Authenticity, Culture and Language Learning

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Abstract (English)

In philosophy, authenticity has been used with two meanings: one entails the notion of correspondence; the other entails the notion of genesis (Cooper, 1983, p. 15). Like certain branches of philosophy, language teaching has perhaps clung too long to the first of these notions of authenticity at the expense of the other. This paper reviews four key conceptualisations of authenticity which have emerged in the field of applied linguistics: text authenticity, authenticity of language competence, learner authenticity and classroom authenticity. If any of these types of authenticity is couched exclusively in terms of one usage or the other, it can lead to an impoverishment and objectification of the experience of language learning. Text authenticity can lead to a poverty of language; authenticity of competence can lead to a poverty of performance; learner authenticity can lead to a poverty of interpretation; classroom authenticity can lead to a poverty of communication. This paper proposes that a pedagogy of intercultural communication be informed by a more hybrid view of authenticity as a process of subjectification, derived from the Heideggerian concept of self-concern.

Abstract (Greek)

Στην φιλοσοφία, η έννοια της αυθεντικότητας έχει χρησιμοποιηθεί με δυο σημασίες. Η πρώτη έχει να κάνει με την έννοια της αντιστοιχίας ενώ η δεύτερη με την έννοια της γένεσης (Cooper, 1983: 15). Όπως και άλλοι κλάδοι της φιλοσοφίας, η διδασκαλία της γλώσσας έχει ίσως σταθεί παραπάνω από όσο θα έπρεπε στην πρώτη έννοια της αυθεντικότητας παραμελώντας τη δεύτερη. Αυτό το σύγγραμμα εξετάζει τέσσερις ιδέες κλειδιά σχετικές με την αυθεντικότητα που έχουν σημειωθεί στον τομέα της εφαρμοσμένης γλωσσολογίας. Αυτές είναι: αυθεντικότητα του κειμένου, αυθεντικότητα της ικανότητας του χρήστη της γλώσσας, αυθεντικότητα του χρήστη της γλώσσας και αυθεντικότητα του εκπαιδευτικού περιβάλλοντος. Αν κάποια από αυτές τις ιδέες της αυθεντικότητας συνδιαστεί αποκλειστικά με μια ή παραπάνω από τις περαιτέρω ιδέες, μπορεί να οδηγηθεί σε αποδυνάμωση και αντικειμενοποίηση της εμπειρίας του να μαθαίνεις μια γλώσσα. Η αυθεντικότητα του κειμένου μπορεί να οδηγήσει στην αποδυνάμωση της γλώσσας. Η αυθεντικότητα της ικανότητας του χρήστη της γλώσσας μπορεί να οδηγήσει στην αποδυνάμωση της εκπλήρωσής της. Η αυθεντικότητα του χρήστη μπορεί να οδηγήσει στην αποδυνάμωση της ερμηνείας. Η αυθεντικότητα του εκπαιδευτικού περιβάλλοντος μπορεί να οδηγήσει στην αποδυνάμωση της επικοινωνίας. Αυτό το σύγγραμμα προτείνει ότι ο παιδαγωγικός τομέας της διαπολιτισμικής επικοινωνίας θα πρέπει να επιρεαστεί από μια πιο διασταυρωμένη άποψη της αυθεντικότητας. Αυτή θα πρέπει να πηγάζει από τη διαδικασία της υποκειμενικοποίησης και της έννοιας της γνώσης του εαυτού μας όπως προτείνει ο Heidegger.

Keywords

authenticity, English Language Teaching (ELT), intercultural communication, self-concern.

1. Introduction

The idea of authenticity has been foundational to much language teaching and language teacher education for almost 40 years (Guariento and Morley, 2001). This has had powerful implications for pedagogic practice in both English Language Teaching (ELT) and the teaching of 'Modern and Foreign' Languages. The concept has received particular prominence within the field of applied linguistics, arguably the disciplinary homeland of ELT.

In common usage, the term 'authenticity' is used with two senses: one has the meaning of 'correspondence'; one has the meaning of 'genesis' (Cooper, 1983).

> For church historians, a text is authentic when it corresponds with events it purports to describe; whereas John's signature is authentic when it has the right genesis - John himself (8).

