

## USING LITERARY TEXTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS' INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

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Due to constant and rapid changes occurring in the contemporary world, the outcomes of foreign language learning (FL) should be re-thought and focused on the specific needs of modern learners. Above all, as a result of the globalisation process and mobility programmes, people not only encounter members of different communities worldwide, but education has also been internationalised at all its levels. Therefore, apart from the development of learners' linguistic competence, there is a need for the development of their intercultural competence since they should be able to successfully communicate in different sociocultural contexts. One of the ways in which this can be achieved is certainly the use of authentic materials in the classroom as they communicate ideas and are culturally loaded. As literary texts deal with cultural topics involving readers cognitively and affectively, they should find their place in foreign language teaching (FLT).

*Keywords: literary texts, authentic materials, intercultural competence,  
foreign language learning (FLL), foreign language teaching (FLT)*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Although certain attempts were made to integrate culture with foreign language learning (FLL) before the beginning of 1990s (Brooks, 1964; Byram, 1988, 1989; Lado, 1957), its importance came to the foreground with the advent of globalisation. In fact, the process of globalisation has contributed to the increased population mobility, thus leading to the creation of multilingual and multicultural societies. Even though learners' linguistic competence is crucial for communication in the globalised world, it is no longer sufficient to suit the needs of modern learners. Only integrating culture with FLL allows both communication and understanding among individuals from different sociocultural backgrounds (Kramsch, 1998) because language and culture

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are inseparable and culture gives meaning and context to language (Byram & Cain, 1998).

Apparently, in the contemporary society the main outcome of FLL is not only the development of learners' linguistic competence but also the creation of intercultural speakers who should be competent to interpret both language and culture while communicating in specific intercultural contexts (Byram, 1997a; Kramsch, 1998). Consequently, Byram (1989, 1991, 1997a) presented a model for the integration of learners' native cultures and languages in foreign language teaching (FLT) as a means of achieving intercultural communicative competence. This model shaped EU policy towards linguistic and cultural education (Council of Europe, 2001). Namely, by encouraging mobility, European integrations have created a multilingual and multicultural environment (Kramer, 1997; Zarate, 2003), and thereby a need for cultural studies within the framework of FLL. Foreign language learners should possess adequate cultural knowledge besides the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary because problems of cultural mismatch often hinder communication and the development of successful social relationships (Liddicoat, 2004). Discussing cultural diversity broadens learners' horizons and prepares them to understand and accept other cultures, and this leads to the development of their intercultural competence.

## **2. LANGUAGE AND CULTURE**

In an intercultural approach to language teaching, culture should be taught in a way that it develops learners' intercultural skills together with their communicative skills. Brown (2000) argues that language and culture cannot be separated from each other without losing their significance. On the one hand, culture presents itself through language, and, on the other hand, language is important for cultural change. Therefore, one of the crucial roles of language teachers is to develop their learners' understanding of other cultures through language. This can be achieved in the way that foreign language learners learn about cultures, compare and explore them and finally find their own 'third place' between them (Liddicoat, 2004). If culture is integrated with FLL, learners will be able to communicate with native and non-native speakers in accordance with the cultural norms associated with language (Omaggio & Hadley, 1986). Moreover, they can develop positive attitudes towards other cultures and become more tolerant. At the same time, not only do they acquire the knowledge of other cultures, but they also increase the understanding of their own culture (Lado, 1964). Due to their communicative function, both language and culture carry meanings. While language carries syntactic, semantic and pragmatic meanings that enable communication between language users (Brooks, 1997), culture carries cultural meaning that is expressed through patterns of behaviour

(Saville-Troike, 2003). Even if linguistically correct, some sentences can cause misunderstanding in a different cultural context (Schulz, 2007). In order to avoid that, it is important to understand different cultural norms of interaction as well as people's values and thoughts (Saville-Troike, 2003).

