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An interdisciplinary and empirical view of literary education: using original and translated poetry in the classroom

Abstract

Historically, literary research has prioritized hermeneutic interpretations over empirical approaches. Despite a few efforts to examine real readers' emotional responses (e.g., Fialho, Miall, and Zyngier 2012; Zhang and Lauer 2015; Hakemulder et al. 2016; Miall and Chard 2016), investigations in the area of literary education have privileged theoretical discussions rather than looking at student-readers' reactions.

The chapter argues that, besides examining students' reactions, cultural differences also come into play when reading in a foreign language, so they must be taken into account. Based on empirical evidence derived from a large-scale project involving three national groups – Brazil, Ukraine and the US – and four languages – English, Portuguese, Russian and Ukrainian (Chesnokova et al. 2009; Chesnokova et al. 2017), in this chapter we report briefly the results of how 995 participants (all university students of the Humanities from both private and public sectors in urban areas) responded to poems by Poe in the source text or in translation into their native languages. The participants from Kiev and Rio de Janeiro learned English as a foreign language. The North American respondents were undergraduate students from Portland, Oregon, majoring in English, History and the Humanities. We argue that the differences that surged in these studies cannot be overlooked especially when decisions are taken on what language the texts used in the classroom will be made available to the students.

From a pedagogical perspective, this chapter aims at casting light on the intercultural implications involved when reading literary texts in original and translated versions and offers active learning strategies that may promote collaborative interactions in courses where literary interpretations are considered. It is true that when properly contextualized and discussed, texts from different countries, even when translated, may help students become more sensitized to

cultural differences. In this paper, we present empirical data that enable us to state that, instead of following a traditional hermeneutic approach or discussing facts that a wide variety of texts may offer, the perception of how language works in translated texts may promote insights from other peoples and other world views.

1.   **Introduction.**

In many educational settings, using translations to teach literature is often taken for granted and opted for on a mostly practical reason: students are expected to experience texts that are originally written in a language foreign to them. Despite the obvious merit of this decision (learners obtain access to otherwise inaccessible works), inevitable challenges come into play. Translated texts differ from the source text on a range of parameters which include phonology, prosody, graphology, vocabulary, grammar and style – to name just a few. The implications are that readers' reactions to translations may not correspond to those obtained when reading the original. Obvious as this argument may sound, differences in reaction as a consequence of reading translations are rarely, if at all, taken into account in pedagogical practices. Educators tend to treat the new product as if it were the original one. However, as pointed out by Carter and McRae (1996, xxiii), "[l]iterary texts are […] so much more than their language". Finding the right tone, the most adequate phrasing to convey the original wording, realizing what the implications of one or another choice may be make the task of the translator a near impossibility. In the long run, he or she must decide what will necessarily have to be changed. In an obituary to the famous literary translator Anthea Bell, *The Economist* (2018) refers to the fact that "she did not want to lose the foreign feel of a book entirely, and indeed could not start until she had found the writer's voice". Whether such voices can indeed be found by translators, and whether educational practitioners are aware of the need to bring out the differences between source and translated texts still remain to be verified.

In this chapter we offer some pedagogical approaches that may sensitize the students to the implications of using translations. Our suggestions are supported by research (Chesnokova et al. 2009; Zhang and Lauer 2015; Chesnokova 2016; Chesnokova et al. 2017) that has found that not only do individuals react differently to the source and its translation(s), but groups from diverse contexts also respond distinctly. This chapter may be of benefit to educators in the sense that they may anticipate students' reactions when they decide which version of the text they will use in the classroom.

To this purpose, stylistics may provide accurate tools for studying texts and reactions. Often defined as the linguistic analysis of literary texts (Carter and Nash 1990; Simpson 1997; Verdonk 2002; Leech and Short 2007), stylistics looks at patterns authors and translators choose and how readers respond to these choices. In this sense, it is a powerful instrument for bringing out the subtleties of language and anticipating possible responses, especially in educational settings. From an empirical perspective, stylistics may also help evaluate the validity of classroom practices thus enabling instructors to come to conscious decisions (see, for example, Fialho and Zyngier 2014; Chesnokova 2016). By means of observing the educational context and collecting data from students, teachers may be better positioned to validate and justify techniques and practices that best suit the needs of a particular class.

