



Kludia Bednárová-Gibová

University of Prešov

An Integrated Approach to Teaching Literature in Higher Education for Translation Studies Trainees

Abstract

Literature and its position in curricula within translation studies (TS) study programmes has always been a source of heated debates. This paper zooms in on proposing an integrated approach to teaching literature for TS trainees based on combining a linguistic, literary and cultural analysis. Its aim is to outline methodological considerations, give recommendations for future teaching practice and provide the TS-minded community with a possible didactic inspiration on the basis of the author's advocated approach. Part of this paper is also an empirical analysis from the perspective of the proposed integrated approach based on a selected case study of Christopher Marlowe's Act I from his play *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* in order to substantiate its relevance. The analysis shows how a literary text comes to convey its meaning thanks to a combination of threefold interpretative insights.

Keywords: *integrated approach, literature, higher education, TS trainees, translation didactics.*

Abstrakt

Literatura i jej miejsce w treściach programowych translatoryki (TS) zawsze były źródłem gorącej debaty. Niniejszy artykuł skupia się na propozycji zintegrowanego podejścia do nauczania literatury adeptów translatoryki (TS), bazując na połączeniu analizy z zakresu językoznawstwa, literatury i kultury. Celem jej jest podkreślenie wagi rozważań metodologicznych, udzielenie wskazówek co do dalszej praktyki nauczania oraz dostarczenie translatorsko ukierunkowanej społeczności oczekiwanych inspiracji wynikających z proponowanego przez autorkę podejścia.

Częścią niniejszej pracy jest także analiza empiryczna prowadzona, z perspektywy proponowanego podejścia zintegrowanego oparta na studium Aktu I sztuki Christophera Marlowa *Tragiczna historia doktora Fausta*, po to, aby ukazać jej zasadność. Analiza ta ukazuje jak tekst literacki przekazuje zawarte w nim treści dzięki troistej kombinacji czynników interpretacyjnych.

Słowa kluczowe: *podejście zintegrowane, literatura, adepci translatoryki (TS), dydaktyka translacji.*

Introduction: looking at literature for translation studies trainees

The position of literature within curricula in higher education institutions has always been a source of controversy. The effectiveness of teaching literature has been contested already within the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) paradigm. Some against the use of literature contend that its language is "structurally complex, conceptually difficult to understand, and unique to a particular culture or authentic situation and therefore does not support the goals of teaching grammar or helping students meet their academic or occupational needs" (Yimwilai, 2015, p. 14). Others say that the creative use of poetic language deflects from the conventions of standard language and may be unnecessarily manipulated (Savidou, 2004). There are, however, vocal others who take a different attitude and believe, in line with communicative language teaching principles, that literature encompasses a wide range of lexis, provides a meaningful context, enhances creativity and imagination and supports critical thinking (see Van, 2009).

The situation is not easier in the ambit of translation studies (TS) as the opinions on the teaching of literature for TS trainees also vary. They oscillate from treating literature as a useful (but not an indispensable) component of TS trainees' curricula to frowning upon literature-oriented courses as a luxury one can happily do without, giving priority to other, allegedly much more important, subjects. As becomes apparent in section 2 of this paper, I advocate the former approach for linguistic, methodological and motivational reasons in compliance with Duff and Maley (1990). Linguistically, by using a profound range of literary discourses TS trainees are naturally exposed to authentic nuances of the English language, which sharpens their language sensitivity. Methodologically, literary texts make TS trainees more sensitive to the reading process and its strategies. Motivationally, literary di-

scourses support sheer enjoyment of reading because of their inherent nature which opens room for personal responses.

The awareness of the literary discourse with its distinctive features as opposed to non-literary texts mirrors a historic split between linguistics and literature, which Geoffrey Leech famously refers to as a 'lang-lit' problem. This divergence of opinions has caused that the teaching of the two disciplines was treated wrongly for a long time as 'disconnected pedagogic practices' (see Carter, McRae, 1996, p. xxiv). However, in light of my attitude to integrating literature into TS trainees' curricula I hold a view that the separation of literature from language creates an artificial binary because literature represents language and one of the possible manifestations of language can be literary. Moreover, in today's era of the omnipresent interdisciplinarity, integrating linguistics and literature is not only creative, but more than necessary.

