Oscar Rojas Campos
Universidad Nacional

AUTHENTICITY IN LISTENING AND WRITTEN TEXTS

Using authentic texts in second language curricula has become an everyday task for most language teachers. Many of them are now inclined to the incorporation of material recorded in ordinary settings rather than artificially produced texts. However, other professionals still are not convinced about the inclusion of authentic material in second language teaching. They argue that authentic material may be too difficult for beginners to grasp. If the text is modified —they believe— learners can assimilate it better. Thus knowing how to distinguish authentic from non-authentic texts easily is something that all language teachers require.

When talking about authenticity one is faced with three types of texts that are commonly used in second language textbooks. First we have the *authentic text*, which is encountered in the target culture. These texts are created by native speakers in authentic contexts where the target language is used to accomplish communicative purposes in their own culture. They are not simplified or modified in any way. They contain the language that those native speakers use naturally in real-life situations to fullfil their social needs.

The second type is the *adapted or simplified text*. This is a modified version of an authentic text. Language is adapted to make it more easily understood by non-native speakers and also to introduce particular grammar or vocabulary. Likewise, some textbook writers, instead of using simplification, decide to create their own readings, dialogues, tapescripts, or any other piece of writing or listening comprehension text. Most of these texts have characteristics similar to those of an authentic piece of discourse.

This third type, which we will call *creative text*, is based on a contents sequence which has been previously graded according to a particular syllabus, and that the author would like to cover in the textbook. These creative texts as well as adapted ones are both considered non-authentic, since they do not meet native speakers' communicative needs in a real-life context.

These last two types of texts may look so natural that often they appear authentic to many people. Even though it may be argued that some of this material has a very high probability of occurring in a natural setting, at this moment little is known to differentiate authentic and non-authentic discourse systematically. In this article detailed criteria will be provided in order to distinguish whether a text is authentic or non-authentic. This will enable language teachers to know what kind of listening and reading material they are using in the classroom.

When working with written or aural material in second-language texbooks, teachers always face several problems concerning authenticity of texts. Due to this Geddes and White (Omaggio, pp. 128-129) propose two categories to distinguish between two kinds of discourse: *Unmodified Authentic Discourse* and *Simulated Authentic Discourse*. The first is material designed for native speakers in their own culture and the second is designed for pedagogical purposes. We will be analyzing discourse in listening and written texts according to Geddes and White's categorization. These two categories are described only in a general sense in *Teaching Language in Context: Proficiency-Oriented Instruction*[1]; therefore, in this article detailed criteria will be given to provide specific notions and characteristics of each of these two types of discourse.

1.   **Unmodified authentic discourse**: According to Geddes and White, it is "language that occurs originally as a genuine act of communication". This material is gathered from authentic communicative contexts.

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1.   Alice C. Omaggio, *Teaching Language in Context: Proficiency-Oriented Instruction* (Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1986).

2. **Simulated authentic discourse**: It is "language produced for pedagogical purposes, but which exhibits features that have a high probability of occurrence in genuine acts of communication". Adapted and creative texts are included in this category since both share similar features.

Simulated or simplified material may be either similar to authentic discourse or too elaborated and unnatural. It can be recognized by the adaptations to present particular grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. Many textbook writers do this type of adaptation because an unmodified authentic piece of language does not present a varied range of uses of one particular grammatical pattern or vocabulary item; instead it includes a great variety of grammatical and lexical items in a random way. The focus of a genuine text is on the content of the written piece or the speakers'intention, not on particular structural aspects of language. A natural piece of language may contain one or two linguistic patterns of the same kind. Sometimes depending on the nature of the discourse, it may have more, but too many may make it unnatural.

In order to understand how authentic and simulated texts differ let us first discuss the different types of ways in which listening texts are produced.

I. Identification of language for listening comprehension material

To examine the characteristics of listening material, we must consider the different modes of oral discourse. These modes will be useful in identifying the set of characteristics that listening material shows because they vary depending on the mode in which a listening piece is uttered.