2.   Developing intercultural competence in reading literature in a foreign language.

Literary texts authored by individuals who do not share the same culture as the reader is one of the best ways of experiencing different realities without leaving one's own room. This is not a new phenomenon. As printed books and their translations replaced manuscripts and literacy became accessible to many, readers could travel wherever their fancy took them and, like Cervantes' Don Quijote, live various realities. Today, however, it is not just a matter of travelling through imaginary worlds. With globalization and the advent of the Internet, communication between cultures has become essential for economic, social and political survival of a community. Sawyer and Matos (2015, 55) support the claim when they write that "[t]here can be no doubt that international and intercultural cooperation are already of the utmost importance throughout the world, and will be increasingly so as we move further into the 21st century". At the same time they warn that "[t]here are also clear signs that in many contexts the current level of cooperation is inadequate, and that people are not sufficiently prepared for relating effectively with strangers, either at an individual or societal level" (*ibid.*). It is this aspect, of living through the text (Rosenblatt 1938) rather than only carrying out hermeneutic interpretations, that literature plays a very important role in education.

According to Kramsch (1993, 175), "[b]y constructing with the literary text a reality different from that of texts of information, students are given access to a world of attitudes and values, collective imaginings and historical frames of reference that constitute the memory of a people or speech community. Thus literature and culture are inseparable". This is why, when it comes to

reading literature in a foreign language or in translation into the learners' mother tongue, educators should be very much aware of the fact that the texts they indicate to their students were originally produced for an audience culturally and temporarily different from the context of reading, and that this situation plays a vital role in the readers' reaction. Here is where intercultural competence comes into play.

Following Marques-Schäfer, Menezes, and Zyngier (2018, 150), we define intercultural competence as a complex construct involving "interconnected cognitive, affective, ethnic and behavioral levels". Most importantly, the classroom environment should be a place where students develop *criticality*, which Byram (1997, 53) defines as "[a]n ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices, and products in one's own and other cultures and countries". In order to develop intercultural competence, Byram suggests that assessment of one's own culture must be followed by a comparison with another one so that both cultures can be observed under the same criteria. He describes three contexts through which one can form intercultural competence: classroom, fieldwork and independent learning (*ibid*., 64–73). In most educational settings, when it comes to teaching foreign literature it is the first context (classroom) which is prioritized. However, we believe that all three should be taken into account in their interconnection.

To this end, in their work on intercultural competence, Sawyer and Matos (2015) conducted interviews with 12 teachers in Portugal and 2 in Japan. Their study focuses on one of the questions of the interview, namely "Do you see a role for literature in developing critical cultural awareness?" The authors concluded that the interviewees valued the role of literature in education, but that more links between literary texts and interculturality were still necessary. We understand that working with translated texts in an ESL or EFL classroom may be invaluable for developing cultural, ethical, and political competence of the learners. With this in mind, in this chapter we offer suggestions for the development of intercultural competence.

3.   **Empirical research on poetry in translation.**

In a series of studies (Chesnokova et al. 2009; Chesnokova et al. 2017), the reactions of 995 readers to the original of two poems by Edgar Allan Poe in English and their translations into respondents' mother tongues (Portuguese for Brazilians, and Ukrainian or Russian for Ukrainians) were examined to check whether there were universals in responses that should be

taken into account when the educational setting is concerned. The participants, all university students of the Humanities, were foreign language learners of English or Literature, except for the North Americans, who studied English, History and the Humanities. As in most cases in the contexts studied, the level of language proficiency was not homogeneous. Based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, their level of proficiency in English varied from B1 (Threshold or intermediate) to C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency or advanced). Although not totally competent (except for the North Americans, who were native speakers of English), they all read one poem assigned by the instructor: "Annabel Lee" in one study (Chesnokova et al. 2009) and "The Lake" in the other one (Chesnokova et al. 2017).

