

ЛІТЕРАТУРОЗНАВСТВО

INTERPRETING FICTION IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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У статті розглядається художній текст як об'єкт міжкультурної комунікації, а також обґрунтовується різнокультурна діяльність автора і читача-інофона. Особлива увага приділяється лінгвокультурному коментареві, який є ключем до розуміння змісту та ідеї літературного твору.

Ключові слова: художній текст, міжкультурна комунікація, міжкультурна компетенція, лінгвокультурний коментар

В статье рассматривается художественный текст как объект межкультурной коммуникации, а также деятельность автора и читателя-инофона, которые принадлежат к разным культурам. Особенное место уделяется лингвокультурному комментарию, который становится ключом к пониманию содержания и идеи литературного произведения.

Ключевые слова: художественный текст, межкультурная коммуникация, межкультурная компетенция, лингвокультурный комментарий

The article deals with a literary text as a source of intercultural communication. Special attention is given to linguocultural commentaries that make the reader of a foreign culture go out of their limits, covering broader cultural reality than represented in the text in order to find out to what extent they influence the text.

Key words: literary text, intercultural communication, intercultural competence, linguocultural commentary

INTRODUCTION

Global transformations, which have been taking place in the world since the end of the 20th century, contributed greatly to the formation of a new intercultural paradigm in language learning. The idea of TEFL in the context of dialogue between cultures became of prime importance in modern linguodidactics.

Linguocultural capacity of literary works has become an object for contemporary researchers, where a lot of attention has been paid to didactics of literature (Gudkov, Hui Han, Kramsch, S. McKay, M. Nowacka and others).

A literary work is a part of culture, and at the same time, it is a source of intercultural competence, which is necessary for broadening the students' general outlook and developing their intercultural competence. Hence, the curriculum for EFL should include an insight into historical and cultural aspects of the relevant speech community in order to provide students with the background knowledge required to understand and interpret literature of the country being studied.

CHALLENGES IN INTEGRATING LITERARY TEXTS IN TEFL

Recently the linguodidactic priorities in the EFL classroom have moved towards intercultural problems. What follows is a student who is engaged in interpreting fiction and also gets acquainted with the artistic worldview of the writer/poet and the type of his/her language consciousness. In the language classroom, educators will deal with culture on a national level as well as an intercultural level. Thus, the analysis of a literary text should not be reduced to merely traditional linguistic commentary (stylistic devices, expressive means, imagery, plot, and composition). The tasks, which have to be solved during linguocultural analysis are much broader and accompanied by learning the culture of the people representing it.

It is common knowledge that every writer has a distinctive voice. And, it is important for a reader to be able to hear the individual voice of the writer in order to interpret the fictional text and perceive the gentle reverberations of meaning, the ingenious symbols to be explored, decoded, and analyzed; and define their literary value. It is difficult for a foreign reader to recognize all allusions and historic cultural references familiar to the native user of the language. We must not underestimate the value of cultural, historical, and linguistic commentaries as helpful instruments of grasping the content and the message of a literary work. In addition, it is important to select themes that should be highly relevant to students.

Literature offers several benefits to ESL classes. As S. McKay puts it [4, c. 191], “the advantage of using literature to develop language use is that literature presents language in discourse and develops an awareness of language use”. Literary texts offer a variety of genuine structures, vocabulary, styles, and register. They show the reader what sort of language (in terms of both semantics and syntax) would be appropriate in a given context.

From a methodological point of view, literature opens enormous possibilities for interpretation and discussion. It gives the teacher a chance to incorporate into a class curriculum pre-reading, while-reading, and after-reading activities designed especially for a chosen text. To the extent that students enjoy reading literature, it may increase their reading proficiency through a set of well-designed activities to maintain students’ interest and involvement: making predictions, writing essays, drawing character sketches, or deducing situations from contextual clues.

The most important thing remains is that an examination of a foreign culture, using those literary texts in translation that contain culture-specific information, and increase students’ understanding of that culture, and perhaps spur their own imaginative writing. By all means, an interaction with a literary text depends on a reader’s familiarity with the cultural assumptions in it. As P. Allen [1, c. 111] advocates, “Literature is a facet of culture. Its significance can be best understood in terms of its culture, and its purpose is meaningful only when the assumptions it is based on are understood and accepted”.

