What Is Language and What Is Literature? Are They the Same Question?
An introduction to literature with a small ‘l’ and five skills English

Abstract. Judit ZERKOWITZ, a Hungarian linguist and scholar, recently asserted (2007: 157) that McRAE signals a new era in language teaching which will be characterized by “the fuller integration of the text into teaching, the mixing of representational with referential, the development of language awareness concurrently with knowledge about language”. This article looks at what she means, and some of the background to her assertions.

1. The role of literature in language teaching

The role of literature in language teaching, both in the foreign language teaching context (ESL/EFL) and in the native-speaker English context, has been under discussion for nearly 25 years now, since the publication in Britain of several textbooks which introduced an integrated language and literature approach, initially for the English as a Foreign Language market in the 1980s, but later reaching widespread acceptance also in the first language market (BOARDMAN / McRAE 1984; CARTER / LONG 1985; COLLIE / SLATER 1987; MALEY / DUFF 1990; DUFF / MALEY 1990; McRAE / PANTALEONI 1990).

There have, throughout, been theoretical approaches and practical ways of working, with the result that the published resources often fall into distinct categories. Some basic theoretical principles obviously go right back to the early twentieth century, as far back as SAUSSURE (1974, first ed. 1916) and the Russian Formalists (BALDICK 1996), and I. A. RICHARDS (1929), moving forward then to the work of Roland BARTHES (1975, 1977), Wolfgang ISER (1974), Umberto ECO (1979, 2005), and Stanley FISH (1981), and culminating in the work of LEECH and SHORT (1986). Others have moved from these theories into practical teaching applications (LAZAR 1993; BASSNETT / GRUNDY 1993; McRAE 1992, 1998; McRAE / VETHAMANI 1999). It may seem surprising, but many of the successful practical teaching textbooks in the subject area known as the language/literature interface have remained in print for upwards of twenty years. From WIDDOWSON’s (1975) ground-breaking work on to the textbooks mentioned above and later substantive theoretical work by, for example, Paul SIMPSON (1993, 1996, 2004) and Michael TOOLAN.
(1998), to name but a few, the work has been carried forward with a remarkable consistency of approach, as BredeLLa and DelanoY (1996) bear out.

From the outset there have been challenges, frequently based on the fact that ‘literary language’ is not what foreign language students need to learn, and that it does not fit with the skills they require in the modern world etc. (cf. Edmondson 1996) These notions require little rebuttal because they are based on patently false premises which tend to indicate some kind of fear of the aesthetic element, fear of a perceived ‘difficulty’ in literary texts, and a misconception as to what the role of literature and of imaginative materials in general might be in the context of the teaching and learning of a foreign language.

These attitudes take literature to mean the classic ex cathedra teaching about texts, authors, and historical periods, together with the critical exegesis of aesthetics, rather than the more positive idea of hands-on work with relevant texts of all kinds which the integrated language/literature approach encourages (Sperber / Wilson 1986).

The other main debate has centred around what stylistics actually is and its value in textual study (Mackay 1999). It is concerned with how scientific stylistic approaches to text can be, but is in fact not so directly involved with the pedagogic aspects of the subject area, which is more our concern here. We will come back to one or two aspects of this question later.

What is at issue here is largely a question of verbal literacy, with related questions of visual literacy. Students today are much more visually than verbally literate – they are often computer literate before they can actually read books and similar written texts (Baron 2001). This suggests that the educational context has a great deal of work to do to bring some kind of verbal literacy back into their lives. The foreign language context is a privileged one from this point of view: not only are students fascinated by English in the contexts of society and its music, movies and popular culture. They actually want to acquire English as a language they can produce and use in the wider world. And the pleasure of the text, long lost from education, can enhance that developing language and cultural awareness and help it reclaim its rightful place in language teaching (Carrell [et al.] 1988; Caws 1992; Cook 2000; Stockwell / Carter 2007; Van Peer 1988, 2007).