Oral discourse may consist of a distinct variety of text types, which may be grouped into several categories. Byrnes proposes four different categories, or "Modes" as he calls them (Omaggio, pp. 123-125). These modes include all possible oral language manifestations:

a. *Spontaneous free speech*: Characterized by the interactiveness of the situation (initiating, turn taking, leave taking, overlapping speech, and the like) as well as by constraints on the speaker's

manner of production (resulting in fragmented syntax, rephrasing, and speech errors of various types).

b.   ***Deliberate free speech***: Language is planned ahead. It is monitored in such a way that speakers try to avoid colloquial or slang expressions, and instead use a more standard "refined" dialect. It is characteristic of interviews, discussions, speeches, lectures, debates, round tables and forums.

c.   ***Oral presentation of a written text***: The written text is revised and edited before the elicitation of speech. Still it can be modified depending on the circumstances. There may be some extra commentary. It is characteristic of newscasts, more formal commentaries, and lectures (read aloud).

d.   ***Oral presentation of a fixed script***: The text is created by a professional. Thus it is also revised and edited. Since the text is already fixed, it cannot be modified in any way. It is produced on stage or in a film.

Once the mode of a text is identified the characteristics can be assigned according to the particular mode. Each mode may show different characteristics.

Now let us comment on the different characteristics that listening material may present. A text does not necessarily have to contain all these characteristics to be considered authentic or not. A particular text may have some but not others.

1.   Unmodified authentic language

    1.1   Normal speed
    1.2   False starts and/or unfinished sentences
    1.3   Many interjections and exclamations
    1.4   Background noise
    1.5   Overlapping speech
    1.6   Faded speech

1.7   Variety of simple/complex structure, syntax and language functions throughout the passage at all levels

1.8   Variety of simple and complex vocabulary throughout the text at all levels

1.9   Some structural, syntactic, phonological or vocabulary errors may be possible

1.10 Redundancy of language

1.11 Common personal background

1.12 Use of anaphoric features of language

1.13 Randomness of subject matter

1.14 Non-standard language is possible

1.15 Hesitation

1.16 Tendency to use loosely coordinated clauses

1.17 Tendency to overuse parenthetic compound sentences

1.18 Source is given

2.   *Simulated authentic language*

2.1   Moderate (sometimes too artificial) speed

2.2   No false starts or only a few intentional ones

2.3   No unfinished sentences or only a few intentional ones

2.4   Some well-placed interjections and exclamations

2.5   No background noise unless well placed or too soft to interfere with speech

2.6   No overlapping speech

2.7   No faded speech

2.8   Overuse of particular grammar, syntax or vocabulary

2.9   No use of complex structure and syntax rules at beginning stages

2.10 No use or just a few advanced vocabulary items at beginning stages

2.11 No structural, syntactical, phonological or vocabulary errors are possible

2.12 Reduced redundancy and/or unnecessary repetition of information

2.13 Common personal background is made explicit

2.14 No use of anaphoric features without a context

2.15   No randomness of subject matter
2.16   Non-standard language is not possible
2.17   Hesitation is possible only with a purpose
2.18   Loosely coordinated clauses are avoided
2.19   Parenthetic compound sentences are avoided or strategically placed
2.20   Source is not given

At the end of the explanation of each characteristic, the mode in which that particular characteristic is found (e.g. mode **b**) will be indicated.

1.   Unmodified authentic language

This type of material is only encountered in the culture which the language belongs to. It is generally produced for a particulation purpose. This material is not adapted in any way to fit certain teaching demands. Language is a means to achieve communication. And the way this material is collected is by taping oral linguistic manifestations produced in the target culture.

1.1   *Normal speed*: Language sounds natural. In real life people use different speeds of speech: It may be fast and slow in the same conversation. They vary their speed according to the demands of the conversation and their personal style (modes **a** and **b**).

1.2   *False starts and/or unfinished sentences*: There are some cases where a speaker says something and does not finish the utterance; he just starts it. He says only the initial part of a sentence or expression. This is done for different reasons: a) the other speaker(s) already knows what he intends to say, b) the other speaker(s) interrupts, c) the speaker finds another structure or expression to express what he is going to say, d) when he starts an utterance to get some data from the other speaker, this speaker provides them before the first speaker ends the utterance, or e) simply because he decides not to say what he originally wanted to. In a natural setting people would use both types of incomplete utterances almost anywhere in their interaction (modes **a** and **b**).

1.3 *Interjections or exclamations*: In everyday situations interlocutors help each other to keep their conversation going coherently. Both must give each other the chance to interact and follow their partner's ideas. When doing so they try to demonstrate to their interlocutors that they are paying attention to what they are saying, and that they are interested in the topic. They do this by uttering some expressions, interjections or exclamations such as "Oh!", "Yeah", "Really!", "Oh no!", "Come on!" (modes **a** and **b**).

