Peter Lööf

Authentic Communication in TEFL
A far-fetched goal or an indispensable necessity?

Engelska
C-uppsats

Termin: Höstterminen
2010

Handledare: Moira Linnarud
Title: Real communication in TEFL: A far-fetched goal or an indispensable necessity?

Author: Lööf, Peter

Abstract: The majority of people in the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) agree that the communicative approach in teaching English as a second language is one of the most effective methods. A majority of research suggests that the level of authenticity involved in communicative activities is the main factor that determines whether a task is effective or not. However, it is very difficult for teachers to access the level of real communication involved in communicative tasks, and it is also hard to evaluate the effectiveness and results of different communicative approaches. The purpose of this essay is to examine how much of the teaching is focused on “real” communication in a senior high school in Sweden, and at a university in Japan, i.e. communication where the sender of the spoken message or written text has a genuine interest in conveying information to the recipient. In order to obtain data for this study I have interviewed and observed five teachers in Sweden, and two in Japan. The results from this study clearly show that there are huge advantages to focusing on real communication that conveys meaning as opposed to focusing on the form in order to facilitate acquisition. However, the results also show the difficulty in keeping a consistent high level of authenticity in the target language. This is mainly due to all the social functions and roles that are culturally bound to Swedish culture and language, and these functions often take priority in order to manage the class. In Japan, the level of real communication in the lessons is very much determined by the teacher, and his or her cultural background. Moreover, I suggest that there are several things that could be done in order to improve teaching quality, despite the difficulties that teachers experience when they try to maintain a high level of authentic input by speaking only English during their lessons. I also conclude that if teachers received more adequate training in methods that focus on target language use in order to facilitate acquisition, such as ‘the direct method,’” the quality of the lessons would most likely improve in both Swedish high schools and at Japanese universities.
Keywords: authenticity – real communication – authentic material – TEFL in Japan – teachers’ training – comprehensible input – culture of the target language – teaching culture – second language acquisition
Table of contents

Abstract

1. Introduction and aims 1

2. Background 2
   2.1 Definition of the term ‘authenticity’ 2
   2.2.1 The importance of authenticity in second language acquisition 3
   2.2.2 The role of input and output in second language acquisition 4
   2.2.3 Using authentic material for educational purposes 5
   2.2.4 Authentic and communicative tasks in the classroom 5
   2.2.5 Communicative language ability in a cultural context 6
   2.2.6 Cultural appropriateness in the communicative approach 7
   2.2.7 Direct method 8

3. Methods 8
   3.1 Interviews 9
      3.1.1 Abbreviations explained 9
   3.2 Observations 10
   3.3 Swedish students’ questionnaire 10

4. Analysis and results 10
   4.1 Teacher interviews 10
      4.1.1 Teachers’ definition of authenticity when teaching a foreign language 11
      4.1.2 Using authentic material that has not been adapted for TEFL 11
      4.1.3 Amount of time devoted to ‘free conversation’ in an average class 12
      4.1.4 Language of instructions 12
      4.1.5 Peripheral language 13
      4.1.6 How does authentic material affect motivation? 14
      4.1.7 Motivating students to use English only in class 14
      4.1.8 Cultural differences explained 15
      4.1.9 Classroom management in the target language instead of the learners’ L1 15
      4.1.10 Benefits of authentic material and free conversation 16
      4.1.11 Problems about using authentic material and free conversation 17
4.1.12 Culture of the target language 18
4.2 Observations 18
4.2.1 English teachers in Sweden 18
4.2.2 English teachers in Japan 19
4.3 Swedish students’ questionnaire 20
5. Discussion 21
6. Conclusion 23
References 25
Appendix 1 26
Appendix 2 27
1. Introduction and aims
The communicative approach to Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) is one of the most affective ways of acquiring a high level of proficiency (Long and Richards 1987). However, it is also one of the most challenging methods for the teacher, due to the complexity of the subject English and the wide range of different skills that are involved.

I have been working as a TEFL instructor for thirteen years, teaching primarily speaking and listening in Japan, the Czech Republic and in Germany. The main focus of my work has been to improve students’ communication skills in order to enable them to interact more successfully in the global community. Teaching communication skills in these countries has been incredibly rewarding and a great learning experience, but also very challenging. The grammar-translation method has been used predominantly in both Japan and the Czech Republic ever since foreign language teaching started there. As a result, students as well as teachers have had very little experience of and knowledge of communicative language learning, and are thus not aware of its many possibilities and its importance. Therefore, a major part of being a teacher in Japan and the Czech Republic has been to promote the communicative approach in the schools where I have worked.

The communicative approach to English teaching has gained recognition since the early 70s, and it has become the most researched area and leading way of TEFL in western society (Brown 1994). The communicative approach is founded on the belief that learning a language successfully comes from having to communicate real meaning in a real situation, i.e. the sender of the spoken message has a genuine interest in conveying information to the recipient, and the recipient of this message does not know beforehand what is going to be said. A learner that is involved in real communication will use his or her innate skills to process and acquire the target language, and the level of authenticity involved in the input greatly affects the level of acquisition. There are many approaches and methods that are being used in order to facilitate real communication in the EFL classroom. However, it is often quite difficult for teachers to access and evaluate the authenticity and usefulness of the communicative approach in their classes. As a result, a lot of communicative tasks and activities used in the EFL classroom are not interactive or communicative at all. They are just masquerading as such.
My aims are to: 1) examine the level of authenticity involved in the teaching approaches and material used at a senior high school in Sweden and at a university in Japan; 2) look at when and how much of the communication is done in English during an average class; 3) conduct interviews, observations and questionnaires with senior high school teachers, university teachers, and students in order to find out what the general attitudes towards the communicative approach and authentic material are; 4) look at the cultural aspects of using only the target language in the classroom; 5) have Swedish students fill out a questionnaire in reaction to a communicative activity done with a group of visiting students from Wales. The students from Wales did not speak any Swedish at all, thus, providing a situation where all the communication used during class was real and authentic. The main reason for this part of the study was to get a general feel for how the students responded to a situation where they could not rely on Swedish when communicating. I also wanted to get a general idea of what they thought about this kind of lesson. The research question I attempt to answer in the present paper is stated as follows: Is real communication in TEFL a far-fetched goal or an indispensible necessity?

