MULTICULTURAL FICTION FOR EFL TEACHER TRAINING: DELVING INTO *THE WANDERING JEWS*

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Abstract: The present paper discusses the importance of teaching culture in class nowadays and proposes a specific example of doing so by focusing on Jewish culture. The paper reviews some of the most important themes that have been included in that culture throughout its history and it shows Jewish fiction and the conflictive depiction of Jews in literature and fiction in general. Given the power of fictional resources as a useful tool, it also delves into the role of multicultural fiction in the didactics of foreign language and literature. The last part of the paper is the actual design of a didactic proposal based on Jewish fiction to work with pre-service EFL teachers in order to make a contribution to the current necessity of training teachers in intercultural aspects.

Resumen: El presente artículo discute la importancia de enseñar cultura en clase hoy en día y propone un ejemplo específico centrado en la cultura judía. El ensayo revisa algunos de los temas más importantes incluidos en esa cultura a lo largo de su historia y muestra la ficción judía y la conflictiva representación de los judíos en literatura y en ficción en general. Dado el poder de los recursos ficcionales como una herramienta útil, también se indaga en el papel de la ficción multicultural en la didáctica de la lengua y la literatura extranjeras. La última parte del artículo es el diseño de una propuesta didáctica basada en la ficción judía para trabajar con futuros docentes y hacer una contribución a la actual necesidad de formar profesores en aspectos multiculturales.

Keywords: Multicultural competence, multicultural fiction, Jewish literature, teacher training, didactic proposal.

Palabras clave: Competencia multicultural, ficción multicultural, literatura judía, formación del profesorado, propuesta didáctica.

INTRODUCTION

Multicultural literature is gaining remarkable importance in the field of language teaching as a means of introducing culture in class. However, certain cultures are not being considered at all. Such is the case of Jewish culture, which may offer a valuable opportunity to work on the cultural component. In order for this to become a reality in the field of education, EFL teacher training programmes need to include cultural, and especially, multicultural elements serving as an actual bridge between culture and classrooms.

The present study has two main objectives. First of all, to make a revision of literature related to the question of multiculturalism and culture in the training of EFL teachers and, secondly, to

analyse a book pertaining to Jewish fiction in order to make a didactic proposal for its potential use as a tool for training EFL teachers. The scope of the proposal may be any EFL teacher training program with cultural elements at its core.

THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN THE TRAINING OF EFL TEACHERS

In terms of multiculturalism, Clay and George (2000: 206) insist on the importance of the multicultural reality of post-imperial Europe in the twenty-first century. That is why they think that the implementation of a Code of Practice for intercultural education should be based on challenging the dynamics of power and promoting constructive changes (p. 208). Likewise, Larzén-Östermark perfectly synthesises the necessity for a multicultural education: "Finding a balance between contributing to a certain cultural consensus and increasing the ability to live with a cultural multiplicity is one among many challenges facing the contemporary school, its teachers and thereby also teacher education institutions" (2009: 417). Multiculturalism is the situation where more than one culture co-exist. It is important to first recognise its existence and then to attempt to develop students' intercultural competence, which is a step further.

In the face of an evidently multicultural world, the proposal of considering intercultural competence as necessary for learners is already widely accepted. Such importance is reflected in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2001) which states that the learner develops his/her intercultural competence during the process of acquisition of a second language. In that manner, teachers of EFL are directly involved in this process in the sense that they need to be aware of cultural elements when teaching the language to students (Barros García and Kharnásova, 2012: 101-102). Therefore, if we include an intercultural dimension in language teaching, it will promote students' ability to "ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and their ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality" (Byram, Gribkova and Starkey, 2002: 5). However, teachers face the issue of implementing intercultural competence in class. According to Byram and Kramsch (2008: 21), it would not be such an issue if teachers did not rely as much on history as on personal experiences. They claim that language teaching should be both a personal and a cultural/historical event, which places individual experience into a larger social and historical framework.