Consequently, the importance of cultural education within the framework of FLT was recognised by the EU policy makers. According to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)* "in an intercultural approach, it is a central objective of language learning to promote the favourable development of the learner's whole personality and sense of identity in response to the enriching experience of otherness in language and culture" (Council of Europe, 2001: 1). Therefore, instead of creating a near native speaker, the focus of FLT has shifted towards creating an intercultural speaker (Kramsch, 1998) who will "navigate between the languages and cultures" (Liddicoat, 2004: 19) and successfully communicate in different sociocultural contexts. The foreign language classroom has become the place where students develop their cultural awareness in order to understand and accept other cultures. When learning a foreign language, students encounter a new culture which they compare to their native culture, thus becoming more reflective (Byram 1989; Kramsch 2000; Liddicoat, 2004). In this process, they become aware of the similarities and differences between the cultures and express their positive or negative attitude towards them. The role of the teacher is to motivate learners to analyse their cultural experiences and develop their cultural awareness, and, in that way, they become actively involved in the creation of their knowledge about the culture (Liddicoat 2004; Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino & Kohler, 2003).

Obviously, culture should be taught in the foreign language classroom, but there are different types of culture that should find their place in FLT. Accordingly, Kramsch (1996) distinguishes the culture that is expressed through language in everyday ways of speaking and acting, the cultures of different nationalities and the culture shared by various language speakers around the world. Similarly, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) speak of the source culture, the target culture and the international culture. Whereas the source culture is beneficial for the development of a positive cultural identity, the target culture has a great motivational force for learning the target language and helps students develop positive attitudes towards these people and countries. In addition, the international culture refers to various cultures and covers cultural topics concerning the global society (Matsuda, 2012). Therefore, foreign language teachers should develop their learners' cultural knowledge, so that they become aware of foreign cultures as well as their own. That will raise their cultural awareness, thus gradually leading to the development of their cultural competence (Byram, 1989; Fenner, 2000; Kramsch, 1995; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2004). In fact, learners' cultural

competence may be presented as their intercultural competence because it refers to their competence of the source culture, the target culture, and the international culture.

Consequently, foreign language teachers should carefully select teaching materials that will support an intercultural approach to FLT. In other words, teaching materials should contribute to developing learners' communicative skills as well as their cultural awareness. Not only should culture and language be linked in the foreign language classroom in order to support language learning, but learners should also actively engage with cultural contents because these are not only facts to be memorised. Namely, using cultural contents in FLT should encourage learners to notice, compare and reflect on both language and culture. Otherwise, learners may form false assumptions about a foreign culture, which could lead to cultural misunderstandings. In order to avoid this, it is inevitable to start teaching culture from the early stages of FLT (Liddicoat, 2004).

Since textbooks often lack relevant cultural information, foreign language learners' intercultural competence can be developed by using authentic materials. This term is used to refer to cultural artefacts, such as literary texts, newspaper and magazine articles, TV and radio broadcasts which represent real language that is written for a real audience for the purpose of communication (Morrow, 1977). Since they communicate ideas, authentic texts cannot be regarded without the cultural context in which they were created. According to Troncoso (2010: 90), "authentic resources represent a meaningful exposure to language and culture and often play the role of sociocultural mediators in the formal context of the foreign language classroom". They provide learners with the possibility to deal with authentic language that is used in the real world, so that learners are involved on a deeper level and feel that they are using the language for real purposes (Daskalovska & Dimova, 2012). However, the choice of authentic materials depends upon the teacher, learners' needs and educational contexts in which they are exploited (Feng & Byram, 2002). They should encourage learners to interact with them, to become involved emotionally and creatively and to relate them to their own experience. In this aspect, literary texts play a significant role in the foreign language classroom because they raise learners' cultural awareness and contribute to their intercultural understanding.

### **3. LITERARY TEXTS IN FLL AND FLT**

In the history of FLT, the value of using literary texts in the classroom has been underestimated as foreign language teachers frequently feel incompetent to teach literature. In particular, the traditional approach to literary texts advocates their use in order to illustrate grammatical rules and enrich learners' vocabulary regarding them as finished products that must

be analysed and explained, which makes learners dependent on the teacher (Hall, 2005). However, teaching literature in a foreign language offers a new perspective in the globalised world. In fact, literature provides readers with an access to foreign cultures and languages because it contains stories about different cultures in which identity is negotiated through language. In other words, it represents the language and culture of a specific speech community and is “a form of cultural and linguistic negotiation” (Hall, 2005: 67). Therefore, in recent years cultural studies as well as literary studies have been advocated at all levels of FLL and FLT. It is essential that learners start reading literature at the early stages of FLL because of its humanistic and educational role. Besides linguistic benefits, literary texts offer other educational benefits such as intercultural understanding, empathy and tolerance because they represent learners’ native culture as well as foreign cultures (Bland, 2018).

