TEMA 15: Épocas, autores géneros literarios más adecuados para su aplicación didáctica en clase de inglés. Tipologías de textos.

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1. INTRODUCTION

All over the world stories are told to children. Stories bring culture along
having a great value according to their contents, texts and language which are authentic. And so, they are worth to use them in the classroom to teach a foreign language in connection with cultural features.

The teacher can adapt stories to students’ age, mental stage and interests. There are so many that it is easy to find some for the English-speaking classroom.

There are four types of reasons to use literary texts in ELT:

*Linguistic*: Literature offers a great variety of authentic written materials. Most works of literature are not written for the specific purpose of teaching a language. In reading texts students know the language intended for native speakers, so they gain familiarity with many different linguistic uses, forms and conventions of the written mode.

Literature study can provide a wide range of texts and an introduction to the different registers of English.

*Methodological*: It is a very important complement to other materials used in order to increase the learners’ cultural information of the country whose language is being learnt.

Literary texts provide **authentic language**. The Communicative Approach gives priority to appropriate, native-speaker use according to specific social contexts.

Furthermore, each child is a unique learner, lately there has been a growing awareness of the need to take into account the different types of ‘intelligences’ (Gardner 1993), including emotional intelligence. Consequently, teaching approaches and materials need to adapt to a range of intelligences. The richness of storybooks in terms of their content and illustrations and the variety of the follow-up activities suggested, allow the teacher to cater for all learner types and intelligences and to make learning experiences meaningful for each child.

*Motivational*: Literary texts often touch on themes to which learners can bring a personal response from their own experience. Stories are motivating, challenging and enjoyable and can help develop positive attitudes towards the foreign language learning and culture. Stories exercise the imagination; children can become personally involved in a story as they identify with the characters and try to interpret the narrative and illustrations.
Legal: Finally, the Ministry of Education law LOMLOE 3/2020 of December 29th, which modifies the Organic Law 2/2006 of May 3rd, of Education LOE, provide guidelines to developed basic objectives, contents and methodological approaches for the teaching of English. Literature will help us teachers to reach these objectives and teach English successfully.

According to the current Law, children should develop their communicative competence in at least a foreign language. Therefore, the principal aim of learning English is to communicate orally and in writing. This includes different aspects such as reading different texts and writing, understanding vocabulary related to the children’s world, use of grammatical structures, functions, etc. With literature we will work all these aspects and, literature is also a good way for skill integration (listening, speaking, reading, writing)

Other reasons for using storybooks:

- Storybooks can provide an ideal introduction to the foreign language as they present language in a repetitive and memorable context.

- Listening to stories in class is a shared social experience. Storytelling provokes a shared response of laughter, sadness, excitement and anticipation which is not only enjoyable but can help build up the child’s confidence and encourage social and emotional development.

- Children enjoy listening to stories over and over again. This frequent repetition allows certain language items to be acquired while others are being overtly reinforced. Many stories contain natural repetition of key vocabulary and structures. Repetition also encourages participation in the narrative.

- Listening to stories allows the teacher to introduce or revise new vocabulary and sentence structures by exposing the children to language in varied, memorable and familiar contexts, which will enrich their thinking and gradually enter their own speech.

- Listening to stories helps children become aware of the rhythm, intonation and pronunciation of language.

- Storybooks develop children’s learning strategies such as listening for general meaning, predicting, guessing meaning and hypothesising. In particular, they can develop the child’s listening
skills and concentration via: a. visual clues (high-quality pictures and illustrations that support children’s understanding) b. audio clues (sound effects, onomatopoeia) c. their prior knowledge of how language works d. their prior knowledge of the world.

- Storybooks allow the teacher to use an acquisition-based methodology by providing optimal input (Krashen 1981: 103) – language input that is slightly above the level they are expected to produce.

- Stories provide opportunities for developing continuity in children’s learning since they can be chosen to link English with other subject areas across the curriculum.

