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Durant, Alan (2013) Using literary texts in ELT: retrospect and challenges. In: New Horizons in English Language Teaching: Language, Literature and Education. Toyota, Manasori and Kikuchi, Shigeo, eds. Kansai Gaidai University Press, Kyoto, pp. 1-35. ISBN 978-4-87335-028-8

First submitted uncorrected version (with author's formatting)

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# Using literary texts in ELT: retrospect and challenges

**Alan Durant**

## **Abstract**

This chapter uses reflection on the author's involvement in the movement known as 'language through literature' or 'pedagogical stylistics' as a way into describing how the field emerged, its relations with different theoretical positions in English Language Teaching (ELT), and its main achievements as regards syllabus reform and methodological innovation. Arguments now made in favour of incorporating the study of literary texts into second-language (L2) English programmes are assessed, as well as some arguments commonly made against. The chapter concludes by identifying present and future challenges, ranging from specifics of course design and pedagogy through to a need to respond to the political imperative of vocational relevance in nearly all fields of education. Each kind of issue, the chapter argues, must be a concern for teachers and others who believe that both a cultural and a professional dimension in English language education are essential, if linguistics is to be 'applied' in socially relevant ways.

## **Keywords**

Applied linguistics: communicative approach; ELT; interpretation; language through literature; literary competence; pedagogical stylistics; stylistics

## **1. Introduction**

In a departure from academic custom, I have chosen to introduce my discussion of the use of literary texts in English language teaching (ELT) from a personal point of view.<sup>1</sup> I begin, accordingly, by outlining aspects of my involvement, over a period of roughly thirty years, in the movement known as 'language through literature' or sometimes, with a different

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful for comments on an earlier draft of this chapter from two recent and future co-authors on related topics: Ifan Shepherd and Marina Lambrou.

inflection that I discuss below, as ‘pedagogical stylistics’ (occasionally as ‘pedagogic stylistics’). In this respect, I echo something of the spirit of Carter and Stockwell in their ‘retrospect and prospect’ in the Routledge *Language and Literature Reader* (Carter and Stockwell, 2008: 291-302), though unlike them I do not put forward a closing ‘manifesto’. My preliminary comments reflect on the area of ‘language and literature’ work generally: how the field emerged and developed and what its main achievements have been. I then comment briefly on arguments, as they stand now, in favour of incorporating the study of literary texts into second-language (L2) English programmes, as well as some arguments commonly made against. Finally, I focus on emerging and future challenges. These range from specifics of course design and pedagogy through to a need to respond to the political imperative of vocational relevance in nearly all fields of education. Each kind of issue, I conclude, must be a concern for those who believe, as I continue to, that both a cultural and a professional dimension in English language education are essential, if linguistics is to be ‘applied’ in socially relevant ways.

## **2. Beginnings of an interest**

I can be fairly precise about when my interest in literature in L2 teaching of English literature began: in 1983, roughly thirty years ago.

How can I be so exact? Until that period I had been involved in literary studies in English, including writing a PhD and publishing a book on the place in poetic modernism of the American poet Ezra Pound (Durant, 1981). I had been particularly absorbed by Modernist fragmentation of poetic language and the potential of images to prompt radically open-ended inferences and meanings; some aspects of my fumbling work on Pound’s use of images during that period have been revisited, from a more disciplined stylistic standpoint, in the Routledge *Language and Literature Reader* by Tate (2008:139-41). From time to time, I had

also touched on a topic with particular resonance in Japan: the partial understanding (as well as no doubt frequent misconstrual) of haiku when transposed into Western poetic thinking. Those topics fascinated me because they formed a cultural horizon of my own literary experience. My interest was effectively in poetry I wanted to read, and which others around me were reading and discussing. In time, though, I moved to a lecturing post linked to setting up a postgraduate programme in ‘literary linguistics’ at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, devised with two colleagues, Sylvia Adamson and the founder of the course, Colin MacCabe.<sup>2</sup> Students who registered on that programme would already be mostly either university lecturers or EFL teachers in other countries. In about equal numbers, they were also a combination of native speakers and non-native speakers of English. It was in designing a curriculum for this programme, geared to specific learning outcomes, varying educational cultures and different national contexts that my interest quickly developed, as it needed to, from fascination with literature as an aspect of my own intellectual formation into something broader.

My awakening interest in L2 curriculum and method was greatly assisted both by comments from our students and by colleagues in applied linguistics from (at that time) the universities of Lancaster and Edinburgh.<sup>3</sup> They contributed expertise amounting to a kind of professional training during the first year of course delivery, which was simultaneously a

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<sup>2</sup> The full title of the course was ‘M.Litt in Linguistics for the Teaching of English Language and Literature’. My two founding colleagues, Sylvia Adamson and Colin MacCabe, are both involved in the online research collaboration I refer to towards the end of this chapter: the ‘Keywords Project’, funded by Jesus College, University of Cambridge, and the University of Pittsburgh; see resources at <http://keywords.pitt.edu>. Colleagues in the Programme in Literary Linguistics at University of Strathclyde for various periods of time included Nigel Fabb, Derek Attridge, Sara Mills and Martin Montgomery, as well as after I had left Deborah Cameron and Jonathan Hope.

