

Sue Townsend: Creator of cultural headaches?

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It is only recently that literature has once again been recognised as a valuable source for teaching in the EFL classroom. During the time when Grammar-Translation was dominant, literary texts were "the very staple of foreign language teaching" since they represented models of "good" writing as well as illustrating the grammatical rules of writing (Duff & Maley, 1993: 3). However, with the advent of Structuralism, literature study was soon swept aside. It was associated with bad, old or traditional teaching methods and it was believed that literature failed to provide the vocabulary, structures and functional language that students required.

As teachers of English in a Faculty of Translation and Interpretation, we argue that language is not separate from other forms of language. Apart from having some linguistic implications for use in the language classroom, literary texts offer methodological and motivational implications, being open to multiple interpretation and dealing with themes of utmost importance which allow students to get closer to a foreign culture. Maley and Duff go on to argue how, "this 'genuine feel' of literary texts is a powerful motivator and touches on themes to which learners can bring a personal response from their experience" (1990: 6).

Learning a language means cultural enrichment to which children's literature can contribute. Children's texts are obviously easier linguistically speaking and therefore less intimidating for a student to tackle. Yet, the texts are still genuine and, the range of styles tending to be simpler, their cultural references are often made more explicit. The choice of Sue Townsend's *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13 3/4*, considering its cultural content, is thus an ideal tool for our students of translation who, through an apparently simple text, will discover that learning a language also means taking into account the cultural, social and historical dimensions of that language. It also entails questioning the social and cultural reality that lies hidden behind the words that are to be translated. Studying a foreign language for them means learning to perceive the social and cultural reality of the community that uses the language as an instrument of communication. An intercultural focus implies a double progression where the acquisition of the language runs parallel to acquiring cultural knowledge and knowledge of the meaning that is expressed through that culture. Thus, a double objective exists: to learn to interpret the cultural and semiotic content of the language and, to learn to make a contrastive analysis, using one's own language with its own cultural and semiotic weight as a starting point.

Culture and communication cannot be separated because language and culture are so closely related that one cannot be properly understood without the other. Culture dictates who talks to whom, about what, and how the communication proceeds; it helps to determine how people encode messages, the meanings they have for messages, and the conditions and circumstances under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed, or interpreted. As such, we may agree with Samovar, Porter and Jain (Samovar, Porter, & Jain, 1981) when they argue that culture is simply the foundation of communication.

This is obviously not a late 20th century reflection. At the beginning of 19th century, Humboldt was really considering the relationship between language and culture when he defined language as an activity carried out by man which enabled him to express his thoughts: language is not an end-product but a creative activity (Christmann, 1985). Basing his ideas on Humboldt's work, Vossler (1904) confirms the interrelation between language and the culture and ideology of its speakers.