In this topic we will explain which periods, authors and genres are more suitable for English learners and then what kind of texts suit better our purposes as English teachers; finally, we will establish some guidelines for the didactic application of literary texts.

2. MORE SUITABLE PERIODS, AUTHORS AND GENRES TO BE USED IN THE ENGLISH CLASS.

The criterion of suitability clearly depends ultimately of each particular group of students, their needs, interests, cultural background and language level.


Teachers need to keep the following criteria in mind when choosing texts:

- The needs and abilities of the students.
- The linguistic and stylistic level of the text.
- The amount of background information required for a true appreciation of the material.
- Other text-related factors
2.1.1. Learners’ needs and abilities

2.1.1.1. Learners’ needs

It does not matter how simple our chosen texts may be, they should always be appropriate to the age, interests and goals of our pupils. It is a big mistake to give our oldest pupils a book suitable to younger children simply because the linguistic level is simpler.

The primary factor to consider is whether a particular literary work is able to stimulate the learners by arousing their interest and provoking strong, positive reactions from them. Very young children prefer traditional tales but older children are fond of adventure stories, human interest works and so on.

It is therefore important to choose books, which are relevant to the life experiences, emotions or dreams of the learner.

2.1.1.2. Learners’ abilities

Pupils need to be able to read fluently for extensive reading in order to understand literary texts overall. As Jennifer Hill says: “They must be able to see a passage as a complete unit, not just a collection of sentences with individual meanings.”

The EFL Primary Learners read at a lower speed. Because of this low reading speed, it is better to start with very short texts, for example short stories.

2.1.2. The linguistic and stylistic level of the text.

We have to consider language difficulty, as well. Our pupils may not be able to enjoy a text that they perceive as very difficult to read. The language should be included in the course syllabus.

2.1.2.1. The linguistic level.

Teachers must consider the following factors:

- Vocabulary and text structure within our pupils’ cope.
- Slang, dialect and highly idiomatic language at a minimum.
- Students should be able to infer the meaning of most of the unknown words from the context.
- The vocabulary should not, in general, be archaic or technical.
- Sentence structure must be at a level students can handle.
2.1.2.2. The stylistic level.

It is useless to choose texts of great stylistic complexity for the early stages of language learning because children do not have a solid knowledge in the normative uses of English to perceive literary foregrounding.

We should choose simple texts, at this early stage of the foreign language learning, from the stylistic and linguistic point of view.

As teachers, before choosing a text, we can also ask ourselves questions about this point:

- Linguistic level
  - Does the text add to learning in the whole school curriculum?
  - Is the vocabulary appropriate? And the structures, functions, topics?
  - Is the language authentic?

- Stylistic level
  - Does the text contain stylistic features that may hinder the understanding of the story?

2.1.3. Amount of background information required.

Our pupils’ understanding of a text can also be hindered by their lack of background knowledge of English-speaking countries culture. We should consider both problem and positive features.

2.1.3.1. Problem features

Problem features may include differences in:

- Social conventions and customs
- Attitude and values
- Social class distinctions
- Geographical features and climate
- Diet and dress
- Historical background

2.1.3.2. Positive features

Positive features may include enrichment by:

- Widening of horizons
- Knowledge of other ways of life
- Entrance to the world of imagination
- Appeal to universal emotions

It is important to bear in mind the amount of time we will need to explain background knowledge.
2.1.4. Other text-related factors

Teachers should consider the following factors that are also important for a text selection.

2.1.4.1. Availability of texts

We must consider how easily we can make the text available to our students, if they are easily available in our country, editorial or bookshops. The prize is also relevant.

2.1.4.2. Length of text and quality of illustrations

It is important to consider the length of text and the quality of the illustrations.

Firstly, we need to consider the time available to work in class. Short stories are very useful because of their length. This means that we can usually read them entirely within one or two class lessons.

Secondly, when we have children in the last levels of Primary, we should consider their available time to work the text at home. Short stories are very suitable because students get that feeling of achievement at having come to the end of a whole work, much sooner.