<sup>3</sup> Especially influential were Mike Breen, Mick Short, and Jenny Thomas (all then at Lancaster), and Alan Davies, Tony Howatt and Antonella Sorace (all then at Edinburgh). A record of some of the dialogue that took place on the topic of course planning at University of Strathclyde and at University of Lancaster can be found in juxtaposed articles by Durant, Mills and Montgomery (1988) and Breen and Short (1988), as well as in associated commentaries on each other’s articles published in the same volume.

period of refinement and extension of the programme.<sup>4</sup> A creative tension between my two perspectives on literature has persisted ever since, as it does in the work of many colleagues. It is the familiar position of a native speaker (in my case, effectively a monolingual native speaker) working on a combined field of language and literature with others for whom that language and culture play a necessarily different role in their personal, social and professional lives.

What questions surfaced in that formative experience? They are fairly obvious ones. It would have been impossible to ignore how far reading the literature of another country, or in this case a cluster of Anglophone countries, can look ‘from outside’, especially how interpretive processes are interwoven with variable linguistic experience of the relevant language while the reader continues to inhabit a different first language. Questions arose, for example, not only about the level but also about different kinds of application of grammatical ability and wider language proficiency. For a native speaker, it is mostly straightforward to determine when some stretch of discourse meets expectations of grammaticality and when it deviates either as a result of inability to communicate clearly or in order to create some distinctive, often humorous or sometimes artistically ‘experimental’ effect.

Equivalent intuitions operate at other linguistic levels, too, for instance as regards the many different speech acts that language performs, including indirect speech acts with a complex relationship with considerations of politeness and other, culturally specific pragmatic strategies (Thomas, 1983; Watts, 2003; Mills, 2003). Native-speaker competence also allows insights into how far whatever is communicated conforms to a given idiom or

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<sup>4</sup> The work of the Strathclyde Programme in Literary Linguistics is summarised in Durant and Fabb (1987); it also underpinned the TV documentary based on a Strathclyde conference, *Big Worlds, Small Worlds* (Channel 4 Television, 1987), written by David Lodge and viewable in full on the Keywords Project website (the documentary contains short contributions from a range of authors referred to in this chapter). Papers presented at the conference were collected as Fabb et al (1987).

genre (Duff, 2000; Biber and Conrad, 2009), an aspect of style which is highly sensitive to place, time and other circumstances, and which is affected by historically-formed conventions of interaction and publication, including in what might be called the specialised communicative events we consider literary works (Pratt, 1981).

Alongside the significance of linguistic intuitions, there were also social questions, including problems surrounding cultural references and allusions. What information, for example, is likely to be ready at hand for a particular readership, available as a reservoir to be drawn on, apparently spontaneously, in a process of understanding that combines top-down processing based on pre-existing schemas drawn from life and works of fiction with bottom-up processing triggered by local textual cues, such as features of vocabulary (Culpeper, 2001)? Conversely, what knowledge content is calculated to remain esoteric or exotic, to be puzzled over even by a native-speaker reader? Incorporating unfamiliar references in literary works can mark a departure from a customary expectation of ‘recipient design’ in composition, through which a communication is planned and constructed in ways that display an orientation and sensitivity to the particular other(s) to whom it is addressed (Sacks et al., 1974: 727). A shift away from this norm of information management can transform the relation between a text’s implied reader and its likely actual audience (Montgomery et al, 2012), sometimes with complex effects. When readers engage with literature in another language, such effects are often foregrounded as being problematic. The same problems are not evident to anything like the same extent to native speakers, even where the associated interpretive issues do still arise, especially during periods of significant cultural change.

The areas of difficulty I am describing combine with each other and with other aspects of reading, requiring what has been called an overall ‘literary competence’ (Culler, 2002): a set of interwoven skills which are inevitably both linguistic and socially variable, and which are formed (where literature is a body of publications circulating actively in a

given culture) by socialisation into overlapping interpretive communities (Fish, 1980; Kramsch and Widdowson, 1998). For non-native speakers, studying in equally active cultures that are nevertheless not organised around the same L1, the question remains open as to which interpretive communities readers are members of, how literary competence in L2 is achieved, and what purpose is served by working to cultivate it.

### **3. ELT context**

With such preliminaries I invite you now to rewind for a moment to 1983, the date of my first professional encounter with literature in an L2 environment, referred to above. Let us briefly revisit how issues in literature and ELT presented themselves at that time. Such a retrospect will, I hope, offer an additional angle on both the growth of ‘language through literature’ approaches subsequently,<sup>5</sup> and the challenges such approaches now face.

Consider yourself momentarily transported, then, to the 1980s - in effect a whole academic generation ago. This was a period when ELT was already a substantial global industry, but an industry led by native-speaker scholars, before the value of professional influence from non-native speakers with experience of actually learning English was fully appreciated (Howatt, 1984; Block and Cameron, 2002). A lot of discussion among specialists was concerned with what were described as three broad approaches, crudely distinguished below in order to emphasise some relevant contrasts between them.

#### **3.1 Structural syllabuses**

One still influential approach, persisting from an earlier period, was that of ‘structural’ syllabuses (Stern, 1983; Howatt, 1984; Davies, 2007). Such syllabuses are designed on the principle that language consists of an inventory of grammatical patterns and vocabulary

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<sup>5</sup> For a thematic review, see Carter (2007); more detailed annual reviews are published regularly as ‘The Year’s Work in Stylistics’ in the journal *Language and Literature*.

items. Different grammatical patterns present different degrees of complexity; so courses organised in this way typically start with relatively simple structures and progress until a more comprehensive model of the target language is built up from controlled sampling linked to rules of precedence.

