LITERATURE IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL ROLE*

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An examination of the ways in which the literary text has been used in foreign language programs during the last 15 years revealed that literature has been seen to play a series of separate and mutually exclusive roles, often at the expense of the student who is perceived as either a "foreign-language learner" or as a "reader of foreign literature". This paper attempts to show how literature should play but a single, multidimensional role in the foreign language teaching context, to describe how these dimensions are interconnected, as well as to demonstrate how the literary text, when seen from a holistic perspective, constitutes a resource for enhancing the personal and academic growth of the student.

INTRODUCTION

Literature and its place in the foreign language classroom has been a topic of discussion for both linguistic experts and language teachers on both sides of the Atlantic for the past several years. During the 1960's and the early part of the 1970's, the arguments for or against the inclusion of the literary text in the language teaching syllabus reflected the predominance of the structuralist approach to foreign language teaching. Based on a behaviorist paradigm, this approach consisted primarily of a "conditioning" process in which frequently-used phonetic structures, vocabulary, and grammatical patterns were practiced incessantly in the classroom with the intent of "installing" in the learner the linguistic "habits" required to speak the target language correctly. The ultimate goal of this method was for the learner to automatically produce the correct response to a given linguistic stimulus. The structuralist approach placed great emphasis on the phonetic and grammatical correctness of the utterance, irrespective of its logical relationship to the previous or following discourse and/or

situational factors. The literary text, if and when contemplated in the program, was usually relegated to the level of an extra-curricular activity, a complementary tool with the potential for increasing the student's vocabulary. Although a few visionaries, such as Prator (1965), advocated the use of literary texts as teaching tools for developing reading and writing skills in the intermediate or advanced class in English as a second language, the incorporation of literature in the foreign language classroom during this period was sporadic, limited, and highly individualistic and the inclusion of the literary text was more dependent upon personal preferences of the teacher than upon any particular pedagogical objective.

The 1980's witnessed a renewed interest in the literature-language relationship due largely to the advent and popularization of the Communicative Approach to language teaching in which "authenticity" constituted a fundamental feature in the selection of materials and preparation of the so-called functional-notional syllabuses for classroom use. Within the framework of a systemic-contextualist paradigm, language use is conceived of as discourse, realizing different rhetorical and/or communicative functions. At the same time, the social characteristics of the speakers (e.g., age, gender, profession, position), in conjunction with contextual conditions, are seen as determinants of the function and the type of language appropriate to the situation. Because of the importance of "authenticity" and "discourse" in this approach, the literature-language relationship emerged as a significant issue and numerous articles and books dealing with the use of the literary text in the teaching of foreign languages have been published during the last 15 years.

This tendency, however, should not be interpreted simply as a return to the classic tradition in which literature was conceived of primarily as a vehicle for the transmission of ideas, facts and values considered indispensable for the "truly educated and cultured" individual. Rather it should be seen as typifying an evolutionary process characteristic of the Humanities where "old" themes are re-examined and re-conceptualized at a higher level of complexity. With specific reference to literature and language teaching, this process seems to be dominated by what can be conceived of as a double Copernican revolution in which the peripheral becomes centric. The first revolution produced what has been described by Grabe and Kaplan (1992: 77) as an "important shift from an emphasis on teaching and a teacher-centered classroom to an emphasis on learning and a learner-centered classroom", and the second corresponds to what Kast (1984: 34) has called the "discovery of the reader". These revolutions were also accompanied by a paradigmatic change with regard to the reception of the literary text, a change caused by the subjective character of the literary work that results in (and promotes) an unavoidable construction of meaning on the part of each individual reader. This results in multiple, legitimate interpretations and, as a consequence, a plurality of meanings. In both cases the change is decidedly democratic; the foreign language teacher is no longer the omniscient *manipulator* of obedient but passive students and the reader of literature is now able to escape the monopoly of the "authorized interpreters" of the literary text. Moreover, when one conceptualizes education as a *formative* process, not just as an *instructional* one, it can be argued that not only *can* the language learner

become a reader of literature in the target language but that he *should* be both a learner and a reader simultaneously.

