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**EXPLORING LANGUAGE THROUGH
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EXPLORING LANGUAGE THROUGH LITERATURE

In dealing with the question of literature and language a number of difficulties arise. First and foremost, there is the consideration that somehow the two are distinct entities which exist separately and are consequently difficult to reconcile. It would appear necessary to examine why this form of dichotomy exists, and if such a separation is in any way justifiable. Certainly literature is possessed of peculiar characteristics, especially in the poetic form and while it may be more difficult to pin down in prose, "the great novelists of the English language have been arguably without exception, also great artists in the use of words" (Leech and Short 1981: 2). These peculiar characteristics are possibly what give one the sensation that literary language succeeds in expressing "what oft was thought, but ne'er so well express't", as Alexander Pope defines "true wit" in his *Essay on Man* (quoted in Balboni 1999: 5). Therefore, it is sometimes considered as something superior to everyday experience. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to describe this form of expression as not being a representation of language itself. We should also bear in mind the fact that literary language is vastly wide-ranging in terms of style and content, from the enigmatic sonnets of Shakespeare to the incisive prose of Jane Austen to the entertaining tales of Roald Dahl, lending itself admirably to applications in language improvement for second or foreign language students. The language of literature may be archaic or modern, the layout or format may differ widely from one text to another, conventions may be used and at times it is difficult to draw the line between what is literature and what is 'ordinary' language. As Crystal and Davy (1969: 79) claim:

Literature can be mimetic of the whole range of human experience – and this includes linguistic as well as non-linguistic experience. In a poem or a novel, one may find pieces of religious or legal English, or any other, which have to be understood in their own right before one can go on to assess their function in terms of the literary work as a whole.

It is the purpose of this paper to examine both the characteristics of literary language and provide examples of how it may be exploited in order to bring about a clearer understanding of to what extent literature may be used productively in the second language classroom.

The first section of the paper attempts to identify what issues are of most

interest to teachers of English through the use of interviews with practising teachers in the Italian state school system.

Secondly, an analysis is made of some of the literature central to the development of theories both regarding the nature of literature and its applications in the classroom. Literature is examined from two points of view, in the first place a structurally based perspective and secondly how the reader reacts to the text. In addition, examples are provided as to how literature may be productively exploited in a programme of general language improvement.

Focusing the Issues

The subject matter of this paper could potentially cover an enormous area, and it was therefore deemed necessary to focus attention on those questions which are of direct interest from a pedagogical point of view. In order to concentrate attention on this specific area it was decided to investigate the opinions and attitudes of teaching professionals with interests in this field. A number of decisions had to be made with regard to the approach taken for the collection of data. It seemed that the interview offered the most suitable solution, in that it provides a degree of flexibility not possible with the questionnaire, permitting the formulation or testing of hypotheses and the exploration of issues which may arise during the interview procedure and thus providing what Cohen et al. (2000: 270) term "word-based qualitative data". However, it was also felt that a highly structured interview format would limit the interviewer's space for deeper exploration of points that may arise during discussion and it was decided to adopt a semi-structured format which Seliger and Shohamy (1989:167) define as consisting of "specific core questions determined in advance from which the interviewer branches off to explore in-depth information, probing according to the way the interview proceeds, and allowing elaboration, within limits". Furthermore, the question types were 'open ended' in order to allow the respondents greater freedom of response and to elicit more genuine answers. This would also give the interviewer greater freedom to "probe" (Morrison, quoted in Cohen et al. 2000: 278) or clarify. For the purposes of this study, two interviews were carried out with practising language teachers in the Italian state school system. An initial set of questions dealt with personal language learning experiences and issues concerning the teaching of the English language, before moving on to the specifics of using literature in the classroom.

After the initial stage of the interview with the first respondent, attention was turned towards the importance of literature in language development. The respondent considered it to be essential, turning to personal experience to illustrate the point. His first exposure to English literature was Dickens' *David Copperfield* at high school. He had read the Italian version previously and was curious to discover what it would be like to tackle the original version in English. Although he felt a great sense of frustration at not being able to understand everything, finding particular problems with the range of lexis, he also felt that he was somehow getting closer to the real English language and he realised how limiting it could be merely to read the translations of the classics. The experience was motivating and stimulating, allowing him to discover some of the nuances and complexities of the English language, which he had never been aware of before. This, he felt brought him closer to English culture and way of thinking, an understanding of which was essential, in his opinion, if one is to acquire a deep and effective knowledge of the language.

From a pedagogical point of view, the respondent was quite critical of the school system in Italy. He felt that there were far too many institutional constraints on syllabus development imposed by government programmes. These programmes tend to be too wide-ranging and frequently adopt an analysis of the text from a purely narrative point of view, describing characters, plot and setting. Literature was also studied from a historical perspective, through the use of anthologies, which provided short extracts from the main works in English literature, with a heavy bias towards Britain up to the late nineteenth century. This often meant that little time was dedicated to what could be termed 'literary appreciation' or the reader's reaction to the text.

The second respondent had many years teaching experience in different schools and at the time of the interview she was teaching in a vocational school for hoteliers, where, although literature was not a part of the official syllabus, she made use of literary texts to stimulate interest in the language going beyond the instrumental need to pass the final school exam. In her opinion this interest was of a primarily cultural nature, since, "to acquire the language they [the students] need to know all the culture".