Literature texts are suitable for developing intercultural communicative competence. Not only do they invite their readers to subjectively view a nation or an ethnic group by portraying specific values, prejudices, and stereotypes, but they also offer their audience the chance to exchange their culturally restricted points of view together with the character of a piece of narration, or with the narrator telling his story. Literature texts guide their readers through the reading process focusing the readers’ attention not only on actions and characters.

The academic Rosenblatt [6, c. 445] found two distinct ways that readers approach texts. “Efferent” reading, according to Rosenblatt, is reading for the purpose of getting information. When we read from an efferent stance, we focus more on content than on form, attending more to the writer’s message than how that message is delivered. The opposite of efferent reading is described by Rosenblatt as “aesthetic” reading. Reading aesthetically involves concentrating upon the images, associations, and feelings the material evokes. The latter enables and strengthens the readers’ interaction with the text.

These ideas imply that teachers work with a story or poem in class not only on a cognitive level but also on an affective one, offering analytical and creative tasks to arrive at a deeper understanding of the linguocultural background of the text. Often creative tasks lend themselves to a blend of literary and intercultural objectives, leaving enough space for the learners where they can experiment with different perspectives and culturally different points of view as well as compare their own culture to that in the text [3, c. 74].

Thus, literature in TEFL in its present context tends to emphasize its role in improving communicative competence and create awareness in students on the culture and society of the relevant country.

PROCEDURES FOR CULTURE-ORIENTED ANALYSIS

The shift of the students' attention from the purely linguistic analysis of the text to a more culture-oriented analysis is of paramount importance. Accordingly, the emphasis is placed on "the contrast with the students' known 'home' literature and culture rather than 'establish literary and cultural parameters, especially where the difference between the learners' own culture and the target culture is large" [2, c. 20].

It is not easy to establish general procedures of comparing and contrasting methods in cultural studies. Still, this method can inspire intercultural interest in the students by raising their own cultural awareness and using it as a basis for intercultural communication. The aims of the cultural dimension in language teaching are related to the following [3, c. 76]:

- giving students an understanding of their own cultural identity;
- developing their ability to see similarities and differences among cultures;
- helping students to acquire an interested and critical attitude towards cultural/social issues;
- breaking down prejudices and developing students' tolerance;
- making language teaching more motivating.

However, when introducing cultural orientation classes we should take into consideration two kinds of ideas. The first one is connected with the very process of reading and the second one with class management. The criteria for designing such a reading program can be as follows [5, c. 65]:

- setting course objectives,
- selecting texts,
- designing reading activities.

The third issue requires more intense involvement and embraces pre-reading, while-reading, and after-reading activities.

The warm-up and pre-reading activities are designed to arouse learners' interest in the reading material. They include a glossary with linguocultural commentaries containing items and idioms which are relevant for an adequate understanding of a text, which students haven't come across before in their language practice.

The commentaries are designed to reflect the specific features of mentality, national character, ideals, morals, and the elements of foreign standards of living. They are given on the basis of specific items of the text, and then they make the reader of a foreign culture go out of their limits, covering broader cultural reality than represented in the text in order to find out to what extent they influence the text.

In this section "Three Cuckoo Birds with Songs and Kind Regards", a short story by Hryhir Tyutyunnyk will be discussed. The text for analysis is taken from the magazine "Welcome to Ukraine" and translated by Oleksandr Panasyev.

The metaphoric sense of the title needs interpreting: to send someone three cuckoo birds with songs and kind regards means to make someone forget about their love by sending good wishes especially if you don't need his/her love.

The events in the story take place in a Ukrainian village in the period from the early 1930s to the middle of 1950s. Tyutyunnyk's characters are set in the centre of the reader's interest against their social background.

The analysis of cultural realia could presuppose the following steps:

- Find realia of the time period described in the text,
- Think of some distinct features of the culture's lifestyle including clothes, occupation, social activities, values in the first half of the past century,
- Compare the typical lifestyle features of the first half of the past century to those of today.

Among typical culture bound items that should be explained in the glossary are as follows: *threshing machine* – a machine used to separate grains of wheat, corn, etc. from the rest of the plant; *scythemans* – a person who cuts grain or long grass using a scythe, a tool with a long blade on a long

wooden handle; *sheaf* (pl. *sheaves*) – a bunch of wheat, corn, etc. cut and bound together; *rick* – a haystack kept in a field; *halushky* (pl., singular – *halushka*) – a special sort of dumplings, a dish of Ukrainian cuisine; *togs* [plural] *informal* – clothes; *bandura* – a popular Ukrainian folk musical instrument.

