Cultural awareness and language awareness based on dialogic interaction with texts in foreign language learning

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Introduction

Anne-Brit Fenner

Background

This collection of articles was initiated during Workshop No. 5/98 *The Specification of Objectives for Learner Autonomy and Cultural Awareness within Syllabus Development at Secondary Level* which took place in Malta in April 1998. The workshop was organised as a result of co-operation between the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in Graz and the Ministry of Education and Culture of Malta. The aims of the workshop were "for the practitioners from different countries to:

1. share their experiences;

2. explore routes in the specification of objectives, resources, processes for learner autonomy, cultural awareness and syllabus development;

3. at the end of the workshop to engage in a research and development phase by forming networks in order to disseminate the work."

(Camilleri 1999: 2)

Although the workshop emphasised practical work, especially in the field of cultural awareness, the last day was set aside for the participants to reflect on and discuss the theoretical aspects of the topics presented during the workshop. Several network groups were set up, one of which was on *Cultural awareness and language awareness based on interaction with texts*. The outcome of the networking process is this collection of articles by the four members of the group. During the period between the workshop in Malta and the publication of this book, one networking meeting has been held in Graz.

Aims

The aims of the network group were originally to "explore cultural awareness, language awareness and learner autonomy using a dialogic approach to texts in the foreign language classroom at different levels, including teacher training,

also with an aim to clarifying cultural awareness in the syllabus". Texts in this connection include literary texts and learner produced texts as well as digital texts. We decided to base our reflections on practical research work in the classroom with young learners and students.

The Modern Languages Division of the Council of Europe and the ECML have published a lot of material on cultural and intercultural awareness as well as on language awareness. A substantial amount of theory has been developed, most of which is based on British, French and German theoreticians and practitioners. The network members wanted to add to this work by including linguistic and philosophical theories from their own countries and language communities, as well as from other traditions of thought which have played an important part in developing the members' own theories and approaches to language teaching and learning.

Focus and theoretical stance

The four projects, which are described and discussed in these articles, have a common focus and theoretical stance. They are all based on a communicative approach to learning English, although aspects of such an approach are perceived and highlighted in different ways. Certain features of what might perhaps be termed a 'traditional communicative approach' are questioned in some of the articles. Interaction and a dialogic approach constitute a common denominator in all four articles. Encountering the foreign culture is seen as dialogue and part of a communication process which influences participants in a dialectic interrelationship where meaning has to be negotiated. Culture is, consequently, regarded as dynamic and not as a static entity (Fenner and Newby 2000: 149).

None of the practical approaches discussed are seen or should be seen as recipes when dealing with texts in the classroom. Rather, they should be regarded as part of an ongoing dialogue, presented through examples and illustrations, which are then interpreted in relation to language awareness and cultural awareness. These interpretations are based on a diversity of theories stated and explored in each article: the Prague Linguistic School, Russian formalism, stylistics, socio-linguistics, postmodernism, deconstruction, hermeneutics and reception theory. The balance between theory and practice varies from one article to the other: some have the main focus on practical classroom work while others have a more theoretical focus illustrated with practical examples.

Three of the articles deal with dialogic interaction with literary texts and one with digital text encounters and exchange of mother tongue material between

two cultures. Common to all of them is the fact that the practical projects are based on authentic texts produced by authors, playwrights and learners. The tasks that were created in relation to the texts are also authentic in the sense that they are largely non-finite and open to learners' interpretations. This gave the learners scope for personal reflection and opinion forming, and classroom work thus became part of their personal sociocultural development. It also opened up for their individual needs as language learners.

Cultural awareness, language awareness and learner autonomy

The main foci of the four articles are cultural awareness and language awareness, with varying emphasis on the two topics. Some of the projects described put the main emphasis on cultural awareness, some on language awareness, but in all of them there is interaction between the two, and they are both seen as essential aspects of communicative competence and inseparable from it. The aim of the practical classroom work was to assist the learners in their development of these aspects of language learning through a mediated process using different types of text. Foreign language learning was throughout regarded less as the development of specific skills, more as enabling the learners to react linguistically and culturally in an appropriate manner in communication situations which were not predetermined. Such situations require that learners apply general cultural and linguistic competence and awareness, not only of the foreign language and culture, but also of their own. It is thus a question of intercultural and 'interlingual' awareness in the encounter with the foreign language text.[1]

Although learner autonomy was one of the aims of the workshop which this collection of articles originated from, it is not specifically treated in any of the articles, but it is an underlying factor in all four. In none of the practical projects described is the teacher seen as the sole provider of knowledge and answers. The tasks are all based on the learners' own interpretations and needs and thus the learners become participants in their own 'curriculum development' (Little 1991). In some of the projects their answers form the basis for further work. The nature of the tasks also puts them in a position where they have 'to act independently and in co-operation with others' (Nordic Conference on Autonomy in Dam 1991). Furthermore, because the learners provide information previously unknown to the teacher, the teacher also participates in the learning process in all the projects.

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1 For definitions and discussions on cultural and intercultural awareness see Byram, Zarate and Byram, Zarate, Neuner in publications by the Council of Europe.

Types of dialogic interaction

The four articles in this publication investigate various types of dialogic interaction in foreign language learning, and the order in which they appear is a joint decision by the members of the network based on the content of each article.

In the first article "Dialogic interaction with literary texts in the lower secondary classroom", Anne-Brit Fenner defines and discusses the term dialogue in relation to communication and learning. The article investigates the use of literature in foreign language learning, where the focus is upon the individual learner's interpretation of the text. Employing reception theory Fenner argues for reading as a communicative experience and as a productive, not a receptive skill. Based on a specific approach, reading literature in the target language is seen as a dialectic dialogue between reader and text as well as between two cultures within the social interaction of the classroom. The article investigates such dialogic encounters from a hermeneutical point of view where one aspect of communication and development is adjusting attitudes and views between individuals and between cultures and through this process cultural awareness is enhanced. Finally the article presents a practical classroom example of working with a specific literary text and the learners' response to the text and tasks.

Marina Katnić-Bakaršić's article "Dialogic interaction with dramatic texts in foreign language teaching with emphasis on raising cultural awareness and language awareness" focuses on structural and poststructural stylistics when discussing the importance of using dramatic dialogue in foreign language learning. Katnić-Bakaršić investigates differences between everyday communication and dramatic dialogue. Intercultural dialogue with the aim to raise students' cultural and language awareness is discussed and illustrated through various examples of work with dramatic texts. The dialogues chosen are in themselves interesting presentations of language use, in some cases from the Theatre of the Absurd, which saw as its purpose the illustration of the futility of communication and how human beings are alienated from each other because of language. (Both Ionesco and Beckett chose to write in a foreign language, a language from which they were alienated.) By concentrating on absurd pieces of dialogue and examples of failed communication, the students have to analyse and interpret intercultural communication and reflect on the real meaning of language.

In her article “Raising language awareness and cultural awareness by using literary texts in the process of foreign language learning in Slovakia” Mária Kostelníková introduces the Prague School and briefly investigates the impact these linguists have had on foreign language teaching in Slovakia. Based on a research project among teachers and students of English and German on the use of literary texts in the classroom, the article discusses the relatively limited use of such texts in relation to a communicative approach to language learning in Slovakia. Kostelníková compares authentic and didactic texts in textbooks and argues for a more extensive use of literary texts. Various ways of working with literature in the foreign language classroom are discussed and a traditional method of teaching literature is compared with an approach focused on dialogue with the literary text, where the aim is to enhance language awareness and cultural awareness while learning the foreign language. The article presents in detail a number of examples of tasks related to literary texts, poetry in particular, developed in co-operation with foreign language teacher trainees.

The final article in this publication, Hermine Penz’s article “Cultural awareness and language awareness through dialogic social interaction using the Internet and other media” describes and discusses cultural exchanges between groups of students in different countries, using both native and foreign language in the interaction. In the exchanges it is left partly up to the students to define the content of the texts they work on. The material is exchanged via fax, e-mail and chat lines on the Internet. In all projects the teacher’s role is one of mediator and assistant rather than instructor or provider of knowledge. Information and material are provided by the students themselves and in most cases produced by the students. The examples show that the students immediately engage in dialogues, which challenge them to ask questions and provide answers for their peers on central issues concerning both cultural awareness and language awareness. In their textual interaction students of all levels show a surprisingly high level of awareness in anticipating both linguistic and cultural problems that the learners of the foreign language might have, and also in interpreting and clarifying problems that occur in the dialogue. This process forces them to consider aspects of their own language and culture from the outsider’s point of view and consequently their awareness of both cultures and languages are enhanced.

The articles as dialogic cultural encounters

None of the contributors are native speakers of English, and three are users of minority languages in Europe: Bosnian, Slovak and Norwegian. As learners and teachers of English, all four of us have, consequently, experienced the position,

within our field, of outsiders encountering the language and culture of the majority. This is not a negative position to be in as teachers of English; in fact it can easily be regarded as an advantage. If the encounter with the foreign language and culture is seen as dialogic and dynamic, the influence on the participants is mutual and constitutes an enrichment of both cultures: one's own as well as the Other. Part of our aim in writing this book has been to show that such a dialogue is possible when working with foreign language texts. Both the content and the form of the articles in this book show that the authors represent different academic traditions, and no attempt has been made to erase this cultural diversity in order to create an international academic style.

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Dialogic interaction with literary texts in the lower secondary classroom

Anne-Brit Fenner

Introduction

The project presented in this article is based on teaching English as a foreign language in a Norwegian mixed ability classroom of 14-year-old learners. For a little over a year the students had been working according to principles of learner autonomy. The article will first discuss the importance of literary texts as cultural artefacts in foreign language learning. This will be done from a hermeneutical point of view, defined widely as "'the science of interpretation': the understanding of texts and the problems of understanding" (Newton 1997: 45). Secondly, approaches to literary texts in the classroom will be looked at, and I will argue for a dialogic approach, which includes dialogue between reader and text, between the students and between students and teacher. Finally the article presents classroom work with a specific literary text, *The Selfish Giant* by Oscar Wilde. Throughout, the aim of the classroom work has been to raise the learners' cultural and intercultural awareness, and awareness of learning in addition to learning a language.

Changing views on literature in the foreign language classroom

Foreign language learning in the classroom depends heavily on written and oral texts, texts which are read, listened to or spoken. If we go back a century in the history of foreign language teaching, authentic texts played an all-important part, especially in the teaching of Greek and Latin. With these texts as media, the students read, analysed, translated, and learnt grammar, and the process was, in addition to learning the foreign language, intended to promote the student's development as a human being, his or her educational development or 'Bildung'. Now, after decades of foreign language teaching from constructed textbook texts at lower school levels, authentic text has come into focus again. It is, however, the factual text that has been focused upon for young learners in many countries rather than the literary text. Sometimes the reason has been that textbooks were meant to reflect reality: foreign language learning was supposed to be based on real life situations, especially the reality of young learners. In my view it is a misconception that 'real life' for teenagers necessarily means that

textbooks have to reflect their everyday lives outside school, as this seems a very limited presentation of the foreign culture.

I am not disputing that textbook texts about teenagers in a foreign culture have a role to play in foreign language teaching of adolescents. The problem is that these texts are rarely authentic: very often they have not come out of the language community of the specific culture in question, but have been constructed by textbook writers from the learners' native culture (Fenner and Newby 2000). If we regard language as an expression of culture as well as communication, specifically constructed texts will not necessarily reflect the foreign culture. Authenticity is emphasised in many foreign language classrooms, but more often than not, the authentic texts used are texts presenting facts from the foreign culture, often through newspapers or the Internet. Especially as far as teaching and learning culture is concerned, realia texts play an important part. Literature is, to a much lesser extent, used as material for language learning and for developing linguistic and cultural awareness at this level. There might be several reasons for this, some of which will be considered here.

Behaviourism, and later structuralism, resulted in reducing language learning to a near science, with language being represented as a set of techniques that could be learnt, and where answers were correct or incorrect. Great emphasis was put on fill-in exercises and short dialogues, trying to create 'good habits' which one hoped would be reproduced automatically when a specific situation required action and speech. Literature had little place within such instrumentalist frames of foreign language teaching as it did not focus on specific practical, utilitarian situations of communication. The study of literature was left to higher levels of education for students who specialised in languages. The basic view was that students had to learn the language first before they were able to cope with texts that were not regarded as useful in everyday communication.

Another reason is that the view of culture changed during the latter part of the 20th century from 'high' culture to everyday culture or from a 'culture of the elite' to 'common culture' (Fenner and Newby 2000: 143). Textbooks were now meant to reflect the everyday lives of ordinary people, not literary characters: literature was out, football was in. A reductionist view of the purpose of learning a foreign language was prevalent, and students did not need to read literature because they were not taught a foreign language in order to talk to members of the foreign community about literature.

Communicative language teaching has often emphasised the spoken language and many teachers have been under the misconception that the main concern of communicative teaching is oral language. Communication has primarily been

interpreted as talking to people, and classroom texts and tasks have focused upon examples of dialogue in given situations. There seem to have been two main types of dialogue in foreign language textbooks, serving two different purposes. One kind has been dialogues based on models of speech conventions with very little content and only ritualised meaning. The other has been short dialogues to introduce specific topics, which have then been expanded upon in further texts.

A tendency in the former type of dialogue has been a lack of awareness of the fact that dialogue is not only dependent on a minimum of two participants, but also on having a topic to talk about, what Ricoeur calls the third participant (Ricoeur 1992). Forced dialogue in the classroom without a topic that the learners can engage in dies out quickly. Without personal involvement, it is doubtful whether the learners acquire the skills that they need when required to use the speech conventions that were the objectives of this type of dialogue.

The latter type of dialogue, which is common in most Scandinavian foreign language textbooks, has been regarded as an easy way to introduce a topic to weak learners, in addition to giving examples of speech conventions. The main problem with this kind of dialogue has been that it is inauthentic and deals very scantily and artificially with the given topic (Aase, Fenner, Little and Trebbi 2000). Many foreign language teachers have, as a result, come to regard weak learners as incapable of coping with other text genres, including literary genres, and these learners are, therefore, rarely required to read or listen to authentic text. Their knowledge and awareness of the foreign culture will consequently be extremely limited.

With regard to literature, there might also be a certain anxiety among teachers of reverting to very traditional teaching methods. In many countries there seems to have been an attempt to get away from curricula weighed down by literary texts, which are often defined as works by ‘great’ authors, and which have been analysed to extremes in many foreign language and mother tongue classrooms. Finally there might even be a misconception that young people are not interested in reading literature, and unless they take a certain interest in what is taught, their motivation for learning will be minimal.

Literature has, on the other hand, always played an important part in the teaching of foreign languages at higher school levels. The main aim has been that students should be acquainted with the works of famous writers and they should learn to analyse literature, which, with the emergence of New Criticism, meant discovering the author’s intention, the ‘meaning’ of the text. Teaching literature in a static society with little diversification might have justified the way literature was taught in the upper secondary foreign language classroom for

a long period of time. Learners in a specific social context had perhaps a more uniform way of understanding literary texts. The teacher's interpretation of a work of literature might not have been so very different from the competent students' understanding of it, and even if it was, they had to learn the teacher's interpretation or what Sørensen calls the 'teacher's text', and reproduce it in exams (Sørensen 1983: 22). Today we live in a dynamic and diverse society with constant changes, and, as teachers, we also find ourselves faced with young people who are not always willing to accept what we might call the teacher's text, at least not as the 'truth'.

The role of literature in foreign language learning

Why should literature be important in young people's foreign language learning? In defence of the literary text a number of arguments will be presented. The first of these is, as briefly stated previously, that the literary text is authentic. Authentic here means that "it is created to fulfil some purpose in the language community in which it was produced" (Little, Devitt and Singleton 1989: 23). Thus the text carries the culture of a specific language community and can give the reader valuable insight into the foreign culture, as well as into the language and form used to express that culture. Literature represents the personal voice of a culture.

Secondly, literature has richer and more diverse semiotics than factual text genres and consequently offers more learning potential. Literary texts are experiments with thought, a dialectic between reality and fantasy. They employ more metaphorical language than other types of text or in Ricoeur's words: "the metaphor is in the literary language as a producer of meaning" (Ricoeur 1992). Metaphors can be interpreted differently by different readers, and literary language, more than everyday language, consequently provides the 'space' where the learners can experience the multiplicity of meaning. This is expressed in the Norwegian National Curriculum for English as follows: "When learners focus on the relationship between form and content and discover that a multiplicity of meaning opens up for different paths to understanding and insight, they will find the scope they need to explore the language" (224)[1]. Literature gives the learners ample opportunity to explore the multiplicity of language as well as culture when they engage actively in the reading process to discover meaning.

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1 This is my translation as the original meaning has been lost in the English edition: *The Curriculum for the 10-year Compulsory School in Norway*. The Royal Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs. Oslo: 1999.

The third point to be made is that literary texts function as models for the learner's own text production. In Norway language teaching at lower secondary level aims at general language competence and such competence is partly assessed on the learner's creative text production. Literature presents good models for the learner's personal writing, content-wise, linguistically, and structurally, and I believe that models of quality are more important than rules in foreign language learning.

Another specific feature of literature is that it is 'undetermined' and open (Iser 1991). According to Bakhtin, literary language is not "… represented [] as a unitary, completely finished-off and indisputable language – it is represented… as a living mix of varied and opposing voices…" (Bakhtin 1981). It leaves room for personal interpretation and opinion forming, and thus provides more interesting open spaces than most of the information gap exercises produced by textbook writers within the communicative teaching tradition. This applies as much to the individual's reading and interpreting processes in a dialogue between text and reader as to the classroom or group discourse that might follow. The narrative text or poem has what Iser and Eco call 'gaps' that need to be filled by the reader. Far from everything is expressed within the literary work; the reader has to listen to what the text tells him or her, discover the gaps and try to fill them. Different readers will discover different gaps, and a reading experience is an encounter between what the hermeneutical philosopher Gadamer calls the 'horizon' of the text and the reader's personal 'horizon' (Hellesnes 1998: 32). Briefly this means that the reader brings his or her complete experience and pre-knowledge, in Bourdieu's terms his or her habitus and cultural capital, into the encounter with the text and interprets it from this (Bourdieu 1994: 12-14). Discovering and interpreting the gaps constitute an active dialogue with the text, whether internal or external, dependent on the social context. For the young learner this discovery process is an active and creative part of language learning.

In addition to the above, reading is a communicative experience. It is not so much a matter of hypothesising, as in other aspects of language learning, as it is a matter of being open towards answers to one's own questions. We have as learners, and indeed as human beings, unconscious or conscious questions and we are constantly looking for answers to our own questions. Literature makes statements, which might turn out to be the answers we are looking for (Hellesnes 1988). If we regard reading as a productive language exercise, where the reader participates with the text in producing meaning, the literary text offers a cultural meeting point. This encounter with the text is a dialogue, which is dialectic and enhances both language competence and cultural competence.

At this point it seems necessary to define how I wish to understand communicative competence. What does a learner know when he or she knows a foreign language? This has been defined in different ways, and some of the definitions can be agreed upon by most language teachers. But, as Wittgenstein argues, we have to be aware of the fact that we do not know exactly what it means to know a language. This is partly due to language not being a static entity, but dynamic and continuously changing. The same applies to cultural competence; culture is also a dynamic force. Encountering a foreign culture is a dialogic process: the learner is influenced by the foreign culture at the same time as he or she is influencing that culture (Foucault 1983). If we pretend to know the exact answers to how to react linguistically in specific communicative situations, we are in danger of reducing language competence to technology (Fairclough, Ricoeur).

We are all, as foreign language teachers, to a certain extent influenced by behaviourism, whether we want to admit it or not, at least when it comes to teaching weak learners. Foreign language textbooks are still full of exercises based on behaviourism, and few of us can honestly say that we never resort to drills. But we have to realise that human communication is not a matter of technique, nor is it a matter of correct or incorrect, although it cannot be denied that right or wrong comes into it. There are no given answers to fit specific situations; most communication is spontaneous. As both Wittgenstein and Habermas claim, only minor parts of language can be reduced to technique. In many classrooms based on communicative teaching, and certainly in many textbooks within this tradition, understanding language has been reduced to an instrumental understanding: that language use is merely a means to obtain certain objectives (Nicolaysen 1997: 102).

Most human communication, however, is non-finite without pre-empted answers. Certain conventions of speech might be learnt in the foreign language classroom, but they might not fit an actual situation, most likely they will not. Knowing a language means to be able to interpret, understand and explore, even at the simplest levels of communication in a foreign language. It depends on the Aristotelian term *kairos*: being able to assess a specific situation and then analyse the possibilities for action given within the situation (Hellesnes 1988). It is in other words a matter of being aware of and prepared for the unexpected. How to act and what to say in a real situation requires *kairos* and can only be practised through experience with a diversity of life situations. Literature offers a diversity of examples of how different characters act in different situations of life. They are not examples to be imitated, but they offer a multiplicity of possible actions, which enhance our own experience. Dialogue with different literary texts develops a different kind of competence than traditional language competence. It has more scope, linguistically as well as culturally, and it is an

‘open’ competence making for a wide scope of possible actions because it is not presented as right or wrong. Through literature the learners can experience “how language can be used in different situations, for different purposes, and to varying effect” (Aase, Fenner and Trebbi 2000).

