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**Topical Issues of Linguistics and Teaching Methods in Business and Professional Communication**

**THE RELEVANCE OF “HOME READING” WORKING WITH AN  
ANTHOLOGY ON ENGLISH LITERATURE**

Evgeniya V. Klyukina (a), Marina V. Ziza (b)\*

\*Corresponding author

(a) Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia, eugenialex@mail.ru

(b) Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia, zizamarinav@gmail.com

**Abstract**

The importance of reading works of art in foreign language study, including for professional and business communication as an important source of knowledge of culture and mentality, is studied on the example of an anthology in English literature. Due to the fact that many students and teachers primarily pay attention to the functional study of a foreign language, its application in real life and professional situations, it is not always possible to give fiction a worthy place in the curriculum, especially in non-philological universities. Nevertheless, reading fiction as part of the study of a foreign language has a number of undeniable advantages and is able to solve rather complex problems. In order to find out the students' attitude to literature, a survey was conducted that showed its relevance to learners, preferred formats and types of tasks. The authors come to a conclusion that reading fiction in a foreign language has undeniable advantages and allows you to solve certain communicative tasks in the course of learning a foreign language.

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## 1. Introduction

According to researchers, the processes of reading fiction in a foreign language and actually teaching a foreign language are in a difficult relationship (Burhanuddin, 2018). Due to the fact that many students and teachers primarily pay attention to the functional study of a foreign language, its application in real life and professional situations, it is not always possible to give fiction a worthy place in the curriculum, especially in non-philological universities. In addition, works of art are often distinguished by lexical, grammatical, and syntactic complexity and require not only a sufficiently high level of language proficiency, but also extensive background knowledge of the history, culture and mentality of the country. That is why language learning through reading fiction is considered a complex and lengthy process, and other tasks come to the fore in the conditions of a limited number of teaching hours – namely, raising the level of a general and professionally oriented Western language.

### 1.1. Advantages of reading fiction in the classroom

Nevertheless, reading fiction as part of the study of a foreign language has a number of undeniable advantages and is able to solve rather complex problems. That is why modern studies on pedagogy already have examples when the use of fiction is presented as an innovative technology for teaching a foreign language (Burhanuddin, 2018).

One of the advantages of fiction is that students are open to complex topics and issues. A play or poem can take foreign language learners to other countries or fantasy worlds, present different life situations and human conflicts, and evoke a powerful emotional response. This emotional experience can be transferred by them to real life.

In addition, students have the opportunity to get a sense of the country's culture, while studying the language as the literary work highlights the life, habits, traditions and way of thinking with representatives of different socio-cultural strata (Collie & Slater, 1990; Pinar & Jover, 2012). According to the definition of the Council of Europe (2001), "It is a central objective of language education to promote the favourable development of the learner's whole personality and sense of identity in response to the enriching experience of otherness in language and culture" (p. 1).

As Bennett et al. (2003) very figuratively put it "The person who learns language without learning culture risks becoming a fluent fool" (p. 237).

Fiction provides fresh, unexpected, even "deviant" (Hirvela & Belcher, 2001) uses of a foreign language. This is authentic language material written for native speakers, not for learning (Collie & Slater, 1990; Ur, 1996). Being fascinated by the storyline and characters, students can master a fairly large amount of vocabulary as if along the way, get acquainted with functional discourse and ways to achieve coherence and consistency in a voluminous text. Some researchers argue that the language of literature is the living language of speakers which implies that studying literary works provides examples of the application of language and a context for this application (O'Sullivan, 1991; Widdowson, 1971). The inclusion of literary texts is of great importance at any level of learning a foreign language, which, together with factual information, develops a deeper understanding of the use of the language (Krsteva & Kukubajska, 2014).

Many scholars have noted the benefits of extensive reading of fiction for expanding vocabulary. A lexical item must occur at least six times in order to be memorized. In a literary work, the probability of repeating lexical units is higher than in course book texts, where topics change faster, which creates more prerequisites for keeping them in memory (Thornbury, 2002).

Literary texts often possess multi-layered meanings, and the reader is actively involved in understanding and interpreting the unsaid or the implied. By encouraging students to deal with the ambiguities of a literary text, foreign language teachers help them develop the ability to read between the lines and extract meaning, which is useful in real life.

