Exploring the Possibility of Using Authentic English Materials in Requisite English Classes in the Faculty of Business Administration

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Exploring the Possibility of Using Authentic English Materials in Requisite English Classes in the Faculty of Business Administration

Yoichi SATO

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1. Introduction

In the era of globalisation and digitalisation, people agree on the importance of using English for the purpose of international communication from a macro perspective. Seen from a micro perspective, however, a consensus pertaining to how to help students develop such global business competence in the sphere of higher education still remains to be achieved. Various scholars of business communication have tackled this issue from a multitude of angles. Some researchers argue that, rather than teaching business protocols and templates with textbook-based instruction, the use of authentic business English materials will help learners better develop their global communication competence (e.g., Tanaka, 1997, 2013; Tanaka & Handford, 2010; Tanaka & Sato, 2012). With the use of such materials, students can be exposed to the realistic use of English necessary in business practice. On the other hand, some also argue that the opportunity for students to experience the real-life language use in business situations is rather limited because such materials are relatively difficult to obtain (Sato, 2013, 2014).

As an alternative approach, especially in the context of higher education, the use of authentic English materials, including English literature works and movies in a broad sense, could be considered valuable. Actually, much has been discussed about the pedagogical validity of using authentic English materials in the advanced English communication classes even in the context of Japan (e.g., Kuze, 2008). Although English educators in business discipline can potentially celebrate the benefit of this approach, little has been argued about the use of such materials in requisite English courses for business administration majors, as far as the author is aware of.
In this light, this paper will conduct an initial exploration to investigate the possibility to use authentic English materials in such classes, especially in the context of a Super Global University (SGU), which Toyo University is also recognised as. In this paper, I have defined authentic English materials as English text or movies which were not originally designed to be used to study English yet were also found beneficial for educational purposes. Since this study employs an initial exploratory approach in which the focus is to develop a hypothesis to be further explored in the future, I do not wish to empirically examine the pedagogical efficacy of using authentic English materials in business English classrooms, including the score growth on standardised English proficiency test. To supplement this discussion, I will include my own perspectives based on my two-year teaching experience at Toyo University, when necessary.

2. Research context

Before looking at the following example cases, I will briefly describe the context, in which the use of authentic English materials will presumably be realised eventually. In this article, I will assume a typical requisite English classes as a possible venue of this educational attempt. In the faculty of business administration of Toyo University, there are approximately 20 requisite English courses running for the first and second year students. This time, for the sake of this discussion, I will think about the middle range level classes as an example of this educational context, largely because it can possibly be considered average in the broadest possible sense, and thus they are arguably prototypical of business English classes. Evidently, the students are not English majors but business majors. Most of them are not moderately motivated to acquire English skills for the purpose of business communication; rather, they take English classes as they are required subjects when they are in their first and second years. Furthermore, they have not been trained enough to speak English throughout the course of compulsory education and beyond. Since the context is a Super Global University, students are all supposed to take this English class with an English mediated instruction approach, where instruction in English should be maximised whereas Japanese input should be minimised, in theory.

For an example of authentic materials, I chose a British movie, The Remains of the Day, whose original text was written by Kazuo Ishiguro, a Japanese-British writer. I chose this material not because I am personally interested in the story, but because the author recently won the Nobel Prize in Literature (in 2017). Because of this worldwide popularity, the story must be relatively attention-grabbing to students. Besides, in this movie, there are a number of
business communication scenes included, such as a job interview, lodging a complaint, politico-economic debate and small talk. Since this is exploratory research at its initial stage in nature, I will not include any kind of voices and interview data from participants in the study. Rather, I will just theoretically examine the pedagogical validity of using the said authentic English material in requisite English classes. Hereby, I admit that I am not the expert of literature studies in general. Due to the nature of the identity of the author, I do not wish to discuss the content of the literature work in a professional academic manner. Instead, I will focus my argument on the discussion pertaining to the possibility of using this authentic material in requisite business English classes in the said context, to the best of my efforts.

3. Example cases

Below are some example cases where the use of authentic materials can be actually utilised in classroom instruction. Due to page limitation, I chose only four different scenes from the movie and labelled them as example cases 1 to 4, respectively. In the following section, I will discuss how the scenes are related to business communication and provide some examples of how the instructions can be implemented.

