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VOLUME V

GOCE DELCEV UNIVERSITY - STIP
FACULTY OF PHILOLOGY

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FACULTY OF PHILOLOGY**



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FACULTY OF PHILOLOGY**

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Стручен труд
Professional paper

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Марија Дончева¹, доц. д-р Нина Даскаловска²

Апстракт: Наставниците можат да ја користат литературата како моќна алатка во процесот на подучување на странски јазик. Преку неа тие би можеле да подучуваат вокабулар, изговор, синтаксички структури, граматика, стилистика и друго во зависност од целите на програмата и од интересите на учениците. Литературата е автентичен материјал кој лесно ги вклучува учениците во светот на фантазијата. Ефектот од ова се мотивирани ученици со позитивен став кон учењето. Поемите, романите и приказните може да иницираат силни емотивни одговори. Тие придонесуваат учениците да ја поврзат сопствената реалност со понудените содржини, што придонесува учењето да стане задоволство. Но, литературата сама по себе не е доволна. Треба да се изберат методи и активности кои будат интерес и мотивираат, како и содржини релевантни за учениците. Додека тие се трудат да ја разберат пораката на текстот, разбирањето на новите зборови станува споредно, а нивното учење инцидентно и спонтано. На овој начин литературните текстови лесно може да станат мост помеѓу учениците и културата на луѓето чијшто јазик тие го изучуваат. Целта на овој труд е да се сугерира како горенаведеното може да се постигне преку различни модели на користење литература. Првиот дел од трудот се фокусира на разликата помеѓу референтен и литературен текст, понатаму се набројани причините за употреба на литературни текстови во процесот на изучување на странски јазик и е објаснета улогата на ученикот како читател, а на крајот се заклучува следното: ако литературните текстови се успешно интегрирани во програмата, тогаш тоа може да биде најефективниот метод и мотивациона алатка која активно ќе ги вклучува учениците во процесот на учење.

Клучни зборови: *литературен текст, референтен текст, учење на странски јазик, мотивација, имагинација, читател*

¹) ООУ „Никола Карев“, Кочани

²) Филолошки факултет, Универзитет „Гоце Делчев“, Штип



THE ROLE OF LITERATURE IN LEARNING ENGLISH AND ITS EFFECTS ON LEARNERS' LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

Marija Donceva³, Nina Daskalovska⁴

Abstract: Teachers can use literature as a powerful tool to teach a foreign language. They can teach vocabulary, pronunciation, syntactic structures, grammar, stylistics and other aspects of the language depending on the goals of the curriculum and the interests of the students. Literature is authentic material that draws students into the world of fantasy and imagination. The effect is motivated students with positive attitudes towards learning. Poems, novels, and stories can bring powerful emotional responses to the classroom. Students can relate their own real lives to the stories, which contributes to affective and enjoyable learning. However, literature by itself is not enough; teachers need to use imaginative techniques for integrating literature work with language teaching. It is also necessary to use motivating methodology and to choose the right materials to keep students interested. As they use literature, they learn about language structures without even noticing, which helps them to develop their communicative competence and that is the ultimate goal of English learning. Learners become involved with the stories they read and the understanding of the words becomes less important as they are trying to get to the message of the story. If the activities are oriented towards enjoyment and creativity instead of memorizing grammatical rules, students may get to like literature. It can easily become a bridge between the learner and the culture of the people whose language they are studying. The aim of this paper is to explain how this can be achieved through different models of teaching. The first part focuses on the difference between referential and representational materials. Then, the reasons for using literature in the classroom are elaborated and the roles of the learner as a reader are explained. The conclusion is that literature should be the teachers' strongest methodological and motivational tool to keep their students engaged in the learning process.

Key words: *representational text, referential text, foreign language acquisition, motivation, imagination, reader.*

³) OOU „Nikola Karev“, Kocani

⁴) Faculty of Philology, Goce Delcev University, Stip



1. Introduction

When talking about literary texts, it is important that teachers understand the difference between referential and representational materials and what they can achieve by exploiting these types of materials. Referential materials offer opportunities for communication on one level only. These materials are made up of words which have only one meaning and usually only one grammatical construction is possible. There is no questioning of rules or meanings. Representational language differs in the way that rules are questioned, there is a play on words, imagination involvement, free interpretations. Working with representational materials favours fluency over accuracy. Involving imagination underlies representational language teaching. Stories, poems, songs are all part of this type of language learning. They all have something in common and that is involvement of imagination. These representational materials allow students to overcome the limited attitude that most of them have developed and which deprives them of seeing the richness of the language. As Carter and McRae (1996) claim, language is reachness and variety and as such it demands more representational approach to learning and teaching:

„For as soon as language begins to mean, it begins to extend its meaning, to make demands on its users, whether speakers, listeners, readers or writers. And as soon as this happens, questions of interpretation, of shades of meaning, of reaction and response are brought into play.“

(Carter and McRae , 1996:19).

