Chapter 4

Literature in Chinese language teaching and learning supported by the use of the internet and digital resources

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In the past, literature as a teaching component has been directly associated with traditional pedagogy using mostly the translation method. Therefore, literature has been gradually isolated in the language classroom to give way to a more communicative and interactive style of teaching. The choice of texts has not helped either, since teachers felt obliged to choose from the classics, a choice that was not always popular amongst learners and schools who wanted to modernize. Consequently, literature lost its status and eventually its place in the language classroom. This chapter will explore the differences (if any) between using literature in the European language classroom and in the Mandarin Chinese classroom. Then challenges and perceptions of using literature in the language classroom will be explored as well as the suggestion of using new technologies to approach literature. I shall then proceed to suggest ways in which to use literature in the Mandarin classroom.

Introduction

Over the last twenty years, foreign language teaching and learning has taken on a new dimension thanks to the application of new technologies in the classroom and the development of the internet. The internet as a resource has two salient attributes: it is a vast source of information and can be a source of interactivity, if used correctly by the teacher. The latter confirms the very persuasive argument of Thomas *et al.* (2014) that technology alone cannot improve the delivery of knowledge; in other words, having access to a computer and the internet cannot make a teacher teach better. However, with judicious use and careful planning, access to technology can make life in the foreign language classroom a little bit more interesting, especially if

its use is underpinned by appropriate language pedagogy. It would be ideal if both aspects, information and interactivity, were combined during the planning and teaching process in order to promote effective learning; the discussion that follows will try to make that case.

Unlike the dynamic environment that can be created with the use of the internet in the classroom and the excitement that this can bring to the learner, the use of literature has not lately experienced a similarly warm reception in foreign language teaching and learning. Conversely, it has been gradually abandoned due to the view that literature is too difficult or not even a necessary component of foreign language teaching (Diamantidaki, 2010); instead, more instrumental functions of the language with so-called communicative value have been favoured to the detriment of the use of literature.

Recent changes to the national curriculum in England, however, have encouraged educators to believe that literature can regain its place in the languages classroom and eventually have an impact on children's learning. The Department for Education (DfE, 2013) in London has recently published a new programme of study for KS3 which clearly states that all pupils should:

- understand and respond to spoken and written language from a variety of authentic sources
- discover and develop an appreciation of a range of writing in the language studied
- read and show comprehension of original and adapted materials from a range of different sources
- read literary texts in the language (such as stories, songs, poems, and letters), to stimulate ideas, develop creative expression, and expand understanding of the language and culture.

The entire process is expected to start at key stage (KS) 2 (7–11years), so that by the end of KS3 (11–14 years), pupils are expected 'to understand and communicate personal and factual information that goes beyond their immediate needs and interests, developing and justifying points of view in speech and writing, with increased spontaneity, independence and accuracy. It should also provide suitable preparation for further study.' (DfE, 2013: 2) 'The teaching should enable pupils to express their ideas and thoughts in another language and to understand and respond to its speakers, both in speech and in writing. It should also provide opportunities for them to communicate for practical purposes, learn new ways of thinking, and read great literature in the original language.' (DfE, 2013: 1)

In light of the above, this chapter proposes that the use of literature supported by the use of the internet and digital resources is of great potential in foreign language teaching, with the hope that the suggested combination (literature–digital resources) will motivate teachers and eventually learners to improve reading skills and develop linguistic proficiency (Ellis and Shintani, 2014). To acquire a foreign language, the learner needs to be exposed to some sort of input, which will allow him or her to appreciate the complexity of the language taught, going beyond learning rules and isolated items of vocabulary (Krashen, 2004).

Context

In a Chinese as a foreign language classroom in English schools, there are several impediments to implementing reading in general (without yet considering the literary element) as a task and as part of a lesson. This is partly due to learners having very little exposure to reading either in their L1 or the L2 and 'thus [finding] the effort of reading widely for general understanding difficult and unrewarding. Such readers adopt a word-by-word processing strategy which makes it very difficult for them to read for pleasure.' (Ellis and Shintani, 2014: 172) This raises issues, since it involves teaching reading as a skill during foreign language lessons. Such a task is rarely implemented during lessons, as the focus is mainly on new words and structures and on producing sentences in the target language (TL). Input is mainly given through the present–practise–produce model (PPP) which incorporates opportunities for controlled production in the TL (Ellis and Shintani, 2014) and through the very structured question and answer model, as described below:

a. The teacher presents new vocabulary; practise through choral and individual repetition.
b. The teacher asks the students yes/no questions.
c. The teacher asks the students either/or questions.
d. The teacher asks the students: 'What is it?'