(1) Example case 1

The first example case is where Miss Kenton (written as Kenton) paid a visit to Darlington Hall for a job interview, and Mr. Stevens (written as Stevens) explained the working conditions. Below is the excerpt from the movie which I transcribed based on the provided English subtitles. The italics were employed to ease reference.

Stevens: No gentleman callers allowed, of course. Forgive my mentioning it, but we've had those problems before. Inside the house too. The previous housekeeper ran off with the under-butler. If two staff members decide to get married, one can say nothing. What I find a major irritation are those persons who go from post to post looking for romance. Housekeepers are particularly guilty here. No offense intended, of course.

Kenton: None taken. I know from my own experience how a house is at sixes and sevens once the staff start marrying.

Stevens: Yes, indeed.

In this scene, there was an apparent power difference existing between Mr. Stevens and Miss Kenton, since the former one was an employer whereas the
latter was an employee candidate. Mr. Stevens’ overpowering behaviour manifests itself as his pressurising tone toward Miss Kenton. To that, Miss Kenton tried to listen to Mr. Stevens while trying to stay as patient as possible so as not to fail in her interview.

When applying this scene to the teaching of business communication, instructors may be able to address the issues of power relations emerging in business discourse. As long as human interaction is concerned, the issues of power relations cannot be ignored. My personal interview with an expert of this literature work also suggested that the historical perspectives of power relations in business interaction could possibly be referred to in a discussion of this scene. According to the expert, power relations derived from gender inequality in the decade of the 1930s’, which is the time setting of this scene, is worth referring to in order to help students better understand this scene.

One other possible example to utilise this scene is to have students continue this dialogue on their own by playing the role of these two parties. With this approach, students will experience some contextual limitations in their role-play activities, and it is intellectually more challenging to do so than to create a free dialogue as is frequently employed in language classes in general. Students cannot change the atmosphere of the dialogue in order to continue this conversation; otherwise, it would totally devastate the situation. Under this educational control, students will have to think carefully about the detailed contextual information which can potentially result in deeper understanding of the text. Besides, in order to continue this conversation, students also have to understand the power relations between Mr. Stevens and Miss Kenton, in addition to the historical context that they were in. Although creating a free dialogue can be potentially more motivating to students, including some contextual restrictions will lead students to think more carefully about the situation, and will desirably enable them to be engaged in more active learning.

(2) Example case 2

The second example is the scene where Mr. Stevens lodges a complaint to Miss Kenton about the terms of address she used to call his father, who was employed as an under-butler of Darlington Hall and happened to be her underservant because of his age.

*Kenton: I thought these might brighten your parlour a little.*
*Stevens: Beg your pardon?*  
*Kenton: I thought they might cheer things up for you.*  
*Stevens: That's very kind of you.*  
*Kenton: If you like, Mr. Stevens, I could bring in some more for you.*
Stevens: Thank you, Miss Kenton. but I regard this room as my private place of work and I prefer to keep distractions to a minimum.

Kenton: Would you call flowers a distraction, then, Mr. Stevens?

Stevens: I appreciate your kindness. I prefer to keep things as they are. But since you are here, there is a small matter I wanted to mention. I happened to be walking past the kitchen yesterday morning and I heard you call to someone named William. May I ask who it was you were addressing by that name?

Kenton: I should think I was addressing your father. There are no other Williams in this house, I think.

Stevens: True. May I ask you in future to address my father as Mr. Stevens? If speaking of him to a third party, you may call him Mr. Stevens Sr. to distinguish him from myself. So, I would be most grateful to you, Miss Kenton.

Kenton: I don't quite understand what you're getting at, Mr. Stevens. I am the housekeeper in this house, and he is the under-butler. I am accustomed to addressing under-servants by their Christian names.

Stevens: If you would stop to think for a moment, you'd realize how inappropriate it is for one such as yourself to address as William someone such as my father.

Kenton: It must have been very galling for your father to be called William by one such as myself.

Stevens: Miss Kenton, all I am saying is that my father is a person from whom if you'd observe him more, you may learn things.

Kenton: I'm grateful for your advice, but do tell me what things might I learn from him?

Steven: I might point out that you're often unsure of what goes where and which item is which.

