

## Didactization of the Literary Text under the Maxim of the Theory of Literature and the Theory of Language Learning

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### Abstract

*Teaching literature in the foreign language classes is associated with constraints often acting as defining elements of the efficient comprehension of the literary work. Literary language is featured with inderterminacy and results in difficulties in approaching the text by English learners especially within the limited pedagogical assistance that still stands on traditional paradigms. Didactization of literature needs rather to cope with the updates from both the literary and language learning theories which seem to be in opposition and result thereby in a limited focus on each paradigm. The present paper discusses the elements of an efficient didactization of English literary texts by setting off the necessary elements for a more or less satisfying method in the literary classroom.*

**Key words:** *literature, understanding, didactization, language, learning, competence, meaning, text.*

## ملخص

أن تعليم الأدب في أقسام اللغات الأجنبية مرتبط بإكراهات في مستوى الفهم الفعال للعمل الأدبي توصيف اللغة الأدبية بعدم الوضوح مما ينجر عن ذلك صعوبات في فهم النص لدى متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية أن ادخال الأدب في المجال التعليمي مرتبط أساسا بالنظريات الأدبية ونظريات التعليم التي من الممكن أن تعيق فهم الأدب نريد من خلال هذا المقال أن نقترح عناصر أساسية ليكون تعلم الأدب فعالا لأجل الوصول لفهم المعنى الأدبي

**Résumé**

*L'enseignement de la littérature en classes des langues étrangères est lié à des contraintes au niveau de la compréhension efficace de l'œuvre littéraire. La langue littéraire est caractérisée par l'indéterminatie et engendre des difficultés dans la compréhension du texte par les apprenants d'anglais notamment avec l'assistance pédagogique limitée qui se dresse encore sur les paradigmes traditionnels. La didactization de la littérature doit plutôt faire face aux mises à jour à la fois des théories littéraires et des théories de l'apprentissage langagier qui semblent être en opposition et qu'il en résulte ainsi en un intérêt limité sur chaque modèle. Le présent article examine les éléments primordiaux pour une didactization efficace des textes littéraires anglais en déclenchant les éléments nécessaires pour une méthode plus ou moins satisfaisante afin d'atteindre une compréhension efficace du sens littéraire.*

## 1. Introduction

Teaching literature in a foreign language classroom is related to several issues having to do with both the theory of literature and the theory of language teaching and learning. With the post-structuralists' calls to consider the text in the teaching of English literature, literary comprehension becomes part of the classroom task as learners need to focus attention on both the form and meaning of the literary text. The teaching-learning process assists the comprehension task by providing learners with the most appropriate ways of getting into the text's intimate aspects. If this has to point to something it is the reliance on the classroom as a medium wherein the study of English literature occurs, and indeed, a setting where appropriate methodologies should be provided to make such a task a successful one. Teaching English literature as such is a process of discovering a whole construct of thought, structures, concepts often new to the learner and requiring from him/her high cognitive efforts, to be assisted by the teacher of English literature as h/she is the source of both literary knowledge and the method by which the learner acquires the skill of understanding this knowledge.

The relationship between literature and language teaching answers the question of what and how should be taught in the classroom? Research on the interaction between literature and language learning focuses "*on how learners as language learners are able to interact with the text, and on how literary texts influence classroom interaction*" (A. Paran, 2008, p.19). This intersection depends on the classroom task with a split often between literary knowledge and linguistic knowledge. The reading of literature can be undertaken by several mediums as far as the literary text is addressed to all types of readers. But the classroom is thought to have a particular role in the efficiency of the task and is too loaded with the responsibility to equip the learners with the necessary pedagogic assistance for the efficient study of the text.

For the reading to be a cognitive task designed for the aim of working out meaning, it is to rely on a code or method of

reading to be initiated by the teacher in the classroom. The teacher of literature is supposed to have received training in the didactics of literature in order to be able to give to the learners a way of reading the text. The present paper aims at identifying the main elements of an efficient didactization of the English literary text in the Algerian universities by discussing the main issues in literary comprehension.