To appreciate the importance of presenting multiculturalism in class, the work of Glazier and Seo (2005: 686) describes the experience of a group of high school students when they read N. Scott Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1996) which focuses on the Kiowa nation. However, as they point out, it is desirable not to focus only on minority cultures, but to have a look at majority groups as well. If we do not do so, many students in class belonging to majority cultural groups may feel disregarded, as shown in the study. Students from minority cultural groups were very pleased to have the opportunity to talk about their own culture by connecting it with the text studied in class. Nevertheless, students belonging to majority culture in the United States, although given the opportunity to know more about their peers' culture, were not able to connect the experiences in the text to their own experiences and traditions. They even felt as though they did not have a culture.

Finland is also a good example of multicultural education. Acquah and Commins (2013: 448) very recently implemented a course on multicultural education for international Master's degree students and exchange students from the Erasmus Programme in an urban university in Finland. Some innovative initiatives of the course were observing classes in a school where 30%

of students were immigrants and 50% spoke a different language from Finnish. The idea was to analyse students' previous perceptions on multicultural and intercultural aspects, and contrast them with the new perceptions after the course. The students' response was very positive because they all wanted to learn how to deal with culturally diverse children at school and they showed a wider knowledge about multiculturalism and were better prepared to teach in multicultural contexts after the course. They were also willing to have children from different backgrounds in their future classes. Students were themselves diverse and that is why the authors think this kind of courses can be carried out everywhere with the adaptation of participants. As they state (Acquah and Commins, 2013: 458), offering a multicultural education course in teacher education programmes is very important for teachers to have a greater awareness about cultural diversity.

When helping speakers in terms of intercultural competence, it seems advisable to teach them to analyse the representation of events in certain texts rather than studying these events or the information contained in those texts. Accordingly, an intercultural speaker needs to own some knowledge about the other culture, but also some skills, attitudes and values in order to understand human relationships. From this statement, Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002: 6) infer the following implication for EFL teacher training programmes: A good teacher is the person who "can help learners see relationships between their own and other cultures, can help them acquire interest in and curiosity about 'otherness', and an awareness of themselves and their own cultures seen from other people's perspectives".

Regarding teacher training programmes then, introducing intercultural competence should not be a question of acquiring new knowledge about a certain country, but of how to organise the classroom and its processes. What a teacher may do is to present a series of activities which allow students to draw conclusions from their own experience of the target culture. Providing them with some factual information is fine, but it would be desirable to encourage them to compare the target culture with their own ones. Consequently, it is a question of focusing on how students respond to others and others' views of themselves as well as how they interact with people from other cultures (Byram, Gribkova and Starkey, 2002: 11). We could conclude then that inter/multicultural competence consists in gaining experience and tools in order to interpret, and also acquire, attitudes, values or behaviour from people belonging to different cultures.

Although the interest in culture has not been widely spread in the field of teaching, professional journals and associations have paid attention to it in recent years. The implication of that for teachers and teacher training programmes is outstanding:

> There is also widespread recognition that such interest will require extensive professional development to ensure appropriate classroom implementation. There is clearly an agenda here for teachers, teacher trainers, and researchers. Preparing students in the US and Europe for successful participation in an increasingly diverse society and workplace will require careful attention to the teaching of culture in language education programmes (Byram and Met 1999: 68).

It is widely recognised that the teaching of culture as factual information about literature, history and arts has already left way to a more context-based culture. However, this kind of culture, which is based on interaction and built up at every second, is not still fully admitted as the kind of culture students need to know in order to be competent intercultural speakers (Kramsch, 2013). In that sense, new teachers and teacher training programmes may endeavour

to spread the teaching of this context-based culture in the field of foreign languages so that it becomes an increasingly common practice. The present study tries to be a humble step in the consecution of such spread, starting with the consideration of a particular culture: Judaism.

MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE: THE JEWISH CASE

The importance of considering Jewish literature resides in the fact that, as Valman (2010: 206) states, it is a great source of knowledge on the peculiarities of an ethnic or religious minority. Jewish culture, in particular, has been stigmatised throughout decades and this fact can easily be compared with current stories of persecution because of ethnic reasons, giving teachers the opportunity to treat the topic of migration and the cultural implications it has. In addition, the prevailing Spanish Law for Education specifically mentions the Jewish Holocaust as a historical fact that needs to be studied at schools and, as such, would be teachers should be widely familiarised with it. Together with persecution, one of the main aspects which have shaped Jewish history is exile and literature has always been considered its main way of expression:

> Exile seems to stimulate a form of literary imagination like no other experience. This is compounded by the writer's detachment from home and roots, the attempts to transcend time and space and the need in extremis to access and imagine other places or to idealise the real past (Abramson, 2006: 171).

America, for instance, was a place for Jewish exile. Most of American Jewish fiction is a kind of reaction to American culture given the conflict between the demands of Jewish tradition and the expectations of American culture which very often resulted in favour of the latter. However, in the seventies, American Jewish fiction started to advocate the norms of Jewish tradition and, a bit later, in the eighties, the problems of Jews were fully represented in fiction. In addition, Jewish novelists returned to traditional figures and classical texts when telling their stories. Thus, they did not worry any more about what Christians would think (Berger, 1990: 221).

The Holocaust too will be noticeable in this reaffirmation of the Jewish question in the eighties as some important writings of survivors' children were released. It seems that Jewish novelists started to consider the meaning of being Jew from inside and not from the perspective of American culture. In that sense, some of the issues they take into account are the role of memory, family relations or the state of Israel. Jewish religion is also present and many novels show the lives of people having certain problems, such as, for instance, drugs, until they find their salvation converting into Judaism and being totally covenant (Berger, 1990: 222).

Surprisingly, after the destruction of European Jewry, the silence about the Holocaust in novels was notable. Nevertheless, some writers started to pay attention to it without remarking theological consequences (Lewis Wallant's *The Pawnbroker*, 1961) and, a decade later, it was considered as a civilization marker (Saul Bellow's *Mr Sammler's Planet*, 1970). Progressively, the Holocaust started to be seen as a moral teaching and it became a literary exploitation focusing on the catastrophe's moral and theological scars (Berger, 1990: 226).

Likewise, novelists began to wonder about a variety of topics such as God's role, Jewish response to destruction, the nature of evil or the nature of Jewish-Christian relations after the Holocaust in order to find an answer to all these questions. Jewish novelists such as Elie Wiesel and Cynthia Ozick insisted on the idea of writing about the Holocaust, no matter how difficult it could be. Wiesel's novel *The Fifth Son* (1984), for instance, treats a very important topic for the aim of this work. Wiesel is the son

of survivors from the Holocaust and he concedes a very special role to memory. He considers that survivor's tales are of an incalculable value to memory (Berger, 1990: 229). Other common themes described in this kind of novels are traumatic death or disappearance (representing Jews' vulnerability) and children being separated from parents and friends. Jewish identity is a very important concern too in second generation novels (novels written by survivors' children). Lastly, theology and God are two other recurrent topics. Jewish novelists use God as a redeemer for evil, but also as the responsible for the bad things which happened to them. Hence, characters asking and begging God because of the Holocaust are abundant in Jewish fiction in the eighties (Berger, 1990: 232).

METHODOLOGY

After the revision and analysis of several texts from Jewish fiction, *The Wandering Jews* is the chosen work for the didactic proposal given not only its cultural value but also its touching narration about the sorrow of thousands of Jews based on real life. Once the author and the text are briefly analysed, the variables that have been taken into account for the didactic proposal are exposed.