It is claimed that there is a strong link between literature, language and culture. Literature is a rich source of authentic material which is beneficial for foreign language learners and which facilitates communication. What is more, cultural awareness can be promoted through language and literature pedagogies since language gives record of its users and can be used to develop learners’ awareness of their own culture as well as the foreign culture (Hall, 2005). Similarly, Brumfit and Carter (2000) argue that literary texts are made from language, and the patterns made by language can be analysed in FLT. Nonetheless, intuitive responses to a literary text are central to the process of reading literature. When interacting with the literary text, foreign language learners infer meanings, which makes reading more enjoyable and stimulating for them. Since they are actively engaged in the exploration of linguistic and cultural processes in literary texts, they encounter new discourses and accept them (Kramsch, 1985).

Brumfit and Carter (2000) argue that there is no literary language, but language can be used in a literary way. When studying literature, learners identify and understand the operation of language for different communicative functions. However, the four skills approach to FLT ignores representational language which is open to interpretation and requires negotiation in order to be understood and focuses on referential language where words have denotational meanings. Therefore, there is a need to include the fifth skill in FLT, i.e. the skill of processing and thinking that requires discussion and the statement of opinions and views. The development of the fifth skill involves language awareness, text awareness and cultural awareness, and that can be achieved by using teaching materials which, apart from developing the basic language skills, also require interpretation skills and develop learners’ cultural awareness (McRae, 2008).

It is important for teachers to develop their learners' literary competence in order to make them sensitive towards cultural norms and expectations which are valued in different cultures. As foreign language learners cannot approach literary texts with the intuition of native speakers, they should explicitly be taught reading strategies in the development of their literary competence (Brumfit & Carter, 2000). Lütge (2013) points out that teachers should develop their learners' literary literacy, which is a term used to refer to different literary competences such as a reading competence, a cultural competence, a reflective competence and a foreign language discourse competence. In this view, Ellis (2016) uses the term multiple literacies which should be developed from the early stages of FLL by learning how to interpret and decode information conveyed through multiple modes. For instance, in order to develop their cultural literacy, learners should be able to interpret and understand similarities and differences between the culture depicted in a literary text and their own cultural reality.

The interpretation of literary texts by foreign language learners is not the same as that by native speakers who interpret them with a different sociocultural background and from their own personal experience. This reflects the differences between 'cultural reality' and 'cultural imagination' (Kramersch, 2000). Consequently, "the foreign language teacher's task is to endeavour to ensure that the synthesis that is born from this encounter will occur in a third space, from the foreign reader's perspective but using skills that will assist him/her in understanding the explicit and implicit meanings in a given (con)text" (Gonçalves Matos, 2005: 60). The term 'third space' has been used in order to refer to the space between the two cultures. In other words, that is a place from which literary texts are read and which stimulates critical reading, thus contributing to the cognitive and affective development of foreign language learners (Bhabha, 2002; Byram, 1997b; Gonçalves Matos, 2005; Kramersch, 1999, 2000; Purves, 1993; Sen Gupta, 2003). In this way learners are involved in the meaning-making process because they integrate their own understanding and expectations with a literary text. However, there is a possibility that they misinterpret some of the conversations based on the conventions which are inaccessible to them, and the literary text might be misunderstood. Therefore, the teacher should clarify the points that cause misunderstanding in order to encourage learners to read. Furthermore, the role of the teacher is also to use carefully designed activities so that their students could respond appropriately to the ideas expressed in the literary text (Brumfit & Carter, 2000).