The fact that literature is concerned with identity and self-awareness is another important aspect. Poetic language has a ‘divided reference’ to a real world as well as a fictional world because literary texts are experiments with thought: a dialectic between reality and fantasy. Through reading texts we gain an indirect understanding of the world, and, according to Ricoeur, this is a characteristic of poetic language. Reflections on a text allow the reader to turn interpretations upon him/herself and will consequently result in enhanced understanding and self-awareness (Nicolaysen 1997: 102-104). Young learners in particular are in the middle of a process of establishing their own identity. In literature they find the general represented through the particular. One of the characteristics of the age group is that they are often narcissistic and tend to compare themselves to others. It is easier for them to relate to and identify with particular individuals and situations than with the general. Reading and interpretation is not only understanding a text and looking for meanings, it is also relating to that meaning personally: “… the idea of interpretation adds to the simple idea of meaning that of a meaning for someone. For the agent, interpreting the text of an action is interpreting himself or herself” (Ricoeur 1992). Through the reading of literary texts, within which young people can conduct their search for meanings as well as models, the field is extended, and through the foreign literary text they experience other ways of living in addition to what they have the opportunity to experience within their own culture. Characters, plot, setting, and theme in the narrative text, the drama or the poem offer them possibilities to widen their perspectives, their view of self, and their cultural capital. Through the foreign culture they can also achieve a useful and necessary outside perspective of themselves and their own culture. The literary text as an artefact of the foreign culture provides the mirror in which they can see themselves reflected; it provides an outside to their inside (Fenner 2000: 149).

In addition to the above arguments, which for the most part also apply to the reading of literary texts in the native language and to reading outside a school context, the foreign language literary text provides material for language learning in a context of meaning. More than in other types of text, the understanding of parts and the understanding of the whole in a literary text exist in a dialectic interdependence. If the content is interesting to young readers, they are willing to strive hard to understand the meaning of parts, right down to the individual word if necessary. They will also discover that the interpretation of words depends on the text as a whole. Thus the reading process depends on a

constant interplay and feedback between the parts and the whole, what Dilthey calls the 'hermeneutic circle' (Newton 1997: 45).

The final argument I want to put forward is that literature does not only represent contemporary foreign culture. Written texts can also represent the past which has survived and been handed down "to make memory last. Literature [] has acquired its own simultaneity with every present" (Gadamer 1997: 48). Different from historic texts, the literary text thus offers young readers a unique chance to communicate with the foreign culture of the past and enables them to gain insight into this aspect of culture as it is perceived by members of the foreign community.

Literary theory and hermeneutics

In the previous section, a series of arguments for using the literary text as learning material in the foreign language classroom have been presented. Some of these arguments are based on my view of literature and the relationship between text and reader. Before sketching an approach to working with the literary text in the classroom, some aspects of this relationship will be looked at from a point of view of literary theory as well as from a philosophical point of view.

Recent literary theory has changed its focus from the relationship between the text and its author to the relationship between the text and its reader. The historical-biographical method of looking for clues to the meaning of a text in the author's life, has been replaced by receptionist theory where it is the reader and his or her understanding of the text which have become the main focus. The former theory occupied a large space in the teaching of literature in schools. It was then replaced by New Criticism, which also influenced teaching, including foreign language teaching, to a large extent. With this theory came close reading of texts, an important contribution to the foreign language classroom. Close reading was based on the thought that meaning had to be found within the novel, the drama or the poem itself, which in its turn was seen as an organic, structured entity. From this point of view the fictional work exists separate from its writer, its reader and its context. Both the historical-biographical method and New Criticism tend to ignore the reader's role as a co-producer of meaning. Another common denominator for these theories is a possibly naive view of language generally, and literary language in particular, that it refers to reality in a one-to-one correlation. Such a view of literature and language makes the reading process receptive and not productive. A process where students can relate actively to the text is far more interesting in relation to foreign language learning.

In *Från text till handling*[1] Ricoeur describes two attitudes to a literary text: one of explaining and one of interpreting, where explanation is associated primarily with science, and interpretation and understanding with the humanities (Ricoeur 1992: 39ff). These two attitudes will result in two different approaches to the text in the classroom. In the former the text is regarded as an autonomous entity as can be recognised in the views of New Criticism as well as of structuralism. This view requires the reader to explain or, often in the classroom situation, have the text explained by the teacher, and this has been the prevalent classroom attitude to literary texts, especially where foreign language texts are concerned.

The latter attitude requires a different approach because interpreting means that "to read is to compare a new discourse with the discourse of the text". Ricoeur talks about 'appropriation' of a text, and inherent in this is that the interpretation of a text is realised through "the subject's interpretation of himself" (54). The subject or the reader, through the reading process, starts to understand himself in a different way: "… in the hermeneutical reflection – or in the reflexive hermeneutic – the building of the self and the meaning (*sens*) are simultaneous" (55). The reader makes the text his own or in other words, the semantic possibilities inherent in the text are realised, made real, by the reader in a temporal situation. Interpreting is seen as communication with the text, and the relationship between reader and text is comparable to the relationship between the spoken text and the linguistic system. The reader becomes a co-producer of meaning in communication with the written text. When a break in that communication occurs, which it invariably will as misunderstanding is an inherent part of any communication process, particularly in a foreign language, readers have to try to understand why it collapsed and negotiate with the text. Thus, as readers, we find ourselves in a dialogic process.

In many ways a hermeneutical view of the process of reading literature is similar to any learning process. Statements are seen as answers to questions we have – open questions we carry around with us all the time. The statements we encounter can answer our questions or, in other words, fill the gaps. This view is also the basis for autonomous learning (Fenner 1997, 2000). The learners have to become aware of the questions and gaps they have in their knowledge before they can find the answers to them. The answers might be there, as in a lot of traditional teaching which is based on presenting answers, but as long as the learners are not aware of their own questions, they will not be capable of utilising the answers or statements. Each individual learner has his own questions dependent on his or her pre-understanding or 'Vorverständnis' in Gadamer's words, his or her 'horizon'. Whether the answers given in the classroom fall into line with the questions each individual has, depends on his

1 *From Text to Action* (my translation).

or her pre-knowledge. If and when it does, it constitutes a communicative experience and learning can take place. Hermeneutics talks about this as the "harmonious state between a hermeneutically accessible phenomenon (the statement) and the pre-knowledge. The statements fall into place within the 'horizon' constituted by the question". Identifying one's own lack of knowledge and experiencing a wish to fill the gap are two aspects of the same thing (Hellesnes 1988). A literary text consists of statements and presents answers to our own questions; reading literature and discovering the answers can be defined as a communicative experience. A relationship between subject (reader) and 'the other' (text) is established.

One of the aims of hermeneutics is to fight cultural distance, to make what was 'foreign' one's own. (Ricoeur 1992: 55) This is also the aim in the foreign language classroom. Only by entering into communication with the other, is it possible to understand the other as well as oneself. In foreign language learning the reading of literature must be seen as a double process. Entering into a communication process with the literary text is also entering into a dialogic process with the foreign culture, where not only the text and the culture in question are interpreted, but where the individual learner's self is developed through temporal dialogue and interpretation. Personal engagement on the learner's side is vital in this process. Foucault claims that knowledge of the foreign culture cannot be acquired passively: "The idea that the other can simply reveal or disclose itself to us, without any work whatsoever on our part, is ultimately unintelligible. There can be no access to the other without our actively organising the other in terms of our categories" (Falzon1998: 37). Our own categories are, however, also dynamic and will be altered by outside influence in the dialogic process. Learners will impose their categories upon the foreign culture in order to understand, simultaneously with being influenced by the foreign culture and having their own understanding changed. Through this dialectic process with the foreign language text, both cultural awareness and language awareness develop.

Dialogue and learning

At this point it is necessary to have a closer look at the term dialogue and its importance for learning. In linguistics communication and dialogue are regarded in terms of encoding and decoding language. Both processes depend on the speaker's as well as the listener's pre-knowledge, expectations, prejudices, and the social context. Dialogue, in its true meaning, is an exchange between a minimum of two partners. As stated previously, Ricoeur includes a third party, namely the topic which the participants communicate about. Dialogue, however, can take place without communication. Most communication models dealing

with encoding and decoding as separate aspects of a process can be used to show this. The same is the case with numerous examples of modernist and postmodernist literature as well as the Theatre of the Absurd, suffice it to mention the plays of Ionesco and Samuel Beckett (cf. Katnić-Bakaršić's article in this volume).

In the foreign language classroom we wish our learners to be able to communicate, not merely perform dialogues. A prerequisite of communication is that there is a minimum of understanding between speaker and listener. Encoding and decoding cannot be regarded as linear processes; they are aspects of an open-ended process where encoding and decoding occur simultaneously, and where both participants attribute similar meanings to the context in which the communication takes place. What Rommetveit calls "reciprocally adjusted perspective setting and perspective taking" is necessary in order for dialogue to be termed as communication: "Reciprocal adjustment of perspectives is achieved by an 'attunement to the attunement of the other' by which states of affairs are brought into joint focus of attention, made sense of, and talked about from a position temporarily adopted by both participants in the communication" (Rommetveit 1992: 23). This can hardly be achieved when learners work with constructed dialogues in textbooks, even when they are used only as a starting point. Because they are most often devoid of meaning, there is hardly any topic on which to focus attention and make sense of. I will, therefore, claim that they can only serve as examples of speech conventions, and as thus they have a very limited function in foreign language learning.[1]

Dialogue as such does not necessarily provide a potential for learning unless it is dialectic, i.e. intended to solve differences between two views without dichotomising these. But in order to solve differences, the participants have to become aware of these differences, whether they are between individuals, between cultures or between reader and text.

In what ways can the reading of literature in the foreign language classroom serve the purpose of providing learners with a focus for dialogue and communication? In foreign language learning speaking and writing have been regarded as productive skills while reading and listening have been classified as receptive skills. This is based on a view of foreign language learning as a kind of hierarchical system where the so-called productive skills have traditionally

1 For a further discussion on textbook dialogues, see Trebbi:" Mother tongue and foreign language learning – some aspects of a mutual relationship" in Aase, L., Fenner, A., Little, D. and Trebbi, T. (2000) *Writing as cultural competence: a study of the relationship between mother tongue and foreign language learning within the framework of learner autonomy*. CLCS Occasional Paper No. 56. Trinity College, Dublin.

been regarded as more important when the student is assessed. When literature is used in the classroom, the reader is commonly seen as the recipient of a text produced by somebody else, the writer, and consequently the reader takes on a passive role. In this opinion it is only once the reader does something with the text, like talking or writing about it, that he or she becomes a producer of language.

In my view this is not necessarily the case. A reader, and in particular a reader foreign to the language of the text in question, can only come to grips with a text as co-producer of language and meaning. Nystrand calls this process configuration: "Written communication is never a case of the unilateral transmission of meaning, one way from writer to reader; writers do not do the "encoding" and readers do the "decoding"; … Text meaning is uniquely configured by what both writer and reader bring to the text and consequently how they interact" (Nystrand 1992: 160-61). Bakhtin describes the reading process in a similar way: "[message] X is not transmitted from the writer to the reader, but is constructed between them as a kind of ideological bridge, is built in the process of their interaction" (Bakhtin and Medvedev 1985: 152). Reading a literary text, according to Bakhtin, creates "suspense between utterances", the utterances of the writer of the text and the potential utterances of the reader, the inherent questions with which the reader encounters the text (Wertsch 1992). Characteristics of the text: language, content, and cultural aspects, require interpretation, an active encounter with potential meanings of the literary text. Lexical, functional, and cultural aspects have to be interpreted as they are not static entities with one given meaning, but are given meaning by the subject, the reader, in the reading process. The reader will engage his or her experience and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1994) in the process of understanding, and diversity of background and cultural capital will thus be determining factors for what the individual gets out of the textual dialogue. In a classroom this means that there are a number of different dialogues taking place even when learners concentrate on the same text. Each reader of a specific piece of literature will be a participant in a dialogue, and this dialogue will differ from one reader to another.

The literary text does not speak in one tongue to all readers; different 'voices' in the text will speak to different readers in different ways. The more gaps there are in the text itself, the more the interpretation will vary. Because the reader is an active creator of meaning, reading literary texts is not a receptive process, but a productive one. The foreign language learner thus produces meaning already in the reading process itself; he or she is actively participating in a dialogue with the text even before being asked to produce oral or written language about the text in the classroom. When reading a literary text in a foreign language, the reader also encounters a foreign culture, expressed

through the language, and Bakhtin's "kind of ideological bridge" is constructed, not only between reader and text, but also between two cultures.

The above process will take place whenever a literary text is read. The classroom situation, with its general aim of learning, has other requirements than just interpreting, understanding, and emotionally responding to a literary text. In our case the requirements are learning a foreign language as well as acquiring cultural knowledge and competence. As teachers in the classroom can have no insight into the learning process which goes on within the readers, it is necessary to engage learners in a further process of talking or writing in order to gain that insight. Examples of this will be explored at a later point in this article when reader responses to Oscar Wilde's text, *The Selfish Giant*, are interpreted and discussed. Further work on the text is also necessary if the learner's understanding and knowledge are to be enhanced.

In my view there are three main reasons for written and oral dialogue about the literary text in the classroom. The first is, as mentioned above, that it provides the best opportunity for the teacher to become aware of and gain insight into the learning process which goes on within the individual. It is only through authentic oral or written dialogue that the teacher can find out anything about the outcome of the reading and learning processes. Secondly, according to Vygotsky, learning takes place in social interaction. Thought is developed through language, and by expressing themselves through speech or writing the learners develop their thinking as well as their speaking (Vygotsky 1991). Although Vygotsky primarily speaks about the native language, there is little reason to believe that foreign languages are developed very differently. Learning a foreign language is being socialised into a new culture through interaction with that culture, and the literary text represents the personal voice of that culture. Thirdly, communication about a text will give learners a chance to become aware of limitations in their own understanding. By listening to and discussing what other learners and the teacher express about their individual interpretations and understanding of the text, the learners will discover new aspects of that text, as well as personal reactions to it, which will, through further dialogue, expand their own scope and enhance their learning. In order to encourage authentic dialogue about the literary text, the nature of the tasks given is of vital importance. Examples of tasks and learners' response to them will be discussed at a later point in this article.

In a foreign language classroom where the teacher is considered the sole possessor and source of knowledge, there is little or no dialogue. Communication in such a classroom consists of monologue or at best monologic dialogue: a pretence dialogue with the sole purpose of getting the learners to produce corrects answers. There is no exchange of opinions on

language, literature or culture. Unfortunately this is very often the situation in foreign language classrooms, even when the aim is communicative competence, and it is also the case when literature and other cultural topics are on the agenda. If a textbook presents a literary text, it is most commonly followed by tasks concerned with understanding the surface content of the text. Closed questions of the type: Who is the main person? What happens? etc., prevail in textbooks and classroom tasks relating to literature. The answers to such questions only have two possible outcomes: the learner who has read the text and looked up the difficult words get them right; the ones who have not read the text properly will invariably get them wrong or not be able to answer. The sole purpose of such questions is to enable the teacher to check who has done the homework and who has not. Those learners who have read and understood the words in the text can produce correct answers by reproducing parts of the text in question, but they do not produce language. Neither do they get a chance to contribute their personal interpretation and opinion of the literary text. There is no real dialogue because authentic dialogue, an exchange of information and views on a subject where both participants have to adjust their attitudes and views, depends on new information being exchanged.

In order to provide for classroom discourse of a different, more genuine kind, authentic questions need to be asked. By authentic questions I mean questions which will engender answers that are not pre-empted. If the teacher, for instance, asks who the author of a specific literary text is, the answer is known to him or her as well as to the majority of the learners. If the teacher, on the other hand, poses questions about the learners' own interpretations and opinions of the text, the resulting answers will present novel information to every participant in the classroom discourse, including the teacher. Each learner will thus be given the opportunity to contribute to the ensuing 'classroom text' (Fish 1980). Different views will be exposed and can give learners a new and increased understanding of the text, and the teacher might also see it in a different light. A basis for interesting classroom discussion is given in which everybody takes on a participating role, and where everybody, including the teacher, is learning something new. Answering this type of question forces the individual to produce language and meaning as well as contributing a part of him/herself. It is, however, essential that the teacher does not have a preconceived idea of the exact meaning of the text in question, but keeps an open mind towards new interpretations.

Choice of text

The Selfish Giant by Oscar Wilde was chosen primarily for the following reasons: language and text quality, genre, intertextuality and cultural recognition. Although fairly difficult for some learners in a mixed-ability class, it is possible for a group of 14 year-olds to cope with the linguistic level of the story. It can be hard to predict what a group of learners will find difficult in a text. Many foreign language teachers tend to regard any text as difficult for learners if it is of some length and if there are several unfamiliar words or grammatical structures. Unfortunately, interpretations of Krashen's concept of 'comprehensible input' has contributed to such an understanding of what constitutes a difficult text. As adult readers we know that difficulty in interpreting a literary text does not necessarily consist of 'difficult' words or length. A very short poem with commonly used vocabulary can be extremely hard to interpret. Experience also shows that if young learners take an interest in the topic or the story, they can cope with surprisingly difficult texts as regards vocabulary, structure and length. If given the opportunity to discover that unfamiliar vocabulary in a literary text does not necessarily present an unsurpassable obstacle to grasping meaning, some learners experience this as a revelation.

In addition to functioning on a superficial level of action, *The Selfish Giant* has fairly obvious gaps inherent in the text. The story is not merely a simple, straight-forward narrative, but works on different levels and opens up for the individual's personal interpretation. Despite requiring personal interpretation, the story is not too difficult for young readers, and they can manage to identify with aspects of the text. If the structure of a text is too complex, it requires an analytical approach on a meta-level where the reader places him or herself 'outside' the text, and this cannot be expected of 14 year-olds.

The intercultural encounter in literature is made simpler by the fact that the text represents something which is familiar to children of many cultures: a genre resembling the fairy-tale. Because of its similarity with some of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy-stories, Oscar Wilde's text might even be more familiar to Scandinavian readers than to English readers. The class in this particular project had previously spent quite a long time on different kinds of fairy-tales, including writing their own, and knew the genre well. But familiarity is not only to be found in the genre. General simple features of narrative are also recognisable to the foreign reader: the state of disharmony at the beginning of the story, the change of character in the middle, and the restoration of harmony at the end. So despite being written in a foreign language, literature can offer a more familiar basis to the reader when encountering the other culture than many real life situations.

The religious aspect of *The Selfish Giant* is also part of a commonly shared cultural heritage. Thus, behind the foreign language there is cultural recognition, and a text like this raises certain intertextual expectations even in a young reader. Oscar Wilde's story also challenges the young learner because, as a fairy-story, it has a surprising ending, which invites differences of opinion and, therefore, discussion. Because there are features of both structure and content which young readers have the possibility of recognising from their own culture, they can use these familiar features as assistance in a mediating process with the text (Lantolf 2000), where recognition provides them with a certain kind of 'scaffolding'.

Vital to young readers' motivation is that the text evokes some kind of emotional response and inherent in Wilde's text is the possibility of such response. Recognition can in itself spark an emotional response, as can the pastoral beauty of the description, and the feelings evoked by the death of the main character might be another affective response. Fairy-stories often have a fairly simple moral and young learners recognise the moral messages of fairytales; they form part of their intertextual expectations. In *The Selfish Giant* there is room for interpretation as far as the moral is concerned, an aspect which gives learners a chance to see different moral messages, and because the narrative is a fantasy, they do not necessarily feel that the text is moralistic. They also know and relate to Christian morals although they often pretend not to.

The merging of two diverse literary traditions has the potential to make Wilde's narrative interesting and surprising to this age group because it is unexpected and unfamiliar. Through the cultural artefact, 'the Other', they encounter two separate traditions with which they are familiar in their own culture. By presenting the familiar from the outside, Wilde's story offers them a new perspective from which to approach moral questions. In such a textual context, these questions have the potential to engage young readers more than either the simplistic fairytale moral or the Christian moral would do separately.

There is an increasing demand in schools and exams that pupils should be presented with authentic situations, where authentic means 'real life'. This is presumably to prepare students for life after school, the outside reality. Oscar Wilde's story in no way offers a representation of this kind of reality; it is a fantasy story with few realistic links. The choice of text was, however, not made in order to give the learners a chance of escapism. Fantasy can offer young people a chance to use their experience to imagine what reality could be and, therefore, something that can challenge them to extend their knowledge and experience (Sørensen 1983). By giving them valuable *images* of reality, fantasy provides them with tools for reflection and thought. According to

Ricoeur such tools are necessary for our personal development as members of contemporary society. Unless we want to become victims of a technocratic society, we need as members of that society to include fantasy in our rationality (Nicolaysen 1997).

