

Book Review

Reconceptualizing Authenticity for English as a Global Language, Richard S. Pinner. Bristol, Buffalo and Toronto, Multilingual Matters, 2016. 208 p., \$35.00 (ePUB), ISBN 9781783095681

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Richard S. Pinner's work on authenticity in language teaching is a timely exploration of the problem of authenticity, reconceptualized to consider recent trends in applied and sociolinguistics such as complexity/chaos theory, dynamic systems theory, and even more importantly the emergence of English as a global language. The book is divided into seven chapters which explore a range of topics from existential philosophy to digital literacy and new media all the while emphasizing how the notion of authenticity should not have a static definition (e.g. authentic materials from the target language such as newspapers), but rather one that takes into account the multiplicity of identities, materials, and media that make English as a language of globalization.

Chapter 1 introduces the problem of authenticity in language teaching focusing upon how the standard definition of authenticity is too simplistic. Situating his argument in the context of English as a global language, Pinner emphasizes that the definition of authenticity as language teaching materials that were not designed for the classroom,

is too vague and static, opting instead for a more holistic and relative definition which includes identity and new literacy practices. In addition Pinner emphasizes how there has been few empirical studies that focus upon authenticity despite the fact that the concept seems to be an integral part of the field of language teaching.

In Chapter 2 authenticity is situated within existential philosophy identifying how the concept of authenticity is tied to notions of the self philosophically in addition to a philosophical discussion of what is and is not authentic. The first half of the chapter is devoted to a discussion of some of existential philosophers beginning with Rousseau and continuing through Heidegger, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and finally Sartre. The second half of the chapter is devoted to relating these ideas to second language acquisition through such notions as autonomy and agency. Pinner emphasizes that the relationship between existential philosophy and SLA is in many ways related to how it is that teachers can enable language learners to, “express their authentic self through another language” (p. 17). This chapter then dives into the relationship between identity and the second language learner. Pinner’s discussion of his own Japanese language learning is noteworthy as the impetus and topic of the book focuses upon English. The last section of the chapter discusses complex dynamic systems and chaos theory which Pinner notes are related to the notion of authenticity as processual in nature and like chaos/dynamic system theory, in a constant state of flux.

The crux of the argument of Chapter 3 is that English being a global language enables us to reconsider, and reconstruct, the concept of authenticity in terms of its application to teaching English the world over. This chapter provides a great discussion of English as a global language and covers many important issues within it such as: what is a native speaker, English as a lingua franca, varieties of English, the

Quirk/Kachru debates, features of world Englishes, the notion that what is authentic in terms of global English is often left out of textbooks, and many others. What I found intriguing is that he makes a distinction between the terms World English and Global English, where the former refers to the fact that there are varieties of English spoken throughout the world from Singlish to Pittsburghese, and the latter refers to the fact that English is everywhere due to the effects of globalization. Pinner includes a great discussion on Native-speakerism – the notion that native speakers simply by their status as such are the best teachers of a language. This discussion is all the more interesting because it is rooted in actual data that Pinner collected from participants during a workshop he conducted in Japan. Pinner also discusses how native speaker varieties of English dominate the “authentic” material that is used to teach English despite the fact that in many parts of the world English is more of a tool for communication where such speakers are not interested in becoming fluent. The chapter also discusses how authenticity, affect and autonomy are related to one another in language learning.

Chapter 4 draws our attention to the relationship between authenticity and language teaching by connecting it to autonomy, noting that where autonomy has received a lot of attention in terms of both definition and research, authenticity has received the opposite. Pinner then discusses what he refers to as the classic definition of authenticity which is often defined as language teaching materials which were not originally constructed for the purposes of teaching (e.g. a newspaper). Authenticity is perceived to be materials which come from the real world, the implication being that because the material is from the real-world then it must be more “authentic” as an instance of language usage. Pinner then goes on to discuss a variety of definitions of authenticity noting that the notion should not be static but relative to individual learner’s needs. The chapter then goes into detail about

a variety of studies that have been conducted on the subject, noting the paucity of research on authenticity, but advocating an approach to language learning that focuses upon authenticity, autonomy and motivation.

Chapter 5 is a discussion of a model that Pinner himself has developed which is known as the authenticity continuum. Pinner's intention is to draw our attention away from the idea that in language learning there is one target culture from which a text can derive meaning. Drawing on Benedict Anderson's (2006) notion of *imagined community*, he then discusses how individual language learners have different motivations for learning a language, and as such it is difficult to pin all English language learners into one community of English language learners. Pinner's continuum contains four structural components: use domain, community, individual and learning contexts. His figure is represented by a horizontal and vertical axis with a circle imposed across the four axes with four arrows representing each of the four components. His motivation for developing this continuum of authenticity was to overcome the linguistic and cultural imperialism that one may find within the classic definition of authenticity. In a similar manner to chapter 3, Pinner also discusses his continuum through some actual data that he collected from surveys from workshops. The surveys gauged the opinions of Japanese English language teachers on the use of the continuum, which was positive. He then analyzes some longer narrative excerpts from these surveys. In the latter part of the chapter Pinner discusses how one may use the continuum in order to assess materials for a use in the classroom. He plots a few materials on his continuum such as an international textbook and a graded reader chosen by a student for self-study to clarify how the continuum can be used. He also mentions a class where he had students conduct a project which had real-world implications for some of the students. Pinner also notes that his is not the only such continuum and discusses one that was

developed by some other researchers. Throughout this chapter Pinner draws attention to the notion that what makes up authentic materials is not uniform or static but relative, course materials designed in one context to be authentic do not translate to other contexts. Also what is considered authentic by textbook designers and teachers may not be authentic for students.

