

LITERATURE AND CROSS-CULTURE COMMUNICATION

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During the past few years, the author has been teaching English to advanced junior high school and high school students at a private school in Mexico City. The majority of these students, Mexican citizens from the upper socioeconomic class, have been studying English since the age of four and when they reach high school, many of the English programs use textbooks used by many school districts in the United States. It has become obvious that a special program must be adapted for these students. In applying the findings of linguists to the teaching of English as a second language, the primary emphasis in the early grades has been oral communication and basic reading skills. At the junior high school level the study of the literature of the language is important to achieve the over-all goal of making students effective in communication in an English-speaking culture. Knowledge of the deep structure of the target language and of the underlying values, assumptions, beliefs, and inter-group attitudes of its culture are now seen to be as important in the real mastery of a language as a facile use of the patterns of everyday speech. The study of the literature of the language is the surest way to attain these more elusive qualities that go to make up a total mastery of the language. Since a course in English as a second language seeks as a primary goal to help the student learn to communicate in a variety of situations, the chief problems in deciding on the literature to incorporate into such a course are: (1) selecting works of literature that will give the student this skill of communication, (2) devising the best sequence for teaching the selected works, and (3) teaching the chosen works effectively.

The purpose of this study is to select literary works for a class of Mexican secondary students who are learning English as a second language. Most of the material selected will deal with American literature and American cultural backgrounds since these students travel frequently to the United States and many intend to later study in the United States. These students are the privileged few from a third-world nation that may have the potential of becoming leaders in their country and it is important that they learn not only to become effective communicators in English but also understand the culture of the United States. Formulating new materials must take into consideration the diversity of reading levels. It is necessary to consider the skills required for reading and the structure of the English writing system. In order for the students to communicate more

effectively they must increase their vocabulary skills and learn the deep structure of the target language.

A language cannot be taught well without coming to grips with its cultural content. There can be no real learning of a language without understanding something of the patterns and values of the culture of which it is a part. Fries states this strongly: "To deal with the culture and life of a people is not just an adjunct of a practical language course, something alien and apart from its main purpose, to be added or not as time and convenience may allow, but an essential feature of every state of language learning. . ." (16) As previously stated, the study of the literature of the language can help the student absorb the full cultural meaning of the target language. Since literature is expressed through language, one cannot understand it unless he understands the meanings of the culture expressed by the words of the language and unless the values and cultural experience against which the literature is written are also understood. One cannot jump from the structure of a language into its literature without passing through the basic cultural content of the language. To experience a literary work it is necessary to understand the language in which it is expressed, the cultural meanings which it contains, and the circumstances surrounding it. If it is a contemporary piece, average proficiency and cultural information are usually sufficient. If it belongs to an earlier period, special preparation and motivation will be necessary.

There are many anthologies prepared specifically for students of English as a second language. The author is not aware of any anthology designed specifically to train students to communicate with native speakers of English. The Literature in English Book Six of the "English for Today" series (New York: Graw-Hill Book Company, 1964), for example contains more writings by non-American than by American authors. The student preparing himself to communicate with Americans should steep himself in literature chosen to improve both his grasp of the language and his understanding of the cultural "meanings" with the literature in English of other cultures. The author, therefore, sought to include paperback books that would increase the students proficiency in English and increase their knowledge of American culture. Two sets of criteria by which the author selected and sequenced the works to be taught were: (1) language criteria, and (2) culture criteria. (31)

In selecting literary works for a particular class of ESL/EFL students, two assumptions are basic: (1) that the structures and lexicon of the learner's language interfere with his mastering of the structures and lexicon of the target language, and (2) that the patterns of the student's culture interfere with his understanding of the cultural patterns of the speakers of the target language. Both of these types of interfer-

ence operate most tellingly at the points where the native and target structures and patterns differ the most. Interference from the structures of the mother tongue is easier to identify, and thus to overcome, than the points of interference from the student's culture, for the latter are subconscious and informal as well as conscious and formal.

Language criteria compose discourse types in literature, sentence patterns, and lexical features that cause varying degrees of difficulty for the student. The discourse type is the primary basis for determining the level of difficulty a reading will have, for it influences the sentence patterns, lexical features, and the level of concreteness in the context of the reading.