The criteria for selecting these poems were the fact that they (1) were written by a Romantic poet and focused on individuality and emotion, (2) had been translated by renowned translators, (3) were very commonly anthologized, and (4) would take approximately 10 minutes to read and respond. In both studies, the participants evaluated their emotional reaction to the verse (e.g., from "very sad" to "very happy") on a five-point semantic differential scale (see Annex for the questionnaire sample). The adjectives for the questionnaire derived from a pilot study with 100 Brazilian and Ukrainian undergraduate students of the Humanities. In this pilot study, they were asked to list 10 adjectives that best described their evaluations of "The Lake" in English (20 Brazilians and 20 Ukrainians), in Portuguese (20 Brazilians), in Russian (20 Ukrainians) or in Ukrainian (20 Ukrainians). The answers in Portuguese, Russian and Ukrainian were translated into English, and the top 15 adjectives were selected for the questionnaire. For a stylistic analysis of the poem and the translations compared, see Chesnokova and Zyngier (forthcoming). For a more detailed description of the methodology, see Chesnokova et al. (2017).

The respondents in this large-scale empirical project encompassed ten groups as detailed in Table 1:

Table 1

PARTICIPANT GROUPS

Group	Nationality	Poem	Number of participants
1	North American	"Annabel Lee" in the original	95
2		"Annabel Lee" in the original	100

3	Brazilian	"Annabel Lee" in Portuguese translation	100
4	Ukrainian	"Annabel Lee" in the original	100
5		"Annabel Lee" in Ukrainian translation	100
6	Brazilian	"The Lake" in the original	100
7		"The Lake" in Portuguese translation	100
8	Ukrainian	"The Lake" in the original	100
9		"The Lake" in Russian translation	100
10		"The Lake" in Ukrainian translation	100

These series of studies were unanimous in indicating that each translation creates a singular context that affects the readers' responses, and this is something that cannot be overlooked in academic practices. For instance, it affects the choice of text the learners will read. Will the teacher use a translation or the original? How would the learner react to each of these texts? How far would the poem be appreciated? Would the translator's word choice differ widely from the poet's original words? For a more detailed discussion on these implications, see Chesnokova and Zyngier (forthcoming).

On a five-point semantic differential scale respondents indicated their thoughts on the poem (e.g., from "very sad" to "very happy", including a neutral option). In inferential statistics, we establish a general statement (the null hypothesis) that there is nothing significantly different happening. In our case, that there are no differences between the groups and the responses to the poems studied, that is, that no relationship between the measured phenomena can be established. In order to decide whether the results obtained would be actually significant or not, we set the level of probability of an existing relation at <0.05. If the results obtained were lower than <0.05, this p-value would give us 95 % confidence to assert that the groups of readers reacted differently.

The p-values indicated that Brazilians considered "Annabel Lee" in translation into their mother tongue as more romantic. They obtained a means of 13.78, distancing themselves from the realistic end of the spectrum. The same occurred with more beautiful (17.43), more melancholic (17.68), more nostalgic (17.43), clearer (30.00), warmer (35.61), dreamier (17.43) and easier

(33.90). At the same time, Ukrainian respondents rated the translated version of the poem as sadder (16.36), more touching (17.84), and more sincere (16.47).

The results are indicated in Table 2 below, and the numbers are kept at the decimal place so as to facilitate the reading. In the table we show the pairs of adjectives, the nationality of the groups, the means obtained, and the *p*-value of each pair of adjectives. We also indicate the standard error, that is how representative the sample is. The smaller the standard error, the more representative will it be.

Table 2

BRAZILIANS' AND UKRAINIANS' RESPONSES TO POE'S "ANNABEL LEE"

IN TRANSLATION (PORTUGUESE AND UKRAINIAN)

Pairs of adjectives	Nationality	Mean	Std. Error	*p*-value
Sad — Happy	Brazilian	21.46	.08	.000
	Ukrainian	*16.36*	.06	
Romantic — Realistic	*Brazilian*	*13.78*	.09	.038
	Ukrainian	15.45	.08	
Beautiful — Ugly	*Brazilian*	*17.43*	.11	.035
	Ukrainian	20.11	.10	
Melancholic — Encouraging	*Brazilian*	*17.68*	.09	.002
	Ukrainian	21.59	.10	
Nostalgic — Not longing for the past	*Brazilian*	*17.43*	.08	.002
	Ukrainian	21.70	.10	
Touching — Hard-headed	Brazilian	20.36	.09	.002
	Ukrainian	*17.84*	.10	
Mysterious — Clear	*Brazilian*	*30.00*	.14	.049
	Ukrainian	27.27	.13	
Sincere — Insincere	Brazilian	20.85	.10	.000
	Ukrainian	*16 .47*	.09	
Cold — Warm	*Brazilian*	*35.61*	.11	.045
	Ukrainian	32.27	.12	
Dreamy — Down-to-Earth	*Brazilian*	*17.44*	.09	.004
	Ukrainian	21.25	.10	
Difficult — Easy	*Brazilian*	*33.90*	.11	.000
	Ukrainian	26.93	.10	