Classroom procedures

How can we create a learning situation in the classroom where an authentic dialogue with and about a literary text is possible? This part of the article is an attempt to describe and discuss the procedures chosen for this particular project in order to facilitate and mediate a dialogic process using a literary text. The following kinds of dialogue were planned: dialogue between learner and text, oral dialogue between peers, written dialogue between individual learners and the teacher, and, finally, oral dialogue between the whole group of learners and teacher. The classroom procedures consisted of these elements:

- encountering 'the Other' in the form of a short story by listening and reading;
- learners' spontaneous oral response to the text in groups;
- learners' individual written responses to a set of tasks;
- classroom discourse about interpretations based on individual answers to the tasks;
- planning further work based on classroom discourse.

In this particular case I chose to let the learners listen to a professional reading of Oscar Wilde's text for two main reasons: Norwegians associate fairytales and folktales with an oral tradition and they are used to listening to stories being told or read to them from a very early age. A good reading is also easier for dyslectic learners and most weak learners to understand, and it assists their own reading process. It is a question of mutual support: listening supports reading, and the written word on the page supports listening. In addition to the above, a professional reading enhances the pure enjoyment of the story.

After listening while looking at the text, learners spent time close-reading the story at school with the optional assistance of peers, teacher and dictionaries. Experience has taught me that concentrated classroom time on reading is time well spent, as the learners get an opportunity to concentrate on one thing over a lengthy period. This is contrary to current foreign language methodology, which

accentuates rapid changes of activity to counteract boredom. In my view this disturbs the students' possibility to concentrate. During the reading period, weaker learners were given the opportunity to repeated listening of the recorded text.

As learning generally, and language learning in particular, is dependent on social interaction (Vygotsky 1991), the students were asked to present their immediate response in groups, without focusing on any specific aspect of the text. They discussed problems they had with understanding, difficult words and structures as well as their personal and emotional response. According to Vygotsky's theory of proximal zones, young people will extend their knowledge and understanding with assistance (Vygotsky 1991), and as Lantolf claims in his article "Second language learning as a mediated process", they can receive valuable assistance through peer mediation (Lantolf 2000). Talking about the text also forces them to reflect, and their thinking as well as their speaking develops through communication (Vygotsky 1991). Bakhtin even states that meaning is created through dialogue and response is the activating principle (Bakhtin 1991). By listening to other learners' views, they also enhance their own understanding of the text. Group discussions can in addition offer the teacher valuable insight into their way of thinking.

The next step of the process was working individually with written tasks designed to promote dialogue, tasks which will be discussed in the next section of this article. While writing the learners have time for proper reflection on what they have listened to, read and discussed with peers. By having to structure their thoughts through written communication, they further develop both thought and language. Writing makes them aware of their lack of vocabulary, and they have to learn new words according to their own needs to express themselves. The answers to the tasks were then read by the teacher and became the basis for the ensuing classroom discourse.

Although this stage of the process may appear very traditional, the classroom dialogue was not identical to the traditional question and answer monologues which learners are exposed to when teachers or textbooks ask comprehension questions to a literary text. It was based on the learners' written response to non-finite tasks which enhance dialogue with the text. At this stage the teacher knew what the learners had answered, and the classroom discourse concentrated on areas which the learners had focused on and, therefore, also their needs: differences of opinion, interesting personal interpretations, problematic aspects of the narrative, specific features of language as well as content and form. Because there are no correct or incorrect answers, each member of the class, including the teacher, has something to contribute to this kind of classroom dialogue. The learners' response has shown where the text causes problems for

the readers and where there are gaps in the text which need to be expanded upon. How learners interpret the text is made audible in the classroom and the discussion widens the learners' personal horizon. According to Fish, the text that develops in the classroom when a literary text is discussed can be regarded as a different text from the original, and a new 'classroom text' emerges (Fish 1980). This is a text shared by learners and teacher, and its quality depends on all the contributors, even if the teacher is a more experienced reader and user of the foreign language and also monitors the mediating process.

Tasks

Previously in this article it was claimed that dialogue with a text depends on the hypotheses with which any reader approaches a text as a cultural manifestation. Inherent in the text is the possibility of the readers becoming aware of the questions they want answered, although they are not necessarily conscious, or even the possibility of finding answers to these questions. In order to promote communication with a text, it is important that the learner is willing to engage him/herself in the dialogue. Most learners will go through the immediate reading process with a certain amount of interest to find out what the text is about. They read for the action and the plot: to find out what happens. During this process they will usually look up certain words which they find necessary for an overall understanding of what happens. This is usually where their reading experiences outside school stop and beyond which most of them need assistance and mediation (Lantolf 2000) to engage in further work as the demands on them increase. At this point it is important to consider tasks which promote dialogue rather than to tell them what the various metaphors and symbols in the text mean. Simple questions can help a dialogic procedure resulting in interaction and learning.

It has been said that differentiation is not so much a matter of the text used in the classroom as of the tasks. As discussed previously, the literary text has too often been accompanied by comprehension questions about the characters and actions in a literary text, in more recent coursebooks perhaps concluded with one question asking for the reader's opinion of the story. 'Closed' comprehension questions do not encourage dialogue, whether it is with the text or with peers in the classroom. To stimulate language production the questions need to be open-ended, with scope for the learner to use his or her own experience or imagination when trying to discover meaning in the text.

As Birthe Sørensen points out in her article about literary texts in the classroom (1983), reading a literary text is to some extent a realisation of self or at least a potential realisation. The question is how the teacher and tasks can mediate a

process of dialogue with the text which enhances a process of reflection and thought through the foreign language, a process which is more than just reading for entertainment.

One of the first criteria is that the teacher does not impose his or her interpretation of the text upon the learners. It is important that they are given a chance to express their own reactions to the text, and these reactions must be made audible or visible in the classroom. By provoking response and making the learners express this response in written or oral language, they have an opportunity to develop thought as well as language (Vygotsky 1991). The process is mediated both by tasks, by peers and by the teacher. The type of questions asked in this process, are of vital importance. When given tasks, learners have become accustomed to asking themselves what answers the teacher might want. Even open questions are often interpreted as 'closed' by the learners and, based on school experience, they tend to think that there is one given correct answer. Consequently the tasks have to be of a character which makes it difficult for the learners to present answers which they believe will please the teacher.

This group of learners were given tasks with the purpose of making them relate to the text personally, to interpret meaning, to reflect on it, and to form an opinion. The focus of all three questions is on the text and the reader's response to it, and they are formed in such a way as to make the learners focus on the text itself and not on the teacher's reading, which would constitute the teacher's text as a product. Rather than making the teacher the centre of attention, the questions force the learners to concentrate on the text itself and their individual reading of it (Sørensen 1983). The young group of learners were asked the following questions:

1. What genre do you think this text is?
2. What surprised you in the text?
3. What did you like about this story?

If the text could easily have been recognised as one particular genre, the first question would not have been asked, because it would invite a simple correct or incorrect answer. As the narrative can be characterised in different ways, this question was given to promote reflection on familiar literary structures in order to encourage discussion and reasoning for the different views. From their answers the learners might see that there are various recognisable literary features in this story. At the same time the question might evoke feelings of familiarity with the story despite it being an artefact of the foreign culture. The question was also intended to familiarise the learners with a limited use of literary terminology in the foreign language, a terminology which they at this

stage have already acquired in their native language. In this way, their mother tongue functions as support when exploring a text as an expression of the foreign culture. Lantolf discusses mediation through native language in relation to Vygotsky's proximal zones, and states that learners will find support in their own language (Lantolf 2000). Although the learners in this particular case used English in their written answers as well as in the ensuing discussion, the principle is the same: the learners discover that when the concepts are familiar to them in their mother tongue, they find support in the knowledge they have already acquired. Consequently it is no more complicated to talk about a literary text than about any other topic with which they are familiar and take an interest in.

The second question was an attempt to make the reader enter into a direct dialogue with the narrative. It was intended so that the learners could focus on gaps in the text and perhaps its central idea. It might also cause the learners to focus upon areas which were not clear to them or unclear in the text itself. The question might also reveal superficial readings and a lack of understanding (Sørensen 1983). An ensuing classroom discussion can 'fill' the gaps with individual interpretations, which again can be discussed. The learners' interpretations can also give the teacher new views on the text, and, consequently, he or she participates in the learning process rather than being the sole provider of knowledge.

The third task opens up for the individual's emotional response to the text. Again, there are no right or wrong answers to the question; each answer is equally valid and interesting to all the learners, and can give them enhanced knowledge and understanding of the narrative. The answers can also give both learners and the teacher information and knowledge about the other learners' thought processes and how they are expressed in language, and thus the information provided serves a social purpose, too: learners get to know each other better.

The personal opinions expressed by the learners created the basis for the classroom text: the shared, common text arrived at through classroom discussion (Fish 1980). The answers might pose new questions which can be used in further interpretations of the literary text. In this way the learners take part in structuring the process of further work, and the literary analysis will be based on their focus rather than the teacher's. Such a process is far more motivating than a literary analysis which is based on the teacher's interpretation.

Another aspect of posing and answering the above questions is that the learners have to *produce* language rather than *reproduce* language from the text. They have to reflect on their own personal response to the text and express their

reactions and opinions. In doing this, they hypothesise about the text, they find answer to their conscious or unconscious questions, and they pose further questions. Hypothesising and formulating questions are central to dialogue and communication. Reading the text raises questions on one level, discussing it with others in the classroom makes this process explicit. In this way the text is used as a tool for reflection and thought simultaneously with developing written and oral skills in the foreign language. And because the learners also express personal likes and dislikes, the dialogue enhances the affective aspect of their foreign language use.

Learners' response

In this final part of the article some of the learners' response to the tasks given will be presented. The classroom discourse on the text which followed will not be discussed further, as, for the purpose of analysing dialogic interaction with the text, the written response functions better as an illustration than the ensuing classroom work. The most interesting responses are to be found among the answers to the second and third questions. These reveal the readers' expectations of the text and what aspects of the story they identify with, as well as their likes and dislikes. Two answers to the first question, however, show the variation in opinion about the genre, and can serve as an illustration of a potentially fruitful classroom discussion about the genre of *The Selfish Giant.*[1]

> "It is a fairytale because it is not true and giants are only in fairytales."
>
> "I think that this text is a short story because there is a turning point in the middle of the text. I think the turning point is when the Giant lets the children play in his garden."

Both answers prove intertextuality between learner and text; the readers' expectations created by previous knowledge of other texts encounter this particular text. The latter example shows that the learner has a solid grasp of specific features required of a narrative plot. Each is in itself just a statement about the purpose of the story, but posed against each other and made 'audible' in the classroom, the dichotomy forms an interesting basis for a discussion where the readers are forced to defend their views and, perhaps, discover that they are not mutually exclusive. Thus it is not the teacher, but the learners who create the focus of discussion.

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1 The errors in the learners' texts have not been corrected.

Answers to the second question show great variety within the classroom, as one would expect when learners are given scope to express personal attitudes. Most of the learners, however, write about the religious aspect of Oscar Wilde's story. This is probably partly due to the expectations they have because the narrative starts as a fairytale, but also to the fact that young Norwegian readers, as members of a secular society, are not often confronted with literary texts which are religious, especially not in foreign language teaching. Textbooks generally tend to shy away from texts which display moral values. One learner expresses her surprise in the following manner:

> "There is a lot of surprises in the last part of the short story. It surprises me that the little boy is a symbol of Jesus Christ, and that the Giant cared so much for the little boy. I was really shocked when I read this sentence: 'For on the palms of the child's hand were the prints of two nails, and the prints of two nails were on the little feet.' It also surprises me that the selfish Giant became a kind friend to the children."

It is obvious that the narrative has had a strong emotional effect on this reader as she uses the word 'shocked'. The nature of her surprise is at first one of intertextual expectation which is not met: characters in fairytales are not usually equipped with empathy and care for others. She is also surprised at the way Wilde introduces a religious aspect into what she believes to be a fairytale, although she classifies the narrative as a short story. Her shock is related to both content and language, the effect which this particular sentence has on her. It is the language of the authentic text, Oscar Wilde's written words about the child, which evokes her emotions, and she shows this by quoting the sentence rather than giving an account of its content. In the dialogue with a fantasy, she engages all her emotional reality when faced with a suffering child. To her, it is no longer a 'foreign' language; it is a language and a content which she identifies with and reacts to emotionally.

Several of the readers are surprised by the ending of the story: "It surprised me most that the giant died". Again it is a surprise created by an intertextual expectancy of the text by the reader. What they see as a fairytale should have a happy ending according to their previous reading experience. If they had been asked traditional comprehension questions after having read the text, it would not have been possible to discover what they had expected. By asking what surprised them in the narrative, however, the teacher has the opportunity of seeing how advanced their understanding of genre is, and also of discovering which parts of the narrative evoke reactions.

The Norwegian Curriculum of 1997 is heavily based on text and a variety of genres, and text competence is seen as an essential aspect of communicative

competence. Text is defined widely as oral and written texts, including the learners' own texts, pictures, music, drama etc. A number of factual and literary genres are listed as texts to be read, listened to, watched and spoken. They are also intended as models for the students' own speaking and writing. Genre characteristics are not seen as a set of rules, but as a tool for the writer when creating texts for various purposes. The learners need to be able to recognise genres as well as experience how writers break the 'rules' in order to convey different messages. This increases the learners' options when creating their own texts. The aspects of Wilde's text which surprise them thus focus on how the author uses his creative freedom, and it also enhances their text competence.

Their response to the unforeseen ending of the story becomes clear when they answer the third question about how they like the story. One learner expresses it in this way:

> "I didn't like that the Selfish Giant who had become the kind-hearted Giant died at the end. Poor children, who came into the garden to play, and found the Giant lying dead at the ground. For the Giant it was a good thing that he died, because he could visit the little boy who he loved, in his garden, which is paradise."

In this case, too, there is a strong identification with the characters. First the reader identifies with the children by feeling sorry for them because they are faced with death. Again, there is an emotional reaction to what the characters experience in the narrative, which shows that the reader is personally involved in the fictional universe. Literary texts deal with the human predicament, what is common between cultures rather than the differences. Despite the foreign language, the learners have no problems with identification and recognition of what is common to different cultures, in this case grief. The two cultures communicate in a dialogue. Learners of this age group like a happy ending, and they expect it in the fiction they normally read. As stated earlier in this article, they like to see harmony restored. Consequently the majority of this group was disturbed by the fact that the main character dies. This particular learner shows clearly that he enters into a dialogue with the text in order to restore harmony despite the fact that, in his view, this is a sad ending. His interpretation is then to look for a happy ending, and he discovers it in the religious aspect of eternal life.

Another reader sees this in a different way: "I like the ending because it is so different from everything else I have read". In this case it is the 'foreign' element which appeals. This is interesting in relation to foreign language learning as teachers and textbook writers often presume that what is 'foreign' makes things difficult. Here there is an example of the opposite. I think it is

often the case with young learners that what they find strange or exotic creates interest. The pedagogical principle of learners having to be faced with something familiar in order to develop motivation for learning, is not always true.

As can be seen from the above examples, some learners respond to content and some to linguistic aspects of the text. The following example shows that there are learners, even at this stage, who also respond to the more theoretical textual aspects of the narrative:

> "I liked that there was a story behind the story, because it is much better if the reader have to think about the moral and the story behind the story after he has finiched reading. I also liked that the Selfish Giant changes his opinion, and became friendly to the children. He lets them into his garden, and the frost, snow, North wind and hail disappears. The garden is reunited with the Spring! Another thing which I liked, was that the author changes the language in a paragraph at the end of the text. I liked it, because in that way, the author has some variation in the language. The key to a good story/text is varied language."

This reader has an understanding of text and subtext and likes the fact that the story engages the reader's reflections on the meaning of the narrative. He has read the story as a text, which, similar to the fairytale, has a moral. Young readers are preoccupied with morals, but unfortunately many teachers are worried about raising moral questions. As a result of being put into a dialogic situation, the moral aspect is raised by the learner and not the teacher. The last part of this answer is a proof of school knowledge and experience: the learner has been taught that variation in language is in itself good, perhaps a disputable statement. In this case the procedure gives the teacher an opportunity to investigate this statement and discuss it with the class. In any case, the student shows a certain degree of language awareness as a result of his reading and solving the task. An interesting aspect of this student's response is the language he uses to express his opinions, which is clearly influenced by the narrative itself. An expression such as "The garden is reunited with Spring!" is above the language level expected of a learner of English as a foreign language at this stage, and it proves how a good quality text functions as a valuable model for language learning. The statement also shows fairly advanced ability to interpret text.

Other learners are also intrigued by the moral of Wilde's story:

> "I don't know exactly what the boy ment by saying that 'these are the wounds of love', but it could be that God loves everybody irrespective of what people say or do. He even loves murderers in jails, and bad mother-in-laws."

This reader obviously tries out her ability to interpret a certain aspect of meaning in the text. There is here a certain embarrassment at expressing the Christian ethos in writing, an embarrassment which she tries to overcome by using irony and stereotypes in the last sentence. The learner has, however, managed to point out a problematic part of the narrative which can be focused upon in further work with the text. She has also seen that this particular part of the text is important and carries a message.

Some of the learners have problems expressing definite opinions about Wilde's text: "I don't have any special meaning about the story, but I think it was nice. And I learnd that you got to open your heart for everyone." The learner means 'opinion' rather than 'meaning' which is a transfer of mother tongue. Although she has no clear opinion, she expresses her enjoyment of reading the text, and she also feels that the story has something to tell her. Oscar Wilde's *The Selfish Giant* is perhaps a moralistic text, but this age group clearly shows in their reactions that they do not respond negatively to the moral aspect. They have clear opinions of right and wrong and have no problems expressing their opinions honestly when dealing with a literary text. Sometimes this is written in almost simplistic terms: "I liked this passage, because the Giant decides that he will no longer be a selfish Giant, but he will be a kind giant."

As one of the examples above shows, it is not always easy for this age group to express an opinion about a text, partly because foreign language learners are not very often asked to do so. Usually texts are treated as instructive for a specific purpose of learning: grammatical structures, a specific type of vocabulary, specific expressions useful in certain practical situations etc. Such aspects have been emphasised, also in communicative language learning, and curricula, teachers and textbook writers have decided which areas are important in order to communicate in the foreign language. But as expressed previously in this article, it is difficult to know exactly what students need to learn in order to communicate. The above examples of learners' responses show that the areas upon which they focus when given a certain scope may be far from the ones we, as teachers, expect.

Conclusion

As outlined in this article, I have attempted to show that literature has an important part to play in foreign language learning today as far as cultural awareness and language awareness are concerned. In a dialectic communication process the literary text provides a personal voice, not only of contemporary foreign culture, but also of past culture. I have tried to show that interacting with literature provides the learners with a chance to communicate with the foreign culture through the foreign language with its multiplicity of meaning. Culture consists of a web of texts (Time 1989), and the literary text provides an authentic communication partner in a dialogue, where the reader will learn from 'the Other' while having to reflect on his or her own part in the communication process. During a sociocultural process of interpreting and understanding the text, answers can be found to potential and real questions that arise about the foreign culture through its expression in language. Tasks which promote interaction, both in the reading process and in the ensuing classroom discourse, enhance the learners' awareness of their own culture which they bring to the text, as well as of the foreign culture as represented in the text. The literary text as an artefact of the foreign culture forces the reader to reflect on his own culture and identity, and gives the learner a chance to see himself from the outsider's point of view. By focusing on learners' interpretations and problems in the intercultural encounter with the foreign language text, peers and teacher can mediate a dynamic process of developing language awareness and cultural awareness.

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Dialogic interaction with dramatic texts in foreign language teaching with emphasis on raising cultural awareness and language awareness

Marina Katnić-Bakaršić

Bringing into focus of foreign language teaching (FLT) issues of cultural awareness (CA) and language awareness (LA) has shown that literary texts, which were neglected for a while, can be of great importance in that area. At the same time, the importance of interactive FLT has often been advocated (Rivers 1987a). Interactive FLT implies absence of a monologue approach and should therefore be based on dialogue in a broad sense (as communication between people, between people and texts, between texts etc.). What is rather interesting is the fact that drama is often neglected in papers exploring these issues. Some authors claim that poetry is especially appropriate for classroom work in FLT, because it has all the qualities of literariness of fiction or drama, and beyond that it has the advantage that these qualities can be found, observed and interpreted "in little space" (Maley 1987: 94). It can be argued, however, that every type of literature, every genre, can and should become an important element in FLT.