Let's not forget or underestimate the fact that fiction contributes to the development of the individual as a whole, awakens the imagination, develops logical thinking and promotes emotional development (Pinar & Jover, 2012). Reading fiction awakens the writer in the reader (Hirvela & Belcher, 2001), can serve as a springboard for discussions and independent writing, and contributes to the development of students' creative thinking (Ur, 1996).

All this contributes to greater motivation of students due to the fact that a literary work provides a certain context for the actions of characters, in contrast to purely informational texts that prevail in foreign language textbooks. Associating themselves with favorite characters or, on the contrary, reacting to negative characters, students turn from passive students into active students, motivated and enthusiastic (Hirvela & Belcher, 2001).

Another advantage of reading fiction should be highlighted in the present situation, when the probability of switching to distance education remains significant not only due to the epidemiological situation, but also due to its advantages for educational institutions – the so-called home reading classes are quite effective both offline and online, subject to the use of appropriate methods. However, some researchers note dissatisfaction that students experienced with such classes as they felt that it is more important for them to be able to discuss what they have read (Islam, 2021), rather than complete written assignments which prevail in the online format (Yenika-Agbaw, 2010).

## **1.2. Shortcomings of using literary works in class**

Researchers also point out the shortcomings of works of art as a material for studying in the classroom (Ur, 1996). In that way, the culture of which literature is an expression may be completely alien to students. In this case, socio-cultural comments are absolutely necessary. As Ter-Minasova points out, reading classical fiction and understanding it is impossible without commentary; for classical literature, it is always necessary, since, by definition, literature becomes classical only if it has passed the test of time and, therefore, its language has become outdated - more or less, depending on the degree and age of "classicity". The language has become obsolete in connection with changes in life and culture and together with them (Ter-Minasova, 2000, p. 98).

Students of non-philological specialties may be far from reading prose and poetry in a foreign language and therefore not quite motivated to do so. Often works of art are written in a language that is too difficult for students, and the use of simplified, adapted versions no longer brings such pleasure as the original (Ur, 1996). Many literary works are too long and reading them within one semester or even an academic year does not make sense.

There is a fairly large amount of methodological literature in which you can find tips on the selection of literary texts for reading and studying in foreign language lessons, as well as practical recommendations and various tasks when working with a work in the classroom (Paran & Robinson, 2016). At the initial stage, the most suitable works of fiction are adapted works or excerpts from them, and at advanced stages, it is possible to study non-adapted works or anthologies.

### **1.3. Advantages of reading anthologies**

The advantage of reading and studying an anthology, and not a novel or a collection of stories, is that it contains excerpts from the works of different writers and poets of different eras, from antiquity to the present, which are recognized as reference in terms of language and cultural significance for a particular era or time. It seems that the main goal of studying an anthology as a more complex format of linguistic and cultural education will be to get acquainted with the literature of a certain country as a whole, with its best or most significant authors and works that determined the formation of the language and thinking of a certain nation. The linguistic component here will probably be minimized compared to in-depth reading and analysis of whole works, but with regard to the younger generation, the task is often simply to get students interested in reading fiction in principle, to try to help them find the author /authors that they like and that they may want to read in the future.

In our time of globalization, characterized by the blurring of cultural boundaries and the unification of life necessities, literary works act as the most valuable sources of knowledge on history, culture, traditions, moral principles and interests, philosophy and the specifics of life realities described by authentic language means. And the study of such works in the format of an anthology helps to systematize students' knowledge of English literature, language and culture, showing and explaining their place and significance at a certain time and a certain literary era and, hopefully, giving them a taste of reading fiction. According to (Paran & Robinson, 2016) practically all people love works of art.

#### **1.3.1. Englishness**

Acquaintance with a sufficiently large number of works of English literature, figuratively speaking from "Beowulf" to "Harry Potter", makes it possible to become aware of such a concept as "Englishness", which includes certain general ideas that a significant part of the nation is committed to in one degree or another. "In general, Englishness should be understood as the national characteristics of the English that have been developing for centuries, which are stereotypes and images-symbols" (Remaeva, 2014, p. 1). It would be natural to assume that the components of "Englishness" cannot remain unchanged throughout the thousand-year history of the country and nation. As Tsvetkova (2000) writes: "Today, the British note that their former equanimity (the famous "stiff upper lip") is becoming a thing of the past, the innate sense of class belonging is being smoothed out, the idea of a gentleman, honesty, good breeding, and justice is changing. However, an outside observer notices that all these concepts have not yet ceased to be significant for the national consciousness» (Tsvetkova, 2000, p. 166).