In seminars and workshops in many countries, time and again I have seen the scales fall from participants’ eyes as they realise how wide a range of imaginative materials literature with a small ‘l’ can offer. The area is open to every teacher in every teaching situation. Literature with a small ‘l’ (McRae 1991) can be used, and is indeed used, from primary through secondary to tertiary level, and in many specific contexts from airline pilots to business studies students, from lawyers, doctors and nurses, to diplomatic courses, to secretarial training.

T. S. Eliot, no less, famously said, “immature poets imitate, mature poets steal” (1950: 182). In the same way, the mature teacher is a magpie, and steals shamelessly any materials that might prove useful in any particular class in any particular context.

That material can range, notoriously but excitingly, from bus tickets, to soft drink cans, to advertisements, to popular songs, newspaper articles, cartoons – and on to the more traditionally literary forms that might include extended prose, poems, plays, from any
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period or any context. Anything that can be read can be grist to the mill. That is the range. Any kind of imaginative material that a reader can process is grist to the mill.

The problems which teachers might have are more likely to be problems of their own resistance rather than problems of accessibility or of student resistance. CARTER and LONG’s (1991) useful illustration of “clines of literariness” once and for all dispels the myth that there is such a definable thing as ‘literary’ language, and opens up the field of creativity in language use in ways that can never be gone back on.

A good teacher will choose material that is suitable for the students; ‘difficulty’ is often only in the teacher’s own mind, and is part of the resistance. As soon as that resistance is broken down, the new convert frequently becomes the most enthusiastic proponent of work at the lang/lit interface. This can happen at the institutional level just as much as it can at the individual level: governments and ministries of education which have proved resistant over the years are now seeing more and more the visible, verifiable benefit of working systematically with imaginative materials in the language classroom for all subject areas where English is required. This is not luxury teaching: its way of working is fundamentally in tune with how the human brain works. Recent developments in cognitive science have backed up what previously was imagined, to paraphrase William Blake (AITCHISON 1998, 2002, 2007; BODEN 2003; GOODMAN / O’HALLORAN 2006; GOTT-SCHALL / WILSON 2005; GRABE / STOLLER 2001; HALL 2005; LEHRER 2007; SELL 2000).

Because it is not a specialist historical or critical study, the use of representational literature materials in language teaching needs no literary background, no specialist knowledge. Any teacher who is methodologically aware and can teach language communicatively can teach Five Skills English. It is simply a question of going beyond the limitations of referential materials and traditional language teaching texts.

Comprehension is a starting-point here, rather than a point of arrival. Intelligent content and relevant input are stimuli to thinking, and this leads on to spoken and written output. That this does produce more able readers and better users of the target language has now been the subject of a considerable body of academic study: Masters dissertations and doctoral theses in several countries over two decades. Both statistical and empirical results are overwhelmingly positive, and have given Ministries the confidence to implement representational or integrated language and literature programmes in many contexts. The critical mass is accumulating (FABB 1997, 2002; FULCHER / DAVIDSON 2007; HOLLIDAY 2005; KERN 2000; KRASHEN 2004; KRASHEN / SHIN 2007; PARAN 2006; PARKINSON / REID THOMAS 2001).

An unexpected kind of resistance, but on a pretty small scale, has come from Literature teachers themselves, who might at first not appreciate how a linguistic approach to literary texts enhances and enriches the teaching/learning experience. In a world where web access means teachers are no longer the only source of informational input about authors and periods, the teacher has more space to work directly with the text and encourage students to work autonomously on researching aspects which previously might have had to be given as input. Language awareness, text awareness and cultural awareness are now in the literature teacher’s standard armoury, just as literature is now becoming a more and more recognised part of the language teacher’s bank of resources (COOK 1995).
There is a process of democratization at work here – literature of all kinds is becoming more and more accessible to a wider range of readers. This is where intelligent content comes in to the processes of language teaching and learning. And this is where the concept of literature with a small ‘l’ is vital to the entire education system, because it must equip learners to read the world around them as text, just the way they would read a simple written text.