Before continuing our discussion of literature and its role in the teaching of foreign languages, it is important to define what is meant by the literary text. While other genres such as essay, biography, historical narrative, autobiography and memoirs, are frequently considered within the province of literature, for the purposes of this paper the term "literature" is used exclusively to refer to *serious* works of fiction (short story and/or novel), poetry and drama. This type of fictional text, according to Içoz (1992), has suggestive power, creating a special type of reality and, "even when a literary text is about objectively real people and places, the writer treats them in an imaginative way, and he makes use of the language to create the desired illusion" (p. 11). This same author also points out that because the literary text is an *invented reality* it "enables the student to look at the world in new ways and to find significance in things that before appeared commonplace..." (p. 10). Moreover, as Swaffar, Arens and Byrnes (1991: 213) claim: "... literary texts frequently challenge readers with discomfiting perspectives and linguistic techniques that deviate from standard usage." With regard to the term *serious*, these same authors point out that the major difference between popular and serious literature is that the second is not formulaic. This means that when the students read literature they must make inferences not only about what the text says, but how it says it. In other words, they must recognize (and understand) metaphors, point of view, narrative voices, tone and the way in which the information is ordered.

Another author to make a distinction between popular and serious literature is Perrine (1988), who refers to two types of literature: *literature of escape* and *literature of interpretation*. According to this author, "Escape literature is that written purely for entertainment —to help us pass the time agreeably. Interpretative literature is written to broaden and deepen and sharpen our awareness of life" (p. 4). Moreover, as Perrine points out, "Escape literature takes us away from the real world: it enables us temporarily to forget our troubles. Interpretative literature takes us, through the imagination, deeper *into* the real world: It enables us to understand our troubles. Escape literature has as its only object pleasure. Interpretive literature has as its object pleasure *plus* understanding" (p. 4). This does not mean that the nonfiction literary text is of no value in the foreign language program but rather that it plays a different role in the teaching-learning process because it involves reading for fact rather than for restructuring and interpreting information. As a matter of fact, this expository type of text, particularly short news articles, advertisements, short historical narratives or brief biographies, is so useful for specific skill development that it is often found incorporated in textbooks. However, the nonfiction literary text of this nature will not concern us in this paper.

In resuming our discussion of the role of literature in foreign language programs, it is important to point out that the concept of an integrated approach to foreign language learning is not particularly new, but has been in the making for some time. Stern (1987), for example, emphasized the use of literature to expand the English as a foreign or second language program, noting its

usefulness in skill development, aesthetic appreciation and, most importantly, for presenting and discussing cultural issues. Swaffar, Arens and Byrnes (1991) relate various aspects of teaching English as a foreign/second language (including the treatment of the literary text) with developing reading skills in a text entitled *Reading for meaning: An integrated approach to language learning,* and Redmond (1994) discusses the "Whole Language Approach" for teaching foreign languages at the elementary level, pointing out that "it is through interaction with authentic texts such as stories, songs, poems, and communicative language experiences (the whole) and by being actively involved in reading and writing for a purpose that the learner comes to understand the skills (the parts)" (p. 428).

As is evident, there tends to be for each of these authors a predominant component; either *language* or *literature,* or *language and literature,* or *literature and culture,* or *language and culture,* but none considers all four aspects as a manageable whole. Furthermore, these approaches frequently omit aesthetic aspects, issues of universal culture and, with the exception of isolated bilingual programs, virtually no effort has been made to integrate literary and cultural knowledge acquired in foreign language programs in other subjects. This situation is probably due to the multidimensionality of the literary text itself, which has caused some approaches to emphasize one or another of the dimensions, often to the detriment of one or all of the others. Therefore, the primary objective of this paper is to show that literature does not play *several, individual, isolated roles* in the contemporary foreign language program but rather how it should play a *single, multidimensional role* which, if developed properly, can facilitate the integration of the "foreign language learner" and the "reader of foreign literature" into the "literate, culturally-aware, foreign language student" within a framework of personal and academic growth.

