

9. Second Language Learning at Third Level in Spain: Reading English Literature

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This paper describes the different areas of study and research in the Spanish third-level curriculum for second language learning. It focuses on the Spanish degree Filología Inglesa or English Philology, with a case-study of the curriculum of the University of Corunna looking at the subjects, workshops and activities developed by the English department and the University Institute of Research in Irish Studies 'Amergin'. The approach to teaching language and literature to these students of English is considered, and several literary texts used at the University of Corunna are examined in order to analyse the way Spanish university students study English as a second language, both as a major and a minor degree. Amongst the skills we want to promote in the acquisition of English as a second language there is a focus on grammar, syntax and phonetics in order to achieve proficiency not only in speaking, but also in reading and writing in the English language. However, we also introduce the topic of second language acquisition in the context of the North Western region of Spain known as Galicia from the perspective of a diglossic community. That is to say, a community interacting both in Spanish and in the Galician language (a Romanic language similar to Portuguese).

Introduction

The study of literature plays a central role in extending third-level students' linguistic and cultural knowledge of their foreign language. This paper discusses the national curriculum in English studies at university level in Spain, specifically in Galicia, and examines aspects of the teaching and

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learning of English as an additional language among Spanish students. The degree programme in English Philology taught at the University of Corunna recognises that the study of literature in English enriches students' knowledge of the English language, and thus the development of high proficiency in spoken and written English are judged to be mutually reinforcing. The approach to the teaching of language and literature to these students will be outlined here, and some examples will be given of the ways in which English texts are presented to the students. The main objective of our degree is to let students achieve a philological training as well as a thoroughly comprehensive knowledge of the linguistic, literary and cultural aspects inherently represented in the English language and philological studies. In fact, in our degree the study of English language throughout the centuries, from Old English to etymology, is essential.

It is important to situate the study of English in Corunna in the context of Galician history and culture, as these impact on students' contact with English-speaking countries and on their attitudes to the language. Galician culture has always considered itself significantly different from Spanish culture. The most important differences include its geographical situation (in the north-west of Spain), which is quite similar to the Irish one in its peripherality, its traditional music (which is also quite similar to Irish music), and its literature and language, Galician. The Galician community is a peripheral entity in Spain which is deeply influenced by its bilingual situation.

During the Franco Dictatorship, French was considered the most important second language in Galicia. We cannot forget that, during the Second World War, Spain was an ally of Germany and consequently opposed to Britain, and thus, opposed to English culture and language. The 1970s and 1980s were decisive for the introduction of English as the new foreign language in Spain after French. After Franco's death in 1975 Spain experienced political, economic, social and educational changes and improvement. As far as education was concerned, the national curriculum under Franco had been totally controlled by the regime and was old-fashioned. The new democratic parties came to a general agreement and

designed a very complex national curriculum, both for secondary and university programmes.

As far as Galicia is concerned, it is important to consider some cultural features that make us different from the peninsula as a whole. Galicia was, due to its peripheral situation, constantly in contact with the Anglophone countries. Since pre-historic times, navigation was a way of commerce that established fluid socio-cultural relationships between the Galician community, Ireland and Great Britain. St James's Way was, and still is, one of the bridges that brought the influences of continental and English speaking countries to this remote part of Europe. Other elements of connection were the *Colegio de Irlandeses* (Irish School) in the eighteenth century at Santiago de Compostela, and amongst the most important historical events that linked Galicia with the Anglo-Irish intelligentsia we may include Drake's attack on the city of Corunna in the sixteenth century, and the part the English troops commanded by Sir John Moore played during the Napoleonic wars.

Some of the literary relationships and influences in Galicia are particularly noteworthy in an Irish context. An innovative project was developed by the so-called *Xeración Nós* (a group of twentieth century Galician writers and intellectuals who had an intense fascination with Irish culture) and especially through the work of some writers such as D. Alvaro Cunqueiro or D. Ramón Otero Pedrayo, who did the first translation of a fragment from *Ulysses* into a peninsular language (Galician). As for other cultural aspects which link us to the Irish ones, Galician music is mainly represented by its bagpipe, and bears many similarities to Irish traditional music.