Foreign language classes consist of learners who come from different sociocultural backgrounds and have different ways of understanding the world. Moreover, they bring their generational, family, social class, ethnic and national cultures into the classroom (Bland, 2018). Even a homogeneous



foreign language classroom is a multicultural space in which foreign language is used in order to express learners' identity and membership (Hyland, 2006). Also, the classroom reflects the teacher's attitudes and expectations as well as his/her moral values (Choen, Manion & Morrison, 1996). What is more, it is a safe place for reflection in which literary texts are open to learners' own interpretations. In fact, foreign language learners are engaged both cognitively and affectively, and their perspectives are shared in the classroom. Reading these texts critically, they reflect on the ideas from the intercultural point of view, thus gaining different experiences. As a result, they develop self-awareness, which is necessary for understanding and accepting another culture (Gonçalves Matos, 2011).

The awareness raising process starts from the earliest stages of FLL. When selecting literary texts, foreign language teachers should consider their learners' linguistic proficiency, maturity level and interests (Maley, 2001). Only the literary texts that are not linguistically demanding and that deal with issues that are not beyond learners' maturity level can enhance motivation. Furthermore, literary texts are also used to encourage learners' personal involvement by arousing their interest and providing strong, positive reactions from them (Collie & Slater, 1991). Since they are engaged cognitively and affectively, learners interpret foreign culture from the point of view of their own and develop critical self-awareness, tolerance and empathy for otherness (Phipps & González, 2004; Zacharias, 2005). This can be achieved only through analytical and creative tasks using representational materials that motivate learners and build their confidence to say something which is worth saying in order to give some personal contribution to discussion. In the discussion of representational texts there are no incorrect answers, so students can express their opinion and develop critical thinking skills (McRae, 2008). For example, at the early stages of FLL, teachers can use picture books so that learners could observe the illustrations, ask questions about the content or the language and compare similarities and differences between their own culture and the foreign culture. Even though it is important that teachers explain certain cultural information to young learners, the focus should be put on encouraging them to discover and find out information for themselves, so that they become aware of cultural differences (Ellis & Brewster, 2014).

On the one hand, reading literature is motivating as learners are emotionally involved, whereas, on the other hand, it interacts with the FLL process on the cognitive level (McKay, 1986). However, the sociocultural aspects of reading literature are crucial for the development of learners' cultural awareness as literary texts provide access to cultural knowledge of the target language community (Kramsch, 2000). They enable "the learner's interaction with the text, with another society and culture while

encouraging intercultural understanding and communication” (Gonçalves Matos, 2005: 6). Since literary texts depict a world in which protagonists come from different sociocultural backgrounds, learners observe the world from different perspectives and become involved both at a cognitive and at an emotional level. In other words, they are required both to understand the text and engage in the process of developing their self-awareness when they are confronted with the subjective worlds of characters (Bredella, 1996, 2000; Brumfit & Carter, 2000; Burwitz-Meltzer, 2001; Delanoy, 1993; Kramsch, 2000, 2003; Rogers & Soter, 1997; Soter, 1997).

By reading literary texts, foreign language learners become able to understand other cultures at a deeper level. They develop empathy and understanding towards them and become able to see similarities between foreign cultures and their own, which helps them value the differences (Hibbs, 2016). Therefore, it is claimed that literature “provides a means of building bridges of understanding across countries and cultures” (Short, 2011: 131). It leads to intercultural understanding, which helps foreign language learners to “decentre and take up the perspectives of the other, to see the world from another place” (Gonçalves Matos, 2011: 1). When reading literature, they live the characters’ lives and reflect on their decisions considering whether they would act in a similar or a different way in their position. In other words, learners identify with the characters and experience other cultural perspectives (Lütge, 2013). They compare the life experiences of the characters with their own and make connections between the two cultures. In that process, they recognise and appreciate important values shared by both cultures and become aware of cultural perspectives other than their own. As a result, they raise their awareness of the otherness, which contributes to the development of their intercultural competence (Hibbs, 2016; Lütge, 2013).