2. Background
2.1. Definition of the term ‘authenticity’
When I refer to the term authenticity, I primarily refer to language that is being used to convey meaning, i.e. the sender of the spoken message or written text has a genuine interest in conveying information to the recipient, and the recipient of this message does not know beforehand what is going to be said. The authentic language that I will be investigating in this essay has the same qualities as language used in real life and in real communication. For example, when the teacher is asking a question to a student that the teacher already knows the answer to, that is not authentic communication according to my definition. Neither is controlled oral practice, where a grammatical structure is being drilled back and forth to simulate real communication. Activities like these are ‘staged communication,’ which might be communicative and life-like to some degree, but they are not authentic in my definition in this study.
2.2.1 The importance of authenticity in second language acquisition

The level of authenticity in the target language that is featured in a learning situation is crucial in order to facilitate acquisition, according to Krashen (1983). He claims that methods that do not consist of real communication, i.e., where the purpose of the communication is not to convey real meaning, will not be successful in making the students proficient in communicative English due to the lack of real meaning in such activities. Approaches like the ‘audio-lingual’ method will not improve the students’ ability to communicate either since there is no real meaning conveyed in the types of language drills that the audio-lingual method make use of. Moreover, Krashen (1983:13-21) makes the distinction between language acquisition and language learning, and between sub-conscious and conscious learning. He claims that conscious learning that focus on form will not facilitate acquisition or improve the learners’ ability to communicate. The only benefit of conscious learning is that it functions as a “monitor,” i.e. an inner device that tells us when we use a grammatical structure correctly or not.

Furthermore, Krashen claims that the only way of becoming proficient in a foreign language is by sub-consciously acquiring the target language, as opposed to consciously learning grammatical structures. He implies that the only way of doing so is by being exposed to authentic language that conveys meaning, and by being in situations where one needs to transmit real meaning for a real purpose.

Stephen Krashen (1983) calls this ‘The Natural Approach’. The goal of this approach is for learners to be able to communicate with native speakers of the target language. He believes that comprehension precedes production, thus, the focus on improving students listening skills is more important than the students’ ability to produce the target language. Focusing on acquisition activities is central to the natural approach, and there is a strong focal point on comprehensible input of the target language (the input hypothesis). In his hypothesis, the letter (i) symbolizes the current level of the learner, and (1) that symbolizes the level slightly above the learner’s current level. Krashen calls this model (i + 1). He believes that the new lexical and grammatical input the learner is exposed to is understood and acquired as a result of his or her current knowledge (i), and through the context and content of that situation (1).
Furthermore, Krashen stresses the importance of lowering, what he calls “the active filter”. This is crucial since the active filter impedes acquisition when at a high level (1983:58). His idea of an existing active-filter is a well-known hypothesis that deals with the impact of the learners’ attitude and emotional situation when studying a foreign language, and the way it affects acquisition.

Krashen has been an influential person in the field of second language acquisition since the late 70s, when his ‘hypothesis theory’ first emerged. His controversial theory has been widely discussed and it is both hailed and criticized among TEFL professionals.

2.2.2 The role of input and output in second language acquisition
Rod Ellis puts the focus on the need for both comprehensible input and interaction when acquiring a second language. He claims that learning is a product of multifaceted interactions between the input that the student receives and the student’s “internal mechanism” (1997:44). Ellis stresses that acquisition is a very social and human activity that consists of a wide variety of “negotiation and collaboration” (1997:50). Furthermore, Michael Long’s ‘Interaction hypothesis’ focuses on the major importance of the “negotiation of meaning” that takes place when non-native speakers of English communicate, i.e. situations where learners are able to correct themselves thanks to the response they get from their communication partner while speaking. This is crucial to second language acquisition, according to Long (1983a). Furthermore, the role of output also plays an important part in second language acquisition, according to Ellis (1997). Krashen claims that the output in second language learning is a direct result of comprehensible input of the target language. For example, in order to become a fluent speaker of the target language, one first has to acquire good listening skills. Krashen suggests that the only way a learner can benefit from his or her language production is by treating it as ‘auto input’. However, Merrill Swain claims, contrary to Krashen’s opinion, that the output in second language learning plays a vital role. She believes that when a learner of a foreign language is producing spoken and written language, the learner will be able to feed off his or her own output, using it as mechanism that helps her uncover gaps in grammatical and lexical knowledge. Moreover, she suggests that it helps the learner to understand grammatical structures because of the response that he or she gets,
i.e. the learner gets an idea whether the structures are correct or not, judging from the response of the speaking partner (Swain, in Ellis 1997:49).

2.2.3 Using authentic material for educational purposes
The communicative approach to language learning has gained importance in the past few decades, and the demand for authentic materials and approaches that meet students’ needs have increased largely. Many researchers in the field of education strongly claim that in order to develop good receptive skills, like listening and reading, the input has to be authentic in order to provide proper comprehensible input (Greller, in Krashen 1981). Other researchers favor a model where the target language has been modified to some extent in order to make it more comprehensible, especially for learners at lower levels (Greller, in Krashen 1981).