Table 3 below also shows that the lower the means, the closer the preference is to the adjective on the left. When comparisons were made between the reaction to the poems in English and the respondents' mother tongues, the findings which were also significant (*p*-value < 0.05) indicated that Brazilians evaluated the original of "Annabel Lee" as sadder (17.77), more touching (16.02) and warmer (38.39) than the translated version.

Table 3

BRAZILIANS' RESPONSES TO POE'S "ANNABEL LEE":

ORIGINAL (ENGLISH) VS. TRANSLATION (PORTUGUESE)

Pairs of adjectives	Language of the text	Mean	Std. Error	*p*-value
Sad — Happy	*Original*	*17.77*	.09	.009
	Translated	21.46	.08	
Touching — Hard-headed	*Original*	*16.02*	.08	.002
	Translated	20.36	.09	
Cold — Warm	*Original*	*38.39*	.11	.020
	Translated	35.61	.11	

The situation became even more complex when the linguistic landscape in the bilingual Ukraine was considered as it was in the experiment with "The Lake" (Chesnokova et al. 2017). For this nation, the Ukrainian and Russian languages are equally regarded mother tongues and languages of everyday communication with unequal proportion for urban and rural areas and for different regions of the country (see Sergeyeva and Chesnokova 2008 for bilingualism in Ukraine and its pedagogical implications). As can be seen from Table 4 below, the Ukrainians who read "The Lake" in translation to Russian as their mother tongue offered the most positive evaluations of the text as the means indicate, considering it the happiest (2.40 for Russian, as compared to 2.04 for Ukrainian and 2.09 for English), the lightest (2.89 for Russian, compared to 2.45 for English and 2.47 for Ukrainian), the most encouraging (2.55 for Russian in comparison to 1.81 for English and 2.01 for Ukrainian) and the most cheerful version (1.98 for Ukrainian, 2.30 for English and as much as 2.50 for Russian) thus indicating the fact that even such nuance as a native language of learners in a classroom of a bilingual society (which is not that rare in global terms) should be taken into account.

Table 4

UKRAINIANS' RESPONSES TO POE'S "THE LAKE":

ORIGINAL (ENGLISH) VS. TRANSLATIONS (RUSSIAN AND UKRAINIAN)

Adjectives	Mean				*p*-value			
	English (ENG)	Russian (RUS)	Ukrainian (UKR)	Overall	ENG-RUS	ENG-UKR	RUS-UKR
Sad – Happy	2.09	2.40	2.04	.000		.011	.000
Dark – Light	2.45	2.89	2.47	.003	.004		.027
Melancholic – Encouraging	1.81	2.55	2.01	.000	.000		.001
Lonely – Gregarious	1.80	1.78	1.40	.016		.029	.049
Interesting – Boring	2.40	2.12	1.87	.002		.002	
Mysterious – Clear	2.17	1.78	2.06	.031	.025		
Dreamy – Down-to-	2.08	2.05	2.45	.024			.039

earth							
Exciting – Dull	2.63	2.56	2.31	.040		.034	
Solitary – Social	2.24	1.72	1.64	.000	.001	.000	
Gloomy – Cheerful	2.30	2.50	1.98	.000		.027	.000

Therefore, these studies provide first-hand evidence that reading a poem in one's own language or reading it in a foreign one will yield different responses. The gap becomes even wider when different cultures are compared.

