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Authentic Language Samples Based on Audiovisual Media

Regardless of what grammatical structure we are teaching to students of any age group and any level of proficiency, it is essential to use language examples. These examples are usually artificially constructed, either available in the coursebook and/or teacher's book, or spontaneously created by the teacher during the explanation phase. For the purpose of showing the correct form of the given grammatical structure, these kinds of sentences are absolutely appropriate. There are two more important aspects, however, which should be taken into consideration while selecting or creating language examples for the students. These are the authenticity of the language sample and the context provided to it. The authenticity of artificially constructed sentences is arguable, since they are created (or generated) with a specific purpose that is not to use them in any form of communication but to use them as examples which reflect the way language is used. Except for language examples taken from authentic sources (magazines, books, TV, etc.), these sentences will never reflect real life communication. This is where audiovisual media can help us to a considerable degree. Using language examples collected from such audiovisual media as TV shows, series, or films basically "guarantee" the authenticity of the sample, especially when we want to put the emphasis on spoken communication. Another great advantage of using audiovisual media is the context, which is easily available virtually to any extent, immediate or broad. Besides the authenticity

and context factors, the motivational power of audiovisual language examples is also considerably higher than their purely text-based counterparts.

To satisfy the counter-balance, there are two disadvantages of using audiovisual media in the language classroom which are necessary to mention. One of them is the need for certain technical equipment, involving a computer and a projector or an interactive whiteboard (a computer room or a language laboratory equipped with individual displays in the cabins can also work). Another disadvantage is that using audiovisual language examples increases the amount of time needed for the explanation phase of the grammar structure in question. Also, if we are using audiovisual examples for the accurate reproduction (practice) phase of the lesson, the time factor increases further. There is a way, however, to by-pass the time problem, and that is by using certain features of the project method to make the students search and collect for the language samples needed.

In case all factors allow us to apply this approach to our teaching, there is one detail left which is necessary to discuss, and that is using subtitles as aids to the audiovisual language samples. There are many advantages of using subtitles of different kind, but in this case we should focus on subtitles in the same language as the foreign language we are teaching. Subtitles are freely available on the internet for various kinds of audiovisual media, such as TV shows, series, or films. Getting the students used to reading subtitles while listen-

ing and watching the language examples is very profitable for long-term application of this approach.

The second step in this procedure (collecting the audiovisual language samples) does not necessarily have to be done by the teacher. If we apply certain features of the project method, or simply turn the task into homework, collecting language examples can be completed by the students as well. This approach has more advantages. First of all, it saves up valuable time from the preparation phase of the teacher. Secondly, and more importantly, it makes the students work with the grammatical structure at hand in a way they probably would find entertaining. The idea is that after a lesson of introducing to any grammatical structure (based or based not on audiovisual materials), the accurate reproduction phase is delayed to the next lesson, while the students are asked to work in pairs or small groups (project method) or individually (homework) and collect language samples about the grammatical structure in question. This task should have at least three parts: (1) find an audiovisual material which interests you, (2) search the material for language examples, (3) with the help of the brief context, explain why that particular structure is used in each sample. The third part of this task is very important, since it provides a valuable feedback to the teacher about how well the students acquired the usage of the given grammatical structure. Also, it can serve as the material for the practice phase of the lesson.