LITERATURE FROM A HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE

The basic dimensions of the role of literature and the way in which they are interconnected within a framework of personal and academic growth, as perceived from a holistic point of view, are shown in the figure below. As can be seen in this graphic representation, the center of the foreign/second language learning process is an active learner who progressively avails him/herself of the resources present in the target language, who uses strategies that he/she controls, and who is able to broaden his/her affective and intellectual horizons. It is important to point out that while this representation attempts to demonstrate how literature has a "globalizing" effect within the foreign/second language program, the individual contribution of each of the dimensions towards this effect is not overlooked. If a synthesis is to be superior to a collection of various parts, it cannot discard that which is of value in each portion, but must incorporate the essentially positive aspects into the new model.

THE ROLE OF LITERATURE AND ITS DIMENSIONS

Dimension 1: Although it would also be possible to begin our discussion with any
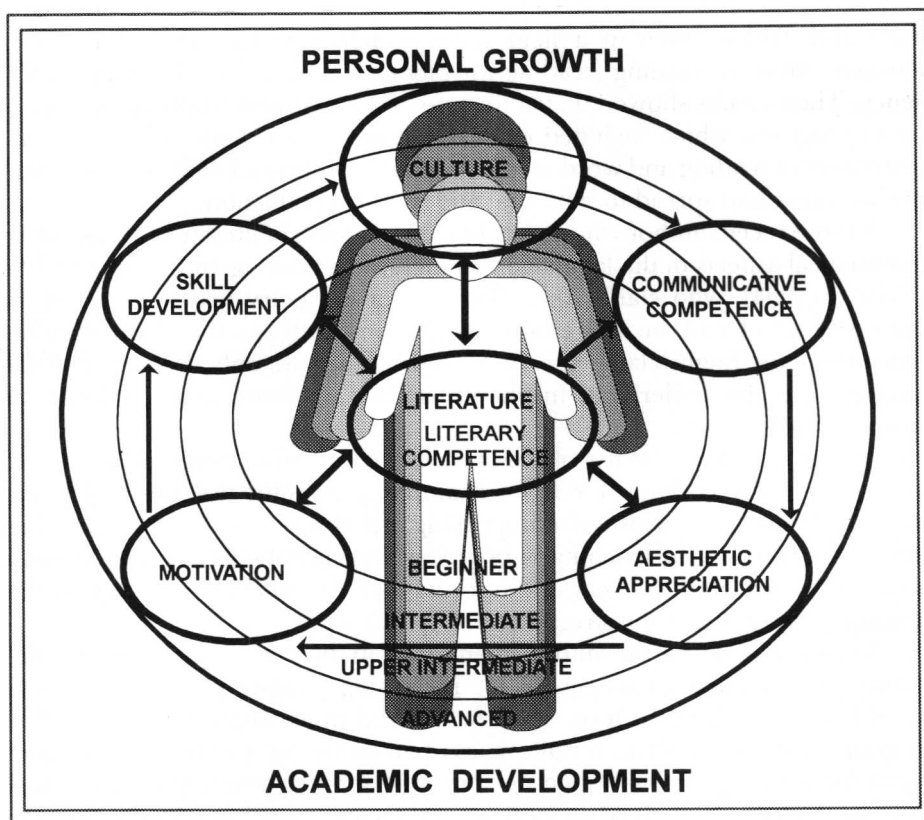
A HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE

of the six dimensions due to the fact that the process is not necessarily sequential nor hierarchical, we will begin with the skill development dimension as it is often a major concern at beginning levels or for instrumental purposes. With regard to the use of the literary text (as previously defined) in the foreign language program, the first acceptable argument that can be made for its inclusion reflects the attitude of the structuralists in the sense that literature constitutes a teaching tool ideally suited for the *development of specific skills.* While it is indeed possible to find phonetic, morphological, syntactical and/or lexical examples of the linguistic code in other types of texts, the beauty and originality with which they are expressed in the literary text enhance their usefulness as a teaching resource particularly with regard to developing reading skills.

