1977) and Gilmore's (2007) definitions of authenticity, although again this student expressed that she found it hard to distinguish what constitutes 'real'.

Emi commented that

If teacher[s] don't correct the mistakes students can't learn the language used by native speakers. (Emi of ALC, Foreign Language Major, 2012)

Again this comment seems to be reiterating the students' association between authenticity and 'correct' English. I would like to point out that all of the students who took the questionnaire had received instruction from me in which I explicitly pointed out that English is a global language and in which I had encouraged them not to try and emulate so called 'native speakers'.

However, perhaps most noteworthy were comments such as the following:

[I]n Japan, schools tend to teach only grammar. So even when we study English for over 10 years, when we talk with native speakers, it's hard to communicate. (Kosuke of AEi, non-English Major, 2012)

This is a representative comment and one which quite succinctly explains some of the problems with Japanese (and indeed many other countries') foreign language education policies. The above comment also suggests that for many students around the globe, the English language is a rather abstract concept, merely a subject to be studied, or even a disembodied language. It is also worth noting the emphasis given to communicating with 'native speakers', which in some ways shows that the international status of English might not always be fully comprehended by students, especially those for whom English is merely a subject at school. Such students seem to view English as a product of globalisation, and yet their view of globalisation tends to gravitate towards Anglo-American perceptions of international culture. However, the 'real' definition was often implicitly and sometimes explicitly connected to the 'native speaker' definition of English:

To learn the language which is actually used in the native country. (Minami of ALC, Foreign Language Major, 2012)

Unclear Definition

Reflected in many of the comments and also noted in my field journal was the fact that many students reported that they could not define authenticity clearly, or that they did not know what it was. Moreover, four of the ten students in the Language Major Sociolinguistics class at University B left the answer blank, and during the administration of the questionnaire I noted in my observation record that students completed the questionnaires in small groups of between two and four. By the end of the session, at least one person in every group had asked me "what is authenticity?" and every single student had searched for the term in their Japanese dictionaries for a translation. Clearly, further support was needed in order to elicit the student's own definition, as they had not previously thought about the meaning of authenticity although they were familiar with the term in relation to language learning. The results from this item also revealed a further lack of a clear, single, definition and reveal the fact that authenticity, although an everyday part of the language teacher's vocabulary, is not something that students necessarily think about, despite the central role of students in the process of 'authentication'.

In summary, students were very confused about exactly how to define authenticity. They were unable to define it in their own words or to choose a preference from Gilmore's definitions. They were also unable to say whether they thought authenticity was a good or bad thing. Overall, their comments revealed a general lack of consensus, although conducting the research did generate some interesting class discussions and responses in the data. Furthermore, my observations were that students had a lot to say about the issue, although not all of them were able to fully explain their ideas because few of them had considered authenticity before in relation to their own learning.

Teachers' perceptions

Native speakers

During the teacher training workshop, I started by asking the participants to discuss in groups what they felt the definition of authenticity was. I noted in my field journal that at least one person in each small discussion group raised their hand when I asked "how many of you mentioned 'native speakers' in your definition of authenticity?" This, together with the reaction papers, shows that

many of the participants arrived at the session with culturally embedded ideas about authenticity, something I have also noted in other studies (Pinner, 2014, 2015). However, by the end of the workshop, participants displayed a broader and more inclusive understanding of the concept of authenticity:

Is only the English produced by L1 speaker authentic? The answer is no, I think. Because too many people from non-English speaking countries speak English as a real communication tool. We can't decide which English is authentic or not. Therefore, I think all English used in real communication is authentic. (Tomoko)

Difficulty of the language

Throughout the workshop, one of the messages about authenticity which I tried to stress was that it was not related to *nativeness* or the origin of the language, but rather it was more concerned with making the language relevant and meaningful to the learners, or in other words giving them a real reason to use the language within the pedagogic setting. This seems to have been communicated quite effectively, as many of the teachers picked up on this in their reaction papers:

I think authenticity in language learning materials is a real thing, especially related to the students...The problems with authenticity is sometimes to make the students get confused. The real materials are not only for learners so sometimes the materials have other difficult expressions and other aspects. But authentic materials help the students learn deeply. The materials have various aspects that are not related to the target expressions, but the various aspects help them to understand deeply, rather than the simple example. (Mami)

Mami expresses the common complaint against authentic materials, which is their linguistic complexity and thus appear too difficult for many learners. This criticism has been addressed by several scholars (Gilmore, 2007; Peacock, 1997), but in those cases the term 'authentic' was generally referring to things such as newspapers and other 'cultural products' (Mishan, 2005) which originate from a country where the target language is spoken, in other words the 'classic' definition. However, Mami has also made a valid point that by asking students to talk about issues which are relevant to them, we are likely to be asking the students to draw on a greater repertoire of expressions in order to explain their opinions or views on a given topic, which, as Mami points out later, means that "teachers have to spend more time [preparing] than when using text-books". This view characterised much of the workshop, which I noted in my field journal often organically shifted to the issue of balancing authentic materials within the teachers' busy workload and other curricular teaching responsibilities.

