

The Use of Literature as an Advanced Technique for Teaching English in the EFL/ESL Classroom

El uso de la literatura como técnica avanzada para la enseñanza del inglés como segunda lengua en el aula

MIRIAM FERNÁNDEZ DE CALEYA DALMAU

LICENCIADA EN FILOLOGÍA INGLESA. PROFESORA EN EL CES DON BOSCO,
UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID

JELENA BOBKINA

DOCTORA EN FILOLOGÍA ESLAVA Y EN LINGÜÍSTICA INDOEUROPEA.
PROFESORA EN LA UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID

MARÍA PILAR SARTO MARTES

LICENCIADA EN TRADUCCIÓN E INTERPRETACIÓN. PROFESORA DE SECUNDARIA,
COLEGIO GREDOS SAN DIEGO LAS SUERTES

Resumen

En el presente trabajo se investigan y analizan el alcance y la importancia del discurso literario en la adquisición de una lengua extranjera. El enfoque planteado en esta investigación combina cinco perspectivas esenciales en la enseñanza de la literatura a los estudiantes de inglés como segunda lengua: la herencia cultural, las habilidades del lenguaje, las funcionales, las de crítica literaria y las del crecimiento personal. Integradas en único modelo, no sólo ayudan a los estudiantes a desarrollar las habilidades lingüísticas y las diferentes áreas de una lengua, sino que también les ofrecen un contacto directo con la cultura de esta segunda lengua. Todo esto favorece entre los estudiantes una mejor comprensión de su propia identidad y de la complejidad del mundo que les rodea.

Palabras clave: enfoque de género, literatura, cultura, currículo de la lengua.

Abstract

The paper investigates and analyzes the extent and importance of literary discourse in foreign language acquisition. The approach suggested in this research combines five essential perspectives on the teaching literature to ESL/EFL students: the cultural heritage, the language skills, the functional, the critical literacy and the personal growth ones. Integrated into a single model, they not only help students to develop linguistic skills and different language areas, but also offer them a direct contact with the target language culture. All these promote better understanding of students' own identity and the complexity of the world around them.

Key words: genre approach, literature, culture, language curriculum.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Spanish National Curriculum standards in foreign language teaching are being reformed nowadays in order to meet new demands towards preparing bilingual students, critical and imaginative thinkers, effective communicators and active learners. One of the ways to reach these objectives is through introducing English Literature into language classrooms. Through analyzing and composing a diverse range of literary texts, students develop better understanding of cultural, social and technical aspects of the target language.

While working with literary texts, students construct, deconstruct and reconstruct a variety of textual genre representations. They not only learn to improve the basic literacy skills, but also to explore the historical, cultural and social contexts in which texts are being created and interpreted. Furthermore, working with texts contributes positively to the students' personal growth and psychological development.

In spite of the fact that until recently literature has not been given much emphasis in the EFL/ESL classroom, it offers potential benefits of a high order for students of English as a foreign language. In fact, literature elements could be highly beneficial for the foreign language development.

2. LITERATURE AS A TOOL TO TEACH LANGUAGE

British and American literature has been taught in non-English speaking countries overseas for over 100 years, playing a major part in the English language syllabus. Unfortunately, starting from the middle of the 20th century there has been a consistent rejection of using literature in the language classroom partially provoked by inadequacies of traditional literature-based methods.

A decline of literature as a language teaching tool has become quite evident all over the world. In fact, «few would dispute that there had been a decline in the prestige of English literature study abroad, particularly in the context of language learning» (Gilroy-Scott, 1983, p. 1). The literature component has been practically eliminated at early and intermediate levels of language gaining, concentrating language teaching mainly on reading, written and spoken skills.

In Spain, there is at present a high degree of uncertainty about the role of literature in a school foreign-language course. Although literature clearly benefits the teaching of language skills, quite a number of teachers still feel reluctant to include literary blocks into the language curriculum.