Cooper goes on to suggest that certain branches of philosophy have clung too long to one or other sense of the term.

> A proper account of authenticity in relation to lives, beliefs or values should have a place for both of the notions suggested by the everyday use. And there are inadequate philosophical accounts which, perhaps, are generated by one-sided attachment to one or other of these notions (8).

This paper proposes that this 'one-sided attachment' is also within the field of applied linguistics; and that within this field, it is also time to synthesize these two accounts of authenticity.

2. Authenticity and language education

Four types of authenticity have been proposed within the literature of applied linguistics: text authenticity (e.g. Guariento & Morley, 2001), competence authenticity (e.g. Canale and Swain, 1980), learner authenticity (Widdowson, 1979), and classroom authenticity (Breen, 1985; Taylor, 1994). We

argue that this typology reflects the binary conceptualization of the term: the first three types are derived from an authenticity of correspondence; the last is derived from an authenticity of genesis.

2.1 Text authenticity

Reference to authenticity in canonical ELT texts frequently features the collocation of the word 'authentic' with the terms 'language', 'text' or 'materials'. For example, we find 'authentic language' (McDonough & Shaw, 2003, passim); 'authentic text' (Canale & Swain, 1980: 31; Guariento and Morley, 2001); or 'authentic materials' (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 15). On this argument, authenticity is an attribute of language, text or materials. It refers to a correspondence between 'pedagogic' language, texts or materials and 'real world' language, texts or artefacts. For example, McDonough and Shaw gloss authenticity as:

> "…a term which loosely implies as close an approximation as possible to the world outside the classroom, in the selection of both language material and of the activities and methods used for practice in the classroom" (2003: 40).

2.2. Competence authenticity

The desired outcome of language teaching is the demonstration by learners of some form of competence (Bernstein, 2000) in the language which is being taught. Canale and Swain (1980) proposed one enduring model of language competence under three categories: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. Grammatical competence comprises knowledge of lexical items and of rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantic, and phonology. Sociolinguistic competence comprises: sociocultural rules which are concerned with the extent to which "appropriate attitude and register or style are conveyed by a particular grammatical form within a given sociocultural context" (Canale & Swain, 1980: 30); and

discourse rules which relate to awareness of the properties of cohesion and coherence of a text. Strategic competence derives from the communication strategies that may be used to compensate for breakdowns in communication. This model implies that competence in another language entails a correspondence between the communicative realisation of these three categories and their realisation by a hypostatised 'native speaker' of that language (Alptekin, 2002; Block, 2003; White, 1997). What 'authenticates' a learner's ability to communicate in another language is derived from its correspondence to interactions which take place between idealised native speakers or between native speakers and non-native speakers.

2.3. Learner authenticity

The concept of learner authenticity emerged as a riposte to the way in which the concept of text authenticity was gaining currency within language teaching (Lee, 1995). For Widdowson (1979: 165-6), authenticity does not reside in instances of language. Rather, it is bestowed upon a text by the response of its reader or listener. Crucially, learner authenticity is achieved by the 'non-native' reader or listener responding 'appropriately' to the text. A response is appropriate if it realises the intentions of the writer or speaker by reference to a set of shared conventions. Again, implict in this model of authenticity is the notion that these conventions are shared with 'native' speakers or writers. On this argument, it then becomes incumbent upon language teachers to instil in learners an awareness of notional 'target language' conventions which will ensure the necessary appropriacy of response. Learner authenticity is therefore also grounded in an authenticity of correspondence.

2.4. Classroom authenticity

Classroom authenticity problematizes the three preceding versions of an authenticity of correspondence. In a paper which follows on from Widdowson (1979), Breen (1985) writes:

> ...when we are concerned with the teaching of a new language to our learners, authenticity is a relative matter…1985: 60).

Breen goes on to suggest that the social practice of language teaching and learning realises aspects of the language teaching context. The fourth type of authenticity, therefore, emanates from the classroom, the site of language teaching:

> …the authentic role of the classroom is the provision of those conditions in which the participants can publicly share the problems, achievements and overall process of learning a language together as socially motivated and socially situated activity (1985: 68).

