Literature in Lower-Level Courses: Making Progress in Both Language and Reading Skills

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Abstract: This research project investigated the role of the literary text in intermediate reading instruction in an attempt to address the question of how instructors can integrate literary selections into all levels of language instruction. Specifically, the study examined one particular classroom environment and explored its relationship to our present understanding of the teaching of literature and reading comprehension. Using a qualitative research approach, the study investigated: (1) the interplay between "reading" and "literature" in the second language (L2) classroom; (2) the underlying beliefs and assumptions that the instructor and students bring into the classroom regarding literature and reading comprehension; and (3) how these underlying assumptions affect what occurs in class. A presentation of course goals, classroom roles, and class activities and tasks elucidates how each of these issues is influenced by the students' and instructor's conceptualization of the reading process. Suggestions are made to help language teachers incorporate literature into classroom instruction. Attention is also given to the Standards for Foreign Language Learning and to their implications for incorporating literary texts into an intermediate reading course.

Introduction

"It's called Reading in Spanish, but it's a literature course." This is how one student characterized Spanish 120, an intermediate reading course offered during a recent spring semester at a large research university. The intended audience of Spanish 120 was the student in his or her fifth semester of language study; it was the first course that students could take after fulfilling the four-semester language requirement. The course catalog described Spanish 120 as follows: "Emphasis on rapid reading comprehension. Selected readings from contemporary Hispanic literature, social sciences, current events, etc." Even though literature was a stated component of this course, the student quoted above differentiated between a "reading" course and a "literature" course—a distinction reflected in the language/literature curricula in many foreign language departments.

Historically, teaching language has consistently been viewed as a less sophisticated, and therefore less difficult task than teaching literature (Barnett 1991; Kramsch, 1993). Hoffman and James (1986) commented on the prevalent framework underlying many foreign language departments: "The teaching of literature to undergraduates legitimizes our standing as professors and the teaching of language does not" (p. 29). Even today, when literary texts are chosen to teach reading, language teachers seem constrained to teach these texts primarily for their information value. The result is a dichotomy between language teaching and literary instruction. Lazar (1993) referred to this distinction as the difference between the study of literature and the use of literature as a resource. The study of literature makes literature itself the content or sub-

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ject of a language course, while the use of literature as a resource draws on literature as one source among many different kinds of texts for promoting interesting language activities. Given this dichotomy, Kramsch (1993) called for the need to "reformulate their relation within the language teaching enterprise" (p. 8). She added that the pedagogical question is not whether language teachers should teach literature or not. Rather, instructors need to ask how they can help learners read literary texts.[1]

The development of linguistic skills and literary appreciation are common goals in many language programs. However, both researchers and instructors (Bernhardt, 1995; Scher, 1976; Schulz, 1981) have commented on the lack of articulation between courses in many foreign language departments. While lower level language classes may read literary works for language practice and reading comprehension, courses at the more advanced levels might use the literary selections for the development of knowledge of world literature, practice in reading and discussing creative work, and the understanding of literary concepts, genres, and terminologies (Mittman, 1999; Muyskens, 1983). Thus, the focus in beginning language courses is on skill acquisition while in advanced courses it is on the development of critical thinking skills using the target language. Bragger and Rice (1998) commented that language/literature courses often are organized in ways that create sudden jumps in difficulty level in both content and in language, and that expectation levels of instructors often do not correspond to the realities of student proficiency. As a result, students are confronted with major gaps between their current level of linguistic proficiency and content knowledge, and the high expectations and increased difficulty level at which they are asked to perform. Kramsch (1985) commented that learners often perceive an "unfair gap" between the literary selections of the upper levels and the readings they were offered at the elementary level. Moreover, literature courses traditionally constitute the core curriculum of advanced undergraduate studies in many foreign language departments (Klein, 1987). Once students leave the second-year classroom behind, they are confronted with the negotiation of a relative chaos of course sequencing. The lockstep approach to taking one course after another is less common since the curriculum offers students a variety of courses that can be taken during the fifth semester of study, so any given course beyond the second year contains a group of students of widely diverging experiences and abilities. (Mittman, 1999).

Challenges for the L2 Student

In the second language (L2), students are challenged by both the linguistic and literary aspects of literature courses. Linguistic competence in the L2 clearly plays a role in reading comprehension. One cannot read in a second language without some knowledge of that language. Limited linguistic proficiency could result in inaccurate decoding of target lan-

guage texts and even misunderstanding of the overall intent of the text (Davis, 1992). However, findings across studies have been discrepant and it is not easy to determine what specific linguistic knowledge on the part of the learner will enhance comprehension (Alderson, 1984; Bernhardt, 1991; Shook, 1996; Verhoeven, 1990). Unfortunately, a prevailing presumption in many literature courses is that language serves as a mere tool without which literary appreciation cannot go forward and that students should arrive in their literature classes with language proficiency as standard equipment—that is, with fluent, accurate, analytic linguistic ability (Barnett, 1991).

The students' limited linguistic ability is often further restricted by the particular representation of that language found in the literary text. While literary language is not completely separate from other forms of language, Lazar (1993) suggested that literary texts do involve special or unusual use of language such as creative use of style and register, complex themes, and higher instance of metaphors, similes, assonance, and alliteration.

Kramsch (1985) mentioned another factor that detracts from the L2 learners' comprehension of literary selections. She said that L2 readers, as nonintended readers, have the "difficult task of understanding intentions and beliefs that are not necessarily part of their representation of the world" (p. 357). Often this requires them to ascertain which role the author wants them to assume, or to disregard the writer's intentions and create their own meaning of the text. As stated by Bernhardt (1991), texts are manifestations of culture. These manifestations inherently imply socially acquired frames of reference, value systems, and idiosyncratic knowledge and beliefs. If one adheres to Kramsch's definition of reading as "the construction of a social reality between the reader and the text" (p. 357), the learner's prior knowledge—not simply skills or vocabulary—is crucial for reading comprehension.

