

# Authentic Literary English Texts as a Tool of Teaching Reading, Comprehension and Analysis to EFL Students

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## Abstract

Among several skills that have to be mastered in the process of EFL teaching, reading is one of the most significant. Nobody can deny that authentic literature is a marvelous way to enrich teachers' and students' scope of material to teach and to learn. Nevertheless, reading can carry a lot of difficulties. This research has its purpose to study in which way various types of adaptation differ from each other, to analyze if it is appropriate to use authentic fiction literature or not, and, finally, to develop a methodology that teachers and students could use to be able to solve all the problems which appear in the course of reading authentic feature texts. In this article, we have taken J.K. Jerome Three men in a boat as a piece of authentic fiction literature to use at English reading classes for B1-B2 level students of Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russia. We have developed a framework which can be advised to teachers for application to facilitate the process of fiction literature comprehension. This framework involves profound practicing of reading and speaking skills by students in the following essential stages: pre-reading, reading and comprehension, vocabulary work, speaking and analysis. This framework is recommended for reading literary texts at EFL classes.

**Keywords:** University education; Reading; Authentic literature.



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## 1. Introduction

Learning to read is one of the basic perceptive skills that a student has to acquire while studying at an EFL course. The strategy selected by the teacher will depend on many factors - the university curriculum, the student's level of English, the teacher's preferences and experience. Teachers may choose their reading material from a variety of sources - prepared textbook materials, authentic literary works and loads of texts from the Internet. However, while the teacher devises the strategy of teaching particular students, he will have to answer the questions of what to read and how to read. The first question implies the choice between a literary and non-literary text, the second makes him choose between an authentic and adapted text, as well as build up the strategy of a lesson. This article considers choosing the appropriate type of reading in a foreign language course (Passov, 2002) ; (Alyousef, 2005; Klychnikova, 1983; Yazar, 2013), studies different arguments for and against literary and non-literary texts in the classroom (Ibragimova et al., 2017; Maley, 2001; Tatsuki, 2015) , discusses the problem of using adapted and authentic reading material (Simensen, 1990), (Frey et al., 2012), (Daskalos and Ling, 2005), Campbell (1987) describes the process of working with authentic literary text at the EFL reading class.

## 2. Methodological framework

Before choosing the strategy of teaching and the appropriate text for reading, three main points should be covered. First, we should distinguish between different types of reading and their definitions and choose the ones which are the most applicable to be used for teaching reading. Second, the debatable issue of using literature in the English classroom should be viewed. Third, the difference between authentic and adapted texts should be considered.

### 2.1. Types of reading

In methodological literature, we find many different types of reading, based on different criteria: synthetic or analytical (in other terminology, top-down or bottom-up), immediate and translated, communicative or academic reading. Traditionally, Russian EFL methodologists single out three main types of reading, based on the purpose of reading and the organization of the reading process. The types are skimming (reading for gist or skim reading), scanning (reading for specific information) and reading for comprehension (reading for detail) (Passov, 2002) ; (Klychnikova, 1983). Skimming requires general understanding of the text, learning its main points without going deep into details. Thus, students learn how to summarize the text and avoid focusing on unfamiliar grammar

structures and lexical units. This type of reading is necessary to deal with any unknown text at the very first stage – to understand its genre, general purpose and main idea.

Scanning is used to search for necessary information in the text (data, numbers, names etc.) or, after looking at the material, detect if the text contains necessary information. This type of reading is also quite frequently used in professional sphere and everyday life – when, for instance, one needs to look through large volume of information and decide if it is relevant and necessary. Reading for detail (reading for detailed comprehension) implies complete and thorough understanding of all facts and details, their comprehension and memorizing. As a result, a learner should be able to evaluate, comment on or clarify the peculiarities of the studied text. Yazar (2013), following the research results, singles out other types of reading, except the ones mentioned above:

- Intensive and extensive reading (Alyousef, 2005),
- Search reading,
- Receptive reading,
- Critical reading,
- Reading for meaning,
- Prediction,
- Redundancy (Yazar, 2013)

The researcher emphasizes reading for meaning as one of the most valuable for EFL teaching. According to the purpose of reading, (Berardo, 2006) uses the criteria of purpose as the basis and classifies reading to reading for survival, reading for learning and reading for pleasure. The first type uses reading as a response to urgent everyday situations. Reading for learning is done in the classroom for study purposes, whereas reading for pleasure is the only one, which is done on a voluntary basis and used for entertainment.

## 2.2. Using literature in EFL classroom

Still, there is a lot of debate on whether to use literature at EFL classes. Literature has been used as the source for teaching a foreign language since ancient times. But the XXth century brought in some changes into this approach. With the development of TESL/ TEFL methodology the idea of a functionally competent user of a foreign language has become prevailing (Maley, 2001). This approach does not see fiction or a literary text as an appropriate source for teaching a foreign language. Fortunately, numerous followers of the idea to use literature see its stimulating and motivating effect to teach EFL/ESL courses. As a result, literary texts have been reintroduced to many countries' study programs and curricula (Tatsuki, 2015).