This paper tries to answer the following questions:

- Why is drama appropriate for a dialogic approach to the literary text in FLT?
- What differences can be observed between dramatic dialogue and everyday conversation? If such differences do exist, should they be taken into account in FLT?
- What are the possible effects and advantages of this approach?

Dramatic dialogue in FLT – advantages and obstacles

It is often noted that dramatic discourse has been subject to far less stylistic and discourse research than poetry and fiction. Thus drama can be regarded as the *Neglected Child* of these disciplines (Culperer, Short, Verdonk 1998). This statement can even more justly be applied to dramatic discourse in FLT.

One of the possible reasons may be the complex nature of dramatic dialogues and drama itself (i.e. drama is often regarded as a syncretic semiotic situation, which includes written or/and spoken text, music, motion, non-verbal means of communication, lights, stage etc.) This paper deals with dramatic dialogue as a written or oral text primarily, at the same time bearing in mind the complexity of drama as a genre.

However, the dual function of dramatic dialogues, "on the one hand as a reflex of *ordinary* conversation, and on the other as a literary artifice, an aesthetic structure with no more than superficial claims to naturalistic status" (Nash 1989: 29), makes them both more challenging and more rewarding for their usage in FLT.

It has been argued that the major difficulty encountered by language learners when approaching literary texts lies in the gap between "here-and-now communicative activities of elementary levels to the more text-bound discussions of the intermediate and advanced" (Kramsch 1993). Interactive reading of drama texts can herein have a very important role since dramatic dialogue strongly resembles the *here-and-now* of everyday communication. It has the same basic structure as naturally occurring dialogue, involving four elements:

I – you – here – now.

Therefore, dramatic texts could serve as a medium that will help learners to overcome the difficulty of first encounters with literary texts in FLT.

Language learning during the work on drama texts is not only reduced to acquiring language units, but also implies reflecting on language, reflecting on every utterance – in other words: it implies developing LA as well. The aesthetic values make dramatic dialogue interesting. Through interaction with that type of text learners acquire all: knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. These three aspects are described as desirable goals that should be achieved in FLT (Byram, Morgan and colleagues 1994: 135-136).

If the starting point is the fact that dramatic text itself is based on dialogue, on interaction, its main characteristics being dialogic by nature, this can be the reason for the suggested study of dramatic dialogue. Moreover, the dialogic nature of dramatic text emphasises interaction on several levels and enables various types of communication and interaction with the text in the classroom.

Drama in FLT can be used in two different ways. Firstly, dramatic text can be used for performance: "Drama is communication between people. Therefore if

our students are doing dialogue work, and if they are conveying the intended meaning, as opposed to reciting lines, they are using drama." (Via 1987: 110). In the few papers dealing with dramatic discourse in FLT this approach predominates as a rule. In spite of the definite importance of that approach to drama, this paper is focused on the second model.

Secondly, dramatic text is important for interactive relations between reader/learner and text, as well as for various forms of work in the classroom that are aimed at developing CA and, even more, LA. Multilevel communication and different types of dialogue that will later be elaborated in this paper represent the basis for creative teaching.

It should also be emphasised that every literary text, not just poetry, to which this quality is assigned in the first place, but drama as well, belongs to the so-called reactional type of language. Its main purpose is "to make people react personally to another person's verbal sensibility", whereas one of its most important features is "non-triviality" (Maley 1987: 94). In the terminology of Jakobson's language functions these types of texts are characterised by the aesthetic/poetical function of language, where the message itself is the focus, i.e. its form and implications of the form on the content of the message. It can be argued that reactional language or language with poetic function, is always especially appropriate for acquiring and developing LA: language units become emphasised, their form is stressed, as well as pragmatic relations between the form of utterance and its meaning.

Consequently, the main hypothesis of this paper is that dialogic interaction with dramatic texts can have great importance and creative possibilities for developing CA and LA in FLT.

It has already been shown by researchers that different cultures speak differently (different loudness, turn-taking management, politeness-formulae can be observed; even silence is represented differently in different cultures); it is therefore appropriate to speak about "culturally diverse speech styles" (Robinson 1987). That is why the cross-cultural approach is crucial for any dialogue-centred FLT. In this approach, however, the "ethnocentric bias" should be avoided, i.e. the danger that viewing the cultures of the Other is "distorted if we view them through the prism of our own culture" (Goddard, Wierzbicka 1997: 231). The most important task of the language teacher is therefore to create a classroom atmosphere of the so-called third-place (Kramsch 1993), as a site which enables learners to overcome ethnocentricity or uncritical acceptance of Otherness. One of the stylistic features of postmodern drama is introducing different dialects and even different languages, but not as a device of creating humour. On the contrary, this is a way of showing cross-cultural, plurilingual

orientation of new drama. It is interesting that certain cultural stereotypes can be found even in contemporary dramas written under the influence of the postmodern conceptions of heteroglossia[1] and polyphonic structure of dramatic text (Sakellaridou 1995, Singleton 1995). One of the goals of a dialogic approach to dramatic text in FLT is the critical analysis of that type of stereotypes as well.

Apart from that, one of the tasks is to compare principles of the function of dramatic dialogue vs. naturally occurring everyday dialogue. In this respect the basic hypothesis is that these two types of dialogue are created according to the same principles, but are at the same time crucially different because dramatic dialogue violates many rules and principles that are necessary for the success of a naturally occurring dialogue. Better understanding of everyday conversation helps to understand the nature of dramatic dialogue. At the same time, these dramatic foregrounded or distorted dialogues, motivated by aesthetic aims, make the features of the naturally occurring dialogues more obvious: "Oddly enough, by examining strikingly unusual interaction in a literary text, we may alert ourselves to the discourse patterns in everyday interaction" (Simpson 1989: 43). Language learning in general, especially foreign language learning (FLL), should therefore benefit from exploring both types of dialogue.

Theoretical foundations of the research

Papers from the area of stylistics, both structural and poststructural, served as the theoretical basis of this research (Birch 1991, Burton 1980, Weber 1996 etc.). Poststructural stylistics, being an expression of postmodern thought, emphasises as its dominant feature the principle of dialogic interaction between texts, i.e. an intertextual approach (Derrida 1979, Asher 1994), as well as between text and reader / receiver. At the same time, communication being the central issue here, semiotics (literary, linguistic and sociocultural) should be another theoretical starting point for the analysis, according to the definition of semiotics as investigation of all types of "conveying meanings".

In order to discuss dialogic interaction with texts, it is necessary to approach the texts critically, to enable the permanent negotiation of roles. Every dialogue, including dialogue with literary texts or dialogue in the classroom, is contractual – it is therefore important to enable permanent contractual relations between participants – teacher and learners. It is argued that every reading of

1 The term *heteroglossia* was introduced by M. Bakhtin. This concept means that "all discourse is multi-voiced", and "texts often reflect and recycle different voices" (Jaworski, Coupland 1999: 8).

the text involves intertextual links with other texts the reader has in his/her cognitive background or "*schemata*"; furthermore, every communication or interaction implies that the interlocutors possess different cognitive models, i.e. schemata (information, knowledge, beliefs, expectations, cultural background) (Weber 1998). Dialogic model work with dramatic text should inter alia foster the development of critical awareness of these differences, and enable the building of bridges to overcome them.

Contemporary stylistics is closely interrelated with a number of linguistic disciplines exploring discourse: first of all, it involves discourse-analysis, conversational analysis and pragmalinguistic analysis (speech act analysis). Consequently, the knowledge of all these disciplines and their main techniques represents the necessary condition for the work with dramatic dialogue in FLT (see bibliography and the crucial results of these disciplines in the analysis of dramatic discourse in: Herman 1995, Culperer, Short, Verdonk 1998, Toolan 1998).

Traditionally, on first levels of FLT, and even on further levels, dialogue learning/teaching generally predominates for the two following purposes:

- with a view to teaching/practising usage of certain language forms (making questions, typical answers, starting and closing/ending dialogue etc.);

- with a view to practising certain communicational situations, i.e. communicational tasks (asking for advice, information, expressing agreement/disagreement etc.).

A third purpose was recently introduced as well:

- acquiring the dialogues typical of the target culture, by obeying the principles of CA.

Introducing dramatic dialogue in FLT implies and underlines all these functions of the naturally occurring dialogue, and at the same time adds a number of other possibilities and aspects due to the aesthetic nature of dramatic texts and their complex communication models.

Types and levels of communication in activities with dramatic texts

Another source of the importance of interaction with dramatic text[1] lies in the fact that several levels of communication can be presented. In the proposed model these levels are interrelated, they are often combined, and that fact creates communicative situations appropriate for an interactive approach to FLT. The basic levels of communication in this model are the following:

Communication of dramatic text, comprising two aspects:

- communication playwright (addresser) – message – addressee (reader, audience);

- communication character A (addresser) – message – character B (addressee), with a constant switch of roles between A and B.

The difference between dramatic and everyday dialogue is obvious even here, because the naturally occurring conversation normally has a one-level communication scheme:

Addresser A – message – addressee B
(of course, again with switching roles between A and B).

Consequently, dramatic dialogue always functions on two levels and can therefore represent a more complex model as compared to everyday communication. This two-level communication of dramatic text is regarded by discourse analysts as crucial for the understanding of dramatic irony or "for the way in which we know that when we listen to two characters talking on stage we are meant to deduce, through what they say, what the author is telling *us* about *them* in terms of characterisation" (Short 1994: 950). Two-level discourse is also necessary in order to provide the readers/audience with information about past events that are known to the characters but not to the audience, e.g. the initial dialogue of the guards in Hamlet serves to inform addressees about recent events in Elsinore: the death of the king, the apparition of the ghost etc.

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1 This paper makes a distinction between the terms "dramatic text" and "dramatic discourse", that is discourse of drama. Dramatic text represents a written or spoken text intended for reading or performing on the stage and subject to textual analysis (analysis of coherence, connection, coreferentiality, etc.). Dramatic discourse includes both, dramatic text and all sociocultural and discourse practices of the addresser/author of the text and addressee (reader or audience seeing the drama on the stage), their expectations, and cognitive and intertextual background.

At the same time, interaction with dramatic text in FLT adds new communicational levels: communication, i.e. dialogic interaction with dramatic text and related to it.

This type of communication includes various dialogic models which are usually not separately studied, but appear inevitable when using drama in FLT. Basic types of such communication are:

- teacher – dramatic text;
- learners – dramatic text;
- teacher – learners;
- learner – learner;
- learner – character (role-playing) etc.

The first two types and the fourth one represent communication that is essentially an attempt to read, understand, and interpret the text based on one's prior knowledge and sociocultural identity, i.e. experience. Every reading of the text is a new creation of the same text and its meanings, for it is always based on the individual, subjective schemata of the reader[1]. It is consequently justified to distinguish two types of reading: efferent (reading for understanding, for information) and aesthetic (reading for aesthetic and emotional response to the text); these types can be viewed "as dimensions of reader – text dialogue" (Kramsch 1993: 124). Both efferent and aesthetic reading can be used in FLT for interaction with dramatic dialogues, but the emphasis should be on aesthetic reading.

Especially important is the third type: interaction between professor and students with dramatic text as its basis. This communication has two aspects:

a. In studies of naturally occurring dialogue, communication between students and teacher is sometimes described as the case "when one participant has acknowledged responsibility for the direction of the discourse, for deciding who shall speak when, and for introducing and ending topics" (Burton 1980: 109). Although recognising such a role of the teacher to a certain degree, we should bear in mind the fact that interactive dialogue student – teacher more frequently manifests signs of oscillation between the two poles of discourse – instructional and natural discourse with their typical qualities. Kramsch claims that instructional discourse is characterised by the fixed status of roles, teacher-orientation, and focus on content and accuracy of facts, whereas main characteristics

1 "There is indeed one text, but there are as many discourses as there are readers of the text" (Kramsch 1993: 122).

of natural discourse are negotiated roles, group-orientation and focus on process and fluency of interaction (Kramsch 1987: 18).

b. This could be accepted in most cases although natural dialogue is not always on this pole, but depends on a number of factors: power, domination vs. subordination, it is not always fluent etc. On the contrary, teacher – students dialogue must show as much readiness as possible of moving from the instructional towards the interactive pole. Postmodern theoreticians, as previously mentioned, claim that every dialogue implies the existence of a contract between its participants, a contract which will define relationships among them and the dominant person who will manage the dialogue. What is necessary for interaction is a permanent negotiation of social roles. Dramatic dialogue is the most appropriate genre to serve as an illustration of such negotiating and, at the same time, as a type of classroom work involving a changing of roles. The teacher sometimes, while starting with the instructional type of discourse, actually aspires to enable the students to construct their knowledge, empathy and consciousness through deconstruction of the dialogue. Dramatic dialogue, with its characteristic undermining of the principles of everyday communication, represents an appropriate form for fulfilling that task.

Naturally occurring conversation vs. dramatic dialogue

Dramatic dialogue and naturally occurring communication share certain common characteristics. Their common deictic structure *I – you – here – now* has already been mentioned; in addition, it is often said that certain dramas are characterised by "natural dialogue". At the same time, any drama that retains all the authentic characteristics of everyday dialogue, with all the pauses, hesitations, interruptions, overlapping or even turn-stealing, topic-changes, incoherence, nonsequiturs, would, as a matter of fact, be boring. Dramatic dialogue borrows some characteristics of everyday communication, some of its peculiar qualities. Some of them it even intensifies, whereas others are simply ignored as irrelevant, as noise or redundancy.

There is a theory that the basis of every dialogue is *exchange* (of information or service) (Toolan 1998). This principle of exchange or transfer can be applied to dramatic dialogue as well. Yet dramatic dialogue is artificial, and it must therefore be more organised than everyday dialogue, must be more orderly in turn-taking, with less interruptions and simultaneous speaking; characters are usually given the chance to say everything they want to. Hesitations, silence and uncompleted turns are represented less than in naturally occurring dialogue.

It is also important to bear in mind that not all dramatic dialogues are based on colloquial speech. On the contrary, they can have various stylistic or register features. They can for example belong to a certain dialect or register (compare some elements of Shaw's *Pygmalion*) or they can comprise elements of foreign language, archaic language of a certain epoch etc. The analysis of such dramatic dialogue involves exploring its style or register or sometimes even the paraphrases of certain parts. For example, the paraphrase of the dialogue from the beginning of Hamlet was suggested by Nash as a first stage in the analysis and interpretation of the text (Nash 1997), but it can become an important device in FLT too.

Some important notes for the work on using drama in FLT:

Recognising the principles of everyday conversation (Grice's maxims) represents the basis for understanding dramatic dialogue. Dramatic dialogue often violates these principles, from which its irony and ambiguity or even its aesthetic values originate. It is impossible to discuss dialogic interaction with dramatic text without a previous discussion of these principles and rules.

According to Grice, a general principle of every conversation is the co-operative principle. This principle includes the following maxims:

- *the Maxim of Quantity* – it is necessary to give the interlocutors the appropriate amount of information; do not make your contribution more informative or less informative than is required;

- *the Maxim of Quality* – interlocutors should say the truth and only speak about what they have proof of. If we ask a passer-by for directions, we expect him/her to give us correct instructions. Naturally, this maxim is often violated in communication for various reasons (wishing to leave out parts of the unpleasant truth, to avoid consequences of a certain action, to gain something etc.);

- *the Maxim of Relevance* – it is important that what interlocutors say is relevant (that they do not talk about football if asked about growing orchids). However obvious this may appear, it often happens that interlocutors fail to observe this rule in everyday conversation as well as in official types of conversation;

- *the Maxim of Manner* – this maxim assumes above all the need for brevity, order and avoiding ambiguity or obscurity (Grice 1957).

Some authors later add other maxims, e.g. the maxim of politeness (Brown, Levinson 1987), which could also be applied to dramatic dialogue.

Dramatic dialogue violates these maxims, plays with them, and dramatic conflict is the focus of the dialogue. Such dialogue is a “reflex” of ordinary conversation, but it is always “a literary artifice, an aesthetic structure with no more than superficial claims to naturalistic status” (Nash 1997: 29). One of the most frequent devices serving to express that conflict is violation of Grice’s maxims in dialogue.

Violation of the everyday conversation principles in dramatic dialogue can be regarded as a form of estrangement (the term originates in Russian formalism – *ostranenie*) or foregrounding. Some authors even use Brecht’s term *alienation device* in that sense (see Burton 1980: 101).

Estrangement or foregrounding, as the basic principle of every literary text, confronts dramatic dialogue with everyday conversation. Naturally occurring conversation is automatised, it often has a very specific, schematic structure with typical opening and closing formulae (Burton 1980: 110).

FLT was traditionally based on dialogues characterised by such a structure, their goal being to achieve a similar level of automatisation among students. As much as automatisation may be desirable in the learning of a certain communicational model, particularly in initial stages of learning, there are still a number of problems arising from this approach.

First of all, the main problem is the learners’ lack of interest, their lack of motivation. Apart from that, the dialogue teacher – learner can easily lose the features of interaction, so that an instructional type of dialogue predominates. That is why dramatic dialogue should be given a special status in FLT: all these expected, predictable elements of everyday conversation can be intentionally distorted in it. In other words: we often recognise the norm when it is distorted; some features of everyday dialogues are highlighted when they are not preserved in dramatic dialogue (Simpson 1989: 43).

Once students perceive these distortions and become aware of them, a double effect is achieved:

- on the basis of distorted (foregrounded) dialogue, students develop LA of naturally occurring dialogue in the given situation; they start thinking about culturally-appropriate and language-appropriate replies;

- on the basis of such perception, they obtain aesthetic information conveyed by dramatic dialogue. Through deconstruction of the dialogue, they construct the world and language of a literary, i.e. dramatic work.

Both aspects or effects are extremely important for FLT; learners can become "more conscious of texts and stretches of language as containing messages which need to be negotiated for meaning"; at the same time, this confirms the hypothesis that "a more conscious reflective language learner is a more effective language learner" (Carter 1997: 168-169).

Another difference between dramatic and naturally occurring dialogue lies in the fact that the former implies conflict (even those dramatic dialogues that seemingly do not contain conflict or contain a latent one, are actually preparing the scene for a future conflict). On the contrary, everyday dialogue does not necessarily imply conflict – there is a number of dialogues with dominant phatic function. Phatic function was described by Jakobson. Malinowski further explores its importance in various cultures. Its goal is to express group belonging and it is therefore found in greeting formulae, forms of addressing, conversations about weather or some other emotionally non-controversial material. Consequently, playing with phatic function in dramatic texts may have great importance (for concrete analyses of phatic function, see below).

A model of interaction with dramatic dialogue

The suggested model of a dialogic approach to dramatic text comprises several stages:

- selection of the text appropriate for the target task;
- interactive reading of the text (individual or group, at home or in the classroom);
- selection of the focus: the key problem in some dramatic dialogues is violation of Grice's maxims, in others it is politeness strategies or turn-management (domination vs. subordination of individual characters), phatic function of communication etc.; some dramatic texts are especially appropriate for developing CA, whereas others mostly enhance LA;
- students are given various assignments depending on the previously selected focus;
- speech characterisation of characters in drama is discussed;

- aesthetic values of drama are discussed wherein the reader always constructs (re-creates) the meaning of the text based on his/her own sociocultural background and schemata, as well as on the intertextual background.

Notes:

The teacher can decide to work on a single dramatic scene or a single dialogue or he/she can select a longer stretch or a whole drama. Depending on this choice, the teacher will decide what background information should be given to learners (information about fabulae, context of drama etc.). In some cases, however, the reading of a dialogue can come before any explanation – thus the teacher can select the following short segment of dialogue from *The Bald Prima Donna* and ask learners to share their opinions about it:

Mr. Smith: hm
Mrs. Smith: hm-hm
Mrs. Martin: Hm hm hm
Mr. Martin: Hm hm hm hm
Mrs. Smith: Oh! Really!

Mr. Martin: I think we must all have colds
Mr. Smith: It's not cold weather though
Mrs. Smith: There are no draughts
Mr. Martin: Oh no! Rather not!

Learners will as a rule perceive that the dialogue is in a way unusual even if they do not know that it was taken from Ionesco's drama or if they do not have any background knowledge about the drama itself. Apart from that, they will understand without any preceding explanation that it is a conversation about weather without any informative value. Thereafter the teacher may explain the principles of phatic function, the role of humming and coughing (*hm-hm* or *well-well, so*... etc.), the function of which is to overcome the uncomfortable silence in conversation. Further discussion is aimed at comparison of the given dialogue with similar typical everyday dialogue, and finding differences between the two. Students will most frequently recognise humour in dramatic dialogue, that is they will perceive the way in which the dialogue pronounces certain characteristics of everyday conversation or even makes them appear funny and absurd.

