
CREATIVE USE OF LITERATURE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract: The article deals with problems of using artistic literature in a foreign language teaching. The author strongly advocates the idea that literature plays a very important role at the English lessons and if teachers properly motivate their students, their work can be very useful and successful. Teaching of all four skills, reading, listening, writing and speaking, is emphasized and also some activities that can help teachers when working with literary texts are suggested.

Key words: *Artistic literature, motivation, creativity, reading, listening, writing, speaking.*

VYUŽÍVANIE LITERATÚRY VO VYUČOVANÍ CUDZÍCH JAZYKOV

Abstrakt: Príspevok sa týka využívania umeleckej literatúry vo vyučovaní cudzích jazykov. Autorka veľmi podporuje názor, že literatúra zohráva veľmi dôležitú úlohu na hodinách anglického jazyka a ak učitelia vhodne motivujú svojich študentov, ich práca môže byť veľmi úspešná a užitočná. Zdôrazňuje vyučovanie všetkých štyroch zručností, teda čítania, písania, počúvania a hovorenia, a navrhuje niekoľko aktivít, ktoré môžu učitelia použiť pri práci s literatúrou.

Kľúčové slová: *Čítanie, hovorenie, kreativita, motivácia, písanie, počúvanie, umelecká literatúra.*

Introduction

In the last decades, artistic literature has been included into the process of language teaching. “ In the sixties and seventies, in fact, there was a distinct reaction against the use of any literary English at all in the classroom, but now the pendulum has swung the other way and there is a renewed interest in literature teaching.” (Hill, 1992, p.7)

There are a lot of reasons why to use literary texts when teaching and learning a foreign language, and one of them is that “...literature, which speaks to the heart as much as to the mind, provides material with some emotional colour that can make fuller contact with the learner’s own life, and can thus counterbalance the more fragmented effect of many

collections of texts used in the classroom“ (Collie, Slater, 1996, p.2). As a result of this, students working with literature are able to think about different possibilities in solving problems that occur in the text of particular literature. Situations described in literature are often closely related to their own experiences. This helps them to be inventive and come up with various ideas that could be used even in their real life.

Creative use of literature

Motivation

When we want to answer the question what creative use of literature is, we have to highlight that any use of literature is creative. Everybody is creative because it is an inborn qualification, but everybody can learn how to be more creative. Even the reading of a text without additional tasks can be considered creative because the reader develops his fantasy. However, there are a lot of activities that help develop creativity.

Obviously, the choice of literature, as well as activities presented during the language lessons, has a great impact on learners. Teachers must motivate their students why to read and what to read. Motivated students put much more effort into their learning. *“it is also true that where student motivation is high, where the text has a particular interest for them due either to its exciting story or relevance to their way of life, they will be prepared to expend more effort on understanding it...”* (Hill, 1994, p.31).

Speaking of motivation, there are a lot of different levels of motivation. A highly motivated student is more likely to succeed. Teaching materials have to be carefully prepared and created since they may raise the motivation. Roe suggests several levels of motivation for those who want to learn English. He divides them into three levels:

1. *The highest level* is for those who require English to obtain a degree or get a promotion.
2. *The second level* is for those who would like to have good results in their exams.
3. *The third level* is for those who want to travel abroad or widen their knowledge (Roe, In: Kennedy, Bolitho, 1991).

Another important division of motivation is into two levels:

1. *An instrumental motivation*, which is used to achieve a practical or Professional purpose.
2. *An integrative motivation*, which is used especially when the learner wants to identify with the social or cultural aspects of learning.

It is the instrumental motivation that is emphasized in schools more often. It is also true that motivation may change from one lesson to another. This may be the result of the development of students as well as the impact of the environment. *“In particular it is worth remembering that levels of motivation in individuals and groups may fluctuate from one lesson to the next (this is true in all learning) and the teacher will know when to take advantage of an upturn in his learners’ motivation.”* (Kennedy, Bolitho, 1991, p.16) It is therefore essential to organize every lesson very carefully and try to stimulate their needs and interests. Presentation of the material should be done in such a way so that students can both enjoy and profit from the work.