Her university experience had been important in influencing her way of teaching of literature, as she had had the opportunity to observe two types of approach. Firstly the more traditional approach, where "the teacher, read the passage and then the comment". Little space was given to discussion or freer interpretations and students were expected to conform to a pre-defined interpretation of the text under examination. This contrasted markedly with

the second approach, which the respondent defined as, "psychological", where literature was brought under closer scrutiny from different perspectives and interpretations and the student's own reaction to the text was taken into consideration through discussion and exchange of opinions. This is reflected in the respondent's teaching practice, where the primary aim is to stimulate interest and to use the text as a springboard for personal growth on the part of her students. In fact, great importance was placed on the teaching of practical skills, in particular speaking and listening, as this provided the key to communication.

However, the respondent's classroom approach to the exploitation of a text showed a combination of strategies which ranged from reader-centred to text based: predicting content from the title, reading comprehension questions, identifying main points, writing summaries, classifying the type of text, studying the characters, analysing the content or the message and checking vocabulary and different linguistic aspects of the text. Indeed the respondent stated that literary text was important because she believed that learners, "achieve grammar through the text", implying that a formal grammatical analysis of the text was desirable alongside activities designed to stimulate cultural interest among her students.

On the basis of these reflections, a number of salient issues would appear to come to the fore, and on the basis of the interview material the following tentative points have been made:

- literature is important for language development, since it offers the opportunity to expand language knowledge, in particular from a lexical point of view, and provides exposure to a wide variety of language styles;
- literature is a motivating factor in learning a foreign language;
- English literature and language are closely linked to a specific culture and therefore provide insights into that culture;
- the language syllabus often places literature in a historical perspective and focuses on established typologies of literary form;

It would seem, moreover, that a further point of some importance is evident. Although there seems to be a genuine interest in encouraging students to think about what they are reading and a desire to provide a degree of cultural insight, a heavy emphasis is placed on the structural content of the text. This runs contrary to more recent 'reader-response' approaches where "learners are asked to generate personal responses to something in the text" (Hirvela 1996: 128).

For this reason, in the first part of the next section there is a discussion of the literary genre in an attempt to define literature from a more technical

point of view and, indeed, discover if it actually possible to so analyse the literary text in any practical form for language teaching purposes. Subsequently a further point of interest is taken up in the examination of the role of the reader in accessing, understanding and interpreting a text. This is an aspect which possibly has far wider ranging implications for the teaching of a second or foreign language, in the sense that the reader becomes the focal point in the learning process, rather than the material employed, thus taking us closer to more learner-centred approaches advocated in modern teaching practice, where "students should leave a course with a better understanding of *language* and of *themselves* as both language users and language learners" (Tudor 1996: 282. The italics are mine).

Defining Literature

It may be a over-simplistic to state that the teaching of literature, and thereby language itself when literature is the vehicle for language improvement, is often heavily biased towards a structural analysis of the text, which is intended to examine and highlight those technical peculiarities which distinguish poetic or literary language from every day language. This is possibly best exemplified by the words of the formalist linguist Shklovsky (1988: 27), who claims:

In studying poetic speech in its phonetic and lexical structure as well as in its characteristic distribution of words, we find everywhere the artistic trademark – that is we find material obviously created to remove the automatism of perception; the author's purpose is to create the vision which results from that deautomised perception.

In this way the poetic language of a literary text has been carefully crafted by the author and it is our task as interpreters of that text to identify or appreciate those characteristics which make it unique or peculiar. However, such an approach, while being commendably scientific and objective, is also somewhat cold and clinical and perhaps does not lend itself ideally to the second language classroom (Maley 1989: 11).

A different perspective, based on how the poetic content of a text may be perceived by the reader, is taken up by Widdowson (1992: 76), who claims that:

We talk of the heart and the soul as the closest approximation we can get to referring to such experience, and even to use such words is to risk ridicule. But every individual will attest to its existence. Inchoate and articulate as it is,

it cannot declare itself, it cannot be referred to. But it can be represented. And that is the point of poetry.

This would move the analysis of the literary form to another extreme, touching deeply personal and emotional areas of our existence, and therefore becoming more relevant to the reader who is interacting with the text, since it is that reaction which provides the motivation for reading or studying the text in the first place, rather than viewing it as an inert artefact to be placed under the merciless eye of the microscope. These two positions may provide an insight into what could be considered as the core of the problem, in the sense that they appear to view the literary form from diametrically opposed perspectives. For the purposes of this paper these perspectives could be defined as the *analytical pole* and the *affective pole*, which are illustrated in Figure 1 below as being the two extremes of a continuum.

Figure 1: The Analytical-Affective Continuum.



It would perhaps be hasty to dismiss either one or the other out of hand and an evaluation of them both may be helpful in finding a clearer definition of literature which can have a value in pedagogical terms. In the former, the object under examination is considered as something analysable using a scientific methodology, with a concentration on the formal features of the text, while the second approach looks at the 'human', emotional reaction to what is "the specifically human activity of reading" (Fish: 1996: 104). Focus could be moved forwards or backwards along the scale according to the objectives of the teaching context.

