

## Literary texts in the teaching context

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### Abstract

This article aims to analyze the methods of using literature in the teaching of foreign languages (specifically the Italian language) in Albania.

The study will begin with a brief description of the reasons why to use literature in the teaching of foreign languages and the different ways of using a literary text to improve language skills by illustrating the importance of including literature in the teaching of foreign languages and the issues that need to be addressed by the teacher when he decides to use literary texts.

It describes teaching techniques and operational models on the use of literature in language learning as a vehicle to revive the interest of students and to give them the opportunity to express thoughts, feelings and their own viewpoints.

The study concludes with an operating model which consists in the creation of a teaching unit on a literary text.

**Keywords:** teaching techniques, teaching context, literary text, teaching unit.

### Introduction

To make an authentic text didactic (beginner, intermediate or advanced level) means to create around it teaching activities that aim at the development and perfection of language and reasoning skills by programming them according to the level that students present.

First of all it should be noted that the literary text is particularly suitable for learning a foreign language as it is an authentic text and as such very stimulating and fulfilling for the student as it makes him feel on the same level with the reader who has this language, in this case Italian, as a mother tongue.

The teacher who will teach a literary text must take into account some basic factors/criteria. First of all, the class where you teach, so take into account the level of language competence that students have, their general knowledge, interests and their cultural level. Different types of narrative texts, novels, excerpts from novels, autobiographies, poems can be proposed. The presented text should not be too long or in this case can be proposed in a few lessons, but always keeping in mind that the text should be calibrated and functional so as not to become tedious for students.

Textbooks that fit the language level of the students are not adapted or simplified but treated as in the original.

#### Why choose a literary text?

##### *1. Literature is highly inspiring*

Students who are studying the Italian language react positively by showing inter-

est in the use of literary materials in the classroom as literature confronts them with arguments and diverse linguistic uses which they may not have encountered before. The subject of a novel or a story may include more than that of non-authentic texts commonly encountered in teaching methods, while a poem may include them emotionally even more.

#### *2. Literature gives you the opportunity to learn about another culture*

Another benefit of literature is that it gives students the opportunity to access the culture of the people whose language they are studying. Given that literary texts often reflect the culture, customs and traditions of native speakers, the student gets to know and assimilate them. In this context literature gives students the opportunity to develop their perceptions on cultures and other lifestyles and to identify with them. Literature is the easiest way to bring the student in contact with the language because if the teaching part is attractive, the language used in it is ingrained in the mind of the reader.

#### *3. Extensive reading widens the horizon of the reader in terms of vocabulary and usage, which invariably promotes the thoughts. 3. It helps in the acquisition of new grammatical and lexical patterns*

Literature is a very effective tool for the acquisition of linguistic structures, especially lexical ones. As mentioned above, the language level of the students should be taken into account in the selection of textbooks to be taught, as in the beginner levels they may not be able to work independently with excerpts from a story, novel or poem in Italian language. However, at advanced levels they can be involved by the event and the characters, thus automatically acquiring new language structures and new lexical elements.

#### *4. It develops the student's reasoning and interpreting skills*

Using literary texts in the classroom is often a successful way to encourage students to express their views and feelings by discussing or working in groups or individually. Literature offers different ways of interpretation as literary texts often present different levels of meaning e.g. a word used in a poem in addition to its first meaning can also have figurative value and precisely finding this other meaning is a great opportunity for students to discuss and express their thoughts. In this way, encouraging students to deal with the different ways of interpretation that a literary text may have helps them to develop their reasoning skills in general. Thus, indirectly, by encouraging students to express themselves about the texts given to them, we help them gain self-confidence and security in expressing their thoughts and feelings in Italian.

How to organize lessons based on a literary text? One way could be according to the following scheme:

Motivation	stages	analysis of "n" texts	Summary/Conclusions
		For each text:	on subject, literary genre, author
		Comprehension	(by Teaching unit)
		Analysis	
		Evaluation	
		Acquisition	
		Check	

Teaching activities should have some other features. For example, the teaching technique should be deductive and not inductive, one should work with the text and not talk about the text, one should evaluate what has been acquired and the way it has been acquired, etc.

In language teaching, didactic tactics are often used that are based on several texts that are first treated in general and then analytically. The same model is used in the teaching of a foreign language through literary texts where the structure of the teaching unit cannot be based on a single text but on several texts on which conclusions will be drawn.