Furthermore, students’ ability to fully understand the concept of authentic texts and listening activities are very much dependent on his or her ability to relate to the material at a personal level, i.e. if the student has good prior knowledge of a particular subject, he or she is more likely to succeed in processing the target language (Widdowson, in Hedge 2000). The main importance for teachers when approaching authentic written texts and spoken language is to be able to exploit the material and create an appropriate task that is suitable for that particular level. It is often difficult to grade the level of difficulty in authentic materials, and it is therefore especially important to grade the task that is given to the students instead, in order for them to succeed (Widdowson, in Hedge 2000). When choosing material for learners of English, the students’ needs should always be the main factor that determines what material is appropriate and what is not. This is especially true when considering using authentic material. For example, a businessman that is preparing to go abroad for an extensive amount of time will have very different needs than the students of an average senior high school class (Hedge 2000).

2.2.4 Authentic and communicative tasks in the classroom
In Hedge (2000), Brumfit claims that in order to gain a high level of proficiency in communicative English, students have to develop what he refers to as ‘fluency’. In his definition, fluency is a pattern of language interaction that is very similar to the language
pattern of a native speaker. Brumfit believes that it is important to simulate conditions that occur when native speakers of English communicate with each other in the communicative classroom. Just like Krashen, Brumfit wants to focus the learning situation on language that conveys real meaning, and steer away from focusing on grammatical structures. He thinks it is crucial that the material used in a communicative lesson must focus around the learner, who in turn must be able to come up with ideas and opinions that he or she expresses, in order to make it useful. Brumfit stresses the point that the students must be able to interact and respond and use the information given to them while communicating, i.e. students must utilize their pragmatic and discourse competence as well as their fluency. However, he points out that it will only have a full effect when students receive information that is not predictable. All four skills should be at play, and the students should be in a situation where they are modifying grammatical structures as well as finding different ways of expressing what they want to say, but cannot, due to lexical and grammatical limitations. In order to gain the best result, the teacher should be a facilitator that sets up and monitors the activity, however, he or she should not intervene during the communicative task. Brumfit suggests that during a communicative task students will put all the linguistic rules that they have learned in classes focusing on the syntax of the language into use (Brumsfit, in Hedge 2000).

2.2.5 Communicative language ability in a cultural context

There are a number of different types of skills involved in oral communication, and there is a complex interplay of factors involved in the process of communicative competence. The American anthropologist and sociolinguist Dell Hymes added the communicative aspect to competence in the early 70s and later coined the term ‘communicative competence’ (Hedge 2000). In contrast to Chomsky, who had made a distinction between competence and performance, Hymes focused on the social and cultural aspects involved in oral communication that are needed to understand all the linguistic forms of a language. Thus, in order to become a competent user of English one has to learn the cultural aspects and social codes of the target culture. Hymes’ research had a huge impact, and a number of new approaches followed that put the focus communication, especially on the situational and the functionality of the language in TEFL classroom
Hymes’ work put a whole new focus on communication competence and the way we look at communicative competence. Today we divide communicative competence into five main categories: Linguistic competence, Pragmatic competence, Discourse competence, strategic competence and Fluency (Hymes, in Hedge 2000).

2.2.6 Cultural appropriateness in the communicative the approach

The increasing importance of communicative teaching in schools has given rise to a discussion about the cultural appropriateness of the material and methods used in the classroom. The role of the teacher as a leader and lecturer in a traditional sense has changed with the communicative approach and created a new role for the teacher where he or she is more of facilitator of learning as opposed to the traditional lecturing teacher (Long and Richards 1987). This means that all new approaches must be anchored to the traditional way teaching and learning.

Furthermore, the teacher’s personality, education and communicative skills become an issue that determines whether interactive, communicative tasks are indeed affective and suitable. Medyges (in Ellis 1997), for example, claims that the “linguistic demand” is far too great on a non-native speaker of English when teaching an ‘English only’ communication class. He claims that the non-native teacher must focus too much on his or her own language performance, which has a negative effect on the students. Medyges suggests that only the teachers themselves can judge if they are able to teach a lesson where the focus is on communication and authenticity, thus, ruling out the idea of a general approach for teachers. Sano Takahashi and Yoneyama (1984) have argued that when students are in a situation where they cannot find a good reason for learning English due to a cultural situation that does not promote global concepts like a universal language, the focus and aim should be moved towards “self-expression and personal growth” instead (Hedge 2000).

Furthermore, there are other important things to consider regarding cultural appropriateness of teaching methods and material. Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) give an example how teachers can modify and exploit communicative course material like ‘Headway,’ (commonly used text book published by Oxford UP) in countries like Vietnam, where the average learner comes from a very different background compared to
the average student from the industrialized world, that the material was primarily
designed and aimed for. In their example, they describe how to adapt the material and
method into a more culturally accepted approach. Headway largely focuses on pair-work,
and is therefore not in accord with local methodological approaches. Therefore, instead of
doing pair-work, the material is taught to the whole class, with the teacher performing
one part of a conversation, and the whole class performing the other. Kramsch and
Sullivan’s example shows us the importance and necessity of locally modified
methodology (Hedge 2000).

2.2.7 Direct method
The direct method (Richards and Lockhart 1994) is based on the idea that L1 should not
be used, and in order to avoid L1 teachers should demonstrate and not translate, act and
not explain, ask questions and not make speeches. The method is based on the belief that
L2 is acquired the same way as L1, and the focus is mainly on listening and speaking.

3. Methods
As mentioned in the introduction, I a) conducted teacher interviews, b) made
observations, and c) used questionnaires with senior high schools teachers (Sweden) and
university teachers (Japan). The interview with the Swedish teachers was based on a
questionnaire with 12 questions (see Appendix 1) and the teachers were interviewed in
English (with a few exceptions) directly after the lessons I observed. The Japanese
teachers were also interviewed in English directly after the lessons I observed, based on
the same questionnaire that I used with the Swedish teachers. Furthermore, due to the fact
that Swedish senior high school students (16-18 years old) are roughly at the same level
of proficiency as 1st year university students in Japan (18-20 years old), I made no
differentiation between the two age groups in my study.