## 2.3. Authentic and adapted texts

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines the phenomenon of authenticity as of the quality of being real or true. Simensen (1990) prefers the term original to authentic and uses the term adapted for various alterations in the text. Nunan sees authentic materials as the ones that have been produced for purposes other than language teaching (Erkaya, 2005). Frey *et al.* (2012) view the term authentic as having something to do with the real world Frey *et al.* (2012). Daskalos and Ling (2005) consider authentic material as books and articles where language and structure are not simplified in any way (Daskalos and Ling, 2005). These authors see the term authentic as a reaction against fabricated artificial language, which is mostly used in textbooks.

Taking into consideration the definitions mentioned above, we consider the term authentic as the material which has been produced for native speakers, which has not been altered in any way and the purpose of which was not language teaching. We should also see the difference between different types of adaptation and consider its distinction from authentic material. Campbell (1987) points out the peculiarities of adaptation, its linguistic and lexical simplification and linguistic standardization. Adaptation can exist in a form of abridgement and rewriting. Abridgement involves editing sub-plots, detail, and simplification of a narrative structure, which makes it linear. Rewriting is another form of adaptation, when lexis and syntactic structures are rewritten and given in their simpler forms in order to match the readers' level (Akhpanov *et al.*, 2018; Campbell, 1987).

## 3. Results

As the scope of our research is the issue of using authentic literature in the process of teaching EFL reading, we think that reading for detailed comprehension and reading for meaning are the most significant, as they require the combination of different learned skills. Except the fact that learners should possess sufficient grammar and vocabulary knowledge, comprehend syntactic structures and have enough background knowledge, they should be able to elicit the meaning of the text as a work of literature. It means that students should read and perceive a literary text as a whole, interpret it according to the learner's experience, analyze and comment on it. This, of course, means that the level of foreign knowledge should be sufficient for such a complicated activity (starting with intermediate and above).

These types of reading also correspond well with extensive (in the meaning of both quantity and quality of the material) and intensive (explore the meaning and understand the writing mechanisms) reading (Alyousef, 2005). According to Nuttall (1996), the final overall goal of teaching reading is to teach students read unfamiliar non-adapted texts. Ideally, all these skills should bring students to reading authentic literature for pleasure, which we consider to be the highest developing point while teaching reading. We support the point of view that literature should be used in a language classroom and insist that using literature in a foreign language classroom could be highly motivating and beneficial for learners, providing them with authentic and genuine language and cultivating

good taste. Taking into account the points mentioned by Campbell, not all adapted (rewritten or abridged) texts can be successfully used in a language classroom. The reason is that lexical or grammatical simplification is done by native speakers, who might not be familiar with the words, difficult for particular learners. The second reason could be oversimplification of the literary text, which results in the loss of narrative interest by the readers (Campbell, 1987)

Daskalos and Ling (2005) suppose that EFL/ESL textbooks use texts with removed cultural component (the reason of a text being more difficult), which makes textbook material artificial and uninteresting. Thus, lexical adaptation may sometimes lead to the lack of cultural interest. Adaptation should only be used when the learners' level of English prevents them from understanding the text thoroughly. At the same time, adapted reading can be successfully used for preparing students to read authentic texts. We agree that at the initial stages of learning a foreign language, adaptations are necessary, though they can be substituted by simpler authentic texts like fairy tales or nursery rhymes. When the volume of vocabulary and grammar increases, students may start getting acquainted with an authentic literary text. The process of switching from adapted to non-adapted material should be performed carefully; otherwise students might lose their interest and motivation. The first authentic texts for reading should meet certain requirements, such as:

- Be preferably short than long,
- Have a simple plot and set of characters,
- Should not be overwhelmed by complicated vocabulary,
- Be easily interpreted,
- Should be relevant to the students' needs,
- Do not contain any irregular linguistic forms (e.g., dialects, slang etc.)
- Should be interesting for students.

At the same time, careful preparation is extremely important if the teacher chooses an authentic text. The teacher must follow three traditional methodological steps in preparing the reading class – pre-reading, while reading and post reading stages. The pre-reading stage overcomes difficulties of linguistic and socio-cultural character. The while-reading stage is used to encourage the learner to be a flexible, active reader and also promote a dialogue between reader and writer (Berardo, 2006). The post-reading stage usually includes comprehension check in the form of questions, true/false questions etc. Taking into account all the theoretical points mentioned above, the series of classes for intermediate students was carried out in Kazan Federal University as the part of their EFL course. The novel *Three Men in a Boat* by Jerome K. Jerome, which consists of 19 chapters, was taken as the authentic literary text. Students read one chapter of the novel at a time and did the exercises. The work on each chapter was divided into pre-reading, reading and comprehension, vocabulary work and speaking and analysis parts. Thus, we combined traditional three-stage approach (pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading) with extensive vocabulary work and stylistic analysis.