Introducing representational materials brings with itself an infinite number of strategies and possibilities which play with the learners' fantasy. But as McRae (1996) suggests, this freedom could be risky and the teacher has to balance between the awareness of the language system and how it works, and the range of flexibility this system allows. Only this balance can be a productive educational balance. According to McRae (1996), „development of language competence is a result of imaginative interaction, creativity which go beyond the limitations of referential language“ (p. 19). As he further explains, purely referential texts are rare. And as soon as we start doubting about the degree of referentiality, there is a move towards representational language. New areas are opened, areas of freedom and risks, which offer engagement of imagination and different interpretations of the words in the text. Representational language is all around us. It always involves thinking as a fifth skill of foreign language acquisition, and thinking results in reflection, interpretation, evaluation. Teaching a foreign language requires integration and mixing of the representational with the referential.



2. Reasons for using literature in the classroom

According to Pinar and Jover (2012), there are many reasons for integrating literature in the syllabus. Literary texts can be used as good motivational materials as they bring up dilemmas and emotional responses. Literature provides students with knowledge about the culture of the people whose language they are studying. These materials encourage language acquisition spontaneously and enjoyably while learners are absorbed in the plot of the story. Using literature expands students' language awareness in terms of making them more sensitive to the different uses of the language. Literature develops students' interpretative abilities. In order to understand the meaning, students are encouraged to make assumptions, infer the meaning by handling ambiguities, which results in the development of the overall language capacity. Using literature has an effect on the growth of the whole person. It has a pedagogical function as well in the way that it increases their emotional awareness, develops their critical abilities and makes them confident to express their ideas.

2.1 Literature generates motivation

Williams (1987) remarks that „readers read with a greater degree of engagement if they are reading for their own purposes, rather than a purpose imposed by the task” (p. 1). He further suggests that the task of the teacher is to create “a situation where students read a text because they are interested in it”. But it is not enough to provide a text for the students and ask them to read it. Generating motivation which occurs in the pre-reading phase is very important because it contributes to effective engagement of the students in the activities in the later phases. According to Williams (1984), the purpose of the pre-reading phase is to introduce the topic and arouse students' interest, to motivate students by giving them reasons for reading and to provide language preparation for the text. This phase attempts to activate existing schemata which, according to Carrell (1983), is what a person knows about a topic before he reads the text (as cited in Williams, 1987, p. 2). The reading phase focuses directly on the text. These activities help learners find relevant information in the text. The final phase or the post-reading phase is to encourage learners to think about what they have read and relate it to their own experience and opinions.

2.2. Literature contributes to language enrichment

According to Cruz (2010), „ literature can be regarded as a rich source of ‘authentic material’ because it conveys two features in its written text:



one is ‘language in use’, that is, the employment of linguistics by those who have mastered it into a fashion intended for native speakers; the second is an aesthetic representation of the spoken language which is meant to recover or represent language within a certain cultural context“ (p. 2).

In his work Cruz focuses on the aesthetic reading which contributes to language enrichment by providing a rich context in which the lexical items are more memorable. By reading literature students get a clear idea about the syntactic structures of written texts and how they differ from the spoken language. He suggests that learning about the formation and function of the sentences and the structure of a paragraph or a longer stretch of language, learners develop their writing and speaking skills. Their vocabulary also expands and this whole “process leads to cultural enrichment” (p. 4). This kind of reading helps students make connections between the text and their own culture and become aware of the effect that the text has on their own identity: „...a universe of possibilities is opened for the study of a foreign language where students can weave their own experience and life...“ (p. 7).