4. Original and translated poetry: pedagogical implications.

4.1. Pedagogical stylistics in EFL context.

That social environment impacts the way readers respond to texts is by now a widely accepted concept [see, for instance, Fish, 1970; see also Tompkins (1980) for an overall view of the different reader response theories]. Here we contribute to the series of studies conducted earlier (Chesnokova et al. 2009; Chesnokova et al. 2017) which provide empirical evidence that can substantiate the assertion that by comparing original and translated versions of a literary text students will develop intercultural awareness. Our data indicate that when translations are used, responses will change depending on the students' cultural background. In our view, these findings may alert educators that equivalence between translations and originals is not guaranteed. On the contrary, translations bring about further problems which can be dealt with if the teacher uses them to show stylistic differences. In this case, they may promote cultural awareness.

At this point, we would like to clarify another issue: when translations are used *in lieu* of the original text, the experience of literature is changed. If we hold that literature is to be experienced rather than taught (Rosenblatt 1938; Miall 1996), it necessarily follows that the educational setting should be ready to offer an adequate environment where the experience can be carried out.

From our perspective, reading both original and translated texts should be a personal experience. In *Experiential Learning* (1984), David Kolb places reflection as the focus of any pedagogical practice. Demanding strong cognitive and emotional discipline on the part of the student and empirical in nature, reflection implies observation leading to description of the student's

experience, an analysis of the experience (including offering possible explanations and development of a relevant theory), and experimental testing of the theory or assessment of reflection. Thus, based on the Dewey's concept of reflective thought and action (1933; 1938), Kolb suggests the general four-stage model of learning by experience. As defined by Simon Fraser University, experiential learning is "the strategic, active engagement of students in opportunities to learn through doing, and reflection on those activities, which empowers them to apply their theoretical knowledge to practical endeavours in a multitude of settings inside and outside of the classroom" (see McGill University, n.d.).

In this sense, laboratory classes or workshops instead of tutorials are the ideal educational format. They allow students to see the limitations and the benefits of translations in action, enabling learners to move from noticing problems to understanding the principles that generated them. In this way, they move from concrete to abstract and become culturally critical.

In the next section, we offer techniques that can be used in EFL classrooms to raise learners' awareness of how stylistic choices authors and translators make affect readers' responses.

4.2. Classroom activities plan.

An innovative pedagogical approach using a workshop format based on the principles of experiential learning is to sensitize students to the effects different linguistic renditions of a poem may provoke. This class can be carried out in two sessions of 90 minutes each where students compare the original of the text and the various translations. The timing suggested is, of course, flexible. We do not rule out the possibility of developing intercultural competence and sensitivity further with some background contextual explanations by the teacher *after* the proposed activities to avoid pre-empting individual and personal responses

In the first session, the work could be developed as follows:
1) The teacher selects a poem in English and two translations of the same poem taking into consideration the following criteria: (a) brevity: the learners should not take more than 10 minutes to read the poem either in the original or in the translated versions; (b) language proficiency of the learners so that they can read the poem in the original with ease; (c) the theme of the poem should be of learners' interest so that they feel motivated to read it; (d) one of the translations should be a published version by an acknowledged translator; (e) the second

translation should be one that "subverts" the original by distancing itself from the original in terms of lexical choices, imagery and prosody.

2) The teacher divides the class into three groups. (Each group should not have more than 5 students. If the class is larger than 15, more groups should be created.)

3) One group is given the poem in the original, another one the translation by an acknowledged translator, and the third one the translation that distances itself from the original.

4) Students read the text they are given and underline what they consider to be the most striking passages. (Duration: 10 minutes.)

5) Each group discusses these passages and comes to an interpretation of the poem based on these passages. (Duration: 20 minutes.)

6) Each group presents their interpretation to the class while the other students follow the presentation and take note of the striking differences between their own reactions and those of the group presenting. Guiding questions: Did the group presenting their interpretation react to the poem the same way your group did? Were there differences? If so, write down what differences your group noticed. (Duration: 30 minutes.)

7) The class discusses any differences that may have been noticed and try to find out why they occurred. (Duration: 30 minutes.)