The suggested model anticipates a number of activities, both oral and written, aimed at enabling interaction with dramatic dialogue. One of the key tasks is discussion of certain aspects of drama and its interpretation. Additional types of activities with dramatic text include the following tasks:

- insertion of missing lines (the key line in a certain dialogue segment is missing, and learners should replace it);

- completion of a dialogue/ scene (an incomplete dramatic scene is given, and learners should think of the possible ending; various options are discussed in the classroom);

- transformation of the given dialogue based on the concrete task (the task is to rewrite the dialogue in another register, from verse to prose etc.);

- putting lines in the correct order (learners are given lines of the dialogue written on separate cards; the task is to put the lines in the correct order);

- schematic presentation of the development of a dramatic conflict (Byram, Morgan and colleagues, 1994: 130-134 describe this task with work on fiction, but dramatic dialogue has even more potential). Students find the line initiating the conflict or introducing its background and they further present on a chart the development of conflict up to the climax and eventual closure;

- discussion of viewpoints represented by persons in the text and the cultural significance of these viewpoints; discussion of varieties of language. This assignment is aimed at enhancing various aspects of CA;

- debate wherein students take up positions of certain characters;

- comparison of dramatic dialogue with an everyday dialogue in the same context. This activity fosters development of CA and LA; a possible task would be to convert the dialogue from literary into colloquial register and discuss the consequent stylistic changes;

- performing parts of a drama (it would be interesting to see learners performing the drama after its detailed interpretation according to the suggested model).

The above tasks are both written and oral, including activities done at home (individual interaction with dramatic text) and in the classroom (individual and group). In addition to these tasks it is possible to introduce the task of creating

dramatic scenes. Interesting suggestions for creating "dialogues of incongruity" or "odd dialogues" can be found in Simpson 1998: 49. Given the complexity of this task, it should be introduced in advanced stages of FLT or for students in language and literary departments.

Finally, it should be reiterated that this paper, while advocating a dialogic model of work with dramatic text in FLT, emphasises several goals of such a model:

- one of the basic goals of this model is a better understanding and interpretation of the principles of dramatic and naturally occurring dialogues; other goals follow from it;

- development of CA and LA;

- development of stylistic competence could be regarded as a subtype of LA development, but it is here mentioned separately in order to emphasise its importance since it was earlier given little attention in FLT. Stylistic competence includes the ability to recognise various registers, i.e. styles, as well as the ability to use various registers. Stylistic competence and performance represent one of the prerequisites for developing "elaborate-code speakers"[1], familiar with various language resources and able to use them appropriately;

- development of aesthetic awareness; learners gradually develop awareness of a multiplicity of meanings of literary (dramatic) texts, as well as a multiplicity of possible readings and interpretations of these texts;

- critical reflection of dramatic discourse will enhance the development of reflective skills in general, which will contribute to the development of creative personalities, ready to reflect on their own and attitudes of the others without prejudice and stereotypes.

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1 The term is used by Weber as opposite to the term *restricted-code speaker* who as a rule finds it more difficult to participate in conversation on an equal basis (Weber 1998: 116).

Examples of interaction with dramatic text

The following examples may serve as an illustration of the suggested model of interaction with dramatic text. Various types of dialogues are given, belonging to different types of drama, originating from different time periods and having different stylistic orientation. They all, however, represent a solid base for FLT, especially when focus is put on the development of CA and LA. Apart from that, these dialogues provide opportunities for real interaction in the classroom, since they can provoke different opinions and attitudes, discussion and creative dialogues.

EXAMPLE 1

Dialogue from *Pygmalion* by B. Shaw

This dialogue is extremely appropriate for work in the FL classroom. First of all, the text itself is quite well known, and learners at intermediate and advanced stages are often familiar with the story. Secondly, in *Pygmalion* dialogue often contains metalinguistic statements, since language is of great importance to the whole dramatic conflict. Thirdly, it gives an opportunity for analysis and interpretation of three interesting issues:

- phatic communication in everyday conversation and drama;
- politeness strategies and power-structure in the drama;
- language as a tool of speech characterisation.

(1) Liza[1] (*speaking with pedantic correctness of pronunciation and great beauty of tone*) How do you do, Mrs Higgins? (*She gasps slightly in making sure of the H in Higgins, but is quite successful*). Mr. Higgins told me I might come.
(2) Mrs. Higgins *(cordially)* Quite right: I'm very glad indeed to see you.
(3) Pickering. How do you do, Miss Doolittle?
(4) Liza *(shaking hands with him*). Colonel Pickering, is it not?
(...)
(5) Freddy (*coming to their side of ottoman*) I've certainly had the pleasure.
(6) Mrs. Eynsford Hill *(introducing*) My son Freddy.
(7) Liza. How do you do?
Freddy bows and sits down in the Elisabethan chair, infatuated.
(8) Higgins *(suddenly*). By George, yes: it all comes back to me*! (They stare at him).* Covent Garden! *(Lamentably*) What a damned thing!

1 Excerpts of dramatic dialogues in this paper are quoted in the same form as in the sources from which they are taken.

(9) Mrs. Higgins. Henry, please! (*He is about to sit on the edge of the table)* Don't sit on my writing table: you'll break it.
(...)
A long and painful pause ensues.
(10) Mrs. Higgins (*at last, conversationally*) Will it rain, do you think?
(11) Liza. The shallow depression in the west of these islands is likely to move slowly in an easterly direction. There are no indications of any great change in the barometrical situation.
(12) Freddy. Ha! ha! how awfully funny!
(13) Liza. What is wrong with that, young man? I bet I got it right.
(14) Freddy. Killing!
(15) Mrs. Eynsford Hill. I'm sure I hope it won't turn cold. There's so much influenza about. It runs right through our whole family regularly every spring.
(16) Liza *(darkly*) My aunt died of influenza: so they said.
(17) Mrs. Eynsford Hill (*clicks her tongue sympathetically*) !!!
(18) Liza *(in the same tragic tone).* But it's my belief they done the old woman in.
(19) Mrs. Higgins *(puzzled*) Done her in?
(20) Liza. Y-e-e-e-es, Lord love you! Why should she die of influenza?
(...)
(21) Mrs. Eynsford Hill. What does doing her in mean?
(22) Higgins *(hastily)* Oh, that's new small talk. To do a person in means to kill them.

(Shaw 1965: 734-735)

This excerpt shows violation of the rules of phatic communication, which should be general, casual, predictable; it should not be personal. Liza, however, directs the conversation towards "real" situations and people, she is taking turn too often and talks too much (her lines are the longest). There is a contrast between the lines from (1) to (10), where norm is preserved, towards the middle of the dialogue, where Liza violates it (lines 11, 18 and 20).

The maxims of politeness and manner, even the maxim of relevance to some extent, are also violated. When compared with the reproaches that Mrs. Higgins addresses to professor Higgins, it is easy to see the difference: he violates the politeness principle due to the absentmindedness of a professor, without thereby violating the style of his class, whereas Liza is received as "different", "unusual" (therefore the professor finds an excuse for it by explaining it as new "small talk").

The teacher needs to encourage students to recognise her register switching towards registers of weather forecast and colloquial speech, both inappropriate. Discussion of various registers as a rule encourages students to comparison with their native tongue and similar possibilities and effects in it.

In this case the teacher may include reading or even performing this scene while including as many of its stylistic features as possible.

The dialogue can also serve to initiate a discussion of stereotypes (one of the stereotypes about English culture is the role of conversations about the weather):

- Are the expectations that students have based on their cultural background and stereotypes met in this dramatic dialogue?

- Can they remember situations in their experience when one of the interlocutors failed to understand the nature of "small talk" and phatic communication?

Students can be given an assignment to think of an alternative ending of the scene or to change the slang and weather forecast lines with appropriate ones. Greeting norms in their own culture and the target culture of Shaw's time and today are discussed.

If the teacher feels it appropriate, he/she can give students a longer stretch of the dialogue, including the closure of the dramatic scene, and again use it to observe Liza's switching back and forth between "appropriateness" and "non-appropriateness", and to mark certain lines. The comic effect of the dialogue should also be discussed and interpreted.

EXAMPLE 2

The Bald Prima Donna by E. Ionesco

This is a drama that is extremely appropriate for FLT. Its subject-matter is language itself, and the playwright stated that some lines were directly inspired by nonsensical phrases from old FLT textbooks. Learners as a rule react by recognising these phrases, which could serve as a basis for critical discussion of textbooks in general. One of the assignments should therefore be analyses of passages containing parody of false, artificial phrases taken from FLT textbooks.

Ionesco's style is discussed. Special emphasis is put on the fact that language and communication become main characteristics of dramatic text. It was the author's purpose to expose the absurdity of everyday communication. The dialogue distorts all Grice's maxims – and the co-operative principle as well; politeness strategies are foregrounded too.

Stereotypes in dramatic dialogue

Mrs. Smith: Goodness! Nine o'clock! This evening for supper we had soup fish cold ham and potatoes and a good English salad and we had English beer to drink The children drank English water we had a very good meal this evening And that's because we are English because we live in suburb of London and because our name is Martin

What stereotypes can be observed in this line?

Why does Ionesco insist on these stereotypes?

Would it be possible to compare and replace these stereotypes with stereotypes existing in the learners' culture?[1]

Compare this with the introductory information to the drama, where Ionesco repeatedly uses the word "English": "A typical middle class English interior. Comfortable armchairs. Typical English evening at home. Typical English Mr. Smith, in his favourite armchair, wearing English slippers, smoking an English pipe, reading an English newspaper, beside an English fire.... A long English silence" etc.

Recurrence of words or phrases in a literary text is in stylistics regarded as a device for emphasising certain segments, whether the emphasis is on their importance for the text or the repetition leads to complete emptiness and loss of their original meaning. What is the role of the repetition of these stereotypes?

Why is Ionesco believed to bring a number of everyday communication elements to the level of the absurd?

Distortion of the co-operative principle

It has been claimed that the co-operative principle enables successful everyday conversation. Ionesco's drama violates several of Grice's maxims as well as usual politeness-strategies. The following dialogue is rather illustrative:

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1 It is claimed that comparison and contrast have central roles in overcoming stereotypes about the culture of the Other. Simply avoiding stereotypes in FLT is therefore not sufficient; they need to be introduced directly, compared with stereotypes of the source culture, and it is only then that a basis to overcome them is created (Byram, Morgan and colleagues 1994).

Maid (Mary) shows the guests in saying:

What do you mean by being so terribly late? It's not polite you must arrive punctually Understand?

Still now you're here you might as well sit down and wait
(...)

(The Smiths arrive)

Mrs. Smith: Good evening! How nice to see you! Please forgive us for keeping you waiting so long We thought we ought to pay you the honours you have a right to expect and as soon as we learnt that you were going to be kind enough to give us the pleasure of coming to see us without announcing your intended visit we hurried to go and put on our glad-rags.

Mr. Smith: We've had nothing to eat all day We've been expecting you for four hours

Why have you come so late?

Which characters violate the politeness principle?

Is the same device for showing the dramatic conflict as in Shaw's play used here?

Could it be described as Ionesco's individual stylistic device? What does this device aim at?

Mrs. Smith's and Mr. Smith's lines contradict each other, and the maxim of quality is violated too – the visit was or was not announced. Mrs. Smith combines extreme politeness with criticism: "to give us the pleasure of coming to see us without announcing your intended visit", whereas Mr. Smith directly violates the politeness-principle and strategies.

If politeness should be seen on the following scale: overpoliteness – politeness – neutral – underpoliteness – offensive remark, where on the scale would the maid Mary's and Mr. and Mrs. Smith's lines fit?

Does the absence of the guests' response also represent Ionesco's specific device?

What would a naturally occurring dialogue look like in the given situation?

Could it be possible to add the guests' lines while preserving the style of the drama?

The following dialogue is also about politeness. At the same time it exposes the two-level nature of dramatic dialogue: in the first ten lines all characters ask and beg the Fire-Chief to tell another story, whereas in the last three lines it turns out that they really do not want to hear his stories:

(1) Mrs. Smith: Please tell us another one
(2) Fire-Chief: No It's too late now
(3) Mrs. Smith: Tell us one all the same
(4) Fire-Chief: And then I'm much too tired
(5) Mr. Smith: Do it to please us
(6) Mr. Martin: Oh please do
(7) Fire-Chief: NO
(8) Mrs. Smith: You have a heart like an icicle We're on hot bricks
(9) Mrs. Martin: I implore you
(10) Fire-Chief: All right then
(11) Mr. Smith: There we are He agrees He's going to bore us again
(12) Mrs. Martin: Damn
(13) Mrs. Smith: Serves me right for being too polite

What would be the graphic representation of politeness/impoliteness for these lines?

In what way do the last three lines show the contrast between what was said in previous lines and the real meaning behind these lines?[1]

Is the contrast between words and their real meaning found in everyday conversation?

Which lines belong to the communication between a character and the audience?

Ionesco uses hyperbola of conventions that sometimes predominate in everyday communication. What is the relation between the quality maxim and politeness?

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1 Pragmatics claims that "words can mean more – or something other – than what they say" (Blum-Kulka 1997: 38).

EXAMPLE 3

Compare two short dialogues from Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Ionesco's *The Bald Prima Donna*, containing contrast between what the characters say and what they do.

In this case students need to have background information of the complete dramas or at least should be provided with detailed explanations by the teacher.

Vladimir: Well? Shall we go?
Estragon: Yes, let's go.
They do not move.

(Beckett: *Waiting for Godot*)

Mrs. Smith: Do take off your helmet and sit down a moment.
Fire-Chief: I'm sorry but I can't stay very long I'll be glad to take off my helmet but I really haven't the time to sit down.
He sits down without taking off his helmet.

(Ionesco: *The Bald Prima Donna*)

In the first case the closing dialogue of the drama shows the tragic end: absurdity of every motion, lack of sense and uselessness of any change, whereas in the other case it creates comic effect, and again serves as an illustration of emptiness and triviality of words in everyday communication. Pragmalinguistic analysis shows that in both cases the speech act is completely contradicted by action. Words lose their meaning, the action alone dominates (the meaning of action being different in Beckett's and Ionesco's dialogues). Examples show the same device in two styles and with two separate purposes.

How was this done? Why is one dialogue comic, and the other is not?

Why is the author's comment necessary in both cases for understanding the controversy between words and action?

Which of Grice's maxims are violated?

Is it possible to find such dialogues in everyday conversations?

In what way is controversy between words and action understood in the dialogues? (Context is the most important).

Suggestions for further work

The drama *My Mother Said I Never Should* by Charlotte Keatley shows the relationships between several generations of women as the basic dramatic conflict. An important trigger of the conflict and its catalyst is language itself. Charlotte Keatley provides a fairly long comment on the importance of language for understanding and interpretation of dialogue.

One of the key mini dialogues is the one wherein the daughter requests explanations from her mother or seeks for her protection and gentleness, whereas her mother in response says, “I’ll bring you some hot cocoa”.

Instead of responding, her mother reaches out for a reply that is at first sight irrelevant to the topic (violation of the maxim of relevance). If every dialogue is understood as an exchange or transfer model, then the mother’s response cannot be regarded as a proper reaction. Such a reply would be expected in response to another line of the daughter’s, e.g. “I’m thirsty or May I have some cocoa?”.

Does the mother avoid serious talk?

Is this a frequent pattern in the communication mother – daughter in everyday life as well?

What is your personal experience? Is this a pattern of behaviour characteristic for only one culture or it is a cross-cultural phenomenon that mothers cannot verbalise their emotions but try to express them through care for nutrition?

Is the communication between mother and daughter in the drama subject to a negotiation of roles?

Which character is more dominant? In what way is it expressed through language?

Do these lines have relevance for the development of dramatic conflict?

Conclusions

The model of interaction with dramatic dialogue as presented in this paper is based on the hypothesis that it can be both challenging and rewarding for teacher and learners. Since the very analysis of dramatic dialogue is not seen as the only approach, but as a combination of various mutually interactive techniques, it enables permanent reflection of one's own point of view, as well as the point of view of the Other. The classroom work proves that by this means, i.e. by using analogy with interaction in drama, a constant negotiating of roles, negotiating of meanings and beliefs are made possible. Learners are encouraged to subjective interpretations of dramatic text and of dramatic characters, given that contemporary stylistics claims that the reader of every literary text is the person who always recreates it in the constant tension existing in the triad of text (including the sociocultural and cognitive background wherein it originated and is received) – author – reader.

The suggested model is an expression of the belief that language is not only a tool of communication, but possesses the unquestionable "symbolic power" (Bourdieu 1991), expressed in various types of discourse. Especially interesting is its realisation in literary texts due to their aesthetic nature. Only elaborate-code speakers, ready to reflect on their place in the world, their cognitive models as well as on those of the Other, can represent true partners in a pluricultural dialogue which FLT has aimed at over the past few years.

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Raising language awareness and cultural awareness by using literary texts in the process of foreign language learning in Slovakia

Mária Kostelníková

Printed text is still prevalent in the process of foreign language learning in Slovakian schools, in spite of the development and spread of other media. In general, a decreasing interest in reading can be observed, not only among pupils of secondary schools, but among other young adults (even university students) as well. I have been working with our students, future English teachers with the aim to find ways of stimulating young people to get acquainted with literature and to increase interest in reading. In our didactic course we have been investigating ways to stimulate young people's interest in literature with the help of literary texts and thereby increase their interest in reading while initiating genuine dialogue: communication on interesting topics. If we study literature on communicative methodology in the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s we can observe a clear neglect of the integration of literary texts and literature into English foreign language teaching.

To address the problem of and obtain data on the integration of work with literary texts in the process of foreign language teaching in our schools, we addressed 30 teachers and 385 pupils at secondary schools. (Some questions from the inquiry are included in the appendix.) The rationale of the survey was to get information about the reality in our schools in the field of integrating literary texts into the process of teaching English as a foreign language. From the results of our inquiry we see that the majority of teachers and pupils would like to read and work with literary texts more often than they do at present. To explain this neglect some objective reasons like out-dated textbooks, accessibility of books, and copying were considered crucial. The teachers would welcome a publication of literary texts with a variety of genres, styles, authors and topics produced in Slovakia and distributed to various schools.

Relating to these facts the main issues investigated in this paper are the following:

- the place/position of literary texts in Slovakian schools – based upon the results of a survey;
- the importance of text in foreign language learning with special regard to literary texts;
- criteria for the selection of literary texts in the context of Slovakian schools;
- poetry and metaphor in the language classroom;
- nature of activities and tasks with literary texts in communicative language teaching;
- strategies for overcoming cultural problems when reading literary texts;
- list of activities with literary texts initiating personal response;
- dialogue with poems – examples.

The role of text in the language learning process

In the context of teaching foreign languages in Slovakia, texts basically function as:

- a source of vocabulary, lexical units and grammatical structures;
- a source of information about the culture, history, literature and country of the target language and the language itself;
- a source of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation of the learner.

This more or less traditional distinction is based on the fact that the findings of the Prague Linguistic Circle – later referred to as the Prague School, which was founded by Vilem Mathesius in the 1920s, decisively influenced the teaching of modern languages in Czechoslovakia. The theoretic studies were rooted in the so-called Geneva structuralism, mainly de Saussure's teaching.

The Prague linguists stressed that language exists as a system in relation to individual utterances, which in fact carry out that system. According to them every component of the language system can only be understood in its relation to the whole. The language system has various levels or partial strata, e.g. the sound stratum (the Prague School dealt at the beginnings mostly with functional phonology of contemporary language), the morphological, syntactical, stylistic and lexical strata. Each language phenomenon has its function which corresponds to the informational and expressive needs of the speaker or society respectively. Parts of the language can have a different function in the spoken/oral standard of the language and in its written norm. Equally important is the function and choice of lingual means in various language styles, according to the needs of the speaker (writer) with regard to the listener (reader), in the given context of the social condition of the communication. Especially important for the learning of foreign languages is the knowledge and information gained from the confrontation of two languages by analytical comparison (not genetic comparison) built on functional and structural analysis. It was stressed that the characteristic features of language will stand out more clearly if a language is compared with some other language which is not genetically closely allied to it – e.g. English can be more profitably compared with Slovak than with another Germanic language.

The Prague linguists declared themselves functionalists in the late 1920s, as they wanted to underline the basically communicative function of language, communicative in the broadest sense of the term. It is the communicative needs which are responsible for the "organisation of the formal means by which language satisfies the communicative needs..." (Vachek: 1973:13). The emphasis put on communicative needs implies the necessity to study language "with constant regard to the history (economic, political, and cultural) of the people using that language" (Vachek 1973:13).

By their contrastive analysis, initially based on the phonological confrontation of languages, the linguists of the Prague School developed the linguistic characterology of languages based on *functional onomatology,* concerned with the activity of naming selected elements of the extra-lingual reality and the *functional syntax*, which is concerned with organising such elements into larger wholes: sentences and utterances (Vachek: 1973:16). It can be said that this contrastive study of languages, which is not identical with the idea of American contrastive linguistics, has had its solid and rich tradition in former Czechoslovakia and in present day Slovakia since the 1930s, based on the findings of the Prague School.