Tsvetkova (2000) identifies the following basic concepts of the English cultural world: "home", "freedom", "privacy", "common sense", "sense of humor", "gentlemanship", "fair play", "restraint", "tradition". Some researchers add "eccentricity" to this list. Shestakov (2000), the author of a book on the

English national character, accurately notes that the English accent "also exists in English culture, giving art, literature, artistic traditions an original and unique character" (Shestakov, 2000, p. 7).

The geographical position of the country also affected the national character and literature. It is no coincidence that this is where the novel about Robinson Crusoe originated. In general, in English literature one can find many works set on an island ("Utopia" by More, "Coral Island" by Ballentine, "Treasure Island" by Stevenson, "Lord of the Flies" by Golding and others), since in the mind of the English reader any island is subconsciously associated with their native country (Tsvetkova, 2000).

Not just a sense of humor, but the ability to laugh at oneself, self-irony, the British consider the most important distinguishing feature of a mature civilization (Tsvetkova, 2000). According to Shestakov (2000), humor is "an essential part of the English national character and a necessary element of national identity" (p. 93).

Due to the centuries-old tradition of parliamentarism, it is England that can be considered the birthplace of political satire. Its roots go back to the genre of medieval visions by W. Langland, its heyday is associated with the activities of the great educators of the 18th century (D. Defoe, A. Pope, J. Swift), and at the beginning of the 19th century it takes the form of a political caricature (Tsvetkova, 2000). Humor is one of the manifestations of the well-known English restraint, the belief that the inability to restrain feelings is a sign of bad taste and poor education. Priestley (1973) emphasizes that the British are horrified by exaggerated feelings and overflowing emotions, because feelings for them are the key to the citadel of their inner self and losing control of themselves is tantamount to giving away all their secrets". «England is the land of privacy», concludes Priestley (1973, p. 25).

Civilization and culture are very important elements of the English national concept sphere. Robinson Crusoe, once on a desert island, immediately begins to "civilize" it.

### **1.3.2. Examples of "Englishness"**

Due to the fact that the authors did not set themselves the goal of conducting a literary analysis of all the works included in the anthology, here are just some examples of "Englishness". A whole range of authors created nothing short of portrait galleries of contemporary types, e.g. G. Chaucer, C. Dickens and J.K. Jerome, to name a few, at different times depicted characters which were a quintessence of their epoch. Not only the literary works themselves, but biographies of their authors demonstrate what life and people were like, how manners and social values changed over time. Charles Dickens, for instance, himself was a man of the era: perhaps all aspects of Victorian life are reflected in his biography, he knew firsthand both the debtor's prison and the most respectable living rooms in London. The talent of the essayist allowed Dickens to create vivid, as if photographic, descriptions of his era. Another example is the life of women-writers, which illustrates how society they lived in perceived their aspiration to write – not only did the Bronte sisters who lived and created their stories in the seemingly distant past use pseudonyms to make their writings publishable, but Joanne Rowling of the not so distant past also used them for the same purpose. Let us take a look at the life of Oscar Wilde, who ridiculed Victorian traditions - the institution of marriage, family and religion. "Wilde made dying Victorianism laugh at itself, and it may be said to have died of the laughter" (The Norton Anthology, 1987, p. 1899). Being

sentenced to a term of imprisonment, he was pardoned by the British parliament another hundred years later, which indicated a sharp turn in the European values.

## **2. Problem Statement**

It is becoming increasingly obvious that reading in general and reading fiction in particular have been losing its appeal with teenagers, especially so with the advent of the Internet and mobile technologies. Twenge et al. (2019) who analyzed tendencies concerning media use among American teenagers between 1976 and 2016 came to a conclusion that the average high school student spent twice as much time online as ten years before, devoting considerably less time to print media. If in the late 1970-es about 60 % of adolescents read a book or a magazine every day, by 2016 this proportion decreased to mere 16 %. The researchers found that these tendencies could be observed practically everywhere around the globe regardless of gender or nationality.

As far as fiction reading classes are concerned, there might be observed a generation gap between teachers who are typically advanced in age and far more fond of classic literature and their teenaged students who are not that keen on reading in general and are practically unfamiliar with fiction by foreign authors. Thus, the problem is to find ways of turning fiction in a foreign target language into a material relevant for students.