Those of the Spanish teachers who try to use literature in the classroom inevitably encounter a series of problem, such as lack of preparation in the area of literature teaching in TEFL; absence of clear-cut objectives defining the role of literature in EFL; absence of the background and training in literature, and, finally, lack of pedagogically-designed appropriate materials that can be used by language teachers in a classroom context.

Clearly, a change is needed to re-establish literature in the foreign-language curriculum in Spain. One of the possible ways to do it is through elaborating a didactic model that would exploit multi-dimensional cultural and linguistic characteristics literature texts offered to a modern reader.

According to Collie and Slater (Collie & Slater, 1990), there are four main reasons which lead a language teacher to use literature in the classroom. These are valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement.

Literature is authentic material as far as that most works of literature are not created for the specific purpose of teaching a language. Thus, learners are exposed to genuine and undistorted language. Besides, when working with literary texts, students have also to cope with language intended for native speakers, gaining additional familiarity with many different linguistic uses, forms and conventions.

Literature provides exposure to the culture of its speakers by examining universal human experience within the context of a particular setting and the consciousness of a particular people.

Linguistically, literature has the potential of serving as the central focus of the unit of study in the classroom. A number of different activities of the four basic language skills may be developed around the reading of a literary work.

While reading a text, students get involved into the story, eager to find out what happens next. They feel close to certain characters and share their emotional responses.

These four perspectives, once integrated into a single didactic model, turn out to be an attractive language learning tool.

3. INTEGRATIVE APPROACH TO TEACHING LITERATURE

Our aim is to enrich conventional approaches to teaching literature in the foreign language classroom developing a new multi-dimensional understanding of language and texts. We hope in this way to stimulate students' desire to read, as well as to encourage their response towards language learning.

The suggested model is based on the latest developments of the Australian educators, and underpins the way English is being taught in Australian schools and colleges. The literary texts are studied not only from the linguistic point of view, but also from social, cultural and literary ones. These five perspectives reflect the main beliefs and practices that have been developed in English teaching over time.

- 1. A Cultural Heritage Perspective:** this one supports the view that literature embodies the history, tradition, wisdom and beliefs of a particular society and those important cultural beliefs are transmitted through the study of texts. The meaning of the text is timeless and universal and it is also an impartial representation of reality.
- 2. A Language Skills Perspective:** it is focused on the teaching of the foundation skills of literacy. Students work with texts in order to learn the skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking that are necessary in order to function adequately in school and society.
- 3. A Personal Growth Perspective:** this perspective supports the idea that language learning is a holistic, natural process in which meaning is constantly constructed by students. Students engage with large units of meaning in whole texts, and all areas of their language curriculum are integrated and interdependent. The personal growth perspective is

related closely to the Reader Response theory which supports the view that readers are active in the process of constructing and responding to text. Readers create individual meanings in interaction with the author's intended meaning. They engage emotionally with texts, developing empathy, connecting fictional experience with their own lived experience and gaining insights into their personal, and the broader human, condition.

4. **A Functional Perspective:** it aims at identifying different types of text, different 'genres', which are used in a culture to achieve particular purposes. The ability to use a range of genres, especially those important to academic success, gives students a greater opportunity to operate powerfully within society.
5. **A Critical Literacy Perspective:** the last one supports the view that texts are social constructs reflecting the beliefs and values of their time and culture. Texts have multiple meanings, and readers are positioned by the structure of the discourse, by emphases and omissions. The texts also offer selected, partial versions of the world, producing, reproducing and maintaining different social ideologies.

4. PUTTING THE FIVE PERSPECTIVE INTEGRATIVE MODEL TO WORK

To illustrate how the five perspective model works, we have selected a famous Conan Doyle's story «A Scandal in Bohemia» (Conan Doyle, 1891).

In practice teachers draw from each perspective, to greater or lesser extent, depending upon their learning intentions for their students, the text selected and the activities designed to be used with that text.

In fact, a unit of work might focus on two or three of the perspectives, or may include elements of all five. A process such as this is a useful tool for teachers in planning an appropriate, rich and balanced English program for their students.

In the examples that follow, activities in relation to the each perspective are included.

Table 1. Activities in relation to the each perspective.