Research on nontextual information as comprehension sources is conducted under the rubric of schema theory. Schema include familiarity with text topic or content, as well as familiarity with text structure or rhetorical organization (Barnett, 1989). Research shows that prior experience and familiarity with the context of a literary selection contributes to comprehension (Lee, 1988). Schema can be activated by linguistic and situational cues and can help or hinder the reader by constraining, elaborating, and filtering the interpretation of a text. (Lee & VanPatten, 1996). Background knowledge varies from one individual to another and the challenge lies not only in determining what knowledge is held by the readers but also how to activate the appropriate schema for the text to be read, thus adding another potentially problematic issue for learners' comprehension of a literary text.

Too often, when reading literature, students are expected to perform at a level of intellectual maturity that many

are unable to reach even in their native language (Nance, 1994). In many L2 literature courses, it is assumed that students already possess the requisite skills to understand and appreciate literature. Gaudiani (1984) said that many literature courses are "watered-down versions of the graduate courses faculty themselves took as students" (p. 294). Instructors expect students to analyze and theorize about texts from various perspectives, and present a critique of the selection according to certain literary theories. This mature level of performance is expected from students even though they never may have been given an opportunity to interact with L2 literary texts prior to the course in question. Thus, they are limited not only by their linguistic capacity, but also by their lack of critical and analytic ability.

However, it has also been suggested that students do have analytic ability but cannot display it in the L2 (Lee, 1988). Scher (1976) said that even if students do possess the capacity for analytic thinking, they often lack the technical vocabulary and critical concepts with which to define that experience. Instructors often require their students to comment on aspects of literary selections and to express concepts that they are unable to explain in the L2.

Considering these variables of linguistic level, background knowledge, textual factors, cognitive maturity, and unfamiliar cultural allusions, teachers are confronted with the question of how and when to introduce literary texts into the classroom. How can instructors help their students bridge the perceived gap between basic language instruction and advanced literature courses? Must students attain a certain level of linguistic competence before being asked to interact with literary texts? Do students possess the necessary intellectual development to "handle" literature? Finally, can specific textual features be addressed appropriately in the L2 so that the literary value of the text is not diminished for the sake of language practice?

Several methodological approaches have attempted to address these issues. First, Birckbichler and Muyskens (1980) suggested a student-centered approach. In such an approach, literature is read and analyzed not only in light of the author's intentions but also in light of the students' own interests, and personal reactions and judgments. The aim is to arrive at a better understanding of the self as well as of the human condition. Such an approach addresses the interpersonal issue and takes into account the linguistic limitations of students. The question remains, however, how do we develop a student's linguistic capacity to deal with literary selections with this approach? Second, Muyskens (1983) underscored the need for introductory literature courses that "aim at improving students' reading ability, on the one hand, and introducing the basic concepts of literary criticism on the other" (p. 416). While this is a viable option, it only begins to address the issue of literature in the classroom at a more advanced level of language

instruction. Other researchers (Kramsch, 1993; Lazar, 1993) felt that the integration of language and literature need not wait until that introductory literature course. Instead, they believed it could happen earlier in the language learning process, through a language-based approach to teaching literature.

A language-based approach has several advantages. As outlined by Lazar:

> Studying the language of the literary text will help to integrate the language and literature syllabuses more closely. Detailed analysis of the literary text will help students to make meaningful interpretations or informed evaluations of it. At the same time, students will increase their general awareness and understanding of [the L2]. Students are encouraged to draw on their knowledge of familiar grammatical, lexical or discoursal categories to make aesthetic judgments of the text. (p. 23)

Theoretically, this seems a well-grounded conceptualization, but exactly how is it manifested in the classroom? Spanish 120, the class examined in the present study, is a course that was designed to accomplish this integration of language and literature. Keeping in mind the course description, as well as the fact that two literary anthologies were the required texts for the course[2] this researcher was curious to see how the two would interact, thus motivating the following investigation.

Spanish 120: A Case Study

The purpose of this research project was to investigate the role of the literary text in intermediate reading instruction in an attempt to address the question of how instructors can integrate literary selections into all levels of their classes and help learners to comprehend them. Specifically, this study sought to discover what was happening in one particular classroom environment and to explore its relationship to our present understanding of the teaching of literature and reading comprehension. The following questions guided the project:

(1) What is the interplay between "reading" and "literature" in the second language classroom?

(2) What are the underlying beliefs and assumptions that the instructor and students bring into the classroom regarding literature and reading comprehension?

(3) How do these underlying assumptions affect what occurs in class?[3]

During the semester of this investigation, Spanish 120 met two days a week for an hour and fifteen minutes each session (1:00–2:15 p.m.). There were 14 students enrolled in the class. Two students audited the class and the rest took it for college credit. Four informants participated in this study.[4] Three were female undergraduate students who self selected to participate.

Karla,[5] a native speaker of English, was in her sophomore year of study. A highly motivated student, she entered the university with a full semester of Advanced Placement credits, mostly in French. Spanish was one of her three minor areas of study. Sue was a freshman planning to begin a Spanish minor. She was also a native speaker of English. Isabel, the third informant, grew up speaking both Spanish and English. She came from a Cuban family and Spanish was the language spoken at home. She was in her junior year of study. Her major was international media studies and Spanish was one of two minors that she was pursuing; the other was business.