Structural syllabuses are underpinned by a model of more or less conscious language learning, including system-building, problem-solving, and synthesis by the learner. Reflecting this emphasis, teaching methods prioritise rules and use of exercises and tests. Illustrative language materials are appropriate to the extent that they exemplify patterns being taught, hence the importance of a controlled sample of selected extracts for use in drills and ‘decoding’ comprehension tasks.

### **3.2 Notional syllabuses**

Notional syllabuses, by contrast (emerging in the mid-1970s as a result of research commissioned by the Council of Europe), followed a different ordering principle (Wilkins, 1976). Such syllabuses are organised to highlight learner behaviour and the purpose of learning, rather than the structures of language itself, and are especially concerned with how a particular language encodes or expresses concepts (e.g. aspects of time, agency, modality, or location), as well as with how language serves specific functions (e.g. making requests, greeting, persuading, or expressing disapproval). Syllabuses organised along these lines tend to be organised cyclically, with language input selected according to the purpose it serves in actual social behaviour (either a social purpose in a given situation, or a general ideational or interpersonal function).

Notional syllabuses were mostly arranged thematically, around concepts, topics, events or activities that the learner wished to understand and communicate. Each topic in a syllabus would then be modelled on exposure to varied language input, with pedagogy



designed to explore situational demands on language and the resources in the target language available to meet those demands. Language materials are suited to such an approach to the extent that they address a given scenario: how a topic is talked about in L2; or how people perform a particular action or transaction.

### **3.3 Communicative syllabuses**

A third emphasis in syllabus design -- perhaps the most influential in more recently elaborated versions - was the 'communicative' syllabus (Johnson, 1982). In approaches on these lines, broad principles of communication are elevated over and above 'the four skills', or grammatical structures or language functions. Emphasis is placed on the general operation of language as communication, combined with recognition of second language acquisition (SLA) as an intuitive activity (Tarone, 1988; Gass, 1997).

Communicative syllabuses showed a preference for simulation of interactional settings (or immersion in real situations, where available) in order to expose the learner to a continuous demand to absorb linguistic input, acquiring language in a manner closer than in other approaches to L1 acquisition. Appropriacy was valued over correctness; and attention to continuous, contextualised 'discourse' was preferred to analysis of isolated linguistic structures (Widdowson, 1978). In later refinements, communicative approaches absorbed successive insights from SLA research, and for instance foregrounded the stretching for understanding and use performed by the learner, prompted by materials which are embedded in situations and sufficiently close to (but just beyond) the model of the target language that the learner has internalised so far (Krashen, 1981, 2004).

### **3.4 Syllabuses and teaching practice**

In the practice of the 1980s, most syllabuses were hybrids between these three approaches. The models may even have served as much to enrich and stimulate applied linguistic enquiry as to guide practical syllabus design.

Although description as ‘three kinds of syllabus’ is no longer widespread, however, interaction between the tendencies has persisted into most current ELT thinking. For literature teaching in particular, what has mattered most has been the different implications each model has, as regards the role likely to be played by literary works and extracts, as well as which methods are most suited to ensuring that literary texts or extracts, if used, serve a strategic pedagogic purpose.

#### **4. What role for literature?**

Recall how, in a structural syllabus, ‘literature’ occupies a rather special position. Literary works are unlikely to be found near the beginning of a syllabus, since at that stage students are still learning basic linguistic structures; they are unlikely to be ready to engage with much naturally-occurring, non-literary discourse, let alone with complex and sometimes experimental literary writing. It is only as learning advances that greater ability allows engagement first with simplified adaptations (including in readers which contain carefully modified literary extracts), then with more ambitious literary passages, and finally with longer, whole literary works. Reading ‘literature’ functions as a kind of capstone to the syllabus, applying what has been learnt to a recognised body of language use: literature. Literary works perform this special role not only because they have been influential in the L2 culture but because they have shown themselves to repay close investigation and to test a reader’s interpretive abilities. Classroom use of literature is likely to be viewed, as a result, as both a moment of completion and as a new beginning: a rite of passage for the student from learning atomised lexical items and constructions, through using language in varying social

contexts (i.e. as discourse), into appreciation of literary and imaginative possibilities associated with the target language and its user-cultures.

In notional syllabuses, by contrast, texts used in courses also illustrate linguistic patterns but the selected patterns are organised in a different way and for a different purpose. Since such courses are arranged mostly around themes and functions, literary texts are likely to be chosen, if at all, to illustrate how L2 encodes thought, manages interpersonal relations, or brings about actions and transactions in the world. Such purposes contrast with any appeal to traditional ‘literary’ interest, if by literary interest we mean something partly aesthetic and partly contextual or historical. The expressive, ‘literary’ purpose conveyed by a work is largely superfluous, with use of any given passage saved from the charge of trivialisation by pedagogic commitment to a belief that the learner will find sufficient motivation in what they read to go on learning.

In a communicative syllabus, attention is directed towards all kinds of language in use, subject to such language being employed for a genuine communicative purpose. Literary works form part of such an inclusive view of ‘communicative use’. But there is no *prima facie* reason why literary works should feature prominently in a classroom organised along these lines. Neither is it self-evident how literary texts will be put to relevant use, other than as problem-solving materials on the horizon of learners’ reading abilities, or in order to stimulate writing activities or discussion that make communicative (as well as metalinguistic) demands on students’ linguistic performance and classroom interaction.

