USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS TO IMPLEMENT THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH IN TEACHING ENGLISH AT THE MIDDLE STAGE

Dilmurodjon Burkhonov
Affiliation: Moscow International University, Moscow, Russia
Field of Study: Linguistics; Theory and Methods of Teaching
Foreign Languages and Cultures
E-mail: dilik.rayli@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigates the utilization of authentic materials within the framework of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) for middle school English classes (Grades 5 to 9, CEFR levels A2 to B1). Such materials include brief videos, podcasts, public announcements, websites, infographics, menus, reviews, and social media posts. The focus centers on a prevalent challenge: students often acquire vocabulary and grammatical structures yet encounter difficulties in comprehending natural language or engaging in authentic conversations outside the classroom environment. By providing opportunities for students to practice real-life language features—such as speech pace, reduced forms, set phrases, social norms, and cultural nuances—the employment of authentic materials proves advantageous.

To facilitate the selection and implementation of authentic materials without the necessity of rewriting them into simplified textbook texts, this paper proposes a practical, instructor-oriented framework. The framework encompasses: (1) establishing a clear communicative objective (e.g., information exchange, decision-making, persuasion, or clarification); (2) evaluating linguistic and cultural accessibility, considering factors such as length, speech rate, lexical density, and requisite background knowledge; (3) offering targeted scaffolding through visual aids, key lexical items, sentence starters, and interactional strategies; and (4) designing tasks aligned with the pre–while–post structure. The while-tasks concentrate on understanding the overall meaning and salient details via guided comprehension, whereas the post-tasks involve negotiate meaning and completing outcome-based activities such as role-plays, problem-solving tasks, or collaborative projects. Pre-tasks serve to activate topic familiarity and prepare necessary language.

To exemplify the task sequence from comprehension to interaction, a three-lesson mini-module titled "Planning a Weekend" is presented. It incorporates sample prompts and an assessment rubric emphasizing task achievement, interaction quality, clarity, and adequate language control. Furthermore, the paper discusses common classroom challenges—including lexical overload, cultural misunderstandings, limited speaking participation, and the tendency to transform lessons into translation exercises—and offers feasible solutions. In conclusion, authentic materials are most effective in CLT when authenticity is maintained in input, and task

design offers sufficient support, thereby fostering student confidence and communicative competence in real-world contexts.

Keywords: Authentic materials; Communicative Language Teaching (CLT); intermediate stage; A2–B1 proficiency; scaffolding; task-based instruction; interaction; pragmatic competence; English language teaching.

Introduction

The communicative approach views language learning as the development of learners' ability to use a foreign language for meaningful purposes—expressing intentions, understanding others, negotiating meaning, clarifying messages, and achieving outcomes through interaction. At the middle stage of education (approximately Grades 5–9; CEFR A2–B1), a frequent methodological difficulty is the gap between classroom language and the language learners encounter outside school in everyday media environments (online videos, music, games, applications, and social networks). As a result, students may demonstrate knowledge of grammar and vocabulary while still experiencing difficulties in spontaneous speaking, listening to natural speech, and participating in real-time interaction.

Authentic materials can reduce this gap by providing learners with exposure to real discourse and pragmatics: natural speed, reduced forms, formulaic expressions, register choices, and culturally embedded meaning. When used within Communicative Language Teaching, authentic input is most productive when it is paired with clear communicative goals and supportive task design rather than simplified rewriting of the original text. Therefore, the central focus of this paper is to describe practical ways of selecting authentic materials and integrating them into communicative lessons at the middle stage while maintaining authenticity and ensuring accessibility for A2–B1 learners.

Aim:

To describe effective ways of using authentic materials to implement the communicative approach in teaching English at the middle stage.

Objectives:

1. to clarify the concept of authentic materials and the functions they serve in language teaching;
2. to propose criteria for selecting authentic materials appropriate for A2–B1 learners at the middle stage;
3. to describe principled "adaptation through tasks" (scaffolding) while preserving authenticity of input;
4. to outline a practical algorithm for communicative task design using the pre–while–post sequence;
5. to present a sample mini-module and a transparent assessment rubric for classroom use.
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2. Authentic Materials: Definition and Pedagogical Value

In language teaching methodology, **authentic materials** are typically defined as spoken, written, or multimodal texts that are **produced for real-life communication rather than for instructional purposes**. Such materials include public announcements, posters, menus, timetables, brochures, webpages, email messages, online reviews, short interviews, podcasts, and short videos. A key feature of authenticity is that these texts represent language as it is naturally used: they reflect real communicative intentions, real audiences, and real contextual constraints.

