

## **A SITUATED LEARNING PRACTICE FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING CLASSES: TEACHING SPOKEN ENGLISH WITH AUTHENTIC SKETCHES**

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**Abstract:** Situated Learning is a term first proposed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger as a model of learning in a community of practice. According to Lave and Wenger learning should not be viewed as simply the transmission of abstract and decontextualised knowledge from one individual to another, but a social process whereby knowledge is co-constructed; they suggest that such learning is situated in a specific context and embedded within a particular social and physical environment. Foreign language teaching is proved to be most effective and optimal only when it is performed in a setting of real communication and performance. The exposure to spoken language and cultural elements of foreign language is the best way of teaching the language itself rather than grammatical patterns and rules of the language.

In this study, we aim to review ‘situational learning approach’ in context with its role and efficiency of teaching spoken language.

An experimental study was conducted on the university students in the prep classes at the School of Tourism in Erzincan University. 12 male and 11 female students in the control group and 14 male and 10 female students in the experimental group took part in the research.

The language levels of the students were determined by a language proficiency test which is used as pre-test of the study. Language proficiency test composed of mainly dialogues including spoken language patterns. After 8 weeks of lectures with authentic sketches which were used as reading materials in experimental group and classical reading materials in control group, the students were given the same language proficiency test as post-test. When pre and post-test results were evaluated, we found that there was a significant difference between the pre and post-test results of the subjects on behalf of the students in the experimental group. In view of the findings obtained from the study, we can conclude that spoken language can be achieved by authentic sketches which are designed to serve as a situated learning setting.

**Key Words:** situational learning, spoken language, language teaching, authentic sketches

### **1. Introduction**

Language teaching takes place in many settings. There are many factors influencing learning. Malamah – Thomas (1987) describes setting in terms of three levels in an education system:

- The country
- The school
- The classroom

After determining basic elements of setting, there occurs another question:

- What is the relationship between ‘the role of English in the country’ and ‘teaching in English at school’?

Whether English is spoken in the community outside the class or alternatively never heard is closely related to main problems of Foreign Language Teaching (FLT). Also the role of English in the school and its place in the curriculum is important (McDonough and Shaw, 1998).

## **2. Conditions for Foreign Language Teaching (FLT)**

FLT has a complex structure and it involves many conditions likewise all other educational activities. An ideal grouping of these conditions can be as follows:

- Proximity to spoken language
- Equality of four skills
- Internal and external interferences of learner
- Teaching/learning materials

An effective teaching is possible only when these conditions have optimal values on teaching atmosphere. The first condition – proximity to spoken language – should be as the first step for a communicative language teaching approach. Because there are many studies proving that learning is achieved by obtaining comprehensible input from original or at least authentic settings (Piske and Scholten, 2009).

## **3. Situated Learning**

Situated learning is a term first proposed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger as a model of learning in a community of practice. According to Lave and Wenger, learning should not be viewed as simply the transmission of abstract and decontextualised knowledge from one individual to another, but a social process whereby knowledge is co-constructed; they suggest that such learning is situated in a specific context and embedded within a particular social and physical environment.

As an instructional strategy, situated cognition has been seen as a means for relating subject matter to the needs and concerns of learners (Shor, 1987).

A situated learning experience has four major premises guiding the development of classroom activities (Anderson, Reder, and Simon 1996; Wilson 1993): (1) learning is grounded in the actions of everyday situations; (2) knowledge is acquired situationally and transfers only to similar situations; (3) learning is the result of a social process encompassing ways of thinking, perceiving, problem solving, and interacting in addition to declarative and procedural knowledge; and (4) learning is not separated from the world of action but exists in robust, complex, social environments made up of actors, actions, and situations.

The key components of situated learning model are:

- Stories
- Reflection
- Cognitive apprenticeship
- Collaboration
- Coaching
- Multiple practice
- Articulation of learning skills
- Technology (McLellan, 1996).

As an overall assessment, situated learning model can provide a valuable tool for enhancing the design and implementation of teaching/learning experiences.

The efficiency of the SL model should be considered in accordance with the innovative ideas of FLT to be able to provide a good example of its application in the field.

Foreign language teaching is proved to be most effective and optimal only when it is performed in a setting of real communication and performance. The exposure to spoken language and cultural elements of foreign language is the best way of teaching the language itself rather than grammatical patterns and rules of the language. Situated learning is a useful model for those who are seeking a communication atmosphere to make language teaching more effective by means of communicative purposes as this learning model emphasizes the importance of real settings of knowledge.

## **4. Communicative Language Teaching**

When the subject is ‘to teach a language to communicate’ then Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) appears to be as the inevitable and probably most appropriate approach. CLT is based on communicative competence which is described as the knowledge needed to be able to communicate effectively (Thornbury, 2006).

CLT aims broadly to apply the theoretical perspective of Communicative Approach (CA) by making communicative competence as the goal of language teaching and by acknowledging the interdependence of language and communication (Larsen – Freeman, 2008).