## **5. ‘Language through literature’ and pedagogical stylistics**

We should move on from this historical backdrop of the 1980s, with its local significance for me but otherwise undue separation from the continuous, far longer history of literature in

English language teaching (Michael, 1987). How have scholars negotiated a changing role for literature in the face of these divergent language learning priorities?

The implications of emerging work in ELT regarding the place of literary texts in L2 were not lost on applied linguists or classroom practitioners, even if few of the questions raised carried over into L1 literature studies. In L2 settings, momentum for innovation gathered (Quirk and Widdowson, 1986; Brumfit and Carter, 1986; Brumfit and Benton, 1993). Over time, it resulted in initiatives now consolidated as the intellectual-professional movement known as ‘language through literature’ or ‘pedagogical stylistics’. This movement, under the wider heading of ‘stylistics’, is traced in the history provided by Carter and Stockwell (2008:291-302) and in the chronology listed by Jeffries and McIntyre (2011:255-7).

In terms of proponents, publications, and professional forums for discussion, in Britain there has been considerable overlap between what – and who - comes to mind under these alternative names (Brumfit and Carter, 1986; Brumfit and Benton, 1993; Carter and Long, 1991; Carter and McRae, 1996; Leech, 1973; Leech and Short, 2007; Short and Candlin, 1989; Culpeper, Short and Verdonk, 1998). Other descriptions have also been used for the broad field, including ‘poetics and linguistics’ (cf. Poetics and Linguistics Association [PALA]), ‘literary linguistics’ (Fabb, 1997, 2002), ‘language in literature’ (Toolan, 1998); ‘language and literature’ (Carter, 1982); ‘language through literature’ (Simpson, 1997); ‘linguistics and literature’ (Chatman, 1973); ‘linguistic criticism’ (Fowler, 1986); ‘linguistics and literary style’ (Freeman, 1970); ‘linguistic stylistics’ (Enkvist, 1973); and simply ‘stylistics’ (Widdowson, 1975; Wright and Hope, 1996; Verdonk, 2002; Lambrou and Stockwell, 2007; Jeffries and McIntyre 2010; Wales, 2011). Together these differing names, with their varying prepositions ‘in’, ‘and’ and ‘through’, denote a cluster of ways of investigating the intersection between language (approached by means of linguistics) and

works of literature, with substantial cross-fertilisation between them. In terms of precise aims and pedagogic values, however, there may be nuances obscured by fluidity of the nomenclature.

The name ‘language through literature’, for example, appears self-explanatory (even if ‘language’ virtually always means L2 but not L1 in this expression). The name defines by purpose. Developing language skills is the goal and the preposition ‘through’ suggests that literature provides a method or means. For example, classroom tasks using literary texts may give access to intuitions on the part of the learner that the learner was not aware he or she had acquired. Or alternatively, such work may show how insights into communicative behaviour can transfer from L1 to L2. Or alternatively again, such work may sharpen skills of observation and analysis in ways that support the monitor function which is active in L2 acquisition. Whatever the precise mechanisms involved, ‘language through literature’ invites evaluation in terms of outcome: its degree of effectiveness in enhancing L2 skills, which are themselves not (or not mainly) ‘literary’. Other goals, such as stimulating interest in reading further literary works or understanding a culture’s history, are treated as subordinate. They are either assumed to support the main objective or viewed as a welcome bonus.

‘Language through literature’, understood in this way, may be contrasted with some aspects of ‘stylistics’ (absent for the moment the modifier ‘pedagogical’). With stylistics there is similarly no indication of L1 or L2. But in this case, neither is there any implication of either, specifically. Emphasis is on analysing how language works at a level of abstraction beyond the needs or interests of any particular group of users (such as L1 or L2 learners). ‘General stylistics’ forms part of descriptive linguistics (Crystal and Davy, 1969). It describes how linguistic features (and pragmatic strategies) correlate with variation in language use, including in register and genre for example (Birch and O’Toole, 1988; Carter and Nash, 1990; Biber and Conrad, 2009); or such work maps linguistic resources, such as those by

means of which language reports or represents speech and thought (Lodge, 1994; Leech and Short, 2007; Fludernik, 1993); or it may examine the language of specialised fields, such as advertising (Leech, 1966; Myers, 1994) or humour (Nash, 1985; Simpson, 2003). Within general stylistics, literary stylistics specialises in showing the major contribution made by formal properties of language, and by conventional language-user strategies, to determining meaning and effect for literary works in particular. At their most distinctive, analyses produced in literary stylistics reflect descriptive approaches in linguistics (as well as stated or implied theoretical positions)<sup>6</sup> by linking interpretive insights into a text to how language typically works to achieve meanings and effects, often especially how particular linguistic features are either active in their customary way or deviated from in that text. Where stylistic analysis focuses less precisely on linguistic characteristics, its analyses become less ‘stylistic’ and blend more into wider literary criticism and response.

There is a lot in common between the two tendencies I am describing here. But their directionality differs. Stylistics works in almost a reverse direction from ‘language through literature’. Its essential claim is not that language use and understanding will be improved by employing literary texts as a learning resource, but that applying what we know about language, from various paradigms of linguistics, can illuminate intuitive literary interpretation (potentially making it clearer and more objective - possibly even replicable).<sup>7</sup>

In terms of content, accordingly, stylistics is part of a ‘communicative’ approach, in being

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<sup>6</sup> A great deal of stylistic work is descriptive; it presupposes and applies, rather than develops, theoretical positions. The diverse and changing theoretical content of stylistics can nevertheless be traced historically from perspectives presented in Freeman (1970), through more generative-influenced work in Freeman (1981), to publications associated with cognitive linguistics, such as Semino and Culpeper (2002) or Stockwell (2002). Gavins’s book based on text world theory (Gavins, 2007) marks another development. Contrasting approaches to metre illustrate how far mapping textual structure raises wider theoretical issues: compare Carper and Attridge (2003) with Fabb and Halle (2008).

