Journal of Translation and Languages مجلة الترجمة واللغات
ISSN : 1112-3974

Inclusion of the filmed versions of literary works in teaching literature An effective strategy to foreign cultures' familiarity

Arabi Melouka
University of Chlef Hassiba Benbouali -Algeria
thefairy_cherry@yahoo.fr

Abstract: *Teaching British and American literature has constituted an enormous and a sharp challenge to teachers of English as a foreign language, so far. Actually, many teachers find themselves in part obliged to teach students suffering not only the linguistic incompetence, but the cultural unfamiliarity of the literary text as well, whether the latter is a novel, a play, or a short story. Highlighting the cultural framework plays a major role in understanding the literary work. The overall aim of this paper is to show how helpful and rewarding is the combination of both the filmed and written versions of certain literary works to realize full comprehension of the literary content, mainly the cultural one.*

The paper has discussed the importance of integrating the cultural knowledge in EFL learning and literature classroom by having students revealed their perceptions of the target culture through the implementation of movies which are considered very motivating and culturally fruitful. As a matter of fact, the inclusion of movies in the EFL literature classroom has proved to be an effective strategy to elucidate this class and transform the boring task of literature learning into an entertaining and amusing one. This paper has shown also that the more knowledge and understanding of the target culture is enlightened and gained, the more an increase in the students' literary knowledge and linguistic competence of the target language, which is used in the movie by its native speakers, is expected. In Last of all, gained cultural knowledge not only develops students' language abilities for effective and appropriate communication within cultural contexts of the target language and culture, and their capacity to engage into intercultural situations, but free students' critical minds and creative imagination to think.

Keywords: *Literary works, cultural element, films, critical thinking, understanding.*

Résumé : *L'enseignement de la littérature britannique et américaine a constitué un énorme défi pour les enseignants d'anglais comme langue étrangère. En effet, de nombreux enseignants se retrouvent en partie obligés d'enseigner à des étudiants souffrant non seulement de l'incompétence linguistique, mais aussi de la méconnaissance culturelle du texte littéraire, que ce dernier soit un roman, une pièce de théâtre ou une nouvelle. La mise en évidence du cadre culturel joue un rôle majeur dans la compréhension de l'œuvre littéraire. L'objectif général de cet article est de montrer à quel point la combinaison des versions filmées et écrites de certaines œuvres littéraires est utile et enrichissante pour parvenir à une compréhension complète du contenu littéraire, principalement culturel.*

L'article a discuté de l'importance d'intégrer les connaissances culturelles dans l'apprentissage de l'EFL et la classe de littérature en demandant aux étudiants de révéler leurs perceptions de la culture cible à travers la mise en œuvre de films considérés comme très motivants et culturellement fructueux. En fait, l'inclusion de films dans la classe de littérature EFL s'est avérée être une stratégie efficace pour élucider cette classe et transformer la tâche ennuyeuse de l'apprentissage de la littérature en une tâche divertissante et amusante. Cet article a également montré que plus la connaissance et la compréhension de la culture cible sont éclairées et acquises, plus une augmentation des connaissances littéraires et de la compétence linguistique des élèves de la langue cible, qui est utilisée

dans le film par ses locuteurs natifs, est attendu. Enfin, les connaissances culturelles acquises développent non seulement les capacités linguistiques des élèves pour une communication efficace et appropriée dans les contextes culturels de la langue et de la culture cibles, et leur capacité à s'engager dans des situations interculturelles, mais libèrent l'esprit critique et l'imagination créative des élèves pour réfléchir.
Mots clés : *Œuvres littéraires, élément culturel, films, pensée critique, compréhension.*

1. Introduction

Most of the EFL students consider literature one of the difficult and boring modules; as they confront it with lack of linguistic competence and cultural unfamiliarity of the literary text. Thus, many teachers are becoming increasingly discouraged from teaching this module. In fact, most of the time and being unaccustomed to reading on a regular basis, EFL students are ignorant of the culture described in the literary work studied whether being a novel, a play or other genre.