It must be mentioned, that the plot structure of the novel chosen is peculiar. Each chapter is the collection of short stories and situations, which are sometimes vaguely connected with the main plot line (travelling of the three men down the Thames). Thus, the purpose of the pre-reading stage was to help students get acquainted with the situations mentioned in the chapter (e.g. visiting a doctor, seeing historical places, singing in public etc.). We also tried to overcome difficulties of socio-cultural and linguistic character. For example, the students were asked to look up historical personalities and their contribution to the history of England in the reference books and web-sites. A similar task was given about geographical places that could be unfamiliar for students. To avoid difficulties with unfamiliar vocabulary, the students were asked to do a range of guess the meaning exercises (e.g. guess the meaning of words with international roots (like symptom), of compound nouns etc.) and were given the unfamiliar vocabulary with pronunciation. The reading and comprehension stage consisted of two types of questions – for skimming and scanning. For example, the students were asked to place the events in the correct order to check the general understanding of the plot and to answer special questions about particular events in the chapter. The novel by J. K. Jerome is abundant in topical vocabulary in different areas, e.g. clothes, diseases, food etc. This was the reason why we decided to include the stage of vocabulary work. The students worked with the particular vocabulary of each chapter, starting from the level of a word/ word building, then word-combinations and the use of this vocabulary in the sentences. The tasks included giving Russian and English equivalents, a range of matching exercises, gap-filling tasks and Russian and English translation exercises, which included the practiced vocabulary units (Villalobos, 2013).

The speaking and analysis stage included three types of exercises: guessing the meaning of the expressions or idioms from the context, analyzing stylistic peculiarities of the text and speaking exercises, which included scaffolding language (use the following phrases to talk about the episode). We tried not to overload the stylistic analysis part with literary terms, thus the tasks were directed at the practical usage of the devices. For example, look at the following extract from the chapter. The device the author uses is called... (A metaphor). A metaphor is.... (Then the short definition of the term was given). Are the following examples metaphors or not? Does the author use similar devices? etc. This way the students learned to analyze the use of literary language and style. As a result, the literary text was not only used as the object of language, but was also studied for its literary value (Mohammadi et al., 2018).

## 5. Discussions

As reading is one of the key aspects of language teaching and learning, it has been thoroughly discussed among researchers and methodologists. Christine Nuttall's "*Teaching reading skills in a foreign language*" (Nuttall, 1982)

can be called the teacher's manual. It contains the basics of L2 teaching methodology and the author's valuable experience. Wallace has also described her experience of teaching various age and social groups and has written several articles and books on teaching different skills. Among them reading has been the focus of her attention, including the aspect of using authentic texts (Wallace, 1992). The chapter Reading written for The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages was also a valuable contribution to this research. Similarly, the chapter written by Maley (2001) (Literature in the Language Classroom) for the same Cambridge Guide has played a significant role in this research. Hamp-Lyons (1985), the author of several textbooks from the University of Edinburgh has devised her own text-strategic approach to teaching reading, which can be generalized and used to work with any text.

Nancy Campbell's research on various types of adaptation, based on comparison of authentic and adapted texts (Campbell, 1987) was very valuable and useful for the present article and teaching practice. Many other authors have studied the problem of using adapted and authentic texts in the EFL classroom (Alyousef, 2005; Berardo, 2006; Daskalos and Ling, 2005; Erkaya, 2005; Frey *et al.*, 2012; Shulgina, 2013; Simensen, 1990). All of them are practicing teachers and their experience has been extremely helpful from both theoretical and practical points of view.

## 6. Conclusion

This article studied different types of reading from the point of view of Russian and foreign methodologists. We have studied the issue of using literary texts in the classroom and came to the conclusion that literature is still a precious source of living and real language, which also fosters good taste. Talking about the authenticity of reading material, both adapted and authentic texts can be used in the classroom, although certain conditions should be satisfied – the appropriateness of the text for students from lexical, grammatical, meaningful and stylistic point of view and careful preparation from the teacher's side. Therefore, authentic literary text can be used in the course of EFL teaching, but demands additional work from the teacher's side (creating pre-, while- and post-reading exercises; selecting appropriate and interesting texts), but the result will be students' increased motivation and self-confidence, because they manage to work with authentic literature. It must be said that not all authentic literary texts are easily read and understood by learners. If we choose the authenticity of a text as the main priority and avoid any type of simplification or adaptation, we are not to change the literary text itself. But we can change out approach to working with it and teaching reading through the use of literature. The J. K. Jerome's literary work is neither short nor simple. It is overwhelmed by historical and cultural details and facts, unfamiliar vocabulary and language. The approach presented helped us to overcome the difficulties of language and style, while the authenticity of the literary text was kept unchanged. From the applied point of view, the research is important, as it combines studying the text from literary and linguistic points of view. Stylistic analysis is applied from the practical point and supplements linguistic understanding of the text. The research also shows how to work with a long literary text.

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