Figurative language is everywhere, and much of our perception of the world is constructed in metaphors, as the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) amply demonstrated. Applying this to the reading context and the educational situation Littlemore and Low’s words (2006: 134) become important: “to produce figurative language is very different from working out a reasonable interpretation of what an expression means when someone else uses it.” So we are more concerned with reception than production – this much must be obvious. As Mick Short reminds us, we are not in the business of coming up with unusual interpretations either:

[…] let us make sure we know which critical ‘game’ we are playing. Stylistic analysis, unlike more traditional forms of practical criticism, is not interested primarily in coming up with new and startling interpretations of the texts it examines. Rather, its main aim is to explicate how our understanding of a text is achieved, by examining in detail the linguistic organisation of the text and how a reader needs to interact with that linguistic organisation to make sense of it. Often, such a detailed examination of a text does reveal new aspects of interpretation or helps us to see more clearly how a text achieves what it does. But the main purpose of stylistics is to show how interpretation is achieved (author’s emphasis). (Short 1995: 53)

This is the best description of the discipline and its techniques and objectives that I know, but the emphasis, as in so much the field of stylistics and of cognitive poetics, is on a critical practice, one which, I believe enhances our pedagogic aims, but is not an end in itself. We do indeed need help “to explicate how our understanding of a text is achieved”, and occasionally new revelations do emerge, as happened to me in a well-documented classroom situation in Bangladesh while teaching Wordsworth (McRae 1998: 33–35) and on a wider scale with the pedagogically guided reading of the Edith Wharton novel The Custom of the Country (McRae 2000). But taking a text to pieces is no help at all unless it teaches the reader something about the text and how it works: then it has to be put back together, and the reading process continued beyond the analytical moment.

How a text works, how a poem works, how an advertisement works, how a story is told – these are the pedagogic interests at the heart of all this. And where the learning takes us beyond that individual textual experience is the building up of a wider reading frame of reference, which becomes the student’s own intellectual baggage, his or her range of reading experience (Chambers / Marshall 2006; Showalter 2002).

Stories are at the heart of all our perceptions of the world around us. Readers learn to read stories, to think in stories, and to recount stories, as part of their social interaction and their social being (Fisher 1997; Nash 1998; Gottschall / Wilson 2005; Spiro 2007).

And this is not solely the province of ‘humanities’ students. Some of the most successful implementations of the five skills approach have been with students in a range of

At the heart of any approach which encourages an awareness of language, and the development of critical thinking skills must lie the basic awareness that language, any language in the universe, is mostly representational.

In large part, the language system that is taught in the four skills approach focuses on referential language. This is language which means exactly what it says, where one word has one meaning, and where grammar and syntax follow the accepted rules. It is a rule-based approach, and usefully gives a basis for language use, a linguistic skeleton which learners can move on to fleshing out.

However, the four skills approach frequently ignores representational language. That is language which is open to interpretation, contains plurality of meaning potential rather than one single denotational meaning, and requires negotiation and judgment by its receiver in order to be fully understood.

No living language in the world can remain only at the referential level for very long. Every language in use is hugely representational, and perhaps no language more so than English (McRae 1991; Carter / Nash 1990; Burns / Coffin 2001; James / Garrett 1991).

Recent work on corpora of spoken English (Adolphs 2006; Hoover [et al.] 2006; Semino / Short 2003) goes a long way to confirming that language in use is rarely as prescriptive and definitive as the kind of language usually learned through the recognised communicative methodology. English in use is hedged about with modality, with vague language (Channell 1994; Cutting 2007), with hesitations and lack of commitment, whereas learners of English are usually encouraged to use definite verbs, assertion, bland unqualified affirmation. In the simplest possible terms, the use of ‘may’ or ‘might’ is not sufficiently widespread in current language teaching: that would be the first major step towards a mastery of the enabling language required for discussion, the statement of views, opinions etc.

It is this that leads to the necessity for a fifth skill to be incorporated into the currently widespread four skills communicative approach to language teaching and learning in order to enhance and develop the four basic skills (Carter / McRae 2001).

The fifth skill is thus the skill of processing and thinking. Any text spoken, written, or heard has to be processed and thought about in order that its implications be decoded, its frame of reference understood, its context and connotations assimilated, its ideological standpoints assessed, where it is coming from and who it is directed at, all being incorporated into the overall understanding.

