The Ghost at the Banquet: the use and abuse of literature in the language classroom

Alan Pulverness
Norwich Institute for Language Education
When learners merely *use* language, and do not have their attention drawn to language *as* language, there is a risk that their productive proficiency will become fossilised at an unduly rudimentary level.

Referential

- Language which communicates on only one level, seeking information or handling a social situation
- Transaction-based
- Socially conditioned
- Motivated by social or personal rationale

Representational

- Language which engages the imagination of the receiver
Referential

• Language which communicates on only one level, seeking information or handling a social situation
• Transaction-based
• Socially conditioned
• Motivated by social or personal rationale

Representational

• Language which engages the imagination of the receiver
Referential

- Language which communicates on only one level, seeking information or handling a social situation
- Transaction-based
- Socially conditioned
- Motivated by social or personal rationale
- Referential language informs

Representational

- Language which engages the imagination of the receiver
- Opens up, calls upon, stimulates and uses areas of the mind, from imagination to emotion, from pleasure to pain, which referential language does not reach
- Representational language involves.
When I spoke in French I felt I was a rat in a maze, guided by a single point of light in the right direction but constantly going down blind alleys and having to retrace my steps, whereas in English I could just babble and occasionally astonish even myself with what came out of my mouth.
FUTILITY  Wilfred Owen

Move him into the sun -
Gently its touch awoke him once,
At home, whispering of fields unsown,
Always it woke him, even in France,
Until this morning and this snow.
If anything might rouse him now
The kind old sun will know.

Think how it wakes the seeds, -
Woke, once, the clays of a cold star.
Are limbs, so dear-achieved, are sides,
Full-nerved, - still warm, - too hard to stir?
Was it for this the clay grew tall?
- O what made fatuous sunbeams toil
To break earth’s sleep at all?
The next text was written during war-time, the First World War (1914 - 1918). A young soldier is dying, and as the writer (Wilfred Owen) speaks about him he reflects on the futility of the situation. As you read and listen, see if his reflections go further.

1. What do the following words refer to?
   - him (lines 2, 4, 6)
   - its (line 2)
   - it (lines 4, 8)
   - this (line 12)

2. The poem is set in France. Pick out other references to place, and try to work out what the dying man’s job was before the war.

3. Now try and identify references to: (a) time; (b) substance; (c) movement

4. What difference is there in the writer’s attitude to the sun in lines 7 and 13?

5. Why are there so many references to waking?

6. Line 11 is a kind of climax; can you interpret what has happened to provoke the writer’s question?

7. Is this poem without hope, or can you see anything positive in it?

8. The word *fatuous* (13) means ‘stupid, foolish, inane’. Can you see any connection between this and the title of the poem?

9. Is it an anti-war poem, in your opinion?
The Things that Matter  E Nesbit

Now that I've nearly done my days,
   And grown too stiff to sweep or sew,
I sit and think, till I’ll amaze,
   About what lots of things I know:
Things as I’ve found out one by one -
   And when I’m fast down in the clay,
My knowing things and how they're done
   Will all be lost and thrown away.

There’s things, I know, as won’t be lost,
   Things as folks write and talk about:
The way to keep your roots from frost,
   And how to get your ink spots out.
What medicine’s good for sores and sprains,
   What way to salt your butter down,
What charms will cure your different pains,
   And what will bright your faded gown.
The Things that Matter  

E Nesbit

Forgetting seems such silly waste!
   I know so many little things,
And now the Angels will make haste
   To dust it all away with wings!
O God, you made me like to know,
   You kept the things straight in my head,
Please, God, if you can make it so,
   Let me know something when I’m dead.
Read the poem and answer the questions.

1 Which of the following best summarizes the poem?

   a She is afraid of death and wants to hold on to life.
   b She would like her knowledge to be passed on and not lost when she dies.
   c She wonders what her life was for, if, in death, she forgets.
   d She thinks it would be a waste if her knowledge was lost when she dies.

2 Read the poem again and mark it like this.
   A References to food and cooking
   B References to health care
   C References to looking after a house

3 Many of the old lady’s chores were to do with food and its preparation. Which of them are still commonly done by people nowadays?