1.4 *Background noise*: It includes any kind of sound from the outside world. These sounds usually interfere with speech perception. This noise may be a car, a bird singing, the wind, the pounding of a hammer, an airplane, a dog, a train, music or people talking. In fact everything that makes sounds other than the speech is included in this category (mode **a**).

1.5 *Overlapping speech*: When two or more speakers are talking, each interlocutor tries to get his ideas across without having to stop. Some speakers do not wait until the other speakers finish their ideas: they interrupt to say something new, add some important information, say something about the topic under discussion, clarify what they have said before or react to what other speakers are saying. When this happens the speech of two or more speakers overlaps in such a way that most or part of it is distorted, or almost incomprehensible (mode **a** and in some instances **b**).

1.6 *Faded speech*: Speakers tend to lower their voice at the end of utterances in such a way that it is very difficult to understand what they are saying. This happens mainly if one is not familiar with the on-going conversation, lacks some important information about the topic under discussion, or simply does not possess the ability to understand native speakers. They speak so fluently that often they do not vocalize the consonants, vowels and sentence links clearly. Sometimes they mumble the words quite a bit. At times their speech becomes very faded and blurred (mode **a**).

1.7 *Variety of simple/complex structures and syntax throughout the passage at all levels*: In spontaneous interaction interlocutors use such a great variety of structures that they have no restrictions on the selection of grammatical patterns to develop language functions. Speakers use the

language for a purpose, not for carrying out a grammatical task. In so doing these speakers do not stop to think that a specific structure is too complex for a particular function or for the topic under discussion. They use any structure and any syntactical pattern to develop any function in any setting (all four modes).

1.8   *Variety of simple and complex vocabulary throughout the text at all levels*: A similar case occurs with regard to vocabulary. Native speakers in a real-life situation are not restricted to one specific type of vocabulary (simple or complex) to develop a language function. They employ such a great range of items and expressions (all four modes).

1.9   *Structural, syntactical, phonological and vocabulary errors*: When communicating, native speakers concentrate on negotiating meanings with other speakers. They sometimes do this so rapidly that they may lose control of the language rules. In many cases they are so interested in what they are saying that they often do not notice how they are saying it. Often these errors are caused by temporary confusion due to a high speed of speech, over-concentration on the topic (or purpose) or any blockage of the linguistic ability caused by other aspects such as anxiety, tiredness, boredom, excitement and anguish. At times the speakers use self-correction immediately after those inappropriate manifestations. In some other cases these errors are not caused by any of these external factors but by a lack of linguistic competence. Some other phenomena —like slips of the tongue— will be included in this category, although they are not necessarily errors. They are caused by some interruption of the message sent by the brain to the oral aparatus; this causes other words or sounds to be pronounced instead of those originally intended (mode **a**).

1.10   *Redundancy of language*: Language is in itself redundant. In authentic speech people they tend to repeat many linguistic clues and perform some gestures to reinforce the information they want to communicate. For example, in a question they use several redundant indicators that help their interlocutor to understand the message: the use of modal auxiliaries, rising intonation, question order in conjunction with paralinguistic features such as facial expressions and body movements. Also they may use synonyms and similar expressions that express what they want to communicate. They

may repeat their ideas in other words and sometimes may use some language devices to emphasize information that has already been mentioned. These expressions may include phrases like: "as I said before", "as you already know", "you know", "as I told you", "in other words", as well as the use of the definite article "the" and descriptive adjectives, such as "the handicapped girl" (modes **a** and **b**).

1.11   *Common personal background* (Crystal)[2]: In any conversation people share some knowledge that is not generally made linguistically explicit. This knowledge may be related to the culture they live in, general concepts that enable us to understand a conversation, some aspects of life, information about the speakers, a problem a person has, what might have happened at work or school, a love affair. This information does not necessarily need to be mentioned since both speakers already know it, but it is indispensable to carry out some communicative acts.. The interlocutors may also use paralinguistic features or pronouns and demonstrative adjectives, but they without giving the referents: they are implied or inferred. What these speakers must do is mention what is not known by their partners (mode **a**).