According to Carter and Long (1991), there are three main approaches to teaching literature, i.e. the language, cultural and personal growth model. While the language model is based on students' working on lexical, grammatical and discourse features of a literary text, the cultural model encourages them to explore the literary, cultural, historical and social context of a particular text. Lastly, the personal model growth model empowers students to interconnect their own personal and cultural experiences and those expressed in a literary text. As each of these approaches differs in its focus on texts, in order for literature to be really beneficial for TS trainees, I suggest, in line with Savvidou (2004) and Yimwilai (2015), that an integrated approach model combining key elements of all the three models be used in higher education teaching. The aim of this paper is not only to reflect on the current position of literature in higher education for TS trainees, but outline my approach to its integrating into curricula and potentially inspire pertinent literature course supervisors how literature for this target student group could be taught.

Methodological considerations and recommendations for teaching practice

Aside from combining the three models described above, the integrated approach to teaching literature implies in my understanding a transdisciplinary approach that involves the teaching of relevant ideas across more than one subject field. This means blending a linguistic, literary and cultural analysis with interspersed translation activities. Pragma-stylistically, the benefit of the integrated approach rests on a close text analysis in order

to find out "not just what a text means, but also how it comes to mean what it does" (Short, 1996, p. 224).

My perception of the integrated approach differs from its evaluative understanding in translation didactics where the portfolio is used a tool of learning and assessment (see e.g. Giaber, 2018). The driving force behind the presented approach is my conviction that in order to free TS trainees from forbidding misconceptions about linguistics and literature, it is beneficial to show them how the two disciplines can be mutually enriching especially through naturalistic observation and qualitative analysis. At the same time, it is important to demonstrate to them how it is possible to get the messages across via integrated translation exercises.

Outlining methodology as regards teaching literature for the selected target group of students, I propose that critical reading exercises be taught within literary courses. This is because they require active participation of trainees in analysing concrete cases studies. Critical reading exercises can be done with two kinds of teaching materials. First, they can be as long as a couple of paragraphs and second, they can involve a whole chapter (or act) from a selected literary work, be it a novel, short-story or play. The second type of the teaching material represents a more comprehensive critical reading activity and is more instrumental in providing TS trainees with a holistic perspective towards dissected linguistic and literary problems, which results in a more enriching interdisciplinary experience. However, translation exercises can be integrated more easily within the first possibility.

Furthermore, a thorny didactic problem in teaching literature for TS trainees is what kind of literature should be included into these courses. Classics or contemporary post-modernist authors? Or a balanced mixture of these two? Based on my teaching experience and trainees' reactions to the teaching material, I think a fair course should be based on the latter. Avoiding classic authors like Shakespeare or Hemingway can lead trainees astray in their future careers because not being sufficiently familiar with their works can cause that they will not be able to recognize plentiful cultural allusions when translating or interpreting. It should be borne in mind that in the Anglophone cultural space allusions to Shakespeare can be encountered virtually in any type of media ranging from a contemporary literary text via a comic strip up to a movie. On the other hand, shunning post-modernist authors do not provide trainees with a taste of contemporary literature, which can result in a somewhat oldish and biased approach. Thus, it is the course supervisor's responsibility to sensitively integrate both classic as well as more recent authors and not be unwisely influenced by personal preferences.

Below follows an empirical demonstration of the integrated approach I used within a course entitled *Lexis of the Literary Style* at the Institute of British and American Studies at the University of Prešov in Slovakia on the basis of a selected case study with its goals.

Teaching literature for TS trainees on the basis of a case study

This section of the paper focuses on an analysis of the character of Doctor Faustus from Christopher Marlowe's play *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* as a Renaissance scholar with his overwhelming desires for knowledge, power, wealth and fame. Its primary purpose is to discuss Faustus' personality traits on the basis of firstly, textual analysis of selected verses from Act I of 1616 Marlowe's drama and secondly, extra-linguistic knowledge about the background of the Renaissance. This is how a linguistic analysis comes in functional when being sensitively intertwined with a literary and cultural analysis, in compliance with my proclaimed integrated approach.

First and foremost, it is vital to realize that the Renaissance as an era in the history of mankind is a time marked by the liberation of individuals from any external authorities, secular and ecclesiastical dogmas. A Renaissance man, fully aware of his potential, is amazed at the world which unfolds before him. This type of man with his outstanding capabilities and flair may be perceived as a deified individual craving for knowledge going beyond the boundaries of the science of the day; as a creature who pushes his self-confidence to the uttermost bounds and overcomes emerging horizons in a titanic way (see Leclerc, 2004). This philosophical and cultural backdrop must be emphasized to TS trainees if we are to approach the character of Dr. Faustus in an objective way.