In valorising the social context of the language classroom, Breen's version derives from an authenticity of genesis rather than correspondence. Both pedagogic texts and pedagogic tasks are authentic because the classroom is their point of origin. Similar claims have also been made more recently as a basis for the use of concordance data in language classrooms (Gavioli and Aston, 2001). However, Widdowson challenges this position:

> The difficulty with [Breen's] conclusion is that one can claim authenticity for anything that goes on in the classroom, including mechanistic pattern practice and the recital of verb paradigms, on the grounds that it might be conducive to learning (1990: 46).

Although a *reductio ad absurdum*, Widdowson does draw attention to the relativism underlying the idea

that the classroom is the originating context of authentic language learning.

3. A poverty of pedagogy

Three out of the four types of authenticity that emerge from the field of applied linguistics are framed in terms of correspondence; and even the fourth type, an authenticity of genesis, also reflects Cooper's (1983) binarism. This leads us to ask a question of each type of authenticity. With regard to the

authenticities of correspondence, we ask:

- of text authenticity, *whose text*?
- of competence authenticity, *whose competence*?
- of learner authenticity, *whose meaning*?

With regard to an authenticity of genesis, we ask:

- of classroom authenticity - *whence the text*?

3.1 Whose text?

Text authenticity derives from the idea that the types of text used in language classrooms should correspond to the types of text used outside the language classroom. The types of text incorporated into both published English language textbooks and institutionally written materials are often selected mainly from 'inner circle' cultures, predictably Britain and America (Gilmore, 2004; Kachru, 1985). Thus, texts which are regarded as authentic are also texts which originate from hegemonic cultures.

On many accounts, the location of this point of correspondence has become increasingly problematic. Even within the inner circle, it is been debatable what texts might be called authentic in terms of their correspondence to some commonality of linguistic code. If we set aside the competing claims of the inner circle countries - USA, UK, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand - within the UK alone there are many distinctive regional codes of English. Moreover, Graddol has already suggested that the 'centre of gravity' of the inner, outer and expanding circles would shift towards 'non-native' English speakers at the start of the 21st century:

> "…those who speak English alongside other languages will outnumber first language speakers and, increasingly, will decide the global future of the language"(1997, p. 10).

The ownership of English and hence of English language texts has already shifted geographically and demographically from the centre to the periphery. However, despite this, outmoded notions of ownership still maintain (Jenkins, 2000). From this, we would suggest that the continued prioritisation of certain pedagogic texts in terms of their apparent correspondence to those of hegemonic cultures can lead to a *poverty of language*.

3.2 Whose competence?

Authenticity of language competence derives from the idea that the performance of language learners should correspond in some way to the performance of an ideal 'native speaker'. However, this point of correspondence fails to cater for communication in English that might take place only between 'non-native' speakers. With respect to the inner circle, this might include speakers of different European languages negotiating diplomatic or commercial affairs in a shared foreign language; or, with respect to the expanding circle, entire populations who use of English as a *lingua franca* in countries as diverse as India and the Seychelles.

However, in the operationalisation of grammatical competence (Canale and Swain, 1980), correct grammatical usage does not always appear to be necessary for successful communication to take place. When 'non-native' speakers engage in conversations with each other, they tend to use similar communication strategies such as 'approximation', 'word coinage', 'circumlocution', 'translation' and 'language switch' in order to make themselves understood by their hearers (Ludwig, 1982: 278; Jourdain, 2000: 192). Even when syntactically incorrect utterances are produced, both participants make themselves understood on account of the component of their interpretive systems which makes amends for many apparent 'inaccuracies' in everyday speech (Coppieters, 1987: 570). Here, more universalisable communication strategies are able to compensate for 'inauthentic' grammatical

competence.

A narrow view of sociocultural competence has also been criticised. Alptekin (2002) questions the relevance of a monocultural model of competence to the contemporary, globalised contexts in which communication in the English language now takes place:

> How relevant, then, are the conventions of British politeness or American informality to the Japanese and Turks, say, when doing business in English? … How relevant is the importance of American eye contact, or the socially acceptable distance for conversation as properties of meaningful communication to Finnish and Italian academicians exchanging ideas in a professional meeting (61)?