In a CLT design, language functions are emphasized rather than forms and grammatical patterns of a language. All four language skills are studied to have a meaningful competence of language. Besides, CLT is generally associated with notional – functional syllabuses (Larsen – Freeman, 2008).

## **5. Authentic Materials**

### **5. 1. The Description of Authentic Materials**

Authentic materials are those educational materials which can be used to teach authentic and natural knowledge, competences and abilities. Those materials do not need to be developed or prepared for the purpose of educational. While explaining authentic materials which are used in FLT, Widdowson (1990) emphasizes that those materials are designed to reflect the spoken language to learners.

### **5. 2. Some Advantages of Authentic Materials**

- Learners have the chance of hearing original dialogues of spoken language.
- Learners learn about the cultural patterns of target language.
- Learners learn about the change in the language.
- Learners learn about the daily news of that society speaking the language.
- Authentic materials are easy to be prepared and used in educational settings.

### **5. 3. Sketches as Authentic Materials**

Authentic materials are divided into three groups as

- written materials
- visual materials
- audio – visual materials

Sketches are the examples of written materials. Some simplified play pieces also can be used as good sources of spoken language. In a sketch dialogue, an authentic language atmosphere can be created and through this context many language patterns can be reflected.

While using sketches as authentic written material to spoken language, the key points are the same as they are in all other authentic materials:

- simplification
- revision for cultural issues
- appropriateness to the context.

## **6. Methods and Procedures**

### **6. 1. Introduction**

The aim of this study is to review SL in context with its role and efficiency of teaching spoken language.

An experimental study was conducted on the university students in the prep classes at the School of Tourism in Erzincan University. 12 male and 11 female students in the control group and 14 male and 10 female students in the experimental group took part in the research.

### **6. 2. Process**

Before starting the study, both groups were given a language proficiency test including reading comprehension and vocabulary questions as pre – test and the same test were given at the end of the study as post – test. The results of both tests were evaluated by means of answers and their percentage in whole (right – wrong - null).

Basic material of the study is a sketch book which is published on line in a web site for the purpose of teaching spoken English to the speakers of other languages.

Sketches were given to experimental group (14 male, 10 female; 24 students in total) beforehand the courses. During the courses, vocabulary was given to the students so that they were encouraged to use dictionary and find out the meanings of the vocabulary. Students were not obliged to act out the roles as they were freshmen and it would be embarrassing for them to act out in front of their classmates. The sketches were read by them as role – plays and during the activities they were modeled to give the meaning of the context through the intonation.

Control group of the study (12 male, 11 female; 23 students in sum) were given plain texts with different topics including nearly the same vocabulary and contexts. Likewise the experimental group, those students were also encouraged to look up the vocabulary and answer reading comprehension questions.

## 7. Analysis and Findings

### 7. 1. The results of pre – test

Before the reading activities that lasted 8 weeks, both groups were given a language proficiency test including vocabulary and reading comprehension questions as well as idioms. The results are as follows:

	Experimental Group (N: 240)		Control group (N: 230)	
Grammar questions (10 Q)	Percentage of correct answers: % 40	C: 100 W: 120 N: 20	Percentage of correct answers: % 38	C: 87 W: 108 N: 35
Vocabulary questions (10 Q)	Percentage of correct answers: % 20	C: 50 W: 160 N: 30	Percentage of correct answers: % 22	C: 51 W: 119 N: 60
Idioms questions (10 Q)	Percentage of correct answers: % 5	C: 12 W: 70 N: 158	Percentage of correct answers: % 5	C: 12 W: 92 N: 126

N : Number of questions in total C : Correct answers W : Wrong answers N : Null answers

As it can be seen from the table, there was no significant difference by means of proficiency levels of the two groups and they are homogenous.

### 7. 1. The results of pre – test

After 8 weeks of research conveyed with both experimental group and control group, above mentioned proficiency test was given again to determine the difference between the two groups. The results are as follows:

	Experimental Group (N: 240)		Control group (N: 230)	
Grammar questions (10 Q)	Percentage of correct answers: % 38	C: 95 W: 90 N: 55	Percentage of correct answers: % 39	C: 97 W: 114 N: 29
Vocabulary questions (10 Q)	Percentage of correct answers: % 27	C: 64 W: 130 N: 46	Percentage of correct answers: % 24	C: 57 W: 120 N: 53
Idioms questions (10 Q)	Percentage of correct answers: % 13	C: 31 W: 81 N: 128	Percentage of correct answers: % 7	C: 17 W: 103 N: 10

N : Number of questions in total C : Correct answers W : Wrong answers N : Null answers

### 7. 3. Overall Assessment and Students Opinions

It is obvious that authentic sketches work as suitable tools of conveying spoken language patterns. During the study, the students were interviewed for the efficiency and appreciation of the process. After 8 weeks

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of study, the majority of the students in the experimental group expressed their appreciation for the course design provided them many language patterns and also they found those sketches very useful to learn about the cultural elements of target language.

