

The use of realia in a classroom

The term realia has long established itself in many fields of knowledge invariably denoting some kinds of objects or artifacts. In methodology of teaching English as a foreign language there circulate more than two dozen of definitions of the term. Having analyzed many of them, we came to the conclusion that two distinct meanings may be singled out. Thus, on the one hand, realia denotes a term for real 'culture rich' objects that are used in a classroom to help students build background knowledge of the target culture, on the other hand, it is defined as an item (or item substitution) which is brought in the classroom for illustrations and facilitation of language acquisition.

Even though some scientists stress that only authentic objects and by no means their copies, facsimiles, or representations should be termed realia, we are of the opinion that both may qualify as any of those lend themselves well to the purpose of bringing life to class. What is more, the appearances of the notion 'visual realia' as 'a collection of linguistic and non-linguistic authentic materials which have been compiled, scanned and posted on www server' testifies to this point of view. Since certainly one may find realia while travelling abroad, for those who are less mobile or otherwise unable to collect their own material substitutions of realia including visual realia are quite beneficial.

The following activity exemplifies creative use of an everyday object (a stapler) for teaching grammar (relative clauses): Write two sentences on the board (an object and a subject relative clause): 'The man that I saw was crying.' 'The man that cried was my father.' Point out that the first sentence has two pronouns (personal and relative), 'that' and 'I', and the second has one, 'that'. Now take two pieces of paper and staple them together twice. This represents the first sentence. Staple two more pieces of paper, just once. This represents the second sentence. Remove one staple from the first two pieces of paper and they will still be joined together. The conclusion is that the relative pronoun is unnecessary in the first sentence.