<sup>7</sup> Replicability of readings is raised as a possibility in various publications by Short, and discussed in Jeffries and McIntyre (2010:22-4).

consistent with Widdowson's prioritisation of 'discourse' (Widdowson 1975, 1978). But in terms of method it is not. Stylistics calls for a considerable amount of metalinguistic terminology, for example (Nørgaard, Montoro and Busse, 2010; Wales, 2011), which may be at most marginal in a communicative ELT approach, as I suggested above. 'Language through literature', by contrast, seeks less to presume and apply, than to develop, linguistic capability; in practice it is likely to concern itself less with the task of developing metalinguistic knowledge than with practical experiments in 'meaning making'.

Given the degree of overlap in other respects between these differently named specialisations, the distinction I am drawing here may seem merely a technical one. It might for example be argued that there will always be a virtuous circle between linguistics, practical exercises in reading, and overall language development, such that finer points of approach will hardly be material over an extended period of study. In practical terms, this seems likely. But the distinction I am drawing also points to differences at other levels of professional practice, including what counts as research. How far, for example, should research publications consist of exemplary readings by stylisticians themselves, contributing to what Widdowson has described as a 'discipline' rather than a 'subject' (Widdowson, 1975: vii)? Or how much should research consist of empirical studies reporting processes through which actual readers create meanings (Short and Van Peer, 1989; Alderson and Short, 1989; Durant, 1998, 2003; Stockwell, 2002)? Or of collections of classroom materials (such as Luca et al, 1982; McRae and Boardman, 1984; Collie and Slater, 1991; Lazar, 1993; Gomez Lara and Prieto Pablos, 1994; McRae and Vethamani, 1999)? Or of longitudinal studies showing how far stylistics cumulatively enhances L2 acquisition? (This last research genre is rarer, though still a research goal appropriate to what Widdowson called a 'subject' rather than a 'discipline'; note however important contributions in Watson and Zyngier (2006) and Bellard-Thomson (2010).) All these kinds of scholarly work are to be found, woven together,

in many key texts in the field, and are especially interestingly juxtaposed in the chapters collected in Short (1989) and in Jefferies and McIntyre (2011). Little is to be gained, however, by understating differences between the different kinds of study, not least because preference for one or other can have major consequences as regards the career progression of individual scholars, as well as affecting the field's scope, growth and influence.

Complications of the kind I am drawing attention to may throw light on why unpredictable distribution of disciplinary names in this area is puzzling, including as regards another, broader and vaguer term: 'language and literature'. The 'and' in this wider description – less convergent than the 'in' of 'language in literature' - conveys no specific view as to the direction of influence between linguistic description, application and learning. And while perhaps the most influential term mentioned above, 'pedagogical stylistics', seems to integrate stylistic analysis with attention to modes of learning, even this term leaves uncertainty. It is unclear, for example, whether linguistic insights will be mobilised pedagogically by and for the benefit of the teacher (for example to inform materials design) and how far the linguistic structures and categories essential for stylistic analysis will be directly taught to the learner. This distinction is hardly trivial, since, while L2 learners following some kinds of syllabus may be assumed to be already familiar with relevant concepts and terminology, such teaching appears less compatible with the priorities and techniques of communicative syllabuses.

No clear narrative of the field's development or complete assessment of its successes is possible, either, without further discussion of the wider disciplinary context. 'Language through literature' and stylistics both emerged out of interdisciplinary contact, and have continued to evolve in complex interaction with developments in cognate areas over the same period. 'Stylistics', for example, has had to face - and respond to - sustained critiques in literary theory of its assumptions, methods and outcomes (influentially by and in the wake of



publications by Fish (1980)). Interaction across the various approaches described above does now more often involve alliances and collaboration, nevertheless, than the sometimes hostile theoretical engagement which greeted early stylistic presentations of the 1960s and 1970s.

## **6. Where are we now?**

My sense of the present situation of this cluster of literary linguistic initiatives is that both ‘language through literature’ and ‘pedagogical stylistics’, as I have described them, are thriving and expanding fields. Both have benefited from being invigorated in recent years by cognitive linguistics and by corpus analysis, as well as by web-based learning and teaching. It is easy, therefore, to assent to the view expressed by Lambrou and Stockwell in their introduction to an influential collection of contemporary work, that the ‘integrated study of language and literature’ is now a ‘vibrant single discipline, with a confident new generation of researchers’ (Lambrou and Stockwell, 2007: 1). That assessment will be further warranted by the papers in this volume, which offer ample illustration of innovative stylistic and pedagogic activity, in many cases showing impact on Japanese classroom practice in particular.

What is perhaps most striking in the contemporary state of the field, however, is the scope of its impact, not only its production of particular readings of passages, works, authors and discourse genres. We should note considerable influence, for example, on both main axes of educational organisation in L2: both ‘what to teach’ (syllabus design) and also ‘how to teach’ (innovative kinds of pedagogy).