## 2. The Nature of the Literary Text

Being unusual language, the literary text is loaded with forms which often impede the task of comprehension. In that, the literary text takes its complexity from the specificity of literary discourse:

*Literature is undoubtedly several things at once, things that are connected, or example, by the rather loose bond of what Wittgenstein called “family resemblance” and are difficult, or perhaps –according to an uncertainty principle comparable to the ones invoked in physics –impossible to consider simultaneously* (G. Genette, 1993, p. 1).

Literature belongs to the world of objective contents of thought (Pooper, 1972)<sup>1</sup> as it is conceptualized as models of reality. Its linguistic form is more than empirical sentences or direct manifestations of brain processes: “*Literary models of reality may be of a varied conceptual nature, indicating certain levels of connections with reality*” (D. Sørensen, 1987, p.166). Being a symbol, a word, an expression, a sentence –long or short, the literary text is to consider for its propositional content which obeys the conventional sense and at the same time has to propose a particular object being more than just a grammatical inscription (Goodman, 1976). Thus, literary texts reflect an idea of relevance and significance to other ideas in the vertical textual scope, i.e. paradigmatic<sup>2</sup> relations.

Despite their objective content, literary texts exhibit variation in the sense that they can inscribe to other spheres since they are as Pooper (1972) said “*a knowledge without a knowing subject*” (p.109). Sørensen (1987, p.166) said in this respect:

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<sup>1</sup> As cited in Corvi (1997), p.89.

<sup>2</sup> See chapter three for more understanding of the paradigmatic relation.

*Literary texts do not fall squarely in this or that part of the scheme, and some parts seem to be excluded altogether [viz. That of the formal concepts, consisting closed systems]. Yet, the categories of problem/problem solutions and of empirical and transempirical concepts seem to have a certain relevance in relation to literary texts. (D. Sørensen, 1987, p.167).*

Along the same scope, Gennette distinguishes between fiction and diction where the former refers to the artistic imagery creation that gives judgmental value to the text whereas the second refers to the text's formal properties (1993, p. 9-10). What is part of the conventional discourse (diction) is possible to understand despite the interrelations between texts, and what is purely fictional is rather subject to comprehension by the general reader and interpretation by the literary critics since the literary text is of *defferentia specifica* nature.

The literary text presents to the reader two forms, one is superficial while the other is deep. When reading the text, the reader's task is at the superficial level as he/she deals with a group of words with variable degree of relatedness or coherence. In that, the more the words are related the more their reading is easy. The opposite, however, calls for the second level which is the deep form. The latter is the reading that the superficial form cannot take to. It is the navigation between the surface and deep levels aiming at getting to meaning which is put in words that exhibit low relatedness.

### **3. Linguistic Competence vs. Literary Competence**

Literature study has been coined by literary critics whose literary knowledge equips them with a priori experience and competence in understanding literature in general as they develop through time a tradition of understanding literature. Literary critics consider the study of literature limited to the mastery of literary competence which is considered as so different from usual competence or linguistic competence. Both trajectories have methodological differences and keep their methods of understanding literary meaning independent.

Literary competence grows up through time and develops in the form of intuitive capacity as the result of reading and studying different texts. Intuition becomes central in directing the reader towards the text's meaning. In fact, this competence copes with pre-readings and develops in the reader the tradition of analysing texts on the basis of other texts sharing the same features. The literary scholar believes that literature needs competence different from the linguistic: "*This knowledge of the language would enable him to understand phrases and sentences, but he would not know, quite literally, what to make of this range concanecation of phrases*" (M.K.L. Ching, 1980, p.2). For linguistics, literary competence is submitted to rules and conventions, as argues Culler (1975) "*The existence of implicit knowledge or internalized rules – 'conventions of reading' which enable readers to discriminate, read and make sense of literary works*" (as cited in H.G. Widdowson, 2013, p.99). Literature is distanced from linguistics for the general belief that the literary text transcends its linguistic properties and the linguistic analysis lacks a model that can account for these deformatal properties. In the same line of thought, the linguistic analysis is seen to be limited to specified number of occurrences and thus unable to cover the creativity of literary texts. Some of this statement is true while an important part is subject to controversies because the linguistic competence can, too, cover literary meaning. Linguists consider literary language as no different from any other language and set it under the linguistic analysis. Their argument stand on the view that the speaker's linguistic competence equips him/her with the capacity to account for all sentences: "*The main contribution of a formal system, as Chomsky himself often points out, lies not only in its formal validity –and this in its coherence and unity- but also in its capacity to account for observable truth on the common-sense or intuitive level*" (Pavel, 1980, p.190). Moreover, the linguistic theory assigns to the speaker rules of usage whether his/her sentences are usual or novel: "*A native speaker can produce a new sentence of his language on the appropriate occasion, and other speakers can understand it immediately, tough it is equally new to them*" (N. Chomsky, 1964, 50).