Source: prepared by authors.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE A SCANDAL IN BOHEMIA
<p>Cultural Heritage Perspective Narrative - Identify plot, characters, theme, point of view, narrative voice - explain, plot characters, theme, point of view, narrative voice. Intertextuality - explore connections with other detective mystery novels.</p>
<p>Language Skills Perspective Phonics: – Intonation. Vocabulary in context: – Repetitions. – Synonyms. – Superordinates and generals. – Opposites and related words. Grammatical connections: – Reference. – Elipsis/substitution. – Organization of text. – Modality.</p>
<p>Personal Growth Write a letter to a Victorian woman explaining how women live nowadays. Discuss the conveniences/inconveniences of marriage nowadays and in the Victorian times. Write/tell the story of an invented or imaginary crime. Act out the story.</p>
<p>Functional Detective story as genre (structure and elements). Genre – Deconstruct detective story genre in text. Genre – Construction (individual & joint): – Construct own detective story text to meet genre guidelines. Crime scene investigation news.</p>
<p>Critical Literacy Class structure in Victorian Times. The role of women in Victorian society. The importance of The Industrial Revolution in the Victorian society.</p>

4.1. Cultural heritage perspective

1. At the beginning of the second paragraph Watson talks about an event which has drifted them [Sherlock and Watson] away from each other. What event is he talking about? Why was this event so important in Victorian times?

What differences can you find between Sherlock and Watson in terms of obeying social conventions and their personalities? Give evidences from the text in the chart provided below and explain in your own words what they mean (table 2).

Table 2. Doctor Watson and Sherlock Holmes.

Source: prepared by authors.

DOCTOR WATSON	SHERLOCK HOLMES
	

KEY: Watson's marriage was the event that caused Sherlock and Watson to separate from each other for a while (table 3).

Table 3.

Source: prepared by authors.

DOCTOR WATSON	SHERLOCK HOLMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • «My own complete happiness»: Watson was very glad about his marriage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Holmes) «loathed every form of society, with his whole Bohemian soul»: Holmes does not feel bound

- «Home-centred interests which rise up around the man who first finds himself master of his own establishment were sufficient to absorb all my attention»:

Watson has decided to settle down with a woman he loves and now his life has changed. He has more responsibilities, he has to spend more time at home with his wife and he is happy to do so.

up to the conventional society he lives in. He has his own perception of life and lives accordingly. He also despises society.

- «Buried among his old books»: Holmes did not like to socialize much.
- «Alternating (...) between cocaine and ambition, the drowsiness of the drug (...):» Sherlock takes drugs to disconnect from reality, something not accepted by society.
- «(...) and the fierce energy of his own keen nature»: Another evidence which proves that he only follows his own rules and beliefs.
- «Clearing up those mysteries which had been abandoned as hopeless by the official police»: Sherlock challenges society by trying to solve the most difficult mysteries. He feels superior to society.

2. The character of Dr. Watson is said to be inspired on the writer, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Look for information on the Internet and find the common features between both, Dr. Watson and the author. Which personality features of Sherlock Holmes were also inspired on Doyle? Did you find anything that caught your attention about Doyle's biography?

KEY: Conan Doyle, who also worked as a doctor, physically resembled Dr. Watson. Like the narrator, he was very patriotic and was a strong supporter of the British Empire. Like Holmes, Doyle also had great powers of

observation. The writer was also interested in spiritualism, especially after the death of his son during World War I, and wrote some books about this subject. Conan Doyle resented the success of Sherlock Holmes' books, having the impression that they overshadowed his most important historical and scientific books.

3. In the first page, third paragraph, Dr. Watson mentions «the dark incidents of the Study in Scarlet». Can you find why this case was so important for detective stories and for the characters?

KEY: A Study in Scarlet was a detective mystery novel written by Conan Doyle. It was the first novel that described the character of Sherlock Holmes, before he became one of the most famous detectives in fiction. The books' title was inspired from a speech given by Holmes to Dr. Watson when referring to the nature of his work. He describes the investigation of a murder as his «study in scarlet»: «There's the scarlet thread of murder running through the colourless skein of life, and our duty is to unravel it, and isolate it, and expose every inch of it».