Chapter 6 focuses upon issues of authenticity in bilingual education given the context of globalization and multiculturalism. After a discussion of the ever-changing nature of education and pedagogy, Pinner discusses two models of education that have an impact upon authenticity in language learning, English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). EMI not only refers to the fact that courses are taught in English, but more so that there is little if any support for language learners who do not have L1 proficiency in English. EMI supports a multi-million dollar industry of language instruction that focuses around testing. TOEFL and IELTS are well known throughout the English language teaching world, but as Pinner notes, they pose a problem in terms of authenticity in that they perpetuate native-speakerism. CLIL has become increasingly popular in Europe as a means of instruction as it provides more of a context for language learning, similarly to EMI, CLIL teachers may not be language instructors, but the CLIL pedagogy enables them to understand that there is to be a balance of content and language instruction. Because of this balance CLIL appears to be a method of instruction which has an important place for authenticity in terms of language materials. The importance of this chapter is that it discusses how English has become a popular language to learn the world over, and as such, has a strong amount of linguistic capital tied to it. People want to study English in order to better themselves and/or broaden their job prospects in the ever expanding global market. As a part of this marketplace of linguistic capitalism EMI and CLIL have emerged

as educational models with pedagogical implications. From Pinner's discussion it appears that CLIL is more suited to the global economy as it allows for such things as bilingual education, code-switching, and even translanguaging.

In chapter 7 Pinner introduces the relationship between new media and technology to the concept of authenticity, once again drawing our attention to the fact that authenticity as it has been traditionally defined does not work especially in the context of digital literacy. The internet as one means of globalization has effectively washed away the physical boundaries that had traditionally separated language learners from communities of practice. Pinner discusses a few stories to situate the readers to nuances of digital literacy noting that one way in which authenticity and globalization are intertwined is through how technology drives processes and outcomes. An interesting point that Pinner makes concerning what is an authentic text, has to do with the fact that it is more readily defined by what is not authentic. The absence of authenticity then leads us to an understanding of authenticity, and this can be related to how internet memes can skirt the boundaries of authenticity through anachronisms such as a picture of Abraham Lincoln with a quote about the internet on it. One way that language learners in the classroom can overcome the problem of authenticity and digital literacy is through the use of publishing through blogs or other types of social media as a part of classroom activities. What is more it is often the case that the English language learning that occurs in the classroom is far removed from how students may use English, if at all, in their everyday lives not to mention how English has become a global language. Pinner goes on to mention some ways that on-line learning has effected English language classrooms for example the use of on-line classroom exchanges where classes across the world can be paired up. There are notable pros and cons to this, e.g. it is hard to find another classroom doing on-line exchange that has the

same proficiency as the class that one might be teaching. Pinner also notes such things as on-line self-access centers and gaming focusing upon the notion of autonomous or incidental learning where students are exploring something on-line, such as a gaming platform, and incidentally learn language. Digital literacies are certainly sources for developing authentic materials, however it is often difficult to pin down how teachers can fit such a vast array digital literacies into classroom activities which are still often drawn from textbooks, the least authentic materials at our disposal.

A work like this is difficult to be critical of because it treads upon new ideas and opens the door for a lot of researchers to follow ideas about authenticity for their own research. Despite this excellent reconceptualization there are a few criticisms worthy of note. Pinner refers to a number of recent ideas from applied and sociolinguistics that are extremely popular right now including: superdiversity and translanguaging. It goes beyond the scope of a book review to discuss these terms in detail. The issue has to do with how the terminology is presented and then dropped without a detailed discussion on how they are related to authenticity. Translanguaging (García, 2009) is referred to only briefly in chapter 6 with regards to CLIL but still the issue here is the fact that Pinner does not emphasize how translanguaging is really related to the problem of authenticity. The same holds for superdiversity, how Blommaert's use of the notion of superdiversity (Blommaert & Rampton, 2012; Blommaert & Varis, 2011) is related specifically to the topic of authenticity in English is not discussed at length. While both of these concepts are relevant to the topic of authenticity it would have been more effective had the author had a more specific discussion on how these concepts are relevant. Otherwise it just seems like keywords being checked off from a list.

Another criticism I have has to do with the fact that this work is largely based on English language research and applications. Despite the fact that this work is targeted towards English as a global language, the notion of authenticity has applications that go well beyond English. Pinner does fill that void with anecdotes about his own experiences and struggles with studying Japanese as a second language noting some experiences that we could refer to as authentic, such as keeping a blog solely for the purpose of exploring Japanese literacy. These criticisms aside, this book is largely a review and reconceptualization of the literature with bits of data and experiential anecdotes mixed in. It lays the foundation for research that I anticipate to follow soon. Any language teacher concerned with or interested in researching authenticity would find this book well worth the read.

Pinner presents a great discussion on authenticity in language learning materials in the context of English as a global language. The strengths of this book are in how Pinner ties the problem of authenticity to language teaching and research, as well as the fact that what has been considered as authentic in terms of teaching materials no longer works in the context of English as a global language as well as in the context of digital literacy. Suffice it to say that Pinner has done an excellent job of reconceptualizing authenticity in such a way to lay the ground work for more interesting research to follow.

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