‘Doing’ literature in the language classroom

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Overview

- Background
- Questions
- Some answers: examples of practice
- More answers: group activities
Background

- Grammar-translation method: use of literature as a ‘noble’ form of language.

- Communicative method: focus on spoken language and texts reflecting ‘practical’ uses of language (Littlewood, 1986).

- Today: renewed interest in the use of literature in the language classroom – multiple values: linguistic, cultural, aesthetic, emotional.
Background

- Modern Languages: lack of integrated approach – literature often reserved to ‘literary option’ of syllabus + advanced learners (Paran, 2008).

- CEFR: literary texts included in reading skills from B2 but creative writing already introduced at level A2 (simple poems).
Questions

- Why use literary texts?
- What kind of texts?
- How?
Why use literary texts?

- Practice at Essex University.
- Rich material for study and practice of language: range of styles, registers and text types at different levels of difficulty.
- Don’t become out-of-date the way informative texts can.
- Facilitate discovery and understanding of individuals and cultures.
Why use literary texts?

- Lend themselves to different interpretations > conducive to exchange of impressions and discussions.
- Emotional impact can promote learning (Shanahan, 1997).
- Objection: ‘deviant’ use can confuse learners – but ‘liberating’ + leading to development of learning strategies.
What kind of texts?

- Considerations of length and level of difficulty.
- Dimension of the ‘affect’.
- Example: Annie Ernaux’s *La Place* (1983).
How to use literature?

Level A2: Apollinaire, *Calligrammes* (1918).
How to use literature?

Sentence parsing, vocabulary building, creative writing.
How to use literature?


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Déjeuner du matin</th>
<th>Breakfast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Il a mis le café</td>
<td>He poured the coffee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dans la tasse</td>
<td>Into the cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il a mis le lait</td>
<td>He poured the milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dans la tasse de café</td>
<td>Into the cup of coffee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(...)</td>
<td>(...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il a allumé</td>
<td>He lighted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Une cigarette</td>
<td>A cigarette</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How to use literature?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sans me parler</th>
<th>Without a word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sans me regarder</td>
<td>Without looking at me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il a mis</td>
<td>He put on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son manteau de pluie</td>
<td>His raincoat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parce qu'il pleuvait</td>
<td>As it was raining</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Miming/acting, reading aloud, translating, contrasting perfect and imperfect tenses.
How to use literature?


Researching history, drawing family tree, comparing book and film adaptation, discussion: how would you have felt? what would you have done? writing: imagining what happened before, what will happen next.
How to use literature?


Analysing poetic language: broken narrative, imagery, rhythm; researching colonial history; discussing Duras’s perspective on social, sexual, racial and family relationships; reading aloud.
How to use literature?

Group activities:

1. Drawing on your teaching experience, share some successful language activities involving the use of literary texts.

2. Discuss how best to exploit the first paragraph of John O’Farrell, *The Best a Man Can Get* (2000). For what type of learners would it be most suitable?