In a communicative classroom, authenticity is not limited to the text itself. Many scholars distinguish between (a) **text authenticity** (the original source is not pedagogically simplified), (b) **task authenticity** (learners perform a real-world type of action with the text), and (c) **learner authenticity** (learners engage with the material meaningfully and personally). For middle-stage learners (A2–B1), these dimensions are especially important because motivation, confidence, and willingness to speak often determine whether students actually use English beyond controlled exercises.

Authentic materials are pedagogically valuable because they (1) bring real contexts into the classroom, (2) expose learners to discourse patterns that are frequently absent in textbooks, and (3) provide a bridge between classroom practice and everyday language use. Importantly, authentic materials are not meant to replace structured instruction; rather, they serve as a resource that supports communicative goals when combined with appropriate scaffolding and task design.

2.1. Why Authentic Materials Support Communicative Teaching

Authentic materials contribute to Communicative Language Teaching in several ways:

- **Motivation and relevance.** Familiar formats (posts, short clips, reviews, announcements) increase learner interest and perceived usefulness of English. When students recognise how English operates in real life, classroom tasks become less abstract and more meaningful.
- **Pragmatic competence.** Authentic input demonstrates how speakers perform functions such as requesting, refusing, apologising, persuading, and showing politeness. Learners observe how meaning depends on context, relationship, and register rather than on grammar alone.
- **Sociocultural awareness.** Authentic texts carry cultural knowledge: values, humour, conventions of public communication, and interaction norms. Middle-stage learners benefit from guided noticing of these features through discussion and comparison with their own context.
- **Listening and reading for gist.** Authentic texts train learners to tolerate ambiguity and focus on essential meaning. This develops strategic competence—predicting, inferring, confirming hypotheses, and identifying key information without translating every word.
- **Interaction and negotiation of meaning.** In CLT, language learning is strengthened when learners must clarify, confirm, rephrase, and negotiate understanding. Authentic

materials naturally create information gaps and decision-making situations that require interaction.

- **Lexical and formulaic language development.** Authentic sources contain high-frequency chunks and collocations (e.g., *I'm looking for…, Could you…, It depends…, That sounds good…*). Learning such formulaic sequences supports fluency at A2–B1 more effectively than isolated vocabulary lists.

2.2. Pedagogical Functions of Authentic Materials at the Middle Stage (A2–B1)

At the middle stage, authentic materials can serve several concrete classroom functions:

1. **Contextualisation of language forms.** Grammar and vocabulary become meaningful when learners see how forms operate in real discourse (e.g., requests in service encounters; past tense in short stories or reviews; modal verbs in rules and advice).
2. **Input enrichment and exposure.** Authentic materials increase the amount and variety of comprehensible input learners receive, supporting gradual acquisition of patterns through repeated exposure.
3. **Skills integration.** Many authentic tasks integrate listening/reading with speaking and writing (e.g., watch a short clip → discuss → write a short comment/review).
4. **Development of learner autonomy.** Students learn to use real resources outside class (websites, short videos, captions, reviews), which promotes independent learning and lifelong language use.
5. **Assessment of communicative performance.** Authentic tasks allow teachers to evaluate whether learners can achieve a communicative outcome (choose, explain, persuade, request) rather than only reproduce a structure.

2.3. The Main Challenge: Difficulty and the Role of Scaffolding

Despite their advantages, authentic materials may create difficulties for A2–B1 learners. Common barriers include fast speech, reduced pronunciation, idiomatic phrases, dense vocabulary, and cultural references. If these barriers are not managed, learners may become passive, rely on translation, or lose confidence.

For this reason, the most effective principle is **not to simplify the authentic text excessively**, but to make the task accessible through scaffolding. Scaffolding may include: short pre-teaching of essential vocabulary (limited to the "must-know" items), visual support, guiding questions, sentence starters, and staged comprehension tasks (gist first, details later). In communicative teaching, scaffolding should ultimately lead learners toward meaningful output: interacting with classmates, negotiating a choice, solving a problem, or producing a small real-world artefact (a message, a review, a mini-poster). Thus, authenticity is preserved in the input, while accessibility is ensured through methodology.

3. Selecting Authentic Materials for the Middle Stage

The main risk is choosing a "real" resource and getting a "real" failure: speech is too fast, slang is heavy, cultural references are unclear, vocabulary overload demotivates learners. Therefore, careful selection is essential.