In these ways, we would suggest that viewing language competence in terms of the correspondence of the performance of a 'non-native' speaker to that of a 'native' speaker can lead to a *poverty of performance.*

3.3 Whose meaning?

Learner authenticity derives from the idea that written and spoken texts possess some autochthonous meaning which is recoverable by the language learner. Within the field of literary criticism, where the notion of learner authenticity possibly originated, the location of autochthonous meaning was also conceived of as residing in the intentions of the author. However, this 'intentional fallacy' was discredited some sixty years ago (Wimsatt, 1954), and we would suggest that this fallacy is even less applicable to intercultural texts.

Texts used for the purpose of learning another language are there to be appropriated by the language learner. Language learners not only have the right to bring their own cultural frames of reference to the

process of understanding, but these cultural frames of reference are also part of their potential as intercultural beings. To insist on a correspondence between the language learner's interpretation and an autochthonous meaning actually inhibits the imaginative and creative potential of the learner, which is precisely what should be fostered in language classrooms. We would suggest that an engagement with spoken and written texts that demands a correspondence with an autochthonous meaning can lead to a *poverty of interpretation.*

3.4 Whence the text?

Classroom authenticity suggests two things: first, that authenticity is not a characteristic of the text itself but derives from its function in a particular context (Taylor, 1994); and secondly, that the primary context of activities and materials used in the language classroom is not relevant to the process of language learning. In other words, if a text leads to successful pedagogic outcomes, it can be regarded as authentic. On this account, questions such as 'who is this?' following an immediate statement of a person's name would be unnatural in real life circumstances. However, they are very common in learning encounters. If learners come to understand that by using this statement they are likely to find out a person's name, then this type of utterance becomes authentic to the context of learning. Claims for classroom authenticity therefore redefine the point of origin, or genesis, of classroom discourse.

When a text is brought into the language classroom, it remains unchanged in terms of its discursive features; however, links to its original discursive context are only tenuously maintained and its original social and cultural setting becomes implicit. In other words, the text becomes 'recontextualised' as a pedagogic text (Bernstein, 2000). Michael Byram critiques this process of recontextualisation as being typical of communicative language teaching:

> … despite 'authentic materials' imported into the foreign language classroom, the experience is a restricted and limited version of using the language in the foreign culture and society, and the principal focus remains on the language and on learners' fluency and accuracy in language use (1989: 40).

We would suggest that a version of authenticity which views a written or spoken text in terms of its genesis in the classroom can lead to a *poverty of context*.

4. Authenticity for intercultural being and becoming

The answers to each of the four questions above suggest that maintaining a binary account of authenticity in the field of applied linguistics can lead to particular forms of impoverishment of the language learning experience. Due not least to their linguistic origins, these versions are embedded in an *objectification* of authenticity as a property of pedagogic text, language competence or social situation. We suggest that it is timely in the field of language teaching and learning, not just to move beyond a binary deployment of the concept of authenticity, but also to reinstate it within the experience of being and becoming. For engagement with language(s) and culture(s) entails not just the detached deployment of a correctly formulated linguistic system and the enactment of socially appropriate genres, but is part of the learner's process of *subjectification*.

4.1 Narcissism and iconoclasm

Within the field of philosophy, Cooper (1983: 8-15) identifies two accounts which emerge from a 'one-sided attachment' to an authenticity of correspondence or an authenticity of genesis. On the one hand, there is a version of authenticity which is preoccupied with a search for the 'real self', either by trying to identify a singular self from a multitude of possible selves, or by allowing the true self to 'shine through' a panoply of distractions. On the other hand, there is a version of authenticity whose

goal is spontaneity, and the 'total overthrow of previous conventions and standards', which can sometimes go as far as the rejection of the existing social order. Each of these has been invoked by subcultural movements in the not-so-recent past. The first, which arguably is derived from an authenticity of correspondence, was foundational to the Hippy movement; while the second, which is arguably derived from an authenticity of genesis, was foundational to the Punk movement.

Within the terms of the Hippy version of authenticity "…each person…has his individual essence; and to live in accord with it is to live authentically" (Cooper, 1983: 8). For Charles Taylor, this 'narcissistic' form of authenticity has its roots in two 'malaises' of modern society: individualism and instrumental reason (1991: 1-15). Here, the culture of 'self-determining freedom' has led many people 'to lose sight of concerns that transcend them'. This self-referential form of authenticity leads ultimately to a moral relativism, where:

> "…everyone has the right to develop their own form of life, grounded on their own sense of what is really important or of value. People are called upon to be true to themselves and to seek their own self-fulfilment" (Taylor, 1991: 14).