In the opening scene of the play, with Faustus in his study, one meets a man who has reached a pausing place in his life. He has been sustained by an undefined but powerful aspiration and complacency in his lifetime endeavours, but now the latter seems to have vanished. Already the first of Faustus' words imply (see Marlowe, 2003, p. I i 1-4) that he is an impatient, eager and vigorous man, dissatisfied with his current status and knowledge, still craving for more; to ascertain the ultimate purpose of every branch of study.

Faustus: Settle thy studies, Faustus, and begin
 To sound the depth of that thou wilt profess.
 Having commenced, be divine in show,
 Yet level at the end of every art. (Marlowe, 2003, pp. I i 1-4)

All this implies that it is time for a re-evaluation of the situation of the scholar. Faustus examines the traditional branches of human knowledge, i.e. philosophy, medicine, law and divinity as they were organized in the universities at that time. He finds each of them inadequate and limited to satisfy his desires. After many years of being bent over books, he becomes conscious of the limits of human knowledge as well as of the fact that human beings have not been endowed with the perfection of God. So, he solves this contention by an intrepid revolt against everything that confines him.

His soliloquy has from a lexical point of view a characterizing function: Marlowe makes use of Latin quotations, e.g. *Bene disserere est finis logices* (Marlowe, 2003, p. I i 7), which reflects a feature of his time – an interest of the Renaissance in Latin and Greek so that scholars could engage in original texts of ancient philosophers and poets. By references to the proper names of the famous personalities of Antiquity such as Aristotle, Galen, Emperor Justinian or Saint Jerome, Marlowe emphasizes Faustus' erudition. He equally rejects all these figures, which symbolizes his break-up with the Medieval Ages prizing authority, in favour of a modern spirit of free enquiry of the Renaissance. Furthermore, Faustus' repeated use of his own name throughout the soliloquy supports his awareness of his individualism and strength of will. It is precisely this pronounced individualism of the human being that is a crucial feature of a Renaissance man.

Having been ravished by Aristotle's *Analytics*, Faustus does not want to have anything in common with philosophy because he has already "attained the end" (Marlowe, 2003, p. I i 10), that is, he has already mastered its ultimate purpose. Besides, he already excels in the art of disputation. In medicine, apart from being the author of famous prescriptions, he helped cities to escape the plague and has equally attained the end of curing human bodies of ills. Yet, being a physician does not imbue him with a sensation of satisfaction and delight. His fundamental grievance is: "Yet art thou still but Faustus, and a man" (Marlowe, 2003, p. I i 21). Dissatisfied with his status, he rises up against the limitations that define the mode of human existence. He goes as far as to take the liberty of blaspheming when he exhibits superhuman ambitions such as to make people live eternally and to be able to resurrect them, like the Almighty. Since he realizes that he cannot vanquish Death, he renounces medicine. Equally, he denounces law as a mercenary pursuit, a drudgery undermining one's spirit. Finally, Divinity, traditionally seen as the peak of scholastic endeavour, holds the greatest disappointment. It strikes him as inconclusive, not admitting desire for knowledge and human curiosity, having its exact limits which when overstepped by man, incur con-

demnation by God and society. However, Faustus' principal objection against Divinity is that, as Gardner suggests, "it is grounded on the recognition of man's fallibility and mortality" (Gardner, 1972, p. 197). In the presented attitudes of Faustus towards the traditional fields of higher learning, one can spot his pride, haughtiness and mutinous spirit. Faustus' fortitude to go beyond the knowable and possible is worth admiration but also warning.

Faustus realizes that years of being immersed in studying bring him neither expected gratification nor limitless knowledge of truth and essence of reality, nor wealth. He reaches the conclusion that to grasp the meaning of one's life cannot be achieved by abstract brooding over it but by its experiencing, which is culturally another distinctive aspect of a Renaissance man. Being aware of the depressing force of the limitations imposed by traditional fields of learning, he abandons his systematic search for the final understanding of the world. He deviates from the moral position of a scholar and ethical principles of the science of the day and plunges defiantly into the practice of magic.

Only magic, holding out the possibility of gaining the omnipotence of God, seems to be able to please his restless spirit. "These metaphysics of magicians and necromantic books are heavenly" (Marlowe, 2003, p. I i 49-50), claims Faustus haughtily. The moment of the scholar's decision to take up sorcery deserves, however, a more comprehensive explanation. From a cultural angle, it must be interpreted against the backdrop of the period of the Renaissance. The physical borders of the world, which were getting a new shape at that time, enhance one's spiritual horizon as well. This rush of new facts, however surprising and unexpected, makes people feel disoriented and smashes up their traditional medieval picture of the world. The point is that a Renaissance man yearns precisely for a well-rounded picture of the world and believing in himself, he craves to know the essence of all phenomena in order to take control of them. Yet, he must realize his limits. The desire to explore nature and the universe and their secrets seems too audacious and equally surpasses the possibilities of science at that time.