Finally, the quality of illustrations plays an important role in helping general comprehension.

2.1.4.3. Exploitability

It is important to choose a text that provides tasks and activities that we can devise to exploit that text. Also, we need to analyse if the story provides follow-up work such as drama or roleplay in order to reinforce vocabulary and structures in a meaningful way.

Thus, we can consider, as well, whether there are resources available to help us to exploit the text as a film, recordings, pictures, etc.

2.1.4.4. Adequacy to syllabus

A syllabus is concerned with the selection and grading of content. A coursebook may have based the content and sequence on guidelines laid down by the Ministry of Education and the Autonomous Community. A language syllabus is most likely to include functions and structures, vocabulary, pronunciation and skills to be developed. It may also include the types of activities and tasks children will be involved in.
We can analyse how the texts link with the rest of the syllabus, for example in terms of vocabulary, grammar, discourse, themes or methodology.

The following diagram by Ellis and Brewster, can help teachers to select texts that are accessible, useful and relevant for children learning English.
Is the language level appropriate? Not too easy? Not too difficult? Does the story contain language included in beginner syllabuses, for example, vocabulary, structures and functions? Will it provide my pupils with a successful learning experience?

Does the story contain any features such as rhyme, onomatopoeia, rhythm, intonation that my pupils will enjoy imitating and improve their pronunciation?

Will the story interest my pupils? Is it relevant to their needs? Is it amusing? Is it memorable?

Do the illustrations relate to the text and support the children’s understanding? Are they appropriate to the age of my pupils? Are they attractive and colourful? Are they big enough for all the class to see? Do they depict life in the target culture?

Is there any natural repetition to encourage participation in the text and to provide pattern practical pronunciation practice, to recycle language items and develop memory skills? Does the repetition allow my pupils to predict what is coming next in the story and to build up their confidence?

Will the story motivate my pupils by drawing on their personal experience? Will it develop their imagination and appeal to their sense of humour?

Will the story arouse their curiosity and make them want to find out more about the target language, culture and language learning?

Is the language representative of the variety spoken in the target culture? Does the story provide any information about life in target culture? Does it contain any obscure cultural references that may be difficult to understand? Is it too culture specific?

What is the learning potential of the story in terms of learning about other subjects, the target culture, the world and learning about learning?

Will my pupils respond positively to the story and develop positive attitudes towards the target language, culture and towards language learning?

Is the language of the story authentic and appropriate in terms of language and content?
A book will be suitable to our pupils if we can answer ‘yes’ to the questions mentioned above.

Once we have analysed the different criteria for selecting texts, we need to decide the most suitable periods, authors and genres.

### 2.2. Periods, authors and genres

#### 2.2.1. Periods

Following our official curriculum, as we quoted in the Introduction and according to our pupils’ interests, needs and abilities and moreover the linguistic, stylistic and background knowledge required for a fully understanding of a text, it seems obvious that the literature of our times is more accessible to our pupils.

So, mostly nowadays literary works are the most suitable; although it is recommended, as well, especially for our youngest pupils to use classical literature as traditional tales, For example: *Goldilocks and the Three Bears, Little Red Riding Hood, The Enormous Turnip* .... fairy tales as *The Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella* and so on. Children are already familiar with them in their mother tongue, so they can infer the meaning of the unknown words and understand the story.