The fourth informant was the instructor of the course, a male with 33 years of teaching experience and a native speaker of Spanish. His area of specialization was contemporary Spanish drama. This was not the first time he had taught this particular course.

The data collection process for the study utilized fundamental techniques relied on by qualitative researchers for gathering information: observation, interviewing, and document analysis. Like most qualitatively oriented studies, the research combined several data collection techniques in an effort to bring multiple sources to bear on the topic and to avoid distortions in the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

First, each informant participated in a formal, tape-recorded interview, lasting from 30 to 40 minutes. The instructor was also interviewed. The questions used for the interview came from standard interview protocols (see Appendixes A and B). These interviews were conducted individually in the same classroom where the class met. The only exception was the interview with the instructor, which was conducted in his office. The goal of the interview was to probe the subjects' perceptions of literature, its role in the foreign language classroom, and the particular actions undertaken by the informants when interacting with a literary text. In addition, the interview questions inquired about demographic data and information on each individual's academic history and experience with foreign languages.

A second source of data came from observations of Spanish 120. The class was observed for one unit, which consisted of five consecutive class periods at approximately the tenth week of the semester. The intention of the observation was to compare the information received from the interviews with what was actually occurring in the classroom. Certain features of the classroom situation were the focus of the observation: the activities accomplished, the physical arrangement of the room, and the patterns of interaction between the students, the instructor, and the text.

This observational aspect of the data collection procedure proved to be extremely helpful. It is important to note that the researcher was also a Spanish instructor. While this may have been useful for enhancing sensitivity to and increasing awareness of the issues, it also may have caused a certain amount of hidden bias since every instructor has his or her own ideas about reading instruction as well as the use of literature in the L2 classroom. The classroom observations were beneficial in helping to minimize that bias. Clearly, the focus of this investigation was pedagogical. By being in the classroom, the researcher was better able to see the instructor from the perspective of a student and could more easily diminish her own role as an instructor, although not entirely dismiss its effect on the interpretation of the observed events.

An additional aspect to the data collection came after the classroom observations. Shorter, informal follow-up interviews were conducted with the instructor and the students as was deemed necessary to clarify any questions or to obtain additional explanations of issues that arose during the observation. Often the instructor would expound in greater detail on particular aspects of his lesson and explain the logic behind his actions. These informal interviews also gave the students an opportunity to provide additional reactions to the class hour or to the text being discussed. This step proved helpful in the final analysis of the data. It often made the interplay between the students, the instructor, and the text more evident by revealing those aspects that were not so easily observable.

The final source of data was a document analysis of the course syllabus, the literary texts being studied, course assignments, handouts, and other pertinent information that surfaced during the course of the investigation.

Qualitative data analysis entails the reduction and interpretation of raw data via the generation of categories, themes, and patterns (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Through the information obtained from the interviews (both formal and informal), the classroom observations, the course documents, and the researcher's own experience as a language instructor, the following interpretations were made regarding the research questions mentioned previously.

Underlying Beliefs and Differing Perspectives

There are certain underlying beliefs and assumptions that instructors as well as students bring with them to a course. Those precepts contribute to the formulation of course goals and classroom roles. In addition, the class activities and tasks are designed from that same perspective and further reflect the theoretical foundation from which the instructor is approaching the course. By addressing each of these aspects, the researcher hopes to provide a picture of current methodology in action as represented in Spanish 120.

As mentioned in the introduction to this article, Karla clearly distinguished between what constitutes a course in reading and what constitutes a course in literature. In her opinion, there was a distinct difference between the two. She said, "If you're taking a literature course, it's not about newspaper articles." She felt that people could read "that

sort of thing" on their own. She added that in a literature course, "you're not talking about just anything that's written and published . . . there's another level, a step up." When asked to clarify that statement, she said that literature "has a lot to say and it doesn't have to directly say it. . . There's always something more that you can get out of it other than what is just very bluntly stated. It's subject to interpretation a lot." Before taking Spanish 120, Sue thought that literature was just "a book that you would read and the story line and the plot, but I didn't realize how much more is implied in it. [I thought] it was just basic stuff and I was wrong." This course had taught her that there were "different meanings" that you can get out of literature.

Perhaps her conceptualization could be attributed to her instructor's view of literature. He said, "When I read something, I don't want a plot. That's what I read for pleasure, to distract myself. I want a plot that will serve a deeper purpose." That "deeper purpose" was what he called the "second level of reading" which he was always trying to help his students discover. This seemed to be his primary goal in the course. After our interview, he stated that while this was called a reading course, it was "essentially the same thing" as a literature course. He added, "When you teach literature, you're teaching something other than just reading it out loud or understanding. You have to get into this other level of the deeper sense of it."

In contrast, the students had goals distinct from those of their professor. Karla was primarily interested in the historical and cultural context of the readings. For that reason, she felt that using literature in class was an advantage. She said, "I've gotten more exposure to historical things, to different viewpoints, and I mean it's just not something you think about, you know, come up with on your own . . . Like, I wouldn't have known a lot of the authors and I might not have gone out of my way to find out about them." Spanish 120 was one of her favorite courses that semester because she felt that what she learned in the course was going to be very useful for her. Karla confirmed Muyskens's (1983) opinion that one of the benefits of literature is the multiplicity of viewpoints it offers and its potential to expand upon one's world knowledge.

Sue had different expectations of Spanish 120. She approached the course with the hope that she would learn "how to do more with the language." For example, she wanted to learn "how to read a short story and interpret it on my own, not with the help of vocabulary words." However, she expressed frustration at achieving those goals. While she thought that the course would fulfill her expectations, "I didn't think it would be as difficult as it seems to be. I mean, it's challenging and it's interesting to see what you can do with it, but it's hard." She further explained that "it's hard when you haven't really been exposed to this kind of thing before." Her statement further endorsed the existence of the language/literature dichotomy previously discussed. Sue felt that she was being expected to perform at a level for which she had never been prepared.