1.12   *Anaphoric features of language*: In oral communication people use paralinguistic and extralinguistic elements that do not need to be made linguistically explicit. Among them we can find demonstrative adjectives, subject/object pronouns, absolute pronouns such as everyone, somebody, etc. There are other features that refer to information that the speakers in a conversation may share and that only they know; for example, "Did you see 'the man'?", "He told me something about 'what I told you yesterday' " (mode **a**).

1.13   *Randomness of subject matter*: Interlocutors interact in such a way that they do not talk only about one specific topic. There may be frequent "topic shifts, since the development of the topic of the conversation is cooperatively constructed" (Omaggio, p. 124). They usually start speaking about some subject matter and end up talking about something totally unrelated to the previous initial topic (mode **a**).

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2.   David Crystal and Derek Davy, *Investigating English Style* (London: Longman, 1976), p. 103.

1.14 *Nonstandard language*: Speakers use the language freely to carry out specific tasks, by communicating meanings spontaneously. In doing this they may use any kind of accent, pronunciation or regional dialect that is not considered standard language by many scholars, grammarians, language teachers, linguists and many other educated people. Some accents and dialects delete or add certain sounds, pronounce particular words differently, or have varied grammar or syntax. Therefore this type of material may include the double negative in English, the non-standard "ain't", deletions of third person verb ending, deletion of subjects, auxiliaries, articles and extreme nasalization. (Mainly mode **a**; it may be encountered in modes **b**, **c** and **d**, in which case it is mostly related to the speakers' accent).

1.15 *Hesitation*: As in the two previous aspects speakers may vary their flow of speech for several reasons. Some speakers pause because they would like to monitor their linguistic output. Many times when talking they stop to think because they do not remember a specific word or are looking for a better word or expression to continue the conversation. They "use fillers and silent pauses to 'buy time' as they plan what they want to say next" (Omaggio, p. 124). Among these fillers are "Ah!", "Well!", "OK" and the "schwa" sound, speech pauses, clicks, thrills and intakes of breath (modes **a** and **b**, and sometimes mode **d** in an intentional way).

1.16 *Tendency to use loosely coordinated clauses* (Crystal, p. 110): Speech is very casual and not very elaborated, as it is in a very formal register, for instance. In genuine communication speakers avoid using long complex/compound sentences. They prefer to communicate through short clauses coordinated by "ands", "buts" and some other coordinating words such as so, if, though, and so on. (Mode **a**, but they can be encountered in mode **d** to resemble spontaneous speech).

1.17 *Tendency to overuse parenthetic compound sentences* (Crystal, p. 111): This variety is characterized by the high proportion of short sentences or clauses that are used as conversational fillers, as an indication of some forthcoming information or some data already mentioned before. These sentences are placed anywhere; they may be used at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of an utterance. Since they are mostly used in oral interaction, they have no established place. For example: "you know", "I mean", "you see", "Well" (mode **a**, or in some instances mode **d**).

1.18 *Source is given*: When authentic materials are integrated in a second language textbook, copyrights have to be specified. A textbook publisher is not allowed to publish any material without the written permission of the owner of the material; therefore the source has to be mentioned in the textbook. It may be specified in the listening activity or mentioned in the preface, introduction or teacher's instructions. The material may be extracts from radio and television, or texts recorded in real-life contexts. For the latter the copyrights are not given since the texts do not belong to any institution or entity, but they have been collected by the textbook writer. In this case the text might specify the way those materials were gathered.

2. Simulated authentic language

This material is not taped in real-life communicative contexts. It is artificial. It does not convey a real social function in a natural setting. It is produced to fit particular language demands and to make it more accessible to language learners. Since authentic material is considered difficult for students to grasp, it is simplified in order to account for their language deficiencies and level. Or it is completely created according to particular grammatical or lexical criteria. The complex grammar or advanced vocabulary is left until later stages of learning. This kind of material is relatively easy to understand.

2.1 *Moderate speed*: Speed is moderated and speech is clear so that it is easier to understand the message. No natural alterations that occur in real life are allowed. The speakers pronounce the individual sounds, words and sentences so clearly and slow enough that everything is fairly easy to understand. This speed is neither too slow nor too fast: the same speed is maintained. Speech "tends to consist of complete sentences, pausing at the end of sentences, well-worked-out language, relatively well-packed with information" (Brown)[3]. Many times it sounds as if the speakers were reading a written script (all four modes).