Spanish degree *Filoloxía Inglesa* or English Philology

Before analyzing in depth the teaching of English in Spanish universities, it is necessary to explain that the university structure in Spain is divided into three main levels or categories: *Primer ciclo* or First level, *Segundo ciclo* or Second level and *Tercer ciclo* or PhD studies as well Masters courses. Within *Primer ciclo* or the First level, corresponding to two years of study (equivalent to a minor degree), 450 hours are dedicated to the study of the

English language, while 270 are given to compulsory study of English literature. In this first level of degree study of English as a second language, the study of writing techniques and literary criticism are included. Both subjects are meant to improve the skills the student needs to develop in order to continue with their training or specialization in literature. Thus, a course such as 'Writing Techniques' deals with the formal aspects of any language and is mainly directed at commercial applications of their foreign language skills. Students learn how to write a memo, a formal letter, a c.v. and, most specifically, to plan and write a critical essay. 'English Literary Criticism' on the other hand, deals mainly with the different critical schools we find in nineteenth- and twentieth-century English literature. Consequently, in this course students focus on reading and writing skills, and improving their linguistic competence in order to gain experience in analytical criticism.

Within *Segundo ciclo*, or the Second level, corresponding to another two years of study (higher degree), 420 (compulsory) hours are dedicated to the study of the English language, compared to 270 hours required for the study of English literature. Students may also take a number of optional courses on literature, and can, in fact, choose between different literatures written in English, such as Scottish, Irish, American, and others. So the student can prepare to specialise in the study of the literature written in English by means of achieving the basic skills necessary to continue with higher studies such as Masters degrees or PhD studies, or any other technical course, such as Paleographic Studies or Forensic Linguistics. Once a student has passed both the First and Second Levels s/he can specialise in literature, as it is considered that the groundwork has been laid by means of a highly comprehensive variety of language courses. Without such a good basis in the language, the student would not have the necessary skills to tackle the difficulties present in the works of some authors, such as Shakespeare, Chaucer or Joyce, which are included amongst the literary subjects of the Second Level. The study of such works would be impossible in First Level because of the students' more limited English competence.

Tercer ciclo or PhD studies include 'English Philology' and 'Irish Studies' programmes, but also the Masters course offered by our research institute. The *Amergin University Institute of Research in Irish Studies* was founded at the University of Corunna with the intention of promoting academic research on issues concerning Ireland and the teaching of Irish Studies, and providing a source of information on Irish issues with the overall objective of relating such questions to the context of Galicia and Spain as a whole. It is, therefore, important to provide a platform from which research and information about the situation regarding various aspects of Irish life and the equivalent in Galicia can be spread. The online postgraduate course 'Expert in Irish Studies' is one of the most innovative and multidisciplinary Masters degree programmes in Europe, offering an integral vision of the Irish world. The fact that it is situated in the Western Atlantic gives Ireland a special relevance for Galicia and other regions within the Atlantic area in a wide variety of fields including culture, economics, business and information technology. Thus, this multidisciplinary postgraduate course is conceived as a necessary introduction to Irish and Atlantic Studies, with the belief that the success of Ireland could have a positive effect on Galicia and the Atlantic area at all levels, from academia to the public and private levels. An online PhD programme in 'Irish Studies' has been developed with the idea of offering a wide variety of perspectives on different aspects of the contemporary Irish panorama from a scientific, academic, cultural and historical point of view. Amongst its main objectives it includes the study of Irish culture through its literature, history and music; the analysis of the Irish economy as a factor of development, as well as the study of technological development and its influence; and cultural tourism as a model for the Galician tourist industry, among many other topics.

Other aspects of the non-established curriculum represented by the pioneering work of *Amergin* are the Irish language courses and the activities of the English Studies Alumni Office. In fact, the Alumni Office offers a wide range of courses as well as many other cultural activities. Amongst the projects in this academic year we may highlight a photographic exhibition based on the Diaspora and the Irish identity, the publication of several volumes related to English for Specific Purposes,

and a wide range of courses on Irish, Scottish and Welsh language and its literature.

A case study: Teaching English literature in Galicia

In considering specific aspects of teaching and learning English at third level in Galicia, we will consider here the importance of gaining a linguistic base in the English language in order to develop more complex skills such as reading comprehension and criticism. The texts chosen for discussion in this regard are a fragment from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as well as the literary background and social context from Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, both texts which are part of the English literature IV programme.

Teaching *The Canterbury Tales* to third-level learners of English

Teaching a text such as *The Canterbury Tales* to second language learners is extremely difficult from the teacher's perspective. The student needs to know in advance many of the social and literary characteristics of Chaucer's times in order to accomplish a reading comprehension of the *Tales*. The approach adopted considers the following aspects:

1. Social context

The student has to be aware of the social structure during the medieval ages as well as the social and political implications of the period in order to understand the social scheme developed in the *Tales*. The base for this historical background is offered in one optional subject (at First Level) dealing with the history of Great Britain.