There are a lot of different strategies that can be applied to the teaching of reading and understanding literature. They contain methods such as prediction, creative writing, role-plays, drama, etc. The teacher’s role is to cooperate with the learners. He should present them opportunities to work with the text in different ways, because he is the one from whom the students are learning, copying his views and sometimes even his beliefs. He is the one who encourages students to come up with their suggestions and use them effectively to develop their learning skills, which cover, as it is generally known, reading, listening, writing and finally speaking. Recent studies have shown that teaching these learning skills should be involved in every teaching of a language. Artistic literature is a valuable source for teachers. *“Each novel, short story or play can spark off a wealth of different activities. Tasks and exercises based on a literary text can provide valuable practice in listening, speaking or writing, as well as improving reading skills. Literary works of all kinds are now becoming increasingly available in spoken form on cassettes”* (Collie, Slater, 1996:36). The teacher can focus the aim of his lesson on one skill only although the skills are seldom practised in isolation. For example, a lesson focused on reading may involve any or all of the other skills.

It would be a very long list if we wanted to describe all possible methods when teaching the above mentioned skills creatively, so we will only summarize them.

Teaching reading

Reading is considered a basic activity when speaking about using literary texts in the language teaching. At a basic level, everyone is familiar with the reading skill. No matter whether students know the alphabet and are able to connect the single letters into words and sentences, they still need to learn reading strategies in learning a foreign language. Skill in reading like all skills takes time to develop and can only develop when learners are given many opportunities to read. Language teachers know a lot of strategies they can use to build and improve reading skills when teaching reading. The following ones belong among the most popular:

- *Skimming* – it is used when a student has to select from a list only those titles that are appropriate for his task. Skimming involves quickly reading through the list and matching titles with his topic.
- *Scanning* – this involves reading more slowly than skimming so that students can extract specific information that is required.
- *Predicting* – the reader predicts how a text is going to develop and what a writer is likely to say next.
- *Intensive reading* – is usually used with a shorter section when students read a text to find certain details.
- *Extensive reading* – this kind of reading is used when we read for pleasure, to understand a text in general.

Teaching writing

It is generally known that writing as a learning skill is in most cases neglected. Teachers either omit this skill or place it as a homework activity. It must be mentioned that students have to be taught how to write. *“Just as reading has a purpose, so should writing. The writer must be aware why he is writing a particular piece and who his readership is meant to be.”* (Kennedy, Bolitho, 1991, p.87) Learners need to know the difference in the style of formal and informal writing. They must be aware of the fact that writing a personal letter or diary is not the same as writing an essay or a review of a story. The teacher should explain these differences and make the writing purposeful. The first important point is that students should be explained the aim of their writing. They should know whether they are writing to learn how to spell words or to express their opinions or simply to practise the language. Another important element is to encourage them to cooperate. This cooperation

involves discussion about the ideas from the text but also their own, plans of writing and revision of students' work. If they have an audience who would listen to their writing, their motivation rises. So they could and should be encouraged by the teacher to write and read sentences which, for instance, other students have to decide true or false or which act as riddles for the others to guess the answer to.

There are a lot of other activities that can make students very creative when working with artistic literature. After reading the original text, they can write another story based on it but from a different point of view, or make it into a dialogue, or change the end of the original story. They can change its form into a letter, advertisement, or if they are skilled enough, they can write a poem.

Teaching listening

It is very important to be in contact with the English language presented by many different speakers. When students have a possibility to hear other speakers besides their own teacher, they gain a certain ability to adapt to different kinds of pronunciation different ways of speaking.

Listening is an active activity. According to Ellis and Brewster (1991), listening will not be successful if students are simply asked to listen to a tape. It is effective if students are given a particular task and if they listen to find specific information.

There are many situations when learners need to use their listening skills, for example: social situations with their friends, colleagues or strangers, listening to and answering a telephone call, face-to-face conversations, listening to instructions..., thus it is very important to train listening as often as possible. Every language teacher uses tapes that are connected with the teacher's book. Nevertheless, in my opinion, students will be more motivated if they can also listen to songs, stories, lullabies, or other supplementary material that is closer to their mental development. The teacher can also use various films with very good students.

Again, there are quite a lot of strategies to develop listening skills:

- prediction – students will guess the right answers (this is based on their background knowledge)
- attitude – when listening we may feel the speaker's attitude (according to the intonation and stress he/she uses)

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- working out the meaning based on the context – listening for general understanding (students try to guess the unknown vocabulary)
 - gap filling (this activity is very useful with songs)
 - true/false questions
 - multiple choice

Teaching speaking

The reason for learning the language is to be able to use it in practice, to make oneself understood. Thus, the most frequent way of using it is speaking. According to Ur, and I believe most language teachers would agree, speaking plays an important part in learning a foreign language. She says: *"Of all the four skills /listening, speaking, reading and writing/, speaking seems intuitively the most important. People who know a language are referred to as 'speakers' of that language, as if speaking included all other kinds of knowing, and many if not most foreign learners are primarily interested in learning to speak"* (Ur, 1991, p.120). Schools concentrate more on grammar, but many learners are interested in speaking activities. On the other hand, our experience shows that very often teachers ask questions but the willingness of many students to answer is very low. Of course, the teacher cannot force students to speak, but he can encourage them to take part in conversation. Students need to be given opportunities to speak as soon and as much as possible.