Such a process does not always leave room for more meaningful interaction to take place, nor does it successfully build confidence in getting the students to read longer passages. The teacher is lucky if the students leave the lesson knowing a structure or a sentence. Time is also an issue, as the teacher meets the students a few times each week for no longer than an hour, as is locating the appropriate resources for the level and topic that needs teaching. Considering this context, literature can be considered a tool rather than an end (Hişmanoğlu, 2005) for modern foreign language teaching

and learning; it is a tool that helps develop reading skills and linguistic proficiency (Ellis and Shintani, 2014).

Why should we teach literature in the foreign language classroom?

One of the reasons for integrating literature is because it is real language produced by a real writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message; this characterizes literature as authentic material as discussed by Morrow (1979). However, Widdowson (2003; see also 1978) as presented in Ellis and Shintani (2014) conceives of authenticity not as a property which resides in a text itself, but more like a process of authentication. 'Authentic', therefore, is used for the 'specific ways in which language is made communicatively appropriate to context' (93). He continues by arguing persuasively that it is 'people who make a text real by realizing it as discourse, that is to say by relating to specific contexts of communal cultural values and attitudes' (98). Hence, a literary text is not relevant only to the era when it was written; its message is transferable across eras, it evolves and can be adapted to other contexts, in Widdowson's words, which leads us to the next reason for integrating literary texts in the foreign language classroom, namely cultural enrichment.

Literature can help readers understand the lifestyle of the country whose language they study. It is possible to do so with radio and newspapers, but literature is a more intimate approach. For example, even if the characters in a novel are fictitious, a literary text can provide a living context in which characters from different social backgrounds associate with the reality of the reader. Readers can explore the thoughts, feelings, habits and customs, beliefs, and fears of a population living in a particular era and start making links with their own reality.

Another aspect of reading a literary text is that readers gain a lot of vocabulary and can enrich their lexical knowledge. As Collie and Slater (1987: 5) argue, '[t]he compressed quality of much literary language produces unexpected density of meaning'. Literature provides a rich context in which elements of the lexicon or syntax can be highlighted during the teaching process. A first reading can also help the reader get familiarized with the different styles of language, see the variety of possible structures, and understand new meanings of words and phrases using context and personal interpretation. A more detailed reading of a text may allow students to make assumptions about the meaning of the linguistic elements and deduce the meaning of a text as a whole. The overall aim in this process is for

the learner to achieve 'foreign language competence' (Thơm, 2008: 121) through 'a dynamic, student-centred approach' (Hişmanoğlu, 2005: 57).

Finally, literature motivates learners by engaging their imagination and their creativity and by generating emotions; this can capture the learners' interest and create an atmosphere in which students learn how to use the vocabulary and structures taught in a less mechanical way. Using literature may be more motivating than role plays or working from texts made for pedagogical purposes and therefore not authentic. However, it is crucial that the text is chosen based on the learners' level of knowledge and on the topic in need of teaching.

How to integrate literature into the curriculum?

In the first instance when literature is mentioned to teachers and pupils within a classroom setting in England, the reaction will be one of doubt, hesitation, and acute anxiety about the accessibility of literary language for students. One suggestion for integrating literature within the foreign language classroom is to use literary texts with the same linguistic material that needs teaching in a language lesson, such as the family, seasons, school, education, items of clothing, and indeed many more. We are therefore suggesting the integration of the literary text as part of the teaching materials used during the teaching process and not as a one-off task. Choosing appropriate texts for specific topics – a pre-defined set of topics which schools have to cover for GCSE in any language – will allow the pupils to develop more complex skills in reading within the particular topic area, see the language in context and undistorted, and, with the right guidance, go beyond the survival stage of communication and 'ultimately increase their reading proficiency' (McKay, 1982: 529).

We would like to illustrate our point by showing some Chinese literature and suggesting that, if a literary work is integrated within a topic, it becomes automatically more real, relevant to the curriculum, and, most importantly, easier to teach.

The reasons for using Chinese to demonstrate the use of literature in the classroom are twofold: firstly, the change in the national curriculum in England means that all foreign languages to be taught are considered equal. Secondly, Chinese, the teaching of which is increasing in schools, albeit from a low base, gives an opportunity to look at the transferability of pedagogy between European languages and Chinese with a view to finding similarities and differences in the approach of reading strategies across languages. Hence, this paper aims to prove, through its theoretical framework and application, that the implementation of literature teaching in the classroom is indeed

transferable and, with some adaptation, is applicable to any context of foreign language teaching and learning where the internet is also accessible.