If the linguistic competence can cover novel<sup>1</sup> sentences, it may not do so with the literary. Novel sentences occur in a context known to the reader whereas literary created sentences belong to a context beyond the reader's reach because literary communication lacks the elementary features of the linguistic communication.

Another argument for the linguistic competence is the capacity of language to occur similarly in different usages. Language has a similar mental property and its occurrence in the varied contexts keeps guided by social conventionalism:

*The linguistic features considered especially artistic are also represented in the most habitual communicative uses of language. Even for those features most particularly understood as artistic, such as the metamorphic ornamentation of poetry, rhythm and metrical-strophic divisions, equivalents could easily be found in the principles and tendencies regulating the linguistic standard. [...] Artistic language and the aesthetic properties generally known as literariness and poeticity would be interpreted as phenomena of social conventionalism, as a series of cultural compromises with no objective basis for any claim to artistic specificity (A.G. Berrio, 1992, p.39)*

The similarity of occurrence defines within the linguistic theory's capacity to account for any sentence occurring within the generative circle. This capacity covers language's generalizations of different kinds of occurrences including the literary:

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<sup>1</sup> In the conventional sense of language use, this attribution is governed by a cognitive stability shared among users whereby the attribution of new meanings appears slight and in most of times it is either novelty or coinage. However, this is not the case in the special usages like the literary for example. Words exhibit a higher degree of attribution towards other words radically different from them. De Saussure has raised this systematicity as existing between words expressing different rapports to each other because denotation turns to redefine rather as exemplification.

*Modern linguistic theory finds itself in this ideal position with respect to literature by reason of its increasingly successful effort to capture scientific generalizations about language through the means of objective formalizations on the intuitive, creative competence of ordinary speakers and listeners (M.K.L. Ching, 1980, p.7).*

Competence, whether linguistic or literary, is a property of the human mind. Its mental aspect enables it to cover different types of meaning ranging from simple sentences to abstract texts since the human mind has the capacity to undertake any explanatory task no matter be it loaded with usual or unusual meaning.

#### **4. Didactization of the Literary Text**

The task of reading literature had been long seen as being undertaken for pleasure and appreciation, limiting the role of any pedagogical assistance. However, the post-structural theories radicalized this task and shifted the interest from free reading to oriented reading. Derrida, for instance, argued that the reading of literature is rather a navigation to find a meaning which is not clearly put in the text. In his book “*Of Grammatology*” Derrida entitled a chapter “The end of the book and the beginning of the writing<sup>1</sup>” to contrast between the old and modern ways of reading. This is similar to Barthes’s book “*The pleasure of the text*<sup>2</sup>” where the pleasure itself is not in appreciation but in the trials of arriving at the text’s meaning.

Literature is to be studied in the classroom is thus one of the conditions for the efficiency of the reading task. But is the classroom always capable to absorbing the complexity of the literary text and mediates it to the learner? The answer is surely negative by Verdaasdonk, & Rees (1992, p.144-146) who outlined the following constraints:

- (1) The study of literature, even at the academic level, has attached little importance to the clear and intersubjective

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<sup>1</sup> Derrida, 1998, *Of Grammatology*, p 6.

<sup>2</sup> Barthes, R. (1975). *The Pleasure of the text*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.



phrasing of the premises on the nature and function of literature and literary techniques.

- (2) For centuries literary research -even at the University level –has focused on the analysis of texts; it owes its continuity to its dependence on conceptions of literature and to the position it takes towards a specific national literary heritage.