Savignon (1983), for example, recommends *Personal Reading* (the reading of literature outside of class) for improving reading skills, stating that it will "give the advanced learners an opportunity to read in depth on a particular topic or the works of a single author. The redundancy of information and writing style will facilitate comprehension as well as promote reading for personal enjoyment and the satisfaction of improving reading ability" (p. 206). This opinion seems to be supported by the findings of Eiley and Manguhai (1983, cited by

Hafiz and Tudor 1989) in a field study which examined the relationship between extensive reading (reading for pleasure) and foreign language proficiency. Their results showed that at the end of the first year students participating in programs which included extensive reading had made substantial improvement in reading and word recognition and, by the end of the second year, improvement had spread to both oral and written production.

A more recent author who attests to the usefulness of literature for teaching grammatical aspects of the language and increasing reading and writing ability is Manzi (1994), who claims that "The use of a literary text in a course at university level can be extremely helpful in studying the unchangeable structures of the English language. In this light we see not only the beauty of the language but the underlying mechanisms that are functioning to form an intricate whole" (p. 14).

For some authors the use of literature is not limited to developing reading and writing skills. Gabriel (1983), for example, praises the usefulness of literature as a pedagogical resource for improving oral comprehension and speaking skills and advocates the teaching of poetry as a means of mastering the spoken language by learning to "hear and approximate the tone and melody of the language: the rhythms, the stress pattern" (p. iv).

As can be seen, for the authors mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the literary text has proven successful for increasing reading proficiency in the target language which, in turn, is often reflected in an improvement in other language skills. In addition, certain types of literature, such as poetry, are often useful for teaching diverse aspects of pronunciation. Furthermore, "pleasure" and "satisfaction", perceived as motivational factors, together with the "beauty of literary language" are seen as constituting positive collateral contributions toward language proficiency.

Dimension 2: For the proponents of the Communicative Approach to foreign language teaching, which gained popularity during the late 1970's and throughout the 1980's, the literary text constitutes authentic discourse and, as such, provides outstanding examples of "situated and contextualized speech", ideal for developing *communicative competence.* Seen from the perspective of a cognitive theory of learning as applied to educational psychology (Ausubel 1968), which holds that learning must be *meaningful* in order to be effective and permanent, the presentation of language in context allows the student to relate it to his/her schemata (background knowledge of the event in question and his/her knowledge of the language), thus facilitating the comprehension process. Furthermore, due to the fact that the reading of literature requires interpretation, it involves active mental processes which also contribute towards meaningful learning. Swaffar, Arens and Byrnes (1991: 215) reiterate the importance of the interpretative process and affirm that "When students read only to collect facts they have lower levels of reading comprehension than when they engage in structuring those facts. Studies in metacognition indicate that students generate scenarios or use rhetorical patterns to organize textual information."

Undoubtedly, the use of the literary text provides ample opportunities for the learner to familiarize him/herself with the language in a large number of contexts likely to be found in the target culture. Moreover, literature puts the learner in contact with a wide range of registers, abundant examples of idiomatic expressions and regionalisms, which not only enhances the student's communicative competence but also aids him/her in internalizing the language at a higher level.

It is important to point out that even within the framework of the Communicative Approach the use of the literary text for teaching specific syntactical, lexical or phonological features of the target language has been advocated by various authors (Widdowson 1983, Carter 1982, Brumfit and Carter 1986, Içoz 1992, among others). Thus it is possible to conclude that the development of particular skills in relation to aspects of grammar, idiom and pronunciation contributes positively towards communicative competence. At the same time, from a holistic perspective, it is also possible to assume that a greater degree of communicative competence will facilitate and enhance the learning and developing of specific language skills. This bi-directional relationship is reflected in what Carter and Long (1991: 9) have called the "Language Model of Literature", in which "the importance of interpreting relations between linguistic forms and literary meanings and of learning to read between rather than in the lines of the text is paramount."