We know that 'learning to read is a complex, multifaceted process and even more so in a second language' (Park *et al.*, 2013: 268); therefore, it is of paramount importance that the teacher knows the literature of the target language and has the ability to plan a lesson which addresses the pupils' linguistic and cultural needs. A combination of engaging and interactive student-led activities is also a key aspect of our suggestion.

A selection of poems for the Chinese classroom, which have been selected for use in KS5 (16–18 years), is presented in Table 4.1. The actual poems are available for reference on the 21st century Chinese Poetry website.

Table 4.1: A selection of poems for the Chinese classroom

Poem title	Poet's name	Topic
Parting Before Daybreak	An Qi	Young people
Ferry	Bei Xiaohuang	Young people
Filling in the Blanks	Chen Guiliang	Family
January (or an Evening of Reading)	Chen Yanqiang	Work and leisure
The Wall	Gao Pengcheng	Education
The Shepherd	Jin Qiufeng	Family, the environment
Seductive Wind	Li Shangyu	Media
Wednesday Afternoon Tea	Liu Yali	Work and leisure
Ow, Mama	Song Yu	Family
A Pair of Chopsticks	Zhang Shaobao	Family

Many of the learners in KS5 are working towards an examination whose stated aims in the specification (CIE, 2014) are '[t]o develop insights into the culture and civilization of countries where Chinese is spoken; and to encourage positive attitudes to language learning and a sympathetic approach to other cultures and civilizations'. Well-chosen poems can further these aims, whilst at the same time making reference to the overarching topic of the specification.

The use of the internet and digital technologies in the Chinese as a foreign language classroom

As mentioned earlier, using a computer does not automatically make a teacher teach better, but there is a truth in the saying that the internet

and digital technologies (IDTs) can enhance learning if underpinned by appropriate pedagogy. Assuming that IDTs have a dual role to play – that of information conveyance and interactivity – can their integration completely redefine existing approaches to language learning and therefore encourage new classroom practices? Or do IDTs simply enhance existing good practices developed by teachers? (Evans: 2009b)

Evans (2009b) aims to answer these questions by implementing the use of information and communications technology (ICTs) in the foreign language classroom through exposure to authentic links and authentic cross-communication projects. Mitchell (2009: 32–59) suggests creative and innovative ways of using the internet productively to aid language comprehension through the use of text. However, the use of texts as language-learning aids is primarily guided by experienced teachers, and the internet plays mainly the role of information resource. Subsequent chapters in Evans (2009b) present more interactive approaches to ICT use, either adopted by teachers or explored as part of projects. One of these approaches is active learning through computer mediated communication (CMC) between 14–16-year-old pupils in England learning a foreign language and pupils of a similar age in target language countries. Computer mediated communication has allowed students from every continent to interact in the target language using different kinds and different levels of discourse. In this way, pupils are able to peer scaffold their own learning (Evans, 2009a: 110). During the same process, elements of cross-cultural interactions amongst pupils where observed and elements of code switching took place naturally, meaning that pupils were able to switch every time they felt uncomfortable. (Evans, 2009a: 115).

Al-Seghayer (2001) compared ESL's students' vocabulary learning and developed a programme which provides users reading a narrative English text with a variety of glosses or annotations for words in the form of printed text, graphics, video, and sound, all different modalities which are aimed to aid comprehension and learning of unknown words. The research is measured under three conditions: printed text only, printed text and still images, printed text and video clip. All three conditions aimed to find which of these modalities was the best for word recognition and production. Not surprisingly, using the third mode 'text with video clip' was the most effective way of learning new vocabulary, since, according to Al-Seghayer (2001: 202), 'video builds a better mental image, better created curiosity leading to increased concentration, and embodies an advantageous combination of modalities (vivid or dynamic image, sound, and printed text)'.

Lee and Kalyuga (2011) investigated the effects of simultaneously presenting visual Pinyin and its auditory pronunciation compared to an auditory-only presentation (no Pinyin condition) using relatively more complex learning materials (classical Chinese texts) in a computer-based learning environment. Pinyin is the term used for Romanized phonetic transcription which helps with the pronunciation of Chinese characters. The aim of their study was to present effective techniques for reducing the level of intrinsic cognitive overload when reading Chinese characters in classical texts, bearing in mind that Classical Chinese 'is characterized by using significantly fewer characters for expressing ideas' (Lee and Kalyuga, 2011: 12). Effectively, they have compared the learning effects of three computer-based presentation techniques where learners see on the screen full Pinyin transcription of Chinese characters, partial pinyin transcription, and no pinyin transcription. A full Pinyin condition means that all characters were transcribed with Pinyin and a partial Pinyin condition means that only 'potentially new or key characters were transcribed with pinyin' (Lee and Kalyuga, 2011: 12). The results, as explained by the authors, 'demonstrated the superiority of the partial pinyin transcription over the other two conditions for the more advanced learners' (Lee and Kalyuga, 2011: 11).

