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Authenticity in foreign language education. A well thought-out concept or just a slogan?

Whereas the word *concept* is generally used in a semantically neutral sense, this understanding does not apply to *slogan* in the same way, at least not when used in language education discourse. Here, slogan very often refers to a hackneyed, more or less meaningless expression. Interestingly enough, in other fields, for example, in marketing research and business studies, slogan has a neutral, if not positive connotation, as in the following definition: "The verbal or written portion of an advertising message that summarizes the main idea in a few memorable words – a tag line" (<http://marketing.about.com>). However, in language education discourse and probably in the humanities at large, slogans seem to evoke a negative reaction, as they are largely considered as semantically empty buzz-words being stripped of their theoretical and historical background. Taking a historical perspective to the concept of authentic/ity, the paper aims at identifying its relationship to different language teaching methods/approaches as well as different meanings in its development. This analysis is complemented by a comparative frequency count of authentic/ity in the *ELT Journal* and *TESOL Quarterly* to show up similarities and differences between two influential applied linguistics journals and to see whether authentic/ity is still a concept to be reckoned with or whether it has lost its appeal and become sloganized. An overriding question to be pursued in the discussion is whether it is the potential destiny of terminology in the humanities that it changes and possibly loses its original reading over time and why this is different in the natural sciences and in the engineering subjects. Thus, this study is intended to shed some light on the historical development of a central idea in language teaching and, furthermore, raise the question of whether processes of sloganization may be inherent to the humanities as well as to the social sciences.

Literature

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