Contrastive analysis says that the language reality, which is given by the utterance in one language, is assessed from the perspective of the other

language. Here we ask how the idea, the content, is expressed in the other language, i.e. we are trying to find the functional element in the other language. The term 'Functional Sentence Perspective' (FSP) is often attributed to Mathesius (1939). In their contrastive analysis and the emphasis put on the communicative needs, which implies the necessity to study language "with constant regard to the history (economic, political, and cultural) of the people using that language" (Vachek 1973:13), we can see the roots of the later so-called schema theory: the theory of registers, discourse analysis, all related to better awareness of the culture of the target language.

The theory of the members of the Prague School positively influenced the development of language teaching in Czechoslovakia, of both mother tongue and foreign languages, and they were reflected also in the concepts used in foreign language textbooks. The best known members of this school besides V. Mathesius were the Anglicists B. Trnka, J. Vachek, I. Poldauf, the Slavists B. Havranek, L. G. Kopecky.

Textbooks in former Czechoslovakia written from the 1930s and in Slovakia until now have always contained some literary texts besides other 'textbook texts' with the aim to enhance understanding of the culture of the foreign language, such as proverbs, riddles, sayings, songs, poems, extracts from novels, dramas etc. The authors introduced are predominantly "classics" of English and American literature.

In the school year 1996-97 the previously mentioned survey was carried out, addressing 30 teachers of English and German (20/10) and 386 students of English and German (286/100), with the aim to find out the situation at secondary schools concerning integration of literature and literary texts into the language learning process. The survey was carried out with the help of structured interviews with teachers and questionnaires for students about the frequency of work with literary texts, the activities in the language classroom, and the genres and authors they had worked with (see appendix). The results show that the majority of both teachers and students expressed a desire to work more with literary texts of different genres than they had experienced during their secondary school studies. In addition to the above-mentioned survey, an analysis of textbooks used at thirty-five secondary schools in several regions of Slovakia was carried out in 1999. The analysis of textbooks used at secondary schools in Slovakia shows that neither textbooks produced in Slovakia nor foreign course books (*Headway, Hotline, Strategies, Blueprint, Grapevine, New Cambridge English Course*) used at our schools contain a sufficient amount of literary texts. The current situation is that most teachers, who work more with literary texts or readers, use them only as supplementary material in their teaching.

The survey shows that, in general, texts used in our schools are still most often seen as a source of information, as a paradigm of some grammatical structures, as a source of so-called background knowledge and, unfortunately, very rarely as a stimulus for dialogue. Consequently, from the survey we can see that the most widely used texts and activities related to them in our schools are:

- texts used for acquiring linguistic structures. In exercises, learners choose and match the correct lexical unit or linguistic structures from the text. These exercises focus on important aspects of the language in use and these types of exercises have proved to be very popular in language teaching in our schools. It should be mentioned here that from the results of the survey the majority of teachers tend to choose these types of exercises which they then misleadingly interpret as 'communicative exercises' related to text;

- texts used as models of the foreign language in use. The objectives of the activities related to these texts are to illustrate the correct use of linguistic structures in various situations. These types of exercises do not differ very much from the texts and activities/tasks of the audio-visual and the audio-lingual methods and in fact they do not present any development towards a genuine communicative and dialogic approach to texts;

- texts focused on content. Here the texts and activities represent a shift towards communicative language teaching. These texts are more communicative because texts chosen according to their content/theme attract learners to work with them. Consequently learners are more willing and more motivated to use the foreign language as a medium of communication in the activities.

Literary texts as authentic texts versus didactic texts

The results of our survey clearly showed that didactic texts prevail in language teaching in Slovakia with younger and less advanced learners. Many teachers think that authentic literary texts can be integrated into the teaching and learning process only with upper intermediate and advanced learners.

By the notion 'authentic text' we understand written or spoken language which is addressed to the native speakers of the language, e.g. any text from newspapers, journals, literary genres, broadcasting programmes etc.; in other words: texts which were not originally written explicitly for learners of the language. As Little and Singleton state: "an authentic text is a text that was

created to fulfil some social purpose in the language community in which it was produced" (Kramsch 1993:177). On the other hand we understand by the notion 'didactic text' a text which was written with the aim to help fulfil a didactic purpose – texts in textbooks with the intention to illustrate correct grammar, syntactic units and content. Such texts are still common in textbooks of foreign languages. In the context of communicative language learning authentic texts have been preferred.

A great advantage of authentic material is the fact that it incorporates a piece of reality into the learning process. In their written form 'everyday, common' texts like news, reports, commentaries etc. carry information, and they require of the readers some specific communicative strategies or techniques, for instance skimming or scanning, finding information, finding key words etc. But on the other hand this advantage becomes a disadvantage, because any such 'authentic' text printed in the textbook wears out, and becomes outdated very quickly. Thus the choice of 'authentic' text for textbooks plays an important role. If we want to maintain the criteria of genuine communication we have to proceed very carefully in the selection of authentic texts, because too difficult authentic texts, which cause problems in understanding, cannot evoke authentic reaction in the learners (Widdowson 1979).

I believe that literary texts are really authentic as they address their readers irrespective of context and situation. Literary texts provide a source of enjoyment, information about background, incentive for dialogue, generative tasks and reaction. If we, for example, consider the topic of relationships between people, for instance love in its different forms, and we read authentic texts such as advertisements, announcements and poems, we may from our own experience say that very often a well chosen love poem is a much better source for both genuine dialogue and language work in class.

I would like to advocate the integration of literary texts into language teaching because they are the 'ideal' complementary material to 'authentic situations', which are presented in foreign language textbooks. Reading a literary text differs fundamentally from reading other text-types because the relation between the text and reality is non-existent; it is gradually created by the writer and the reader, and the reader has to create this relationship for him/herself during the process of reading. The reader's perception of the world is dependent on his/her experiences, opinions, emotions and images. It dictates his/her subjective relation to the piece of literature and it defines his/her relation to reality. In the process of reading literary texts the subjective perspectives and opinions of the author and the reader create the actual dialogue. Well-chosen literary texts can initiate discussions about moral and ethical values, cultural similarities and differences – 'Otherness'. Reading literary texts, extracts of

novels, drama, poems and carrying out activities related to them in the language classroom is an excellent way to actively engage the learners in the learning process and give them the opportunity to express their personal opinions, reactions, and feelings. Our aim in class is not to achieve a perfect interpretation of the literary text, but should be an incentive for discussion, for expressing controversial and critical opinions, and for raising LA and CA as well.

In recent years the notion that written discourse may also be regarded as shaped by an interactive process has gained importance and strength through the theories of the Russian linguist and literary theorist, Bakhtin, who argues that all discourse is in a sense dialogic.

Levine and Rivers (1994) deal with the interaction of schemata in text processing in the foreign language. They studied the interaction of linguistic, content and formal schemata and their influence on the complex understanding of text. The results show that all types of schemata play a role in text processing, either individually or cumulatively. In their conclusion the authors point to the positive influence of activities and tasks aimed at an overall understanding of the text and its analysis and interpretation.

Wolfgang Iser (1994) understands the reading of literary texts as a unique activity for raising consciousness in all investigations of meaning. In his theory of response Iser says that a text provides ‘blanks’ or ‘empty spaces’ in the fabric of the text, which are filled according to the reader’s prior knowledge. These ‘gaps’ or ‘blanks’ stimulate meanings. For Iser the meaning of a text is not a definable entity but a dynamic event. These perspectives do not present concrete text features to the reader but, according to him, “degrees of open possibilities” within the text. The study of phenomenology and the work of Husserl, Imgarden, Gadamer and Poulet have influenced Iser’s work.

In my opinion the reasons for using literary texts in FL teaching can be summarised as follows:

- strengthening the learners linguistic and communicative competence (LA);
- transmitting the culture and way of living in the country of the target language (CA);
- personal enrichment – development of the aesthetic processing of the text and the learner’s creativity.

Although the reasons for using literary texts in English foreign language teaching do not exclude each other, they do, however, have to be differentiated while deciding on the objectives of the teaching units. The overall aim is to benefit from all three of them.

To summarise, the integration of literary text into the process of foreign language learning is justified for linguistic, cognitive, didactic, creative, motivational and social reasons because:

- Literary texts are authentic material, which provides examples of different styles, lexical and syntactic phrases and idioms, which are often much easier to remember when used in context with the culture of the target language country.

- All basic language skills are facilitated through different communicative and generative procedures during the discussion and interpretation of the literary texts.

- A carefully selected literary text positively influences the reader's motivation for reading. The literary text functions as a strong motivational factor especially in those cases when the topic of the text deals with issues to which the learners can express their own personal opinion according to their experience.

Reading literary texts in the context of teaching and learning foreign languages plays an educational role as well. By reading, the imagination of the learners is stimulated, and the critical attitude of the learners is developed alongside their emotional engagement. The expressed opinion of the text and the discussion of the text can have a positive influence on the learners' self-esteem when they realise that they are able to express feelings and ideas in the foreign language. The fact that the learner is able to process an unknown text in the foreign language and moreover to compare it with his/her own personal context, must be considered very positive. The learner/reader experiences a certain satisfaction, which may result in motivation for further reading.

Reading and understanding literary texts in foreign language learning is a skill, which in fact constitutes one of the basic components of the native speaker's communicative competence. Thus reading and working with literary texts in foreign language learning can be considered as a contribution to the improvement of the learner's communicative competence. After the creation of positive conditions for reading and further work with literary texts the following positive results can be observed:

- improvement of the learner's linguistic competence and language awareness as literary texts offer numerous examples of authentic use of the target language;

- development of the skill to concentrate on content – literary texts do have a content; they carry information, ideas and thoughts. They address the whole person and thus subconscious language acquisition is fostered;

- use of necessary reading skills: prediction and interpretation;

- stimulation for further language activities – the literary text can stimulate processes: activities which require discussion, analysis, and creative response;

- interest in further reading – by selecting appropriate texts we can stimulate a positive motivation in the learners so that unknown texts in the foreign language are not rejected and opposed;

- independent reading and autonomous learning – if the learner is interested in reading in the foreign language, he/she will most probably continue reading in his/her spare time.

Criteria for the selection of literary texts

If we decide to work with literary texts in the foreign language classroom, it is very important to pay attention to the choice of text. When choosing the text we have to define the audience. The activities which we use in relation to the text depend on the objectives we have. The text should fulfil the following criteria:

- be available (thus the need expressed by the Slovak teachers in the survey for a 'reader');

- represent various periods, authors and genres of the literary tradition of the target language;

- be a piece of work written by a renowned author. At secondary schools students learn about the historical trends and authors of world literature in the Slovak Language and Literature course, therefore it could be motivating and interesting in the English lessons for the learners to read some authors in the original. This of course does not mean that the best known authors should be read exclusively. The topics and values

represented in the piece of literature or extract are equally decisive for the choice;

- be interesting and motivating because the teacher made his/her choice after a thorough consideration, knowing the actual situation in class and the context of the school. In practice, however, we often see that for various reasons teachers stick to the illustrative extracts comprised in the textbooks used, as this is much easier and more convenient for them;

- be intelligible. Here the question of working with adapted literary texts may arise, especially with younger learners;

- be of adequate length. If we decide to work with literary texts, we decide whether to work with a complete text or with an extract. Reading a complete text may be satisfactory for the learner from a psychological point of view; on the other hand a possible lack of linguistic, cultural and literary background knowledge may cause frustration in the reader. Work with a single extensive text offers an opportunity to analyse and interpret it from all perspectives.

While reading a complex novel or drama, and similarly shorter texts, it is advisable to insert phases for pre-reading activities, the function of which is to activate previous knowledge, give background information, and relate it to the background knowledge of the learners. An introduction to the formal features of the text is helpful for independent (home) reading. Reading at home followed by a discussion about it in groups or pairs at school fosters autonomous thinking and independent expression of personal opinion. Monitoring possible difficulties in understanding the text can be carried out in class with the help of various tasks (e.g. personalising, change of perspective, creative writing).

The results of our survey show that it is quite rare to work with extensive, complete literary texts in foreign language teaching in our schools. The reasons for this may be diverse; both time and money are important factors. Foreign books are still relatively expensive in Slovakia and for this kind of work each learner should have his/her copy. Libraries with numerous copies are still very rare in our schools, perhaps with the exception of bilingual schools. Furthermore, the results show that extracts from literary works and short stories are most often used at our secondary schools. The advantage of this choice is that students have the opportunity to read and get acquainted with several authors and thus may be motivated to read a whole work by some of these authors.

If working with extracts, what should be taken into consideration? As Guy Cook (1987) writes, the extract from a literary text should affect the cohesive ties and the semantic relations to the least extent. The extent to which the intelligibility of the extract is influenced, depends on the density of the ties in the complete text, as most of the cohesive ties are ‘anaphoric’ – relating to the previous text and not ‘cataphoric’ – relating to the following text. Thus, least ‘damaging’ is the decision to use an ‘illustration’ either from the beginning of a text or a part of a text, which represents a new beginning, a new unit in the narrative. Consequently, final parts of a literary work are less appropriate for work in the language classroom. It should be noted that a literary extract is grammatically always complete but semantically rarely. An extract, if standing isolated, can be interpreted freely. This interpretation is, however, not necessarily in harmony with the whole piece of work, a fact which only matters if we want to get an interpretation of the work as a whole.

The nature of activities and tasks related to literary texts in communicative language teaching

The answers in our survey to the questions concerning the activities and tasks related to literary texts, show that in the context of EFL teaching in Slovakia more emphasis is put on declarative knowledge than on procedural knowledge (Lojová 2000:169). This was also the case in another research project carried out in our schools with 1 127 respondents (1 056 students, 71 teachers).

In the context of communicative language teaching the tasks and activities related to literary texts should preferably be aimed at communication in the foreign language. Metalanguage and critical explanations are not the objective of such tasks. At this point I think it is necessary to define the main characteristics and principles of a dialogic approach to literary texts, which emphasises procedural knowledge and which could, at least to some extent, change the way of working with texts, especially literary texts, in our schools. The characteristics of this dialogic approach could briefly be summarised as follows:

- the text itself is important, not commentaries and information, which in this case play only a non-essential role;
- the learners are active participants in the process. There is real interaction between the reader and the text; moreover, the relation between the reader/learner and the teacher is fostered by the activities and tasks;

- the text is not interpreted through stereotyped questions but through tasks;

- the text may be presented in a variety of ways; for instance by the use of fragments, jumbled texts, presentation in parts, transformation to other media etc.;

- working with the text itself is not the only activity. Lead-in discussions, interactive work with the text and follow-up activities, often written, foster a dialogic approach to literary texts;

- thematic and linguistic aptitude are decisive criteria for selecting the literary text, as the text should stimulate linguistic skills.

Suggestions for activities and tasks

The following list of activities gives examples of work with texts where the tasks are not directed towards a correct answer or solution, but where emphasis is put on communication with and about the text. This list is a result of ideas generated in a course of English foreign language didactics where students (future English teachers) presented their 'micro teaching' focused on activities connected to texts, preferably literary texts.

- The 'Why?' game. Students have 2 minutes to think of one or more questions beginning with 'Why?' to the text. They put down their questions on a piece of paper and the teacher collects, shuffles and redistributes them. Students then work in groups of three-four to discuss the questions and answer them.

- Students make a diagram of the setting of a part of the literary work (it can be a labelled diagram of a part of the setting as well).

- Content quiz. Students individually read out a paragraph, a chapter of the novel, a part of the story or narrative poem. The others try to guess which character is speaking, which episode it comes from etc.

- The 'Spider Game'. This is best carried out in pairs. The aim of this activity is to explore interconnection between the main themes and the relationships between characters to illustrate different aspects of someone's character. Such charts are very useful for planning essay writing.

- Students write notes about the characters, trying to include everything they know about or how they interpret a character. This can be done after reading a paragraph, a chapter etc.

- Students write an imaginary letter from one character to another.

- Students write an extract from the diary of one of the characters.

- Students summarise each page of a short story, novel etc. in one or two sentences.

- Translation of a poem, dialogue, part of a short story into the mother tongue. Then this translation is re-translated into the foreign language. This new version is then compared with the original. This activity is very suitable for raising cultural awareness and fosters intercultural learning; moreover it can initiate interesting literary discussions.

- Gap-filling is a well-known activity with texts. From a photocopied text key words are removed. Students try to find the missing words without consulting the original text. This can give rise to useful linguistic and literary debate.

- Students try to imagine the appearance of the characters of a novel, short story, drama or poem. Younger learners especially may be invited to make illustrations to the written text or cut out faces from magazines and bring them to class. Other students try to guess the character and discuss and comment on the choices.

- Prioritising. On a card the teacher writes statements or notions about a character from a novel, short story, poem or drama. They can range from the most significant to the banal. Students in groups rank them in order of importance. Then they compare their ranking with that of another group and try to justify their choice.

- Students act out scenes from the text by adapting a dialogue or by inventing an imaginary scene between two or more characters.

- Improvised role-plays. Students choose an episode and take on the roles of the characters. It is not a scripted scene, but is much livelier, less predictable and more personal.

- Students write an extra paragraph, predicting their own ending, a final stanza making their own interpretations and conclusions, trying to imitate the style of the original.

These are just some ideas for getting students involved with literary texts and thus enter into personal dialogue with the text and a possible independent interpretation.

Strategies for overcoming cultural problems when reading literary texts

As stated before, literary texts are often seen as a source of information about culture, history, and society of the target language. Before preparing tasks and activities for use with literary texts, it is advisable to think of the kind of cultural problems students might have when reading the text and to help them overcome these problems by the following suggested strategies:

- Personalising – lead students into the theme and topic of the text by making it relevant to their own experience.

- Ask students to infer cultural information by providing questions that help this process (most often by multiple-choice questions).

- Provide explanations, glosses, brief cultural information in a note or gloss.

- Cultural comparisons – get students to brainstorm ideas about their own society and compare them with those in the text.

- Associations – ask students to make associations freely around a notion, word or phrase that might have particular connotations or figurative meanings for native speakers of the language. How are these similar to connotations from one country to another or from one individual to another?

- Provide cultural background information such as reading or listening comprehension. Discuss the particular cultural aspects of the text.

- Extension activities – role-play/simulation, discussion, project work.

Feedback from our didactic course, within which our students go to their teaching practice in schools, shows that activities and tasks from the above list

were positively evaluated by their learners and the teachers (our students) enjoyed their lively, more actively participating learners.

Poetry in the language classroom

Reading and interpreting a poem in a language class often helps students to overcome a certain fear of reading poetry since many students read little if any poetry in their mother tongue. Is it appropriate to read poems in the EFL classroom when poetry has been described as deviating from the norms of language (Widdowson 1984: 146)? It has been said that poetry frequently breaks the rules of language and this is why teachers may be concerned about it. But if we listen to two native speakers of English having a conversation we may hear many examples of 'incorrect' grammar, which in fact is a proof that language is not rigid, and this 'deviated' use of grammar and vocabulary does not impede communication between the two speakers. If the teacher decides to work with poems in class it helps the students to make confident interpretations. Since many students read little poetry in their own mother tongue, reading poetry in a foreign language may seem even more difficult. Teachers need to pay great attention to the choice of poem. They should also make sure that students are given as much help as possible in understanding the language of the poem. At the same time students often understand the literal meaning of each line, but they may lack strategies for interpreting. As teachers we can devise activities which lead students towards personal interpretations, rather than asking them to make their own interpretations from the start.

Teachers should make sure that they choose poems suited to the proficiency level of the students. It is often the case that students understand the literal meaning of the language but do not understand the metaphoric meaning of the poem. Students very often find it difficult to understand and interpret a metaphor for various reasons – they may not even be aware that a metaphor is being used. If students are used to parcelling up the meaning tidily, they feel uncomfortable when asked to speculate on metaphoric meanings in the poem. Furthermore, they might have problems with inferring meanings, particularly if two very disparate objects or concepts are joined in the metaphor. Readers most often interpret metaphors by drawing on their individual associations, which may be determined by the customs and conventions of their society. Here we have a huge scope for exploiting the fact that students from different societies and cultures have different cultural associations when interpreting metaphors. While allowing the integrity of the students' own interpretations, the teacher points to the likely meaning for the members of the community to which the writer of the poem belongs.

In the following two illustrations of reading and interpreting poems with language learners I want to report on possible tasks/activities which led students to their interpretations.

RICHARD CORY

Whenever Richard Cory went down town
We people on the pavement looked at him:
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
Clean favoured, and imperially slim.

And he was always quietly arrayed,
And he was always human when he talked;
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,
"Good morning", and he glittered when he walked.

And he was rich – yes, richer than a king –
And admirably schooled in every grace:
In fine, we thought that he was everything
To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked, and waited for the light,
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
Went home and put a bullet through his head.

E. A. Robinson

This poem was worked on with students of the third or fourth forms of secondary school (16-17), whose proficiency level is upper intermediate. The activities were actually suggested and prepared by two students, future teachers, originally for their micro teaching and then for their school-practice for more than one teaching unit.

