

4. ЛИНГВИСТИКА

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Адаптация аутентичного материала для введения трудной темы на уроках английского языка

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Аннотация. Адаптация учебников по английскому языку стала решением для удовлетворения потребностей студентов и приближения занятий к реальности. В статье рассматривается использование поэзии в качестве аутентичного языкового материала для введения на английском уроке трудной темы. Помимо краткого обзора литературы по адаптации языкового материала, статья включает анализ стихотворения, подходящего для стимулирования мотивации и свободного использования языка в классе, а также предложения по проведению этого упражнения. Исследовательская ценность заключается в использовании индексальных выражений в качестве отправной точки для обсуждения чувствительной темы - терроризма.

Ключевые слова: преподавание английского языка, адаптация учебника, поэзия, индексность, сложная тема, терроризм.

Adapting Authentic Material to Introduce a Sensitive Topic in the ELT Classroom

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Annotation. ELT textbook adaptation has become the solution to meet the students' needs and bring reality closer to the classroom. This article explores the use of poetry as authentic language learning material to introduce a sensitive topic in the ELT classroom. Besides a short literature review on language material adaptation, the paper includes the analysis of a poem suitable for fostering motivation and free language use in the classroom, as well as suggestions on how to develop the activity. The research value resides in the use of indexical expressions as a departure point to discuss a sensitive topic: terrorism.

Keywords: ELT, textbook adaptation, poetry, indexicality, sensitive topic, terrorism.

Introduction

Together with the growing worldwide implementation of CLT since the mid-1980s, ELT has witnessed an unprecedented increase in the availability of coursebooks as well as supplementary language learning materials in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. This phenomenon has brought problems such as prohibitive prices and copyright issues. From a pedagogical perspective, however, the de facto use of any ELT textbook series as the syllabus without any pedagogical consideration in its relationship with the curriculum, the students' needs and aspirations, and much worse with the reality surrounding the language classroom and the ideas within the language material is common [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10].

Regardless of the advantages and disadvantages of using coursebooks, the danger of getting locked into a particular coursebook, and its content as the only material taken into the classroom, and its teaching and learning as the book prescribes “may become like a millstone around the necks of all concerned, endangering the *engagement* which a student-centred classroom might otherwise create”. Doing without a book “may well be of benefit to their students if, and only if, [teachers] have the experience and time to provide a consistent programme of work on their own, and if they have a bank of materials to back up their ‘no-coursebook’ decision” [11]. The only solution to such a dilemma is, therefore, textbook adaptation. However, though in ELT methodology the need to adapt textbooks to the singularities of each teaching learning situation is underscored, no universal formula exists [12, 13,14,15]. It seems, therefore, that learning to adapt a textbook to the singularities of a learning situation comes with expertise, thus posing a challenge for novice teachers. This paper socializes the results of the authors’ first experience in elaborating additional material based on the poem *Jakarta, January* by Sarah Kay for online lessons with two ELT intermediate level adult students. The relevance of the article is that it touches upon a worldwide problem totally absent in the ELT language textbooks used in Russia: terrorism.

Literature review

Adaptation of language teaching material to the ELT classroom dates to the early 1980s. When introducing the term, Abbot and Wingard (1981) state that any adaptation of the ELT textbooks must be based on informed pedagogical considerations (e.g., interests or needs) to omit, change, or substitute textbook language material [16]. Nowadays, as a result of increasing access to authentic materials suitable to be used in the classroom, McDonough (2013) has extended the term not only to include any addition, deletion, modification, but also simplification and reordering of tasks [17]. Among the requisites advanced for textbook adaptation, Tonawanik & Donavanik (2019) underscore the use of authentic materials because of their positive effect on the learners’ motivation if they are carefully evaluated in terms of the purposes of the course, the students’ proficiency level, learning styles, and interests, aspects that pose

a challenge to novice teachers (Mede & Yalçın, 2019) for they usually only focus on the students' engagement in class and the materials; in contrast, experienced teachers focus on the challenging students by simplifying content and the difficulty of the task [18, 19]. As to the whys of the adaptation of teaching materials in textbooks, Malley (2011) contends the following reason: include missing tasks, make fun, increase communication, simplifying tasks, save time, meet the needs of the learners, fit a teaching context, as well as modernize the material and dynamize the lesson to facilitate comprehension [20].

