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The Role of Literature in Foreign Language Acquisition

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Literature plays essential role in foreign language acquisition. Each level of foreign language study requires inclusion of literary texts. Together with factual facts it develops a deeper awareness of the language use. Courses give indication of the complexity of various texts in terms of themes, characters or cultural difficulty. In early school years children get familiar with associations from role plays, drama, poetry and short stories that help them acquire idioms, colloquialisms and syntax adding to their general cognitive development. This method acquires enormous proportion of linguistic and literary information through higher education. At university schools other than Schools of Philology, learning English focuses not so much on the literary work from artistic point of view, as to the text conveying ideas that students familiarize with and build vocabulary. In upper levels of foreign language acquisition students increase their competence and confident to speak and present ideas in the foreign language. At advanced levels foreign learners put their imagination and research at work and many of them accomplish verbal advantage close to native speakers.

*Keywords:* literature, text, foreign language acquisition

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Introduction

Goals to integrate literary texts and messages have been dating back since the beginnings of oral and written literary history. In today’s hyper-connected society information and communication make *independent research* for students, and teaching staff, more resourceful and accessible than ever. However, theory and practice in teaching English language and literature, on all levels, from K-12 to higher education, recurrently point to the *leading role of educators and scholar,* and their creative selection, recommendation and analytical skills, applying themselves as the interactive navigator and moderator in students’ comprehensive research engagement through the vast diffusion of educational internet contents and culture war conflicts (O’Reilley, 2006; Kullberg, 1996).This research is based on four group study settings that involve inter-active learning models. The research on this literary and language interactive reinforcement was conducted at the University Goce Delchev Stip, School of Philology and covered:

1. Class lecture analysis assisted by digital, video documentaries (The Romantics)Second order head

Class lecture application of video documentaries integrated into English language acquisition has become essential inter-active learning method. It is also applied within the 19th c. English poetry, The Romantics, 3rd semester, School of Philology.

Tools used: digital internet documentaries, BBC TV lecture series by Peter Ackroyd (Ackroyd, 2005).

Factual information on the 19th century Romantic poetry seemed to have been insufficiently and inadequately represented in text books and Anthologies published decades ago (Northon Anthology, 2011). New influx of inter-disciplinary approaches necessitated teaching staff intervention in search for updated presentations. Students were offered a comparative analysis between standard textbook on literary history and a three part BBC TV documentary covering major poets and their language peculiarities. In the process students enhanced their skills to conceptualize and comprehend the complex response of the poets to their socio-cultural challenges of the time. Students increased their research dynamics in enriching a) new vocabulary of the 19 c. vernacular, b) imaginative expression of poetics and c) psychological response to 19th c. scientific and industrial changes. The results from this comparison were strikingly productive: Students’ awareness of a different usage of language and imagination was considerably increased by being exposed to new insights in cultural, social and historic contexts (Kullberg, 1996; O’Reilley, 2006). Students elevated their inquisitiveness in the poets’ expressive challenges. The visual impact and the intellectual persuasiveness of the video assisted the students in the redefining approach to the Romantic language and imagery. It triggered students’ responsiveness to the poets’ messages, and alternatively a more active acquisition of vernacular and ideas. Monitored students had already accumulated sufficient basic data on the liberal radical influence of the French social revolution and the British scientific and industrial revolution. However, students’ understanding increased after the DVD alternative interpretations and findings of the poets’ reasons for choosing particular ideas and verbal expressions that related to their spiritual resignation, social anxiety, and rebellious rejection of change and traumatized search for escapism in nature, in Gothic darkness, or in Greco-Roman art. Students did comparative analysis between atheism, New Age and with traditional Christian moral values (Newcombe, 2009). Video lectures offered crafted introspection into the Romantic poets’ character that impacted their conflicts within themselves and society, British Parliament, socio-pathological deviations, promiscuous tendencies, drug/opium and alcohol addiction, rise of atheism and social unrest. Students redirected their research into the phenomenon of melancholy vs. aggression, or social and cultural activism that is infused by ideological or moral differences. The video lecture necessitated further interdisciplinary inquiry into the poets’ personality which contributed to their linguistic and poetic acquisition.

Ex.: *The Necessity of Atheism* by the English “Romantic” Shelley (P.B. Shelley, 1952), instigated discussion of anti-Christian and New Age issues relevant to “secular progressive” ideology in education, diffused through 20th c. by American Marxism-based education ideologue John Dewey (Dewey, 2009).

New critical thinking, verbal comprehension and knowledge retention benefitted by the *visual language*. The multi-media presentation intensified students’ interest in new vocabulary and information on consequences in using the language of anger, disobedience, inclination to the occult, animosity towards others (Shelley’s envy for Keats’ talent, his sado-masochistic pleasures in horror, his induction of wife Mary Shelley to write *Frankenstein*).

