
Foreign Language Teaching and Literary Works as Effective Blending Components

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ABSTRACT

This paper writes on the issue of literary work incorporation in foreign language learning. Due to the fact that the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages supports the methodology of language learning through “real-life situations”, the paper aims to support literary works as ones best reflecting real-life events. Bearing in mind the fact that literary inclusion in the foreign language classroom is not very common practice in general and in Kosovo in particular, through the descriptive practice, we hereby instigate the hypothesis that with the right choice of material which would fulfil certain criteria and teacher’s guidance with particular steps, the benefits would be in both productive and receptive skills in the target language. Following the firm grip on the chosen material regarding literary work, it equally discusses the interaction and activity patterns which would help both introvert and extrovert students in maintaining the course of the interaction in the literary work discussion, upholding the idea that literary works provoke debates. Not averting from mentioning the skeptical side for this type of material in language classrooms, we strived to prove the integrity of the complementary material in the language learning process.

Keywords: literary works, foreign language learning, non-linear learning, interaction, discussion

Introduction

The inclusion of literature in the foreign language classroom is not a very common practice although it cannot be described as a new method. It has been used for centuries and had a primary position in language and translation as well as grammar and vocabulary acquisition as a traditional way of learning until the 1960s when it gradually vanished from the curricula due to the introduction of the increased linguistic requirements. Nevertheless, by the end of the 1970s, new approaches contributed to the revival of literature use in language learning which extended to nowadays with not very prevalent use or embracing stance. This hesitating mindset, in terms of literary work inclusion, does not derive from the lack of interest as much as the lack of knowledge of literature and its possible role in the language classroom.

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) [1], as an instructional material regarding language learning, writes, “The methodological message of the CEFR is that language learning should be directed towards enabling learners to act in real-life situations, expressing themselves and accomplishing tasks of different natures” [1] (p. 27). Let us remain

emphatic in the “real-life situation” element. If we want to act in “real-life situation”, we should learn from “real-life situation”, the fact which proves the importance of literature in language learning as where better than in literary works would you encounter adapted real-life situations. The realistic-like developments and plots included in literary works contain various aspects and elements of language which are the key to the communication and objective of every language learner. Moreover, literary works contain figurative language, vivid language, denotative and connotative meanings, as well as linguistic aspects of variety, clarity among others, all depending on the selected material in the classroom.

Based on the fact that we learn a language to understand and perceive the opinions and views of others and to communicate our ideas and convey our thoughts if we put our emphasis on the second element, one’s “expressing themselves” in a foreign language as per CEFR, one of the methods, through a literary work, can be using literary analysis and criticism which enable a person to convey their perception and viewpoint on the literary work which would be one way of exercising the target language. Moreover, by using literary works in the classroom, students

will be able to express their own assessment of the selected piece and use the foreign language in an unrestrained manner, which is simultaneously the subject of interest of this paper.

The third element recommended by CEFR of “accomplishing tasks of different natures”, when adapted in language learning through literary work, could be accomplished through various activities, interactions, and the reading of the literary piece as authentic material. This practice will raise students’ language awareness, as well as cultural awareness of the target language’s society.

The problem statement being the skepticism coming from both the teachers and students towards this practice, our hypothesis lies in the belief that through the right material and right guidance in the classroom, literary works can help students express their opinion which was gathered from the stimuli of emotional reactions to the developments in the literary work plot. In this manner, they will develop four language skills and interact in the target language as the ultimate objective in the foreign language classroom.

Literature Review

Foreign language learning is a process that Kosovar students approach with full commitment to, where besides the classes at school and university they take private courses. Teachers, on the other side, mainly practice traditional language learning methodology, not excluding minor attempts to an innovative approach. The traditional methodology includes standard coursebooks and pays no attention to learners’ individual characteristics and needs in the FLL process. Additionally, foreign language acquisition through literary works is not common nor sufficiently embraced when introduced in the classroom, leaving room for empirical studies to be done which would inspire and enforce this approach in our country.