4 Her knowledge of health care seems to rest on old wives’ tales. What popular cures for illness exist in your country?

5 What impression do you have of the old lady? How do you envisage her appearance? Where does she live? What is her way of life like? Was your grandparents’ life like hers in any way?

6 The old lady would appear to have no fear of death, and complete faith in God. Compare the life that she led, and the values that people held in those days, with today’s consumer, ‘throw-away’ society. Have we lost a certain innocence with the knowledge that we now possess?
They saw nothing of Marianne till dinner time when she entered the room and took her place at the table without saying a word. Her eyes were red and swollen; and it seemed as if she held back her tears with difficulty. She avoided the looks of them all, could neither eat nor speak. After some time, on her mother's silently pressing her hand with sympathy, she burst into tears and left the room.

This depression continued the whole evening. She was without any power over herself. The slightest mention of anything to do with Willoughby upset her in an instant. Her family were most attentive to her comfort but it was impossible for them to keep clear of every subject which her feelings connected with him.

Marianne was awake the whole night and she wept the greatest part of it. She got up with a headache and was unable to talk. She was unwilling to take any nourishment, giving pain every moment to her mother and sisters. When breakfast was over she walked out by herself. She wandered about the village of Allenham, crying over the unhappy changes in her circumstances for most of the morning.

The evening passed off in the equal indulgence of feeling. Marianne played over every favourite song that she had been used to play to Willoughby, every piece of music in which their voices had been joined. She sat at the instrument gazing on every line of music that he had written out for her, till her heart was so heavy that no further sadness could be gained. This nourishment of grief continued every day. She spent whole hours at the pianoforte alternately singing and crying; her voice often totally choked by her tears.

**Glossary**

- **grief** *(noun)* - a strong feeling of sadness, usually because someone has died
- **swollen** *(adjective)* - an area of your body that is swollen has increased in size as a result of an injury or an illness
Match the two halves of the sentences to tell a story.

1. After meeting Lucy at a friend's dinner party
2. But on hearing she had been seeing another man
3. Not wanting to show her I was upset,
4. After a few months, I decided to start doing sport
5. And while out running one day,
6. The problem was I couldn’t be with her

a. I decided to break off the relationship.
b. without thinking of Lucy.
c. instead of feeling sorry for myself.
d. I met somebody else.
e. I pretended not to care.
f. we started going out together.

Writing

1. Work in pairs. Choose **one** of the tasks below.

A. Rewrite the story in Grammar exercise 3 from Willoughby's point of view.

B. Rewrite the story in Grammar exercise 4: add in more details about the characters and the events and add dialogue. You can also change details in the story or change the ending.

2. Read your story out to a partner who did the same task. How similar or different are your stories?

---

**Jane Austen** (1775–1817) was an English novelist whose work focused on the questions of courtship, marriage, morals and inheritance. *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) tells the story of Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, two sisters who are very different in personality. Elinor is very practical and sensible and Marianne is very emotional and sensitive.
This is just to say I have eaten the plums that were in the icebox and which you were probably saving for breakfast. Forgive me! They were delicious – so sweet and so cold.
This is just to say I have eaten the plums that were in the icebox and which you were probably saving for breakfast. Forgive me! They were delicious – so sweet and so cold.
THIS IS JUST TO SAY

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox
and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

William Carlos Williams Collected Poems 1921 - 1931
IF YOU’VE GOT A KITCHEN
IN YOUR head
WE’LL BE THE
BRAINS BEHIND IT.
With Schreiber you can easily turn
the kitchen in your head into the
kitchen in your home.
   Because when you choose one of
our designs you also get MFI’s
expert planning service. They won’t
just help you choose a kitchen,
they’ll help you create one.
   Take the superb hand-finished
hi-gloss wall units in the Schreiber
kitchen shown here. Beautiful aren’t
they? And as a glance at the
brochure will show you, they’re
a perfect example of the personal
touches you can add.
   So if you’ve got a new kitchen
in mind, keep dreaming and let us
do the scheming.
   TO SEE THE NEW SCHREIBER
RANGE VISIT MFI NOW.
IF YOU'VE GOT A KITCHEN
IN YOUR head
WE'LL BE THE
BRAINS BEHIND IT.