Pre-reading activities: Students were asked some questions to introduce the topic of the poem, to get them into the right mood, for instance: "What do you consider important in your life? Is it love, money, career or anything else?" I wrote a list of six notions on the blackboard and students discussed them in groups. They ranked the notions on the list in what they considered to be the right order. They could also add to the list what they thought essential. The list comprised concepts like career, marriage, money, love, fame and family.

Students worked in groups, and members of each group introduced their system of values and justified their choices.

The next step was to discuss the title of the poem. The students were asked questions like:

- "Richard Cory – is this a title? What kind of title is it?"
- "What do you think the poem is about? Or about whom?"

The students were asked to try to imagine this man, Richard Cory; they were asked to think of whether 'their' Richard Cory was old or young, handsome or ugly, rich or poor, kind or mean. Describing and discussing his appearance and personal characteristics, students activated their vocabulary on this topic. While trying to imagine a certain person just from the name, they used their imagination and got involved. I asked students whether Richard led a happy life. They made predictions and then they were curious to know how it was in the poem. This motivated them to read the poem and to find out what the 'real' Richard Cory was like.

After this lead-in activity the students were ready to read. They read it individually, silently, and hardly any language help was necessary. With the help of a five-point star diagram on the blackboard students wrote words characterising the real Richard Cory: appearance (imperially slim), personal characteristics (quietly arrayed, human), financial situation (richer than a king), manners, and reactions of other people. Words, which were still not clear from the context, were explained, preferably by the students and preferably in English. Following this, some comprehension check questions were formulated:

- Did Richard live a happy life?
- Why did he commit suicide?
- Are money and wealth the keys to happiness?
- How did other people live?
- How did they react/feel about Richard?
- Do you know anybody similar to Richard Cory?
- Would you like to be rich? Why?

- Do you admire anybody? If yes, what are the qualities you admire in him/her?

The next activity was ‘the living wall’ technique. The students were asked to form a wall diagram – they lined up according to their opinion of Richard Cory, from ‘a very negative character’ to ‘a very positive character’. Each student had to justify his/her position in the diagram. Here expressing opinions in the foreign language, a dialogue with the poem, was the priority. This led to a class discussion drawing on the students’ personal experience of life and a role-play activity with Richard Cory and an ordinary working man, with the opportunity to change perspectives. Role-plays foster understanding, empathy with other people and can in fact teach the learners tolerance; they help to solve conflicts in a constructive way.

A further possibility for interactive, challenging activity was another type of group work; in this case it was the presentation of a communicative situation between Richard Cory and a group of people in two types of situations:

a. Richard Cory meets and talks with a group of people who admire him;

b. Richard Cory meets and talks with a group of people who have a negative attitude towards him.

Students prepared the task in their groups. Each group had to establish who played the role of Richard Cory and who were ‘the other people’, and the issues which they were going to discuss in this imagined situation. The arrangement of the task was in fact controlled by the students. After constructing the dialogue, they performed the discussion in front of the class. The dialogues were not long but they manifested the differences which may appear in the scope and choice of the students’ ideas, their nature, and the way in which they were presented.

Proceeding from spoken activities we finished with a phase of creative writing. The learners were invited to write their own poem about Richard Cory or a person of their choice with the help of some creative writing techniques:

- a poem of 11 words (structured in 5 lines of 11 words. In line 1 learners write one noun, in line 2 learners write two adjectives describing the noun, in line 3 they write three adverbs or verbs; line 4 contains four words and starts with ‘I’ saying something about myself, line 5 is a concluding word);

- an acrostic (the initial letters of the lines form the title of the poem);

- the last page of Richard Cory’s diary which he might have written just a few minutes before he committed suicide.

Volunteering, students then read their own and other peers’ ‘products’, which again were commented – thus a new discussion started.

During the activities and tasks described above, both the students’ individual interpretations based on different schemata and cultural and moral background were revealed, which made the work with this poem so interesting. In the evaluation of the above mentioned activities, the students were positive and enjoyed learning and managed to overcome their ‘fear’ of poetry in the foreign language, which is proved by the comment of one student: “I thought I didn’t enjoy reading poems. But somehow I forgot that Richard Cory was a poem. And I liked it very much.”

The second illustration of work with a poem was chosen because of its non-conventional and provocative ideas. The goal of this task was to increase the understanding of metaphors and the structure of the poem, to think of values and ways of life of old people, as well as attitudes towards the elderly.

Warning

When I am an old woman I shall wear purple
With a red hat which doesn’t go, and doesn’t suit me.
And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer
gloves
And satin sandals, and say we’ve no money for butter.
I shall sit down on the pavement when I’m tired
And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells
And run my stick along the public railings
And make up for the sobriety of my youth.
I shall go out in my slippers in the rain
And pick the flowers in other people’s gardens
And learn to spit.

You can wear terrible shirts and grow more fat
And eat three pounds of sausages at a go
Or only bread and pickle for a week
And hoard pens and pencils and beermats and things
in boxes.

But now we must have clothes that keep us dry
And pay our rent and not swear in the street
And set a good example for the children.
We must have friends to dinner and read the papers.

But maybe I ought to practise a little now?
So people who know me are not too shocked and
surprised
When suddenly I am old, and start to wear purple.

Jenny Joseph

We started with a class discussion initiated by the teacher about the periods of life and finally moved to the life of old people from different cultural perspectives (in our society, in Great Britain, in the USA or Australia). Students discussed in groups first, then presented the results of their brainstorming on the topic of old age. This was an excellent way to confront different schemata and moral and cultural values of the learners as they come from different regions, towns and villages from all over Slovakia. In groups of three/four students wrote down at least five statements about the typical behaviour of old people. The difference in views of 'set behaviour' and of the position of old people in towns, villages and even families were obvious.

In the pre-reading activity students were given some short information about the author and were asked to express their opinion about the first two lines, which were read by the teacher.

What was the poem going to be about? The actual reading phase consisted of ordering the jumbled lines of the poem. Each group of students got the poem cut into strips – there are four stanzas with different ideas and points of view. Another option was to highlight with coloured pens the first lines of the stanzas to see easily and clearly the difference in the groups' understanding of the jumbled lines. Comparing the reshuffled poems and discussing how a poem is put together, is a way of focussing on the structure of discourse in the poem. Many of the discourse features are also common to other forms of discourse, others are more specific to poetry. Finally, comparing the 'reshuffled' poems with the original gives further possibilities for argumentation, justification and interpretation.

Discussion on the ideas of the woman in the poem compared with the typical behaviour and ideas of old women, of children, youth, and adults revealed all possible associations as well as cultural and personal stereotypes. To clarify a

cultural aspect, in our society, especially in villages and rural districts, old women still wear traditional dark dresses and are fairly respected in their families. The situation in towns is different and older women are more up-to-date and modern. Reflection on the title of the poem gave an opportunity for further interpretations.

One of the possible concluding activities on this poem could be to tell students to close their eyes and to imagine themselves as an adult having a job and a young family. The children grow up quickly and suddenly you realise you are old. What are you doing? How do you live? How did you change? They then open their eyes and write a few lines starting with “When I am old...”. Students found this poem funny and provoking but sympathised with the woman in the poem. Awareness of social roles and their outer reflection was raised when interpreting the ‘roles’ that old people have to play in society and in their families. Although the discussions started with the topic related to old people, they extended to the behaviour and the roles of young people.

Students developed abilities to distinguish between different points of view in a poem and understand the structure of the poem better; they discussed new vocabulary related to human behaviour, and developed a better understanding of metaphors.

Conclusion

In view of the above it is not very likely that a publication of a collection of literary texts would fully solve the problem of integrating of literary texts into the process of teaching foreign languages in our schools. The teachers’ task is to rethink the attitudes, methods and activities used in the teaching process. It is desirable that the activities and tasks related to the texts are innovative and creative, which motivate and encourage the learners to read. Then the selection of topics, objectives, activities and tasks are all focussed on the process. The process itself, carrying out the activities, is in fact the objective of the work with literary texts, not a previously defined answer or result. One can fully agree with Bassnet and Grundy who say that “...the division which has arisen between the teaching of literature and the teaching of language is not only an unhappy one, it is also a false one ... we felt we needed to find new ways of working with literature in language teaching” (1993).

Appendix:

Some of the questions raised in the interviews and questionnaires to the teachers in the survey. There were twenty questions in total.

1. What type of secondary school do you teach at?

2. How many hours of English do you teach in a class/in a week? (Classify)

3. What textbooks do you work with? (Please list)

4. Do you work with complementary materials? If yes, what materials?

5. Do you work with literary texts in your classes?

6. Do you work with extracts or complete works?

7. Do you work with the original text or with adapted texts?

8. Which genres do you work with?

9. How often do you work with literary texts in a school year? (There was a scale on frequency)

10. Explain your answers to questions 8 and 9 in more detail.

11. What do you think of the integration of literary texts in FL teaching?

12. Are you satisfied with the frequency of work with literary texts in your classes? (If not, clarify)

13. What holds you back from working with literary texts more often?

14. What would help the optimal use of literary texts in your FL teaching?

15. What is your experience of working with literary texts?

16. What are the positive results of the integration of literary texts in your teaching?

17. List some activities related to literary texts you have introduced in your classes.

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Cultural awareness and language awareness through dialogic social interaction using the Internet and other media

Hermine Penz

1. Introduction

In the classroom context language and culture learning can be much more successfully achieved if students have the opportunity of interacting with peers from the target language. Although this is not always possible by face-to-face contact, there are many opportunities to ensure contact and interaction between peers through various kinds of media. Social interaction through different media between learners of a foreign language is the central point of all the projects discussed in this article. After a brief theoretical discussion of cultural awareness (CA), language awareness (LA) and social interaction I provide some examples of how CA and LA can be practically exploited in exchange projects. In the first project discussed Austrian and British school pupils prepare materials on a cultural topic for each other and exchange these by conventional mail. In the other projects Austrian university students interact with British or American students by means of the Internet. In all these projects the students engage in experiential learning through interacting with their peers. The paper shows that in this learning process the students reflect on their own culture, they learn to see their own and the others' cultures from different perspectives and they engage in a negotiation process which helps them to become mediators between different cultures. Finally, some suggestions are made for similar projects.

1.1. Cultural awareness

In language teaching there has been a strong dichotomy between language and culture. Culture has often been seen as contents conveyed by language, but separate from language. However, if "language is seen as social practice, culture becomes the very core of language teaching" (Kramsch 1993: 8). According to Tomalin/Stempleski (1993: 7) the teaching of "Big C" culture has been based on topics clearly identified in curricula, whereas the culturally influenced behaviours which constitute "little c" culture have often been treated in an anecdotal and peripheral way. They hold that the study of culturally influenced

behaviour "should arise out of the language material being studied, but should nevertheless be clearly identified and systematically treated as a regular feature of the language lesson" (p. 7).

In Europe the question of language and culture teaching has become particularly prominent in the last few years, which is also reflected in a number of Council of Europe publications. Byram and Zarate (1997), for example, view sociocultural competence as part of "intercultural communicative competence". Byram lists four dimensions of sociocultural competence (Byram 1997: 56): savoir être, savoir apprendre, savoir, savoir faire.

In the discussions about the role of culture in language teaching, varying terminology has been used. One of the terms which has gained prominence is cultural awareness. Cultural awareness is also connected to a number of other terms such as "intercultural communication", "intercultural communicative competence", "Fremdverstehen" (= understanding 'the Other'), "intercultural studies", "multiculturalism" etc. and should be seen in relation to these.

1.2. Language awareness

Another issue which has become a major focus in debates about language pedagogy is the question about how language awareness may facilitate language learning. The concept of language awareness was first made use of in the British school system where it was a movement which aimed at creating curiosity about language in school children (particularly aged 10-14) and at integrating all the different areas of language teaching at school, and to provide a good start for foreign language learning. In sum, the aim was to provide a coherent framework for the different language experiences that school children were faced with at school. According to Hawkins (1984: 4) the chief aim of language awareness in the curriculum of schools is to "challenge pupils to ask questions about language, which so many take for granted". He also argues that the concept of language awareness is a useful tool to bridge the barriers that exist between individual subjects concerned with language education, such as mother tongue, foreign language, ethnic minority language, Latin etc. According to Gnutzmann (1997: 228), developing awareness of the relationship between mother tongue and foreign language education is a particularly important factor of language awareness.

Since the 1990s the concept of language awareness has gained more and more importance in the area of language teaching and methodology. In Austria, the Centre for School Development initiated a project on language awareness and cultural awareness in the context of its school teaching (see Huber/Huber-

Kriegler/Heindler 1995). Otherwise, the term language awareness has become particularly prominent in the German speaking context only recently, which is reflected by the fact that some major conferences in the areas of linguistics and language teaching have used this concept as their major theme. E.g. the "Gesellschaft für Angewandte Linguistik" (= German Association for Applied Linguistics) selected language awareness ("Sprachbewusstsein") as the theme for its annual conference in September 2000. Similarly the theme "Grammatik und Sprachaufmerksamkeit" (Grammar and Language Awareness) used in the meeting of the Graz Conference for German as a Foreign Language in June 2000 centered on the topic of "language awareness".

2. Social interaction and the dialogic approach

Social interaction is the central feature of communication and part of our everyday lives. It is also the means of transmitting cultural and historical knowledge (Garton 1992: 11). We acquire cultural values and interactive rules of communication by interacting with others.

Some of the skills acquired may be specific to a particular culture, such as gestures, proxemics, and rules of interaction. Some other skills, however, may be independent of a particular language although they have been acquired in the context of one, e.g. the willingness to relativise one's viewpoint, one's values and attitudes or the ability to mediate between people of one's own and other cultures (cf. Byram/Zarate 1997: 10-11).

One of the essential features of language according to Bakhtin (Bakhtin 1981, Vološinov /Bakhtin 1929/1994) is that meaning is produced in the responsive interaction between at least two social beings. Discourse, and in Bakhtin's view also consciousness, is therefore inherently interactive or dialogic in the sense that "every utterance generates a response in the other who receives it, even if that response is only within inner speech" (Morris 1994: 5). In order to understand each other, speakers must constantly orient themselves to each other's utterances, i.e. understanding is also dialogic in nature (Vološinov/Bakhtin 1929/1994: 35).

Social interaction in its widest sense is viewed as the moving force for learning by van Lier (1996: 42). He defines social interaction as follows:

"In other words, social interaction, although it is first and foremost the use of talk in face-to-face encounters, includes many other word-world encounters as well. Social interaction (inter + action), in this broader sense, means being 'busy with' the language in one's dealings with the world, with other people and

human artifacts, and with everything, real or imagined, that links self and world" (van Lier 1996: 147).

One key element in the learning process according to van Lier (1996: 178) is the quality of interaction between teachers and students in the classroom. He argues against imposing one way of interacting and speaks for opening up an entire array of talking. According to van Lier (1996: 42) social interaction should also be considered the main element involved in the learning of a foreign language. However, in second language learning, particularly in school settings, the opportunity of authentic interaction with native speakers of the target language is usually absent or at least very restricted. This is why the integration of social interaction with peers of the target language and culture has been considered to be an important contribution to language and culture learning in the classroom context. Among the teaching principles enabling the language learner to become an intercultural speaker, Byram / Zarate (1997: 11) list that the use of the target language must include situations of contact and exchange with native speakers, and that the possibility of miscommunication must be taken into account in the management of the relations between the learner's country and of the target language, i.e. the language learner must also be able to play the role of a cultural intermediary.

In classroom situations these goals are not always easy to achieve since the opportunities of social interaction with native speakers are usually restricted. This has been achieved by some projects which also require pupils to consider and shape their communication for a particular audience and negotiate their view of some aspects of culture as one among many (see Morgan 1997).

2.1. Interaction between peers

Research in cognitive development has shown that interaction among peers is very helpful in the difficult process of knowledge revision. This is due to the fact that through peer interaction our attention may be focused on information that we might otherwise ignore or that we might be forced to ask questions and explain our views. Peers may also have a positive effect on motivation, increasing each other's willingness to work on a difficult task. In the interaction peers can increase their understanding and learn to communicate it effectively (Azmitia 1996: 134). It has also been shown that in this type of interaction context is particularly important. Here cultural differences come into play.

In the projects discussed below communication among peers has been integrated into classroom teaching in order to open up a perspective which is not usually available in classroom teaching. In the classroom context the foreign

language and culture are predominantly presented from the point of view of adult writers and experts from the educational establishment. An exchange between peers, however, has the potential to increase the students' motivation to find out about the language and culture of a group in a different culture who find themselves in a similar classroom situation.

3. Description of projects

3.1. The Anglo-Austrian School Project

This project was modelled on a previous project organised by Carol Morgan between a British and a French school in 1995 (Morgan 1997, Morgan/Cain 2000). In June 1997 the pupils of two schools (Graz in Austria and Wotton under Edge in England), aged 16-17, prepared materials for each other in their mother tongue on the topic of "law and order". The choice of content and media was left to the pupils. These materials were then sent to the partner school. Help sheets that contained cultural and linguistic information written in the target language were sent along with the materials.

The project with the title "Intercultural classroom exchange using information technology" was funded by the British Council's Collaborative Research Programme in co-operation with the Austrian Ministry of Education and Culture. The aim was to have a project along the lines of the previous project, yet with the view of extending it by a follow up that used new information technology (Morgan/Penz 1998).

The Austrian school, situated in Graz, was an all girls Catholic convent school. The pupils and teachers of this school have had plenty of experience with project work, since this is a widely practised form of teaching in this particular school. The Austrian group was made up of approximately 20 pupils altogether. They worked in smaller groups consisting of a minimum of two and a maximum of five students on different aspects of the common topic.

The school in Gloucestershire was a mixed comprehensive language college. Neither the pupils nor the German teachers of this school had undertaken this kind of intercultural project before, although the school has been involved in a Comenius materials exchange project. Only four pupils participated in the project. In addition, the UK upper secondary syllabus tends to bring about more constraints than the Austrian curriculum which, although it provides some kind of framework, leaves a lot of space for teachers' own individuality, if they are willing to depart from the widely used practice of restricting themselves to a textbook. Both groups worked for six teaching hours; however, pupils also

worked during their spare time with varying commitment. Both the English and the Austrian pupils prepared materials for the other group on the topic of "law and order" in their mother tongue.

3.1.1 Results of the Anglo-Austrian Project

The five groups from the Austrian School focused on the following topics: "child protection laws", "probation and probation officers", "streetworkers", "child neglect and child abuse", "young (people as) outsiders of society", "drugs". The British pupils prepared materials on the topics of "school rules" and "drugs".

The pupils in the Austrian school used a variety of different text types as a basis for the production of their own texts and materials, for example, the relevant passages of the Austrian Code of Laws, some magazines and newspapers, and information brochures published by various public and state organisations. They also carried out interviews with various groups of society, even some that they would not normally come in contact with. They produced a variety of different text types, e.g. a magazine about the Austrian laws on the protection of young people which included interviews, reports, newspaper clippings, passages quoted from the law, and even a game concerning the Austrian Laws on the protection of young people. They also wrote a radio play, and included a video tape with an interview between an Austrian TV reporter and the ski jumper Andreas Goldberger, who had been involved in a cocaine affair.

The British pupils wrote a text on school rules for their Austrian partners and provided copies of various articles from newspapers, magazines, and textbooks on the topic of drugs. They also included a wide range of information brochures on "Drugs", "Alcohol", and "Smoking", some of which were published by the British Health Education Authority. The pupils then provided comprehension questions, and various tasks, such as cloze tests, and vocabulary exercises for these texts.

Both the British and Austrian pupils supplied help sheets which were not proof-read by either the teachers or the researchers. The help sheets of the two groups were fairly similar, since both groups mainly provided translations of single words and only a few detailed explanations, e.g. the British pupils compiled a list of words that are used for "being drunk". Explanations of cultural aspects were not included in these help sheets, although the pupils had been asked to think about problems that their partners might have with respect to cultural differences.

3.1.2. LA and CA in the Anglo-Austrian School Project

The pupils' work during the project contained many features of language awareness and cultural awareness. These often went hand in hand, though at other times one or the other of those two aspects became more dominant. In the following I am attempting to isolate some of the aspects that surfaced during the project.

a. LA concerning the native language: working with different text types and genres

During the first part of the project the pupils of both schools concentrated on researching the topic of law and order in their own context. This of course involved selecting and working with different types of texts and different genres in their native language. The pupils of both schools encountered a great variety of texts and genres, which went far beyond the range of texts they had worked with on a particular topic so far. As a first step they collected a huge amount of information from various media, which contained a variety of text types and genres. The pupils either used these materials as a basis for creating their own texts (this was the way that the Austrian pupils mainly approached the topic) or they came up with ways to make the original texts more comprehensible (this method was mainly adopted by the British pupils).