2.3. Literature as authentic material

Authentic materials reflect the reality of the language. They enable learners to cope with real life situations. These materials involve the readers in life experiences which provoke feelings, interpretations, assumptions and predictions. They create opportunities for discussions and enjoyment which contribute to building their confidence. Another benefit of using authentic texts is that they help learners to gain „heightened awareness of how language can mean, how its resources can be exploited to express different perspectives on familiar reality“ (Widdowson, 1992, as cited in Daskalovska and Dimova, 2012, p. 1183). It is more likely that language acquisition will occur if learners are exposed to meaningful input. The main task when reading literature is its interpretation and in order to be able to interpret the meaning students have to be involved in many activities such as asking questions, forming hypothesis, using their imagination, their background knowledge and their personal experience. In fact, as Widdowson (ibid.) suggests, the process of questioning before getting to the interpretation is what really matters. By developing their interpretation skills, students develop strategies for understanding texts for a life time, the result of which is long-term learning which will help them in every situation when they are supposed to analyse or interpret a literary work. The teacher should not expect that they will all come to the same or similar interpretations, because their life experience and cognitive and affective characteristics are very different and they influence the process of interpretation



in different, original ways. As we have mentioned, it is the active involvement of the learners in the text which requires manipulation with the already existent schemata which integrates with the new knowledge they are exposed to and makes them modify, change their current attitudes or beliefs or only become aware of something new, different from what they already know. Reading authentic texts is „ a space for the exercise of mental energy; it is a space for creativity; it is a space where the personal elements of interaction, involvement, concern and personality can all be accommodated“ (McRae, 1991, as cited in Daskalovska and Dimova, 2012, p. 1185).

Making students fall in love with literature means preparing them for the most wonderful experience in foreign language acquisition. While enjoying the fiction world the books create, they spontaneously acquire everything they need to become communicatively competent. They acquire vocabulary, reading speed, reading comprehension, reading fluency, oral proficiency, writing abilities, and what is very important is that their motivation and confidence are enhanced. According to Hedge (2000), „learners can build their language competence, progress in their reading ability, become more independent in their studies, acquire cultural knowledge, and develop confidence and motivation to carry on learning“ (as cited in Daskalovska and Dimova, 2012, p. 1185). It is very important that the teacher selects appropriate literature that will provide comprehensible input and light up their motivation and interest.

2.4 Literature enhances cultural learning

Mikulecky (2008) claims that language and culture can not be separated because “language knowledge and thinking patterns are socially constructed within a cultural setting”. She explains that each culture creates different schemata of the world which results in constructing different models of the meaning of the text.

According to Hanauer (2001, p. 393), literary knowledge consists of three types of knowledge: knowledge of literary texts, knowledge of ways of reading literature and knowledge of interpretations of literature. All three types play an important role in the development of cultural knowledge. The author emphasises the importance of exposing students to presentations of well-formed interpretations of literary texts by expert literary readers because this enhances the students abilities to create their own interpretations. She also suggests that ‘the designs of meaning making and meaning production’ are different in different cultures and they ‘can produce drastically different understandings of the literary-texts’. Something that is considered to be positive in one culture or at least normal, can be considered as negative in another and



can be criticised. This means that „literary texts are not self-explanatory...they are ambiguous and polisemantic“ (Hanauer , 2001, p. 393). This is one of the reasons why these texts should be presented and analysed within the language classroom. One of the arguments against using literature in the language classroom is the fact that sometimes literature does not reflect the culture of the whole community, instead it reflects ‘one individual’s perspective of that culture’ (Edmondson, 1997, as cited in Hanauer, 2001, p. 395). This can be problematic because this individual view can be taken as a general one which would present a false picture of that society. As Hanauer suggests, the solution to this problem is presenting a variety of individual viewpoints, so that by combining the different cultural interpretation learners can create a deeper understanding of the foreign culture.

3. The role of the reader

When we read we use different kind of knowledge that we already possess. According to Gibbons (2002), we need a lot more than phonics knowledge in order to understand and interpret the text. Goodman (1967) states that there are three kinds of knowledge: semantic knowledge or knowledge of the world, syntactic knowledge which is knowledge of the structure of the language, and graphophonic knowledge or knowledge of the sound-letter relationship (as cited in Gibbons, 2002 , p. 78). All these kinds of knowledge are used simultaneously and they all contribute to understanding and interpreting the text. According to the schema theory, there is another kind of knowledge that contributes to effective reading. This is the knowledge that is related to the world and is based on our previous experiences and knowledge: “This data is organized in patterns which enables us to know what to expect and how to behave as part of a particular culture and society” (Anderson and Pearson, 1984, as cited in Gibbons, 2002, p. 79). Gibbons (2002, p. 79) explains that “schema theory, applied to reading, proposes that effective readers likewise draw on particular kinds of culturally acquired knowledge to guide and influence the comprehension process“. According to Wallace (1992), this schematic knowledge is of two types: knowledge of the topic and knowledge of the genre (as cited in Gibbons , 2002, p. 79). If we have this knowledge, then reading only confirms what we already know. A problem arises when our schematic knowledge is different from that one presented in the text. Then the reader needs to adapt his knowledge to conform to the norms of the culture of the language. Freebody and Luke (1990) suggest that effective reading is related to the multiple roles of the reader, and these roles are: code breaker , text participant , text user and text analyst. As a code breaker the reader