Finally, Isabel's primary goal was to perfect her Spanish and to have more experience in reading. While she expressed no specific expectations for the course, she agreed with Karla that it provided "more experience in different things." Using literature in class was an advantage for her because "it's a good way to learn how to write in different ways and a good way to express yourself."

The students found that they had to adapt their goals to comply with those of the instructor as the course proceeded. Sue especially struggled with this. She said, "I don't like the fact that I think he makes the stories hard to interpret . . . You think you have an understanding of the story but the questions on the exam are more psychologically based . . . I think he gets too deep into things and it makes it a lot harder to do well." What does it mean to do well? Sue said that her best experience with literature was "probably when I'm sitting in Spanish and I really realize that I understand the stories the way he wants us to."

When asked what his goals were for his students the instructor responded, "You see my point—yeah, it's a language course, but I'm also in a subject area that requires a different kind of comprehension. It's not simply language teaching. And I'm really more interested in their knowing what I want them to understand. However they get it, I want them to get it."

In order for his students to "get it," the instructor found that he often had to switch into English when speaking to them. The issue of language use was very revealing of the professor's aims for the course. In the beginning of the course he spoke only in Spanish, but soon found that he was not able to continue that way. "You size up the group, and especially after the first exam, you find out what they've understood and what they haven't understood, or worse, what they've misunderstood. So, I try to clarify."

Why were they unable to understand? Nance (1994) would likely have attributed it to several factors, one of which related to their lack of knowledge of specific literary vocabulary. Additionally, she would likely have added that students are unaccustomed to speaking about literature and should be given models and practice if they are to discuss literature well. Nance said that instructors need to become more cognizant of the complexity and sequencing of processes that they perform almost automatically. They need to approximate for the students the prior knowledge necessary for comprehending, interpreting, and appreciating the literary selection they are asking the students to read. Additionally, Nance asserted that students would be less likely to engage in literary criticism if their instructor expected them to hazard a guess or go out on a limb in a discussion, so the instructor must sequence the intellectual demands more carefully as well as the degree of "intellectual risk" that the students run in the classroom.

Through these measures, the instructor could decrease the necessity of resorting to the use of the students' native language in the classroom. This instructor, however, had no difficulty with using English as long as his students were learning what he wanted them to learn. On the fifth day that this researcher observed the class, they looked at several poems by Pablo Neruda that the instructor presented on a handout in English translation. He apologized that they were in English but stated that they had ideas and concepts that were important and that exposure to Neruda was more important than using Spanish.

Both Karla and Sue felt that the instructor's use of English was not detrimental to their learning experience; instead, they saw it as a positive aspect of the course. Karla said that it was helpful for her since "you're not talking about everyday things" and "there are a lot of things that he's explaining that we can totally miss because we're not fluent and he is." She added that she knew she would miss a lot if he spoke only in Spanish. After all, "I know that's the whole point of it, just so we get everything out of it." Sue agreed with Karla, "I don't think it hurts only because there are some things that we're not going to understand in Spanish." However, she did express the concern that "if someone who hasn't had Spanish in a long time came into this course, I think they would be a little bit confused because I think they'd be trying to learn both [language and literature]."

Isabel said that she would rather not hear English. She wanted the instructor to speak in Spanish because she wanted as much exposure to the language as possible. She added, "I think he should speak the whole class in Spanish because the students are here to learn Spanish and that's the only way they're going to learn it." Isabel's perspective certainly reflected her own personal goals for the course!

The course seemed to follow the traditional view of the instructor as the dispenser of knowledge, and the students as passive recipients of that information (Collie & Slater, 1987; Lee & VanPatten, 1995). Nance (1994) defined such a course as one where the "students never experience what makes us so passionate about literature—the moment of insight when we draw a connection for ourselves" (p. 23). In Spanish 120, the instructor was viewed as the one who knew what was important about the texts, and the students often expressed a feeling of tremendous responsibility to develop the ability to interpret the texts like the instructor. Isabel said that the most challenging aspect of the course was "reading between the lines; like when you read the story and you come to class and you have a whole different idea [than] what it really means." Karla said, "If you come out of class not understanding something, it's your fault." When Sue was unable to understand something she said, "I just feel that maybe I have to try a little harder to learn the stories rather than having him tell."

Karla explained the typical class as beginning with an assigned reading that students were to do before coming to class. Then, "We read through the story and there's discussion. You can ask questions and he makes sure that everything that was key to understanding is brought out in the open." What does she mean when she says there is discussion? He told them what they needed to understand about each of the texts. "You can ask him something and he'll explain it right to you." The instructor provided the students with his understanding of the meaning or significance of certain passages, generally consisting of "stock interpretations" that the students were required to give back to him in written form on the exams. Nance (1994) described these stock interpretations as oversimplifications that obscure and finally come to substitute for the text itself.

Unfortunately, this is an all too common practice in many literature classes. Kramsch (1985) presented Ricoeur's distinction between explaining a text and understanding it. A teacher can explain and teach the form and content of a text, but an understanding of the values, intentions, and beliefs embedded in the text can only be achieved through "open discussion and negotiation of meanings" (p. 357). This was affirmed by Nance (1994) as she lamented that the literature class has generally been "a passive experience as our students wait for us to tell them what each work means" (p. 23). Thus, for the students in the current study it could be said that the difficulty lay not in the literature itself, but rather in discovering their instructor's interpretation of it.