1. The easiest discourse type for the student to begin with is narrative prose, especially when it has an average sentence length of about ten words, a small proportion of words in dialogue, a small proportion of different hard words (that is, words not on Edgar Dale's list of 769 easy words) a small proportion of structural variations from the subject-verb-complement sentence pattern, and a small proportion of dialectal expressions.

Examples to consider: William Saroyan, My Name is Aram; Ernest Hemingway, A Clean, Well-Lighted Place; by John Steinbeck, The Red Pony and The Pearl; Fred Gipson, Old Yeller.

2. Essays that appeal to the imagination because of style and that have linguistic features approaching those specified above are on the next rank of linguistic difficulty. They can also serve as models for the student's writing.

Examples to consider: Philip Wylie, The Innocent Ambassadors; John Steinbeck, Russian Journal.

3. Short plays with a minimum of dialect or slang provide the learner with idiomatic language useful for oral communication.

Examples to consider: William Saroyan, The Time of Your Life; John Van Druten, I Remember Mama.

4. Certain poems, if their syntax and vocabulary do not depart too widely from that of normal speech, offer through their rhythmic patterns strong reinforcement of the intonation patterns of American English.

Examples to consider: Selected poems of Robert Frost, Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, Carl Sandburg, Archibald MacLeish, Langston

Hughes, etc.

5. Rock Poetry, the students can study favorite composers, poets, and spokesmen of America's young. This is all part of the oral literature of the young that all young people are exposed to and interested in regardless of the country where they live.

Examples to consider: Bob Dylan, Phil Ochs, Joan Baez, Tom Paxton, Judy Collins, Leonard Cohen, The Beatles and Mick Jagger, Nick Cohn (whose book Rock from the Beginning is an excellent source book).

CULTURE CRITERIA

Order of difficulty in the sequence of works chosen by cultural criteria is based on the extent to which the student can identify himself with the situations or characters portrayed in the works.

1. Works of American fiction with a universal theme, a non-American setting, and American characters are likely to be more appealing and less confusing to the intermediate student.

Examples to consider: Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms; A Bell for Adano by John Hershey; Pearl Buck, The Good Earth.

2. Stories portraying non-Americans in interaction with Americans in an American setting enable the student to identify himself in the situations portrayed and to acquire patterns and insights for making effective responses to similar situations.

Examples to consider: Willa Cather, My Antonia; Howard Fast, April Morning.

3. Stories and plays portraying Americans interacting with non-Americans in a non-American setting provide insights regarding the assumptions, values, beliefs, and outlook of Americans revealed in their reactions to a different culture—insights essential for effective communication with Americans.

Examples to consider: Flowering Judas and other stories set in Mexico by Katherine Anne Porter, Tales of the South Pacific and Sayonara by James Michener.

4. Nonfiction expressing Americans' reactions to their experiences in a foreign culture reveal Americans' explicit and reasoned response to a different culture as distinguished from their more or less instinctive re-

sponses revealed in fiction.

Examples to consider: Frances Calderón, Life in Mexico; Edith O'Shaughnessy, Diplomatic Days; At Home in India by Cynthia Bowles.

5. Works reflecting values explicit in American culture will give the student valuable insights.

Examples to consider: To Kill a Mocking Bird by Harper Lee, Freedom Road by Howard Fast; The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald; A Separate Peace by John Knowles; Catcher in the Rye by Salinger; Native Son by Richard Wright.

6. Poems by Americans and foreign poems translated by Americans responding to scenes or themes related to a foreign culture reveal the capacity of Americans to integrate unique features of a different culture with their own outlook.

Examples to consider: Walt Whitman, Passage to India; Archibald MacLeish, American Letter.

7. Essays, poems, stories or plays coping with some basic issues of American life provide insights into attitudes Americans might assume on particular topics insights essential for cross culture communication.

Examples to consider: Upton Sinclair, The Jungle; David Thoreau, Civil Disobedience; Ken Kesey, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.

8. Stories, poems, or plays dealing with universal values.

Examples to consider: William Golding, Lord of the Flies; Erich Maria Remarque, All Quiet on the Western Front; John Steinbeck, The Moon is Down.