The widespread use of literature as classroom material is based on criteria related to the relationship between language and culture and the possibility for the students to use language creatively and freely. They may be used as the introduction to a topic, engage in thoughtful use of the language, learn about the English-speaking cultures, source of motivation to read more, and develop confidence in language use.

About the author and the poem analysed

Sarah Kay was born in the USA. She has a Master of Arts in teaching from Brown University, and an honorary doctorate in humane letters from Grinnell College [21]. Known for her spoken word poetry, Kay is the founder and co-director of Project V.O.I.C.E. (founded 2004) [22]. The goal of her project is to welcome young poets who feel not to be welcomed in poetry communities, because this support is what she needed herself early in her career [23]. For her, poetry is a community space (not a textbook) which moves others and makes room for everybody regardless of age, life experience, academic background, because everybody has something to say.

Kay has performed on US TV, the Lincoln Center, the Tribeca Film Festival, the United Nations, and TED among others [22]. Sarah is the author of four books of poetry [21].

The choice of *Jakarta, January* as material for an ELT class is not accidental. *Jakarta, January* is a free verse poem, in which two terrorist attacks are described and indexed. This topic, being sensitive, is rarely touched upon in ELT lessons. In this article, we try to show how this can be approached.

Analysis of the poem *Jakarta, January*

Rich in indexical terms, *Jakarta, January* vividly describes two terrorist attacks in two different cities at two different spans of time. Indexicality in language is understood as “the capacity of linguistic signs of various kinds to ‘invoke’ some other object, while not explicitly describing or referring to it” [24]. We present the text of the poem (taken from [25]) in table 1 below.

Table 1

Text of the poem *Jakarta, January*

It is the last class of the day, and I am teaching a classroom of 6th graders about poetry, and across town a man walks into a Starbucks and blows himself up, while other men throw grenades in the street, and shoot into a crowd of civilians.

And I am 27 years old, which means I am the only person in this room who was alive when this happened in New York City, and I was in 8th grade, sitting in my classroom for the first class of the day. And I made a joke about how mad everyone was gonna be at the pilot that messed up. And later added how stupid you have to be for it to happen twice.

And the 6th graders are practising listing sensory details, and someone calls out blue skies as a sight that they love, and nobody in this classroom knows what has happened yet. And they do not know that we are in lockdown, which is a word they did not have when I was in 6th grade. And the whole class is laughing, because a boy has called out dog poop as a smell he does not like. And what is a boy if not a glowing thing learning what he can get away with?

And I was once a girl sitting in a classroom on the lucky side of town who did not know what had happened yet. And I did not know electrical fire was a smell I did not like until my whole neighbourhood smelled that way for weeks. And blue skies was a sight I never trusted again. And poetry is what I reached for in the days the ash would not stop falling.

And there is a 6th grade girl inside this class whose father was inside that Starbucks, and she does not know what has happened yet. And what is a girl but a pulsing thing learning what the world will take from her?

And what if I am still a girl, sitting in a classroom on the lucky side of town making a careless joke, looking up at my teacher for some kind of answer? And what if I am also the teacher with no answers looking back at myself? And what is being an adult if not a terrified thing desperate to protect something you cannot save? And how lucky do you have to be for it to miss you

twice?

And tomorrow, a 6th grade girl will come to class while her father has the shrapnel pulled from his body. And maybe she will reach for poetry. And the sky outside the classroom is so terribly

blue. And the students are quiet, and looking at me, and waiting for a poem, or an answer, or a grown up, or a bell to ring. And the bell rings, and they float up from their seats are tiny ghosts, and are gone.

In the poem Sarah, perhaps besides the description in the first sentence, indexes two tragedies: the 2016 Jakarta attack and 9/11. She talks about them without directly mentioning the dates, or that those were terrorist attacks. As listeners and/or readers, we get only personal information (author's age, location, actions). This helps to immerse us into the "now" of those events.