Cooper also sees problems with unreconstructed versions of both Hippy and Punk versions of authenticity. The metaphysics of the Hippy version are problematic in as much as it fails to explain whether the 'true' self is discovered or constructed, and if it is susceptible to change. Moreover on this account, the authentic self can only be discovered through introspection; and this denies the engagement with the social world which is central to the project of intercultural communication. On the other hand, the Punk version of the self lacks sincerity in as much as it denies its origins. For the very conventions of linguistic and social being demand some degree of convention without which it is impossible to exist in human society; moreover, the self has a history which specifies accounts of who

we are and cannot honestly be ignored. Both Hippy and Punk accounts in their different ways become impervious to questions of belief or value. One's biography and personal narratives are treated as springboards 'for taking totally free, ungrounded leaps', which Cooper believes are ultimately untenable in social life (1983: 8-11).

4.2 Horizons of significance

However, both Cooper (1983) and Taylor (1991) want to retain some version of authenticity. Charles Taylor (1991) suggests we do this by going beyond a preoccupation with the self; while David Cooper proposes that we supercede the dualism of Hippy narcissism and Punk iconoclasm with a more totalising, Heideggerian, focus on 'self-concern'.

Even an inward looking preoccupation with the self can have outcomes which are ethically defensible. In moving beyond self-absorption, Taylor (1991) wants to reclaim 'the moral force of the ideal of authenticity' (17). For authenticity is not only the basis of originality, which can lead to creation, construction and discovery; it can also provide grounds for opposition to the rules of society and morality:

> …authenticity points us towards a more self-responsible form of life. It allows us to live (potentially) a fuller and more differentiated life, because more fully appropriated as our own….at its best authenticity allows a richer mode of existence (Taylor, 1991: 74).

This 'richer mode of existence' emerges from two spheres: the 'fundamentally dialogic character' of human life; and the 'horizons of significance' of human activity. In this respect, Taylor is proposing to reinstate the conventions of semiotics, historicity and society to an understanding of authentic living - concerns which also bear upon the enterprise of intercultural communication. Crucially, it is through the dialogism of our relationships with others that we define our identities. Hereby,

> "…we become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining an identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression" (Taylor, 1991: 33).

These 'rich human languages' are not confined to the realm of lexis and syntax, but also include other expressive modes such as art, gesture, and love (33). Furthermore, languages are not deployed in isolation; they demand an interlocutor, an Other - and in particular 'significant others' such as parents, siblings, or teachers (Mead, 1934). These significant others not only play a role in our learning these languages, but also in continuing to create and maintaining our own identities, as we do those of others.

This dialogics entails 'a background of intelligibility' against which things take on importance (Taylor, 1991: 37). Even where the subject chooses who he or she is, this choice takes place against a background of socially shared values and aspirations. And this principle of self-choosing depends on some things being more significant than others (39). To deny this background to human existence is to plummet into banality and absurdity - where taking a stand on a choice of breakfast cereal becomes as crucial as taking a stand on human rights. It is this "openness to horizons of significance in order to maintain the background that stops human actions from fading into insignificance" (66).

On this argument, learning another language in order to engage with a culture other than one's own potentially involves the discovery of fresh 'horizons of significance' which militate against the myopic self-absorption and 'soft relativism' of postmodernism. However, not only does language learning and culture learning hold the potential for engaging with new forms of social life, it also holds the potential for the re-engagement of the narcissistic self with social life. Language learning necessarily entails communication with an interlocutor; and this Other is likely to hold 'horizons of

significance' different to one's own. In this respect, intercultural communication holds the potential for a dialogic engagement which can reflect back on the pre-existent 'horizons' of the language learner and propel him or her on an ongoing process of individuation. In this way, it can also lead to self-development and personal change.

4.3 Self-creation and self-concern

While Nietzsche rarely used the term 'authenticity' *per se*, Cooper (1983: 3) maintains that this was a 'constant object of his philosophical concern' in his invocation to 'live self-creating lives'

> "The individual is something totally new and creating anew, something absolute, all his actions entirely his own. In the last resort, the individual derives the values of his actions from himself alone (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 913; trans, Cooper, 1983, p. 3).