A. THE AUTHOR AND THE TEXT

Joseph Roth (1894-1939) was a Jewish writer of Austrian origin who combined his work as fiction writer with that of journalism. He was gifted with an exceptional perception of reality reported overwhelmingly through his style. He published well-known novels like *The Spider's Web* (1923), *Savoy* (1924), *Rebellion* (1924), *Job* (1930) or *The Radetzky March* (1932) largely considered his masterpiece. During his exile in France he wrote books of fabulist orientation like *Tarabas* (1934), *Confession of a Murderer* (1936), or *The Tale of the 1002nd Night* (1939). He finally died in Paris escaping from Nazi Germany during the 30s.

The Wandering Jews (1926-1927) is a book of sorrow, a book which tells the story of thousands and thousands of Jews who had to emigrate from their safe home to the unsafe and unknown lands of the West, conforming the process of diaspora. The work is an essay that goes through several cities of wandering for Jews and narrates the different difficulties they had to face both to get there and once there. At the beginning, the author describes how Jews do not know anything about the West and its injustices to foreigners and especially to Jews. Little by little, he introduces the reader to how difficult and unbearable it can be to get to and to live in certain places such as Germany, France, Austria or America being a Jew. In case they succeeded in entering these places, Jews suffered all kinds of discrimination and oppression, which are described by the author in detail. Apart from discrimination, poverty is a pivotal point in the story. Jewish ghettos are full of it. In the same manner, war also plays its part and it is the cause of the many atrocities that Jews committed themselves in order to avoid being recruited.

This text is a very valuable contribution to our proposal since, as previously mentioned, stories of migration caused by persecution are, unfortunately, commonplace nowadays. In that sense, it can help students to establish a relation between the situations back then and now in order to instil a sense of alarm in them about this topic.

B. VARIABLES FOR THE DIDACTIC PROPOSAL

The variables of the study have been chosen in order to give as a complete vision as possible of the fictional text which is the base for the didactic proposal. The first one is linguistic analysis. The points of analysis here are grammatical structures, vocabulary, coherence and cohesion. All these variables are analysed because it is important to know linguistic aspects about the works in order to decide whether they

are suitable or not for our students. Added to the point of appropriateness, it is also useful to know such structures to teach them in class.

The next variable is conceptual analysis. The purpose of this dimension is to know more about certain topics from the fictional work such as love, death or religion and how they are treated. Students usually enjoy discussing about general topics in class, especially if such topics have to do with their own interests and concerns (love, for example). Talking about them can be even more interesting when seen through the eyes of characters, especially in fictional texts like novels or films. It is a great opportunity to reflect on certain subjects about which they would probably never speak otherwise. In our text we find the following topics: longing for the West, poverty and misery, God and His relationship with Jews, discrimination, war and suffering, disillusionment and loss of hope, fear of deportation and diaspora, with special focus on the Spanish diaspora devised as a dark chapter for Jews. The author talks about Spain as the original homeland of Palestine with a remarkable sentiment of homesickness.

The third variable is based on culture and it is developed, in turn, in three sub-variables. The first aspect we have aimed to explore is the values transmitted. Here, the feelings of Jews about their own religion and position are explored. In the majority of cases, a feeling of in-betweeness can be noticed. The next aspect is Jewish culture. The goal here is to analyse and explain every cultural concept, celebration or tradition which appears in the fictional work under study. If we are to introduce cultural topics in class, the need to include this variable becomes clear.

The last variable of culture is the multicultural dimension. What is discovered here are the different relationships, both positive and negative, between Jews and people from another culture, and how the people involved deal with different intercultural situations. This is of great relevance in the sense that intercultural competence is one of the most valuable aims of this study.

DIDACTIC PLANNING

What follows is the didactic proposal for the previously mentioned novel: *The Wandering Jews* (1926-1927). The arrangement into sessions would be as follows:

First and second sessions

The warming-up phase will be divided into two sessions: in the first one, students will be introduced to the topic of migration and the topics of multiculturalism and intercultural competence by asking them to share some of their experiences when travelling abroad. They will explain how they felt, how they were treated, etc. They will be asked to do some research on the topic of migration within their families and to prepare a brief presentation on it in groups of four or five students. They have to collect their relatives' impressions, feelings, etc., and they can also explain some of their own experiences when travelling abroad (Tseng, 2002).