This paper argues that the written version of the literary text, the teacher explanation, the student's imagination, word meanings, maps, and pictures are not sufficient for a good, clear, and full understanding of the cultural message displayed in some literary works. Therefore, the paper aims at highlighting the advantages of combining the filmed and written versions of certain literary works to achieve a full comprehension of the literary and cultural frameworks.

Moreover, for the most part, EFL students have no prior experience at all of studying literature in the target language and this actually creates a bewildering situation to the teacher especially when drawing and describing the cultural framework. What worsened the situation is the fact that students themselves confront literature with the belief that the latter per se is a grey area i.e. full of uncertainties and this hinders the development of their critical minds and skills. Hence, based on their personal experience, most teachers agree that the majority of EFL students respond positively to audio visual resources as they assist the illumination of the context where the target language is used. Therefore, the inclusion of multimedia, in particular, the filmed versions of certain literary works in non- native context not only describes and pictures the foreign culture, but increases the EFL students' confidence when approaching literary texts and encourages them to use their creative imagination to think; as they transform the literary study from a boring and difficult task into an amusing, enjoyable, and interesting one.

2. The Importance of Incorporating the Teaching of Culture in EFL Classroom

During the last few years, there has been much awareness and insistence on the important role of culture in the teaching of a foreign language. Therefore, the assignment of cultural learning in the foreign language classroom has been the anxiety of many teachers and scholars and has raised considerable controversy. As a matter of fact, foreign language learning is foreign culture learning as language and culture are so intricately intertwined. "Foreign language learning is comprised of several components, including grammatical competence, communicative

competence, language proficiency, as well as a change in attitudes towards one's own or another culture. For scholars and laymen alike, cultural competence, i.e., the knowledge of the conventions, customs, beliefs, and systems of meaning of another country, is indisputably an integral part of foreign language learning, and many teachers have seen it as their goal to incorporate the teaching of culture into the foreign language curriculum" (Thanasoulas, 2001)

In the past decades, language education research has revealed that language and culture are inseparable. Cultural awareness and the learning of a target culture can assist the achievement of second language proficiency (Kramsch, 1993). In Kramsch's view, second and foreign language learners necessarily become learners of the second culture because a language cannot be learned without an understanding of the cultural context in which it is used. He adds that Language is the principal means whereby we conduct our social lives. When it is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways (Kramsch, 1998, p. 3). Tang (1999) suggests that to speak a language well, one has to be able to think in that language, and the thought is extremely powerful.

Language is the soul of the country and people who speak it. Language and culture are inextricably linked. In fact, shedding light on the cultural elements of the foreign language is very advantageous. Modifying Seelye's (1988) 'seven goals of cultural instruction', Tomalin & Stempleski (1993, p.7-8) listed the following advantages behind the teaching of culture in the foreign literature classroom:

- It helps students to develop an understanding of the fact that all people exhibit culturally-conditioned behaviors.
- It helps students to develop an understanding that social variables such as age, sex, social class, and place of residence influence the ways in which people speak and behave.
- It helps students to become more aware of conventional behavior in common situations in the target culture.
- It helps students to increase their awareness of the cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language.
- It helps students to develop the ability to evaluate and refine generalizations about the target culture, in terms of supporting evidence.
- It helps students to develop the necessary skills to locate and organize information about the target culture.
- It stimulates students' intellectual curiosity about the target culture, and to encourage empathy towards its people.

Above all, integrating culture in the foreign literature classroom increases enthusiasm and enables students to take control of their own learning as well as to achieve autonomy by evaluating and questioning the wider context within which the learning of the target language is embodied.