has to possess alphabetic awareness i.e phonetic knowledge. But, this is not sufficient for the successful reading of authentic texts. The reader also has to be a text participant. This role allows the reader to connect the text with his knowledge of the world and culture and generic structure. As Gibbons (2002, p. 99) remarks, “being a text participant, means having the resources to match text with appropriate content and cultural knowledge“.

As mentioned above , another role is the one of a text user which means that the reader is able to participate in the social activities based on a written text. In other words, readers are able to predict what would be significant in the text, they know how to approach a character study. This means that the reader is able to draw the meaning from the text because of the presented reader role model. As a text analyst, the reader should be able to read critically and recognize what is the author’s intention, whether it is manipulative or only informative or just a reflection of a different culture and different beliefs. These roles of the reader are at the same time the reading skills the reader has to possess in order to be able to read for meaning. As Mikulecky (2008) suggests, they are “cognitive processes that the reader uses to make sense of the text”, and teachers should help their students to develop the skills that will enable them to understand literary texts.

Gibbons (2002, p. 83) remarks that “the knowledge readers bring to the text is critical in their ability to get meaning from it”. In order to make them able to match what they already know to what is new for them, the teacher must move from the already known to the new or what is yet to come, which does not mean that they should avoid books that contain unfamiliar content. According to Gibbons (2002), instead of avoiding these kinds of books the teacher should build up the knowledge that is relevant to the text. This is closely related to the pre-reading phase or what the teacher does before introducing the text. Unfamiliarity with the language may also affect the quality of the reading . If the reader does not understand some of the words, he/she may not be able to predict what will come next. This means that children must be given the opportunity to become familiar with the text or the book before they read it. All of these can be achieved if the teacher provides good learning conditions, one of them being rich reading environment and good reading strategies.

4. Models of teaching literature

Teaching literature is not an easy task on the part of the teachers. It needs careful planning and good strategies that will contribute to understanding the message of the text or the book and interpreting it in your own, original way. According to Carter and Long (1991, as cited in Savvidou, 2004), teaching



literature can fall into one of the three main models: the cultural model, the language model, the personal growth model. These models are related to each other but still differ in some features. Through the first model students learn about the culture or system of attitudes and beliefs and they acquire new vocabulary and expressions. In other words, they encounter universal ideas but in a way they are seen and treated or experienced in another culture. The second model focuses on the language and the main objective when using this model is to enable the student to develop an original way of interpreting the text and to expose students to good examples of language use. This model is most often used for language development, but there is a risk that it can turn language learning into a mechanistic and boring task. The third model, the model for personal growth represents a genuine interest in reading, choosing topics of interest, reading for pleasure and emotional and imaginative engagement of the learner. Motivation for reading here is intrinsic, not extrinsic. Students read not for the sake of passing the exam, but for the sake of their own personal growth. They evaluate because they want and have something to say about the text or the book. When using literature, some teachers focus on the knowledge about literature and learning facts about authors and literary contexts, which does not lead to reading for pleasure or extensive reading. On the other hand, as Savvidou (2004) suggests, if teachers use literature as a resource they can encourage personal pleasure in reading and active involvement in the text. This is a student-centered approach which involves active engagement of learners. In order to make students able to do in-depth reading, the teacher should first develop their linguistic competences to some extent. It is very important that students are prepared to link to the text experientially, in other words they should have had similar experience in order to be able to understand the meaning of the book. In this way they will get involved in the text and the text will become a learning stimulus which will help them overcome the small difficulties that arise because of some unknown vocabulary.

5. Texts and apparatus

When working on a literary text, the learner should be asked to work comparatively, contrasting phrases and evaluating the way their meanings are created. Usually teachers start with very short texts or even ambiguous phrases in order to introduce the learners to some of the ways of approaching literary texts. The apparatus can open up questions of reaction, response and opinion which will lead to language production. And language production is one of the main aims of language teaching. According to McRae (1996), when using literature, language learning moves beyond the four traditional



skills, i.e it helps students develop a fifth skill and that is thinking. This way of learning offers individual reaction and response and the learner can expand their lexical and structural knowledge and they can experiment with the target language in affective and practical ways. Teachers should not be afraid of the mystery of literature because language is open to all and it is the richest source of learning potential for learners at all levels. Linguists agree that literary texts are appropriate for learners of all levels, but this approach should be encouraged and developed from the earliest stages of language learning. It is very important that the teacher knows what is the aim of using representational materials and why they should become part of the language learning process.