During the researcher's observations, the instructor spoke 90% of each class hour. He asked students to take turns reading aloud segments of the literary text. Each student read once during each class period. Starting at one end of the room (students sat in rows, in assigned seats), the instructor asked the first student to begin reading. Periodically, he interrupted the student in order to comment on sections that he found interesting or worthy of note. Occasionally he asked students, "¿Qué puede simbolizar una mariposa?" (What could the butterfly symbolize?) or "¿Qué representa el caballo negro?" (What does the black horse represent?) He often provided the answer to his own questions when no one responded to his queries. When they did respond, he replied, "Sí, es una posibilidad. ¿Hay otra?" (Yes, that's a possibility. Is there another?) or "Sí, es verdad. Pero ¿podría ser otra cosa?" (Yes, that's true. But could it be something else?) After he commented sufficiently on that passage, the class continued with the next student reading aloud until they made their way around the room. Each class period followed this general format, with little variation of activity types. This approach appeared to engage the same few students in every class meeting, but by no means involved the entire class.

When asked why he had the students read aloud, the instructor indicated that "when they hear each other read, they can appreciate the sound of the language." Additionally, he wanted them to realize "that they are reading something beyond the plot, as I said, to get to that second level of meaning." He concluded, "So I see it both as an introduction to reading in terms of actual reading and in terms of actual comprehension of the meaning of literary writing."

Karla, Sue, and Isabel confirmed what Bernhardt (1983) said about oral reading. Given that phonological encoding of L2 texts generally requires a considerable amount of mental energy, Bernhardt felt that reading aloud in class should be reserved for pronunciation practice, without demands of thorough comprehension. All of the informants appreciated the reading aloud activity for the practice it afforded them in pronunciation. However, they were unable to confirm that it helped them to achieve that second goal of comprehension. Thus, their failure to comprehend gave their professor his opening to explain what needed to be understood, further affirming his perception of the necessity to explain the text to them.

Karla said she was very glad that they read aloud in class: "You're sitting in class and you hear everyone. You hear a huge difference in accents. And I'm always trying really hard because I know who has the really good accents, that are always trying very hard, and it's helped me work on my own [accent]." Sue agreed that "it helps our pronunciation . . . it gives me practice." Isabel said it was good because "with him being here he could let you know if you're pronouncing a word wrong or anything like that . . . and it helps you to read quicker."

However, when the class discussed poetry, the instructor chose not to have the students read aloud. Instead, he read it to them. He said,

> I want them to hear what poetry should sound like. It's such a specialized kind of thing, that just having them read without knowing what it is they're reading or why they're reading a short line here and a long line there, so I'm not having them do very much reading [aloud] right now. But they've been doing it all the way through to this period.

In such a way, students were exposed to the instructor's interpretation of the text. However, they were not permitted to experiment and give their own voice to the text. As Rosenblatt (1985) expressed, "the same text may give rise to different works in transactions with different readers or with the same reader at different times" (p. 34). Thus, she rejected the notion held by this instructor that there is a single "correct" reading of the text of a literary work. Kramsch (1993) stressed the importance of allowing students to "tease out and interpret the various 'voices of the mind' that give the text depth and meaning" (p. 98).

Another common classroom activity was the use of films. Film can make a major contribution to the literature course curriculum. Research on the use of video, film, and television in the L2 classroom is vast, and has focused principally on its benefits for the provision of comprehensible input and for the development of listening comprehension. (Altman, 1989; Gillespie, 1985; Lyman-Hager, 1994; Phillips, 1991). Possibly one of the greatest contributions of video to the literature course is the rich cultural data that it provides. (Ariew, 1994).

In two of the five class hours that were observed, the instructor showed films. His goal was to present the cultural and historical context of the author and the literary text, thus providing background information as well as visual input. One film was an English documentary on the life of García Lorca and was shown the day prior to the planned discussion of his works. The second film, also in English, spoke of Pablo Neruda and his contribution to the world of literature. This film was produced prior to Neruda's death in 1973. Karla confessed that she had trouble staying awake during the film, and actually drowsed during part of the class. Even so, her overall response to the class was positive. However, not all students are as enthusiastic as Karla about their literature courses.

Several researchers have noted the declining enrollments in foreign language literature courses (Bragger & Rice, 1998). Muyskens (1983) remarked that "while undergraduate language enrollments seem to be increasing, fewer students now choose to study second language literatures" (p. 414). She attributed this to a deficiency in the education of foreign language teachers and she commented on the irony that "those who will spend their lives teaching literature are rarely introduced to methods for doing so (other than by occasionally watching those who teach them how to interpret a literary work)" (p. 414). Many foreign language departments traditionally have provided little or no training in teaching language or literature. The instructor of Spanish 120 had never taken a methodology course but he said that wasn't a problem for him because "the methodology in those days was not complicated like it is now." Did this lack of understanding of the most recent research discoveries and innovations in teaching methodology affect his students' desire to continue studying literature?

While all informants expressed a desire to continue with Spanish, none of them felt like she would be able to fit it into her schedule. When asked if she planned to take more literature courses, Karla responded, "I don't think I can. I want to get out of here in four years . . . There are certain things that I have to take." Isabel said she would consider taking another course in Spanish literature; however, she did not express it as a priority. Sue said,

I think I have to concentrate more on the grammar part of Spanish for now. Then I think maybe if I have time in my junior or senior year I might take another one . . . when I read the stories, I think that's part of my problem. I don't know enough vocabulary and I need to learn how to really form sentences right in order for me to be able to understand them.

Sue's comment further exemplifies the polarity that exists between language learning and literature instruction. Her desire to "concentrate more on the grammar" seems to imply that this course did not help her to bridge the gap between the two to better prepare her for literature courses at a more advanced level.

