

The Effectiveness of Using Realia and Pictionary in the Language Classroom

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Abstract

Over the years, several attempts have been made to develop strategies to cope with large mixed-ability classes. In spite of many attempts, the problems regarding large mixed-ability classes have persisted. With Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), we have been able to develop meaningful activities that can be employed to teach a language more effectively. CLT caters to all senses, age groups, and learners with different abilities in terms of receptivity. The present paper intends to establish the worth of using Realia and Pictionary in English language teaching and their relevant significance in the cultural context as well.

Keywords: mixed ability classes, CLT, receptivity, Realia, Pictionary.

Realia and Pictionary can be used very effectively in Large mixed-ability classes. With the advent of CLT, the focus is on Learner-centred education, and the stress is laid on developing meaningful real-world activities. Realia constitutes authenticity. In using them, we bring the real world into the classroom and ensure a lively class. Above all, they are the most economical means, easy to acquire any time and anywhere, and are even little dependent on technology. As is significantly stressed by Krashen and Terrel, 'Utilize the real world, as well as the classroom for progress'(Natural Approach to Language Acquisition in the Classroom, Oxford: Pergamon).

Some advantages of using Realia can be cited as follows:

1. They aid in affecting learner motivation- The Learner becomes curious and eager to know more.
2. They provide cultural information that is authentic- The Learner can seek the nuances of the culture to which he is exposed and compare them with his own.
3. They assist in exposure to real language- The Learner will identify every object in the target language and avoid the translation method.
4. They are closely related to learner needs- The Learner will move out of the classroom and acquire the target language in a fun way.

5. They support a more creative approach to teaching, which will be new, challenging, and thoroughly enjoyable.

Nunan has defined Realia as "objects and teaching props from the world outside the classroom that are used for teaching and learning.". Realia are known as real objects to help learn a new language by presenting concrete examples from the real world. Nunan sums up the advantages of using Realia, stating that visuals, Realia, and authenticity are valuable in planning lessons. With extensive use of these, the gap between the classroom and the outside world bridges, leading to a post-classroom experience, which will make language acquisition more meaningful and motivating. Nunan points out that it will stand in good stead when the Learner actually uses the target language on his own.

The process of new language acquisition begins with the identification and retention of new words, which is thoroughly enjoyable. It transports one to our earliest childhood when acquiring every new word is a thrilling experience. Each Learner loves the process of identification. Identifying names and objects is the first step towards motivating the Learner to learn a new language. The Learner's needs are immediately established, Providing true exposure to the target language. They are the most effective tools in CLT if used judiciously.

Realia in language teaching can be used elaborately for teaching various aspects of language construction. To begin with, a bagful of items taken to the classroom can do wonders in vocabulary enhancement. The objects have a cultural collocation and prove worthy tools for memory retention. The same real-world objects can prove beneficial in teaching parts of speech and later for practicing the target language. For example, an object like a jacket can be used to develop a lesson from names of different attire to the description of a Department store /Shopping Mall. Similarly, props like dolls, puppets, Phones, Wall clocks, coins, currencies, and food items can be used to build activities fostering pair and group work to complete projects and assignments involving mixed-ability students. Teaching numbers, measurements, time, and pronunciation will become a little bothersome if the use of Realia is made possible. It would be less embarrassing for some slow learners and adult learners in particular. Treasure –hunts with and without the internet can be assigned as an activity in the mixed-ability classroom. Each student will have something to contribute. The principal rule in CLT teaching discourages any teacher from dubbing the Learner as intelligent, mediocre, or dull. Working in pairs and groups while doing the hunts levels the standard of the students, as they not only get to learn from the activity but also get to learn from their peers. Objects from the real world used in a variety of treasure hunts prove effective tools for vocabulary enhancement. Thus, Realia contributes to assisting the practice of the target language. Besides, the students are truly exposed to the real world. They get to move out of the classrooms to shops, restaurants, banks, and tourist places. Visits to such places are educative, informative, and entertaining as well.