In support of this method which we wish to utilize in our foreign language classrooms, we initially referred to Vygostky who considers that the key of language learning lies in social interactions which in lack of real physical contact can be substituted by literary works which as nature include social issues. Lazar who supports this method as one which crosses the classroom borders as well as besides others, Collie and Slater

who unfolds the importance of the literary works in language learning as material who subconsciously engages the students due to its included social matters.

Method

Using a descriptive approach, as an important notion in educational research as well as essential for recommendations, this study, which by examining the current situation in the foreign language classrooms, explains the steps that can be taken in literary work inclusion in the foreign language classroom. The description is determined as a result of my observations which is based on my classroom activities and exercises that included the gradual introduction of the literary material to the higher education students of foreign language courses. Our focus on the condition helped us examine the present facts and the results aided us to determine the steps that should be taken in order to resolve or change the established phenomenon.

Results

The study’s focus on the current condition helped us examine the present facts and the results aided us to determine the steps that should be taken in order to resolve or change the established phenomenon. The results further help in clearing the reasons, the methods, the influences, and the benefits of literary material inclusion in language learning.

Advantages and Suitability of Chosen Literary Work

Literary material in the language classroom can have various psychological and practical effects. The psychological effect is the thrill of reading in the target language, in particular with the students who moderately speak it, where it creates a sense of accomplishment once they see the result of their hard work. Using the language at a professional scale, such as reading a literary work in the original language, highly affects students’ personal fulfillment. This positive emotion of accomplishment, as students’ fundamental goal in language learning or ultimately in any learning, motivates towards even greater practical achievements by urging the need for reflection and creative thinking.

The satisfaction of reading literary work in the target language, when literature is considered

difficult to be understood, will urge the students to the practical use of the target language in expressing their opinion related to the literary work, either through writing or speaking practicing these productive skills in a foreign language. On the other hand, listening and reading of the same material, as receptive skills, contributes to vocabulary learning, learning of spelling, grammar, parts of speech, syntactic structures, moreover, promotes comprehension of any emotion and action undertaken in the material.

First, narratives play an important role in constituting the mind: enabling memory, structuring cognition, making meaning, and establishing identity. Second, because we are creatures constituted by narrative, we can be called by stories: engrossed by them, moved emotionally by them, persuaded by them, and ultimately motivated to act by them. Third, because narratives are shared, they can operate at both the individual and the collective level, constructing common desires, enlisting participation in a common drama, and scripting collective acts of meaning [2] (p.2).

As Mayer [2] stated above, stories act in various ways in our mind, they affect our memory, cognition, and comprehension, they kindle emotions in us from empathy to loath, as well as create a sense of involvement and connection. This connection or the students' interest in the selected material is highly significant and considered as one of the main criteria in choosing literary work for our classroom. The chosen material should be interesting. It should be attractive and raise curiosity. It should be pertinent and suitable. Only then it will enthrall and be the object of amusement for the students.

When we talk of interest and the appealing feature of the material, we refer to the material's fitting to the medians such as students' age, sociocultural background, universality, and their level of foreign language comprehension. The text which would contain information beyond their scope will be classified as not conform to their interest. Therefore, it should contain the information required by the target group, respectfully the students, even if it is not considered of great

contribution to the world literature, yet in-line with their curiosity.

The age of the characters can be one of the elements which would contribute to the appeal, hence, when the character is a peer with the students the affinity will easily be created. The parity in age would make students focus on characters' personalities and behavior, the challenges, and solutions they choose under the pressures that the plot served them. Similarly, "You enter into characters so that it seems as if it were your own heart beating beneath their costumes" [3] (p.63). According to French novelist, Gustave Flaubert readers' relating to the characters is a crucial matter. The battles, that characters go through, when resembling the conflicts of life of the readers, in our case students, the embracing will be quicker and stronger. For these readers, the character's type should kindle inside them the sense of "this is me" or "this could have been me". After the creation of unity with the character, the reader follows for the event development and characters' behavior and dealing with the problems.