While-reading activities include ones to check comprehension and language exercises such as “*Find in the text the sentences related to ...*”, “*Paraphrase the following items ...*”, “*Translate the following into ...*”, etc. They make the process of understanding easier, specifying textual implications, helping compare the facts and single out the necessary details, and enlightening the author’s point of view.

Another portion of activities help students predict the content of the text, or the author’s intention and message as a whole. For example,

- *How are the characters of Mykhailo, Sofiya, and Marfa introduced into the story?*
- *Are the names of Myshko, Sonya significant?*
- *Give a full character sketch of the hero / heroine with the following points to be covered: appearance (face, eyes, hair; body), social background, occupation, philosophy of life, and relationships with other characters.*

Special attention should be given to the translation tasks and paraphrasing whilst doing various activities. They aim at searching interlingual equivalents that reveal the accurate word-meaning in the context. At the same time, it makes the reader bear in mind that the word sense in the text is not autonomous; it depends entirely on the context (both in the original and translation). For example,

- *Interpret the meaning of the excerpts from the short story,*
- *In your opinion, should one consider them the symbolism of Ukrainian culture?*
- *What stylistic effect do they produce?*
- *Fill in the chart commenting on the story’s symbolism.*

Passages from “Three Cuckoo Birds ...”	Your Interpretation
a) I swear by the Holy Cross!	<i>a gesture with intention to serious commitment</i>
b) [...] have a drink to his health, please	<i>a toast or a ritual in which a drink is taken as an expression of honour</i>
c) cuckoo bird	<i>it lays its eggs in other birds’ nests (fig. unrequited love)</i>
d) [...] looked like a tender quail	<i>Quail is perceived as a harmless and tender creature (poetic comparison)</i>
e) Father’s pine	<i>Pine tree symbolism includes life, longevity and immortality</i>
f) Siberia which is so vast ...	<i>Siberian exile became the intentional genocide plan of Stalin’s government</i>

After-reading activities (“*Say why ...*”, “*Your opinion on ...*”, “*Discuss the following ...*”, “*Write an essay on one of the topics*”, “*Present your essay in class for questions, comments and further discussion*”, etc.) are designed not only for checking a deep and accurate understanding of the reading material in a broad extralinguistic cultural context but also at providing a creative usage of the text under study. The tasks for essay writing, for example, can be given like this:

- *True and pure love is much written about in the world literature. Do the tasks below.*
 - a) *Find out and write who of the world authors wrote about great love and greatness of heart.*
 - b) *What cultures and historical periods do these texts come from?*
 - c) *Are there such writers in your culture? (About 150-200 words).*

Thus, the assignments offered are problematic and creative. They are directed not only at the adoption or mastering of the phenomena of a certain culture, but also at the cultivation of the students' skills to think analytically. The student must uphold his/her point of view, consider the facts comprehensively, and without prejudices avoid groundless general conclusions as well as be culturally tolerant and sensitive.

CONCLUSION

In recent years the discussion as to the correlation between language and culture are still currently relevant. No doubt language and culture constitute the content of modern linguodidactics because language will acquire significance until it turns out in the context of culture. The introduction of the cultural component into the EFL classroom will be able to provide the meaningfulness of the process of learning and make it motivating for the students and the experts in the field of intercultural communication.

Besides, reorientation of the process of training the students-philologists centered on developing intercultural competences corresponding to contemporary needs of the essence and purpose of a course syllabus, "Linguocultural analysis of a literary text". This research comes from the position of transforming the national education by integrating the conditions of European processes. In order to improve the training of specialists in English philology in higher educational establishments, there arises a need to further strengthen the dynamics of applying intercultural communication theory to TEFL and elaborate on the common international curricula.

But, integrating language teaching with culture teaching is still at the stage of exploration. The introduction of a cultural component into language class is to promote students' curiosity about target culture and raise awareness of their own culture. As Hui Han [3. c. 76] rightly points out, "this does not impede students' language acquisition; on the contrary, it can provide a meaningful context for language learning, thus enhancing motivation". The skill-based approach where the students observe, analyze, and make conclusions is based on their prior knowledge of their own culture and can be compared and contrasted with the target culture.

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