These statements reveal the fact that the pedagogical assistance works on a superficial level in the classroom as the latter skips main literary concepts and keeps text-dependent. The teacher of English literature does no more than coping with the literary critics' prescriptive knowledge in the field wherein both have never set this knowledge to evaluation and judgment. Schidmit notes:

*The field of literature has seen a development from which literary texts have emerged as highly specific products, made, distributed and evaluated by groups of experts whose competence and authority is socially acknowledged. Neither is it debatable that the audience of literature has to acquire specialized knowledge on literature and that literary critics have tried to codify what they see as the 'proper' way of approaching literary texts (as cited in H. Verdaasdonk, & V.K. Rees, 1992, p.149).*

#### **4.1. Teaching Literature Methodologies**

After having answered the questions “why literature is important?” and “how it relates to language teaching?”, a subsequent question arises therefore around the method of teaching literature? The teaching of English literary texts aims principally to make learners understand literary elements of the text which are expressed beyond the word as the text is featured with allegory. Allegory means that every part of the literary work is represented or acts as referent of something else. Understanding the text's literary elements helps readers to understand and discuss the writer's meaning which is set beyond the words and literal meaning. This task can resolve around

understanding the text's theme, characters, plot, setting, perspective, point of view, personification, tone, irony and mode. This implies that the methods by which the text is taught must be communicative and interactional as it is about discussing content between the reader whose is the learner and the teacher who is supposed to facilitate the reading and understanding task to this learner.

The teaching of literature is embedded in the two extremes of the theory of literature and the theory of language learning. This descends from the traditions of literature teaching which Applebee (1974) outlined as: (1) The ethical tradition in which students through literature should learn those values prized by our society, (2) The classical tradition in which students should develop disciplined minds through close analysis of language in texts, and (3) the non-academic tradition in which students through reading should come to appreciate the joys of good literature (as cited in G.I. Hawisher, 1990, p.4). The literary theory calls for teaching literature as text while the learning theory focuses more on literature as a process. The former is the knowing of what the text is and the second how to learn it. Thus, the debate in teaching literature is over content knowledge and procedural knowledge.

#### **4.1. Content-based Approach**

The content-based approach is given much focus for its interest in developing learners' critical skills. Hawisher said about it:

*Although their methods were not integrated into the schools until the early 1960s the new critics have perhaps had the greatest of literature during the past twenty-five years in large part because today's high schools teachers received their education from proponents of new criticism. With its emphasis on meaning residing within a text and its methods of close analysis of the language and form of a text to "find" this meaning, it supplied the rigor that academic reforms saw as lacking in high school curricula of the early 1960s. Thus, although new criticism concerned with how a text means, in educational circles it marked a*

*return to an emphasis on the importance of the subject matter of literature (G.I. Hawisher, 1990, p. 5-6).*

Teaching literature as content has been central in the last decades as it descends directly from the literary theory, and, also, because the learning theory had not been so developed as the literary theory. The literary text was since earlier times the material in education. The teaching of any discipline could not be undertaken without the long hours of reading old literature whether the subject matter was literary or scientific. Even the Sixteenth century reforms continued in the intensive teaching with the literary texts. This tradition continued till the 20th century wherein the text was the model of good writing and the best form of the language. It was timeless because it was not important its affiliation in time if compared to its aesthetic form; the more enigmatic texts were the most used in education. However, the 21<sup>st</sup> century made more effective use of the text in specific subject matter. Important issues such as cultural enrichment and language proficiency were adopted and the teaching of literary texts becomes more contextual by dealing with authentic texts whereby literature becomes a discourse and process. Literature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century made a particular focus on text teaching from cognitive perspectives where comes into play concepts of negotiation, multiple meaning, overlap, intersection, reflection and dialogism. These elementary concepts are the basis of modern literary reading methods as long as the text's meaning is an unstable product involving from the reader openness and flexibility in reading and interpretation.

The above percept had indeed defined the most influential reading theories such as “deconstruction”. Therefore, with the rise of the post-structuralist theory of deconstruction, the teaching of literature becomes more centered on the text study. Deconstruction is a philosophical concept lacking any affiliation that can contribute to its meaning, that is, it exclusively relies on the words of the text as holding meaning. Most influential was the French philosopher Jacques Derrida for his overspread view that “*a text undercuts the presuppositions on*

which it relies on” (J. D. Culler, 2003, p.1). Deconstruction’s limited focus on the text derives from the linguistic theory of structuralism wherein De Saussure’s notion of representation and significance gains more approval than any time before. Culler says in this respect:

*Deconstruction arose in the context of the structuralist movement, which took linguistics as a model for the analysis of human behavior and productions, seeking not just patterns but underlying systems of rules or conventions that make meaning possible. Where there is meaning, there is system; and the structuralist project seeks to identify the structural conditions of possibility* (J.D. Culler, 2003, p.2).

