

REVIEW

A Stylistic Approach to Canon Breaking Texts.
Eds. Alcina Sousa and Ingrid Cíbiková. Trnave:
Univerzita sv. Cyrila a Metoda v Trnave/Filozofická
fakulta, Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky, 2016

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The book we are reviewing bridges a gap in the field of linguistic studies, particularly in that of foreign language teaching and learning. Although the work's focus lies on the study of specific linguistic, discursive and pragmatic issues related to the English language, the epistemological, didactic and instrumental principles of the book may, in fact, be applied to any other natural language. Within the scope of English linguistics, because the object in question is the English language, *A Stylistic Approach to Canon Breaking Texts* is part of what we call Linguistics Applied to the Teaching of non-native/additional languages (beyond the mother tongue), an area which has been gradually assuming more academic and research focus for the last two decades.

The book comprises 197 pages, 21 chapters, as follows: Chapter I – *Ways Out: Checking Students' Set Text Readings*; Chapter II – *Ways In: Previewing Guidelines*; Chapter III – *Characters. Understanding Characters and their Relationships*; Chapter IV – *Context. Understanding the Setting/Social Milieu*; Chapter V – *Plot. Understanding the Plot*; Chapter VI – *Main Themes. Understanding Main Themes of the Text*; Chapter VII *Genre. Understanding the Genre of the Text*; Chapter VIII – *Diary Entries. Understanding Different Modes of Vindicating Subjectivity*; Chapter X – *Radio Talk*; Chapter XI – *Drama Sketch. Understanding Creativity in Prose Fiction and Performance*; Chapter XII – *Postcards and Christmas Card. Understanding Everyday Home/Family/Social Literacy Practices*; Chapter XIII – *Telegraphic Language. Reading between the Lines: Understanding Humour*; Chapter XIV – *Multimedia Messages. Deciding about Register and Language Purpose in Everyday Social/Professional Domains*; Chapter XV – *Personal Narratives: Understanding Voice and Register*; Chapter XVI – *Personal Notes. Understanding Subjectivity in Everyday Literary Practices*; Chapter XVII – *Poems. Understanding Language and Literariness across Genres*; Chapter XVIII – *Essays. Understanding Critical Language and its Creative Use*; Chapter XIX – *Memos. Understanding Short Messages*; Chapter XX – *Messages. Understanding Creativity in Everyday Communication Events: Science and Technology* and Chapter XXI – *Recipes. Understanding the Language of Instructions*. It is worth mentioning that and each chapter has a rather unique and identical structure: "general aim", "specific aims", "tasks" and "activities".

Being a compilation of fictional and non-fictional texts and/or excerpts for use by university students of English as a foreign language, there is, as the very title of the book and the chapters indicate, a concern with the selection of texts that are then properly addressed in the different units of the textbook. In fact, the authors state:

The choice of texts represents a wide range of text types, covering the language of drama, poetry and fiction, the language of non-literary registers such as letters, diary entries, the language of newspapers, technical language, and the language of advertisements, jokes and humour, the language of radio talk, postcards, telegraphic language, personal narratives, personal notes, essays, memo messages and recipes. (15)

There is, in fact, a complementary theoretical – practical approach to textual diversity, the development of students' reading comprehension skills, and the study of language in use across registers and contexts (communicative competence). Starting in most units from authentic texts, a sensitive matter in a foreign language class, the work here analysed resorts to texts ranging from literary to non-literary ones and covers diverse subjects such as informal communication aspects and stylistic details, effectively underpinning language teaching as a global system, opposed to a simple unit in the study of language and communication: the language is regarded in its multidimensional scope. To us, this seems to be one of the most complex tasks of the authors of a textbook such as this one: the design and proposal of a form of teaching drawing on the study of language in use – that is, *real/authentic* language – without overlooking its linguistic, discursive and pragmatic clines along with the communicative and aesthetic dimensions.

Hence, the range of suggested activities are meant to develop three interrelated skills – reading, writing and interpretation/decoding. The authors show a major concern for the new study movements on critical literacy and its integration in the teaching and learning process, which are in fact emphasised by the authors as they outline the methodological principles and the book's structure:

To wrap up, most of the critical literacy practices privilege the interface between language and literature, develop abilities across the curriculum and demand, on the one level, reflective teaching and learning involving an integrative development of skills on the other, a student-centred, activity-based, process-oriented pedagogy (21–22).

Being a reference work in the present scientific panorama, the notion of activity and task, as previously stated, assumes a crucial role in the structure of every chapter. Defending language promotion/awareness according to the principles of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*,¹ the tasks, the textual choices and real-world reproductions are nowadays a hot topic in Applied Linguistics; Tomlinson in this regard, states:

The text does not have to be produced by a native speaker and it might be a version of an original which has been simplified to facilitate communication. The task does not have to be a real-life task, but can be a classroom task which involves the use of real life skills in order to achieve not just communication but a non-linguistic outcome (e.g. one member of a group getting the others to draw a replica of a drawing she has been shown).² (162)

The very notion of “task” and “activity”, as shown in the book, reveals another fundamental notion in the process of English teaching and learning: that of “negotiation”, which pervades activities in different chapters. The authors' design of the practical approach also borrows from the relatively current principles in situations of input and output mismatch with regard to the meaningful learning and acquisition of foreign languages; “negotiation” is fundamental in these cases, and Long's words are quite enlightening:

Negotiation for meaning, and especially negotiation work that triggers interactional adjustments by the NS [native speaker] or more competent interlocutor, facilitates acquisition because it connects input, internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention, and output in productive ways.³ (451–52)

The book, authored by Alcina Sousa and Ingrid Cíbková, was only possible thanks to their solid knowledge in terms of different subjects of Applied Linguistics and Language Acquisition and Learning. In our opinion, we have, from now on, another tool at the service of English teaching that holds a plethora of potentialities for the work of the English language teacher, although it is primarily aimed at a specific learning public, which will have a method facilitating the development of the globalising proficiency of the English language.

More than reading the book, I strongly recommend its use in the classroom, not only for its potential, but also for the new didactic perspectives provided to the foreign language teacher. With a fundamental field now covered, it is of the scientific community's utmost interest that identical materials be produced for other living languages.

¹ Conselho da Europa. *Quadro Europeu Comum de Referência para as Línguas – Aprendizagem, Ensino e Avaliação*. Asa, 2001.

² Tomlinson, B., “Materials Development for Language Learning and Teaching”. *Language Teaching*, vol. 45 no. 2, 2012, pp. 143–79.

³ Long, M., “The Role of the Linguistic Environment in Second Language Acquisition”. *Handbook of Second Language Acquisition*, edited by W. Bhatia e T. Ritchie, Academic Press, 1996, pp. 413–68.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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