Consider the impact on syllabuses first. In Anglo-centric views of English literature prevalent during the 19th century, students (including non-native speakers, often in colonial settings) were commonly encouraged to study canonical literary works under the confident rubric provided by Matthew Arnold’s doctrine of ‘touchstones’ and the importance of

studying ‘the best that is known and thought in the world’ (Arnold, 1953). The goal of this approach, for successful L2 students who were also colonial subjects, was to grasp the body of English literature as closely as possible to how a native speaker might comprehend his or her national literature: in effect, when applied (following Macaulay) as an educational policy in countries like India, a kind of intellectual, aesthetic, and cultural assimilation (Viswanathan, 1989; Sundur Rajan, 1992, putting in place what Phillipson (1992) argues has been a new kind of linguistic imperialism of English in postcolonial countries). Extended to educational programmes aimed at non-subject peoples, the same approach involves a more strongly academic than political programme of detailed philological enquiry, historical learning, and aesthetic appreciation. Over time, however, it came to be acknowledged that studying the historical canon of English literature in L2 in either context, taught in the same manner as to native speakers, was untenable. The main alternatives were then either to abandon literature altogether or to use literary works or extracts only incidentally, for a redefined purpose. It has been a significant achievement of stylistics and ‘language through literature’ approaches, in these circumstances, that they have assisted a continuing shift away from an imposed ‘story of literature’ approach to English literature in the EFL classroom without ending the reading of literature altogether.

It is sometimes now unclear, nevertheless, what provides the conceptual coherence of a contemporary L2 syllabus in which literary texts are used. Should literary works or extracts be chosen to support topics designed primarily to develop language abilities, with little or no reference to aesthetic or cultural concerns (as they might be in an ELT notional syllabus)? Or, perhaps taking a lead from contemporary cultural theory, should material be chosen to engage cultural issues and concerns, as represented in literary works? Or if neither of these, then what alternative rationale is to be preferred?

Released from an earlier need to teach the history of literature, including the relation between literary works and countries in which they were written, courses have often emphasised contemporary writing, including in the New Literatures in English, as well as a wider pool of fiction sometimes known as YALIT (Young Adult Literature, or fiction addressed specifically to young adults). Recent approaches have also encouraged reading literary works alongside non-literary print discourse (e.g. news, biography, travel, features and blogs), kinds of discourse which are typically more accessible and likely to coincide more closely with learners' L1 reading experience. Non-print media are also incorporated into such study approaches, because students now mostly experience narrative and drama from such media sources, for instance in TV and film; and this invites attention to media and multimodal forms of discourse sometimes in order to explore their 'literary' qualities and sometimes to draw comparisons with conventional literary works (e.g. when working on film adaptations of novels). Initiatives mixing different kinds of discourse in this way can help to break down apparently fixed boundaries between textual categories and cultural hierarchies which may act as barriers to understanding and response. Tackling such barriers, courses may investigate differences between texts in different formats in terms of their expressive purpose, genre conventions and distinctive techniques, as well as their likely readership and interpretation.

As regards '*how to teach*', course initiatives in 'language through literature' have tended from the beginning to draw on and apply developments in ELT approaches to reading skills more generally (Grellet, 1981; Alderson and Urquhart, 1984). Drills, tests and exercises have become less pervasive and practical tasks calling for participation have been experimented with, encouraging concentration and self-instruction in ways that tackle a passivization of students that can occur in more teacher-directed approaches. One outcome of this shift of pedagogic emphasis has been publication of a substantial body of ready-made

tasks and activities, some cited above, created for different levels of student and suited to the specific contexts of different countries. Such work on reading connects readily with composition teaching when it uses completion, adaptation and follow-up writing tasks (e.g. extending or adapting a piece of text into a specified new style or genre) in order partly to prompt close analysis of the given text's own style and structure. What can be achieved by methodological innovation along these lines is a shift of balance away from teachers pointing out linguistic details and directing students to particular interpretations, towards activities whose instructions and overall process guides students towards a more active role in managing their own learning.

## **7. Contemporary issues and challenges**

The present situation as I have described it is one of richness of innovation and achievement. So why should my chapter promise to end by highlighting contemporary 'challenges' in a cautionary way, rather than simply celebrating the prospect of more work to come?

Part of the reason is that the challenges I believe the field faces and will need to address arise less from within the field itself than from pressures on it from a wider educational climate. In an age of education markets shaped by government agency requirements, employability preferences expressed by employers, and patterns of fee-paying student demand in relation both to public and to commercial providers, the future viability of stylistics and 'language through literature' courses will depend perhaps as much on institutional considerations as on scholarly content and direction.

For example, the period I have been reviewing in this chapter has seen a rising tide of utilitarian thinking in academic subject specification. Less value is ascribed to processes of open-ended enquiry and scholarly engagement aimed at broad understanding or self-awareness; more emphasis is placed instead on instrumental definitions of purpose,

certification of specified knowledge and skills outcomes, and preparation for designated kinds of career development. In this setting, language education is changing (Block, Gray, and Holborow, 2012). Language is sometimes regarded as a practice consisting of standardised interactional routines which call primarily for referential and transactional abilities (Cameron, 2000); in this context, reading is likely then to be understood as a process of extracting information (a tendency reinforced by ‘search and copy’ habits in online browsing). If educationists start from such premises, little attention is likely to be given to reading as a source of insight, pleasure, or reflection, or as a route towards personal growth and self-understanding. Proficiency in English is more likely to be considered a variable commercial asset: less a means of natural self-expression than a marketable commodity that enhances employability in a globalising world (Block and Cameron, 2002).