A New Perspective: The National Standards

Spanish 120 provided one perspective of current methodology as it represented the underlying beliefs and assumptions about reading instruction and the teaching of literary texts. Through a presentation of course goals, classroom roles, and class activities and tasks, it was evident how each of these issues was influenced by the students' and the instructor's conceptualization of the learning process. As previously mentioned, there is a definite distinction between reading instruction and the teaching of literature in this context. While Spanish 120 was ideally a course where students and instructors could potentially bridge that gap, it was evident that the individuals involved had very distinct perspectives and goals related to the course. The fundamental challenge then is how to integrate specific cognitive and linguistic goals in courses like Spanish 120 to create a coherent L2 curriculum where at all levels, the expectations of the instructor are informed by the realities of the linguistic and cultural possibilities of the students.

Kern (1992) called for L2 educators to respond to the current developments in reading research that demonstrate the interactive nature of the reading process. Instructors need to shift the emphasis from factual level recall to the development of higher order levels of comprehension. He agreed with Bernhardt (1983) and others (e.g., Lee, 1999) who said that the focus of L2 reading should be expanded to include the development of reading as process as well as product. Kramsch (1993) said it is possible to bring together the two ends of the language/literature polarity. Reading is both an exercise to reinforce a student's knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, and a source of information about the foreign culture. Students can learn to decode forms in texts ("reading to learn") as well as learn to decode information in the text and make sense of it despite a deficient knowledge of forms ("learning to read"). How can this be done?

The Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century (National Standards, 1999) have contributed to the shift in focus of language learning and teaching from particular methodologies to a more holistic view that encompasses notions of communication and concentrates on all the facets of language and content.[6] These standards provide an overall framework for setting learning goals without specifying exact curricula. Rather than beginning with the traditional notion that the four skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) comprise a language, the standards begin with a framework of communicative modes that include interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational modes that are based on the types of contexts in which we use language. They are organized within the five goal areas that make up foreign language education: communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities. The standards give attention to language as both a cultural and cognitive practice (Arens & Swaffar, 2000). A summary of the national standards is included in Appendix C.

This new perspective can contribute much to the elimination of the language versus literature (skill vs. content) dichotomy. By setting different goals for each language activity, the Standards alter our focus on what a reader will define as successful outcomes in learning a foreign language. A literary text, for example, simulates various language uses and demands within a self-enclosed culture in order to communicate their significance to an audience outside the text. Successful reading of that text, in consequence, can be defined in various ways. To read a text learners must also understand the cultural context that prompts and augments its messages. In this sense all texts are products of practices that yield perspectives on a culture's people, places, events, and concepts, and students must learn these cultural practices as well as the words themselves (Arens & Swaffar, 2000).

The multiple levels of meaning and variety of interpretations in a literary text demonstrate to the learner the complexity of the philosophy and behavior of the target culture, and exemplify the many ways that language is used to encode these meanings, thereby integrating the linguistic and literary aspects of the text. The cultural features of literature represent a powerful merging of language, affect, and intercultural encounters and often provide the exposure to living language that a second language student lacks (Shanahan, 1997). However the relationship between literature and culture is not at all simple. Lazar (1993) warned against the danger that students may fall into the fallacy of assuming that a literary work represents the totality of a society when in fact it may be a highly atypical account of one particular milieu during a specific period of time in history. She said, "Our response to the cultural aspect of literature should always be a critical one, so that the underlying cultural and ideological assumptions in the texts are not merely accepted and reinforced, but are questioned, evaluated, and if necessary, subverted" (p. 17). An approach consistent with the national standards would invite such ques-

tioning of native and target cultural assumptions since it is the differences in world view and behavior patterns that give rise to misunderstanding and conflict. By expecting these differences and analyzing them, students shape their own awareness, and develop cross-cultural understanding and respect (National Standards, 1999).

According to Bragger and Rice (1998), simply introducing literary content into language programs does not lead automatically to the desired outcomes of the national standards. For learning to occur there must be familiarity with either the language needed to deal with the content or the content itself. Students gain cultural insights while at the same time enhancing their general language proficiency. Therefore, it is important for instructors to select their texts carefully. Lazar (1993) suggested that instructors keep in mind three main areas: the type of course, the type of students, and certain factors connected with the text (e.g., relevance, availability, linguistic complexity, length). One caveat given by Lee (1988) was that "readers of all levels of proficiency can interact (to some degree no matter how limited) with all kinds of texts" (p. 946). What is of central importance is how a reader interacts with a text and not so much the texts themselves or the skills the reader demonstrates, an assertion consistent with the recommendations of the national standards.

Current research and classroom practices indicate that a variety of approaches can successfully lead learners to the standards. The best methodological approach for language instruction is dependent on factors related to the student (e.g., age, native language, learning preferences, cognitive development, goals for learning), the context (e.g., learning environment), and the language being studied. The standards are not a curriculum guide and while they do not describe specific course content or a recommended scope and sequence, they do suggest the types of content and curricular experiences needed to enable students to achieve the standards.

Integrating the standards into any existing methodology will likely imply many changes to the overall language program, and also to attitudes of both students and instructors. Instructors adhering to an approach in accord with the standards will have to adapt their goals to a level that is appropriate to the experience and possibilities of their learners. Additionally, they may need to change their task sequence and assessment choices to gauge if their learners are achieving those goals (Arens & Swaffar, 2000). Such adjustments will add richness and depth to our language courses and enrich the curriculum by providing a broad range of experience and knowledge to our language learners.