## **3. Research Questions**

The research questions included the following:

- i. To determine the overall attitude of students towards reading fiction in a foreign target language in the framework of their course on a foreign language acquisition;
- ii. To determine which literary forms they prefer and why;
- iii. To pinpoint which activities they find effective when studying works of fiction in a foreign target language.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this work was to find the ways to make reading fiction in a target language relevant for the students on non-philological faculties.

## **5. Research Methods**

In order to answer the research questions, a survey was conducted among ISAA MSU students enrolled in the first, second and third years of the historical, philological, political science and economic departments. The majority of respondents study English as their main Western language 67.6%, French is studied by 21% and German by 11.3% of respondents.

The questionnaire consisted of closed-type questions with a choice of one of several options and open-type questions, involving independent analysis and argumentation of students.

## 6. Findings

Sixty two questionnaires were received. When asked whether the survey participants consider reading and studying fiction as part of the study of a Western language mandatory, desirable or optional, exactly half (50 %) answered that they consider it desirable, followed by those who consider it mandatory (33.9 %), another 14.5 % consider it optional, and only 1 respondent considered it unnecessary.

### 6.1. Arguments for and against reading and studying literature in a foreign language

Arguments in favor of reading and studying literature in a foreign language can be combined into the following groups of factors:

- i. reading literary works allows you to expand your vocabulary, see the language in action, so to speak “in all its glory”, get acquainted with idioms, develops a “sense of language”, contributes to the word power and enriches speech with phrases from both written, literary and colloquial languages, helps to navigate in a text filled with unfamiliar or outdated or dialect vocabulary;
- ii. reading literature in the target language helps to get acquainted with the culture of the country, its history and literary heritage, helps to understand the psychology of another nation, brings one closer to understanding “a different picture of the world”, a different speech behaviour;
- iii. familiarity with literary works in general broadens one's horizons;
- iv. literature contributes to the development of cognitive and analytical reading abilities, speaking skills in a foreign language about complex aspects in general and persuasion skills - reasoning in particular, makes you think about the problems of our life and the world.

As can be seen, the arguments of the respondents generally coincide with the arguments in favor of introducing fiction into the course of learning a foreign language, which are given by experts in the methodology of teaching foreign languages.

Arguments against are few and may be related to the specialty of the respondents - for example, economics, when a student speaks pragmatically about the greater benefit of studying materials in his specialty in a foreign language. Another circumstance against the inclusion of such classes in the program may be the lack of time caused by an intense study load, which can discourage reading, let alone analyzing voluminous literary works.

Other arguments against may be of a psychological nature, for example, be justified by the fact that “not all students are ready to share their opinions about what they read, for some, literature is something for themselves, something that they want to keep private”. Another opinion: “You can only get real benefit from reading literature that you like. A culture of reading cannot be developed through coercion.” Rejection can be caused by reading works by unknown authors or the absence of classics in the list of studied works. And here we can assume that the use of an anthology can do a good job, as it will provide an opportunity not only to plunge into your favorite classics, but also to get acquainted with the works of authors from other eras and, possibly, become interested in them.

### 6.2. Arguments for and against various literary form

The next question was about literary forms that the respondents would prefer to read. A slight majority voted for “a collection of short stories by various authors” (41 %), “one long novel per semester” scored 34.4 %, reading an anthology attracted 14.8 %, and a collection of stories by one author even less - 8.2 %.

Respondents explained the desire to read one long work by the following:

- i. The narrative unfolds gradually and captures more than reading short stories, motivates you to follow the plot and read on. “It's interesting when you don't know how it will end for a long time” - as a result, the likelihood increases that students will become attached to the characters or, on the contrary, will feel strong negative emotions towards them. And indifference of any kind gives rise to discussion, questions, which is the purpose of these classes.
- ii. The novel involves working in the same literary environment for more time, you can completely immerse yourself in the era, study everything more thoroughly; there is more time for analysis.

Respondents made the following arguments in favor of a collection of short stories by several authors:

- i. Greater variety - topics, vocabulary, and therefore - more useful;
- ii. There is an opportunity to get acquainted with different authors, and therefore - artistic styles and manner of presentation in order to “understand that within the same language there can be a wide variation in artistic styles, ways of conveying thoughts and reflecting information”;
- iii. Stories are relatively short compositional solutions, they are easier to perceive, but useful for analyzing the means of expressing thoughts, reflecting problems and performing specific communicative tasks;
- iv. According to some respondents, short stories deal with different periods and topics more superficially than longer literary forms.