In preparation for the second session, the teacher may establish contact with a school where the learners' first language is neither English nor his or her students' own native one. Contacting Teachers' Associations in a country of the teacher's choice could be a possibility of establishing links with a colleague. Another option is searching discussion forums in the Internet and making contact with colleagues from other countries. The language used for communication would be necessarily English. Once the contact is established, the teacher could:
1) ask the colleague if there would be any learners / readers willing to participate in a workshop;
2) send the colleague the original poem in English and ask him or her to look for a translation in the language of the target context;
3) ask the colleague to collect not more than 10 written interpretations of the poem. The number has to be limited as digitizing the interpretations could be time-consuming;

4) see that the colleague translates the readers' / learners' written interpretations into English, scans (or digitizes) them and sends them to the teacher.

Once in possession of the X number of interpretations of the same poem in a language that was not used in the first session, the original groups could compare the results of Session 1 and the work obtained through Session 2. This will show students what happens when readers have access to translations of poems in different languages. There may be many other ways of getting the material needed for the second session. The main point is that the learners should have access to interpretations of the poem they read in Session 1 by speakers of other languages. This approach innovates by placing texts and their language versions at stake. Instead of being tutored, students find out by themselves the effects a variety of linguistic solutions in a passage may have on the reader.

Another pedagogical strategy of 90 minutes is to ask students, individually or in pairs, to translate the poem into their native language (duration: 30 minutes). The class then regroups, and each pair or individual compares their production to the ones of the peers and discusses how interpretations may be affected by their choices (duration: 30 minutes). After that, the students (individually or in pairs) prepare a written report on their findings (duration: 30 minutes). This activity will show them that translations offer many possibilities, and that each decision will impact their responses.

5. Discussion.

The activities suggested in this chapter assume that there will never be an exact match between the source text and the translated text as renderings of a poem in different languages will necessarily lead to diverse paths of experience – the claim that has been supported empirically. When the cultural context varies, the gap between readers' responses will be even wider. In fact, the studies reviewed in this chapter have indicated that the cultural background interferes with the reactions and that students need to develop intercultural competence to be in a position to understand a poem which has not been written in the reader's first language. To this purpose, together with experiencing a translated text, students would be made aware of the implications the translator's choices involve. We thus hold that intercultural competence rather than hermeneutic interpretations or facts about literature must be the baselines to pedagogical practices. For future research, we think it would be beneficial to replicate the reported

experiment with translations of the same poems into other languages to see if the effects hold, and we invite our colleagues from other cultural contexts to do this.

The pedagogical strategies we offered earlier in this chapter are based exactly on the learners' experience with the poem in a foreign language rather than on being informed about the text as is the case in numerous educational settings. We strongly believe that in an EFL university classroom students should be encouraged to *experience* the striking passages in the text, the foregrounding tools as preferred by the poet and / or the translator, the strangeness the textual elements evoke – and, what is central, the effects produced. This, we claim, is the best strategy to inform the learners what differences are created when one translates a poem.

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Annex

RESEARCH ON READING

This questionnaire is part of a study jointly conducted by Brazilian and Ukrainian researchers. It should take you approximately 10 minutes to read the poem and choose the adjectives which describe your reactions to it. This is an anonymous questionnaire, and your identity will be preserved. We thank you for your collaboration.

Please read the following poem.

In spring of youth it was my lot
To haunt of the wide world a spot
The which I could not love the less –
So lovely was the loneliness
Of a wild lake, with black rock bound,
And the tall pines that towered around.

But when the Night had thrown her pall
Upon that spot, as upon all,
And the mystic wind went by
Murmuring in melody –
Then – ah! then I would awake
To the terror of the lone lake.

Yet that terror was not fright,
But a tremulous delight –
A feeling not the jewelled mine
Could teach or bribe me to define –
Nor Love – although the Love were thine.

Death was in that poisonous wave,
And in its gulf a fitting grave
For him who thence could solace bring
To his lone imagining –
Whose solitary soul could make
An Eden of that dim lake.

Have you already read this poem before? ☐ YES   ☐ NO

Now, please mark your reactions to the poem. For each line of the table, **choose only ONE of the five options**.

	I think this poem is…					
	Very	A little	Neutral	A little	Very	
sad						happy
dark						light
beautiful						ugly
melancholic						encouraging

nostalgic						not longing for the past
lonely						gregarious
interesting						boring
mysterious						clear
mystical						physical
dreamy						down-to-earth
romantic						realistic
deep						shallow
exciting						dull
solitary						social
gloomy						cheerful

Gender: male _____   female _____   **Age** _____