2. Cultural context

In this case students are informed about the oral tradition in the British Isles, the invention and popularisation of the printing press, and the role of the monasteries as the main source of culture, among other topics. This information is presented as part of a compulsory course at Second Level, entitled 'History and Culture of the Anglophone Countries'.

3. Literary context

In order to present the literary context relevant to this text the teacher might highlight the different techniques used in the oral tradition, the illuminated books phenomena or the part Geoffrey Chaucer played in the transition of the *Tales* from the oral realm to the written sphere. It is interesting to consider the literary genres used in the period, not only in England but also in the rest of Europe, and the significance of Chaucer's work, as well as its innovative character.

4. Linguistic context

It is very important that the student achieves some knowledge of the history of the English language as well as the dialectal varieties differentiated in Chaucer's period and these topics are studied as part of courses on Diachronic Dialectology or Etymology. Both subjects, only studied during the third year, demand the tools to decipher some dark aspects of the 'narrative continuum', as well as a portrayal of the characters' behaviours and their roles.

Here we consider an example taken from *The Wife of Bath's Tale* in order to illustrate the application of the four points above in its analysis. It is also judged to be worthwhile to compare the text in modern English with the text in Middle English. As a matter of fact, this subject and 'The History of the English Language' are taught in the same academic year, allowing the student to apply knowledge gained from the history of language course to the linguistic and even to the literary context in this activity.

Another interesting point of study is the comparison of this paragraph taken from the *Tale* with the preceding part corresponding to the Wife of Bath's *Prologue*, where the style differs completely. The student can appreciate in this way Chaucer's mastery of style: the *Prologue* is told in a first-person narrative, as a kind of apology, where the character of the wife of Bath talks about her life in a tone which contains a multitude of aspects taken from the oral literature. The *Tale*, on the other hand, is told in a literary style, where the poetic devices are the representative factors. Students are encouraged and helped to explore these texts from the point of view of their social, cultural, literary and linguistic contexts, as outlined above.

The Wife of Bath's Tale

In the old days, the days of King Arthur,
He whom the Britons hold in great honour,
All of this land was full of magic then.
And with her joyous company the elf-queen
Danced many a time on many a green mead.
That was the old belief, as I have read:
I speak of many hundred years ago.
But now elves can be seen by men no more,
For now the Christian charity and prayers
Of limiters and other saintly friars
Who haunt each nook and corner, field and stream,
Thick as the motes of dust in a sunbeam,
Blessing the bedrooms, kitchens, halls, and bowers,
Cities and towns, castles and high towers,
Villages, barns, cattle-sheds and dairies,
Have seen to it that there are now no fairies.
Those places where you once would see an elf
Are places where the limiter himself
Walks in the afternoons and early morning,
Singing his holly offices and matins,
While going on the rounds of his district.
Women may now go safely where they like:
In every bush, and under every tree,
They'll find no other satyr there but he:
And he'll do nothing worse than take their honour.

Chaucer and Wright 1998: 240-1

The Tale

In the 'olde dayes of the King Arthour,
Of which that Britons speken greet honour,
All was this land fulfild of fayerye.
The elf-queen with hir joly companye
Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede.
This was the olde opinion, as I rede—
I speke of manye hundred yeres ago—

But now can no man see none elves mo.
For now the grete charitee and prayers
Of limitours and othere holy freres,
That serchen every lond and every stream,
As thikke as motes in the sonne-beem,
Blessinge halles, chambers, kichenes, boures,
Citees, burghes, castels, hye toures,
Thropes, bernes, shipnes, dayeryes—
This maketh that ther been no fayeryes.
For ther as wont to walken was an elf,
Ther walketh now the limitour himself
In undermeles and in morweninges,
And seyth his Matins and his holy thinges
As he goth in his limitacioun.
Wommen may go now saufly up and doun:
In every bush or under every tree
Ther is noon other incubus but he,
And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour.

Chaucer 1989: 857-881

Teaching Hamlet

If the study of *The Canterbury Tales* is problematic due to all the issues the teacher must take into account when presenting it to the students, and bearing in mind that this difficult work is being deciphered by an audience which is approaching it through their non-native language, with all the cultural implications this might have, then the task of tackling Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is no less difficult. And surprisingly, most of its difficulties lie in the fact that *Hamlet* is more familiar to the general audience as a result of its widespread influence, resulting in some students having a preconceived idea of the story and characters.