Historically, the first approach finds its origins in the more formalist style of literary criticism or analysis. While Jakobson (1988: 33), for example, admits that literature is a part of language as a whole, he also claims that the subjective or 'emotive' analysis of a literary text holds little scientific value. Consequently, a series of instruments need to be designed to permit "an objective scholarly analysis of verbal art" (ibid.: 33). These instruments are based on syntactic and phonological elements, which have specific functions in creating a text. And it cannot be denied that in the reading and appreciation of a text, some degree of technical competence is necessary. As MacCabe (1988: 434) claims:

There is little doubt that our ability to read is dependent on a knowledge of changes in meaning, syntax and phonology and that our ability to analyse is dependent on the possibility of using grammatical and prosodic categories to articulate the literary effects that turn on them.

To an extent this serves as a justification for seeking to identify what those peculiar characteristics of the literary form may be, in order to examine how such characteristics may be exploited in the language classroom. Jakobson (op. cit.) draws attention to the fact that choices are made in the construction of any kind of text or discourse, and that these choices are based on "selection" and "combination" (ibid.: 39). The language user has at his or her disposition a range of lexical items which can be *selected* and then *combined* into "larger units of meaning" (Bradford 1997: 37) in order to construct a message or achieve a particular aim.

Apart from the technical construction of the text, we could also assume that the person producing the text has an aim or objective, whether it be literary or anything else. Jakobson (op. cit.: 35) identifies six functions of language which are determined by the way in which language is being used in given situations. The six functions are interdependent, and elements of all or some of them will be found in any text. For instance, the *referential function* may be dominant in, let us say, a television documentary concerning famine in Ethiopia, where the aim, theoretically, is to communicate factual information objectively. Therefore the meaning of language employed will be denotative, that is to say face value, in much the same way as the dictionary definition of a word is denotative, for instance 'a car' is 'a private means of transport with four wheels'. The *poetic function* regards the aspect of 'language as art', as exemplified by poetry in particular. However, Jakobson (ibid.: 38) states quite clearly that "the linguistic study of the poetic function must overstep the limits of poetry, and, on the other hand, the linguistic scrutiny of poetry cannot limit itself to the poetic function". Returning to the example of a television documentary, it is, for example, quite possible that within the overall referential context, there may be descriptions or the expression of opinions. Such a description may well be coloured by emotional content expressed through language, where the poetic function may be "superimposed upon the other functions of language" (ibid.: 40). Michael Buerk's reporting for the BBC on the Ethiopian famine in 1984 would be a case in point. His emotionally charged accounts of the situation painted a vivid picture of the extent of the disaster in the minds of the British public (Bell and Gower 1992: 76-77 and 155). In

this way part of the technical skill in constructing a text assumes some kind of reaction on the part of the listener or reader.

It is often a characteristic of poetic language that lexical or structural combinations may be unusual or incongruent at face value, and this form of 'deviation from the norm' is what constitutes one of the most striking features of poetic language. According to Leech (1969: 42-46) such deviations may include, among others, lexical forms, as in the juxtaposition of terms which do not find collocation in everyday language. In Wole Soyinka's poem *Telephone Conversation* (Deller et al. 1992: no page reference), for instance, the landlady's "voice" is described as "lipstick-coated", physically impossible, but highly effective as an image. This comes about because of the 'economical nature' of literary language, in the sense that, "Even in its simplest forms it invites us to go beyond what is said to what is implied" (Maley, op. cit.: 12).

Further to this there are often grammatical deviations, such as changes in word order, what is sometimes termed dramatic inversion, as we see in this example from Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798/1994: 187) (the italics are mine):

The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,
Merrily did we drop
 Below the kirk, below the hill,
 Below the lighthouse top.

It should be noted, however, that such constructions are also used in common language, as when some unfortunate individual, without wanting to resort to more colourful terms, wishes to express anger or frustration:

Never have I been so humiliated.

Jakobson (op. cit.: 47) identifies a further aspect of the literary or poetic text in what he terms "parallelism", or the repetition of similar structures in the text, for example in John Donne's *Sonnet IX* (highlighted in my italics):

If poysonous mineralls, and if that tree,
 Whose fruit threw death on else immortal us
If lecherous goats, if serpents envious [...]

The doubting *if* construction repeated four times with slight lexical modifications raises the readers sense of uncertainty and regret: '*If only I hadn't done that*'. In the example from Coleridge above, a sense of

movement is given by the repetition of “below the ...” as the Mariner’s ship pulls out of the harbour. But these structures are not only to be found in classical literature. They are also commonly found in modern songs, which may provide a stimulating initial access to these characteristics with younger learners in particular. Furthermore, it may also be found in the rhetorical style of political speeches, such as Martin Luther King’s 1963 address to civil rights marchers in Washington (*Speak Up* 1999: 32/VI): “I have a dream” (repeated four times) and “Let freedom ring ...” (repeated eight times); or it may even be found in recounting life experiences or telling jokes, where the narrative is often embellished with this kind of form, in much the same way as fables and fairy tales. While certainly not poetry, there is a certain musicality in the telling of a joke, with the repetitions, the building of suspense and the final pun.