Applying the National Standards

Applying these principles to courses such as Spanish 120, several areas of opportunity become evident for instructors to create an integrated course that addresses both reading and literary instruction. By working with literary texts, learners are given the opportunity to develop their competence in virtually every one of the five Cs of foreign language study. There is potential for them to engage in conversations and express feelings and emotions as they react to the literary text, thus meeting one of the communication standards. They are provided with opportunities to understand practices and perspectives of the culture from the point of view of writers within that culture, thereby addressing aspects of the cultures standards. They also can analyze the relationship between the particular cultural concepts present in the literary text and their own culture as the comparisons standards suggest. Learners additionally learn about topics and issues presented in the works they read and consequently work on the connections standards. As stated by Henning (1993), through literature, students can develop a full range of linguistic and cognitive skills, cultural knowledge, and sensitivity.

In courses like Spanish 120, students ideally focus on both the linguistic and cultural aspects of the literary text. An additional goal of such courses is the introduction of literary concepts that prepare students well for future literature courses. Using a text that the instructor used during the present observation of his class (excerpts from *Platero y yo* by Juan Ramón Jiménez in Andrian, 1987), the following learning scenario suggests activities that are congruent with the national standards and demonstrates how they could be applied to a reading course that utilizes literary texts. The activities involve both individual work and small group collaboration.

Prereading Activities

Prereading activities to prepare students to interact with the text include an assignment asking students for a personal reaction to the theme or subject of the reading. In the case of *Platero y yo*, students think about animals and a person's relationship to them. These entries are then shared in class discussion, via electronic mail, or posted on a course Web page. As previously mentioned, to activate students' background knowledge, the instructor of Spanish 120 showed films to the students. Although film is a useful tool in presenting cultural and biographical information, another option that is motivating to students and that requires their active participation is the creation of a biographical sketch of the author, or a regional montage using pictures or photos. Students work in groups to create posters and later present them to their classmates.

Targeted Standards: These prereading activities target Standard 1.1 because students communicate with each other orally and in writing. They also address Standard 1.3 since students present their work to their classmates. Finally, the prereading activities also target Standard 3.1 since students learn about the author and about Spain and Andalusia as they prepare their biographical sketches and regional montages.

Reading Activities

While reading, students are asked to analyze certain words and phrases that appear in the text, especially deviant or unusual language. In the case of *Platero y yo,* the text is written phonetically in some places to represent how an Andalusian would speak. (In the observed class when the instructor came to this portion of the text, he simply stated, "This is *jerga andalusa.* We'll let you off the hook." In essence, he ignored an opportunity to focus on a linguistic issue with rich cultural allusions.) In addition, students' attention is directed to words connected with a particular lexical set as they read. With the text of *Platero y yo,* such an activity serves well to introduce students to the concept of personification in literature, since in many instances human qualities are attributed to the donkey *Platero.* After underlining all such words in the text, students are asked to speculate on the metaphorical or symbolic meaning of them.

Targeted Standards: These reading activities address specifically the following standards: (1) Standard 1.2 as students read and interpret the written text; (2) Standard 2.2 since they are working with a text that is a product of both an individual writer and the culture in which the writer and text are situated; and (3) Standard 3.1 as they learn about literary theory and personification through their in-depth study of the text.

Postreading Activities

In class, subsequent to the reading of the text, the instructor asks students to read brief interpretations of the text (possibly from critics) and decide which one they think is the most plausible or appropriate. Students are asked to compare various English translations of the work and decide which one is the most satisfactory. Students are also asked to imagine filming the work, which requires them to determine what visual images they would provide for each segment of the work as it is recited, after which they are expected to render a dramatic interpretation of the text. This type of reading aloud activity focuses on pronunciation, but only after the students have already concentrated on the meaning of the text. Follow-up activities include a discussion of appropriate behaviors and feelings in their culture or society in a particular situation. Then students compare this with the emotions expressed in the text about that situation. Are these individual to the writer or indicative of cultural norms? Students also discuss the values and worldview that are either implicitly or explicitly expressed in the text. Do they agree or disagree with them? Finally, if the writer is contemporary, students could engage in correspondence with the author and share their reactions to the text.

Targeted Standards: These postreading activities target several additional standards: (1) Standards 3.2 and 4.2 as students consider the relationship between humans and animals in their native as well as the target culture; (2) Standard 4.1 where students compare and contrast the English and Spanish language systems as they determine the best translation of the text and as they observe the variety of ways that language is used to express ideas in the text; and (3) Standard 5.1 as students correspond with the writer and experience the Hispanic literary world.

The learning scenario described above provides some of the many options open to an instructor who is interested in teaching reading and literature in a manner congruent with the national standards. The suggested activities engage students in the process of literary awareness and reading skill development, and they provide an introduction to literary criticism. These activities also enable the students to use Spanish while dealing with intellectual content at a high level. The students are accomplishing a variety of tasks and are working with a variety of audiences (classmates, instructor, and possibly the author) in numerous contexts.

Analysis

It is important to keep in mind the limitations of this study. First, the transferability of the results could be problematic. Due to the specificity of the context, time period, and participant pool, the present investigation is limited in its replicability. Further research applied to distinct populations and language groups would provide additional insight and perspective to the relationship between reading instruction and the teaching of literature. Second, qualitative research by nature requires considerable involvement of the researcher in the data collection and interpretation process. This researcher's own personal experiences and beliefs are embedded in the research design and therefore may have distorted the interpretation of the data. A third limitation is the nature of the participant pool. Using only volunteers for the interview process may have influenced the results since it is likely that the students who were willing to participate may not be entirely representative of the group of students who were enrolled in Spanish 120 during the time that the research was conducted.