If we are to see how ‘language through literature’ fits into, or challenges, this social or political, rather than academic view of language education, I believe we need to look at literature in ELT from another point of view: not only as scholarly approach but as a kind of symbolic currency.

Think, for instance, about how literature is incorporated into ELT syllabuses not only for the cultural understanding it encourages, or linguistic skills it helps to develop, but also because it functions as a badge of educational achievement. English literature, from this viewpoint, adds value to an L2 university curriculum because it differentiates an institution’s academic offering from lower-level school programmes and from commercial language colleges. It offers a kind of endorsement by appearing to be benchmarked against international standards of English education. In some recent developments, this role for literature in L2 has been taken over by theoretical linguistics, especially US generative and more recently cognitive linguistics, used similarly not only for academic worth but as symbolic marker of professional excellence. At institutional level, then, English literature (or

theoretical linguistics) functions partly as academic content that guarantees a role for English as a subject: as something more than an ancillary skills service, even where the benefit to students from the specific research undertaken or courses taught has not been demonstrated.

The kind of symbolic currency I am suggesting characterises university-level L2 English is not fixed, however, and fluctuates with the markets in which it operates. And in my view, the next period of the subject's development may be decisive. The symbolic stature of literary study in L2 may be being gradually eroded by a new set of assumptions associated with English, reflecting several increasingly important social factors. Firstly, there are changing practices in L2 English education globally (e.g. the rise of degree programmes taught in English both to native speakers and non-native speakers in many countries where English is not L1). Secondly, there is the now almost ubiquitous access enjoyed by learners to English-medium online resources and the internet, affecting how young people acquire the English they learn outside the classroom. And thirdly, there is increased intercultural convergence of professional populations and friendship groups (for example in multinational corporations and international organisations, as well as in cosmopolitan teams of young employees working in jobs together during periods of international travel or residence abroad). The impact of these factors is uncertain enough; but they, in turn, must also be understood against a backdrop of the potential rise of competing global languages which may push or squeeze L2 English education in other ways.

If I am right on the significance of such factors, then the present balance between the symbolic functioning and educational benefits to students of engagement with English literature in L2 will become increasingly unsettled. What kinds of argument are, or can be, made from within the field in response?

One possible response is to ignore the kinds of challenge of new forms of self-justification I am pointing to, and to continue to presume the importance of literature as a traditional element in L2 English curricula. The scholarly and symbolic roles of English literature in L2 may not match up perfectly, but their combination seems to function successfully for now. This position may nevertheless be difficult to sustain over time (as I believe it may also be in relation to L1 literature, even in circumstances where the significance of ‘tradition’ is strengthened by concern being with students’ own national literature). The extent and implications of a general shift in contemporary literacies towards broadcast and internet discourse, in preference to engagement with print material, should also not be underestimated (Wolf, 2007; Carr, 2010); and a possibly related reduction appears to have taken place in educational engagement with historical perspectives that provide crucial underpinning for literary understanding of traditional kinds. Together, such changes may have the effect of disconnecting what is currently understood as literature from its practical role in L2 development. If the same critique is levelled against L2 as L1, it will be compounded by the additional remoteness of the literature being studied from students’ L1 and national experience. In a period of rapid technological and educational change, therefore, arguing for the *status quo* -- even one that has only recently been achieved following a gradual process of scholarly advance and professionalization - seems unlikely to be successful.

An alternative defence of L2 literature is often made: that, as a precondition of their success, literary works are written to be enjoyable to read. Language development will accordingly be carried along by students’ willing absorption in what they are reading. It is this potential of literary works that is weighed up in choosing texts for any given course (e.g. use of famous or less famous works; or contemporary or historical works; or texts with socially relevant or more esoteric themes). It is true that studying language use in literary

works, this argument goes, may be more demanding than analysing minutes of meetings, reports, and other kinds of professional discourse; but the extra difficulty is compensated by pleasure (and resulting motivation, and therefore achievement).

Another line of advocacy, that I have often favoured in my own work, might be called an ‘argument from linguistic reflexiveness’ and is traceable back to the Russian Formalists (Erlich, 1981). Studying literature as a means of understanding how language works is helpful because language is often (though not always) used especially creatively in literary texts. Challenges inherent in such literary uses of language set a kind of problem, both of understanding the condensed, inapposite, or deviant literary use of language itself and also of understanding the intentions that lie behind such deliberate choices. The text also guides the reader towards interpretive solutions to that ‘problem’, however: aspects of the language used are made available for reflection and analysis, leading the reader to new kinds of general awareness as well as understanding of the particular passage or work. Studying literary discourse puts a spotlight on the processes by means of which language achieves its meanings and effects, so that they are highlighted and appear ‘defamiliarised’. Without a need to isolate specific discourse features as cogs in an abstract formal system of rules and structures, linguistic processes are exposed for analysis and classroom discussion.

Alongside this established stylistic argument, there is also a possible ‘argument from social representation’. Suitably chosen, literary passages and works (whether canonical or popular) often express personal concerns, but in a publicly projected and topical way. Such concerns are typically expressed in descriptions of internal, psychological and emotional experiences; in presentation of tastes and aspirations, or of social dilemmas; in discussion of moral values and prejudices; and in statements of belief about social structures and justice. Literary works are, in these respects, public manifestations of their authors’ thinking and feeling in ways that may not otherwise be expressed so compellingly or in such powerful



detail in the public sphere. Explored cross-culturally in an L2 course, literary texts accordingly allow insights into different ways of experiencing, and invite exploration both of people's common humanity in different places as well as their cultural and historical specificity. Such work encourages reflection not only on the particular ideas, values and issues being articulated, but also on the means of their expression and significance as public representations.