Dimension 3: In addition to the arguments centered on skill development and on communicative competence, there exists a third argument (a legacy of the Classic tradition) for the inclusion of the literary text in the foreign language teaching program: *literature constitutes a means of access to other cultures.* The use of the literary text as a type of "cultural bridge" is proposed by Stern (1987: 47), who believes that "Literature can help students understand, empathize with, and vicariously participate in the target culture. Just as language is both reflective of and determined by its speakers' culture, so too is its literature. In fact, language, literature, and culture are integrally related." The importance of cultural aspects in the literary text with regard to its use in the English as a foreign/second language program is also discussed by Içoz (1992), who points out that "Literature is the product of a particular culture and is more culture-bound than language; therefore some awareness of the culture of English speaking countries is indispensable to an understanding and evaluation of literature written in English. The student needs to learn something of the history, customs, and way of life within which these works were written" (p. 10). For each of these authors, the literature-culture relationship is based on two types of conceptualizations; one in which culture is perceived as "difference" and students and teachers are conceived of as "bearers of culture" (McGroarty and Galvan 1985), and the other in which literature constitutes a tool for 'vicarious learning' –an essential concept of Social Cognitive Theory– (Bandura 1986) that will facilitate cross-cultural encounters and enhance tolerance.

As is evident, for the authors cited in the previous paragraph, the term culture is related specifically to either that of the learner, and/or the teacher, or

that of the target language. However, Swaffar, Arens and Byrnes (1991) take a broader view of the issue and affirm that "cultural literacy" requires that the individual be able to link social, artistic, historical events, or be able to identify fundamental moral or ethical issues which transcend individual cultures and are frequently thought of as universal values and beliefs. These authors also underline the importance of making the student aware not only of historical or sociopolitical issues surrounding a particular work of fiction but also of the prevailing philosophical trends which act as the referential system of the text or corpus of literature.

Perhaps one of the most convincing arguments for the systematic incorporation of literature into the foreign language program resides in the ability of literature to provide the individual with a "port of entry" into another culture, thus setting the stage for a positive, cross-cultural encounter. In the words of McKay (1986: 193), literature may "work to promote a greater tolerance for cultural differences for both the teacher and the students." Certainly few things are needed more in today's world (and tomorrow's world as well) than an *awareness of* and *a tolerance for* diversity, which, hopefully, can and will promote understanding and compassion.

On the basis of the opinions of the different authors referred to previously, it seems evident that the literary text constitutes an excellent vehicle for teaching history, geography, beliefs, values, and the customs associated with the culture of the target language. From the holistic perspective the role of literature in the teaching of culture in the target language is also interconnected to skill development and communicative competence. In terms of code, literary texts dealing with historical events, geographical locations and/or the sociodemographic characteristics of a particular population provide ample opportunities for increasing vocabulary and understanding grammatical patterns present in the selection. At this same level reading and writing skills can also be developed. Oral communications skills may be improved through increased discussions about human and social problems described in the text. Furthermore, because literature treats cultural elements in contextualized discourse it also serves as a tool for incrementing communicative competence. In synthesis, we can say that literature plays a catalytic role in an interactive process in which each component (skill development, communicative competence and cultural knowledge) makes a significant contribution towards language learning at a higher, more complex level as well as towards personal and academic growth as the students' cultural awareness and tolerance for difference increase.

Dimension 4: The interaction between reader and text and the subsequent interpretive process involved in the reading of the literary text brings us to yet another aspect of the use of literature in the foreign language classroom: *aesthetic appreciation* of the language. Even if one subscribes to the thesis held by Brumfit and Carter (1986), in which the poetic function of language is not the only one present in literature nor is it the exclusive property of the literary text, certainly it is a predominant one and it is one that places literature in an undeniably privileged position to nurture aesthetic development. Stern (1987), for example,

in referring to the potential benefits of including literature in the foreign language program, is of the opinion that "Literature offers a unique aesthetic and intellectual experience that provides perceptive insight into man's existence within the artistic and intellectual boundaries of a literary framework, i.e., the literary experience" (p. 47). In addition, as Wright (1993) points out, because the exploration and communication of aesthetic values require a significant personal involvement with the text, the use of literature within an educational framework, particularly in foreign language programs, has remarkable potential for enriching the students' lives.