3. The impact of cultural unfamiliarity on literary texts' comprehension

Before explaining cultural unfamiliarity of literary texts, it is crucial to cast some light on the meaning of the word culture. The latter is what distinguishes people of one group from another not only in terms of race, religion, or color but also in terms of distinct patterns of behavior, perceptions, interpretations, ways of thinking and feeling which are simultaneously shared by and yet unique to the group of people who share the same culture. So, culture influences people's perceptions, responses and reactions towards things or issues in life.

In fact, cultural unfamiliarity hampers students' understanding. As a result, students' comprehension and motivation to read the text will decline because the `text might remain a `mystery' to the reader' (Delanoy, 1991) in spite of the teacher's attempts at enlightening the cultural background of the text. This may prove to be a heavy burden on the teachers whom themselves may find the culture of the text alien to them.

It is popularly believed that enjoyment of a literary text stems from the readers' comprehension of it. Among the factors that assist the understanding process is a clear idea and description of the foreign culture displayed in the literary text. Accordingly, to achieve full comprehension of the literary work, it is essential to have an enlightened idea about the foreign culture described in it. If readers succeeded to understand the cultural framework of what is read, it would become very easy to achieve understanding and subsequently enjoyment. This justifies that cultural unfamiliarity holds back reading, comprehension, and enjoyment of a literary text in the EFL classroom.

Most of the time, EFL teachers follow the most traditional approach i.e. the cultural model when teaching a literary text. The cultural model examines the social, political and historical background to a text, literary movements, and genres. In view of that, the literary text is seen and used as the main source of information about the target culture. If the latter is not enlightened, a deep and full comprehension of the literary text will never be achieved entirely. All in all, cultural unfamiliarity of literary texts may be a problem to EFL learners; and methods have to be found to lessen the difficulties and enhance the output of literature teaching and learning in EFL literature classrooms.

4. Films as new method of understanding cultural elements in EFL literature classroom

Lately, it has been argued among some literature teachers that language acquisition and knowledge of the target culture through foreign language classes can be enhanced by implementing teaching aids such as media. Movies or films are widely used as a teaching material in foreign language classes as they are a medium which can convey informational content and insightful learning experiences of the target culture and language. In addition, movies are an economical substitute for field trips and other real visits to a country in which the target language is used. According to Kramsch, (1993) Films are a multimedia technology being implemented in

language education as an authentic or real-life material that replicates alternative ways of acquiring knowledge that are different from printed media. Films offer an exploratory and motivating type of learning as follows:

- Films provide a world of knowledge that is non-sequentially organized and that invites relational thinking and hierarchical structuring of the phenomena observed.
- It is suggested that students have to learn how to use the acquired knowledge in varying situational contexts for varying purposes and movies enhance a domain of cultural knowledge that has to be learned across different contexts.
- It is believed that movies invite learners to reinterpret, reorganize, and reconstruct prior knowledge in light of the new, to recognize the traces of prior texts and events as they appear in new contexts, endowed with a new value.
- Films are an accessible authentic material and lie in the construction of certain social reality by a society in dialogue with itself. Having been exposed to movies, non-native learners have to construct and reconstruct the meanings.
- Upon finishing watching films, a common comprehension classroom activity is to have a discussion in which students are given opportunities to explore various levels of understanding and to be conscious of their own knowledge assets and deficits.

5. Hint on using films in EFL literature classroom

In fact, cultural awareness of the target language helps widely the development of the linguistic and communicative competences. Movies can serve as real cultural texts in EFL literature classroom where students are required to express themselves and communicate in activities such as asking questions, giving answers, or discussing what happened in the films which were watched. As a matter of fact, Classroom-based activities can be designed according to the curriculum, students' background and knowledge, their level of proficiency, and other related factors to incorporate language learning related to cultural knowledge. Tasks may vary from describing what happened in the scenario, predicting what will happen afterwards, referring to specific communities in their own native culture, along with specific products, perspectives, and how individual persons whom they know respond to this practice.

