

THE USE OF LITERARY TEXTS AS DIDACTIC TOOLS IN THE TEACHING/LEARNING OF FRENCH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract : It is advisable in this article to be interested in the characteristics of the literary text which appears as the main tool in the teaching / learning of a foreign language namely the French language. Indeed, in the present study, we shall have to review some concepts like text, literature or even a literary fact, in order to show that literature has its place in FLE courses, and that any return to literary text as medium and model of the teaching / learning of FLE, turns out crucial for essentially establishing in the learner productive competencies in French.

Keywords: literature – Language - French as a foreign language

L'UTILISATION DE TEXTES LITTÉRAIRES COMME OUTILS DIDACTIQUES DANS L'ENSEIGNEMENT/APPRENTISSAGE DU FRANÇAIS LANGUE ÉTRANGÈRE

Résumé : Le présent article s'intéresse aux caractéristiques du texte littéraire qui apparaît comme l'outil principal dans l'enseignement/apprentissage d'une langue étrangère à savoir la langue française. En effet, dans la présente étude, il s'agira de passer en revue quelques concepts comme le texte, la littérature ou encore le fait littéraire, afin de montrer que la littérature a sa place dans les cours de FLE, et que tout retour au texte littéraire comme support et modèle de l'enseignement/apprentissage du FLE, s'avère crucial pour asseoir essentiellement chez l'apprenant des compétences productives en français.

Mots-clés : littérature - Langue - Français langue étrangère

Introduction

Our contribution forms part of a broader contemplation on the pedagogy of foreign language education, specifically focusing on the French language. The emphasis is on utilizing literary texts to foster the acquisition and refinement of language and intercultural skills, a significant educational undertaking. This article delves into a pivotal aspect, highlighting the role of literary texts in the didactics of French as a Foreign Language (FLE). The primary inquiry guiding our exploration is how incorporating literary texts can elevate the quality of FLE instruction. The underlying questions steering this reflective analysis include: What is literature? What is a literary text? What is a literary fact or discourse? Why introduce or teach literary texts in the FLE classroom? Considering that

the primary objective of the FLE classroom is to instil productive and receptive skills, what role does the teaching of literature play in achieving this goal?"

1. A Few Concepts

Firstly, it is crucial to emphasize the concept of literature and text before delving into the challenges associated with teaching literature. Etymologically, literature refers to writing. Understanding literature entails grasping the composition of a text and its written form. Additionally, it involves embracing notions like erudition, knowledge, and general culture that define the literary phenomenon. Escarpit contends that literature is primarily a subjective experience before being a matter of knowledge (Ouhibi-Ghassoul, 2003: 109). The literary phenomenon is defined by social life and its specificity within the realm of literature. The existence of a fact as a literary phenomenon relies on its distinctive quality. What constitutes a "literary fact" in one era may be perceived as a linguistic phenomenon in another, and vice versa. This perception is contingent upon the literary system to which the phenomenon is related. The correlation between the literary and social series is established through linguistic activity; literature serves a verbal function in social life (Tynianov, 1965: 132, as quoted by C. Achour and Rezzoug, 1990:92). The literary text is viewed as a linguistic product—an observable and interrogatable space. It serves as a revelation of the intricate workings of the language system (Peytard, 1986: 247), governed by a language that establishes its system of reference operations. Furthermore, it is the outcome of an enunciation—an activity conducted upstream of its production.

2. The Literary Text and Its Characteristics

Discussing the distinctiveness of the literary text involves addressing its "literary" – the processes by which works of art fall within the realm of art and the aesthetic functioning of language. According to Jakobson, literarity is the defining factor that makes a work literary and allows us to categorize it as such (1960, cited by C. Achour and S. Rezzoug, 1990:87). Literary works exhibit another specific characteristic, as outlined by P. Macherey (quoted by N. Ouhibi-Ghassoul, 2003, p.110) – autonomy. Autonomy, in this context, implies that a literary work establishes its own rules by constructing its limits. This sets literary texts apart; for instance, scientific texts have practical purposes. Unlike non-literary texts, which offer a single meaning, literary works are open to various interpretations. They convey ideas while concealing interpretations, allowing for diverse meanings based on a single, unalterable source of signs. The evolution of language sciences has added another dimension to the status of the literary text. New conceptions and perspectives, particularly those emphasizing the relationship between poetics and linguistics, have emerged, highlighting literature's linguistic particularity in creating a distinct signifying system; as R. Barthes (1964, quoted by Toursel and Vassevière, 1994: 7) states, literature is crafted from language – a matter already laden with meaning at the moment literature seizes it. Furthermore, literary works provide opportunities to cultivate an awareness of language in the context of reading. Literature embodies the nuances and complexities of language, encompassing semantic subtleties and ambiguity (Pieper, 2006: 11). Consequently, the selection of literary texts as didactic tools for teaching/learning

foreign languages is a pivotal phase in enhancing foreign language education. D. Coste asserts that literature, or literary work, is a central concern in the didactics of foreign languages (Coste, 1982: 59).