Nevertheless, literature can provide a number of sensitive topics that may be interesting for learners, but challenging for teachers. Yet, if these topics are avoided, learners are not encouraged to explore controversial issues, which may lead to boredom. Therefore, sensitive topics should be explored in the classroom with the emphasis on developing empathy and mutual respect because “being intercultural means to be able to accept the others’ beliefs and values, even if we cannot approve of them” (Bredella, 2003: 594). However, intercultural understanding is difficult to achieve because literary texts are subject to individual interpretations and are not representative of the whole society. Due to that, they can also reinforce prejudices and stereotypes because different learners read differently. To avoid these generalisations is one of the central issues in cultural education (Edmondson, 1997; Hall, 2005). This can be achieved if teachers supply learners with background information and “provide the model towards which the students work” (Brumfit & Carter,



2000: 23). It does not mean that learners should copy the teacher's responses; on the contrary, they should develop their own. In addition, literary texts should not be regarded as real documents of different cultures but used as a platform for provoking critical discussion. In that way, learners will be able to understand the foreign culture by negotiating meaning. By reflecting on literary texts, they may adopt different views on the world (Gonçalves Matos, 2005), thus broadening their horizons. Therefore, it is essential to value alternative perspectives and experiences in FLT (Hall, 2005).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

FLL is facing new challenges in the globalised world. On the one hand, there are great migrations caused by economic, political, social or religious factors that are gradually changing the cultural and linguistic map of the world. On the other hand, European integrations have encouraged mobility and, as a result, internationalised education through different Erasmus programmes that stimulate international projects at all educational levels. Consequently, members of different nationalities come together in various sociocultural contexts, so that many researchers have recognised the deficiencies of the communicative and task-based approaches in FLT. Namely, the creation of near native speakers is no longer the sole objective of FLT as it is not a prerequisite for successful communication in the multilingual and multicultural world. Besides, the emphasis is put on the intercultural approach that will contribute to the creation of intercultural speakers, which should suit the needs of global citizens.

As a result, foreign language teachers should be equipped with specific knowledge, skills, beliefs and attitudes which are not the traditional foreign language teacher competences. The new foreign language teachers are the foreign language and intercultural competence teachers (Breka & Petravić, 2015; Sercu, 2006). They have been assigned a role of intercultural mediators who should endeavour to develop their learners' self-awareness and their acceptance of otherness. Therefore, they should include cultural contents into their teaching practice by using authentic materials in the classroom.

Literary texts are authentic materials that engage learners both cognitively and affectively. Furthermore, they frequently deal with different cultural issues depicting sensitive topics that are likely to provoke discussion on complex dilemmas. What is more, learners' native culture should be taught alongside the target culture and the international culture in the classroom because, only then, learners will be able to perceive others' values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours and compare them to their own. In that way, foreign language learners will develop tolerance and empathy towards other cultures and, eventually, become competent intercultural speakers capable of successful communication in different sociocultural backgrounds.

However, foreign language learners can be culturally challenged by literary works as they do not possess adequate cultural knowledge. Therefore, Kramsch (1997) considers literature even more enjoyable for them because in that way they get an insight into the private lives of people from a different culture and become aware of alternative perspectives. It can be argued that cultural content is more important than language in the comprehension of literary texts. If the cultural background is familiar, linguistic factors will not hinder understanding. On the contrary, literary texts are misunderstood. Nevertheless, the fact that literary texts may be difficult for foreign language learners to process is not an argument for not using them in the classroom.

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## UPORABA KNJIŽEVNIH TEKSTOVA ZA RAZVIJANJE MEĐUKULTURNE KOMPETENCIJE U NASTAVI STRANOGA JEZIKA

Zbog stalnih i brzih promjena koje se događaju u suvremenom svijetu, potrebno je razmisliti o ishodima učenja stranoga jezika te ih prilagoditi potrebama suvremenih učenika. Naime, zbog procesa globalizacije i raznih programa koji potiču mobilnost, pripadnici različitih zajednica dolaze u kontakt u svim dijelovima svijeta. Štoviše, teži se i internacionalizaciji obrazovanja, i to na svim razinama. Stoga, osim razvijanja jezične kompetencije učenika, izuzetno je važno i razvijanje njihove međukulturne kompetencije kako bi mogli uspješno komunicirati u različitim društveno-kulturnim kontekstima. To se između ostalog može postići i uporabom autentičnih materijala, pogotovo književnih tekstova, u nastavi stranoga jezika jer upravo oni obrađuju teme koje su povezane s kulturom pojedinih naroda.

Ključne riječi: *književni tekstovi, autentični materijali, međukulturna kompetencija, učenje stranoga jezika, nastava stranoga jezika*