Moreover, cultural interpretations tasks may be practiced at a certain level. These tasks are based on cultural information elicited in the movie. At this stage of learning, students are invited to learn how to make inference, hypotheses, substantiation, justification, comparison and contrast, and other forms of langue that link concrete to abstract. At this point, questions such as: 'what cultural attitudes, values, beliefs, or perceptions are explicitly and implicitly portrayed in the shown movie excerpt?'; 'how might participants in the given scene differ in their

perceptions of this event?'; 'how do distinct communities within the culture differ in their perspectives on certain issues?'; 'and how do these attitudes, values, beliefs, or perceptions contrast with those of other cultures that you know?' can be asked.

Furthermore, students may learn how to respond expressing their feelings, opinions, values, beliefs, concerns, awareness, intentions, strategies, decisions, or plans as they anticipate further involvement in the cultural phenomenon. To put this approach into practice, students might be asked to respond to the questions, for instance: 'What thoughts, feelings, or opinions do you have about this cultural phenomenon?'; 'Describe any personal experiences you have had with this cultural phenomenon.'; 'Do you share the cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, or perceptions of this cultural phenomenon?'; 'What more would you like to know or do in regard to this phenomenon?'

6. Conclusion

The paper has discussed the importance of integrating the cultural knowledge in EFL learning and literature classroom by having students revealed their perceptions of the target culture through the implementation of movies which are considered very motivating and culturally fruitful. As a matter of fact, the inclusion of movies in the EFL literature classroom has proved to be an effective strategy to elucidate this class and transform the boring task of literature learning into an entertaining and amusing one. This paper has shown also that the more knowledge and understanding of the target culture is enlightened and gained, the more an increase in the students' literary knowledge and linguistic competence of the target language, which is used in the movie by its native speakers, is expected. In Last of all, gained cultural knowledge not only develops students' language abilities for effective and appropriate communication within cultural contexts of the target language and culture, and their capacity to engage into intercultural situations, but free students' critical minds and creative imagination to think.

References

[1] Champoux, J.E. (2007). *Film as a Teaching Resource: Journal ofManagement Inquiry*, New York: Oxford University Press.

[2] Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and Culture in Language Teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[3] Kramsch, C. (1998). *Language and Culture.* Oxford: OxfordUniversity Press.

[4] Landar, H. (1965). *Language and Culture.* USA: OxfordUniversity Press

[5] Seelye, H. N. (1988). *Teaching Culture.* Lincolnwood, IL: NationalTextbook Company

[6] Singhal, M. (1998). *Teaching Culture in the Foreign Language Classroom.* Thai TESOL Bulletin, Vol. 11 No. 1, February 1998.

[7] Swaffar, J. (1992). *Written Texts and Cultural Readings.* In Kramsch, C. an McConnell-Ginet, S. (Eds.). 1992. *Text and Context:Cross- Disciplinary Perspectives on Language Study. Lexington*, MA: D.C. Heath.

[8] Tang, R. (1999). *The Place of "Culture" in the Foreign LanguageClassroom: A Reflection.* The Internet TESL Journal, 8, 1–3.Retrieved on August 8, 2009, from http://iteslj.org/Articles/Tang-Culture.html

[9] Tavares, R. & Cavalcanti, I. (1996). *Developing Cultural Awareness in EFL Classrooms*. English Forum, 34:3, July-September, 1996.

[10] Thanasoulas, Dimitrios, (2001). The Importance of Teaching Culturein the Foreign Language Classroom, http://radicalpedagogy.icaap.org/content/issue3_3/7-thanasoulas.html Tomalin, B. & Stempleski, S. (1993). Cultural Awareness. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[11] Valette, R.M. (1986). *The Culture Test.* In J.M. Valdes (Ed.), CulturalBound, New York: Oxford University Press.

[12] Zailin Shah Hj, Yusoff**,** Cultural Familiarity in Literary Texts:Consideration for Text-selection, http://umpir.ump.edu.my/926/1/11_zailinmi_cultural.pdf