4.2. Language skills perspective

1. Find words in the text which make reference to Sherlock Holmes and Watson's personality and physical appearance by completing the information in the table. In case you do not find this information in the text try to imagine a description and complete the table accordingly.

Table 4.

Source: prepared by authors.

	SHERLOCK	WATSON
Physical appearance		
Way of walking / Body language		
Way of interacting with other people		
Personality		

KEY: table 5.

Table 5.

Source: prepared by authors.

	SHERLOCK	WATSON
Physical appearance	«Tall, spare figure». «Dark silhouette»	He is smaller and fatter (he has put on 7 pounds)
Way of walking / Body language	«Pacing (...) swiftly, eagerly». «His head sunk upon his chest». «His hands clasped behind him». «Rubbed his long, nervous hands»	He is very busy and always in a hurry.
Way of interacting with other people	«His manner was not effusive». «With hardly a word spoken ... he waved me to an arm-chair». «Looked me over in his singular, introspective fashion». «He chuckled to himself»	He is talkative. He greets according to social conventions.
Personality	«Cold and precise mind». «The most perfect reasoning machine». He despises human passions, such as love, as well as he disregards women.	He is happily married and devoted to his wife. He does not observe every detail. He is more careless.

2. Find words in the text related to the following capitalized words:

- **EMOTIONS.**
- **DEDUCTIONS.**

KEY: table 6.

Table 6.

Source: prepared by authors.

EMOTIONS	DEDUCTIONS
love cold, precise, balanced mind softer passions, gibe, sneer happiness to loath ambition fierce energy deeply attracted keen desire intrusions distracting factor	to work it out simplicity itself dull ease ridiculously simple easily reasoning baffled

3. Classify the words you found for **EMOTION** according to the connotation you think they have (positive, negative, neutral). Some words can be classified more than once (table 7):

Table 7.

Source: prepared by authors

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTRAL

KEY: table 8.

Table 8.

Source: prepared by authors

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTRAL
love	Gibe, sneer	Cold, precise, balanced mind
softer passions	To loath	
happiness	Ambition	
Fierce energy	Intrusions	
Deeply attracted	Distracting factor	
Keen desire	Cold, precise, balanced mind	
Ambition		
Cold, precise, balanced mind		

4. Rearrange the order of the following sentences without changing its meaning. For example, you can start the sentence with: «It was...», «What...», or changing the adverb of place or time.
- a. From time to time I heard some vague account of his doings: of his summons to Odessa in the case of the Trepoff murder (...).
 - b. One night —it was on the twentieth of March, 1888— I was returning from a journey to a patient (for I had now returned to civil practice), when my way led me through Baker Street.
 - c. My own complete happiness, and the home-centred interests which rise up around the man who first finds himself master of his own establishment, were sufficient to absorb all my attention...

KEY:

- a. I heard some vague account of his doings from time to time: of his summons to Odessa in the case of the Trepoff murder ... What I heard from time to time was some vague account of his doings: of his summons to Odessa in the case of the Trepoff murder... It was the vague account of his doings what I heard from time to time: of his summons to Odessa in the case of the Trepoff murder...
- b. It was on the twentieth of March, 1888, one night, when I was returning from a journey to a patient (for I had now returned to civil prac-

tice), when my way led me through Baker Street. I was returning from a journey to a patient (for I had now returned to civil practice) one night on the twentieth of March, 1888, when my way led me through Baker Street.