Kenton: I'm sure Mr. Stevens Sr. is very good at his job, but I can assure you, Mr. Stevens, that I'm very good at mine.

Stevens: Of course. Thank you.

Kenton: If you will please excuse me.

Stevens: Miss Kenton. Oh, well.

Superficially, Mr. Stevens and Miss Kenton used polite linguistic expressions such as “I am afraid...”, “May I ask...?”, and “I am grateful...”, just to mention a few. This scene, if you take a close look, however, is an example of apparent face-threatening acts. Both Mr. Stevens and Miss Kenton attempted to insist on the legitimacy of their assertion while negotiating and compromising in a multidimensional level. This scene will give students a chance to observe how
face-threatening acts are conducted in English and interpersonal relations are multidimensionally negotiated. It is often reported that, in order to help college students without business experience to grasp the essence of business communication, teaching business protocols and templates based on textbooks is not sufficient (e.g., Tanaka, 1997, 2013). Rather, students can potentially benefit more from actually observing the realistic communication and analyse the discourse presented in authentic English materials.

To utilise this scene in actual teaching practice, in addition to the aforementioned dialogue-continuation activities, conducting role-play activities of lodging a complaint based on their real-life experience while encouraging them to use the vocabulary and expressions appearing in the dialogue will do.

(3) Example case 3

The third example is the case where the representatives of Germany (written as GER), France (written in FRA), the United States of America (written as USA), and the United Kingdom (written as UK), talk about their perspectives of war and peace at the post-conference dinner at Darlington Hall. The first two representatives from Germany and France declared peace. Responding to that, the third speaker from the USA criticised traditional amateur, gentlemen politics in Europe. To that, the final speaker representing the UK, who is an employer of Mr. Stevens, offered a rebuttal by attacking the opinion of the American politician. Below is the actual excerpt of the scene of politico-economic argument.

**GER:** On the last day of our conference, permit me to say how impressed I have been with the spirit of good will that has prevailed. Goodwill for Germany. And with tears in my eyes I see that everyone here has recognized our right to be, once again, a strong nation. With my hand on my heart, I declare that Germany needs peace and desires only peace. Peace with England and peace with France.

**FRA:** Thank you very much. I, too, have been impressed, yes, deeply impressed by the genuine desire for peace manifested at this conference. Unlike our American colleague, we in Europe know the horrors of war. And whether we are French or English or Italian or German, our one desire is to never have to experience them again. Indeed. Impressed, or I may say touched by the words of goodwill and friendship I have heard, I promise you that I shall do my utmost to change my country’s policy towards that nation which was once our foe, but is now, I may venture to say our friend.
USA:  Ladies and gentlemen, the United States doesn't want war, any more than you do. On the other hand, neither do we want peace at any price, because some prices, you may find, are too outrageously high to pay. But let’s not get into that now. We may have to soon enough. For the moment, let us raise our glasses to Lord Darlington in gratitude for his magnificent hospitality. Lord Darlington is a classic English gentleman of the old school. Decent and honourable and well-meaning. So are all of you. All decent, honourable and well-meaning gentlemen. It's a pleasure and a privilege to visit with you here. But now, excuse me, I must say this, you are, all of you, amateurs. And international affairs should never be run by gentlemen amateurs. Do you have any idea of what sort of a place the world is becoming? The days when you could act out of noble instincts are over. Europe has become the arena of "Realpolitik", the politics of reality. If you like, real politics, what you need is not gentlemen politicians, but real ones. You need professionals, or you’re headed for disaster. So, I propose a toast, gentlemen, to the professionals.

UK:  Well, I've no wish to enter into a quarrel on our last evening together. But let me say this. What you describe as amateurism is what I think most of us here still prefer to call honour. And I suggest that your professionalism means greed and power rather than to see justice and goodness prevail in the world. I've never concealed from myself that what we were asking of Germany is a complete break from the tradition of this country. Thank you.

Although this scene does not directly represent business, it still contains some aspects of business-oriented interaction since it is a politico-economic debate. In this scene, completely opposing perspectives of war and peace were presented. Mr. Lewis, the American representative, talked about the 21st century type peace-keeping strategies where collective security is the key. Lord Darlington, on the other hand, placed emphasis on the notion of self-defence, which represents itself in this context as the 20th century type peace-keeping strategy. Responding to Mr. Lewis's denial of the European gentlemen politics, Lord Darlington offered a rebuttal and had a debate with his American counterpart in gentlemanly manners, which eventually received the appraisal from the audience. This scene can be viewed as an example of debating, which often takes place in business communication discourse.