#### 2.2.2. Authors

We can choose from a wide range of suitable authentic storybooks written by traditional storytellers as Perrault and modern writers, as those authors on the *Puffin or Early Bird* series such as:

- Jack Kent ... *The Fat Cat*
- Raymond Briggs ... *The Snowman; The Mother Goose Treasury* (nursery rhymes) especially very suitable for the 1st and 2nd graders.
- John Burningham ... *My Gumpy’s Motor Car*
- Colin and Jacqui Hawkins ... *Pat the Cat*
- Eric Hill ... *Where’s Spot?*
- Helen Nicoll ... *Meg and Mog*

For 5th and 6th graders, we can select literary works from different collections of texts for foreign learners, edited in different publishers as Oxford, Cambridge or Heinemann, for example:

- Jones, E ... *British Short Stories of Today* (Penguin Books)
- Swam, M ... *Zero Hour and Other Modern Stories* (Cambridge)
- Taylor, P ... *Modern Short Stories for Students of English* (*)
- Milue, J ... *Heinemann Guided Readers* (*)

(*) Both of them are graded text, and only if we decide to use them in class, we can recommend them (see last section).
2.2.3. Genres

We can use different genres: Plays, small poems, but especially, short stories.

2.2.3.1. Plays

Many students love planning costumes, sets, masks, etc. With groups who like drama activities, put-on one scene or a short play, can be both enjoyable and rewarding.

It is very useful because children have to act and this means that they must learn a few lines by heart. They have to repeat the words or sentences very often, so the particular words and structures become more assimilated.

Saying their lines gives the children a chance to use English interactively.

They need to work together co-operatively.

Acting in a play can help shy children gain self-confidence.

But a play reading is not really easy and we need much time available if we want to perform it.

It would be suitable for shows to put on at the end of the academic year.

2.2.3.2. Poems

Small poems are ideal because:

- They offer a rich, varied repertoire and are a source of much enjoyment.
- Also, they have the advantage of length. They are well suited to a single classroom lesson.
- We can work the stress, rhythm, onomatopoeia and intonation.

2.2.3.3. Short stories

We think this genre is the most suitable for our pupils. Very young children enjoy listening stories. Oldest children enjoy both listening and reading stories.
Short stories are often an ideal way of introducing students to literature in the foreign language classroom. They offer many advantages:

- They are very motivating; children like stories.
- They exercise the imagination, link fantasy with the child’s real world.
- Teacher can revise or introduce new vocabulary and sentence structures in a varied and familiar context.
- Listening to stories develops the child’s listening and concentrating skills via:
  - Visual aids (pictures, illustrations)
  - Their prior knowledge of how language works
  - Their general knowledge

Help to understand the overall meaning of the story and relate it to their personal experience.

- They are chosen to consolidate learning in other school subjects across the curriculum.
- Learning English through stories can prepare students for Secondary School in terms of basic language functions, structures, vocabulary and language learning skills.

Teachers need to plan carefully the introduction and exploitation of storybooks. And one of the most relevant question is: What types of storybooks can we choose, authentic or adapted stories?

3. TYPES OF STORYBOOKS

There are a wide range of storybooks: traditional and fairy tales, picture stories, rhyming stories, everyday stories, etc.

Ellis and Brewster classify the storybooks under the following three headings:

- **Narrative features**
  - Rhyming words
  - Repeating structures
  - Cumulative content and language
  - Interactive
  - Humorous
  - Isolated words which rhyme
  - Some structures are repeated once and again
  - Different characters do the same action at different times
  - Children have to help to construct the story choosing different possibilities
  - Comic situations
Content

- Everyday life stories
- Animal stories
- Traditional/folk/fairy tales
- Fantasy stories
- Adventure stories
- Cumulative stories with predictable endings

Layout

- Flap
- Cut-away pages
- Minimal text
- No text
- Speech bubbles
  - There is something hidden. Children have to discover it
  - Something has to be stuck on the story
  - Words or simple structures and illustrations
  - It’s a picture storybook. No sentences or words
  - It’s like a cartoon. There are dialogues

Notice that the stories can belong to different groups. They are not exclusive.
These types of books can be read with pupils of different ages and levels, depending on the way they are used, the amount of detail we wish to go into and the time we have available. As Ellis and Brewster say: “The overall aim of using storybooks with young beginners is to encourage general comprehension that can trigger a wealth of purposeful language learning activities.”

But perhaps, most important is to distinguish between authentic and graded or adapted texts and to decide what to choose.