An effective illustration of the study above is the GoChinese website; it is an online Chinese learning platform which makes any level of text in Chinese more accessible for learners. Up to 1,000 characters from any source can be cut and pasted into the platform. We suggest *The Destination* by Anyi Wang (n.d.) for testing the functionality. One click and the text is segmented into words, with or without Pinyin above. Another click and the text can be heard. Hovering the mouse over any word gives the English meaning. There is still the excitement and considerable challenge of working out the meaning at sentence level, but the learner is supported, making literature accessible in a way that would otherwise not be achievable in school. This provides the intellectual stretch that some of the more utilitarian language-learning texts at KS5, where learners spend considerable time looking up characters and deciding on word segmentation, do not.

Winke *et al*. (2010) have conducted a study on the effects of captioning for learners of Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, and Russian. More specifically, they investigated how the use of authentic videos via DVD, Youtube, and ViewPoint, with use of captions or without, helped or impeded vocabulary comprehension. All learners took comprehension and vocabulary tests based on the videos. For leaners of Chinese, captioning during the second showing of the video was more effective. The data revealed that learners

used captions to 'increase their attention, improve processing, reinforce previous knowledge and analyse language' (Winke *et al.*, 2010: 65).

In this section, we have used different studies and online learning platforms to prove that the use of the internet and digital technologies in Chinese foreign language learning can be a useful and interactive tool to enhance vocabulary acquisition, increase learner interactivity, and aid comprehension

Use of literature and digital technologies in the Chinese as a foreign language classroom

Literature can provide the stimulus and the motivating element for improving reading skills and developing linguistic proficiency (Ellis and Shintani, 2014), when combining appropriate reading strategies with the use of digital technologies.

An underlying pedagogy needs to be adopted in order to teach the literary source. This can be achieved by applying distinctive steps during the teaching process, which enhances comprehension of the text/poem. The use of digital technologies as a motivating and student-centred tool can enhance the entire teaching and learning process.

In this respect Cummins (2008), Luke and Freebody (1999), and Scarborough (2001) suggest three components of the reading process: word recognition, language comprehension, and text interpretation.

Word recognition – either through phonological decoding or sight-reading – is widely recognized as a vital skill for early reading development (Hoover and Gough, 1990; Joshi and Aaron, 2000; McBridie-Chang and Kail, 2002; Ziegler and Goswami, 2005, cited in Park *et al.*, 2013: 269). Without it, it is impossible to start the process of understanding what is being read. This is particularly relevant to the case of Chinese foreign language learning, as the general teaching input is done mainly by teaching characters in the first instance, without always providing a text where pupils can see all the characters in context so as to start making sense of the language they are learning.

Word recognition in Chinese is of paramount importance, as decoding characters is key to the production of meaning at a later stage. If learners do not know the words or characters, they cannot make sense of the text they are trying to read. Phonetic translation in Pinyin can help overcome the initial cognitive barrier. The internet is particularly useful for accessing texts such as Tang poetry in classical Chinese; it is a source of information and helps foreign language learners access literature which would otherwise be inaccessible. Wang Wei's poem (Wei, n.d.) is an excellent example of

this; it can be used by learners to create a literary translation of their own based on the literal translation:

鹿 柴   Lù Chái

空 山 不 见 人   Kōng shān bú jiàn rén
但 闻 人 语 响   Dàn wén rén yǔ xiǎng
返 景 入 深 林   Fǎn jǐng rù shēn lín
复 照 青 苔 上   Fù zhào qīng tái shàng

Wei, n.d.

Empty hill not see person   Hills are empty, no man is seen
Yet hear person voice sound   Yet the sound of people's voices is heard
Return scene enter deep forest   Light is cast into the deep forest
Duplicate light green moss on   And shines again on green moss.

When reading Chinese poems, the learner has to focus immediately on the characters and elucidate which characters might go together to form words; the poems are almost puzzles that need decoding. Characters carry meaning; the more sophisticated the poems, the more complex the layers of meaning.