This leads into a further point regarding not only the literary form. All language is imbued with musical qualities, and English is no exception, although it possesses its own characteristics. Most obviously, this would include stressed/unstressed syllables (/fə'nɒmənəl/, for example, with the main stress on the second syllable and the unstressed /ə/ appearing in the remaining syllables) and weak/strong forms (/wəz/ and /wɒz/). Italian students in particular have difficulties with this aspect of English, since they tend to place minimally differentiated stresses on each syllable, much as they would do in their own language. Therefore /'hæmbɜːgə/ becomes something more akin to /em'buər,geər/ with a characteristically trilled /r/. Not only this, but an adroit manipulation of these stress patterns on the part of a proficient user of the English language can modify the communicative value, and therefore the meaning, of an utterance. ‘That’s *my* car’ emphasises the speaker’s concern with possession (possibly someone is trying to steal it), while ‘That’s my *car*’ places emphasis on a definition of the object under discussion (perhaps someone is making improper use of it). These factors may help in determining the lexical choices we make in constructing a text (be it spoken or written), and once again it is Jakobson (op. cit.: 38) who provides an example with a speaker who referred to “the horrible Harry” and how this speaker discarded all other alternative terms of description, “dreadful, terrible, frightful, disgusting” because they failed to suit the name of the person in question in that would not have ‘sounded right’. Jakobson (ibid.: 39) places great emphasis on the musical nature of poetry, and indeed all language, and also that this very musicality is a vehicle which itself can carry meaning, claiming that (ibid.: 51):

Poetry is not the only area where sound symbolism makes itself felt, but it is a province where the internal nexus between sound and meaning changes from latent into patent and manifests itself most palpably and most intensely.

In the classroom situation these characteristics can be effectively exploited. Dwyer and Borrega (2000: 47) observe that reading aloud can have beneficial effects in the language classroom, especially if poetry is used. Work can be carried out on specific sounds, sense groups and changes in pace and volume so essential in reading a poem aloud. Students could also be encouraged to produce their own work suggested by the theme of a specific poem or its structure. Such personalisation gives the students the opportunity to experiment with language, re-model texts, experience the reaction an audience has to their work and "to make words 'say' just what they want them to mean" (Brice Heath 1996: 776). Gerber (1996) suggests the use of role-plays based on literary texts, where students act out the roles of characters in novels in order to identify more deeply with them, claiming that this, "involves the pupils emotionally, prompts them to use more natural language, and it is particularly effective in that it facilitates fluency" (ibid.: 259). It can be the case that students come up with the most remarkable inventions, which while not being strictly correct, are at the same time comprehensible and are possessed of a marked communicative impact. In fact, they become expressions of personal creativity, which form an essential part of the language learning process, since in the first place the learner is experimenting with the target language and in the second place the freedom to do so provides a high degree of motivation (Hutchinson and Waters 1987: 47), adding "a deeper, more meaningful dimension to the whole teaching-learning process" (Dwyer and Borrega op. cit.: 49). One example of such creativity comes to mind from personal experience of teaching English to Italians, when during a class discussion about personal experiences a student invented the following expression: "The police stopped me because I was *one-waying* it up the street on my bike". This expression replaces the somewhat more laborious 'I was riding the wrong way up a one-way street'. Although it is certainly non-standard, it is comprehensible, in much the same way as the creative use of language in a poem may be deviant from the norm, but at the same time understandable within the context of that specific poem.

The accentuated use of specific linguistic devices in poetry lends itself to use in the classroom as a form of awareness raising exercise. Perhaps such peculiarities do not have direct applications in every day language use, but they can help learners to become more sensitive as to how language works

as a mechanism beyond the formulaic application of set structures imposed by the syllabus. Thus, teachers "encourage their students to develop their overall language awareness. Students will become aware not only of how specific language items function but of more generalisable linguistic principles" (Lazar 1996a: 774). Work could be carried out on pronunciation, stress and intonation, while working with a whole text. This would differ from the approach often used in text books, where isolated chunks of language are used to exemplify specific points of interest, but the real communicative and, therefore, motivational value of the material used provides little stimulus for the learner. Swan and Walter (1985: 9) propose a word counting exercise, where sentences are taken from an authentic interview which has been listened to previously, and students are required to count the number of words in each sentence. In this case students are working within a context, although each sentence is a separate entity in itself. Such an exercise could be adapted by using a short poem, where students could be required to count the words in each line or note down the words where main stresses fall. This could then lead into an analysis of the poem and its content.

In the above examples, we have seen parallels between the structure of literary language and every day language, which would suggest that a selective focus on structural elements of the literary text may not be wholly undesirable. However, this approach alone does have a major drawback in that it fails to take into serious consideration how meaning is produced in a text and, therefore, how the reader interprets the text.