Furthermore, literature constitutes an ideal tool for dealing with aesthetic aspects of language because meaning is often transmitted by extra or metalinguistic features (sounds, melody, rhythm and visual aspects) rather than exclusively by morpho-syntactical features. Put another way, a melody played by a violin is different from the same melody played by the bassoon. Often, this balance between the ideational elements and the audio-visual structure of the poem (and other literary texts) is what determines its communicative potential and its aesthetic appeal. Also, it is possible to assume that an increase in aesthetic appreciation will be reflected in a more positive attitude towards the language (as well as a body of literature and a culture) and act as a motivational factor.

From a holistic point of view, the pleasure that is derived from acquiring an aesthetic appreciation of the language will positively influence communicative competence as the student actively seeks out more complex literary selections and devotes time and energy to reading and experiencing them. In addition, an understanding and appreciation of poetic devices such as metaphor, alliteration and rhyme, among others, serve to improve the learner's literary competence. This combination of factors will tend to interact to promote personal growth as the student gains greater self-confidence in his/her ability to function in the target language. Furthermore, this personal development is likely to be reflected in a more mature attitude towards cultural differences and an increased interest in social and moral values, thus encouraging academic growth.

Dimension 5: The role of *motivation* in foreign and second language learning has been attested to by a large number of authors (Dornyei 1994, Oxford and Shearin 1994, Stern 1987, Wright 1991, Omaggio 1986, Snow and Shapira 1985), to name but a few, whose research has been based primarily on the seminal work of Gardner and Lambert (1972). For some authors motivation is one of the primary reasons for using the literary text in the language learning context. Stern (1987) suggests that "Literature, as opposed to materials written especially for ESL/EFL, can motivate students to want to read and help them develop the habit of reading both in and out of class. And, because literature can be highly stimulating, interesting, and enjoyable in its own right, it can also motivate students to write and speak in English as well" (p. 47). Another author to advocate the use of the literary text in the foreign language classroom is Elliot (1990), who maintains that language learners need material of a high motiva-

tional value which will encourage them to become actively involved in the learning process.

With reference to student attitudes towards the target language (and its culture), Hirvela and Boyle (1988) recommend that particular attention be paid to students' likes and preferences when selecting literary texts, since the students' attitude towards the material can influence their motivation towards the literature and the target language. According to Rönnqvist and Sell (1994) this is particularly true in the case of adolescents. In fact, these authors propose the use of literature written specifically for teenagers in the target language, affirming that this type of literature is more relevant for the teenage reader who can identify with the themes, characters and situations present in the text. Naturally, as in any type of teaching situation, the use of a particular type of material or activity in the classroom is no guarantee that the students will be motivated; however, if properly approached, the literary text, because of its entertainment value, does possess significant motivational potential.

Obviously, the student's degree of motivation will be present in his/her attitude towards the language, the literary text and the cultural context. Motivation will also interact with any or all of the dimensions present in the holistic model. For example, Redmond (1994) emphasizes the motivational aspects of using the literary text and affirms: "Literature offers opportunities for personally gratifying experiences through the use of one's imagination, participation in vicarious experiences of fantasy and adventure, and involvement with human behavior in many different situations" (p. 430). From this, we can conclude that cultural awareness, aesthetic appreciation as well as literary competence are affected by this dimension. Furthermore, taking into consideration that these three dimensions have the potential to interconnect skill development and communicative competence, the motivational value of the literary text in the foreign language program is significant.

Dimension 6: We will now turn our attention to the sixth and final dimension contemplated in the holistic model: *literary competence.* Carter and Long (1991) have suggested that the acquisition of literary competence is not limited to the language classroom nor the literary text, but also occurs in a variety of daily situations as well as in word games, song lyrics and television commercials, to name but a few instances. They also point out that one of the most effective methods for achieving literary competence consists in stressing "the importance of the creative uses of language in the making of literature..." (p. 7). Thus, one must conclude that literature is an excellent, if not exclusive, vehicle for developing an awareness of the kinds of conventions, forms, symbols and figurative representations which characterize the works of certain authors, particular historical periods and/or different schools of literature.