In order to quicken the process of word cognition, 'a number of studies suggest that technology-supported automaticity training can facilitate faster lexical access during reading' (Park *et al.* 2013: 269). Park *et al.* adduce studies by Fukkink *et al.* (2005), Li (2010), and Tozcu and Coady (2004) in support of this assertion. This idea was illustrated in the previous section with the discussion of the GoChinese.net platform, which allows faster character access through a multisensory approach where learners can listen, read, and recognize the words and characters (through the use of translation and/or Pinyin).

Language comprehension. Once the first obstacle, word recognition, is overcome, the next stage when reading a text is to achieve comprehension. In the Chinese as a foreign language classroom, a combination of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and effective application of reading strategies can allow learners to understand what they are reading. In this respect, there has been extensive research into different 'types of multimedia used in vocabulary learning studies'. Park *et al.* (2013: 269) discuss studies on a wide variety of media ranging 'from electronic dictionaries […] to short readings' and which work at different levels, from sentence-level translation

to word-level basic translation, (Gettys *et al.*, 2001; Grace, 1998). They also discuss the effect of multimedia glosses (for example graphics, videos, or audio) versus textual translations (Abraham, 2008; Al-Seghayer, 2001; Yoshii and Flaitz, 2002).

Comprehension is also promoted through well-planned lessons based on effective reading strategies that enhance the teacher's methodology and questioning. In this regard, Jones (2001) suggests clear steps for teaching reading in the language classroom. We have adapted them for Chinese poems:

> *With the source visible/audible*
> 1. Identify what you have understood – read and listen for the gist: what characters did you read that you recognized; what did you understand?
> 2. What words did you read/hear that you recognized?
> 3. Practise and expand – read/listen again: can you add anything else to your list? What else did you understand? How did you guess the meaning of the unfamiliar characters or words: did you use radicals or components of characters with which you were already familiar to make a guess at pronunciation and meaning? (If listening, did you try writing the character/word down in Pinyin? How will you go about finding out what the remaining unknown characters/words mean?)
>
> *Away from the source*
> Use the language you have read in combination with the vocabulary you already know to discuss the topic area with other learners.

In light of Jones' adapted strategies, the Mandarin Chinese poem reader must rely mostly on identifying what the poem has to offer, what characters can be recognized, and how the reader has interpreted the characters according to the specific context of the poem.

Moving away from the poem and discussing the topic area with others is the next stage for Chinese, because the learner is less likely to move straight away to reproduction in written form; this is due to the complexity of writing the characters and the fact that the pronunciation of a Chinese character does not give a learner much indication of how to write it. A suggestion might be that if the learners are familiar with specific characters, using a computer and typing the characters to create a poem might turn out to be a very rewarding task for learners without them having to remember how to write the characters by hand.

Text interpretation. When moving away from the text or source, as discussed by Jones (2001), what learners find most challenging is to go beyond the comprehension stage, create new meanings, and eventually offer their own interpretation on the text. Kitajima (2002), cited in Park *et al.* (2013: 270), suggests that computer-assisted reading materials could help learners improve their higher-order interpretation skills by embedding prompts in digital texts, leading to students applying reading strategies. Further, Kitajima suggests that this is achieved through a process of recognizing organizational patterns within the text, such as themes and word patterns.

Conclusion

Approaches to teaching and learning foreign languages constantly evolve, depending, in large measure, on prevailing fashions of thought. Currently, the focus is not just on the teacher/learner relationship; a much more integrated approach is sought, one in which multimedia plays a significant role in motivating and facilitating language and literature teaching and learning, particularly since the internet and digital technologies play such a key role in the life of young learners today. This paper has argued in favour of using literature and digital resources in the language classroom to motivate foreign language learners. The use of digital resources can assist the process of learning and make learners increasingly conscious of their own learning, therefore gradually increasing their independence.

PRACTICAL IDEAS

- Introduction to literature needs to be gradual. Before seeking meaning, learners must have understood the vocabulary first, which motivates them to spend time on understanding the text.
- Establish a framework for guided reading and graded comprehension:
  o Level 1: understand the basics: who, with whom, what, where.
  o Level 2: explore the themes and images of the text/poem.
  o Level 3: guide and allow independent interpretation of meaning.
- Different kinds of vocabulary activities can be organized to help towards a gradual understanding of the literary source; pupils can:
  o Replace the words: replace the adjectives with a set of other possible adjectives.
  o Change the tense.
  o Describe characters: match adjectives with characters; this can lead to a writing activity.
  o Act a part/role/scene or mime (think of emotions and personality).

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