There is no doubt that teaching *Hamlet* to an audience which has English as a second language presents extra difficulties for the teacher. One approach to introducing *Hamlet* to this audience is presented here, starting with a central question: Why is *Hamlet* attractive for the modern audience? This can be an interesting subject of analysis for students as they become

acquainted with the world of Shakespeare, and as they learn about some features of the play such as supernatural events, the psychological and identity problems of the characters, intrigues, family matters, sexual slander and corruption. It becomes clear that the conventions of tragedy and the highly dramatic events portrayed are central to our understanding of why a play such as *Hamlet* is still of interest for contemporary audiences and readers².

Let us take the subject of family matters as an example of the social and even cultural context of the author's period, which is represented in the play by the precepts Polonius gives Laertes as advice before he sets off on his journey. According to Harold Jenkins in the Arden edition (1982) of the play:

Such parental advice, giving maxims of worldly prudence, was a tradition of the period. ...In Elizabethan literature similar sets of 'precepts' abound, most often delivered by a father to his son about to set off on his travels.

Jenkins 1982: 440-1

Students are encouraged to relate in this way to such texts as the first example:

Pol. Yet here, Laertes? Aboard, aboard for shame.
The wind sits in the shoulder of your sail,
And you are stay'd for. There, my blessing with thee.
And these few precepts in thy memory
Look thou character. Give thy thoughts no tongue,
Nor any unproportion'd thought his act.
Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar;
Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel,
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment
Of each new-hatch'd, unfledg'd courage. Beware

2 Introduction to Hamlet didactic unit (Introduction to English literature 101) developed at the Nottingham Trent University, by Rubén Jarazo Álvarez.

Of entrance to a quarrel, but being in,
Bear't that th'opposed may beware of thee.
Give everyman thy ear, but few thy voice;
Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgement.
Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
But not express'd in fancy; rich, not gaudy;
For the apparel oft proclaims the man,
And they in France of the best rank and station
Are of a most select and generous chief in that.
Neither a borrower nor a lender be,
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow as the night the day
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
Farewell, my blessing season this in thee.

Laer. Most humbly do I take my leave, my lord.

Act I, sc.iii, Hamlet-Arden Shakespeare, Jenkins 1982: 1.55-83

Polonius's topics – speech, deportment, clothes, friends, quarrels, borrowing – are the central ones considered in more than one of the works cited, and most of the precepts themselves were recurrent. Several were proverbial maxims, though Shakespeare characteristically phrases them afresh (Jenkins, 1982:441). Examination of such a text with students therefore allows discussion of linguistic issues, through study of the language in the proverbs Polonius cites to emphasise his point to Laertes. It is clear that students require the varied range of skills achieved during their philological education through the First Level (two-year period), not only in literature and culture, but also in language, in order to understand the symbolic use of those proverbs and terminology. Only in this way are students able to value the magnificence of Shakespeare's command of language.

Shakespeare's genius and linguistic mastery are also present in the numerous sexually ambiguous references, such as, for instance, in the

flowery language Hamlet utters in his passionate speeches to Ophelia during the play. An example of a representative scene of communication breakdown is included here because it offers a rich vein of exploration for these students:

Ham. Ay, truly, for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is a bawd than the force of honesty can translate duty into his likeness. This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. I did love you once.

Oph. Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

Ham. You should not have believed me; for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. I loved you not.

Oph. I was the more deceived.

Ham. Get thee to a nunnery: Why wouldst thou be a Breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me. I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves all, believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. Where's your father?

Oph. At home, my lord.

Ham. Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool nowhere but in's own house. Farewell.

Oph. O help him, you sweet heavens.

Act. III, Sc. i, *Hamlet-Arden* Shakespeare, Jenkins 1982:111-135

The student needs to be able to understand the social and cultural implications present as well as the language used here. Clearly, a beginner or a student with limited knowledge of the English language will not be able to tackle an effective reading of this literary text in order to value *Hamlet's* greatness. Thus, *Hamlet* is included among the works studied

later, in Second Level literature subjects. And eventually, the previous study of language, literature and cultural subjects combine to offer students the indispensable tools needed to survive, and profit from, Shakespeare.

Conclusion

In general it is necessary and valuable to apply the skills achieved through the study of the English language to the study of the literature written in English. But it is also necessary to apply the skills achieved through the study of English literature in order to extend and enrich students' knowledge of the English language. In this case, the curriculum of the Spanish university (represented here in the example of the University of Corunna) while very recent, has been based on the central tenet that investing in literary and linguistic professionals, by means of offering a varied range of philological courses to students during their training, is a worthwhile and enriching exercise. This approach to reading literature in the students' foreign language offers a valuable source of linguistic and cultural enrichment to students at the University of Corunna.

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