Seen from the holistic point of view, the ability of the student to recognize and understand the literary conventions of a text is not only an indication of his or her level of literary competence; it is also closely related to his/her level of communicative competence, reading skill and his or her overall proficiency in the target language. This means that progress in one dimension will affect the

other dimensions positively, either directly or indirectly. There also exists a bi-directional relationship between aesthetic appreciation and literary competence, since an increased development in one will automatically exert a positive influence on the other. It is also logical to assume that the student's level of motivation is directly proportional to his or her levels of communicative competence, aesthetic appreciation and literary competence; the greater the level of motivation, the greater the level of development in any (or all) of the other dimensions. Furthermore, because of the historical, cultural and/or social elements implicitly or explicitly presented in the novel, short story, poem, or play, literary competence enhances and is enhanced by cultural knowledge. This network of relationships involved in achieving literary competence closely resembles what Brumfit and Carter (1986: 18) have described as "an interesting combination of linguistic, socio-cultural, historical and semiotic awareness."

While material selection and/or preparation is not one of the primary topics of this paper, any discussion involving issues of "authenticity", "cultural awareness", "aesthetic appreciation", "motivational potential", and "literary competence" inevitably brings up the question of which type of text is most appropriate for the teaching objective, the level and type of students, and the way in which it should be used. Obviously, the requirements of specific teaching situations cannot be dealt with in this paper, however, some of the more general criteria for material selection proposed by different authors are presented below.

Tomlinson (1986), for example, proposes that "universal appeal", "surface simplicity", "potential depth", "affective potential", "contemporariness of language", "brevity", and "potential for illustration" (pp. 35-36) be used as criteria for selecting poems to be used in the foreign and/or second language program. Carter and Long also suggest "general availability of the printed text", "representativeness of the selection of the literature as a whole", "relation to culture and/or country of reader", and "genre or theme" (1991: 141-144) be taken into consideration in the selection of teaching materials. For Içoz (1992), difficulty level of language, students' cultural knowledge related to target language, students' ability to recognize literary conventions or devices and students' cognitive development constitute the major factors to be aware of in selecting literary material for the language class, while for Redmond (1994: 430), "Interest level, difficulty of vocabulary, cultural authenticity, and the variety of topics that can be incorporated within the [elementary]curriculum" are of particular importance. Furthermore, according to this author, particular attention should be paid to the level of language when selecting the text (story) so that it can be used by the students in a wider variety of activities, such as dramatization, retelling, sequencing events, and making inferences, to name but a few.

In each of these cases, the guidelines put forth for choosing the literary text reflect the orientation of the respective authors: those giving preference to language development and those giving preference to affective aspects and personal growth. Purely practical issues such as text availability, whether the choice of material is restricted by a syllabus or whether the selection should be

simplified, complete or an extract, are also of interest to most professionals in the field.

A FRAMEWORK OF PERSONAL GROWTH AND ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

Central to the concept of *personal growth* in relation to literature in the foreign language program is the proposition that the pleasure and satisfaction derived from an increasing understanding of complex ideas, together with a heightened appreciation of cultural artifacts, will contribute towards an increased self-awareness and intellectual development. In addition to this, the development of the student's ability to recognize and appreciate the "melody" and beauty of language and its essential creativeness is seen as another important contribution of literature towards personal growth. Furthermore, personal growth can also be measured in the development of the student's confidence in his or her ability to communicate effectively in a wide range of contexts, situations and registers, both orally and in written form. And, finally, the use of the literary text promotes personal growth by teaching the learner how to relate aspects of a particular literary text to personal and social situations which go beyond both the text and the classroom. In synthesis, "involving" the student in a pleasurable and satisfying activity (reading literary texts) which will extend beyond the classroom and become a lifelong habit is contributing towards his or her personal growth. Thus, as Carter and Long (1991: 3) have stated, "Helping students to read literature more effectively is helping them to grow as individuals by developing their ability to establish productive and satisfying relationships with the people and the institutions around them."