Qualitative research is by nature cyclical and continuous, and the present discussion opens many avenues for further investigation. As in other fields of inquiry, foreign language study needs to reexamine its disciplinary base and its underlying presuppositions. This can be accomplished with continued research and collaboration between L2 educators and specialists in other fields such as reading and language arts. The profession needs to engage in collaborative discussion regarding program goals across instructional levels. Thus, we can cooperatively explore ways of creating a coherent language program where students can move forward from early levels of instruction toward the advanced levels of foreign language study.

Conclusion

As the results of the present study indicate, the intermediate reading course is often plagued by misconceptions and

unrealistic expectations of both students and instructors. It is true that no single methodology will resolve all the issues related to reading and literary instruction. The standards call for a broader conceptualization of the foreign language program, and they offer one valid approach for addressing the language/literature dichotomy in classes like Spanish 120. Rather than looking at reading instruction and the teaching of literature as two mutually exclusive elements of the language curriculum and then searching for ways to bridge the gap between the various levels of second language courses, it is more appropriate to see how literary texts can be used at all levels to enhance instruction not only in the reading process, but also in the acquisition of other linguistic and cultural skills. Due to the focus of courses aligned with the standards, the debate of reading versus literary instruction ceases to exist. Any course can offer opportunities to utilize literary texts at all levels and promote both linguistic and literary awareness.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. There is considerable controversy among literary theorists and critics about how to define "literature." For the purposes of the present discussion, literature is taken to mean "those novels, short stories, plays and poems which are fictional and convey their message by paying considerable attention to language which is rich and multi-layered" (Lazar 1993, p. 5).

2. The two texts were the following: (1) Andrian, G. W. (1987). *Modern Spanish prose* (4th ed.). New York: Macmillan. (2) Coleman, A. (Ed.). (1969). *Cinco maestros: Cuentos modernos de hispanoamerica.* San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich. During the present observation of the class only the first text was used.

3. Qualitative research methods assume that systematic inquiry must occur in a natural setting rather than an artificially constrained one such as an experiment. Initial questions for research often come from personal experience and real-world observations. One purpose of qualitative research is to *discover* important questions, processes, and relationships, not to *test* them; guiding hypotheses are merely tools used to generate questions and to search for patterns (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

4. Such a small number of participants is common in qualitative research studies. The extensive use of interviews and personal observation requires intensive, in-depth interaction with the participants and a large subject pool would be quite unwieldy.

5. In order to maintain confidentiality, the names of the participants have been changed.

6. Although the standards were designed for K–12 instruction, they have had an impact on beginning and intermediate levels of college instruction as well. Phillips (1999) said that the majority of language specific organizations who have endorsed the standards consider them applicable for K–16 instruction.

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Appendix A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

(Student)

I am trying to understand current views of foreign language literature from the perspective of both students and instructors. More specifically, I am interested in learning more about what you think of literature and its place in foreign language education. Let me begin with some broad questions.

I. Demographic Data / History

    1. What year are you in your educational program?

    2. What is your major? Why did you choose that major?

    3. What is your native language? Do you speak/read/understand any other languages other than (English) and Spanish?

    4. What language classes have you taken?

    5. Have you ever studied abroad? Where?

    6. What type of reading do you do on a regular basis?

II. Perceptions About Literature and Spanish

    1. How do you define "literature?"

    2. Why did you decide to take this reading course?

    3. What were your expectations for this class? Do you feel they were met?

    4. Why do you think a student should/should not study (Spanish) literature?

    5. What role do you think the use of English should play in the classroom?

    6. How do you feel about reading aloud in class?

    7. What do you enjoy most (least) about this class?

    8. What aspects of the class are most challenging for you?

    9. Describe the activities that you feel are most helpful for learning how to read in Spanish.

III. Actions

    1. Describe what you do to prepare the reading for this class. (where, when, what, how, etc.)

    2. Tell me a story about your worst experience with literature.

    3. Tell me about one of your most positive memories with literature.

    4. Do you plan to take more literature courses in the future?

Appendix B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

(Instructor)

I am trying to understand current views of foreign language literature from the perspective of both students and instructors. More specifically, I am interested in learning more about what you think of literature and its place in foreign language education. Let me begin with some broad questions.

I. Demographic Data / History

    1. How long have you been teaching?

    2. What classes (languages/levels) have you taught?

    3. Why did you decide to study Spanish literature?

    4. What type of reading do you do on a regular basis?

II. Perceptions About Literature and Spanish

    1. How do you define literature?

    2. What do you see as being your role as an L2 reading instructor?

    3. What are your goals for the students (or yourself) in this reading class?

    4. Why did you choose these particular texts for this course?

    5. How do you decide what language to use when teaching?

    6. Why do you have the students read aloud?

    7. What do you enjoy most (least) about teaching reading?

    8. What aspects of teaching this course are most challenging for you?

III. Actions

    1. Tell me a story about your worst literature teaching experience.

    2. Tell me about one of your most positive memories as an L2 literature instructor.

Appendix C

Standards for Foreign Language Learning

Communication: Communicate in Languages Other Than English

1.1 Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.

1.2 Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.

1.3 Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics.

Cultures: Gain Knowledge and Understanding of Other Cultures

2.1 Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied.

2.2 Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied.

Connections: Connect with other Disciplines and Acquire Information

3.1 Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language.

3.2 Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures.

Comparisons: Develop Insight into the Nature of Language and Culture

4.1 Students demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own.

4.2 Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own.

Communities: Participate in Multilingual Communities at Home and Around the World

5.1 Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting.

5.2 Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.

Source: National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project. (1999). *Standards for foreign language learning in the 21st century.* Yonkers, NY: Author.