2.2 *No false starts and unfinished sentences or only some intentional*

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3.   Gillian Brown and George Yule, *Teaching the Spoken Language*.

ones: False starts and unfinished sentences, as they happen in spontaneous speech, are not encountered. They are considered disturbing. Some textbook writers, who are more inclined to formal rules, would use unfinished sentences only to show that one speaker needs the other to provide some information that he possesses: many times the first speaker expects the other speaker to finish his own utterance. These writers would place a few of these elements at the beginning or end of another speaker's participation, but never while a speaker is talking (modes **a, b** and **d**).

2.3   *Some well-placed interjections and exclamations*: Similar to the previous aspects these two elements are specially placed in a conversation according to interaction rules. They are placed as separate utterances before or after another speaker's participation, never while another speaker is talking (modes **a, b** and **d**).

2.4   *No background noise unless well placed or too soft to interfere with speech*: Generally the sounds from the outside which interfere with the normal delivery of speech are considered a menace to 'second language learners' comprehension. It is very difficult to understand what people are saying when there are sounds other than language. This interference is discarded or is used in a very soft way so that it facilitates comprehension. These sounds are introduced as situational background indicators. They tell the learner that the characters are in the street if cars are present, at the airport if airplanes or voices calling passengers are heard. When these sounds are reproduced, students can tell the sounds are poorly faked (modes **a** and **d**).

2.5   *No overlapping speech*: Only one speaker talks at a time, and when some overlapping occurs, it consists of some phrases, interjections or exclamations that do not add anything important to the comprehension of the message (mode **a**).

2.6   *No faded speech*: Faded speech may be a serious disadvantage that second language learners will have when understanding an oral text. This is the main reason why textbook writers design their own texts, and consequently do not use this peculiar feature of oral communication (modes **a**).

2.7 *Overuse of particular grammar, syntax or vocabulary*: This material is produced to fit specific grammatical patterns and vocabulary of particular units. They are used as many times as possible; this violates natural rules of occurence in real-life contexts. Many times the overuse of these patterns makes the excerpts sound too elaborated and artificial (all four modes).

2.8 *No use of complex structure and syntax at beginning stages*: This material presents mostly simple grammar and delays complex patterns to more advanced levels. These excerpts usually start with the simplest rules such as the verb "to be" and personal pronouns and then go on into more advanced rules. Text writers prepare their own sequence of grammatical patterns so that learners find in the material what they have been studying at a specific stage of learning. They may find some sporadic advanced patterns, but in such cases they are overlooked, and the emphasis of the lessons is only on what has been covered already (all four modes).

2.9 *No use of advanced vocabulary at beginning stages*: The previous criteria (from the simplest to the most complex) apply here too. Text writers know that at beginning levels, learners supposedly do not yet understand advanced vocabulary. These writers think that presenting these learners items and expressions that they do not understand is useless. This is why advanced vocabulary is provided in intermediate or advanced stages (all four modes).

2.10 *No structural, syntactical, phonological or vocabulary errors are possible*: These excerpts present mostly formal rules of grammar, pronunciation and any other standard aspect which is considered important to be taught. The way people speak in spontaneous interaction is free and subject to errors of all kinds. However these irregularities or deviances, some believe, are not considered important to be included in material for second language learners (all four modes).

2.11 *Reduced redundancy and/or unnecessary repetition of information*: These texts reduce the amount of information that is repeated by the speakers in an authentic conversation. These texts do not go into so much reiteration, which they consider useless, and are precise and very concrete. Much of the information is refined and edited to fit specific educational

purposes. In doing this text writers delete some information which is generally necessary to understand the ideas that are being communicated. People can not assimilate all the information that is given to them at once. The mind takes some time to accomplish this task. And during that time it needs reinforcement every certain number of seconds. This repetition gives the mind time to process all the information. Nevertheless in this kind of material this information is so concentrated that it does not let the mind assimilate it all at once. Or texts are otherwise overloaded with so much unnecessary repetition that is really useless and unnatural. For example, "Is there any milk in the refrigerator?" "Yes, there is some milk in the refrigerator" (all four modes).

2.12 *Common personal background is made explicit*: In these passages this type of information is made linguistically explicitly in order to be understood by the students, without presenting observations or footnotes (mode **a**).

2.13 *No use of anaphoric features without a context*: These features are used only when all the background information, which is not mentioned, is included in the texts linguistically. All the referents are provided for all the pronouns. All the information necessary to understand every detail of the text is present through words, not through gestures (mode **a**).

