

Literary Texts in Teaching German as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

For years into the teaching of foreign languages, the main focus has been the communication in real situations with the aim of comprehension and using of language abilities. But the teaching of foreign language, in our case the German language, cannot be understood on only one function: the communication in real situations. Learning foreign languages means that the learner have to know the history, the culture and the spirit of a nation. A way to achieve that, is the literary text inclusion on the foreign language learning whose functions are more than mentioned. Literary texts can motivate the learners to arouse their curiosity and interest. This help them to understand the culture of the foreign country and to stimulate their abilities to make comparisons. The use of literary text, into the teaching of foreign languages is based on several steps, that are related to the phase before, during and after textanalysing. An important role play the criteria of the text selection, principles, learning objectives and working methods with literary text into the teaching of foreign languages.

Keywords: literary texts, German as a foreign language, text selection, textanalysing, learning objectives.

Introduction

In recent years, foreign language learning has been focused mainly on communication in everyday life situations, with a view to successfully understand and make excellent use of language skills. However, language learning cannot be limited to just one specific function, which is that of communication. Language learning plays an informative role by enabling us to learn about the country's history, culture, tradition and heritage. (Weller 1989: 254) These fundamental elements will keep us hooked on the learning process. Therefore, it becomes vitally important that in foreign language learning, in our case German language learning, we should rely not only in authentic texts which include everyday life situations but also literary texts from German writers.

Through these texts students will get acquainted with a wider world of feelings and thoughts. Encountering literary texts can awaken their desire to read, but proper precautions should be taken so as not to overcome the extent to which these literary texts should be included. Otherwise foreign language learning will become less attractive for students. We must bear in mind that in recent years there is a decline in the desire to read. It is teacher's responsibility to determine how much literature he can offer to his students to maintain and further develop their desire to read.

Each student has his own way of reading, understanding, interpreting or evaluating a text that is closely related to their social, cultural, and their personal values. (Bischof M./Kessling V./Krechel R., 1999 :20) On this basis, students discuss and converse, by making possible to express themselves (Scheibler 2007:183) in German language.

In addition to the interaction between the readers, an interaction between the reader and the text is created, where the reader brings to his attention preliminary knowledge, his expectations regarding the text and then he tries to read between the lines to understand the meaning of the text. (Bischof M./Kessling V./Krechel R., 1999 :20) All his thoughts, assumptions, judgments, and assessments on what he reads will bring him into conversation with other students. (Bauer 2003:284)

Literary texts represent reality from one's own point of view, therefore, the reader needs to discover these perspectives and make proper comparisons so as to distinguish social and cultural differences.

The cultural information that a literary text conveys to the reader helps him to know and understand the culture of German-speaking countries. Being rich in cultural themes and information, they provide a way to know and learn more about these

countries. Such opportunity is especially beneficial for those who have not had the opportunity to know and visit them closely.

Working with literary texts in German language learning, among other things, helps motivate students, raises interest, and encourages them to deal with meaning. This helps them develop the four language skills required while learning a foreign language. The student reads the text or listens to it while being read by the teacher or another student, or even on CD as it is possible for a part of German books, then they talk to one another about the text and finally they write about it.

Since literary texts often ask questions, they are not always explicit and address readers not only cognitively but also emotionally. This makes the reader to get involved in what he reads, become part of it, work on imagination, think critically, react, recognize, distinguish, evaluate and bring his experiences in this wide cultural dimension of literature. (Brusch 1985:362) This will promote and further develop intercultural learning and their speaking skills in foreign language.

However, including literary texts in German language learning cannot be reached so easily. There are difficulties and disadvantages on the other side of the coin. One of them which was also mentioned above was that the student may be bored (Koppensteiner 2001: 14) and not attracted by reading literary texts as he is not inclined towards reading. The language of these texts is difficult, requires a lot of work from the learner to understand and good language skills. In addition to these, interpretation skills as well as knowledge from other areas: social, cultural, historical etc. are needed. Again, teacher's work and assistance is needed so as to prevent the above mentioned from appearing as an obstacle to German language learning. The difficulties do not only appear for the student, but for the teacher as well. The teacher has to introduce a literary text which does not always allow him to do grammar exercises. As a result the teacher has to work harder in advance in designing these exercises. Also, it takes a great deal of work to create and customize vocabulary exercises, as well as discovering opportunities to exercise listening. On the other hand writing and speaking is easier to be organized.

To overcome the difficulties and problems and to reach the desirable objectives of learning German successfully it comes handy to us to carefully select the literary texts. Literature offers all of its genres so as to be integrated in the German language learning. However, different factors should be considered and properly weight while selecting them. (Bischof M./Kessling V./Krechel R., 1999 :23)

One of the factors to be considered is the age of the students. Selected texts have to be in line with their age. Different ages have different desires and interests. Based on this, the literary texts should fit with the students' interests. They should address topics that motivate them, with which they can also be identified. Teachers should carefully evaluate even the language of the text so as to adapt to it the age of the students.

