USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN GRAMMAR TEACHING: SOME CONSIDERATIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Tran Thi Nhu Hoa
Hanoi Metropolitan University

Abstract: *This article explores the role of authentic materials in grammar instruction within the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Using insights from recent research, it evaluates the advantages and challenges of incorporating authentic texts into grammar teaching. Authentic materials, such as newspaper articles, advertisements, and real-life dialogues, offer contextualized learning experiences and expose learners to natural language use, helping them develop a deeper understanding of grammatical structures in meaningful contexts. However, their implementation also presents challenges, including linguistic complexity, unfamiliar cultural references, and the additional time and effort required for teachers to adapt materials and design suitable activities. To address these challenges, the paper suggests a balanced approach integrating authentic materials with appropriate scaffolding techniques. By carefully selecting and modifying authentic texts to align with learners' proficiency levels, teachers can create an effective grammar learning environment that fosters accuracy and fluency.*

Keywords: *Authentic material, adapting materials, EFL context, grammar teaching, selecting materials.*

Nhận bài ngày 20.03.2025; gửi phản biện, chỉnh sửa, duyệt đăng ngày 26.04.2025
Liên hệ tác giả: Trần Thị Như Hoa; email: ttnhoa@daihocthudo.edu.vn

I. INTRODUCTION

Grammar instruction in foreign language teaching has long been a subject of continuous debate. Traditional methods of grammar teaching have primarily relied on memorization of rules and artificial examples, whereas contemporary approaches emphasize communicative competence and contextual learning. In EFL contexts, grammar proficiency remains a crucial indicator of language competence and a fundamental aspect of language instruction across educational levels and institutions.

Despite its importance, grammar learning often proves difficult and even frustrating for many learners. English grammar is challenging for learners because it combines structural complexity with numerous exceptions to its own rules. For example, students may find it hard to remember irregular verb forms or understand subtle distinctions in tense usage that often do not exist in learners' native languages. Additionally, the nuances of modal verbs and conditional structures require extensive practice to master. These challenges may become greater when learners must apply the rules in real-time conversation, where they have little time to consciously recall complex grammatical principles. As a result, they may make mistakes repeatedly, even with familiar grammatical rules or structures.

To address these challenges, various instructional methods have emerged, with the use of authentic materials gaining particular attention in recent years. Authentic materials offer a window into how grammar functions within real communication contexts and provide a dynamic way to integrate grammar instruction into meaningful language use.

This paper aims to investigate key considerations for EFL teachers implementing authentic materials in grammar instruction and provides some recommendations for effective classroom practice.

II. CONTENT

2.1. Defining authentic materials

The term "*authentic materials*" has been defined in various ways within language teaching literature. Martinez (2002) and many others characterize authentic materials as real-life texts written for native speakers of the language to fulfill some social purposes rather than for teaching purposes. We adopt the definition given by Gilmore (2007, p.4), which describes an authentic text as "*a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort*." These definitions collectively establish that authentic materials are created for real-life purposes rather than for language learners, distinguishing them from artificial textbook materials that are designed or modified for language learning purposes.

2.2. Advantages of using authentic materials

2.2.1. Contextual learning

When teaching English as a foreign language, teachers often have to rely on certain required textbooks. However, teachers should not limit the teaching and learning tasks to the textbooks, but should try to incorporate materials from authentic sources into the lessons. According to Akbari (2016), teachers have positive attitudes toward authentic materials in foreign language classes, considering them important input for improving students' skills and exposing them to real language. Authentic texts, including literary works, news articles, and spoken dialogues, provide learners with real-world grammatical structures, enhancing comprehension and application. Contextual learning occurs when students observe grammatical rules used naturally within meaningful situations rather than in isolated drills. This exposure enables learners to understand how language functions dynamically across various communicative settings, promoting deeper retention and practical application of grammar rules.

Research by Javadi and Tajik (2021) emphasizes the need for authentic materials in communicative grammar teaching, particularly for learners who struggle to apply textbook-based grammatical patterns in real-life communication. Their study on Iranian high school students highlights the deficiencies of traditional grammar instruction, which often fails to cultivate practical language skills. They advocate for a curriculum that incorporates authentic texts to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

Strandberg (2025) observes that using authentic text when teaching grammar creates connections between grammar and language in use. According to Myhill et al. (2013), cited in Strandberg (2025), examples created specifically to illustrate grammar points are typically decontextualized and unrealistically simplified. Authentic texts, on the other hand, create a more accurate representation of language in use and support students in understanding how grammar operates in real language contexts. We strongly agree with Strandberg (2025) that authentic texts enable students to make connections between grammatical phenomena and their functions within texts, helping them discover how grammar functions across different contexts.

From the discussion above, we believe that using authentic materials can significantly improve the process of grammar internalization for learners by providing real-life contexts for language use. Therefore, English language teachers need to make efforts in trying to employ some authentic materials in their grammar lessons.

2.2.2. Motivation and engagement

Students are more likely to engage with texts that are culturally and linguistically rich compared to contrived textbook examples. Literary texts offer compelling narratives that keep learners invested in the learning process. Tomlinson (2012) argues that "authentic materials can provide meaningful exposure to language as it is actually used to motivate learners and help them develop a range of communicative competencies and enhance positive attitudes towards the learning of a language."

Exposure to genuine language usage increases student interest and willingness to engage in learning activities. According to Saleh (2022), teachers report higher student participation when authentic materials are integrated into lessons. The real-world relevance of these texts helps students recognize the practical value of what they're learning beyond the classroom.

Javadi and Tajik (2021) observe that grammar instruction becomes more interesting and dynamic when authentic materials are used. These materials tend to be more motivating, up-to-date, and relevant than traditional textbooks. They prepare students for real communication by providing natural, unmodified language input, guiding them toward language needed for specific contexts, and building interest and motivation in the classroom.

We share the views of the authors mentioned above about the importance of using authentic materials in improving students' motivation and engagement in the classroom. From our own experience, students seem to be much more interested in the tasks that involve authentic texts such as excerpts from real articles, e-mails, or film reviews. They engage more in grammar tasks and more readily get involved in classroom discussions about the grammar points covered in the lessons.

2.2.3. Learning effectiveness

Using authentic materials helps to promote the simultaneous development of grammar, vocabulary, reading, listening, and writing skills. Using authentic materials allows students to encounter language holistically, helping them recognize the interplay between different language components.

In terms of grammar and vocabulary development, with authentic materials, students observe how grammatical structures function within meaningful contexts while expanding their vocabulary through exposure to varied word usage. Li (2023) demonstrates that text-based grammar teaching methods have a profound impact on grammar accuracy and facilitate a more comfortable understanding of grammar rules among English language learners. By using authentic and real-world materials, this approach encourages learners to apply grammar rules in context, generating more natural and communicative language use.

The complex reality of authentic grammar usage challenges learners in ways that simplified textbook examples cannot. Strandberg (2025) notes that authentic texts foster discussions about the function of grammatical phenomena rather than merely memorizing terms. By focusing on the complexities of English grammar in context, students develop a better understanding of how to construct coherent and grammatically accurate sentences and paragraphs.

It can be seen that when learners encounter grammatical structures in their natural context, they develop not only technical accuracy but also pragmatic competence. They understand better when, why and how certain structures are employed. Exposure to authentic texts also fosters critical thinking as students interpret meaning, infer grammatical rules, and apply them in new contexts. Therefore, we strongly believe in the effectiveness