I focused mainly on authenticity in communication in my observations and on the
teachers’ awareness of the level of authenticity in the content of their lessons. One of my
aims with the interviews was to make teachers reflect on how much of the
communication during an average class that is authentic and how much that is pseudo
authentic. I also gave a questionnaire to a group of Swedish students in order to find out their general attitude toward a communicative approach.

3.1 Teachers interviews

I interviewed seven teachers, five in Sweden and two in Japan. The Swedish teachers currently work at a high school in a middle-sized town in Sweden and they have been teaching for about 6-10 years. Four of them are female, and one is male. They are aged 35-50. Two of them worked at other high schools prior to the one they are at now. The Japanese teachers work at a university in an area of Japan called ‘Kansai’. Both of them are my former colleagues, females and in their 50s. One is originally from North America and the other one from Japan. They have both been in their current job for a couple of years, but with prior experience for about 10-15 years at other Japanese universities. The interview was based on a questionnaire with 12 questions (see App. 1). All the questions were answered orally. I recorded the answers in my notebook and later compiled and edited all the information. The interviews (approximately 30 minutes) took place in the teachers’ room directly after the lesson I observed. The participants were well aware of the fact that the interviews were totally confidential, and that their name, workplace, and even the name of the local area would not be mentioned in this study. The participants seemed generally very happy to part take in this study; the overall feeling I received from the teachers was that they were pleased that someone was actually interested in a) their work, b) they way they saw themselves as teachers, and c) their role in society. The atmosphere during the interviews was for the most part relaxed. However, some of the teachers expressed that they felt as if they were being tested, despite the fact that I had told them that there was no such thing as a right or wrong answer to my questions.

3.1.1 Abbreviations explained

I will refer to the five Swedish English teachers that I interviewed in the following abbreviated form: for example, SwT1 (Swedish teacher one), SwT2 (Swedish teacher two), etc. Furthermore, I will refer to the North American teacher in Japan as ‘J native,’ and the Japanese teacher as ‘J non-native’.
3.2 Observations
All the observations during the three-week period I spent at the Swedish high school were done during the teachers’ regular classes, i.e. none of the content was in any way modified due to my presence. The lessons I observed were taught by the same five teachers who I interviewed, and all the teachers were aware of the fact that I was focusing on a specific area of teaching. However, none of them knew exactly what I was focusing on in my observations, and they all agreed to participate under those conditions. The teachers in Japan were also given the same information about my observations, and they both agreed to participate under those conditions. The data was analyzed and compiled from notes taken during observations.

3.3 Students’ questionnaire
During my teaching practice I had the opportunity to teach three classes where a group of eight visiting students from Wales participated. I had the Swedish students fill out a questionnaire (see Appendix 2) directly after they had done a speaking activity together with the visiting students. The visiting students from Wales do no speak any Swedish at all, thus, providing a situation where all the language used during class was real, authentic communication. The main reason for this survey was to get a general feel for how the students responded to a situation where they cannot rely on Swedish when communicating. I also wanted to get a general idea of what they think about this kind of lesson.

4. Analysis and results
4.1 Teachers interviews
In this section I will present the results from the interviews with teachers in Sweden and Japan. It was noticeable when I did the interviews that some teachers had though about these topics more than others. I have therefore given priority to these teachers in my presentation of the results.
4.1.1 Teachers’ definition of authenticity when teaching a foreign language

Most of the teachers that I interviewed strongly believe that authenticity is very much connected with real communication, i.e. a situation where the speaker is conveying a message that the listener is genuinely interested in receiving. In other words, authentic becomes equal to ‘real’ in their definition. Furthermore, SwT4 felt that all the peripheral language that was not directly connected to the target language or subject of a lesson was the element that was the most representative when defining the term ‘authentic’.

“When I talk to the students about things that are not connected with the lesson, that’s when I feel like the real learning is taking place,” she said.

SwT2 felt that ‘authentic’ meant the language that was produced by a native speaker. She suggested that a non-native teacher of English could not represent the idea of authenticity with his or her speech in a learning situation, even though that person might be a competent user of English. Moreover, SwT4 made a very strong connection with the use of ‘authentic material,’ when defining the term authentic, and could not really relate the concept of authenticity to speech.

4.1.2 Using authentic material that has not been adapted for TEFL

The most commonly used authentic material among the teachers interviewed was newspaper articles. Three of the interviewed Swedish English teachers quite often used authentic texts that were taken from newspapers. However, none of this material was used in the lessons I observed. Furthermore, SwT1 used to design all her material during her two first years working as an English teacher, but found it too time consuming and laborious so she decided to stop doing that. However, she did feel that the material she had designed was very useful in order to meet students’ needs. She felt strongly that her own authentic material was more useful than the regular textbook she had been given to teach from. Nevertheless, she did not think that it was feasible to keep putting in all the hours required to design all her material.

“It took all my energy, and both my social and family life was very affected by all the work I had to do,” she said.
Moreover, both teachers in Japan almost never used these kinds of texts, due to their high level of difficulty and the effort involved in exploiting and adapting the material.

### 4.1.3 Amount of time devoted to ‘free conversation’ in an average class

All the Swedish teachers that I interviewed agreed that Swedish students are very keen on doing communication tasks that focus on conveying real meaning. However, despite of the popularity of free conversation at the high school I visited, only about a quarter of the time is allocated to communicative activities. Furthermore, most of the Swedish teachers said that the outcome of the speaking activity is affected greatly if a topic is chosen ahead of time that gives the students a chance to prepare.

