

Teaching the Discourse of Transgression

Azzeddine Bouhassoun

Belhadj Bouchaib University Centre

Ain Temouchent, Algeria

Jenks defines transgression as ‘to go beyond the bounds or limits set by a commandment or law or convention; it is to violate or infringe’ (Jenks 02). The whole culture, therefore, has ‘the desire to transcend limits – limits that are physical, racial, aesthetic, sexual, national, legal and moral’ (Jenks 08). Transgression, in the Western culture, seems to point at boundaries, tries to understand them, and denounces them if not valid according to its own morality and taste. Transgression turns out to be more of an intellectual behavior rather than a transient denunciation of some thoughts. According to the Western mind, it is an intellectual initiative to understand and discover.

However, do we really need/have to teach the discourse of transgression if the latter chases religious beliefs, trespasses political and economic issues, hits the walls of sexuality and morality? How do we teach the discourse of transgression in our universities? What has transgression to do with education in general and teaching in particular?

Transgression, education and politics are closely knitted. There certainly should be some tacit guidelines to teach and learn taboos. Teachers are engaged to carry out a project of openness and tolerance within the boundaries of the society cultural and aesthetic tastes. Jenks sets transgression in the middle of the struggle between the master and the serf, the ‘oppressor and the oppressed’ to use Paulo Freire’s terminology (1993) when he sits education as a process to gain liberation and freedom.

Literature can be a field to speak openly and freely and learn. From a tiny classroom, transformation of minds can occur. Virginia Woolf argues that 'literature is no one's private ground: literature is common ground; let us trespass freely and fearlessly and find our own way for ourselves' (qtd. in Ayers 51). Jenks, Freire and Woolf agree on achieving freedom through, respectively, transgression, education and literature.

Suggested Method for transgression teaching

For Werner Delanoy (2005) 'readers are invited to become involved in secondary worlds and to ask themselves what a literary text means to them as a whole'. This implies integration of functional objectives: analysis of a (literary) text, an immersion in a fictional world to develop aesthetic tastes, improving the expressive competence, developing cultural competence, but above all the encounter with the different cultural Other. All of the above points converge towards the construction of an identity, sharpen a critical and free mind, and a development of one's own cultural awareness.

However, teaching foreign literature may pose some cultural challenges with regards to transgression. In fact, literature has always been a battlefield of transgression. There should be some strategies to teach transgression as it can be a very controversial, passionate and intellectually stimulating among students. Debates will prevail charged with emotions and most probably religious and ideological fervor. But we need to raise a question: Untill when should we stick our heads in the sand? When can we speak about transgression as the culturally different Other's way of life and a cultural attitude towards life and society, culture and politics ? Darwinism, Nitetscheanism, and Freudism have influenced much of modernist and post modernism world literature, and sexuality studies are invading the literary text. One can even go earlier in

time to Shakespeare to discover his sexual terminology or Milton's blasphemy. Is a teacher of literature to avoid all the enculturation chain ?

However, as put forth by Alison Phipps and Manuela Guilherme (2004), languages are never neutral; therefore, critical pedagogy and language teaching should always be suspicious. 'Those of us in the field of language and intercultural communication are constantly in situations where we are negotiating power, watching it shift and play between all our encounters as we use words from different languages, as we *language* in our own tongue and we attempt, in often broken, yet always profoundly hopeful ways, to reach out to others, and to communicate' (Phipps and Guilherme 02)

I suggest, so as to have control on the show, the top-down approach strategy¹ (Pendergast & McWilliam) as the starting departure point. The status of the teacher is a very controversing one in this case. He can be the oppressor who violents the oppressed through what Freire calls 'the banking' deposit education (Freire 72), but he can also be the political institution to operate the changes advocated by the oppressed. However, the top-down approach remains the perfect strategy for listeners to 'decode the incoming text.' (Macaro 38). The teacher does not teach transgression for the sake of transgression. It should be as suggested by Ayers (2014) inserted within a pedagogy of curiosity, a pedagogy of the unknown and that of skepticism. He needs to show clear goals, methods but above all clear results for his course. The teacher needs to know the transgression he wants to teach, the reason and how to relate it to the author's culture.

¹ This is already considered as a transgression by feminist scholarship, which sees in it a god/serf relation.

Teaching literature can take advantage of the skopos theory developed by the functionalist approach for translation. We have to consider the source text (ST) culture and the students's understanding and cultural awareness. In fact, the functionalist approach considers the register (field, tenor and mode) as an important step in Discourse Analysis (DA) and communication. Register is a linguistic variety and its description 'covers three major components: the situational context, the linguistic features, and the functional relationships between the first two components' (Biber 06). The analysis bears extra-textual and intra-textual features that remain mostly functional:

| | |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| Who transmits | on what subject matter |
| To whom | does s/he say |
| What for | what |
| By which medium | (what not) |
| Where | in what order |
| When | using which non-verbal elements |
| Why | in which words |
| A text | in what kind of sentences |
| With what function? | in which tone ? |
| | to what effect (Nord 41) |

According to Nord, *Who transmits* is the author, *what for* represents the autor's intentions, *To whom* is the audience, *By which medium/channel* stands for the text, *Where* for the place, and *When* for time of text production and reception. *Why* stands for the reasons and motives for communication. *What* stands for the information carried in the text. *What not* is the 'knowledge presuppositions' of the author. *In what order* refers to the order within the construction of the text. The *non verbal elements* stands for the intertextual elements that provide the connotation or further

information. *In which words* stand for the lexical choices and characteristics the author uses. *In what kind of sentences* refers to the syntactic structure that the author uses. The last question *to what effect?* refers ‘to a global or holistic concept, which comprises the interdependence or the interplay of extratextual and intra-textual factors.’ (Nord 42).