However, while the principle of self-creation might be adequate as a metaphysical tactic, it falls short of providing a sufficient basis for ethical behaviour. For Cooper, it is the capacity for self-concern that is the distinguishing characteristic of being human:

> "...we...should live as the *kind of* beings that we really are - ones distinguished, that is, by the capacity for self-concern (1983: 16).

This conceptualisation is derived from Heidegger's account of authenticity in *Sein und Zeit* (1962), which entails subjects reflecting on the conditions of their existence in order to take responsibility for their actions, beliefs and values (Cooper, 1983: 18). For Heidegger, the distinguishing mark of the authentic person is 'resoluteness' (*Entschlossenheit*):

> "...the authentic person will live in full awareness of the possibilities of action, belief, and purpose that are in fact open to him (sic) and which anyone connected with his existence as an 'issue' must consider"(Cooper, 1983: 19).

The notion of self-concern is able to reconcile the Hippy and Punk versions of authenticity. For these two viewpoints no longer entail a stable, essential self; rather, they reflect different emphases of the subject's preoccupation with a self which is always a work in progress. The emphasis of the Hippy version is on what Cooper calls a 'situational' self-concern; the emphasis of the Punk version is on a 'projective' self-concern. The aims of situational self-concern are to do with taking stock of one's life: reflecting upon one's personality; assessing one's emotional responses; assessing the situations in which one is placed; examining how one came by one's beliefs; as well as examining the language one speaks. The aims of projective self-concern are to do with 'how one shall be': reflecting upon the goals to pursue in one's life; considering the value to put on one's activities; as well as thinking on how to widen the projects and possibilities open to one (Cooper, 1983: 16-17).

This project of the self is not without a 'groundedness': "...a person is 'thrown' (*geworfen*) into a particular world and time" (Cooper, 1983: 19). In Heidegger's terminology:

> "Resoluteness, as *authentic Being-one's-Self*, does not detach Dasein from this world, nor does it isolate it so that it becomes a free-floating "I"…Resoluteness brings the Self right into its concernful Being-alongside what is ready-to-hand, and pushes it into solicitous Being with Others (Heidegger, 1980: 344).

Just so, intercultural communication is similarly located in a 'particular world and time'. The situation in which language learners find themselves derives from a particular culturally bounded set of beliefs and values; while they project themselves into an exploration of and engagement with another culturally bounded set of beliefs and values. In this way, engagement with language(s) and culture(s) has the potential for a realization of both situational and projective types of self-concern. Furthermore, these two aspects of authenticity necessarily generate a certain reflexive relationship, one with the

other. As the language learner engages with a different language and culture, not only are new, 'projected' sets of beliefs and values opened up; but a certain perspective is gained upon prior, 'situated' beliefs and values. Thus the interculturalist denies the stasis of existing systems of beliefs and values without succumbing to fantasies of their total overthrow; existing sets of beliefs and values are restructured and extended rather than torn down root and branch. In these ways, an intercultural authenticity opens up a dialogic exchange between two versions of being and becoming which continually interact and reflect, one upon the other, through the plethora of 'rich human languages'.

5. El vino del idioma

In the following stanza from the poem *The Word*, Pablo Neruda celebrates the life-giving irreducibility of language.

Bebo por la palabra levantando
una palabra o copa cristalina,
en ella bebo
el vino del idioma
o el agua interminable,
manantial maternal de las palabras,
y copa y agua y vino
originan mi canto
porque el verbo es orígen
y vierte vida: es sangre,
es la sangre que expresa su substancia
y está dispuesto así su desarrollo:

dan cristal al cristal, sangre a la sangre

y dan vida a la vida las palabras (1977).

By invoking the imagery of the Eucharist – 'copa', 'vino', 'agua', 'sangre' – Neruda evokes the transcendent power of language. In the case of language teaching and learning, this transcendence can be confined neither to the analysis of linguistic equivalence nor to the investigation of social origin. Rather, 'rich…languages' have the potential to transform those who live them, in the process of their becoming authentic beings, intercultural beings.

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