Newspaper seems to be the most effective Realia that can be used in ESL teaching. Realia surrounds us abundantly through newspapers. The use of English language paper has never been denied for teaching the English language. Even before the concept of CLT

became vogue, one can recall how often the teachers suggested the second language learner to read an English Daily, no matter how much he or she could comprehend the contents. Targeting the news particularly, the teacher aimed at equipping the Learner with listening skills by suggesting the listening of at least one English news broadcast. Some bit of read-aloud was also suggested. Was the teaching of segregated skills not aimed at doing so? This realization opens new vistas before us. Several activities can be developed with the use of newspapers, more consciously leading to teaching Integrated skills. Above all, they provide the most authentic cultural information, hence can speed up the process of language acquisition.

The present classroom scenario poses more challenges to the teacher than ever before as the student's attention needs to be captivated all the time by trying to find more creative uses of authentic materials. Realia comes to the teachers' aid. Everyday objects which are easily identifiable can be displayed to find creative uses of these objects. Simon Mumford, in 'Using Creative Thinking to Find New Uses of Realia,' has elaborated upon using everyday objects like scissors, spoons, and knife Cuisenaire rods in innovative ways to keep interest alive in the language classroom. Nevertheless, just throwing about such objects might help the teacher elicit some innovative uses of the same, making the students creative and the class more interactive. The students will indulge collectively in discussing ways to use these objects. This will assist in language acquisition. Mumford states, "Classroom aids are all around us, but sometimes we need to think about the best ways to use an object. 'Mapping' the use of an object onto a language point or finding a language-related use of an object are two ways of using Realia in class. Have a look around the staffroom. The teaching aids you need may be closer than you think."

Realia particularly eases understanding of the L2 learners when two words signify the same in two cultures. For instance, words like cab and taxi, lift and elevator, mobile and cell have distinct identities in spite of referring to the same, except that one in each pair is British and the other is American. With the advent of MNCs and Call Centers, particularly in India, the youth is more inclined towards American usage. Realia can be employed to acquaint the learners with this difference in the usage of words and expressions like these.

Pictionary is equally effective in terms of its being economic, appealing to the eye, being handy, and not necessarily being dependent on technology. Sometimes or even often, we as teachers are confronted with the problem of managing a large class with restricted movement. The regulations of the institution do not permit us to let the students out of the classroom. Although some bit of Authenticity that Realia offers is lost, Pictionary is equally effective. The appeal to the senses mentioned earlier is exacted perfectly through pictures. Is not a beautiful picture of a chocolate cake as mouth-watering as an actual one?

With quality posters more easily available these days, one can make elaborate use of Pictionary in large mixed-ability classes. Pictures are effective for lesson planning, and the printed posters/pictures can be used as a backup plan if there is a technology crisis, something not uncommon, particularly in our context. Pictures aid in better dealing with mixed-ability

classes. When distributed among students, they enable them to study more keenly, touch and feel, and instantly bring in a cultural context, as does Realia. Does not the word go that pictures say it better than words?

The use of pictures to teach various aspects of grammar and vocabulary-building activities is made by many teachers who seriously believe in learner-centered education. There is endless scope for creativity both on the part of the teacher as well as the students. Picture-Jigsaws have a significant role to play in CLT. A variety of picture jigsaws are being used by language teachers all over the globe, yet there is scope for more innovation. Besides this picture -dictation, story-telling, and many others are used as effective tools in ESL classes. Pictionary as a game brings out the hidden artist in every Learner. Where perfection does not matter, each Learner is prepared to give it a try. Saying it with pictures that too in a guessing game becomes a thrilling adventure. Who does not want to be a part of such an adventure? Young and old, more proficient and less proficient, even Learners and teachers wish to participate keenly, thereby making learning a natural process. Games using Pictionary serve to break all bridges apart from their educative value and hence prove effective in large mixed-ability classes.

Jim Rose likens the mixed-ability class to an elevator/lift, which seems to be a very apt one. As Rose has stated, 'Everyone needs to get into the lift to start with. Some students will run into the lift; some will have to be dragged in.' He further points out that the spirit of challenge and a sense of achievement are the end result for the individual students. We too aim to provide the student ground to prepare for challenges to be faced in the future at the same time each day leave the classroom with a sense of achievement. More mileage towards this aim can be gained by the effective use of Realia and Pictionary.

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