Arguments in favor of a collection of short stories by one author are less elaborate, the respondents only contend that there is an opportunity to get used to the style of the author, to trace his biography or the formation of views through creativity.

Arguments in favor of an anthology:

- i. An anthology helps to consider, first of all, the structure of the text, without concentrating on a long storyline;
- ii. Reading the works of different authors from different eras forms an understanding of the history of the country of the language being studied, and also makes it possible to study the features of the language over a certain period of time;
- iii. Since the available number of Western language hours per week does not allow much time to be devoted to the discussion of fiction, it makes sense to talk only about excerpts of works - to superficially familiarize yourself with the styles of different authors of different eras. Students will have the opportunity to choose their favorite works and read them in full already as part of independent work, and discuss excerpts in the classroom.



For some respondents, the format of the work is not important at all, the main thing is that it should be interesting. And here the teacher's work, his ability to interest and motivate students comes to the fore.

Interestingly, when answering the question about preferences regarding the period of creation of literary works, the reader, although with a small margin (33.9 %), is in the lead, but classical literature of the 19th century (30.6 %) and modern literature of the 20th and 21st centuries (29 %) also show very close results.

### **6.3. Methods of work and activities proposed by the students**

In answer to an open-ended question about the activities the respondents find effective while working with works of fiction, the following ones were proposed:

- i. Working with an author's biography, watching a biopic or TV series (as homework), reading articles about the author;
- ii. Analysing literary critical articles about the work, getting acquainted with the genres of the era; watching short videos on YouTube or reading an article by a literary critic;
- iii. Comparing the context of writing a work (historical, literary, genre) with its content for the best understanding of what the text is about;
- iv. Answering questions on the text;
- v. Discussing the key thought-provoking questions that the author poses, as the respondents put it: "The exchange of views on several of the issues presented and the author's point of view will expand the interaction between the participants in the discussion in the language being studied. It will also expand the language competence of students, active vocabulary, which to one degree or another will be based on language material, speech elements reflected in a particular story (object of discussion)";
- vi. Retelling on behalf of different characters;
- vii. Viewing thematic videos, films; listening to the audio version of the work;
- viii. Writing out quotes from works;
- ix. Playing scenes from works;
- x. Working on vocabulary - analysis and writing out vocabulary, translation of individual passages, comments, literary translation; trying to understand unfamiliar words/expressions based on context, as well as learning grammatical structures;
- xi. Working on grammar - analysis of difficult grammatical structures, highlighting those that are characteristic of a given author or written, bookish speech in general;
- xii. Writing an essay on topics that are covered in the work.

Interestingly, several respondents emphasized the importance of reading aloud and considered it to be a great activity. In an interview conducted by Bibby and Isozaki (2017), Paran is also sure of the benefits of such an activity, since reading aloud strengthens the connection between the phonological sound of the word and its spelling, visual representation (Bibby & Isozaki, 2017, p. 18).

As for the retelling of the text of a work, only a few respondents note it as an effective method of work, and then in a more creative form, for example, retelling on behalf of different heroes of the work. Most often, students note the effectiveness of discussions, and debate. According to one of the respondents the main thing is "to avoid line-by-line commenting on the text in order to look at the issues more globally. Less focus on details that don't need to be known at all, like what kind of cake the characters ate in the morning."

Retelling as a pronunciation of the text in order to memorize vocabulary is not always seen as useful. Work on vocabulary is welcomed by some respondents, but precisely as purposeful work - writing out vocabulary, quotations, doing vocabulary assignments.

## 7. Conclusion

A review of the research literature and analysis of the results of a survey of students allow us to draw the following conclusions:

- i. reading fiction in a foreign language has a number of undeniable advantages that outweigh the disadvantages, and allows you to solve certain communicative tasks in the course of learning a foreign language;
- ii. the majority of respondents consider reading literary works in a foreign language desirable (50 %) and even necessary (33.9 %) thus demonstrating a very favorable attitude towards this kind of activity within a foreign language course;
- iii. the opinions of the respondents were divided on the issue of the preferred form of literary works, though an anthology as a collection of excerpts from various literary works seemed to enjoy a slight preference which coincides with the respondents' opinion that it might be the only source of fiction that makes sense studying if the number of academic hours for a foreign language acquisition is limited.

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