Students’ confidence in exploring the literary imagery and syntax of the Romantic poets profited from the additional video documentary pool of academic cross section of the myth about the greatness of these in essence greatly troubled poets. Students’ increased comprehension was demonstrated in their

Table 1 Class lecture application of video documentaries.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Groups** |  | **Post-Test** |  |  |
| Control Group |  | a) creative criticism and cultural comprehension of the peculiar *spirit of the time*;  b) dedication to deeper exploration in research assignments;  c) intensified interest in learning about the poets  d) increased tendency to stand against drug abuse and immoral conduct |  |  |

1. *English language acquisition enhancement by new IT publications*

First-year IT students recorded higher performance by newly provided, adjusted selection of updated textbooks, purchased by the “Goce Delchev” University in Shtip, and sponsored by the Macedonian government initiative for massive translation of most recent international textbooks in academic fields. As part of the Business English course, Summer semester, 2012, *ProFile, English for Business Studies* (Naunton, 2009), students at the IT school followed special purpose English covering. It consisted in upgraded and updated technical vocabulary including inter-disciplinary terms from economy, business, politics, and culture. Students were also given assignments to read case studies and descriptions of different corporate profiles. They further created their own, expanded glossaries on presented topics. The task surprised the students themselves as to the inventive and informative language resourcefulness they established with both existing and expanded knowledge. High scoring final exam justified the need for constantly updated and upgraded textbooks that follow the fast pace of technological advancement. Students demonstrated high level of familiarity with the vocabulary in the expanded IT and other inter-disciplinary glossaries. Students also showed increased interest in dictation and translation of inserted literary segments as those assisted their acquisition of idioms, colloquialisms and syntax that added to the general cognitive development. The focus on the literary segments in the English course for IT students is not the artistic point of view, but its conveyance of ideas that students familiarize, or identify with (Carroli, 2008).These segments prepare IT students for upper level foreign language acquisition, when they develop confidence in speaking and presenting of both technical information, general ideas and imagination. Out of 109 students who took the exam in the June session, 106 passed, 36 of which scored the highest grade.

1. University radio program: medium for enhanced interest in Shakespeare’s moral themes and language comprehension

**University** **Radio:** studentsdiffuse their English language competence acquired through Shakespeare’s moral messages and language comprehension.

Featured topics: “Comparative approach: Moral messages in Shakespeare’s 16-17th c. literature and their 21st c. interpretation (Northon Anthology, 2011; Shakespeare: Collected Works, 2001). Goal: engage students’ parallel inquiry into contemporary and Renaissance ethics and morals (Sumner, 1906). Validate or discredit their sustainability. This narrative required students’ specialized learning of rich vocabulary, complex metaphors, typical idioms and masterful expression. Means: Study group did in depth research of characters and situations in major tragedies, comedies, history plays and sonnets. Results: Students reached positive competitiveness in offering to their peers a verbal advantage in crisis management and conflict resolution discourses, from their 21st c. perspective, impacting quarter of a million radio audience and student’s population.

1. *Panel Debate as extra-curricular students’ involvement in Bio-ethics and literature with moral messages in 21st century: activity at US Embassy American Corner*

**US Embassy American Corner (AC) activities** partnered with the university library and reading room, served as extra-curricular venue for students’ higher learning engagement in language and literature acquisition.   
 In observance of April - American National Poetry Month, AC Stip hosted a special event, "Two American-Macedonian writers, Marija and Emilia Kukubajski: *Ethical values in literature - excerpts from the Ecology of the Soul,* book of mini-essays (Kubaiska, 2009)Purpose: English language and literature students, School of Philology, explored and advanced their own creative writing and critical thinking, and presented it in a refined foreign language discussion on cultural changes (Levine, 2008, 2012). Students read and discussed select quotes that display contemporary and traditional Bio-ethics concepts, and accomplished a) higher intelligibility on the subject; b) competent discussion on inter-relatedness between the function of literature and its moral messages; c) applicable verbal advantage, rhetoric and oral presentation acquisition (Schweitzer, 2008). Teaching staff Marija Krsteva, MA; Natalija Popzarieva, MA; Marijana Kroteva, MA, Inter-university cooperation coordinator, presented their scholastic interpretation and moderated ethics viewpoints in the literary publication presented by author Dr. Kukubajska. Results: ethical messages in language and literature samples appeal to student’s genuine involvement in rational cognitive processes and intelligent honesty (Peck, 1998, Peck, 1998). Students expressed in English language and popular culture lexicon their own views on main contemporary, global trends.

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