Ability in reading English as a foreign language requires improvement in reading speed, vocabulary recognition, and the comprehension of sentences, paragraphs, and complete reading selections. Below the author will include some general techniques and sample exercises to improve reading skills.

LEXICAL RANGE

Which sentence illustrates the same use of the word (or idiomatic or figurative expression) as in the reading selection.

The following sentences were taken from OLD YELLER:

1. Arliss was bound to go with father.
 - a) Arliss was bound to his father.
 - b) Arliss was determined to go with him.
 - c) Arliss was determined to bound through the woods.
2. I loved the big yeller dog.
 - a) I loved the big yeller of a dog.
 - b) I loved the big yellow dog.
 - c) I loved the loud yell.
3. The men needed to get cash.
 - a) The men needed ready money.
 - b) The men needed coins of small value.
 - c) The men collected Chinese cash.
4. Dad tied his bedroll on back on the cantle.
 - a) Dad tied his bedroll on the rear part of the saddle.
 - b) Dad tied his bedroll on the rear part of his horse.
 - c) Dad tied his bedroll on the back of the cantle.
5. The men talked over the drive to Abilene.
 - a) The men talked over driving the golf ball from the tee.
 - b) The men discussed the problems of the cattle drive.
 - c) The men talked about the number of hours to drive to Kansas.
6. Don't let the varmints eat up the roasting ears.
 - a) That man is a varmint.
 - b) The varmint stole the money out of my purse.
 - c) The varmints are wild animals or birds that eat the corn.
7. I told Arliss to skin out fast for the house.
 - a) Arliss skinned his leg on the wood chips.
 - b) If he didn't obey I would skin him.
 - c) He skinned for home so fast he beat everyone there.

PARAGRAPH ORGANIZATION

Reading for the central idea. Examples taken from "To Kill a Mocking Bird".

1. What single word expresses the central idea of the following paragraph? Read the paragraph quickly to determine the central idea.

Then turn the page and choose one statement that best describes the paragraph.

"She was. She had her own views about things, a lot different from mine, maybe. . . son, I told you that if you hadn't lost your head I'd have made you go read to her. I wanted you to see something about her - I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It's when you know you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what. You rarely win, but sometimes you do. Mrs. Dubose won, all ninety-eight pounds of her. According to her views, she died beholden to nothing and nobody. She was the bravest person I ever knew."

Statements given on page 2 (see below)

Check the correct statement.

- 1. Courage is shown by physical strength.
- 2. A man with a gun is a good example of courage.
- 3. Jem showed courage by being made to read to Mrs. Dubose.
- 4. Mrs. Dubose died courageously because she was able to overcome her drug dependency regardless of suffering.

PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT.

The following paragraph uses examples. Read the paragraph and find examples of description. Find another paragraph using descriptive examples in Chapter 17. List the page and the paragraph number.

Maycomb's Ewells family lived behind the town garbage dump in what was once a Negro cabin. The cabin's plank walls were supplemented with sheets of corrugated iron, its roof shingled with tin cans hammered flat, so only its general shape suggested its original design: square, with four tiny rooms opening onto a shotgun hall, the cabin rested uneasily upon four irregular lumps of limestone. Its windows were merely open spaces in the walls, which in the summertime were covered with greasy strips of cheesecloth to keep out the varmints that feasted on Maycomb's refuse.

The following paragraph explains a reason for a condition. Answer this question after reading the paragraph in a complete sentence. Why couldn't Tom Robinson have hit Mayella with his left hand?

Tom Robinson's powerful shoulders rippled under his thin shirt.

He rose to his feet and stood with his right hand on the back of his chair. He looked oddly off balance, but it was not from the way he was standing. His left arm was fully twelve inches shorter than his right, and hung dead at his side. It ended in a small shriveled hand, and from as far away as the balcony I could see that it was no use to him.

Find another paragraph in Chapter 18 that explains a reason for a condition.

Create a coherent paragraph by placing the sentences below in logical order and add sentences of your own to write a more complete paragraph.