“It’s important to give students a ‘hands up’. Not only because of the topic, but also so that the students can mentally prepare for a communicative task. Mental preparation is actually often more important that preparing for a certain topic,” SwT2 said.

In Japan, the situation was quite different. It became clear during the interview with J non-native that the idea of free conversation is quite foreign. She stressed the fact that free conversation does not really work in its true meaning. Therefore, almost no class time was devoted to free conversation.

“Students are not able to communicate without the guidance of a pre-set topic, and without being given the language needed to help them express what they want to say,” J non-native said.

However, J native tries to make the lesson as communicative as possible.

“I see no point in doing something in class that could be assigned as homework,” J native said.

### 4.1.4 Language of instruction

The Swedish English teachers felt that the topic and the specific task strongly determine whether to use English or Swedish.

“When teaching grammar, I always speak Swedish, and I know the other teachers do, too. That’s very much a part of the teaching culture in this school, and probably for most schools in Sweden, too. I sometimes think that I should probably try to give grammar instructions in English, but I don’t think the students would like it.” SwT5 said.

Furthermore, the mood and physical condition of the teachers as well as the students’
physical and mental conditions also determine which language of instruction is used.

“When I’m tired I always use Swedish,” SwT1 said.

She points out that the students react the same way and are not reachable in English when they are tired.

“I can’t reach them in English when they’re tired and unfocused,” she said.

In Japan, J native always uses simplified English when giving instructions, and refrains from giving instructions in Japanese, even though she can speak Japanese quite well.

“I always have to hide the fact that I can understand and speak Japanese, which is very hard. If I let them know I speak Japanese, I will not get a single word out of them in English,” she said.

Contrary to J native, J non-native always uses Japanese when giving instructions. She said:

“I won’t even try giving instructions in English. If I did, nobody would understand me and I would have to do it all over in Japanese anyway”.

J non-native found the idea of ‘English only’ when giving instructions to an activity, almost absurd.

“It wouldn’t work, it would take too much of the lesson time, and they would still not get it. I would have to do it in Japanese anyway. So there is no point,” she said.

J native felt strongly that it was very important to give instructions in English only.

“Even though I speak Japanese, I refrain from using Japanese while giving instructions. There is so much of the target language and culture embedded in the instructions, for example, like a certain type of language or attitude, etc. I feel like I would approach the speaking task from the wrong way,” she said.

4.1.5 Peripheral language
Three of the Swedish English teachers interviewed considered peripheral language (that is, language that is not directly connected to the linguistic aim of the lesson) the most important of all the language exchange taking place in the classroom.
“That’s where it’s at,” SwT5 said.

The other two teachers find it difficult, unnatural and draining, when having to speak in English in these kinds of situations, where the language used has no direct connection with the linguistic focus of the lesson. Furthermore, in Japan, the peripheral language does not have the same function as in Sweden, and becomes almost obscure, due to the level of difficulty for the students, according to J non-native. However, J native still uses a lot of language that is not directly connected to the target language or structure of the lesson.

“I truly believe it’s important, even though it gets weird sometimes when many of my students don’t understand what I’m saying,” she said.

4.1.6 How does authentic material affect motivation?
All the Swedish teachers that I talked to agreed that authentic material affects the students’ motivation level in a positive way. However, they also all agreed that there are a lot of difficulties involved in authentic material.

“The problem is that the higher motivation that comes with the authentic material does not necessarily mean that the students learn more,” SwT5 said.

Most teachers agreed that using authentic material makes the content of the lesson more difficult to control, and much harder to assess, but yet, more interesting for the students.
In Japan, the use of authentic material has more of a function of getting the students interested in a particular subject rather than supporting a certain linguistic aim. For example, teachers often bring in different gadgets or products to class in order to arouse their interest.

4.1.7 Motivating students to use English only in class
SwT3 felt that there is a clear connection between constant use of English and the students’ willingness to use English throughout a lesson.

“It might sound strange, but it takes a while to get them used to the idea that we should speak English during English class, but once ‘English only’ has been established, there is nothing holding them back,” she said.
Moreover, SwT4 came up with an idea of competing against other classes in who could speak English the longest without saying a single word of Swedish. The rules are simple – if anyone said a single word of Swedish, they would have to start all over again. The teacher would time them how long they could last without speaking Swedish, and keep track of the scores.

“I try to praise the students that go the extra mile and do not switch into Swedish. It's very important that they get recognition for doing something good,” she said.

The Japanese teacher also felt that motivating the students to use English only in class. However, they were both very cautious about pushing the students too hard.

“It's very hard for them to use only use English in class. Less, is more in this respect,” J native said.

4.1.8 Cultural differences explained
Most of the Swedish teachers agreed that most course material explain cultural differences in English speaking countries. However, two teachers found it much more beneficial and interesting for the students when they drew from their own experience of working or studying in countries of the target culture. They found that the students were more receptive to the teachers’ personal experiences than the cultural differences explained in the course book. In Japan, J non-native spends a lot of time explaining the cultural differences during an average class.

“The implication of western culture and the way it affects communication makes it absolutely necessary to explain the cultural difference to the students. It’s so different to Japanese culture that a typical communicative activity would not make sense to a Japanese student without further explanation,” she said.

4.1.9 Classroom management in the target language instead of the learners’ L1
The Swedish English teachers had a uniform opinion about the preferred language of classroom management and how to interact with the learners when experiencing problems. They all had had very similar experiences when it came to classroom management, in that they all thought they should be strict but fair, and they all expressed the same thing more or less:
“It’s like it’s not real to the student when I tell him or her to put away their phone, for example. I sometimes tell the same student several times in English to put the phone down, but it isn’t until I switch into Swedish that the student listens. It happens almost every day. I get the impression that they think it’s not the real me when I tell them in English. It’s the teacher,” SwT1 said.

