Chapter 3

Video–Literature Teaching in the EFL/ESL Classroom: A Multimodal Framework for Teaching Visual Literacy and Literature Through Films

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reports on work carried out to develop an inclusive multimodal framework for the implementation of literary works with film adaptations as part of a video/literature workshop designed for one of the Master’s courses aimed at the training of EFL/ESL secondary teachers in the Complutense University in Madrid (Spain). This multimodal framework was motivated primarily by the fact that literature has recently become an essential part of the curriculum in Bilingual Secondary Schools in Madrid. The reality that the use of film adaptations of literary texts facilitates the implementation of literature in the EFL/ESL classroom was also a key factor. The lines following not only describe the framework developed, but also provide one example of implementation of the model for the teaching of Geoffrey Chaucer’s “The Wife of Bath,” without any doubt one of the hardest texts to tackle in the EFL/ESL classroom out of the literary works recommended for the bilingual official curriculum in the Spanish Community of Madrid.

1. INTRODUCTION

The last few decades have witnessed a growing interest in the benefits of relating the learning of a foreign/second language with the study of its literature. However, the relationship between English language teaching and literature has not always been smooth. There have been moments of mutual understanding and empathy (Carter, 2007; Cook, 1994; Lazar, 1993). This was the case of the early 1900s, marked by

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the dominance of the grammar translation method, which used literary texts as “illustrations of the grammatical rules” (Duff & Maley, 1990, p. 3). Yet there have been also moments of a consistent rejection of literature in the language classroom. In the mid-twentieth century, literature almost disappeared from the language learning curriculum (Carter, 2007) and priority was given to approaches focused on linguistics. Today, theories encouraging the incorporation of literature into the language teaching classroom prevail among teachers and scholars.

Back in the nineteen, Duff and Maley (1990) established three criteria — linguistic, methodological and motivational — to support the use of literary texts in the language classroom while Lazar (1993) claimed that literature sharpened linguistic and cognitive skills and enhanced students’ understanding of the human condition. In this vein, Horner (1983) had previously pointed to literature as an important tool for the holistic development of students. Towards the end of the twentieth century and the turn of the twenty-first, a good number of scholars have also emphasized the importance of culture and intercultural awareness as crucial factors in the implementation of literature in EFL/ESL classroom (Collie & Slater, 1987; Floris, 2004; Hernández Rives Cruz, 2010; Tayebipour, 2009; Van, 2009). Equally highlighted has been the use of literary texts in the EFL/ESL classroom as a means to enhance critical thinking and creativity (Alvarez, Calvete & Sarasa, 2012; Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016; Ghosn, 2002; Sivasubramaniam, 2006; Stefanova, Bobkina, & Sánchez-Verdejo, 2017; Van, 2009; Yaqoob, 2011). This has made possible that recent years have witnessed a strong move towards the reintegration of literature into the language classroom (Alvarez, Calvete & Sarasa, 2012; Bobkina & Domínguez, 2014, 2015; Paran, 2016; Paran & Robinson, 2016; Yaqoob, 2011).

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) suggests students’ direct exposure to authentic texts, including literary texts such as stories, novels, etc. (Council of Europe, 2001). This goes in line with the emphasis on working with culturally authentic texts which comprises one of the central claims for curriculum reform in EFL/ESL teaching nowadays (Arens & Swaffar, 2000; Beresova, 2015; Dakowska 2016; Gilmore, 2007; Dupuy, 2000, Martínez Lirola, 2016 Swaffar, 1999; Xerri, 2012). This means, a curriculum “in which language, culture and literature are taught as a continuum” (Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World, 2007). Nevertheless, the incorporation of literary texts into the language curriculum is referred to by many linguists as extremely demanding for teachers and students (McKay, 2001; Savvidou, 2004).

As a possible solution to this problem, it is worth noticing that the film mode facilitates the use of literature in the classroom. Properly selected and implemented in the classroom, films have an important role in the language teaching/learning process (Stempleski and Tomalin, 1990; Baddock, 1996). Many literary texts such as novels, short stories or theatre plays have been adapted into films and have, therefore, become accessible language products commonly associated with fun by students and teachers. Not for nothing, films are highly motivating and useful tools in the language teaching/learning process (Caixia, 2013; Thaler, 2014) when it comes to ensuring an easier intelligibility of written literary texts (Montgomery, 1992). There is no doubt that language complexity can be mitigated with the visual support provided by film adaptations (Mishan, 2005). According to Caixia (2013), visual images establish a direct relationship with the depicted objects so that film stories are usually more understandable than novel stories. Sound and light effects contribute also to the general understanding of written texts. In many cases, multimodal aids suffice to tell a silent story (Bo, 2008).

A close look at the recent literature published in the field of EFL/ESL teaching and media studies clearly demonstrates that the use of authentic English and North American original version media