In this poem, as in some other works (*Mrs. Ribeiro, Montauk*), Sarah recreates typical behaviour and thoughts of children: the "careless" jokes she as a pupil made about what will later be known as 9/11, and those of the pupils she had to occupy during a lockdown [26] years later. The author also shows how life of real people changed after such events: after 9/11 her having to endure smell of electrical fire in her neighbourhood, deceptiveness of clear blue sky, ash falling; her student's parent being wounded during Jakarta 2016 terrorist attack. Luckily, both times, the author was "on the lucky side of town", but close to where the events unfolded to be affected by them.

In a 2018 interview to *Design Matters* with Dabbie Millman [27] Sarah Kay shared how profoundly the 9/11 terrorist attacks influenced her as a girl of 13. She lived close to the WTC towers. Luckily, she and her close relatives remained alive, but many things changed. Adults around her "were very busy from trying to keep the world from falling apart" [23]. Her mother broke her ankle. Her brother did not speak for months. In the interview, Sarah describes how it felt for her as a teenager to be in such circumstances, "There was a lot of happening. And as a result, I did not want to burden anyone with whatever my 13-year-old thoughts and feelings, and worries were. And to be thirteen and try to wrap your head around terrorism was really hard for me. And so the only way I understood it at the time was that someone had tried to communicate, 'There is no room for you here.'" [23] Later, one poetry community space will provide the "room" she needed.

Using the poem in ELT

The use of this poem as additional material in class is likely to make any lesson more interesting and personalized. However, choosing the appropriate materials is not as easy a task as it may seem. The following section briefly outlines how the poem *Jakarta, January* may be used in class.

Firstly, take into account the student's age. Terrorism is not a topic for a discussion with an immature person under 20. Even Sarah says that she perceived terrorism in an oversimplified way when she was 13. The ideas in the poem may also pose difficulties for students in the elementary and pre-intermediate levels.

Secondly, any additional class materials have to be connected with the topic of a lesson to serve as a practice and communication. Some people probably suppose it is inappropriate to discuss such a sensitive topic in a classroom. But, a learner has to be ready to deliberate on any topic because in real life, the topic of conversation will not depend only on his preferences. Thus, students learn how to explain their refusal to discuss something.

The following didactic steps are suggested on how to develop the activity in class.

1. Ask about their interest in literature and poetry in particular.
2. Offer one line from the poem for prediction: "What is being an adult, if not a terrified thing desperate to protect something you cannot save"
3. Elicit ideas about the content of the poem. And why does the author call adults "terrified things"?
4. Play/ask the students to read the poem (The first variant is better because Sarah recited the poem with her soul)
5. Ask some questions to check general understanding.
6. Play/ask the students to read the poem again and answer previously given questions so that they focus on specific aspects of the poem contents.
7. Get the students out of the poem into real life issues. The objective here is to make the student interact with Sarah by asking questions concerning the student's life; for instance, What/who do you want to protect? Which lines touched you the most? Have you ever lived a similar experience? How do you

feel when you hear/read about a terrorist attack on the press? Many of these questions are appropriate for adults only; however, many senior high school students are very likely to react positively to them.

8. Close the topic by pointing at vocabulary, the power of words in signalling more than literal meanings. Many students might like to write their own poems; others may bring their own to class. The following lines may elicit good starts for those interested in writing a poem: What is a girl if not; What is a boy of not; What is being an adult

Observe that the expectation is not to turn students into good poets, but into people with good communicative skills and positive feelings. Adult learners are often interested in more profound topics than everyday conversation. It helps the dynamics of the lesson as well as contribute to the students' linguistics and teacher's and students' personal development. Either writing poetry or discussing a social issue will require serious thought.

Conclusions

Despite its potential shortcomings as additional classroom material to enhance free communication through art, the proposal has the intrinsic value of connecting an English language lesson into a space of reflection for art is life and affects life. Furthermore, because education is a common good, this additional material may be useful in lessons raising concerns about caring for close people, [28] and as such contribute to the development of positive attitudes towards others. Moreover, because the topic of terrorism is one of the "forbidden" areas one does not want to talk about, the recent terrorist attack in a HE institution in Kazan and mobilization of the security forces in Ekaterinburg and other cities as a result of false calls about mining in schools, for instance, showed Russian educational institutions are unsafe. Many would disagree, but the classroom is also a place to talk about sensitive topics such as the relationship between people, fear for the loved ones, how to protect them not only from adverse events, but also from the consequences of those events, even if they do not affect them directly, as in Sarah's case [29, 30].

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