Student A: (Experimental group)

*"It is interesting that I learn easily while reading and my vocabulary becomes more and more stable. When I try to remember a word for example 'flattered' I manage it by remembering the sketch 'The ticket inspector'. It helped me try to speak."*

Student B: (Experimental group)

*"I started to feel that I am learning English and I learnt many new words."*

Student C: (Experimental group)

*"Now I know how to joke in English because I learnt an idiom while reading 'The passport office.'"*

Student D: (Control group)

*"I learn the vocabulary of the text but when I have a new one generally I missed the old passages'. I think reading is a good activity but it is very complex."*

Student E: (Control group)

*"The passages have long sentences so it is boring for me."*

#### 8. Conclusion

FLT is a quite challenging activity especially for those trying to teach the language in a country where the language itself is neither used nor spoken in the community for everyday needs. In a setting where comprehensible input is restricted to teaching/learning activities, it is essential to use authentic materials to develop productive skills.

Authentic materials are among the main elements of a SL practice. They build up an artificial language environment and this leads an effective learning/acquisition of the language.

Language learner/student needs to speak and listen to be able to master his/her productive skills. Spoken language is difficult to be reflected by using plain texts. In this study, the difficult task of teaching spoken language, expressions, idioms and vocabulary which are used vividly in daily speaking settings have been achieved by the use of authentic sketches in a SL atmosphere. As a result the students could beat their fears of learning language and they learnt many idioms, vocabulary and daily practical expressions.

When the scores of both groups are compared it is obvious that this kind of teaching practices may be very effective with many advantages.

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**Appendix A :**

A Sample Sketch:

The ticket inspector

Scene : A compartment on a train

Characters: A passenger on a train, a ticket inspector, a steward and a waiter

The passenger is sitting in a compartment on a train. He is reading a newspaper. The steward opens the door.

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Steward: Coffee!

Passenger: No, thanks.

(The passenger closes the door, and continues reading.

The waiter opens the door.)

Waiter: Seats for dinner!

Passenger: No, thanks.

(The passenger closes the door again, and continues reading. The ticket inspector opens the door.)

Inspector: Tickets!

Passenger: No, thanks.

Inspector: Pardon?

Passenger: I don't want a ticket, thank you.

Inspector: I'm not selling tickets, sir.

Passenger: No?

Inspector: No, I want to see your ticket.

Passenger: Oh, I haven't got a ticket.

Inspector: You haven't got a ticket?

Passenger: No. I never buy a ticket.

Inspector: Why not?

Passenger: Well, they are very expensive, you know.

Inspector: Sir, you're traveling on a train.

When people travel on a train, they always buy a ticket.

Passenger: Err...

Inspector: And this is a first-class compartment.

Passenger: Yes, it is very nice, isn't it?

Inspector: No, sir. I mean: This is a first-class compartment. When people travel in a first-class compartment, they always buy a first-class ticket.

(They look at each other for a moment.)

Passenger: No, they don't.

Inspector: What?

Passenger: A lot of people don't buy tickets.

The Queen doesn't buy a ticket, does she? Eh? Eh?

Inspector: No, sir, but she's a famous person.

Passenger: And what about you? Where's yours?

Inspector: Mine?

Passenger: Yes, yours. Your ticket. Have you got a ticket?

Inspector: Me, sir?

Passenger: Yes, you.

Inspector: No, I haven't got a ticket.

Passenger: Ooh, are you a famous person?

Inspector: (Flattered) Famous? Well, not very (Back to normal) Sir, I am a ticket inspector. I inspect tickets. Are you going to show me your ticket?

Passenger: No, I haven't got a ticket.

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Inspector see.  
(The ticket inspector puts his hand into his pocket.)  
Passenger: 'What are you going to do?  
Inspector: I'm going to write your name in my book.  
Passenger: Oh  
Inspector: What is your name, sir?  
Passenger: Mickey Mouse,  
(The inspector begins to write.)  
Inspector: Mickey  
Passenger: Mouse. M-O-U-S-E.  
(The inspector stops writing.)  
Inspector: Your name, sir?  
Passenger: Karl Marx? William Shakespeare? Charles Dickens?  
Inspector: I see, sir. Well, if you're not going to tell me your name, please leave the train,  
Passenger: Pardon?  
Inspector: Leave the train.  
Passenger: I can't.  
Inspector: You can't what?  
Passenger: I can't leave the train.  
Inspector: Why not?  
Passenger: It's moving,  
Inspector: Not now, sir. At the next station.  
Passenger: Oh.  
Inspector: It's in the book, sir. When you travel by train, you buy a ticket, and if you don't buy a ticket, you  
Passenger-Inspector: leave the train.  
Inspector: Here we are, sir. We're coming to a station. Please leave the train now.  
Passenger: Now?  
Inspector: Yes, sir. I'm sorry, but  
Passenger: Oh, that's OK.  
Inspector: it's in the book, and what did you say?  
Passenger: I said: That's OK.'  
Inspector: OK?  
Passenger: Yes, this is my station.  
Goodbye.  
(The passenger leaves the train.)