- c. Sufficient to absorb all my attention were my own complete happiness, and the home-centred interests which rise up around the man who first finds himself master of his own establishment...
5. Replace each underlined word with a synonym. Be careful and do not change the meaning.
- a. Grit in a sensitive instrument, or a crack in one of his high-power lenses, would not be more disturbing than a strong emotion in a nature such as his. And yet there was but one woman to him, and that woman was the late Irene Adler, of dubious and questionable memory.
 - b. From time to time I heard some vague account of his doings: of his summons to Odessa in the case of the Trepoff murder (...).
 - c. It is true that I had a country walk on Thursday and came home in a dreadful mess, but as I have changed my clothes I can't imagine how you deduce it. As to Mary Jane, she is incorrigible, and my wife has given her notice, but there, again, I fail to see how you work it out.
 - d. Obviously they have been caused by someone who has very carelessly scraped round the edges of the sole in order to remove crusted mud from it. Hence, you see, my double deduction that you had been out in vile weather, and that you had a particularly malignant bootslitting specimen of the London slavey.
 - e. As to your practice, if a gentleman walks into my rooms smelling of iodoform, with a black mark of nitrate of silver upon his right forefinger, and a bulge on the right side of his top-hat to show where he has secreted his stethoscope, I must be dull, indeed, if I do not pronounce him to be an active member of the medical profession.

KEY:

- a. However, nevertheless.
- b. Occasionally, now and then.

- c. Regarding, in relation to.
- d. Then, thus, therefore.
- e. With regard to, with respect to.

4.3. Personal Growth Perspective




1. Do you think that marriage is so important in today's society? Explain your reasons. Talk about the conveniences/inconveniences of marriage nowadays and in the Victorian times.
2. Write a letter to a Victorian woman explaining how women live nowadays and the advantages they have. You can cover the following points in your letter: women's professions and studies, average age for marriage and children (if any), divorces, distribution of housework duties between couples, president women, inequalities still to be changed (eg. Lower salaries than men's), etc. (You can do this activity after having completed the section related to Victorian women included in the Critical Literacy Perspective).

4.4. Functional / Genre Perspective

1. In the ninth paragraph (starting on the second page) of this text Sherlock impresses Watson with his methodology when deducting and finding evidences. What does Sherlock discover about Watson? Can you support your reasoning by following—in an ordered sequence—the clues shown below? (table 9).

Table 9.

Source: prepared by authors

Clue 1	Clue 2	Clue 3
		

KEY:

- **Clue 1:** the left shoe had six parallel cuts.
 - **Clue 2:** the new servant, who is very careless, made the cuts when...
 - **Clue 3:** ... (when) trying to remove the mud from the soles.
 - **Double deduction:** Watson was under the rain and his shoes got covered in mud. His new servant, who is very careless, slit his shoes.
- 2.** Famous characters like Jack the Ripper provoked panic in Victorian society, a factor which was boosted by press sensationalism. Imagine that you are a journalist working for the Strand Magazine and that a murder has been committed. Write a short newspaper article describing what happened –follow the five Wh– questions used in journalism.

Before writing, ask yourself the following questions: Do the police already have any evidence which proves that there might be an alleged criminal?, are there any witnesses?, who found the body?, etc. You can find below an example from the Daily Telegraph. Find the answers to the 5 Wh- questions in this example before writing your newspaper article (table 10).

Table 10.

Source: prepared by authors

Daily Telegraph (London)	Wh- questions in journalism
<p>Another most horrible murder was perpetrated in Whitechapel yesterday morning. At an early hour, as a police-constable was on his beat in an obscure thoroughfare, he came upon the body of a woman, with her throat cut from ear to ear. On the arrival of a doctor she was removed to the mortuary, where an examination revealed the fact that there were many other shocking wounds upon her person. Though lifeless she was not quite cold, showing that the crime had not been long committed. Late in the day she was identified as a woman named Nicholls, who had led a loose and miserable life, and had at one time been an inmate of the Lambeth Workhouse. So far the police have no clue to the murderer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who • What • Where • When • How

KEY:

- **Who:** Nicholls
- **What:** She was murdered
- **Where:** Whitechapel
- **When:** Yesterday morning
- **How:** Her throat was cut from ear to ear

4.5. Critical literacy perspective

1. How does Sherlock refer to Watson's new servant, Mary Jane? Why does he refer to her in that way? (You will find this information at the beginning of the story).

Read the following rules for domestic servants in Victorian times. What do you think about the relationship between masters and domestic servants in this period? Can you change any of the following rules according to nowadays domestic workers?