Any text is in a dialogical position and questions the cultural and philosophical legacy. However, respecting the functional approach in Discourse Analysis is salient to keep both the class and the debate within the frames of the scientific debate.

Skills students will develop:

Students will develop a variety of skills stretching from personal development to significant transformation and civic responsibility.

1. The ability to analyze a text using DA tools, stylistics and literary criticism. The student is confronted to analysis and learns the power of language in its use.
2. DA is a means for communication and we need to develop communication in our classroom cultural traditions. It is the beginning of ‘democratic’ reasoning in its foetal stage. Suppressions and repressions sit at the origins of conflicts. To recognize a problem and discuss it is the resolution of the problem rather than keep silent. Developing communication is the only way to respect each other, mutual acceptance, and it is a path to real ‘democracy’.
3. Teaching transgression is in no way an invitation to debauchery and blasphemy. It is not an immoral initiative either. It is however important for emancipation and critical mind, self-discovery and ‘mak[ing] conflicts visible’ (Ayers 39) either inside our hearts or in our society. Literature with its innovations, new ‘shocking’ themes is but a reflection on

society. Education is the training of reason and reasoning, and learning about taboos and transgression do not come through intuitive understanding. Therefore, students need to voice their own opinions and defend them with arguments.

4. Teaching language has also the duty to prepare an individual for the future through personal development and intercultural capabilities. Education of the oppressor creates a generation of dominated filled with credulity individuals (Freire 78) unable to compete or adapt to an economically and politically aggressive environment. The psychological submission to domination breeds an adaptation to a world of oppression. The individual will look for another oppressor and dominator. Language teaching needs to foster an individual with intercultural capabilities and instincts to interact easily with the cultural different Other. Communication is the ability to negotiate between personal and transnational culture and it is the sole means to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts but especially wars. Our society needs to prepare the future citizen open and tolerant to all ways of thoughts through education and open dialogues.
5. The ability to relativise one's own culture. Discovery of cultural self and identity in the flood of world culture will help students relativise their thoughts and beliefs. This will strengthen their own cultural identity and awareness of the civilizational legacy. Literature is the transformation of the world into world views and experiences and embody them into words. From understanding and interpreting a culture that is put into words, students can create their own worlds through their own words. From a tiny classroom to the huge world with different cultures, the student will learn to know who he is while searching deep

into his consciousness not only the act of belonging but also the act of freedom..

In conclusion, I think a teacher needs to tackle transgression in an appropriate manner when it is deeply related to cultural phenomenon. It is diagonally opposed to the western challenge to religious and political power (Ayers 136). The Noble Quran does not suppress words to plainly express man's religious duties and sexual relations when teaching muslims. Thus, it describes these sexual relations before fasting as in Al Baqara (2:187), or Al Baqara (2:223). In many other places, licit sexual relations or illicit ones (*fahcha*) are cited in the Noble Quran with different words bringing different stances of imagination. Essoyuti reveals in his *Asbeb Ennouzoul* (السيوطي 44) for aya 223 what we do not seem to be able to teach. The Prophet of Islam (PBUH) was of an unusual openness to teach and the first muslims used to turn to him for everything even in sexual matters. It is perhaps an ideal education type if we know how to frame it with our cultural legacy.

azzeddinebouhassoun@gmail.com

References

- Ayers, R. (2014). *Teaching the Taboo*. New York: Teacher College Press, University of Columbia.
- Biber, D. (2009). *Register, Genre, and Style*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Delanoy, W. (2005). A Dialogic Model for Literature Teaching. *ABAC Journal*, Vol. 25(No. 1), 53-66.
- Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Guilherme, A. P. (Éd.). (2004). *Critical Pedagogy, Political Approaches to Language and Intercultural Communication*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters LTD.
- Guilherme, M. (2009). *The Pragmatics of Intercultural Competence in Education and Training: A Cross-national Experiment on 'Diversity Management' in Becoming Interculturally Competent through Education and Training*. (M. B. Anwei Feng, Ed.) Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Jenks, C. (2003). *Transgression*. London: Routledge.
- Macaro, E. (2001). *Learning Strategies in Foreign and Second Language Classrooms*. New York: Continuum.
- McWilliam, D. P. (Nov-Dec 1999). Marginal pleasures: Teachers, transgression and transformation. *AARE Annual Conference*. Melbourne.
- Nord, C. (2005). *Text Analysis in Translation*. Amsterdam : Rodopi.
- Pendergast, D. (1999). Marginal pleasures: Teachers, transgression and transformation. *The Australian Association of Research in Education*.
- Stefan Horlacher, S. G. (Éd.). (2010). *Taboo and Transgression in British Literature from the Renaissance to the Present*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- السبيوطي. (2002). *أسباب النزول*. بيروت: مؤسسة الكتب الثقافية.