- The first stage, *motivation*, can be based on the discussion of the treated subject, the type, features of the author or the genre to which he belongs. Later, texts are considered one by one to reach the stage of general reflection about them

Each of the texts is analyzed according to a scheme that applies to all languages:

- At the beginning, a general reading is done to understand what is shown, described, argued, etc. This stage can also be carried out by the students themselves in small groups and by working together they can overcome language difficulties with greater ease.
- The second intensive reading is led by the teacher who with the right questions and exercises encourages the students to delve into the specific features of the literary aspect of the text.;
- This stage is followed by that of the extension to make the connection between the text being analyzed and those that have been analyzed during this teaching unit or that will be used later;
- It is then passed to the contextualization of the text, if it is a teaching unit based on several authors or several periods. In this case it is better to contextualize the text as soon as it is read to extract those features that will be needed later in the final part;
- The critical evaluation stage consists in the expression by the student of his judgment, thus fulfilling one of the objectives of using literary texts.;
- Acquisition of the text consists of a moment of personal reflection where the student connects the text with his experience, knowledge and feelings, expressing a judgment also in terms of the pleasure that this text has given him.
- After the summary stage, the acquired knowledge is checked. Although during the analysis stage the teacher creates an idea on the skills that the students are acquiring, checking should be done according to the objectives set for this teaching unit.

## Operational model – fantastic literature

In this teaching unit the linguistic and thematic features of fantastic literature will be described through examples taken by a number of authors representative of this genre.

As part of this operating model author, Dino Buzzati and his story “*Qualcosa era successo*” from his collection of stories “*La butique del mistero*”, have been selected.

This text was selected taking into consideration the following elements:

- Mystery is a stimulating argument that will influence their involvement in dealing with the text; rich vocabulary and different linguistic variants used to express the same sensations; the idea of travel as a metaphor of life that I think is an argument appealing to young people and the idea of the inner monologue that gives the reader the opportunity to express his point of view.

**Language level:** B2-C1 (according to the European framework of languages)

**Age:** 17-20 years old

**Method of interaction:** in groups, individually

**Duration:** 6 hours (3 lectures, 2 hours each)

### Stage i – motivation

The teacher introduces the students to the argument that will be addressed. He gives students one of the most meaningful sentences in the text and invites them to ask questions. The teacher guides the students through the questions he asks.

Before giving the text, the teacher writes the key sentence of the text on the board (“*Oh, i treni come assomigliano alla vita!*”) and later asks guiding questions. Students work in groups and then present the results of the work done. It is precisely these moments of discussion that arouse their interest and involve those who usually participate in the lesson with difficulty.

### Stage ii – globality

The purpose of this stage of reading the text in general is to make the reader feel part of the text. The following is an overview of the impressions created by the text. The questions asked aim to distinguish between the inside and outside environment. After the first reading together the individual reading can be done. Later, the teacher, through questions, guides the students towards reflections on the text, such as: What feelings did you experience while reading the text? Who is the protagonist and where is he? What are you looking out the window? How does the scenario change when the train is arriving at the station?

### Stage iii – analysis

At this stage students do a more detailed reading and express their opinion on what is happening. The purpose is to present the impressions left by the first reading as well as the analysis of the importance in describing the choice of words and grammatical elements selected. The teacher asks helpful questions like: What are people doing on the train? What questions does the protagonist ask himself? Does the narra-

tor participate in the event? etc.

Students are divided to work in groups and some of the activities that can be proposed at this stage are: *What questions would you ask the author to clarify the doubts you have ... Build a table where you present all the information about the objects and people on the train and their state of mind; Try to imagine a dialogue between the writer and one of the characters on the train; etc. (grammatical and lexical exercises are included at this stage).*

#### **Stage iv- reflection and summary**

This stage is very important as it is an opportunity to exchange and compare different views that each of the students may have. The text serves as a means through which each student demonstrates his/her skills, knowledge and experience.

The teacher then brings up the key sentence of the story for discussion and leads the discussion around it. The following is a comparison between the statements made at the beginning and the ones made at the end.

#### **Stage v – check**

Since the check of the acquisition of concepts, lexical and grammatical elements is done throughout the course of the lessons as a form of final control, the teacher can propose that each of the students puts himself in the place of the protagonist and tells the story by stopping and describing the elements that have made the greatest impression on him.

### **Conclusions**

The literary text is a very valuable tool through which the student's expressive ability is encouraged. The aim is not the study of literature from the traditional point of view but the literary text which students can freely interpret. Thus, the literary text turns into a tool from which students can learn to develop their thinking by overcoming traditional teaching and turning the language used into a means of communication. In this way, two ways of learning are fulfilled at the same time: individual skill and language competence.

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