2.14 *No randomness of subject matter*: Characters talk about only one particular topic. There may be some subtopics, but they are all related to a general one. They would not start talking about wedding arrangements and then switch to their favorite football team, which is possible in a real-life conversation (mode **a**).

2.15 *Non-standard language is not possible*: Since these passages are prepared beforehand all kinds of peculiar accents, dialectal differences, regional linguistic manifestations and certain slang and idiomatic expressions are avoided. Only standard grammar, syntax, spelling and pronunciation are encountered. If the textbook is British they would stick to some kind of Received Pronunciation. If it is American they would prefer some variety of standard American English that is common to most of the American dialects (mode **a**).

2.16 *Hesitation is possible only with a purpose*: Hesitation, considered by many a deviant feature of oral communication, is eliminated from this type of listening material. Then the speech is made precise, clear and flawless. However in some instances it is used as a way to show uncertainty like when a character wants another speaker to know that he does not know or remember somebody's name and hesitates so that the other tells him his name again (modes **a** and **b**).

2.17 *Loosely coordinated clauses are avoided*: This type of material integrates more elaborate and complex coordinating conjunctions and connectors, other than "ands" and "buts", to make longer compound sentences. These connectors include "therefore", "however", "whether", "although", "then" and "thus" (mode **a**).

2.18 *Parenthetic compound sentences are avoided or strategically placed*: Since these sentences are redundant or do not add anything important to a conversation, according to many text writers, they are taken away or are used only at the beginning and end of utterances, never in the middle. If they appear in a modified text their use will be restricted to only a few, and not as many as one can find in an everyday conversation (mode **a**).

2.19 *Source is not given*: Since these materials have been especially designed to fit specific teaching criteria, the source is not specified. Unless the listening materials have been prepared by specialists other than the text writers, the credits for copyrights are the same for the whole textbook, including the reading, writing and listening materials. In some cases when texts are adapted versions of the original excerpts, the textbook specifies the source. But still the material must be considered simulated. (If there is doubt upon deciding whether written material is authentic or not this last characteristic may be of great help).

II.   Identification of written language material

Just as in the identification of listening material the different ways in which written texts are produced can also be grouped into four different modes. In written discourse there is a great variety of manifestations. There are so many different text types that we have to group them into more general

categories or modes. Based on the modes for listening proposed by Byrnes (in Omaggio, pp. 123-125), we have adapted our own to facilitate their application. These modes are very important to enable us to identify the characteristics of a particular written text in order to decide if it is authentic or not.

a. ***Spontaneous free written text***: These texts are produced without formal writing criteria. Language is so free and spontaneous that it shares some similarities with its oral counterpart, *Spontaneous Free Speech*. It is mostly handwritten. Generally the functions of this type of text have an immediate effect: they accomplish their purpose at once. Some of these texts are friendly letters, postcards, birthday or Christmas cards, messages, telegrams, informal notices and notes.

b. ***Deliberate continuous written text***: This type of text is characterized by the use of continuous writing. A series of complete sentences are connected in a coherent way. These sentences make up a unit and are presented in paragraph form. Therefore the sentences must show some type of cohesion. These texts may consist of either only one paragraph or a set of several connected paragraphs. Similarly the whole unit may develop and support a complete topic or just present an idea as in the case of a very short paragraph. There is also evidence of some planning beforehand.

Among this type of texts we can find news, formal letters, newspaper and magazine articles, brochures, advertisements, recipes, cartoons (consisting of more than one utterance) as well as descriptions, instructions, warnings and directions.

c. ***Deliberate isolated utterance in a written text***: It appears as isolated sentences and phrases. This type of text is more concrete, condensed and does not develop or support ideas as a formal written text does (continuous written text). Its role is mainly informative or persuasive. Sentences and phrases are written in isolation, but they are not disconnected in meaning

in all cases. They are written separately, but are connected in discourse in some way: all these phrases and sentences are related and contribute to the main purpose or intention on which the writing is based. Utterances are all integrated to the same language function, even though they are not written in a continuum.

These texts are usually encountered in advertisements, recipes, menus, shopping lists, labels, signs, recipes, travel documents, TV guides, hotel registration forms, schedules, posters, forms, price lists, tickets, statistics, catalogs, handouts, telephone directories, dictionaries and cartoons (consisting of only one utterance). They are sometimes accompanied by some graphic representation that contribute to the message or purpose. Among them we can find diagrams, charts, tables, signs, maps, drawings and cartoons. Some of them are framed in a square, show some lines, figures, images, arrows, or any other graphic indication that helps to understand the whole message.

d.   *Creative written text*: Any kind of writing that involves creative language. Usually this language is poetic or literary such as novel passages, stories, poems, and other creative expressions such as songs, tales and anecdotes.