The principles of deconstruction were taken up for methods and approaches of rebuilding the text’s meaning. Several linguistic theories did a turn to the pure focus on the word as holder of meaning.

#### **4.2. Learner-centered Approach**

The literary theory has been subject to change from the limited focus on the text to its process of learning. Louise Rosenblatt suggested that it is not so much a question of meaning residing in text or reader but rather one of text and reader –a transaction negotiation between the two (as cited in G.I. Hawisher, 1990, p.6). Rosenblatt was influential for her transactional theory which gives much focus to the learner. She distinguished between efferent and aesthetic reading whereby the former is about the conveyed information in the text and the second about the effect on content and form generated by the text (1986). The aesthetic reading is the interaction between the reader and the text which makes the learner not only getting information but involved in its discussion as h/she establishes a transaction with the text.

The main features of Rosenblatt’s transaction theory are: (1) the student’s social, psychological and cultural world is strongly related to his/her understanding of literature; (2) reading literary texts is always a unique experience; (3) the understanding of literature is an interconnection between the reader and the text; (4) readers are active during the reading

process because the text is a stimulus that focuses on the reader's attention so that elements of past experience, concepts linked with verbal symbols are activated; and (5) the text is important and lacks a single static meaning.

Rosenblatt (1986) said further:

*It is necessary to make a distinction between the text and 'the meaning' that a particular reader evokes from it during the reading. The text is a set of signs. The Poem Or Play Is An Event In Time. It is the evocation that happens through a coming-together of a reader and a text. To emphasize their reciprocal relationship, I term it a transaction (p.70).*

The literary text requires a model of reading which is not a one on how narrated events will end, neither on how characters behave towards each other but rather a one that enables the reader to establish a transaction and be engaged in the reading and negotiation of why a particular word has a particular occurrence: "A text is no longer a timeless aesthetic object but rather an unfolding temporal experience grasped through a series of changing viewpoints" (L. Bredella & W. Delanoy, 1996, p.42).

The approaches of teaching literary texts are independent from each other, and focus either on the text or on the process of learning, and hence keep their methods independent. Ur (1996, p.141) argued that the integration between the two approaches is necessary:

Bottom-up model	Focus on text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From part to whole</li> <li>• From letters to words to paragraphs to sentences to texts</li> </ul>
Top-down model	Focus on reader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From whole to part</li> <li>• Reader: expectations, schemata</li> <li>• Background knowledge (word knowledge, topic knowledge)</li> </ul>

Interaction model	Focus on integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combination of bottom-up and top-down processes</li> </ul>
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*Table 01: Ur’s integrative Model (as cited in E. Thaler, 2008, p.48)*

Didactization of literary texts is associated with a plethora of constraints imposed mainly on learners to whom the understanding of the text is still a puzzle. From the above discussed methodologies, it can be said that a successful teaching method of the English literary text is one that considers the following elements:

- (1) The text as holder of meaning;
- (2) The learners play a major role in the discussion of the text;
- (3) The text’s meaning is an experience of reading;
- (4) The text’s meaning is negotiated between the teacher and the learner;
- (5) The text’s meaning is not to be given as a finite product to the learner;
- (6) Negotiation of the text’s meaning is based on raising referential questions;
- (7) The raised questions are the key to a successful interaction with the text.

### **4.3. The Problematics of Teaching English Literature**

The above expectations cannot be always realized in the classroom because a lot of important points escape to the teacher. The teaching of literature is even considered as an oxymoron (Giorno, 1995) because the text remains an obstacle for the learner and much of the work is done at the external level of the text which is the literary background and to which the classroom task allocates much focus. Abandoning the reading of classics in favor of less difficult works led to a change in the methods of teaching literature where the focus becomes more on individual elements being the study of the background, characters, plot, and themes. These recurrent elements decrease the reader’s want for knowing about literary works because the latter are selected to be less tiring and time saving indeed.