3.1. Authentic versus graded texts

There are different opinions about the convenience of using authentic versus graded texts.
3.1.1. Graded texts

Simplified/Graded texts are texts which have been written, or adapted, to be within the language competence of the learner reading them. Learners should not be exposed to language which was not controlled to the level of structure and lexis which they were capable of using productively, as this would result in confusion and therefore error - which can be seen as detrimental to learning. On the other hand, simplified texts - texts included in the coursebook, graded readers etc - would reuse the language which the learners had already encountered in the course syllabus, thus consolidating their previous knowledge of the language.

They can be fiction and non-fiction.

According to Sue Swift, books in a graded reader series may be of two types:

- Books specifically written for the series
- Adaptations (simplified versions) of authentic texts

It is important to choose those kinds of abridged versions of famous novel or plays which retains enough of the original to preserve the flavour of the work.

Graded readers are a very useful introduction to extensive reading and should help students to improve their fluency and accuracy in the understanding of a written text.

Grading material allows learners progress in small, regular steps and students are not exposed to cope with too much new material at any one time.

*Ellis* and *Brewster* analyse the advantages of the authentic texts.

3.1.2. Authentic texts

Authentic texts are those texts that have not been written specifically for the teaching of English as a foreign language, and so, the language is not selected or graded.
Ellis and Brewster say that there are many authentic storybooks written for English-speaking children which are also suitable for those learning English because many of these storybooks contain language traditionally found in most beginner syllabuses.

### 3.1.2.1. Advantages

- Authentic texts provide examples of real language and help to bring the real world into the classroom.
- Generally, the quality of illustrations is of a high standard, aiding general comprehension.
- Furthermore, if we simplify or modify stories too much there is a danger of losing some of their magic.

### 2.1.2.2. Disadvantages

But, at the same time this magic can also be lost if the language is too advanced for children to follow. In this case Ellis and Brewster suggest guidelines to make the story more accessible.

### 3.1.2.3. Guidelines to make the story accessible in authentic texts

- **Check vocabulary and general meaning**
  - Unfamiliar words (but keep certain keywords)
  - Idioms → Rephrase
  - Clarity → Give more examples

- **Check grammar**
  - Tenses → Simplify
  - Structures → Reduce the number of structures
  - Word order

- **Check organisation of ideas**
  - Times references → Reinforce time makers
  - The linking of ideas
  - The explanation of ideas

- **Check story length**
  - Number of ideas in the story → Leave out some of characters or events to reduce the length of the story
All the materials used in class need to be authentic. Not only the fact but also the activities and tasks must be relevant.

We can therefore conclude that whenever we need to choose a storybook, and if it is possible, we must use authentic material. And only with beginners, who are not able to handle authentic texts, we will be able to use an adapted story in order to help them to progress in small regular steps, to acquire the necessary skills they will need in a future to handle authentic material.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The study of literature and the study of language can be mutually supportive. A literature study can contribute to the students’ command of the language, as well as to their personal, social and moral development. Students themselves with the right method can get the most out of the materials.

Such methods might involve activities such as:
- Defining the theme, the main characters, the framework…in a text.
- Writing activities: rewrite the story, make a summary
- Orally: retelling the story, taking part in a role-play ...
- Playing games with the text (for example, 20 questions, draw a picture, invent a new setting, ....)

Literature will help students to develop a variety of language skills such as prediction or inference of meaning from the linguistic or situational context. As they relate their reading to their own knowledge of the world and experience, they will internalise the structures and lexis to the point where language recognition becomes automatic and the material will become a stimulus to their own language production. But simply reading a story out loud or reciting a rhyme could be disastrous without careful preparation. If a teacher selects an appropriate text and plans its exploitation thoughtfully, the teacher will be contributing to the development of students’ receptive and productive skills.

As Hill says “literature, carefully chosen, can open up and enrich the language lesson, provide students with a window to new worlds and engage their intellect and emotions in a way that study of the language alone cannot”.
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