After the mode of a particular text has been identified the corresponding set of characteristics appropriate to that specific mode are applied to the text. The following set of characteristics permits us to identify unmodified or simulated written texts. However, a text does not have to show all the characteristics listed in order to be identified as unmodified or simulated language. Some texts may present some but not others.

1. Unmodified authentic language

1.1   Variety of simple/complex structures and syntax throughout the text

1.2   Variety of simple and complex vocabulary throughout the text at all levels

1.3   Structural, syntactical and vocabulary errors

1.4   Relative use of formal writing format
1.5   Common personal background
1.6   Redundancy of information
1.7   Randomness of subject matter
1.8   Variety of registers
1.9   Slang and non-standard language is possible
1.10   Source is given

2.   *Simulated authentic language*

2.1   No use of complex structure and syntax at beginning stages
2.2   No use or little advanced vocabulary items at beginning stages
2.3   Overuse of particular grammar, syntax and specific vocabulary
2.4   No structural, syntactical or vocabulary errors are possible
2.5   Use of formal writing format
2.6   Common personal background is made explicit
2.7   Reduced redundancy and/or less unnecessary repetition of information
2.8   No randomness of subject matter
2.9   Predominance of elements of formal registers
2.10   Non-standard language is not possible and slang expressions are quite scarce
2.11   Occasional use of unreal cue indicators
2.12   Source is not given

At the end of each characteristic below the corresponding mode is given in parentheses to specify to which characteristics the four modes apply.

3.   *Unmodified authentic language*

This kind of material is also collected in the culture where the language is spoken. It consists of any written piece used by native speakers to carry out specific social demands. This material has been produced with a purpose and does not stick to any particular language criteria. Native speakers use authentic written discourse to communicate messages and not to use particular linguistic rules. It must not be adapted in any way; it has

to be presented to students in the original version. As we can see some criteria used for identifying listening material are also applicable for identifying written language here.

3.1 *Variety of simple and complex structures and syntax throughout the text at all levels:* The same criteria used for the listening skill also applies to authentic reading material (all four modes).

3.2 *Variety of simple and complex vocabulary throughout the text at all levels:* The same principles used for listening can be used here to identify an authentic piece of writing (all four modes).

3.3 *Structural, syntactical, and vocabulary errors:* Errors may be possible due to the speakers' lack of language competence, or because the texts are not edited. This may result in spelling, grammatical and vocabulary errors (mode **a**).

3.4 *Relative use of formal writing format:* In order to show some mastery of formal writing format one has to be trained in order to attain coherence, cohesion and to have an acceptable command of punctuation, syntax and typographic rules. Still many people are taught to refine their writing style and to improve their knowledge of organizational patterns of information such as comparison and contrast, cause/effect, definition, description, listing, cronological order, process and clasification. Some educated people may resort to writing courses where they learn to handle the elements of a paragraph and formal essay writing: topic sentences, developers, concluding statements; thesis statements; and introductory and concluding paragraphs. On the contrary to expect the same from any native speaker who is used to producing written discourse spontaneously is unrealistic.

Authentic writing may either present, in some instances, an adequate command of writing format or may show some particular style and format misuse. An authentic written piece may have topic sentences in the middle, at the end of a paragraph or no topic sentence at all. A paragraph may consist of one sentence, and may present no elements of support. An article may contain no examples at all, or very few. Two topics may be discussed in a single paragraph: a writer may switch from one topic to another without

formal transitions. Similarly paragraphs may have no conventional links. Or they may have no concluding statements at all. Likewise punctuation may be inaccurate. Cohesion may be altered by a lack of appropriate connectors and transition words (modes **b** and **d**).

3.5   *Common personal background:* Some knowledge that is not linguistically explicit may be encountered. This phenomenon is present in informal letters, notices and messages (mode **a**).

3.6   *Redundancy of information:* As in oral discourse reiteration is also present in written language. Writers repeat information several times in very different ways throughout the entire text. If this is not done the reader may have to read the text several times in order to process all the data (mainly modes **b** and **d**, but can be uncountered in mode **a** sporadically).