Obviously, there are many possibilities for the teacher when working with artistic literature. In conclusion, I would like to present a few activities which I have tried with my students during my long teaching career and which proved successful. Most of them can be used with all age groups.

1. Story-telling games – students speak out a story when the teacher's finger moves. When the teacher points at another student, then he/she continues to invent the story. The teacher can define limits, e.g. the number of sentences, using specific vocabulary or tense...
2. TV or radio interviews – the teacher acts as an interviewer and students as characters who are asked questions about events, other characters or their own opinion. Characters are selected from a book, story, novel...
3. Telling the truth – students have sheets of paper stuck on their backs, and each student will write something to that person. He/she may represent a character from a book.

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4. Music workshop – the teacher reads a story and students create dramatic effects with their voices, percussion instruments or improvised simple musical instruments.
 5. Fly on the wall – students pretend they are flies on the wall and comment on a certain situation, such as the plot in a story, discussion of two people, an important event – Halloween, Christmas...
 6. Autobiographical sketch – students make an autobiographical sketch of a famous character from a story. They will draw things as a clue to describe a certain character.
 7. Curriculum vitae – this activity is similar to the previous one, students write a CV of a selected character and will supply all the needed unknown information.
 8. Completion of a story – the teacher presents only a part of a story – introduction, ending – and students write the missing part.
 9. Making up dialogues – students write missing dialogues into the bubbles in comics according to the pictures.
 10. Description of a character – students receive a picture of a character from a book. Their task is to describe it in such a detail (body, clothes, facial expression, characteristic features) so that the other learners can guess who this character is.
 11. Design of a cover of a book – when students are familiar with the plot of a story, fairy tale or novel, they design a cover on this book.
 12. In a bookshop – a dialogue between a shop-assistant and customer about books. A shop-assistant presents several books giving their basic characteristics to a customer in order to sell him a book. Here a school library can be used as the setting.
 13. What is it about? – students watch a story on the video without any voice. They are asked to retell the story guessing the plot from what they have seen.
 14. Who is the first? – it is a game (a competition) in which students are asked to look for particular word categories (adjectives, verbs, modal verbs...)
 15. Opposites – students choose two characters and try to compare them (e.g., David and Goliath).
 16. Letter to a character – students write a letter to a character (formal, informal, request...).
 17. What would you do if? – students are asked to imagine they would be in the place of a character. They answer the question what they would do in a different way (reaction on a story, change from good to bad or vice versa...).

18. Actors – students divided into groups of four are given a short story. They read it and act it to their classmates, using verbal or non-verbal language (pantomime).
19. Story telling – students are given a series of questions or words which suggest a story they should create.
20. Stories based on things – students are given several objects (or their pictures) and are asked to make a story in which all these objects would be included.
21. Picture spread – the teacher tells a story and then spreads a large number of pictures among students who are asked to choose one picture each. The pictures should remind them of an important theme of the story and they describe them.
22. Making a poster – students prepare a poster on a new book or a famous character. This activity can also be done as a project work for an individual or groups.
23. Party – students organize a party for characters in a book. They will write an invitation for them, prepare menu and social activities.
24. Searching for differences – students listen to a story or watch its film adaptation and then compare them with the book version.
25. Radio – learners prepare scripts and produce their own radio programme using a microphone.

Some activities may seem very complicated in their design but most of them can be adapted, extended or improved. These activities (and there are many more) are not definite models. Their choice and use depend on the teacher, his expertise and creativity but also on his students and their creativity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to stress that when teachers use artistic literature as a supplementary material in the teaching process they can be sure that their students can hear, read and work with the real language. Articles from textbooks are usually simplified or changed and this may have a negative effect on the learning process as well. Working with textbooks only can make children unable to cope with real texts and less able to understand and grasp new ideas. They need to be exposed to the real language that is used in real life and is not just made up for learning.

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