- a. When being spoken to, stand still, keeping your hands quiet, and always look at the person speaking.
- b. Never let your voice be heard by the ladies and gentlemen of the household, unless they have spoken directly to you a question or statement which requires a response, at which time, speak as little as possible.
- c. In the presence of your mistress, never speak to another servant or person of your own rank, or to a child, unless only for necessity, and then as little as possible and as quietly as possible.
- d. Never begin to talk to the ladies or gentlemen, unless to deliver a message or to ask a necessary question, and then, do it in as few words as possible.
- e. Whenever possible, items that have been dropped, such as spectacles or handkerchiefs, and other small items, should be returned to their owners on a salver.

- f. Always respond when you have received an order, and always use the proper address: «Sir», «Ma'am», «Miss» or «Mrs,» as the case may be.
- g. Never offer your opinion to your employer.
- h. Always «give room»: that is, if you encounter one of your betters in the house or on the stairs, you are to make yourself as invisible as possible, turning yourself toward the wall and averting your eyes.
- i. Except in reply to a salutation offered, never say «good morning» or «good night» to your employer.
- j. If you are required to walk with a lady or gentleman in order to carry packages, or for any other reason, always keep a few paces back.
- k. You are expected to be punctual to your place at mealtime.
- l. You shall not receive any Relative, Visitor or Friend into the house, nor shall you introduce any person into the Servant's Hall, without the consent of the Butler or Housekeeper.
- m. Followers are strictly forbidden. Any member of the female staff who is found to be fraternizing shall be immediately dismissed.
- n. Expect that any breakages or damages in the house shall be deducted from your wages.

KEY:

Sherlock describes the servant as a «bootslitting specimen of the London slavey» in order to emphasize her clumsiness when cleaning Dr. Watson's shoes.

(Free answer for the second part: rules for domestic servants nowadays).

2. Read the following preface of *The Book of Household Management* by Mrs. Beeton and answer the questions below:

What moved me, in the first instance, to attempt a work like this, was the discomfort and suffering which I had seen brought upon men and women by household mismanagement. I have always thought that there is no more fruitful source of family discontent than a housewife's badly cooked dinners

and untidy ways. Men are now so well served out of doors –at their clubs, well-ordered taverns, and dining-houses- that, in order to compete with the attraction of these places, a mistress must be thoroughly acquainted with the theory and practice of cookery, as well as be perfectly conversant with all the other arts of making and keeping a comfortable home.

- a. What was the role of women in Victorian society?
- b. What «problems» did Mrs. Beeton think that men had?
- c. Which solutions did men find to their «problems»?
- d. How do you think women were regarded by men?
- e. Why did Mrs. Beeton write this book?

KEY:

- a. To take care of the house and cook properly for their husbands. ‘What moved me, in the first instance, to attempt a work like this, was the discomfort and suffering which I had seen brought upon men and women by household mismanagement. I have always thought that there is no more fruitful source of family discontent than a housewife’s badly cooked dinners and untidy ways. Men are now so well served out of doors –at their clubs, well-ordered taverns, and dining-houses– that, in order to compete with the attraction of these places, a mistress must be thoroughly acquainted with the theory and practice of cookery, as well as be perfectly conversant with all the other arts of making and keeping a comfortable home.’
- b. Their houses were not properly managed, most of them were untidy and their wives did not cook well for them.
- c. They had dinner out, e.g. at taverns.
- d. Women were regarded as inferior in terms of intelligence and abilities. To become a respectable mother was the only aspiration women could have. Women had to be totally obedient to their husbands.
- e. She thought it was her duty to educate housewives so that they could achieve perfection at home.

5. CONCLUSION

The time has come to re-establish literary components in the language curriculum in Spain. A literary piece is not an end in itself but the means of beginning a creative process in the minds and emotions of the students. Placing themselves in that particular literary world, students relate imaginary contexts with real-life situations, feeling the power and possibility of contributing positively to a larger world than just their own. For many students literature can provide a key to motivating them to read in English. For all students, literature is an ideal vehicle for illustrating language use and for introducing cultural assumptions.

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