Toolan (1988: 121) makes reference to a bi-planar model of language, where structure, or surface linguistic forms on a morphological and phonological level, has its place, but underlying this there is the much trickier question of its semantic content. This is problematic, in the sense that it goes further than the Saussurian (quoted in Jakobson, *op. cit.*: 51) "signifier/signified" distinction, especially in the literary text. The image of a tree may correspond with the lexical item 'tree', but the type of tree visualised may differ, in its denotative value from reader to reader. A native English speaker may think of an oak tree, but what image comes to the mind of an Indian or African English language user, where the oak tree does not form a part of his or her life experience? To take a more unusual example, we could return to the standard definition of 'car' mentioned above, and add the following characteristics: 'it is a private means of transport with twenty-two wheels, a swimming pool, bar, television and discotheque' (Abbs et al. 1992: 98). This description does not satisfy our immediate expectations, but this car does in fact exist. Moreover, the term 'car' can take on all manner of

connotative meanings, such as 'masculinity', 'femininity', 'speed', 'power', 'security', 'status', 'freedom' and so on. These are all aspects exploited in the advertising we see on television, for instance, where the connotative value of the object is predominant in that it is more persuasive (Eco 1968: 174).

In this way the word may take on a symbolic or abstract meaning. More figurative uses of language, often associated with the literary form, illustrate this point and this contrasts markedly with the type of language used in texts used for language teaching. These tend to contain descriptions of general habits, work and free time, very typically with the text designed around the presentation of a specific grammar point. This passage could then be backed up with a recorded monologue, where students listen to a person describing some aspect of his or her life, habits and routines, which possibly contradicts our normal expectations. In this way the initial presentation is consolidated with further material which is intended to be of an interesting and stimulating nature, in that the content is unusual. To an extent this succeeds, but an extract of a more 'literary' nature, Dickens' description of Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* (1854/1995: 2), demonstrates that, as well as providing interest from the point of view of the content, the language used is far more complex:

Oh! But he was a tightfisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue, and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog-days; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

One criticism levelled at the use of literature in the classroom is that it is too demanding on the learner. The extract from Dickens, quoted above, is no doubt challenging, but the intermediate level learner should, theoretically, have quite an extensive background in the language, and if such learners had been exposed to literary forms earlier in their learning experience, parallel to the use of a standard text book, they would firstly have developed some of those skills necessary in dealing with the literary text in terms of their structural form and secondly in terms of its interpretation and appreciation. This could be exemplified by using an extract from George Orwell's *1984* (1949/1989: 3).

It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him.

The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old rag mats. At one end of it a coloured poster, too large for indoor display, had been tacked to the wall. It depicted simply an enormous face, more than a metre wide: the face of a man of about forty-five, with a heavy black moustache and ruggedly handsome features. Winston made for the stairs. It was no use trying the lift. Even at the best of times it was seldom working, and at present the electric current was cut off during daylight hours. It was part of the economy drive for Hate Week. The flat was seven flights up, and Winston, who was thirty-nine and had a varicose ulcer above his right ankle, went slowly, resting several times on the way. On each landing, opposite the lift shaft, the poster with the enormous face gazed from the wall. It was one of those pictures which are so contrived that the eyes follow you about when you move. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption beneath it ran.

Work could be carried out on comparing the character described in this text with that of the presentation text, asking students to imagine Winston Smith's daily habits, way of life or hypothesising why he lives in the conditions described above. The use of this text has the advantage of providing the opportunity to work on both a controlled structural level within a defined syllabus and to allow space for student creativity in the examination of more challenging material. Lazar (1994: 122) claims that literary texts can be used with lower level classes, if careful attention is paid to the type of text chosen (possibly focusing on more modern forms) and the activities are graded according to the level of the learners and the syllabus they are following, their cultural background and their literary background (Lazar 1993: 53-54).

In terms of the structural content of a text, there is an extensive variety of activities which can be carried out by the learners. Lazar (1994: 123) suggests that, "cloze, multiple-choice questions, guessing word meaning from context, and matching activities are just some of the procedures which can be used successfully with literary texts". This type of approach could, for example, lend itself to work on vocabulary development. Soars and Soars (1989: 56) use Siegfried Sassoon's poem *They* with the aim focusing the students' attention on appropriacy of style. The poem is presented as a gap-filling exercise, and a number of words, which are of similar meaning but differing register, are suggested for each space, e.g.

They have *** Death and dared him face to face. *courted/over-*

come/seen/challenged

In spite of such approaches to making literature more accessible to the student, the fact remains that literary prose is generally perceived to be more difficult than the material used in text books. Why, for instance, does the extract from Dickens appear to be so difficult? Firstly, there is a wide range of vocabulary, some of which would probably create problems for second language students. Secondly Dickens uses what we have described as 'poetic' devices above, the musicality and parallelism in this extract are patently apparent. Thirdly, the text is run through with metaphorical references. This character is 'hard', 'solitary' and above all 'cold'. Dickens succeeds, in a very short paragraph, in painting a vivid picture of this most unpleasant person, and this effect is largely achieved through the use of metaphor. Lazar (1996b) argues that figurative language is not exclusive to the literary form, and that it runs, in fact, through all kinds of language and that it consists principally in "playing with a linguistic pattern, so that when an unexpected lexical item is inserted into a slot out of its usual collocational range, it results in the creation of a new meaning" (ibid.: 44). This view is in part sustained by Steen (1994: 193), since he claims that literary metaphors are "less conventional in linguistic terms" than, say, journalistic metaphors, which more closely reflect the every day use of language. Consequently the journalistic metaphor is possibly more difficult to identify, as it may be more difficult to identify in most forms of 'ordinary' language, possibly because:

metaphor is pervasive in every day life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.