Furthermore, switching code and register seems to have a big effect on the students. SwT1 accidentally used the ‘F-word’ on a mentally challenging day, when trying to get a student’s attention.

“The class was dead silent for the remaining time of that period. I felt really bad afterwards and I excused my behavior the next time I saw them,” she said.

Moreover, in Japan, switching code and register seem to have a similar effect when managing the class, according to the J non-native.

“Since I mainly speak to the students in Japanese during the lesson, switching into English when trying to lower the sound level, for example, has a good effect. When I switch in to English, they realize I mean business (laugh),” she said.

4.1.10 Benefits of authentic material and free conversation

“Students love free conversation,” SwT3 said.

She felt that the motivation level increases immediately when doing communicative tasks. SwT5 had a similar opinion about free conversation:

“The students like the challenge as well as the feeling of independence when they are able to express themselves in English conversation,” he said.

Some teachers also found that the language used during ‘free conversation’ was more focused on authentic, everyday situations, and the teachers found that extremely useful. SwT3 stressed the importance of free conversation for all students, especially the ones that do really well in other lessons where the focus is on the form and not communication.

“Becoming aware of the importance of English communication skills is quite an eye-opener for students who do well on written tests and think they know it all. It might be quite devastating for some, but it really brings it home to them that they still have a long way to go,” she said.
Moreover, in Japan, J native felt that, even though it does not really work using a free communicative approach, she feels that it is very important for the learners’ awareness of their own ability.

“The truth hurts, and it becomes obvious to the students that they need to work harder in order to succeed in communicating in English with someone who is not an English teacher, or who has a lot of experience with communication with Japanese people,” she said.

**4.1.11 Problems with using authentic material and free conversation**

Many of the Swedish teachers I interviewed find it very time consuming to plan speaking tasks and adapt authentic material. A commonly expressed view is that they feel there is a huge risk of students not being able to follow the lesson. They mentioned the difficulty for teachers to notice if someone is falling behind. It is also a matter of learning styles, according to one teacher. SwT4 felt like some students need more structure to a lesson than in a communication class.

“Some students feel quite naked when they don’t have a textbook to lean on for support,” she said.

Furthermore, in Japan, both teachers agreed that the students found it too hard when working with authentic material and free conversation. They both feel that the main impediment for success in a communicative task is the general belief in Japan that students do not really need to learn English in order to communicate.

“The main reason for studying English in Japan is so the students can pass the entrance exam to university, and the examination is all grammar and translation based and no real communication is involved. This is the reality for all students, and they all view English as something you need to pass a test, and not like something one uses in order to be able to communicate with other people,” J native said.

Moreover, J non-native pointed out another problem:

“Communication in Japanese is so different than from communicating in English. It’s a whole different culture. You can’t even compare it, and that’s why it’s so hard for our students here. For example, the turn taking is different, and age and gender affects the way communication is structured. For the outsider it might seem like a relief not having to consider all these aspects, but the students are truly at loss without these kinds of structures,” she said.
4.1.12 Culture of the target language

The Swedish teachers were well aware of their limitation when it comes to being good role models of the English language, but felt that they were doing their best, and that was good enough.

“I know I’m not English, and nothing can change that,” SwT2 said.

Moreover, in Japan, the J native felt that she was representing her culture well in class, but she was also aware of the fact that she has been in Japan a long time, and that she has been affected by Japanese culture during this time.

“When I meet other North Americans who have just gotten here, I realize that I’ve changed a lot. But I still think that I’m quite a good representative of North American culture. That’s not really a problem, I think. The real problem is that I have to grade everything I say, and I think that is affecting the authenticity of not only the language itself, but also what I choose to say,” she said.

4.2 Observations

4.2.1 English teachers in Sweden

All five of the Swedish English teachers who I observed were quite similar in their teaching approaches. They all had very good social skills and good rapport, and the students seemed generally content to be in their classes. All five of them relied heavily on course books especially designed for EFL, and none of them used any authentic material during the three weeks that I observed their lessons. However, there were a few communicative tasks where students had prepared topics beforehand and had also learned vocabulary and expressions connected to the topic in order to be able to do it well. The communication rarely steered away from the pre-set topic, making the activity ‘semi-authentic’ to completely authentic, i.e. without a pre-set topic, and almost all instructions for activities were given in Swedish with the exception of a few reading tasks. Moreover, I did not get the impression that the teachers had any self-imposed rules for when English should be used, and when it should not be used, with the only exception of teaching grammar, where there was no English used except for the target structures written on the board. All the questions and answers about the structures were done in Swedish. About 80% of peripheral language used by teachers during the lessons was in Swedish, and almost none of the 20% of peripheral language in English was used to greet students or
used to finish a lesson. These figures are based on all statements made by the teachers during my observations. None of the instructions to the homework assignments that I saw during my three weeks in this high school was given in English, and none of the inquiry about absent students (except for one) was done in English. The language used for classroom management, i.e. asking students to sit down, to be quiet, to put their cell-phones away, etc, was in English about 50% of the time. It was noticeable how differently the teachers’ choice of language affected the students. I was fortunate to experience the exact same situation that SwT1 claimed happened almost everyday:

SwT1 - Please, put the phone away.
(No reaction from student).
*Five minutes later.*
SwT1 - Put the phone away, OK!
(Still no reaction from student).
*Two minutes later.*
SwT1 - Nej, nu får du ta och lägga ner telefon.
(Student puts the phone away).