With Schreiber you can easily turn the kitchen in your head into the kitchen in your home.

Because when you choose one of our designs you also get MFI's expert planning service. They won't just help you choose a kitchen, they'll help you create one.

Take the superb hand-finished high-gloss wall units in the Schreiber kitchen shown here. Beautiful aren't they? And as a glance at the brochure will show you, they're a perfect example of the personal touches you can add.

So if you've got a new kitchen in mind, keep dreaming and let us do the scheming.

TO SEE THE NEW SCHREIBER RANGE VISIT MFI NOW.

Or post this coupon to MFI, 13-15 Kenrick Place, London W11 9AG.

Name
Address
Postcode

Schraber
MFI
All there is to know about Adolf Eichmann

EYES: Medium
HAIR: Medium
WEIGHT: Medium
HEIGHT: Medium
DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: None
NUMBER OF FINGERS: Ten
NUMBER OF TOES: Ten
INTELLIGENCE: Medium
All there is to know about Adolf Eichmann

EYES: Medium
HAIR: Medium
WEIGHT: Medium
HEIGHT: Medium
DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: None
NUMBER OF FINGERS: Ten
NUMBER OF TOES: Ten
INTELLIGENCE: Medium

What did you expect?
Talons?
Oversize incisors?
Green saliva?
Madness?

Leonard Cohen
The next thing was to do the sammy act, which was one way to unload some of our cutter so we’d have more of an incentive like for some shop-crausting, as well as it being a way of buying an alibi in advance, so we went into the Duke of New York on Amis Avenue and sure enough there in the snug there were three or four old baboochkas peeting their black and suds on SA (State Aid). Now we were the very good malchiks, smiling good evensong to one and all, though these wrinkled old lighters started to get all shook, their veiny old rookers all trembling round their glasses, and making the suds spill on the table. ‘Leave us be, lads’, said one of them, her face all mappy with being a thousand years old, ‘we’re only poor old women’. But we just made with the zoobies, flash flash flash, sat down, rang the bell, and waited for the boy to come. When he came, all nervous and rubbing his rookers on his grazzy apron, we ordered us four veterans -
I ent have no gun
I ent have no knife
but mugging de Queen's English
is the story of my life

I don’t need no axe
to split/up yu syntax
I don’t need no hammer
to mash/up you grammar

Dem accuse me of assault
on the Oxford dictionary/
imagine a concise peaceful man like me/
dem want me to serve time
for inciting rhyme to riot
but I tekking it quiet
down here in Clapham Common

I’m not a violent man Mr Oxford don
I only armed wit mih human breath
but human breath
is a dangerous weapon ...
love is more thicker than forget
more thinner than recall
more seldom than a wave is wet
more frequent than to fail

is most mad and moonly
and less it shall unbe
than all the sea which only
is deeper than the sea

love is less always than to win
less never than alive
less bigger than the least begin
less littler than forgive

it is most sane and sunly
and more it cannot die
than all the sky which only
is higher than the sky

e e cummings
Literature...

...is an excellent source of motivation.

...encourages personal involvement.

...is an excellent source of language acquisition.

...provides a real-world reading experience in the classroom.

...provides vivid contexts for language learning.

...helps learners to develop language awareness.

...helps learners to develop text-awareness.

...enables learners to become more confident – and more competent – readers.

...provides a stimulating basis for genuine communicative interaction.

...transcends language *training* and enables the foreign language class to become part of a broader *educational* curriculum.

...brings the reality of another culture into the classroom.
Angelbread!
Varying...

- medium or genre
- point of view
- text time
- Audience
- the voices in the text
- the referential world of the text

Claire Kramsch

*Context and Culture in Language teaching* (1993)
Textual intervention

• alternative titles and openings
• alternative endings
• prequels, interludes and sequels
• retelling from a different point of view
• redistributing speech roles
• direct speech ↔ indirect speech
• adding / removing narrative commentary
• changing narrative context
• ‘the road not taken’
• prose ↔ drama

adapted from Rob Pope Textual Intervention (1995)