Academic development, from the holistic perspective, is conceived of heuristically in terms of the student's ability to apply the knowledge, information and skills acquired in the foreign language program to other educational contexts. For example, the student's ability to generalize from a specific text to other works of literature in the target language and/or to the literary tradition of his or her native language can be seen as an indication of academic development. Another indicator of academic growth is the learner's capacity to relate historical facts and/or customs corresponding to a country where the target language is spoken, and which are found in a literary text, to the content of the "social studies" program in his or her native language. A further example of how the literary text can contribute towards academic development can be found in situations in which the descriptions of flora and fauna or geographical characteristics of a particular region or country encountered in the literary text can be related to subjects such as biology, botany and ecology, which are not normally associated with literature. In synthesis, we would propose that academic development affects and is affected by the student's overall proficiency in the target language, his or her knowledge of the target culture (and universal culture), and his or her literary competence. Moreover, academic development and personal growth also constitute a dialectical relationship in which an improvement in one is both the result and the cause of an improvement in the other.

CONCLUSIONS

An examination of the characteristics of each of the previously discussed dimensions and the way in which they are interconnected brings us to the conclusion that literature has much to offer to the foreign/second language program, and can be particularly effective when conceptualized from a *holistic perspective*. When literature occupies a central position in the foreign/second language learning-teaching process, it contributes to the development of the student both personally and academically in six different dimensions either sequentially or simultaneously. This occurs due to the fact that even when the primary teaching objective is centered on only one or two dimensions, the other dimensions are also affected, albeit indirectly. For example, an increase in reading skills has the potential for increasing communicative competence and cultural awareness, both of which may be reflected in an increase in aesthetic appreciation and motivation and contribute to personal growth. This does not imply that the process always follows a precise sequence nor that it must follow the same sequence but rather it demonstrates the way in which the dimensions interact.

It is important to mention that if one takes seriously the shift from the teacher-centered to the learner-centered process, a holistic approach offers practical advantages for elaborating foreign/second language programs from a more authentically democratic perspective. Although a teacher may select a text with the intention of exploiting it for a specific purpose (i.e., for increasing communicative competence), the student may exploit it for another (i.e., cultural knowledge) which is equally as important, legitimate and as efficient in terms of learning since it has been the student's decision. This means too that the percentage of increase in the development may not be equal in all six dimensions at the same time. For instance, the students' motivational levels may have increased by 40% while the increase in communicative competence may have been only 10% during the first semester. During the following semester both aesthetic appreciation and cultural knowledge may register increases of 20% and communicative competence may rise to 40%.

One must also take into account individual differences; not all students will register the same percentage of growth in all six dimensions. As McKay (1986) has pointed out, the highly elaborated message and the plurality of voices often encountered in the literary text are frequently at variance with the cognitive development of the reader, his or her linguistic competence, his or her experience of his or her own world and knowledge of the target culture. This, combined with his or her literary and extra-literary knowledge, makes the reader-text interaction even more complex and intense. Precisely because of this phenomenon the use of the literary text is particularly useful in heterogeneous classes. The important thing to keep in mind is that the systematic use of the literary text in the foreign/second language context, precisely because of its "multidimensionality", has the potential for achieving a balanced development.

Another interesting aspect of the "interaction" which takes place in this process is a product of the relationship that exists between the six dimensions

in which progress in any of the six, individually or in concert, increases and is increased by literary competence. It is also important to point out that the amount of development in each of the dimensions is relative to the course level. At the beginners level the influence of each of the six dimensions in the overall performance of the student may be only marginal while exercising a proportionally greater degree of influence in these same dimensions at the intermediate, upper intermediate and advanced levels. Also, the age of the student and his or her specific needs and whether or not he or she is studying the target language in his or her own country or abroad will all affect directly or indirectly the level of progress in each dimension. More important, however, than the percentage of progress made in one or the other dimension, or the degree of accuracy or literary competence, or cultural awareness is the fact that the interaction of all six dimensions contributes positively to the intellectual and spiritual growth of the individual, who has gained not only a measure of communicative competence in a foreign or second language but who has also acquired a more positive self-image as a result of having developed analytical skills and a better understanding of the world in which he or she lives and is thus in a position to make a more positive contribution to it.

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