### 4.2.2 English teachers in Japan

I observed two of J native’s lessons during the same day. The lessons were taught in ‘English only’ and the students were aware of the fact that they were expected to use only English. Almost all the things the teacher did in class had a focus on authentic communication, with only a few exceptions: there were a few times when the teacher asked comprehension questions that she already knew the answer to, that made the situation communicative, nevertheless, not completely authentic. Furthermore, the instructions, peripheral language and classroom management were all in English, as well as when students were given clarification of grammatical structures on the board. The only aspect regarding authenticity is that she had to grade her speech throughout the lesson in order to make herself understood, while at the same time trying to provide comprehensible input to the class. The level of simplification of her speech varied depending on the situation and the level of task difficulty, and only once did her slowing down feel unnatural. The teacher used a textbook ‘Headway’ (Oxford University press) that has been designed for universal use, i.e. no Japanese translations are included. Apart from the course book, the teacher used different speaking tasks as a warm up in the beginning of the lesson, and also as follow-up activities. There was no authentic material
used during these two lessons, however, the teacher told me that she brings in different products from America during her lessons that serve as a topic of conversation. I observed three of the J non-native’s lessons the day I visited the university. There were no communicative tasks at all in these three lessons. The closest the students got to practicing communication in English was when the teacher singled out two students and had both of them read a sample conversation out of the course book to the whole class. The course book used was produced and published by a Japanese company, and everything written in English was also translated into Japanese. There was no English spoken by the teacher during these lessons except when writing and reading the target language on the board. The only communication involved between the teacher and the students was when the teacher answered questions from the students about grammar. This was all done in Japanese with no exceptions.

4.3 Swedish students’ questionnaire

I had 74 students anonymously fill out a questionnaire at the senior high where I did my teaching practice. The aim of this study was to get to know how the students felt when communicating in English with a group of visiting students from Wales. I also wanted to find out how beneficial the students found the communicative approach in comparison to a more regular type of textbook-based learning. The result of the questionnaire shows that the students were overall very positive to communicative activities, and most of them felt that they would like to have more of communication classes in their English education. However, some students felt that ‘free communication classes’ could and should not completely replace regular classes where the focus is on the form as opposed to communication. The following are the results of students’ answer to a questionnaire (see App. 2):

1. Did you enjoy the communication activity with the students from Wales?
95% of the students liked it a lot. 3% thought it was OK. 2% did not like it at all.

2. Was it difficult?
45% did not think it was too difficult. 55% thought it was a little difficult. 0% thought it was too difficult.

3. Do you feel that you have learned a lot from the experience?
72% thought that they learned a lot. 28% learned a little. 0% nothing at all

4. What did you learn from this experience?
80 percent of the students commented that they learned a lot because it was a “real life” situation, in which they could use English. 20% of the students felt that they did not learn anything at all communicating with the Welch students.

5. Do you think it is more useful than studying English from a textbook?
68% thought it is more useful to learn English the communicative way. 32% thought that studying from a textbook is better.

6. Why is that so?
75% of the students preferred the communicative task to the textbook because it was real communication. Approximately 25% of the students did not feel they learned as much as they would have from a textbook.

7. Do you think more classes should be ‘real communication’ like this one?
80% wanted more of this kind of lessons. 10% were not sure. 10% preferred the usual lessons.

8. What was the best thing about talking to the students from Wales?
65% liked it because of the real communication aspects. 25% felt that they learned a lot about people from Wales. 10% liked it because it was more fun than their regular lesson. 0% felt that they did not learn anything at all.

9. What was the worst thing about talking to the people from Wales?
50% thought it was too hard. 25% did not learn anything 0% could not connect culturally with the students from Wales. 25% did not like the authenticity aspect of the task.

5. Discussion
In Sweden, all the aspects and teaching approaches used by both teachers in Japan were also part of the lessons taught by the Swedish English teachers. All the teachers were overall socially skilled and very attentive to the students’ social needs, and they were really professional in that sense. It was comforting to see that teachers paid so much attention to the students’ general well-being. They all appeared to be very good teachers and very devoted to their students. However, as communicators in the English language and as providers of comprehensible input, there were areas that could be developed.

Nevertheless, with regard to the Swedish teachers, it seems as if the problem is structural rather than personal. Most of the situations where the teachers switch into Swedish in order to make themselves understood could possibly be avoided if the teachers were more aware of different approaches that do not involve students’ first language. For example, if teachers were more aware of the advantages of the ‘direct method,’ and other similar approaches that avoid students’ L1, the situation would be more beneficial for the students’ acquisition of the target language (Richards and Lockhart 1994).

Moreover, if teachers were given more extensive training in how to ask comprehension questions in a more effective way than now, the learning situation would
benefit both teachers and students. I was surprised how many times I heard the highly ambiguous comprehension question “Do you understand?” when I observed the Swedish teachers. Michal Long stresses the importance for teachers to master the skills of asking comprehension questions. He claims that both over and underuse will affect the level of comprehensible input negatively (Long and Richards 1987:257). If teachers increased their awareness of these tools – the direct method – comprehension questions, most of the interaction in Swedish could be avoided during class.

Furthermore, students are under-challenged when it comes to the communicative aspects of learning English, and putting more importance on communication skills instead of focusing on form would most likely increase their communicative ability greatly. However, in order to get students to communicate and refrain from speaking Swedish in class, one has to give them a reason to do so. Moreover, if real communication was part of the tests and the students knew that this was the most important part of the test, they would be given an incentive to communicate in English. All these relatively small changes would probably have a positive effect on the learners.

My interpretation of the results is that most of the teachers feel as if they have individual control of the content of the lessons, they are in fact tied to a structure and a teaching culture that is ingrained in the institution that they represent. This structure has a great effect on the teachers’ outlook on teaching, and it directly affects what the teachers think is possible to achieve in the classroom and what is not. Making teachers more aware of these structures, and improving their self-assessment skills, will also have a considerable effect on their teaching.