Teachers' interest in literature becomes more on the literary work as a finite product equipped with a finite meaning. Taught as such, the text is less beneficial to the learner who is supposed to understand the literary work as a set of themes, characters and background inscribed in a literary genre. Literary texts need rather to be considered from their skin which is the text or the language from which creep the well-put meanings. Moreover, the simplified way of teaching literature breaks learners' will for reading whereby related items like comments or summaries of the work avail. In that, the teacher usually does not ask learners to explain or look for meaning but h/she just provides them with right answers resulting in less cognitive efforts by the learner and indeed less negotiation of meaning. The right interpretations and answers came not from students' thought or questioning, and certainly not from students' opinions. Paran (2008) argued that "*rather than being presented with an analysis of the work (as would happen in a teacher centered approach), here learners need to construct their own analysis of the poem, making this an analytic approach to learning*" (p.48). Moreover, Chambers & Gregory (2006) argued that teachers' use of flexible learning methods, virtual seminars, video-taped lectures and get-it-right tasks result in less focus on the content of the text (p.12). Speaking about the teacher who is always a conditioning factor leads also to discuss his role in the learning task. "*The teacher should play a significant role in orchestrating and supporting both student interaction with the text and interaction with other students*" (Kim, 2004, p.163, as cited in A. Paran, 2008, p.30). Teachers are not directly trained in using literary texts since the knowledge they received in literature is on the teaching of the literary work as theme not as text.

Both the content-based approach and the learner-based approach have been applied in the teaching of literature and have been of help to the learners' task. However, the question of meaning is less covered by both of them and serves less the classroom practice because "*When English pedagogy takes the*

*form of a display of professorial reading skills, interpretation appears a matter of personal sensibilities or insights rather than shared presuppositions or acquired skills” (I.R. Makaryk, 1993). Both approaches have extreme insights and their independent application may not satisfy learners’ understanding of meaning because as Hawisher says, “[...]knowledge and skill do not exist independently, that a competent performance comes from a considered plan, that the acquisition of knowledge is a precondition for competent action” (as cited in G.I. Hawisher, 1990, p.1).*

Within the two approaches, the efficacy of grasping the text may not be covered. The literary text is after all a language saying more than the ordinary language and thus needs to be read in its literary shape especially in the case where the audience is not native. In the foreign language classroom, the teaching and comprehension of literary texts differ a great deal from the native language class for the issue of language. The learner has the language as foreign in terms of linguistic system and cultural dissimilarity, both leading to a modest proficiency as the access to the literary text is different to the non-native learner.

The teaching of English literature in foreign language contexts is still far away from the literary approaches’ purposes for it is still coping with the traditional methods:

*It is helpful if the teacher actually models this process for the students-showing them by taking them through (...) the way she goes about the task of reading and understanding a representative text or selection of text; and especially how she negotiates a way through ‘unfamiliar’ references of all kinds, always keeping her eye on the main line of argument as it develops. Then, at least, the students will begin to understand what kind of text they are faced with, may have more appropriate expectations of it and will have some clue as to how to go about the job of reading, assimilating and applying it (E. Chambers & M. Gregory, 2006, p.73).*



The traditional methods provide a general cover to the literary work, considering the native reader the same as EFL learner whose inadequate target language proficiency and limited cultural knowledge impedes him/her from approaching the text efficiently.

In Algeria, the teaching of literature as a subject matter has been the concern of language teachers since times of the classical system where learners' written productions in examinations deteriorate more and more. In the LMD system, there was an improvement, at least in the syllabus content, but learners' outputs did not improve. Literature taught as theme vs. text is the source of learners' unwillingness, and rethinking the method of teaching may create more interest in learners' involvement.

## **5. Insights from the Literature Classroom**

Having talked about the main controversies in the study of literature leads necessarily to cast them upon the classroom in order to see how is English literature taught in the Algerian context. In the Algerian Universities, the teaching of English literature as a subject matter has been the concern of language teachers early within the classical system where learners' written productions in examinations deteriorate more and more. An investigation was carried out by questioning teachers and learners of English literature at the University of Annaba – Department of English. The study was an evaluation of the English learners' involvement with literature reading. It was found that learners still approach the literary text from a traditional perspective.

### **5.1. Learners' questionnaire**

Second year LMD learners have been interviewed for the aim of answering preliminary research questions:

- 1) How is the English learners' relation with English literature study?
- 2) How often they read?
- 3) What type of texts they read more?