The second element that can attract the interest of the students is the semblance of students' own cultural and social background to the settings of the literary work as it creates a sense of belonging and empathy for the developments in the story. The sense of fitting will urge the students to justify or judge occurrences on a more personal level, consequently, experience them deeper. Profound involvement in the issues grants students' responsibility of envisioning the solution to characters' problems, and the feeling of complacency or disappointment for the work's ending or conclusion. On the other side, differences in cultural and social levels, though we do not claim to be completely appalling and disheartening, can drive students away based on their superficial understanding. Their blinkered viewpoint prevents them from the comprehension of culturally motivated conduct, hence incomprehension of the changes in the plot. This situation is more widely seen with students of younger age.

Corresponding general knowledge of the students to the literary work, moreover universality of the themes is another point that captures more interest in the literary work. Just where the secret of the Shakespearean works lies, the themes of love,

hate, adultery and betrayal, war, love affairs, backstabbing are everlasting issues that never fail to attract the reader. Considering themselves as subjects of these kinds of feelings and acts, though in various levels and under different conditions, connects them to the plot. Hence, students can be easily related to any of these themes and create empathy while reading or develop any emotions towards the character, whether envy or rage.

The best literary themes explore human nature on a universal level. It's no surprise, then, that multiple books may share the same central idea. Each of the following popular theme examples reveals the human condition and offers readers food for thought long after the story is finished [4] (p.35).

The affinity to the text likewise contributes to easier comprehension due to the fact that students invoke their previous knowledge and background in extracting meaning from the text. After all, "Students learn best when they are engaged in full activities instead of exercises: activities that they themselves find meaningful" [5] (p.607). After inferring the meaning, students can include a metacognitive activity where they express their opinion on the author's delivery or text overall, all of which will require expression in the foreign language and use of the productive skill of speaking and writing.

Lastly, the level of the foreign language should be conforming to the level of the language used in the literary material. Once the level of the student and selected material match, the language will have more meaning and context will be in service of comprehension of the unknown vocabulary. Common European Framework of Reference for Language [1] considers B2 level as suitable for starting incorporating literary works in a foreign language classroom. In its overall scales of DIALANG, a diagnostic system of proficiency in foreign languages, it writes, "At this level (B2) people can understand articles and reports about contemporary issues when the writer takes a particular position on a problem or expresses a particular viewpoint. They can understand most short stories and popular novels" [1] (p. 235), while at the self-assessment grid the CEFR [1] reports regarding reading comprehension "I can understand contemporary literary prose" [1] (p. 27). These findings gradually upgrade going

towards levels C1 and C2 where the complexity of the text rises.

Literature as a special field, mainly but not only, maintaining the written artistic form in general and any literary work in particular, is a reflection of its own society with all the values, traditions, mindset, culture and moral, the components which add up to learning of socio-cultural side of society besides its language. Apart from practicing of the receptive skills of reading and listening, in the process of literary work usage in the classroom, it further activates students' imagination and critical thinking. Moreover, by reading the real-life situation, which is the best reflection of life, we are introduced to new experiences through which we encounter the vocabulary of ordinary events and best practices of natural language. These benefits boost students' interest in a nonlinear way of language learning and the use of literary work as a foreign language learning complementary material.

Although we are aware that literary works are mainly fictional and artistic creation, one still creates a connection with them, the connection which derives various emotions which can lead us to discuss it through analysis and criticism which ultimately produce interaction and communication as an element which helps in foreign language learning with all its four skills.