The question of the relationship between language and culture was encountered by pupils very directly while they were working on the materials for their partners in their native language. During the discussions about how to simplify and clarify texts the Austrian pupils, for example, very often tried to figure out how some of the things they said in German could be said in English. They also discussed whether some of these would be essentially the same or different in English and in German. In these discussions language awareness and cultural awareness were very much connected with one another and by looking at one of these aspects the other was always present too. Both language and cultural awareness were promoted by the dialogic interaction of the two groups (even at a stage were they had not yet received anything from their partners).

b. Orientation towards the other group as learners of a foreign language and culture

One of the essential features of this project was the pupils' orientation to each other's problems as learners of a foreign language and culture. They showed great concern for the needs and interests of the other group and about the effect that their materials might have. The pupils were constantly looking for ways of mediating their own language and culture to the other group. They also became very much aware of this process, as is reflected in the following quotations:

Some of the remarks of the Austrian pupils were as follows (quoted from homework, without corrections):

> "What it made a little bit easier for us was that one of the tasks was to give the English pupils our information in German with a helpsheet in English. So we tried to write everything in understandable German. Sometimes we had a lot of fun when we searched for easier words. For me that was very interesting because I realised how complicated we communicate with others."

One pupil expressed her experiences at length:

> "On the video tape we had an interview with Andreas Goldberger. We thought that they [the English pupils] would surely know him and that it would be interesting for them to listen to an 'original' Austrian accent. It's very difficult to unterstand even for us and so we 'translated' it into understandable German for foreigners. We also had to prepare a worksheet where all words which could be difficult to understand were explained. I think that was quite difficult for me because I was in danger to explain too many words and this could be injuring to them."

Another pupil said:

> "The most difficult work was to write the help sheet. It's strange to read a text by thinking in an absolute easy way and try to explain the words and phrases."

Two of the British pupils expressed their experience in the interview:

> "We had to think about words, about how to say things in proper English" and "We had to make it interesting for them".

These quotations reflect concerns about the use of language with respect to standard and vernacular. The pupils showed great awareness of the problems that the other group might have with non-standard language and made great efforts to envisage and meet the interests of their partners.

c. Developing awareness of (cultural) differences within their own culture

One group experienced some kind of intracultural encounter when they set out to collect information about young punks in the city of Graz. Since none of the pupils involved in the project had any contact with those youngsters they asked a friend to function as a "cultural mediator" and help them do the interviews. The writing of one of the pupils reflects great uneasiness about meeting these "outsiders":

"We wrote about youth outsiders in Graz. We wanted to make interviews and photos with those outsiders. So we went to the "Stadtpark" together with my friend Eva. But we were so afraid that we didn't ask any question and didn't make any real photos. We thought that they would hit or hurt us. Eva made the interviews alone. She knows some of these youths, because most of them attend her school."

Another girl summed up her intercultural experience during the project in the following way:

"On the whole I think that it was a really interesting kind of work and I think we learned much, perhaps not for the English language but to feel the situation of foreigners."

d. Awareness of different linguistic and cultural conventions in working with texts (in educational settings)

Language awareness and cultural awareness activities where also prompted when comparing the materials produced by the Austrian and the British pupils. Here some differences became very obvious. Whereas the Austrian pupils worked hard to produce their own vernacular texts based on the materials they had collected from many different sources, the British pupils tended to send copies of texts written by others. This means that the Austrian pupils attempted to facilitate understanding by simplifying texts and rewriting them in their own vernacular, whereas the British pupils provided comprehension questions and various kinds of vocabulary exercises for the same purpose. The Austrian pupils felt that there were a lot of "quizzes and riddles" in the materials of the British

partners and expressed some disappointment about the fact that they had sent mainly copied texts instead of producing their own. The Austrian group also came to the conclusion that they had viewed the production of materials more in personal terms than within the context of the classroom and the exams connected with it.

The pupils also realised how the same topic could be treated differently by the state authorities in the two countries. When comparing the materials produced by the respective state authorities on drugs the Austrian pupils were quite fascinated by the fact that the official brochures sent to them from England concentrated on the health aspect rather than on the legal consequences of drug abuse, which was the focus of the materials produced by the Austrian authorities.

The observations about differences in the texts produced and the pupils' comments about them served as a starting point to discuss cultural conventions and cultural differences. Here the intervention of the teachers proved to be essential since the initial disappointment formed a basis of discussion about cultural expectations and cultural differences and effects which different expectations and assumptions might cause if they are not questioned in intercultural interactions. However, due to the fact that the project took place at the end of the school year, these aspects were only touched upon very briefly. Yet, finding out about cultural conventions and cross-cultural differences in genres and text types could be a project for language awareness and cultural awareness on its own.

The differences between the British and the Austrian group can probably be attributed to the different school systems to some extent. The British materials seemed to grow out of a very exam-driven context where set exam topics limit the range of activities and topics. The Austrian school system on the other hand allows quite a lot of flexibility if teachers take the syllabus as the broad framework that it is designed to be. Exams in Austria are always set by the teachers themselves, which means that they are able to choose topics accordingly.

The next step in the development of this project would have involved exchanging questions about the materials by e-mail. The British school was already equipped with e-mail at the beginning of the project whereas the Austrian school got Internet and e-mail at the beginning of the following school year. Since the follow-up was supposed to take place in autumn anyway this would not have been a problem. However, the follow-up questions were sent by fax instead of e-mail since there were technical problems in the British school.

In the end it turned out to be more complicated to use e-mail than using traditional communication media such as fax and mail.

3.2. Chat project with university students

Since the summer semester 1997 I have been integrating e-mail projects in various linguistics courses I teach for university students (Penz 1999). The first attempt was a single chat session of three hours with postgraduate students from the University of Bath, School of Education. The course was a linguistics proseminar on "Language and Culture" and the idea was to have British and Austrian students communicate with each other on the topic of education. In Austria sixteen students participated whereas in England there were only five. Both groups were assisted by a computer expert, which was very helpful for overcoming technological problems. The Austrian group initially had no experience with computer-mediated communication whatsoever. However, they were introduced to the Netscape chat programme outside normal class time and even learnt how to produce their own Internet homepage for the project. The groups then communicated via two different systems on the actual day of the event: one was Netscape CUseeme, a simple video conferencing system, and the other was Netscape Chat.

3.2.1.Outcomes of the project

The project in the "Language and Culture" class was the first attempt to interact with partners in the target language via computer technology at the English Department. Since the technology had to be adapted for this particular event as well, one out of the three hours scheduled for the project was taken up by technological preparations. Four questions were posed to the students on an Internet homepage as a prompt to initiate communication:

1. How do you view the role of the student in education?
2. How do you see the role of the teacher in education?
3. What is the purpose of education in general?
4. How have you yourself experienced education?

The project language was English since not all of the British students knew German. The chat interaction was characterized by a great amount of negotiation of linguistic and cultural meaning. Discussing aspects of the educational system of the two countries made the students aware of differences in the conceptual frameworks, and provided the viewpoint of insiders and

outsiders who attempted to achieve some understanding of each other's perspectives (in the sense that Kramsch 1993: 223 promotes).

A particularly interesting episode of negotiation of linguistic and cultural meaning occurred when the students discussed the role of the student in education. The British students explained that they were viewed as clients or interactive partners in the educational system. This immediately prompted questions for clarification from the Austrian students, who did not understand what the term "interactive partner" meant in the educational context. The ensuing interaction very clearly showed that the two educational systems had some very different views of the role of the students and teachers at university.

Text transcript 1:

local user > What do you think of the questions we want to discuss today?

remote user > We think they are interesting. We would like to start with the first question. We see the role of the student in education as that of a client or an interactive partner.

local user > What do you mean with the expression "interactive partner"?

local user > Are you still connected?

remote user > We mean that the student expects information to flow both ways between the teacher and student, using his life experience as well as answering the teacher's questions and increasing his cognitive ability. I think we are still connected but we have tried to pass this message a few times already.

local user > We just got informed what the term "client" means in England at Universities.

remote user > So do you understand what we mean. We think of the student as the customer to some extent.

local user > The term "In Austria the relationship between teachers and students is a bit different from the one in your country. It's more a formal relationship, a bit like on elementary level. In Austria there doesn't exist CLIENT" for students.

The extract above provides an interesting example of an instance of meaning negotiation where the semantic meaning of the words themselves, i.e. “client” and “interactive partner” is probably transparent to the student. However, the Austrian students do not understand these words in the context of education and therefore ask for clarification. Since there was a fairly long break in the interaction due to technical problems I provided a brief explanation to my students what the term “client” means in the British educational system. This was one of the few occasions, though, where I as a teacher functioned as a resource person. During the major part of the chat the students were the main actors and communicated with each other, addressing the teachers and technicians mainly in case of technical problems.

Another piece of information that the Austrian group found very strange was the fact that some of the British students were members of the British army and had their education financed by the army. The exchange on this topic revealed some very basic differences of cultural values and assumptions. Here the students entered into a fairly extensive negotiation of cultural meanings. Both groups were surprised to learn that the others viewed the army so very differently: The Austrian students all agreed on a very negative evaluation of the institution of the army whereas the British students conceived it as a very positive organisation which provided many occupational opportunities.

Text transcript 2:

remote user > We are in the British military. Dick is in the Navy and Judith is in the Army. Do you have to do national service and do you have any military people at your university?

local user > We have to do national service in Austria too, but only men are required to join the army for eight months, but for women it is optional to join in. Do you have compulsory military service in Britain as well? What do you mean with “military people at your university”?

remote user > No, we do not have national service, we are volunteers. As far as being “military people at the university”, we are, in effect, clients. The Army and the Navy have paid for us to attend University and on completion, we will go back to work in the training organisation of the Army or Navy.

local user > This seems to be a joke!

remote user > What do you mean? This isn't a joke, it's true. We are career officers and can stay in until we are 55 years old so there is a reason why they send us to higher education. We can use the skills we learn here for the next twenty years.

local user > What's your motivation to join the army? We first thought you were ordinary students (clients)! What kind of courses do you attend at university and how can you profit from those courses as far as your career in the army is concerned?

remote user > We belong to the education and training branches of the Army and the Navy. At the moment we are studying for a Masters degree in Educational Technology. This course will keep us up to date in education and training methods. We joined because it offers us the opportunity to travel, do interesting jobs and keep fit. There is also quite a good career structure for us.

local user > So does this mean that your outlook on the army is positive? Did you join the army because they pay for your further education and training?

remote user > Not just because of that, but it is a nice perk (extra). The pay is quite good as well.

remote user > Also I would say that we do feel quite positive towards the armed forces because it is a demanding job and we are a very forward looking organisation.

local user > In Austria university access is free and we don't have to pay any tuition fees. Why do you think that the army is a very forward looking organisation?

remote user > In Great Britain university access is free as well for undergraduates doing their first degree. Because we need to keep pace with technological and management changes so that we are properly equipped to deal with any situation we need to (for instance UN tours).

This extract again reveals a great amount of negotiation about linguistic and cultural meanings. The students try to bridge the obvious difference in cultural frameworks and viewpoints by repeatedly asking questions for clarification. They also use metacommunication to clarify pragmatic intent (e.g. "this seems

to be a joke!") and to express their disbelief at the same time. In addition, paraphrasing is used to check the other group's evaluation of the army. It is quite intriguing to observe the enormous amount of negotiation which surfaces in this brief interaction. This, however, might be indicative of the discrepancy of the viewpoints and the cultural concepts of the two groups involved. The negotiation process apparently enables the students to mediate between their different perspectives. It is the place where mediation can occur through dialogue, which is particularly interesting for gaining insights into linguistic and cultural differences (see Kramsch 1993: 232). It has also been claimed that, in foreign language learning, tasks which require a great deal of interactional work to resolve communication problems, provide ideal learning opportunities (see van Lier 2000: 249). Thus it could be argued that dialogic interaction on a specific topic between learners from different cultures may provide a particularly good opportunity for language and culture learning.

Although the interaction time of this project was quite short, it showed some interesting possibilities of approaching LA and CA through dialogue. The students evaluated the project very positively. The Austrian students agreed that they had gained some new insights into British culture, in particular with respect to universities. Some of the students argued that using the computer to interact with students from another culture instead of just concentrating on technological aspects of the computer was some kind of cultural learning in itself. In addition they stressed that they preferred this kind of experiential learning to accumulating factual knowledge. One of the criticisms of the project was that it was too short and that the students would have preferred to communicate with their partners over a longer period of time.

3.3. E-mail projects between Austrian and American university students

In order to ensure an extended period of interaction between the students, e-mail tandem projects were set up between Austrian and American students. Students from the English and American Studies Departments of Graz University were paired with students studying German at the University of Little Rock, Arkansas. This university also has an exchange programme with the Department of American Studies, which means that there was already some link between the two universities which served as an additional motivation for students to get involved in an e-mail exchange. This was the case for the American students in particular since some of them had been to Graz as part of their study programme in German.

Austrian and American students were paired up by e-mail so that each had an e-mail partner who they would write to in English and in German. The idea was

that the learners should have the opportunity to write both in their mother tongue and in their target language. Since the American students were mainly beginners and intermediate students of German and the Austrian students advanced learners of English there was some imbalance with respect to language skills. However, this did not turn out to be a problem, as both groups were allowed to resort to their mother tongue as well when they considered it to be necessary.

The Austrian group was required to use the e-mail exchange for collecting information about and examples of American slang in two of the projects. The data collected via e-mail was to be integrated into a linguistics term paper, which was to contain both theoretical aspects of slang and an analysis of the data collected. In the other e-mail projects the Austrian students were free to use the exchange for collecting data on various topics of linguistics (e.g. getting information on sexist language, politically correct language, language attitudes etc. by means of a questionnaire) or to use the exchange itself for linguistic analysis (e.g. in terms of speech acts, discourse analysis, learners' errors etc.).

For the American students the projects were used for two purposes: one was for language learning (German) in particular and the other for collecting information on Austrian culture. The more advanced American students had to do a project on Austrian culture and asked their Austrian partners to provide some information on their topics.

Since the semester times of the Austrian and the American students did not coincide the American students always started the exchange by sending an introductory letter with information about themselves including their e-mail address to the Austrian students who would start about four weeks after the Americans. In the following semester the introduction was slightly modified, as the American students produced a homepage providing this initial information. The Austrians got an introduction to e-mail technology before the project as most of the Austrian students had not worked with e-mail before. There was then a period of about six weeks when students at both universities interacted with each other. However, this working period was reduced with some of the tandem pairs since some of them took up to two weeks to get organised.

The e-mail exchange was going on outside of class without interference from the teacher. Only in cases of problems, such as with technology or with getting into contact with the partner, did the teachers intervene in this interaction. The e-mail messages contained both personal information and questions and answers concerning the projects. Students from both universities wrote both in English and in German. In general they used their foreign language when they exchanged more personal information but used their native language when they

answered their partners' questions about individual projects. Especially as far as the topic of American slang was concerned, all the American students considered it as appropriate to present all the information on slang in English. The number of exchanges between individual pairs varied considerably: the minimum was 2 e-mails per person, whereas some students sent as many as 15 mails to their partners. There was also considerable variation as far as the contents were concerned. Some American students compiled extensive lists of slang and even provided very sophisticated explanations of the use of their examples, whereas others just provided a few expressions without comments. Several students also provided Internet addresses of slang and slang dictionaries.

The Austrian students also sent information to those American students who were working on projects. Some of the titles of these projects were as follows: "The Internet in Germany and Austria", "Hopes and dreams of young people in Austria and Germany", "Nazi Skinheads", "Images of Russians and Americans in Germany and Austria", "4 artists from different countries", "Writing a fictional story with characters born in different decades", "The Catholic Church in Austria".

It would have been interesting to analyse these e-mails with respect to their presentation of cultural contents. However, since neither I nor the American teacher collected the e-mails concerning these projects this issue was never addressed.

In addition to the information required for the projects both groups of students exchanged a great amount of linguistic and cultural information on other topics, among them the Ebonics debate in the U.S., the reception of cultural and national stereotypes through film and television, aspects of university and college life, feminism in the two cultures, debates about politically correct language etc. Some e-mail pairs also corrected each other's messages in the target language in order to help their partner improve their command of the language. Most of the Austrian students took great care to gear the German they used towards the American learners. They frequently asked for feedback to find out whether their partners understood their messages.

The students' evaluation of the project was predominantly positive. They felt that they had gained some insight into each other's cultures, even though for the Austrian students at least culture was not the main focus. One of the American students made the following comment: "I really enjoyed this experience. It helped me retain a taste of my study in Graz and my appreciation for the differences and similarities of people in different cultures". However, some students complained that their partners were not cooperative enough because

they had not responded to their request for information on the project topic at all. There was a general consensus that e-mail projects are very useful for language learning, in particular for becoming familiar with a more informal type of language. E-mail was conceived as a very convenient and easy way of communicating with native speakers, though some students remarked that "correct language use" should be made a requirement for everybody. If there had been more time this issue could have served as an interesting starting point for discussions on language attitudes as well as standard and vernacular language.

The e-mail exchange was also seen as a less threatening way of getting into contact with the foreign language and culture than face-to-face interaction. This was expressed by an American student in the following quotation:

> "I practised the language and gained experience in informal usage of the language.
> I think for students studying overseas or in Graz, this exercise could be especially helpful, as kind of a buffer in the interaction requirement once you are thrown into another environment where English is not the major language."

Another student said about the medium used in this project:

> "The advantage [of computer-mediated communication] is that one engages in casual conversation but one has time to reflect on new phrases/expressions and time to think about responses since they are typed out."

The Austrian students commented that they had learnt (about) informal English and that they appreciated this very much.

The results of the projects and the students' evaluation of them reflect that in addition to language learning a great deal of language awareness and cultural awareness activities and processes were involved. Due to the different orientation of the two groups, the Austrian students commented more on linguistic aspects whereas the American students included more aspects of culture. As mentioned before, the Austrian students in one of the projects were required to read some theoretical writings on slang and then collect specific examples of slang from their American colleagues. The request for data on slang also made the American students think about slang: what type of language they would classify as slang, how they would explain slang terms to their partners, and whether some of the phrases that the Austrian students had found in books on slang were actually used. With respect to cultural awareness the

interaction with a real person from the target culture provided the opportunity of experiencing some aspects of culture more directly than would have been possible by the study of texts only. The students were able to see each other's point of view and to negotiate meanings and interpretations. The culture aspects in these e-mail projects were perhaps not given equal space to the linguistic issues since the projects were connected to linguistics classes in Austria. This is why courses in cultural studies which deal more specifically with cultural issues could probably make even more use of this type of project for exploring questions of culture.

4. Ideas/suggestions for future projects

The projects described above show that social interaction between peers in language and culture learning can be achieved in various ways. The Anglo-Austrian School project employed very simple methods of exchange such as sending materials prepared by the students for each other by mail. Of course, this type of exchange on a cultural topic could nowadays very easily be done in a similar fashion by using computer technology. Many schools now have e-mail and Internet and produce their own home pages. Using modern information technologies would also facilitate a dialogue between the different school classes about the materials prepared for each other.

Another way of using the approach of working on a particular topic has been successfully demonstrated by a long term project over the last ten years by an organisation called "Internationales Alpen-Adria-College" in Styria, Austria. This organisation has organised international project weeks for pupils from Austria and Central and Eastern European countries, such as Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Romania, but also some EU countries such as Italy and France. Each year one or two project weeks were organised for pupils and teachers from about twenty schools (three pupils and one teacher from an Austrian school and their partner school). Pupils, teachers and experts from different fields then worked on a specific topic during a week. The working language was predominantly German, but in some groups English or a combination of English and German was also used. This approach focuses on project work on a common topic where LA and CA are elements which come up continuously during the working process. Projects of this type could be made the basis of school exchange programmes and thus avoid the danger of ending up with mere "school tourism".

The teacher's role in these projects should also be discussed because it differs from that of common classroom interaction. Teachers here very much play the role of facilitators, being initiators of projects and resource persons when help

or advice is needed. One of the important functions of the teacher is to help pupils/students become aware of the cultural elements in language and in their everyday behaviours.

5. Conclusion

In this article I have described different projects which employed interaction between pupils or students from different cultures in foreign language learning. All the projects discussed involved elements of language awareness and culture awareness and successfully created a dialogue between the participants. This dialogue enabled them to become more aware of their own culture, of its many different aspects and the variety within their own culture. As language learners the dialogue with peers opened up new ways of authentic interaction via different media in the classroom situation. The different types of interaction created more awareness of the different language varieties and their functions, including implications for the learners; the students became more aware of their own language learning process by orienting themselves to other learners. When interacting with students from the foreign culture the language learners frequently played the role of a cultural intermediary. They viewed their own culture from different perspectives: from their own point of view, from the point of view they expected from their partners as well as their partners' actual view, and finally they perhaps developed new perspectives through the dialogue with their peers.

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