3. Using Literary Texts as Teaching Aids

Literary works are considered the most effective means of communication and emerged as an invaluable pedagogical tool in the FLE classroom, aiding learners in acquiring language skills more effectively. According to Peytard (1986, quoted by Rufat, 1997: p.583), the literary text operates in a non-linear and non-univocal manner, allowing for a regulated approach. Due to its capacity to reveal and illustrate the multifaceted nature of language, literary works naturally find a place in FLE lessons. J. Peytard proposes to didactics that the literary text should not be arbitrarily placed at the end or beginning of the methodological progression. Instead, it should be integrated from the outset of the language course, serving as a document for observation and analysis (Peytard, 1982: 102). Ouhibi refers to this by stating that language functions and is 'worked on' in the literary text more intensively than in any other text. Its construction ensures relative autonomy to the conditions of production and reception. Literary texts serve as spaces where a society develops and transmits its myths and rituals, making them particularly suitable for FLE lessons (Ouhibi-Ghassoul, 2003: 112).

From this perspective, it is crucial to recognize that the literary text is the most effective vehicle for conveying connoted values. Unfortunately, it is sometimes marginalized in FLE teaching for political and socio-cultural reasons. Riquois argues that literature has been excluded from the pedagogical package primarily because communicative teaching appears incompatible with the use of literary texts. It took several years, notably the work by Marie-Claude Albert and Marc Souchon in "*Literary Texts in the Language Classroom*," to view this type of text as a communicative document beneficial for language learning (Riquois, 2008: 143). Studies indicate that literary texts have a limited presence in school textbooks. While they often appear in literary works as the basis for language exercises, they are seldom utilized as tools for meaning production or interactive exchange, hindering the cultivation of pleasure from reading. Reading a literary text involves more than decoding signs; it entails perceiving the intricate movements of language.

4. Reading Literary Texts

We propose that one of the initial activities based on a literary text is the act of reading. Reading is the foundational step in acquainting learners with the intricacies of literary texts. Regarding reading literary texts, J-P Sartre, in his work "*What is literature*," contends that the literary object is a peculiar entity that only exists in motion. Its tangible existence relies on the concrete act of reading, which endures only as long as the act itself. Beyond that, all that remains are black traces on the paper (Sartre, 1948: 52). Engaging with these texts allows learners to mobilize their realities, experiences, and representations. Reading should be a continuous practice in the language classroom,

supplemented with guidance, commentary, and illustrations, aiding learners in mastering the language through reading. The primary objective is to cultivate specific skills in the learner, particularly those related to decoding and comprehending language, naturally leading to productive activities. We posit that reading literary texts is the sole means of discovering, analyzing, identifying types, understanding the style of discourse, and ultimately prompting the learner to produce and communicate. These experiences offer valuable material for introducing learners to communication within the class group through rewriting projects. Additionally, we assert that the literary text is not solely literature but also serves linguistic purposes. It stands out as the most effective pedagogical tool, enabling learners to explore all aspects (acoustic, graphic, morphosyntactic, semantic) of the foreign language. Furthermore, it serves as a prominent pedagogical tool for fostering reconciliation with others and their foreign cultures, encapsulating the concept of interculturality. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) underscores that learners of a second language and culture do not lose competence in their mother tongue and culture. The acquisition of new skills is not entirely independent of the previous ones. Learners become plurilingual, acquiring interculturality. Linguistic and cultural skills related to each language are influenced by knowledge of the other, contributing to intercultural awareness, skills, and know-how. This enriches individual personalities, enhances the ability to learn different foreign languages, and opens avenues to new cultural experiences (Council of Europe, 2001: 40). In summary, literature is viewed as an authentic medium for introducing learners to a foreign culture and language, aiming to cultivate intercultural competence.

5. Literary Texts and the Intercultural Approach

Among the various methods for teaching literary texts, the most widely used is the cultural method. This method emphasizes the intercultural, defined as all psychological, relational, group, and institutional processes generated by the interaction of cultures (Clanet, 1989: 21). The goal is to facilitate the reader's integration into the text. Interculturality is necessary because any relationship with the text is essentially intercultural, considering the cultural 'plurality' and the multiplicity of cultural cross-fertilizations characteristic of today's civilization (Séoud, 1997: 137). Acquiring another language, exploring its culture, and approaching its literature involves discovering and recognizing another system of values. Cervera views the literary text as an expression, a fragmentary view of a cultural model. Learning a foreign language is more than just studying it; it involves drawing a parallel between discovering and learning a language and highlighting a shared culture. Learning a foreign language, therefore, entails finding new cultural practices and values (Cervera, 2009: 46) and fostering the development of language skills that cannot be achieved without a genuine intercultural perspective. Literary texts are now considered authentic documents for introducing learners to FLE language skills and intercultural skills. We believe their use as a didactic tool should no longer be problematic. From this perspective, we align with Doubrovsky, who posits that the literary text is authentic. It should not be seen as a place for teaching language, civilization, or critical theories but as a space for learning. Learners can explore all

possibilities of the foreign language and all connotative, pragmatic, and cultural virtualities inscribed in it (S. Doubrovsky, 1971, quoted by J. Bekker, 2008:30).

Conclusion

We underscore the advantageous role of literary texts as a didactic tool in the EFL classroom and as a means of fostering the intercultural approach to foreign language education. We firmly believe that literary texts are pivotal in shaping and enhancing both language and intercultural skills. Additionally, it is crucial to recognize the indispensability of literature and culture in learning a foreign language. Without integrating these elements, the teaching and learning of language culture remain incomplete. As educators of French, we advocate for incorporating literary texts in FLE teaching due to their unique status as a 'language laboratory.' Even when the primary goal is language instruction rather than literary study, as noted by Jean Verrier, it is literary texts that breathe life into a language (Verrier, 1994: 159-174, quoted by R. Cervera).

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