## **8. What follows?**

Suitably deployed, these can all be powerful arguments in favour of using literary texts in L2 courses. In any given educational setting, I imagine they tend to be expressed less as listed alternatives, as here, than combined into an overall strategy of professional justification of an academic subject that combines practical skills with cultural insights and reflection. What is nevertheless also notable about these arguments is that each point in favour also brings possible objections and exceptions quickly to mind.

For example, language may be used creatively in literary works and may have aesthetically significant and innovative formal properties. But the effect of this might be to confuse or even damage language learning by presenting a false (archaic, deviant, or idiosyncratic) model of linguistic conventions that the learner wishes to internalise. Similarly, the argument that literature stimulates motivation may persuade teachers more readily than it does students: teachers are likely to prefer working with literary texts rather than from textbook materials because such works are more professionally rewarding; because of the asymmetric roles and experiences involved in education, however, this 'teachers' view' can scarcely be extended to a more general belief that literary works will therefore motivate students. Arguments based on linguistic reflexiveness also present a persistent difficulty: that if a stated SLA strategy prioritises practically relevant communication, then aesthetic

experimentation at the boundaries of language in literary texts may divert students unhelpfully from mainstream contemporary language patterns that they need to learn. And the argument from social representation can also be problematic, partly because such justification does not always travel well. In a rapidly changing world, studying literature in L2 is not easy to justify as a course in the anthropology of the L1 culture; and social issues (and their perception) vary, sometimes fundamentally, between places and times. Nor do literary texts provide a transparent window onto a world of sociological issues; rather, they are complex textures of verbal representation in which form of expression is itself an essential dimension of the topic and messages being communicated.

Given the difficulty of many of these arguments, it seems likely that some more nuanced framework of defence of literature in L2 will need to be found in response to the broad educational pressures I have described. That framework will I believe need to emphasise that L2 literature teaching *combines* two dimensions: the use of ambitious, illustrative materials to support language development; and the transmission, development and interrogation of social values, including aesthetic judgement, moral sensibility and a wider sense of identity and humanity (Watson and Zyngier, 2006). These two strands engage with one another in unpredictable and changing ways, held in an unstable intellectual and pedagogic tension. The relationship between them was largely unquestioned in earlier, liberal arts understandings of education, but is valuably exposed in pedagogical stylistics and ‘language through literature’ work. What is now called for are new kinds of explanation of verbal ‘representation’ as both an act of communication and as creation and mediation of a social world. Such explanation will be increasingly needed, I believe, because the protective cover for using literary works in L2 English provided by instrumental ELT seems unlikely to offer long-term institutional viability.

## **9. And for me since 1983?**

I began autobiographically and I will also close autobiographically. 1983 was 30 years ago; in the period since I've been fortunate enough to be involved with syllabus innovation in several different UK universities as well as having an opportunity to collaborate with teachers in a number of other countries, sometimes working towards publication of locally specific language and literature teaching materials.

Over the same period, I've also wanted to extend my engagement with questions of language and meaning into other fields. Each new domain calls for work that draws on humanistic skills of close reading, analysis and persuasion and I believe contributes to participation in pluralistic societies by bringing relevant frameworks of understanding to bear on how we communicate and negotiate social meanings. As I currently conceive my work, it has three main threads: firstly, an investigation of social 'keywords' whose polysemy causes misunderstanding and confusion in public debate across topics in education, law, and social policy (a study derived from the combined literary and cultural writings of Raymond Williams, especially Williams (1983)); secondly, analysis of the more specialised functioning of language in law (e.g. of the relationship between legal terms of art and wider use of the same terms in other kinds of discourse; or of specialised legal rules of interpretation, or 'construction'; or of how law judges public language use in fields such as media and intellectual property law, where verbal discourse is often both the object and medium of legal dispute (Greenawalt, 2008, 2010; Durant, 2010)); and thirdly, investigations influenced by work in critical linguistics and rhetoric of public relations as an increasingly influential form of public advocacy, hired commercially but justified as essential supplier of information on different sides of social arguments, so contributing to the competition between ideas valued as a key characteristic of democracies (Moloney, 2006).

The increased range of my work, alongside studies of literature, has moved me towards a slightly different viewpoint on applied linguistics than I held previously. I no

longer see this scholarly field as being organised primarily around SLA (as is still common in some applied linguistics textbooks). Rather, applied linguistics appears to me to be a subject encouraging more open-ended, interdisciplinary engagement (cf. Rampton, 1997). In some areas, interdisciplinary connections have already been made, as for instance between linguistics and law (as forensic linguistics, illustrated for example by Gibbons and Turrell (2008), Shuy (2008) or Coulthard and Johnson (2007)), or between law and literature (as illustrated by Posner (2009) or Wan (2012)). In other areas, issues of meaning and interpretation are still to be found at interstices between fields, yet to be articulated and formalised. Contribution seems possible both to already-established interdisciplinary fields of enquiry, and to fields whose linguistic complexities are only beginning to be acknowledged. In attempting either, it now seems to me desirable to be prepared to move beyond applying already identified linguistic insights and to participate in relevant professional communities of practice in a new way: as simultaneously a learner, a ‘boundary crosser’, and potentially a new kind of ‘applied’ linguist.

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