Faustus, as a respected scholar of his time, is suffused with Promethean daring and is captivated by the thought of magic. He sees in it a possibility of being able to take control over the world, to accumulate wealth and power and overcome all contradictions:

Faustus: O, what a world of profit and delight,
Of power, honour, and omnipotence
Is promised to the studious artisan!
All the things that move between the quiet poles

Shall be at my command. Emperors and kings
 Are but obeyed in their several provinces,
 But his dominion that exceeds in this
 Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man –
 A sound magician is a demigod.
 Here tire my brains to get a deity.
 (Marlowe, 2003, p. I i 53-62)

A close lexical reading of the lines above suggests that Faustus behaves as a Renaissance Titan who dares to assert his individual will in defiance of God, and devoured by ambition, dares to extend his desire for power to the utmost bounds transcending human possibilities. Faustus' mind yearns for unrestrained power and reign over everyone and everything, including mighty emperors and kings. His decision to "tire his brain to get a deity" speaks of his presumptuous spirit, of his aspiring above his order, of his wish to touch the starry firmament and to be on a par with God. J. B. Steane (1964, p. 157), an acclaimed Marlovian critic, describes Faustus as "the young extremist, eager and buoyant, with a brilliantly energetic [...] mind, intoxicated by his enthusiasm" in this connection.

Overall, throughout Act I of the play Faustus brims with vitality and energy. He is infatuated by the vision of a perfect future that seems within the reach of his hand. From a cultural point of view, his ambitions reflect the power aims of Renaissance England, i.e. gaining control over countries and the seas, and the patriotic feelings of her inhabitants:

Faustus: Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please [...]
 I'll have them fly to India for gold;
 Ransack the ocean for ancient pearl,
 And search all corners of the new-found world
 For pleasant fruits, and princely delicates [...]
 I'll reign sole king of all the provinces.
 (Marlowe, 2003, p. I i 78, 81-84, 93)

As the lexical colouring of the verses above reveals, Faustus is enthralled by the idea of the possibility of world domination, which unfolds before him with the aid of magic. In this manner, Marlowe presents through Faustus' mouth the general attitude of England at that time, intoxicated by remarkable achievements of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I., such as implementation of overseas discoveries and acquisition of new colonies. An Elizabethan spectator could have therefore sympathized with the character of Faustus and

his longings to gain more power in the world, more of its wealth and areas that he envisioned to be conquered.

To sum up, we can claim that the interaction of the performed textual analysis backed up with literary and cultural interpretations allows us to arrive at a more detached view of Faustus as a dauntless and presumptuous man full of superhuman ambitions who violates particular ethical rules by his Promethean rebellion to enter territories that are denied to ordinary mortals. From a lexical point of view, the analysed sample makes use of fairly complex, both abstract and concrete lexis. The employed diction tends to be neutral as well as evaluative and is rarely emotionally charged. Marlovian English prefers a rather formal mode of expression, pushing vulgar and slangy expressions to the background. Overall, the lexis is used in an appropriate way with regard to wider contextual considerations; no words are used in any unusual combinations.

Conclusion

In closing, the implications of this paper are that teaching literature for TS trainees can be beneficial providing that it is taught with the application of the integrated approach using linguistic, literary and cultural insights. Indeed, further research is needed to confirm this claim, but based on this paper, literature course supervisors should consider the pros of the integrated approach. Apart from reinforcing TS trainees' strategies to interpret and analyse literary language naturally in context, it also gives them a fair chance to improve not only their linguistic and communicative skills, but also their extra-linguistic knowledge with regard to culture which they will need throughout their prospective translator careers. Learning about foreign cultures, that is about Anglophone cultures and their understanding of the world in a non-coercive way via literature is an added value of this approach. Besides, being familiar with the cultural background of selected literary works paves the way for a proper rendition of assigned text excerpts, thus mastering 'extra-textual' features of translation. Relating this background information can also foster trainees' critical thinking skills. All in all, realizing that literature can be a potentially powerful didactic tool, subjects such as e.g. *Lexis of the Literary Style* should be given considerable attention and room within curricula in higher education.

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*Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to Dr. Habil. Klaudia Bednárová-Gibová, Associate Professor of the Institute of British and American Studies at The Prešov University in Prešov (Slovakia).
E-mail: klaudia.gibova@unipo.sk*