(Lakoff and Johnson 1980:3)

In this way the literary form could be considered as beneficial in raising a student's awareness towards these factors, because its very overtness is immediately identifiable. In the teaching context figurative language may be considered on two levels. The actual structure of the form, which is immediately recognisable as such, and a lexical content which is somehow incompatible with our expectations, but nevertheless comprehensible. Comparisons could be made between overtly literary imagery and the imagery employed, for example, in newspaper articles and students could be encouraged to experiment with their own ideas (Lazar 1996b: 50).

Alternatively themes could be taken up. All literature is run through with

themes, which can be of a highly abstract nature. Nevertheless, these themes, such as love, hate, revenge, madness, poverty, suffering and so on, are immediately accessible to learners in that they form part of human existence on a universal level. The problem exists in how we perceive these conditions and how they are described linguistically. Students could, for example, be encouraged to look at how madness may be described in linguistic terms, using diverse literary sources. This could, for instance, include Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* or Joseph Conrad's *An Outpost of Progress*. This would then lead into activities which examine how madness is perceived by the observer. This could be exploited by learners inventing their own metaphors (Cortazzi and Jin 1999) to describe the phenomenon in question and thereby better understand not only the linguistic mechanisms behind the formulation of a metaphor, but also how this functions to create meaning. For instance, the expression 'having a screw loose' means to be mad, suggesting that there is some kind of mechanical failure, this failure is usually associated with the brain in western culture and consequently the brain can be perceived as a machine.

It is at this point that our attention turns to where the comprehension of figurative language comes from in the mind of the reader. In literal terms it may be nonsense. A person can be as 'tall and thin as another person', but how can a person be as "hard and sharp as flint" (Dickens, quoted above)? The answer may be found in the association of images or by the reader's perception of the world which surrounds him or her in concrete terms.

Although Halliday (1996) is concerned with structure in his analysis of William Golding's *The Inheritors*, the focus is different from a purely structuralist approach in the sense that an attempt is made to investigate how grammar may invest a text with its meaning. According to Halliday (ibid.: 67) the argument that structure is irrelevant to the analysis of a particular linguistic style:

[...] is almost certainly not true. We are probably rather sensitive to the relative frequency of different grammatical and lexical patterns, which is an aspect of 'meaning potential'; and our expectancies, as readers, are in part based on our awareness of the probabilities inherent in the language. This is what enables us to grasp the new probabilities of the text as local norm; our ability to perceive a statistical departure and restructure it as a norm is itself evidence of the essentially probabilistic nature of the language system.

Rather than a simply clinical analysis of the surface form of the text, Halliday seeks to discover how meaning is conveyed. The creation of meaning comes about through "meaning potential" (Halliday 1979: 27), that

is to say the range of semantic options available to the language user. These semantic options are product of the society, the context in which we live and consequently our vision of the world as moulded by our personal life experiences.

In extreme cases, it has been argued that it is impossible to identify 'true' meaning, since "no meaning is sustained by anything other than reference to other meaning" (Lacan 1988: 83). It is not in the 'word' or the 'structure' itself that meaning is created, because this can transform according to the context. From such a perspective the text itself does not exist because absolute meaning cannot exist. As Derrida (1988: 119) states:

The movement of signification adds something, which results in the fact that there is always more, but this addition is a floating one because it comes to perform a vicarious function, to supplement a lack on the part of the signified.

Such a position could be justifiably criticised because language would appear to be possessed of a wholly indefinable nature or "indeterminacy" (Wales 1989: 243), an "interminable free-play of interminable meanings" (Abrams 1988: 270) and to all effects it is an admission that any attempt to 'scientifically' analyse the text from a Jakobsonian point of view alone, and it must be stressed this approach does not pretend to be a pedagogical approach, is doomed to fail. Although this system of constantly changing values creates a problem from a pedagogical point of view, since the traditionalist would argue that we have no concrete rules to teach, this system is possibly comes closer to reflecting 'real language', and could go some way to explaining why the 'teaching text' frequently used in the language classroom gives the impression of being so rarefied, banal and inconsequential. As Prodromou (1996: 774) claims, most teaching material is "about situations which were not only imaginary [...] but vacuous, empty of life". The literary form comes closer to dealing with the problem of providing material which furnishes the language learner with an effective ability to exploit language in the real world. The classroom text tends to focus attention on denotative meaning, being analysed in order to present lexis at face value or particular grammatical structures or functions. To an extent this trivialises and over-simplifies the issues at stake. On the other hand, literature provides space for the learner, beyond the ties of strictly controlled, prescriptively conceived language exercises.