In the second session, they will present their findings by means of a power point presentation followed by a debate about migration and the feelings it provokes. The concepts of multiculturalism, intercultural competence, otherness and identity will be presented on the basis of their experiences.

Third session

Our while-activity will start in the third session. Students are provided with some extracts from *The Wandering Jews*. As Kramsch (2013:61) points out, human beings find who they are by means of their encounter with the Other and the understanding of others' experiences. However, in order to understand these experiences they must see them through the eyes of the Other. These are the selected excerpts:

> They [Jews] wander away from friends, from familiar greetings, from kind words. They shut their eyes to deny what has just happened, which is to wander into a self-willed illusion of night. They wander away from the shock they have just experienced, into fear, which is the older sister of shock, and try to feel comfortable and at ease with fear. They wander into deception, and the worst kind of deception at that – self-deception. And they also wander from one branch of officialdom to the next, from the local police station to the central police headquarters, from the tax inspectorate to the National Socialist Party offices, from the concentration camp back to the police, and from there to the law court, from the law court to prison, from prison to the house of correction. The child of German Jews embarks on its extraordinary wanderings at a tender age, going from natural trustingness to suspicion, fear, hatred and alienation. It sidles into the classroom, past the benches from the front to the back, and even if it has a place, it still has the sensation of wandering. The Jew wanders from one Nuremberg Law to the next, from one newspaper stand to the next, as though in the hope of finding the truth on sale there one day. He wanders toward the dangerous bromide that says: "All things come to an end!" without thinking that he himself is liable to come to an end sooner rather than later. He wanders – staggers rather – into the fatuous hope: "It won't be as bad as all that!" – and that hope is nothing but moral corruption. They stay, and at the same time, they wander: It's a kind of contortionism of which only the most desperate prisoners are capable. It is the prison of the Jews. (Roth, 1976: 128-130)

> The names of their [Jews'] brothers who fell for Germany are erased from monuments and memorials – in a two-pronged attack on the dead and the living – they are legally deprived of bread, work, honor, and property, but they button their lips and carry on. No fewer than five hundred thousand people continue to live in this humiliated condition, go out on the peaceful street, take the street car and the train, pay their taxes, and write letters: There is no limit to the amount of abuse a man is prepared to take, once he has lost his pride. German Jews are doubly unhappy: They not only suffer humiliation, they endure it. The ability to endure it is the greater part of their tragedy. [...] Nothing would have damaged the National Socialist regime as much as the prompt and well-organised departure of all Jews and their descendants from Germany. (Roth, 1976:130-133)

> They gave themselves up. They lost themselves. They shed their aura of sad beauty. Instead a dust-gray layer of suffering without meaning and anxiety without tragedy settled on their stooped backs. Contempt clung to them – when previously only stones had been able to reach them. They made compromises. They changed their garb, their beards, their hair, their mode of worship, their Sabbath, their household – they themselves might still observe the traditions, but the traditions loosened themselves a little from them. They became ordinary little middle-class people. The worries of the middle classes became their worries. (Roth, 1976: 14)

Once every student has a copy of the excerpts, they are given time to read through them and to comment on any linguistic difficulty they may have found. As it is important to work also the formal component of the language, in this third session we are going to review the following grammatical aspects through the texts: tenses, passive voice, relative pronouns, modality, expressions or unknown vocabulary, prepositional verbs, phrasal verbs and order of adjectives. In order to deal with these categories, the class will be divided into eight groups (one group per category) and each of them will search

examples of one category in the previous excerpts. One group, for instance, will have to handle tenses, while another one will aim to find examples of relative pronouns. The next step of the activity will be the explanation of each group's findings to the rest of the class in terms of translation and use of each structure, expression or word. They will show what they understand by giving an explanation about it and examples of its use. In turn, the oral component will be practised too. Once the teacher checks students' understanding of categories, s/he gives an explanation on weaker points and gives more examples if needed. Some specific examples of the previously mentioned categories are:

- Tenses: *has just happened, have just experienced, had lost, have damaged* (present perfect and the use of just); *embarks, has, wanders, says* (third person singular of present simple); *won't be* (future simple); *gave, lost, clung, made, became* (irregular past simple); *settled, changed, loosened*, (regular past simple).
- Passive voice: *are erased, are deprived.*
- Relative pronouns: *what, which, that.*
- Modality: *will, would, might.*
- Expressions: *to feel at ease, to come to an end.*
- Prepositional verbs: *embark on, fall for.*
- Phrasal verbs: *wander away, carry on, go out, give up.*
- Order of adjectives: *familiar greetings, kind words, local police, extraordinary wanderings, natural trustingness, dangerous bromide, fatuous hope, desperate prisoners, humiliated condition, peaceful street, well-organised departure, sad beauty, dust-grey layer, stooped backs, ordinary little middle-class people.*

At the end of the session, students will be asked to make a reflection for the next session by means of a reading journal on the following topics appearing in the text: the feeling of leaving all you have behind in order to find a better place to live, the levels of discrimination immigrants suffer nowadays, and the abandonment of your traditions as the price to be a little bit better treated.

Fourth session

The fourth session will be devoted to sharing their reflections in class, engaging in a debate with their peers. In addition, and looking at the current political arena in Europe in terms of refugees, a comparison between their situation and that of Jews can be made. This gives students the opportunity to compare a latest reality with the similar situation experienced by Jews. At the end of the session, students will be asked to investigate on the topic of the work. That is, they will be divided into groups and they will look for literary works where the topic of the book is dealt with. They will select extracts from these works and prepare some activities to work on cultural aspects. The aim is to develop their abilities as "culture searchers" in the sense of dealing with cultural materials in class in an appropriate manner (Tseng, 2002). This is a crucial task because as Lee claims:

> For pre-service teachers, however, there is no reason why learning to reflect should wait until the practicum. As pre-service teachers start their teaching practice in school, they often find it difficult to bridge the gap between imagined views of teaching and the realities of teaching. (2007: 322)

This is a key reflection for teacher trainers who should help student teachers foster critical and reflective thinking during the whole academic training at university and not only during the school practice period.

Fifth session

Students will present their conclusions in class in the fifth session so that every student can benefit from other students' findings, as well as work together in the revision or modification

of ideas. By means of this practice, students become 'culture creators', which is highly valuable for their training, rather than passive receivers of information.

Sixth session

In the sixth and last session, after presenting the previously developed didactic proposal in class, a final individual and anonymous test about the activity can be conducted as the evaluation of the activity (Eken, 2003: 57):

1. Have you found the experience useful? Why (not)?
2. To what extent has the experience helped you to improve your critical thinking skills?
3. To what extent has the experience helped you to improve your English?

We would like to add a couple questions more which are relevant to develop the self-awareness in their training process:

1. Would you say that your teaching skills have been improved with the activity?
2. Can you think of any other way of improving your teaching skills?

CONCLUSIONS

According to the literature that has been reviewed, the inclusion of multicultural literature has proved to be a valuable instrument when it comes to the introduction of culture in class. In addition, and especially in the case of Jewish literature, it may help students compare their own culture with others, and explore the different situations of migration that are now occurring in the world. However, teachers, as facilitators, need to have certain degree of knowledge when dealing with culture in class. That is why the training of intercultural competence in teacher training programmes is of paramount importance. Only with such inclusion will these programmes be able to connect pre-service teachers and, consequently their future students, with the reality of the controversial multicultural world we are immersed in today.

NOTES

1. See Royal Decree 1105/2014 (art. 6) which establishes the basic curriculum of Secondary Education and Upper Secondary Education

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