Steps in Using literary Work in Language Learning and Solution for Potential Difficulties

Language learning is not an easy thing, nor it should be expected as an overnight-taught phenomenon. Similarly, the incorporation of literary work in language learning requires dedication and interest in order to make the most of it. Therefore, there exist different approaches and different ways of its incorporation in the classroom, depending on various factors that surround our students. Once we follow the above-mentioned components of age, sociocultural background similarity, universal themes, and concordant language level, and students set dominance on the material, they will be incited for the deeper discussion and creation of an interactive environment. Interaction, as a method which develops all language skills, is a coveted practice in the classroom. Through this practice, students express their opinion on the issue, hence, convey their critical opinion to their classmates

and the teacher, where most of all are enabled to practice their productive skill of speaking.

...it is in their interactions with each other that teachers and students work together to create the intellectual and practical activities that shape both the form and the content of the target language, as well as the processes and outcomes of individual development [6] (p.43).

As interaction holds in itself categories such as joint learning, discussion, reading, listening, and speaking, we see the multiple benefits of this practice which arise from students' comprehension of the literary text. In contribution to this, the teachers can set "the interaction pattern" suitable to the lesson objectives, which in language learning are mainly speaking and communication in the target language. Depending on the literary work and the pattern the teacher wants to follow, the interaction groundwork can be constructed as think-pair-share, where the first step involves individual work when the students single-handedly prepare themselves, gather their thoughts, create a concept, and think of the vocabulary they want to use in the foreign language. This practice can in particularity help students who are slow thinkers and need more time for preparation as well as any foreign language learner in the selection of more elevated sentence structures and phrases to the idioms. Since the objective of each participant is their contribution to the group, this preparation period is of immense importance and time well consumed.

Interaction, participation in the conversation, as well as the connection to the literary work can be more effective if the teacher priorly creates steps to be followed or questions to be answered during the analysis of the literary work, which can be given prior to reading the material which would incite more attentive reading. These steps or questions can include information on:

- main theme and idea,
- writing style and genre,
- main plot,
- the connection between the main plot and subplots,

-main and supporting characters' strengths and weakness,

-main and supporting characters' relationship,

-specific questions regarding the plot, character development,

-moral message,

-or open-ended questions regarding any event/act/deed.

This method, which shows the teacher's structuration and procedure of the discussion, will guide the students but will not limit them in the criticism and opinion expression. Such classroom management will prevent pausing and will maintain the flow during students' delivery.

This boost for active participation is not always encouraging nor sufficient since every classroom contains both introvert and extrovert students where it is the teacher's task to keep active both types of characters as equally as possible. Both introvert and extrovert, as well as field-independent and dependent students, should be driven to the field sensitive work which would maximize their sensitivity to the story and discussions of the literary work, consequently, the usage of the target language. Individuals' contribution to the group is always fitting to their character and their interaction strategy, a respectively certain manner of their participation. Therefore, while extrovert students make more questions and are ready to participate more in the activities, introvert students can be silent learners and ready to answer even more questions yet only when asked directly. Due to this phenomenon, teachers should be attentive in the task distribution besides giving the steps to be followed. Thus, introverted students should be directed towards certain things such as character analysis, character comparisons, and chosen excerpt analysis, which have more compact content and require more condensed focus. Consequently, these students will carry the responsibility of "having to" participate at least in that particular discussions as their problem does not stand in incomprehension, yet in avoiding participation. While with the extrovert students, teachers have more untied hands and can delegate open discussion and activities of any sort starting from the themes, motifs, to the plot and subplot analysis.

Apart from the capacity of delivering their thoughts and opinions on literary work and their introversive or extroversive features, students should maintain the quality of being active listeners and good recipients. Their receptive skills will feed them with the necessary information, moreover, open-mindedness will carry them to new acquirements and knowledge. Once the information is obtained, in support of the introverted students to lessen their reserves and extrovert students to organize their conversation, teachers apart from the task delegations can likewise use these initiated sentences, given after the reading, which would guide them during their hesitant moments:

- I noticed in the book that...
- It captivated me when...
- I think it should have ...
- I can compare this plot/action/deed/character to...
- I think this section tells ...
- What I would change/add/remove is...