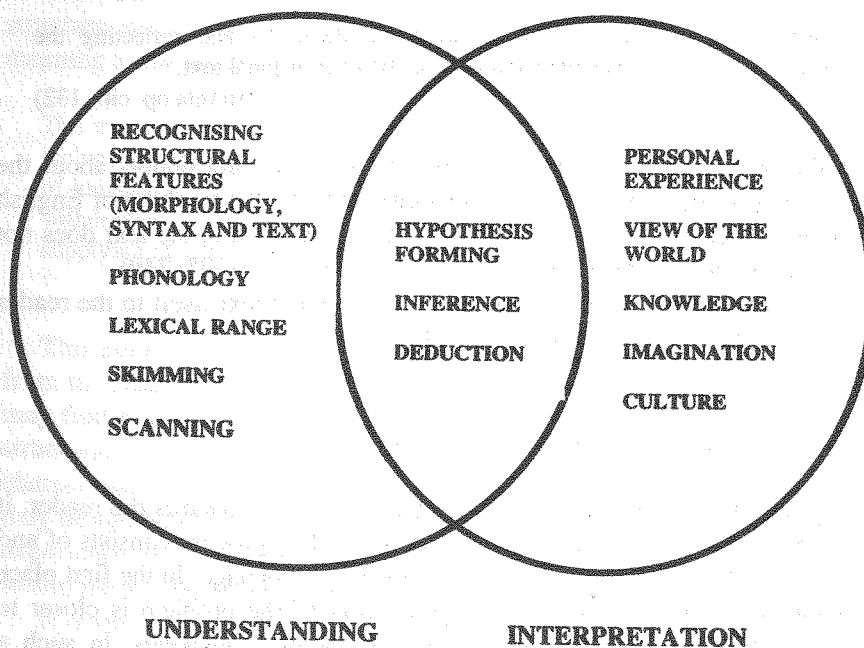
Such considerations force us to move our attention away from the author as producer of the text, to the role of the learner or reader in interpreting the text, since:

Every act of interpretation involves [...] at least two perspectives, that of the author and that of the interpreter.

(Hirsch 1988: 262)

And here an significant distinction could be made between *understanding* a text and *interpreting* it. Understanding may be viewed as that ability to analyse the structural content of a given text, be aware of the mechanisms which are technically employed to construct it, while interpreting that text may be viewed as the ability to map it onto a world reality, which must inevitably contain a degree of personal colouring on the part of the reader, who through cultural or social background will examine its content from a particular perspective, or through a number of different perspectives, in that the text is "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (Barthes 1988: 170). At the same time the reader needs to possess those technical skills which help in decoding the text, not only with reference to purely structural features, but also through the formulation of hypotheses, inference and deduction. This is illustrated in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2. The Understanding-Interpretation Interface



A study by Steffensen and Joag-Dev (1984) would seem to indicate that the interpretation of a text can be heavily culturally biased. A sample of subjects from India and the United States were required to read descriptions of an Indian and an American wedding. The texts themselves were not linguistically challenging, but when the subjects were asked to describe the wedding from a different culture, they were prone to make errors of misinterpretation based on culturally founded preconceptions. As observed above, culture and language are generally considered to be very closely linked, and although in making choices of material the teacher should possibly beware of imposing a form of "Anglo-American socio-cultural domination" (Alptekin and Alptekin 1984: 26) on his or her students, the exploitation of English 'literatures' from a variety of sources, India, Africa, the Caribbean, Australia and so on (Crystal 1995:111), adds a further dimension to the use of literature in the classroom. As Fowler (1996: 198) observes, a "text is a communicative interaction between its producer and its consumers, within relevant social and institutional contexts". The English language literary text would provide ample space for work on areas of cultural awareness, especially if more attention were focused on the way in which English is used all over the world, where it is the reader who brings meaning to the text:

Reading [...] creates meaning, meaning produced by and reflecting the learner and how he or she read and transformed the original text.

(Hirvela op. cit.: 132)

In this way it is the reader who controls the text, and doubts about the ethics of imposing an alien culture and values through the teaching of English are largely dispelled when we consider that "understanding the text does not require acceptance of the values it represents" (Stephens 1995: 249).

As a consequence our focus moves away from the text itself to the reader and his or her role in text-reader interaction.

The Relationship Between Text and Reader.

As focus moves away from the text itself and more towards the reader, it is possible to examine more closely what the reading process consists of and how this may be of relevance in teaching a foreign language. In the first place the reader is the learner, and such a perception of the problem is closer to more modern learner-centred approaches to teaching languages. In such a

context the learner's reaction to the text can be exploited, and here we find ourselves closer to the affective pole of the continuum described above. The reader has an active role in interacting with the text. As Iser (1988: 212) claims:

The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader.

Here there are two points of interest. Firstly, the text is perceived as reality, it has a material and physical form which plays a role in reader-text interaction. Therefore, structure must have some place in the exploitation of a text for teaching purposes, since the reader needs to be acquainted with how a text is build up. Secondly, reactions to the text are individual and reader generated. This means that the reader brings something to the text through the reading process.

Fish (1996) is highly critical of a structure focused approach to the interpretation of literature, as exemplified by Halliday's analysis of *The Inheritors*, even though an attempt is made to go beyond the consideration of the surface structural elements of the text. According to Fish it is not structure which gives meaning to the text, but it is the reader who brings meaning to the text through his or her reading strategies:

The meaning they have is a consequence of their not being empty; for they include the making and revising of assumptions, the rendering and regretting of judgements, the coming to and abandoning of conclusions, the giving and withdrawing of approval, the specifying of causes, the asking of questions, the supplying of answers, the solving of puzzles.