This scene, in addition to this politico-economic debate, can be utilised for the sake of raising students' awareness of linguistic diversity of the English language. In the movie, Mr. Lewis speaks American English, whereas Lord
Darlington speaks British English. The co-existence of different varieties of the English language will help students raise their awareness of different varieties of English. Besides, the representatives from Germany and France also state their opinions using English as a second language, which is different from native-speaker varieties. Considered from the perspectives of World Englishes (e.g., Kachru, 1983), this scene can allow students an opportunity to understand that different varieties of English(es) are practically used worldwide, and the use of English as an international language, not just the language variety used in the inner circle countries including the United States of America and the United Kingdom, has been gradually normalised in the sphere of global business communication.

(4) Example case 4

On a related note, the following excerpt depicts the scene where people in lower class society engage in some political argument.

*Stevens:* I'd forgotten how much petrol the Daimler uses. It's an impractical motor to be going about the country, Mister...

*Smith:* Smith. Harry Smith. It's a privilege to have you here in Moscombe.

*Stevens:* It's a privilege to be here.

*Smith:* Your health, sir.

*Lady:* Dr. Carlisle usually drops in around now. He'd enjoy meeting you. He's a gentleman like yourself.

*Smith:* I don't know what you call a gentleman. It's a name every man in this country has a right to.

*Taylor:* There's Harry Smith now, giving you an earful of his philosophy.

*Smith:* One of the advantages being born as British is to have the privilege of expressing our opinions and voting for Parliament. That's what we fought Hitler for.

*Taylor:* Have you had much to do with politics yourself?

*Stevens:* Not directly as such, no, particularly in these days. Perhaps more so in the early 1930s and just before the war. My concern was more international affairs. Or foreign policy, so to speak. Not that I ever held high office, mind you. No, any influence I exerted was in an unofficial capacity.

*Lady:* Excuse me, sir. Have you ever met Mr. Churchill?

*Stevens:* Yes! He came to the house occasionally. Again, in the early 1930s.

*Smith:* He was a bloody warmonger!

*A man:* Honestly, yeah, Harry!

*Smith:* We wouldn't have won the war without him. Not content to fight...
Germans, he sent troops in against the miners.

Taylor: What about the war?
Smith: Yes, all right. He did a good job in the war, but he should've stepped down.
A man: And Mr. Eden?
Smith: He made a right bugger of Suez!
Stevens: Yes, I met Mr. Eden. Yes, occasionally.
Carlisle: How do you do? Richard Carlisle. Rotten luck about your car; but nice to have you with us.
Stevens: Everyone has been most kind.
Taylor: This gentleman says he knows foreign affairs.
Carlisle: Is that so, indeed?
Stevens: Yes. In an unofficial capacity.
Lady: He knows Mr. Churchill.
A man: And Mr. Eden.
Carlisle: Really?
Stevens: Yes, well, it was my good fortune to have consorted with many men of influence from Europe and from America. Mr. Taylor, I really feel I ought to retire now because I'm feeling rather tired.

In this dialogue, people were engaged in conversation as small talk. As a number of researchers of business communication pointed out, small talk when employed appropriately often functions as a lubricant of conversation, based on which participants in the context can mutually establish rapport (e.g., Koester, 2000). By studying this scene, students can potentially get to know the significance of small talk used in business communication. At the same time, they can recognise how difficult it is to engage in small talk, though the topics of conversation in most of the cases do not seem so interactant-unfriendly.

As regards the application for business communication, instructors can refer to this scene as an example of effective turn-taking. Harry Smith, the one who picked up Mr. Stevens on his way and kindly brought him to the pub, keeps his presence in the conversation by continuously cutting in. On the contrary, the customer sitting next to Mr. Stevens often fails in turn-taking, as is represented in his markedly short utterances. Because of that failure, he looks as if he were talking to himself. In this context, Mr. Stevens appears to be the person who succeeded with his turn-taking in a strategic and effective way. Instructors can refer to this discourse pragmatic feature to help students learn some strategies for effective turn-taking in business interaction.
5. Discussion

The 21st century is said to be the era of pragmatism, in which the value of liberal arts education has been somewhat underestimated. Authentic English materials such as literature works and movies are often seen as unnecessary probably with the assumption that they did not help students acquire practical skills. However, as was argued above, authentic English materials, when utilised properly, can help students acquire global business communication competence, in theory.