3.7   *Randomness of subject matter:* In some informal discourse people usually start writing about certain subject matter and end up writing about something totally unrelated to the previous initial topic. In some formal writing we can notice that some authors start writing about a specific topic and suddenly switch to unrelated topics (mainly mode **a**, but also found in **b**).

3.8   *Variety of registers:* In this type of writing any kind of register may occur. One can find one specific register mixed with other registers in the same written piece. In such cases there is a main register as the core, and another register may be introduced for several reasons: to give an example, to break the formality or informality of the writing, to be ironic, or sarcastic (modes **b** and **d**).

3.9   *Slang and non-standard language:* In many written passages such as friendly letters, messages and any other piece of informal written discourse, slang and non-standard expressions are possible (mode **a**).

3.10   *Source is given:* If the selection is authentic the source from which it was taken must be specified. Usually this information is found at the bottom of the passage or at the beginning of the textbook (preface, introduction, the acknowledgement section). Excerpts might have been

taken from magazines, newspapers, handouts, books, directories and varied slip forms (all four modes).

4. Simulated authentic language

This type of material is created for pedagogical purposes to fit particular language functions, grammar and vocabulary. It is also artificial. The main purpose is to present readings showing certain language criteria and to account for learners' language deficiencies and level. Generally they are based on a pre-determined syllabus. Many times this material resembles authentic discourse, but there are some particular characteristics that are lacking.

4.1 *No use of complex structure and syntax at beginning stages:* Here we can use the same criteria for the listening skill (all four modes).

4.2 *No use or little advanced vocabulary at beginning stages*: The same principles used for identifying listening material may be employed here (all four modes).

4.3 *Overuse of particular grammar and syntax and specific vocabulary:* Particular language is depicted in the readings in an artificial way. Patterns are overused in such a way that the text appears unnatural and modified (all four modes).

4.4 *No structural, syntactical or vocabulary errors are possible:* All the possible mistakes and errors that are encountered in an authentic reading are corrected in order to present it as an appropriate written model for second language learners (mode **a**).

4.5 *Use of formal writing format:* This kind of material is written in a very careful and detailed way. When creating these readings text authors use most formal elements in order to express their ideas accurately and appropriately. This material is well-written and precise (modes **a**, **b** and **d**).

4.6 *Common personal background is made explicit:* This type of information is linguistically explicit (mode **a**).

4.7   *Reduced redundancy and/or less unnecessary repetition of information*: The same criteria for simulated oral language is applied here. Information may be so condensed and well organized that natural redundancy is taken away (all four modes).

4.8   *No randomness of subject matter*: This material does not show any topical disorders, and readings generally develop one topic coherently (modes **b** and **d**).

4.9   *Predominance of elements of formal registers*: These readings generally stick mostly to formal grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. Even when an informal register is used, the text tends to contain more formal elements than informal ones (modes **b** and **d**).

4.10   *Non-standard language is not possible and slang expressions are scarce*: Non-standard language and slang expressions never appear. Then texts show mainly standard language forms (mode **a**).

4.11   *Sometimes use of unreal cue indicators*: Very often text writers use some words, expressions or elements that do not exist in real life. These indicators are created to refer to an article to avoid mentioning a real commercial brand, for example the use of "Brand X" to refer to some kind of soap, the use of "Q" instead of using Dollars or Sterling Pounds or the country of "Utopia" which is an artificial name refering to an imaginary replublic[4] (all four modes).

4.12   *Source is not given*: The source is not provided. If it were taken from another source it would be specified somewhere in the textbook. Only in the cases that material consists of adapted versions taken from original texts, is the source provided. But it has to be considered simulated too. (If there is doubt when deciding whether written material is authentic, this last characteristic may be of great help).

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4.   These examples have been taken from the textbook *In Tune 1*. (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman, 1983), pp. 13-25 y 62-67.

Knowing how to identify authenticity in listening and reading material is an essencial task in second language teaching. Exposing the students only to simulated discourse may hinder their understanding when interacting with native speakers and the way they speak and write. This situation may lead to some sort of frustration, and consequently their oral and written production of the language may be affected in some way. Students have the right to learn the language through authentic relia; therefore teachers must provide them with appropriate unmodified material. To this end the guidelines proposed in this article are useful when selecting textbooks or any other kind of listening and written material for the teaching of a second or foreign language.

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