Moving away from culturally embedded definitions

The following comment from Mitsuko does a very good job of synthesising the main points and shifts that took place in the workshop.

I used to think authenticity means the language produced by native speakers in the U.S. or the U.K. and we Japanese should learn the grammar and pronunciation correctly and mimic how they speak and behave. But lately, I think not only natives but also non-natives can produce authenticity. If the speaker or the writer using the language can really convey a real message and the receiver can feel it's real, it can also be said to be authentic. (Mitsuko)

It is gratifying as the teacher/researcher to read such comments, as this also shows that I achieved my aim for the session, which was to move participants away from culturally embedded definitions of authenticity and begin to adopt a view which was more inclusive to other varieties of English and thus more workable and practical. However, despite this success, many of the comments also revealed an underlying circularity which shows that authenticity still basically came back to ‘native-speakers’ or at the least the source of origin of a text. This highlights the importance of a contextual understanding of authenticity that incorporates both social and individual factors (Pinner, 2016).

Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to show that when defining authenticity, too many assumptions tend to be made by those who are discussing the concept as it relates to language teaching and learning. The definitions of authenticity have themselves been a very contentious and much debated topic for the past few decades, and although the ‘real’ definition is perhaps still the most pervasive, this definition is problematic in the way that it implicitly frames the native-speaker model as the originator of authentic language. In asking the main stakeholders themselves, I was able to learn that although this study revealed no correlation between the students’ and teachers’ notion of authenticity, it did emerge that individuals had their own views and these did not necessarily correlate with their peers’. This is likely because of the very unique and individual way that each person identifies with the language he/she speaks, be it his/her first or second.

One very salient point that emerged from this study was the fact that many students and teachers still tend to view authenticity as having something to do with the ‘native speaker’ or with ‘correctness’. It seems that if we are to begin creating fairer practice within the English language teaching industry regarding the place of NNSTs, it might be worth investigating the relationship between authenticity and what Holliday (2005) describes as ‘native-speakerism’, the fact that the native speaker is disproportionately venerated by institutions and methodologies involving English language teaching.

As I stated previously, I find the definition of authenticity which relates to the ‘real world’ to be particularly undesirable. Although this definition certainly has value, it is also misleading in the way it is often mistakenly framed in such a way as to make it almost equivalent with the ‘native’ definition. It is for this reason that I feel practitioners should resist the urge to seek for a simple, single definition of authenticity, since it has led to a situation where the debate continues to go around in circles. Definitions which are practical in nature (such as the ‘real’ definition) tend to implicitly frame authenticity along the lines of extrapolation techniques, and in doing so they both infer the problematic notion of the mythical ‘native speaker’ and also damage the validity of using language in pedagogical situations by the implication that such situations are ‘not real’.

Definitions which are more existential in their origin (such as van Lier’s, labelled as ‘social’ in Gilmore’s eight definitions) have also come under fire for being too abstract and failing to be workable, because under such a view “any discourse can be called authentic and the term becomes meaningless” (Gilmore, 2007, p. 98). Despite this, I feel that authenticity needs to be seen as something which does not have a positive or negative state, or is not simply black and white or even a spectrum with various shades of grey in-between.

Elsewhere I have expressed the view that authenticity should be viewed as a continuum incorporating both social and contextual dimensions, which acknowledges the need for relevance to 'real' language use but at the same time validates the interactions taking place inside the classroom (Pinner, 2016). Such a continuum would also provide a conceptual bridge between the speech community where the target language is used and the individual who is attempting to learn to communicate with that community. Although such a continuum might not be able to provide a rigid definition of authenticity, it could perhaps be a more flexible framework for considering the nature of authenticity as it relates to different contextually situated individuals, incorporating the true complexity of the reality of language learning identity and motivation.

In light of these findings, I would recommend that future research into the issue of authenticity should be contextually situated, localised, and yet sensitive to global currents of influence. In order to truly understand the complexities of authenticity I believe it needs to be approached from a flexible and dynamic perspective which acknowledges the multitude of influences on the way languages are learned and used in and around the world.

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