(Fish 1988: 319)

This position is extreme, as it examines the approach to accessing a text from the reader's point of view. In a language teaching context, the learner may find him or herself disoriented without at least some reference to the structural form of the text, especially if we consider those specific characteristics of the literary form discussed above, where the literary text may be syntactically and lexically more complex than the learner's previous experience of the second language. Possibly some kind of compromise would need to be arrived at between these two positions.

It is interesting to note that much of the material which purports to take an affective approach to the exploitation of literature in the classroom does

this in many ways. Paran (1996: 25) notes how the "psychological approach" to reading has had an enormous influence on the production of teaching materials in the last twenty or thirty years. This approach focuses attention on how the reader creates meaning from the text by using many of the strategies posited by Fish (1988, quoted above). As such the reader is supposed to take responsibility for his or her interpretation of the text, not only from the text itself, but from his or her world experience outside the text itself. Grellet (1981: 7) places great importance on the reader's ability to hypothesise the content of a text, revise such hypotheses once the text has been accessed and on developing the reader's capacity to infer meaning from context. This has a certain importance in the use of a literary text, since, as we have seen above, the surface content may not always be interpreted at face value and, in particular with poetry, the reader is often makes recourse to a process of "filling the gaps left by the text itself" (Iser op. cit.: 216) in order to make sense of what he or she is reading. In teaching terms this can be exploited by the use of text manipulation exercises. Carter (1996) suggests cloze procedures and guided re-writing. In the former case the usual highly focused, lexically oriented type of exercise could be further developed by the use of 'extensive gap-filling' procedures, where students are required to supply whole sentences or paragraphs in reconstructing parts of a narrative account. Here, the ability to surmise what has happened previously in the narrative or predict successive events will be exploited, providing motivation for the learners. It should be noted, however, that such activities require not only imagination, but also technical ability in constructing texts on the part of the learner. Indeed, the approach outlined by Grellet (op. cit.: 15-16) continues to focus a significant emphasis on more structural aspects of text analysis, that is to say how a text is organised, local elements of syntax, such as linking and sentence construction and morphological characteristics of language. Guided re-writing would entail the same kinds of technical skills, for example in re-writing R. L. Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as a sensational newspaper report.

Paran (op. cit.: 29) is critical of the so-called psychological approach, because he claims that it does not consider different lines of research which would seem to indicate that the actual reading process is a balance of both operative and interpretational skills and that "texts are said to be sampled in a fairly dense manner, and guessing is minimal". This position is in part supported by an empirically based reading study carried out by Berman (1984: 146), who argues that students with a better syntactic knowledge are more proficient at picking out details in a text and that "intrasentential

syntactic complexity might be more of an impediment to grasping specific details than to overall ideas". Nevertheless, Paran (op. cit.: 29) hypothesises the fact that because of the limited linguistic proficiency of the second language learner, he or she will necessarily have to make recourse to more 'psychologically' based strategies in order to understand a text, working from his or her own world view or those perceptions of the world which form a kind of "stereotypic pattern derived from instances of past experience which organises language in preparation for use" (Widdowson 1983: 37). From a pedagogical point of view this has some importance, since the second language user may differ from the native language user, in that the latter will already have developed not only those interpretational, contextual and cultural strategies necessary for extracting meaning, but also the technical "automised" (Paran op. cit.: 29) syntactic, lexical and morphological aspects of his or her own language.

The whole question of how the literary text should be employed in the classroom is certainly complex, but it seems clear that some sort of compromise is necessary between a wholly 'structural' or a wholly 'affective' approach. In reality, it is difficult to imagine how the two can be separated, and any kind of approach will fall somewhere along the analytical-affective continuum illustrated in Figure 1 above. It is the teacher's task to decide how far towards each extreme it is necessary to go in order to provide maximum benefit for his or her students. What is perhaps more important is the fact that the dense nature of the literary text, with its multiple levels of meaning, richness of vocabulary range and relevance of content (Maley op. cit.: 12) lends itself admirably to a programme of real language improvement, where the learner is really pushed to think about the content of what he or she is reading in a manner which is both personally and intellectually stimulating. Furthermore, discrepancies between the literary form and the every day use of language can be used to highlight specific problems of a purely linguistic nature, whether it be syntactic, lexical or phonological.

Conclusions

When literature is considered from a language teaching perspective, it would first be useful to be aware of the objectives which students have within their own areas of interest and the context in which they are studying. It sometimes comes to light that students feel literature is irrelevant to their direct needs, and this may be due to the approach used in exploiting the

literary text for teaching purposes, rather than the nature of the literary text itself, since, as we have seen above, parallels do exist between literature and the real world and, therefore, everyday language. Literature may be exploited to focus attention on specific areas of language or to develop language skills beyond those required in reading, as a springboard for writing, listening and speaking activities. Integration of the literary text, chosen according to circumstances, in a second language development programme may provide both a stimulus for the learner and the opportunity to improve his or her knowledge of the language on diverse levels. In short, the learner is provided with the opportunity to explore language through literature.

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