These questions are likely to provide the research with insights on learners' ways of studying the literary text. Besides, they will reveal the pedagogical role in the task of reading. In brief, the questions aim for evaluating the efficiency of the teaching method.

**Types of Read Texts:** Drama 7.27 %  
 Poetry 12.72 %  
 Novels 70.9 %  
 Short Stories 70.9%

**Frequency of Reading:** High Frequency: 61.8  
 Low Frequency 29.09  
 Place of Reading  
 Classroom 1.81 %  
 Library 5.45 %  
 HOME 98.18

**Understanding Rate:** 83.56 %

**Non-understanding Rate:** 16.43 %

**Readable Texts:** Drama 16 %  
 Poetry 3.27 %  
 Novels 57.37 %  
 Short Stories 78.68 %

**Degree of Readability:** Easiness 14.75 %  
 After rereading 54.09 %  
 After reading the summary 52.45 %  
 With the teacher's help 24.59 %

**Literature Interest Rate:** 78.08%

**Literature Disinterest Rate:** 21.91%

**Reading Interest's reasons:** Themes 28.07 %  
 Teacher's texts 22.80 %  
 Like of literature 63.15%

The informants' answers have been analyzed into two categories: the first represent the rate of learners who read English literary text (75.34%) while the second is for those learners who do not read (24.65%). The latter explained their disinterest in reading by (1) Problem of time, (2) Preference for French literature, (3) Difficulties of understanding, (4) unavailability of books at home, (5) Disinterest in reading; and

(6) Inability of understanding all the text. However, it is the first part which is taken for analysis and discussion.

The informants answers point to a superficial interest in reading English literature. English learners read the most novels (70.9%) and short stories (70.9%), which are pieces of literature easy to read if compared with drama and poetry (7.27%, 12.72% respectively). However, they read with a high frequency, implying that they have the tendency and will to read (High Frequency 61.8%). This is confirmed by the proceeding item on the place of reading. While the library and the classroom takes the lowest scores (1.81%, 5.45% respectively), the home reading takes 98.18%, which means that this location is the more favourable and encouraging for learners' readings.

The learners answers are further confirmed in other sub-questions being: What book(s) are you reading at the moment? What are your favorite works of English literature? Who is your favorite writer? Almost all the yes-questions provided answers on works and writers like invisible man, things fall apart, novel summaries, William Shakespeare, John Milton, Macbeth, Jane Austen, dancing with strangers, Josef Conrad, James Joyce, Biographical novels, Flora Nwapa, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe, Oliver Twist, the sun also rises, Cleopatra, Jack London, A Grain of Wheat, Christopher Marlowe, Stephen Crane, the open boat, the river between, the fall of the house of Usher, Rip Van Winkle, Agatha Christie, The Ministry of Blue Train, Ralph Waldo Ellison, Amy Foster, George Orwell, Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms, the sun also rises, The Great Gatsby, the heart of Darkness, King Lear, Hamlet, Richard III, Charles Dickens, Dead Man's Eyes, Romeo and Juliette, The Old Man and the Sea, The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, The Portrait of a Lady, Cry Freedom, Cry Freedom, Moby-Dick, Herman Melville, pride and prejudice, Doctor Faustus, The Brothers Grimm's book of fairy tales, Othello.

The informants' answers point to the fact that English learners read English literary texts of different types. Their interest in reading is seen in the fact that they read literary works they studied in class and read even others not recommended by

their teachers. This can also bring into discussion another important element which literature awareness. The learners' answers clearly demonstrate that they are aware of the importance of reading and they effectively read literary texts but the method of reading and the efficacy is not yet pointed.

Since the informants read short stories and novels, they think that they understand reading with a high rate (83.56%). Furthermore, the texts that the informants understand are Novels (57.37%) and Short Stories (78.68%). This rate correlates with the previously obtained rate on "Type of Read Texts". Despite this interest in reading, this does not occur at ease since the degree of readability varies: a low rate for easiness (14.75%) whereas a high rate for Rereading (54.09%), Reading the Summary (52.45%); and Teacher's help (24.59%).

The last questions have been on the informants' interest in studying English literature and its motives. 78.08% answered with yes while with 21.91%. The yes-category explained their interest in reference to the interesting themes (28.07%), Teacher's interesting texts (22.80%); and literature general interest (63.15%).