Due to the fact that everyone's comprehension level and background knowledge differ, the interpretation of the literary text is always unique and individually developed. This exceptionality automatically establishes the creative use of literature in language learning with never the same observations, never the same reflection nor response.

Discussion

Rather than a straightforward grammatical or functional syllabus, we should think of a contextual syllabus, one through which learners gradually acquire not only the ability to produce and understand the forms of the language but the capacity to reflect on how the choice of these forms in spoken and written discourse both defines and is determined by personal relationships, social situations, and cultural presuppositions [7] (p.4).

Regarding the skepticism and defense involving literary work inclusion in language learning, notwithstanding the above being said, we cannot oversee the fact that there is skepticism on literature inclusion in foreign language learning.

One of the beliefs is that the comprehension of the text is never complete, thus students are inept for the discussion of the same. Having this thought, the encouragement of a critical approach or analysis of the text becomes impractical. Conversely, the uncompromising belief of learning language through coursebooks and grammar exercises makes teachers troubled and hesitant to interlarding literature to their foreign language course from the fear of failure, as [8] states "Many language teachers have told me that they feel inadequate when faced with 'literature', either because they have no 'literary' qualification or because they have not studied literature since their university days" [8] (p.9). Such hesitation also comes from [9] who claims "that literature does not activate cognitive mechanisms in any way that is different from other texts" [9] (p.467), as well as, from McKay [10] who considers "literature as one that maintains its own complicated language not suitable for foreign language learners due to its distinct purpose" [10] (p.234). Along the same line, against the opposition, there are given proofs of literature's complementary features in the foreign language classroom by many researchers such as, Collie and Slater (1987) who write that literature "spur their own (students') creation of imaginative works, literature provides valuable authentic material, develops personal involvement and help contribute to readers' cultural, as well as language enrichment" [11] (p.120); Lazar [12] who says,

...focusing on deviant uses of language can help learners to become aware of specific stylistic effects and also to consider how these effects are achieved by departing from the norm, and literature is a valuable way of supplementing the restricted input of the classroom and of expanding language awareness and fostering acquisition [12] (p.214),

among other supporters of the literature incorporation into language learning, mentioning its comeback and authenticity in the language classroom.

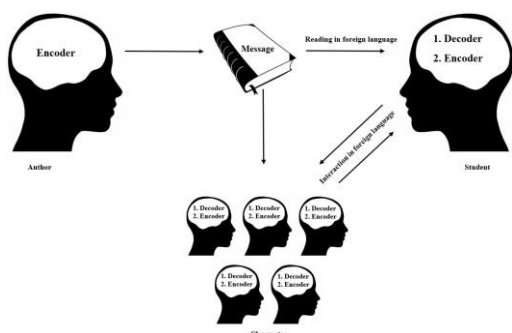
This paper is in the support of literature as a practice that can influence students' creativity, critical thinking, and emotional reaction which would incite them in expressing the opinion gathered from these stimuli. This fact stands when

students are in the act of mindful reading as opposed to what is called “mindless reading” when they physically read yet mentally do not connect with the material [13] (p.206), similar to unemotional connection with the exercises used in coursebooks. Emotional detachment precludes grasping or comprehension of the material. Hence, Goodman [14] on the psycholinguistic process of reading writes:

Reading is a receptive language process. It is a psycholinguistic process in that it starts with a linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning constructed by the reader. There is thus an essential interaction between language and thought in reading. The writer encodes thought as language and the reader decodes language to thought [14](p.12).