Before putting this insight into actual classroom practice, however, educators are advised to think about their educational context very carefully. My experience of teaching at a Super Global University for the last couple of years suggested the following three supplementary perspectives to make it happen realistically; 1) content-language integrated learning (CLIL), 2) project-based learning (PBL), and 3) flip teaching.

First of all, the inclusion of a CLIL approach will help enhance the educational effect of teaching business communication by using authentic English materials. CLIL, as its name indicates, is an integrative approach of teaching language as the basis of understanding the relevant content. Generally speaking, students are likely to pay equivalent attention to content and language when authentic language materials are employed as a resource of classroom instruction.

The use of authentic materials, including literature works and movies, is also considered effective in that it is believed to cover all necessary elements of material development. According to Coyle (2008), one needs to think about cognition, culture, content, and communication when thinking about CLIL material development, otherwise known as the 4C framework. Cognition refers to the thinking process necessary to understand the culture and content of the developed materials. Besides, the materials should also be used to afford students’ communication. The use of authentic materials discussed in this paper could create cognitive challenges for the students to understand the business culture and content necessary for eventual business communication, in theory. In practice, however, helping students communicate based on the developed materials can be rather challenging since authentic materials in general should contain various kinds of elements and thus be looked at from a multitude of angles. One possible solution is to design project-based learning based on the said materials.

Project-based learning, or PBL, is an educational approach to encourage students to learn by getting them to be involved in an in-context learning experience. Recently, an increasing number of educators are eager to introduce this PBL approach to improve their educational environment on the one hand,
and to meet the diversifying needs of students on the other. Soykurt (2008) even mentioned that this PBL approach is highly applicable to the educational context of (business) language teaching in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) settings, which also include Japan. The number of international and exchange students at the Faculty of Business Administration of Toyo University is gradually increasing nowadays, meeting the changing needs of our students is vital. As a faculty member who constantly faces this cultural diversity issue, I would propose the introduction of PBL as one of the possible solutions. As the example of case 3 indicated, the said authentic material includes the scene of international politico-economic debate, which the majority of students may have difficulty understanding by themselves according to my class observation. With our educational intervention, however, students would possibly be able to better understand this context. Moreover, with the introduction of a PBL approach where, for example, students compare the different views of war/peace of the four countries as a group learning project and present their ideas in class, students will be able to gain more insight into the subject matter.

Finally, the importance of flip teaching should be taken into consideration. The said authentic material is the film adaptation of The Remains of the Day by Kazuo Ishiguro. That means, the original literature work exists, and it can also be used as another authentic material. Although the use of literature works appears to be moderately appealing in a macro perspective, the actual classroom conduct may be more or less appalling as it may require a great deal of pre-class assignment in order to fully utilise the text. Besides, checking students’ comprehension levels, which is the very basis of effective teaching by using authentic materials, also requires enormous amounts of time and energy. One may even have difficulty completing the scheduled classroom instruction within 90 minutes. To solve this problem, the introduction of flip teaching can be instrumental. Toyo University has its in-house ICT service called ToyoNet-ACE, and one of the frequently used functions is Quiz. One example to use this function for flip teaching is to have students read the relevant section of the original text as weekly assignments along with comprehension questions. One may argue that students do not want to do this assignment. However, my experience to teach a requisite English reading course for first year students shows that the majority of the students succeeded in submitting their weekly assignment regularly through ToyoNet-ACE. The weekly submission success rate in the Autumn semester in the 2018 school year was over 70%, on average. This result suggests that, in the era of digitalisation, students are more inclined to utilise ICT (or, e-learning) than we initially expected in order to proceed with their routine studies. If that is the case, the probability of conducting flip
teaching as the basis of teaching authentic materials in classes may rise significantly. Since it was a theoretical discussion, I will be tackling the issue of flip teaching in my future studies in order to investigate the further possibility of a flip teaching approach in business English classes.

References

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