In Japan, the two observations look very different. The North American teacher and the Japanese teacher work within the same department, and teach the same level of students. Yet, they are really worlds apart. The authentic communicative approach used by the North American teacher works really well: the students have plenty of opportunities to communicate, and the lesson is also full of comprehensible input to facilitate acquisition. In contrast to the North American teacher, the Japanese teacher is a product of a teaching culture that does not meet the communicative needs of the learners. Focusing on form and grammatical structures is indeed necessary. However, it will not do much to improve students’ communication skills. Moreover, the problem of a non-
communicative approach is structural as well as cultural. The truth is that Japan is still a very isolated society and most learners of English do not fully understand that English is a real language used by real people in the real world, and the field of TEFL is not improve before Japan gets more internationalized.

6. Conclusion
In this essay I have examined the authenticity of the communication involved in second language learning in Sweden and Japan. I observed, assessed and interviewed teachers in order to get an overview of the current situation.

I have reached the conclusion that the level of authenticity involved in different activities in a Swedish high school and at a Japanese university varies greatly depending on the teacher and the social context. Most of the teachers interviewed were very positive to the idea of authentic material. However, very few of them actually used much authentic material in their lessons. Moreover, the level of communicative tasks in English during an average class varied depending on the teacher and activity. Most teachers made a clear distinction between grammar and fluency tasks, and a majority of teachers felt the need to use the learners’ L1 when teaching grammar. Other teachers did not feel such restrictions and were more flexible in their approach.

The results of my interviews and observations show that real communication in TEFL is both indispensible and necessary. In both countries, teachers agreed that they see great benefits in using a communicative approach. Furthermore, in Sweden, the majority of students in my study responded positively to a communicative approach where only English was used and most of them felt that more lessons should be like that.

However, I have realized, when observing lessons and interviewing teachers, that it is difficult to always be a provider of comprehensive and authentic input. This is especially true for the Swedish teachers who I interviewed and observed. As teachers at a senior high school, they have to be so much more to the students than just a language teacher: he or she must also be a friend, cheerleader, police officer, mother/father figure and mentor. These factors make it virtually impossible for the teachers to be all these things in English only.
Nevertheless, I conclude that it is possible to increase the level of authentic input and adapt a more communicative approach in general, despite all the difficulties. With a few changes in the way teachers provide comprehensible input and the way they interact and communicate, the quality of the lessons would most likely increase greatly.

The result of the study with the Swedish high schools students clearly shows the benefits of using a more communicative approach. It also shows that the cultural implications of the ‘English only’ approach did not have a negative effect on them.

Therefore, a suggestion for further studies would be to observe teachers in order to get a better idea of what it is that makes a teacher switch from English into Swedish, and what it is that affects teachers’ choice of language in different situations. If we could detect a breaking point, i.e. the point of difficulty that directly affects teachers’ decisions to switch from English into Swedish, we could isolate the breaking point and analyze it. This would enable us to use that information in order to increase teachers’ awareness of their language and to help improve the training of future English teachers in both Sweden and Japan.

Finally, it would also be very interesting if someone were to do a study to explore the differences in how a variety of teachers teach from the same material. For example, a group of teachers would be asked to teach from the same chapter in a textbook in order to find out the differences and similarities in the organization of their lessons as well as look at how much of the instructions, peripheral language, classroom management, etc. is in English. I hope someone will use this idea for future research.
References


Appendix 1

Questions asked during the teacher interview

1) How would you define the term authenticity when teaching a foreign language?

2) How much authentic material such as newspaper articles and listening activities with materials that has not been adapted for EFL is used in your lesson?

3) How much of an average lesson is devoted to free communication, i.e. the focus is on meaning as opposed to structure?

4) In what language are instructions to activities given?

5) How much of the peripheral language used by the teacher in class is in English?

6) How does the authentic material affect the students? Is there a difference in motivation? And what is the response from the students to these kinds of tasks?

7) Do you motivate students to use an English only approach? If so, how do you do that?

8) Is there any follow up to the cultural context of the material? Are cultural differences explained, and if so, how?

9) How do students respond to being disciplined in English? Is there a difference from being disciplined in Swedish?

10) What are the biggest benefits about using authentic material and free communication?

11) What are the biggest problems about using authentic material and free communication?

12) How are cultural differences in the target language dealt with?
Appendix 2

Questionnaire for students at a Swedish senior high school

1) Did you enjoy the communication activity with the students from Wales?
   a) Yes, I liked it a lot.
   b) It was OK.
   c) No, I didn’t like it at all.

2) Was it difficult?
   a) No, it wasn’t difficult at all.
   b) It was a little difficult.
   c) It was too difficult.

3) Do you feel that you have learned a lot from the experience?
   a) Yes, a lot.
   b) A little
   c) Nothing at all

4) What did you learn from this experience?

5) Do you think it is more useful than studying English from a textbook?
   a) Yes.
   b) It equally as useful as when we use a textbook.
c) No.

6) Why is that so?

7) Do you think more classes should be ‘real communication’ like this one?
   a) Yes, definitely.
   b) I’m not sure.
   c) No, the usual classes are much more useful for me learning English.

8) What was the best thing about talking to the students from Wales?
   a) It was real communication.
   b) I learned a lot about people from Wales and their culture.
   c) It was more fun than our usual lesson.
   d) Nothing. It was too hard and I didn’t learn a thing.

9) What was the worst thing about talking to the people from Wales?
   a) It was too hard.
   b) I didn’t learn anything.
   c) They were so different from me. I could not connect with them. Our culture is so different from theirs.
   d) It was real communication, and I’m not used to it. It’s better with an easy and controlled speaking tasks with other Swedish students, or the teacher.