1. Negroes wouldn't have anything to do with her because she was white.
2. When Atticus asked had she any friends, she seemed not to know what he meant, then she thought he was making fun of her.
3. She was sad, I thought, as what Jem called a mixed child: white people wouldn't have anything to do with her because she lived among pigs.
4. As Tom Robinson gave his testimony, it came to me that Mayella Ewells must have been the loneliest person in the world,
5. Tom Robinson was probably the only person who was ever decent to her.

TYPES OF COMPEHENSION QUESTIONS

Five types of questions for comprehension can be described and graded according to (a) the linguistic form of the required response, and (b) the relation between the information that is needed to answer correctly and the information provided in the reading selection. The following are questions from "To Kill a Mocking Bird".

TYPE I. Information from the reading sufficient for the answer is contained in the question itself.

Mark each statement true or false.

1. This story takes place in the 1940's.
2. Miss Stephanie Crawford gives the children large pieces of her cake.

- _____ 3. Scout's father is a lawyer.
 _____ 4. Scout and Jem's mother had died about four years before the story opens.
 _____ 5. Boo Radley was imprisoned by his father because he was insane.

Yes or no.

Answer each question yes or no.

- _____ 1. Are Scout and Jem witnesses of the trial of Tom Robinson?
 _____ 2. Was Tom Robinson convicted of rape?
 _____ 3. Did Dill come to Maycomb the summer his mother remarried?

Multiple Choice.

Directions: Choose the word or phrase that best completes each statement.

- _____ 1. After Boo saves the children, Atticus and the sheriff decide to (a) tell everyone so they will know what a hero he has been, (b) say that Ewell fell on his knife, (c) admit that Jem killed Ewell, (d) keep the whole thing secret.
 _____ 2. After Scout takes Boo Radley home, she (a) stands on his porch, too frightened to move, (b) runs home, (c) goes in and meets Mrs. Radley, (d) stands on the porch, looking at the street as Boo has seen it all those years.

TYPE II. Answerable with information quoted directly from the reading selection.

1. Who loses his pants on the fence as the children are running out of the Radley yard one night? _____
 2. Who was all angles and bones and was always ordering Scout out of the kitchen? _____
 3. Where did the story take place? _____
 4. What game did Scout, Jem, and Dill play to get Boo out of his house?

TYPE III. Answerable with information acquired from the reading selection, but not by direct quotations from a single sentence.

In a few short sentences discuss each question.

1. Why did Boo Radley's brother cement the hole in the tree?
 2. How did Jem react when Tom Robinson was convicted?

TYPE IV. Answerable from inference or implication from the reading. Briefly relate the local history of the Radley family. How did Boo Radley

come to be confined to his home? What were some of the rumors the children heard and told each other about him?

TYPE V. The answer requires evaluation or judgment relating the reading selection to additional information or experience of the reader.

1. What do you consider to be Scout's major dilemma in the novel?
2. Would you be willing to accept Atticus as a model, or are there some things about his philosophy of life with which you disagree?
3. There is a great deal of fear and superstition surrounding the Radley house. Yet there is no reason for fear. In your experience, have you found that people reacted in a similar way to something they knew nothing about?
4. If Scout and Jem had been killed by Bob Ewell, would Harper Lee's novel appear more in tune with the somber views that sophisticated modern fiction often presents?

In conclusion, teachers of English as a foreign language and linguists, for the past several years have realized the necessity to change the objectives of foreign language teaching. There is now a much greater need for direct communication across national boundaries. For the student to be able to communicate effectively he must not only be taught the basic language skills but also understand the culture of the people who speak the language. Perhaps the best way for the student to have a better understanding of the culture is through reading selections written by authors of the language.

For the student to master a foreign language so that he can understand the native speakers of that language, he must be aware of specific things of the environment in which the language is spoken. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, for any person ever fully to "get inside" a culture that is not his own. There are, however, certain approaches, points of view, techniques, and procedures by which one can gain insight and a measure of understanding.

Foreign language teachers have learned something about the teaching of reading from the three disciplines of education, psychology, and linguistics. Reading in a foreign language implies that the language is known and the student is learning a graphic representation of it. Reading has as its central purpose effective communication. The task of teaching reading in a foreign language can be divided into many parts. Literature should be the last part. A student can only understand literature in a foreign language when the student is advanced enough to experience it like a native reader.

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