5.1 Criteria for selecting the text

The first criteria when choosing a text is the students' cultural background. The teacher should always bear in mind that their knowledge and expectations may help or hamper their understanding of the text. But sometimes what is new and unknown may awaken students' interest. Another criteria is the students' linguistic proficiency which includes familiarity with the usual norms of language use and recognising when they are violated, students' ability to infer meanings, will the students be motivated to enjoy the text or maybe they will be demotivated by the difficulties of the language. Another criteria is students' literary background which refers to their literary competence in their mother tongue which may help them to read and interpret literature in English efficiently.

5.2 Learning techniques

The teacher can use different techniques to use literature in the language classroom. Analyzing the language used in the text is one of them. Comparison and contrast require that the students find similarities or differences between two topic-related texts. Expansion is another technique for working with literature in which students have to add certain elements or predict what happens after the story finishes. Another technique that can be used is matching. Students are given two sets of items which they must link taking into account both syntax and meaning. Media transfer asks students to transform a text from one medium to another, for example from poetry to prose or from written to oral. Reconstruction allows students to re-establish certain elements in a text which have been omitted or jumbled. Reduction is used when the teacher wants to teach the students how to make a short summary of the text and keep the meaning. The replacement technique requires replacing some text elements with others of the same kind.



5.3 Planning for reading a text

According to Gibbons (2002), reading activities should help readers understand the particular text they are reading and they should help readers develop good reading strategies for reading other texts. This means that we could make long term contribution to effective reading . If the teacher explains the unknown words before the children read the text, they will understand the text, but this won't have a long term effect on their reading strategies and they will not be able to cope with unknown words they will meet later in other texts. In other words, teachers should offer explicit strategies for dealing with unknown vocabulary when reading other texts .

The most effective framework for working with texts is dividing the reading activities into three sections: activities that will be done before the reading, activities that students do while reading is going on and activities that will be done after the text has been read. This framework offers a very effective way of working with texts. The goal of pre-reading activities is to prepare the student to deal with linguistic and cultural difficulties and to activate prior knowledge. These activities should not deal with every difficulty but they should develop students sense of what they will be reading about so that they will be prepared and they will be less dependent on the words in the text . When they already have some sense of the overall meaning they will be able to understand more linguistically complex language. During-reading activities are intended to involve the reader actively in the text and to model good reading strategies. As soon as the learners are familiar with the text and no longer have comprehension difficulties, the teacher can introduce after-reading activities. These activities should fulfill three major purposes. First, the text can be used as a basis for specific language study, such as focus on a particular item of grammar. These activities give students the freedom to experiment with their creativity and imagination or simply transfer the information into a different form, a time line or a diagram or poetry. These activities should be created in the way that they always require students to get back to the text and check on specific information.

6. Conclusion

Using literature in the classroom is a great tool, but we cannot forget that we have to choose the right material so that students can maximize their learning. It has to be interesting and adequate for each student level. We would all agree that learners can benefit from literature; we are responsible for choosing material that catches their interest, so that they want to read and listen more, which results in further and richer learning. Literary texts create opportunities



for personal expression as well as reinforce learner's knowledge of lexical and grammatical structure and enable learners to develop their communicative and cognitive skills. Reading and learning are in a symbiotic relationship, "while overall language development supports reading, so too does reading support language development" (Wallace, 1992, as cited in Gibbons, 2002, p. 97).

While reading, the learner uses many types of knowledge and he uses it simultaneously to understand the meaning of the text. Reading is not a simple skill and there are strategies that can be used for helping students to learn to read for meaning. Knowledge that students possess or the schematic patterns contribute to different understanding of the text, i.e. their cultural knowledge can be very different from the culture of the people whose language they are learning and this can obscure or colour the original meaning. It is very important that teachers plan well before working with literary texts, especially the pre-reading phase which is very important because in this phase they motivate the learners and awaken their interest in the text.

We would conclude the paper with a strong recommendation for using literary texts as a source of authentic material in the classroom. They involve the learners in a spontaneous and enjoyable process of language acquisition, allow personal growth and enhance all language skill at the same time developing the most important one - thinking.

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