The analysis of the learners' questionnaire revealed the following:

- 1) High interest in literature study
- 2) High interest in reading English literary texts especially novels and short stories
- 3) Avoidance of poetry and drama
- 4) Low classroom assistance
- 5) Required Assistance in reading (relying on summaries and repetition)
- 6) Interest in the theme
- 7) Low interest in the language
- 8) Variation in reading

## **5.2. Teachers' questionnaires**

Second year LMD teachers have been too interviewed for the same sake. Teachers' answers reflect learners' real relation with literature study as they are frequently experiencing their learners' involvement in the classroom.

Teachers' answers reflect learners' real relation with literature study. Almost all of them think that their learners understand lessons with an average level (75%). This would take us back to what we discussed above as get-it-right lessons whereby the teachers judge their learners in reference to already made tasks requiring ready answers.

Teachers think that their learners have the tendency to study the historical background of the literary work as well as the text study but the content of the syllabus may not always allow them to make use of texts (only 35.5%). This assumption is central in literature teaching whereby the historical perspective, though a traditional method, dominates the teaching and understanding of literary text. This may be reflected in the rate of reading: teachers think that their learners read English literary texts rarely (62.5%). This can imply that teachers do not find the effects of reading in their learners' involvement in studying literature because in the learners' questionnaire, informants' rate for reading is high (61.8%) but it is meant for simple literary works such as short stories and not those recommended texts by their teachers. This low reading rate is reflected in the teachers' need to readjust lessons to student's levels because they may not be able to comprehend (100%), a point reflected in the students outcomes as they reproduce what is given in the classroom with less individual involvement (62.5%). Teachers believe that text study is important to the English literature lesson (87.5%) but learners' disinterest with reading as well as administrative constraints may not facilitate the employability of texts in the classroom.

Teachers' answers provided the following:

- 1) Learners have the tendency to study the historical background of the literary work as well as the text but the content of the syllabus may not always allow them to make use of texts;
- 2) Infrequent reading of English literary texts;
- 3) Need to readjust lessons to students' levels;
- 4) Less individual involvement; and

5) Learners' disinterest with reading as well as administrative constraints may not facilitate the employability of texts in the classroom.

If learners and teachers' opinions on literature teaching would point to something it is clearly the chasm with the texts and the limited focus on the traditional literary teaching. Literature taught as theme vs. text is the antecedent of the gap. Two reasons are central and act as constraints:

- (1) Difficulty of understanding English literary language.
- (2) Difficulty to tackle the text.

## Conclusion

Teaching literature as text or as process involves necessarily the text study wherein the text's meaning is a major source as learners' difficulties in literature understanding are not on how to perform successfully in the classroom task but rather how to develop the capacity of understanding the literary text of all sorts and of all difficulties, in and out of the classroom. Of course, this is not the tackle of all learners especially that ours in the Algerian Universities still struggle with the language of the text given that the native reader is not the same as the EFL learner whose inadequate target language proficiency and limited cultural knowledge impedes him/her from approaching the text efficiently.

The block in the teaching of English literature has always been referred to the learners' difficulty of dealing with texts for the two reasons of lack of reading literary works as well as low language proficiency. Many modern literary theories, to name but a few, the reader-response theory, the content-based approach and the learner-centered approach, have been designed to involve the learner in the reading and understanding task. However, we believe these models to still focus on the literariness of the text and inquire therefore more of literary knowledge yet not available in the learners'.

Teachers of English literature seem to adopt the traditional literary method which centers attention over the literary facts

surrounding the literary work, such as the historical background and the work's literary genre. Salvatori reminds the literature teacher that the text study is rather of much relevance to the learners' success:

[So] the questions I ask as teacher are the distillation of any understanding of reading as a process involving difficult moments, which I see not as a sign of inadequacy on the reader's part, but rather as signs that the reader has sensed and/or identified a textual difficulty that she needs to capture and engage, interpret and respond to. (Salvatori, 2002, p. 84, as cited in E. Chambers & M. Gregory, 2006, p. 60).

Interrogating the transaction between the text and the learner is believed to increase learners' interest and understanding and do better than the individual learning that our students make use of.

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