But language is not only related to age, it needs to be tailored to the language level in which the student is (Koppensteiner 2001:42), so as not to become a barrier to learning German. Language should be used as a tool to expand and deepen language knowledge.

Another influential factor in the selection of literary textbooks is the cultural information they carry, so as to be an incentive to make cross-cultural comparisons.

A significant factor while selecting the literary text gives the reason why students are learning German. Whether it is just learning a foreign language among or whether they are learning to pursue studies in Germany, whether they are learning it for professional reasons or for a possible stay in Germany. Even the factor time should be considered while determining and selecting the literary text in the lesson.

How to work with literary texts in German language learning?

The work done with literary texts in German language learning is divided into several phases, which are related to preliminary work, the work done before reading the text, the work done while reading and writing, as well as the work performed after reading the text.

In the first step, before reading the text, students are given the opportunity to be presented with the subject of the text. This is accomplished through sociograms of key words separated from the text, through any question we can ask students about the phenomenon that is being discussed by the text. Another useful strategy is making the students read some extracted

passages and guessing what the text offers, by letting them listen to some verses or lines cut off from the literary text. Another way is to present different pictures related to the text and its theme.

After discussions and guesses are made by students we can go to the next step: reading the text. Initially, students get acquainted with the text, and then make comparisons with their previous assumptions and ideas. Afterwards, we work with the text in which we exercise all types of reading: global, selective, and detailed. Students perform different types of exercises prepared by the teacher beforehand. At this stage reading and speaking are widely practiced.

As a third step comes the text reading, where the learners can write on a certain topic related to the text, can create a dialogue, play role plays, or stage any part of the text. They can also make comparisons in social or cultural terms. They bring their perspectives, knowledge and experiences and compare them to what is presented in the text, reflecting their personal response to the world and reality.

Below you will find briefly an example of how a poem can be used in teaching a foreign language.

We chose a poem by Timo Brandt taken from the link below:

www.lyrikmond.de/gedichte-thema-14-140.php#1349

Abseitsgedicht

*Ich schrieb, wir könnten uns heute noch sehen,
du schreibst zurück, du hättest da noch was
zu erledigen, in der Stadt, hättest ziemlich viel zu tun.
Ich habe einen Witz gemacht und du schreibst "Haha",
ich habe dich gesehen, (du weißt es ja nicht)
wie du es ernst und gründlich eingetippt hast,
bevor du in die U-Bahn nach Hause stiegst.*

Love in the offside

*I wrote that we could still see each other today,
you wrote back, you still have something
to do there in the city, you have a lot to do.
I made a joke and you wrote "Haha",
I saw you, (but you do not know)
how you typed the letters seriously and thoroughly,
before you got into the subway home.*

As a first step during the lesson plan could be the appearance of a photo that has a smartphone in it. Pupils try to guess what it is all about, talk about the smartphone, discuss how present it is today in their lives, how dependent they are from it.

Another version could be writing the word smartphone on the board so as the pupils could collect word-related associations.

After that, students are provided only with the title of the poetry. Then, they try to make the link between the title and the photo and make different assumptions.

The next step is to work with the text. We provide the students with the opportunity to read the text. They compare their assumptions with what poetry expresses.

- Then we can discuss questions like:
- Were you surprised by anything specific during the reading?
- Who addresses to whom?
- What were you mostly impressed by?
- How would you interpret the title in relation to the poetry?
- What is your personal opinion upon this conversation?
- What connotation does the expression "You have a lot to do" have?

- What kind of feelings does the answer "haha" bring to you? How honest are we when we use it? How do we interpret it when we read it?
- Why has he said: "how you typed the letters seriously and thoroughly"?
- How honest are the interlocutors with each other in this poem?

As far as grammar is concerned, one idea could be to do Reported Speech exercises since the first verse provides us with an example of it. Nevertheless, not in every single lesson can we include grammar exercises.

After reading the text and discussing about it, we can pass on questions that are directly related to the pupils, for example, what is their relationship with the mobile phone. In this way, every student would have the opportunity to share their experiences and express themselves in foreign language.

Another topic of discussion could be: How much does the mobile phone help in love matters? Does it make people be near each other or does it separate? Here pupils exchange their thoughts, ideas and experiences.

In addition, students can come up with arguments about the topic "How honest are we when writing on the phone?"

In order to make students develop the skill of writing they will be assigned the task of writing a poem that would be a kind of answer to the poetry that they read during the lesson.

All we ever tried to achieve in here was to make a proposition of how we can work with such a poem in teaching German. Of course, it is every teacher's duty to adapt it accordingly.

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Internetlinks

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- [2] <https://www.goethe.de/en/spr/mag/20492952.html>