3.1. Selection Criteria

1. **Communicative value:** the material should lead to action (discuss, choose, explain, negotiate).
2. **Accessibility:** learners should understand the gist at A2–B1 with support.
3. **Brevity and chunking:** 30–90 seconds of video or a short post is better than long struggle.
4. **Relevance and interest:** age-appropriate and connected to learners' reality.
5. **Reasonable linguistic density:** limited new vocabulary, some repetition, useful patterns.
6. **Ethical safety:** no harmful, discriminatory, or inappropriate content.

3.2. "Adaptation Without Killing Authenticity"

A key distinction:

- **adapting the material** (rewriting it into "textbook language") often removes authenticity;
- **adapting the task** is the better approach: keep the original, add scaffolding.

Effective scaffolding includes:

- contextual discussion and prediction;
- 6–10 key words/phrases (not 30);
- visuals and guiding questions;
- dialogue frames and sentence starters;
- moving from choice-based tasks to freer production.

4. A Practical Framework for Communicative Lessons Based on Authentic Materials

A widely applicable structure is **Pre–While–Post**.

4.1. Pre-stage (Preparation)

Goal: build context and activate language.

Typical tasks:

- short warm-up questions ("How do you usually…?");
- predicting content from a title/image;
- choosing a headline / matching key words;
- micro-lexis: 8 items + 2–3 interaction phrases.

4.2. While-stage (Working with the Material)

Goal: understand the gist and extract necessary information.

- first viewing/reading: general meaning (gisting);
- second viewing/reading: details (scanning);
- task types: true/false, matching, filling a table, multiple choice.

4.3. Post-stage (Communication)

Goal: move from comprehension to **real interaction**.

Formats:

- role-play (simulated real-life exchange);
- problem-solving (group decision-making);
- mini-project (post/ad/short interview);
- short structured debates (A2–B1 with support).

5. Sample Mini-Module (3 Lessons) for A2–B1

Module Theme: "Planning a Weekend"

Authentic materials:

1. a screenshot of an event poster/announcement;
2. a 45–60 second promo video (low slang, clear visuals);
3. 6–10 short reviews/comments.

Lesson 1. Choosing an Event

Goal: discuss options and justify a choice.

- **Pre:** pairs discuss how they spend weekends (2 minutes).
- **While:** extract key information from the poster (time, place, price, age limits) into a table.
- **Post:** group task—choose one event for the class and convince others using frames: *I think…, In my opinion…, It's better because…, Let's choose…*

Lesson 2. Short Video Listening + Clarification Skills

Goal: develop listening plus communication strategies for clarification.

- **Pre:** predict from a screenshot/title; introduce 8 key words.
- **While:** first viewing—choose the main idea; second viewing—note 5 facts.
- **Post:** role-play "contacting the organizers" (call/chat): ask 4–6 clarification questions: *Could you tell me…? What time does it start? Is it suitable for…?*

Lesson 3. Reviews and Decision-Making

Goal: evaluate information and negotiate a final decision.

- **Pre:** discuss whether reviews are trustworthy and why.
- **While:** classify reviews (positive/negative/neutral) and highlight reasons.
- **Post:** group decision + short presentation.
- **Homework:** write a 60–90 word review using a simple template.

6. Assessment (Simple and Transparent Rubric)

A middle-stage rubric should be clear and motivating. For example, four criteria scored 0–2:

1. **Task achievement** (the task is completed)
2. **Interaction** (asks/answers, responds, keeps the conversation going)
3. **Clarity** (message is understandable; basic cohesion; appropriate pace)
4. **Language control** (accuracy and range are sufficient for the task)

Total: 0–8 points. Learners see that they are assessed for **communication outcomes**, not perfection.

7. Common Challenges and Practical Solutions
1. **Material is too difficult** → shorten it, use a fragment, add scaffolding, reduce lexical focus.
2. **Class slips into translation** → set an action goal ("decide / solve / persuade"), not "translate the text." Use translation only selectively.
3. **Cultural references confuse learners** → give a 1–2 minute cultural note and compare with local context.
4. **Low speaking participation** → provide sentence starters, assign roles, use pair work, limit time, structure turns.

Conclusion

Authentic materials strengthen the communicative approach at the middle stage by creating realistic contexts and increasing the perceived value of English as a tool for interaction. Their effectiveness, however, depends less on the "coolness" of the resource and more on methodology: careful selection, appropriate scaffolding, staged tasks, and a consistent focus on communicative outcomes. When these conditions are met, authentic materials support not only language accuracy but also essential communicative abilities: understanding meaning, clarifying, reasoning, and negotiating.

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