Regarding practicing this process in language teaching/learning, it is “the decoding language to the thought” that is our focal point as a supporting element of interaction since it deciphers the material read and consequently creates an opinion on the same, the opinion which would eventually be expressed by a productive skill of either speaking or writing. The reader, or in our case student, at this point maintains double roles and is psychologically and linguistically more active. While initially, he is the receiver of the encoded language, with the role of a decoder who decrypts the author’s message, he subsequently becomes a sender by encoding his own thoughts into language through which he expresses his opinion and criticism on the texts, hence interacts with other receivers/senders/students in the classroom who experience the same process of encoding and decoding (Figure 1.).

Figure 1. Psycholinguistic process of reading and interacting



Ultimately, “ ‘reading is an interactive process’ that takes place between the text and the reader’s processing strategies and background knowledge” [15](p.33). Therefore, with these multiple activities, when students read, they give meaning to the actions based on their processing connected to the previous knowledge. With the reference to their preexisting information, students get familiar with the developments in the story which simultaneously contribute to the overall understanding of the text through the contextual meaning of the new vocabulary, all in support of foreign language improvement.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As a philosophy of second language learning through literary works, we would refer to the idea that Vygotsky uses in the Theory of Language Development as a part of Sociocultural Theory (SCT), where he claims that the key to cognition is in social interaction, which can also be used in support of literary work inclusion in language learning, in the case of impossibility to create social interaction with the native speaker [16]. Through literary material, the student will not be in direct interaction with other individuals, but, will participate and be recognizant of the plot’s characters’ interactions, dialogues, and actions, which is the closest to real-life or is the simulation of real-life interaction. This connection likewise refers to the real-life situations mentioned in CEFR as a productive element that stimulates communicative language competence. This brings us to the point that literary works and language learning do not have to exist separately when they can have a double effect when in correlation and to each other’s service. Hence, literature can be included in a foreign language classroom as a material of nonlinear way of learning which is a natural way of language learning.

No matter the supporting and skeptical arguments on literature and language learning convergence, what further should be done is the confidence in literature and reading literary works for the language learning purposes that teachers should inoculate in their students as a material that motivates the students and increases their collaboration. We, again and again, go back to the teacher as one who should raise this awareness through the selection of the suitable material and well-constructed lesson plan which would be implemented after the identification of the

students' needs in terms of their strengths and weaknesses, what captivates their interest, and what are their lacking skills. Teachers should likewise develop the belief and prove that literary work usage in the classroom does not end with just reading it, yet, it is the material which will boost their creativity in sentence construction, language usage, and personal growth.

Apart from the mentioned steps of guidance and initiated sentences, it should further be worked on the incorporation of native language in the classroom with the purpose of clarifying unknown words or unfamiliar issues mentioned in the literary work. This activity can contribute to an advanced comprehension of the literary work and should not be considered as a retreat. Furthermore, the successful analysis of literary work can be likewise improved with the inputs from the background information on literary work. In order to afford assistance to the students with less comprehensive ability due to their lower language level, teachers can proceed with the "paraphrastic approach" which includes paraphrasing and retelling of the story with simpler terms suitable to students' comprehension.

Once students give meaning to the text, they feel comfortable in creating an opinion on the developments. This contribution of giving meaning to the literary material, as an ultimately genuine expression in the target language, offer them the satisfaction of active participant in the reading process and assures their success in foreign language learning objective as with literary material you are offered multiple services such as language teaching through authentic material, sociocultural growth, and creative instilment incentive. In support of our recommendation, we can mention that adding to the importance of literary work in foreign language learning, CEFR emphasizes the importance of national and regional literature as contributors to European cultural heritage, hence carrying the load of more than just aesthetic element and having also intellectual and sociocultural benefits [1] (p.56).

Future research is going to be focused on the issue of higher education students' attitude regarding the literary work inclusion in the foreign language courses, and this being verified with separate questionnaires at the beginning and the end of the semester, in order to determine the change in their

approach before and after application of this rare practice at the universities of Kosovo. The results will help us reveal the supply and demand equilibrium which will come to our assistance during class tailoring and language curricula drafting.

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