Comprehension is widely perceived, especially by learners, as the ultimate aim, the point of arrival, the main target of learning achievement. This is a misapprehension both of how language works and of what language acquisition and proficiency are all about.

Where the four skills approach has tended to focus on comprehension as a testable aim,
the five skills approach sees comprehension as a starting-point, point zero in the processing of the text, whether it be spoken or written (CARTER / MCRAE 1996).

Five skills offers, as we have said, a process-based rather than a product-based approach. Experience of the language and how it works is frequently seen as more significant than information. Of course, information transfer on a purely referential level is vitally important in many fields of communication and language use. But it is limited in its applications to specialised areas of, particularly, professional language use.

2. Referential texts and representationality: texts with attitude

Even a text which purports to be referential, such as a dictionary entry, lends itself to fruitful processing. The following text is, as the graphology shows, a dictionary entry (NATION 1991):

Beans on toast
is a popular snack, eaten at any time of the day. Heinz, the most popular brand of baked beans, originally canned beans in tomato sauce in 1895, and when they were imported into Britain a few years later they were sold as an expensive luxury. Everyone can afford their beans now and many companies sell them. Heinz alone sells approximately 2,500,000 cans every day.

See Snack.

What students can be invited to see in this text is some sort of ideological construct: who is writing and to whom becomes a highly useful question. The apparatus would concentrate on where the text’s frame of reference covers (it is wholly British-centred), how much information is given for anyone who knows nothing about the subject (colour, size and type of beans are not mentioned, toast is never mentioned). Frequently students read this as a veiled advertisement for Heinz, as it seems to stress the brand name more than might seem necessary. Questions such as “who is ‘everyone’?” also reveal something about the assumptions the text (and possibly its producer) make. The fact that at current supermarket prices in the UK Heinz beans cost three times the price of a supermarket’s own economy brand might give another insight to the question.

Contrasting that text with a genuine advertising slogan for the same company and product illuminates useful differences in graphology, syntax, semantics and function:

BEANZ MEANZ HEINZ

Students need encouragement to ‘see through language’ in this way, but as soon as they realise that it is fruitful and indeed fun, they take it rapidly and can be encouraged to read any text, from newspapers to text-books, from the non-literary text through any kind of literature (with a small ‘l’ or a large ‘L’) with a healthy questioning attitude. With well-written texts this will of course lead to a greater appreciation of the text’s qualities and the effects it achieves.

This works with any kind of text and discourse: advertising is widely used in language teaching; newspapers which present widely different perspectives on the same story,
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political discourse, agony aunts – any text that might represent a point of view, or have an agenda, or want to influence the reader in some way (COOK 1995, 2007; GODDARD 1998; HILLIER 2003; MILROY / MILROY 1998). Any and all of these and many more are grist to the mill, because they represent the reader with a challenge, with something to find out – these are all texts with attitude.

The development of the fifth skill, and the acquisition of processing skills, involves a refining of three levels of awareness in cognitive terms:

language awareness
text awareness
cultural awareness

The fifth skill is in itself nothing new: it effectively embodies the three ways of learning language originally outlined by HALLIDAY (1978) when he suggested that a three-part structure is needed for discussions of language learning:

learning language
learning through language
learning about language

The most innovative recent textbooks and the best practice over recent years have implicitly, and occasionally explicitly, been incorporating materials which require interpretation skills and which expand cultural awareness as well as developing the basic language skills.

What is to be learned is twofold: the mechanisms of the syntax of the target language are a more or less closed system, with not too many variables, a system of syntax which has more or less clear rules of use and usage. Then there is the much more open system of lexis and register, which necessarily involves choice on the part of the producer of the language and a capacity to evaluate and respond to that series of choices on the part of the receiver.

The factors which condition such choices are of course manifold: they are social, cultural, linguistic, ideological, historical, local, personal, affective, and can indeed be as idiosyncratic as the individual speaker. Communicative language teaching and learning have, almost by necessity, avoided too much consideration of these factors, in a justifiable attempt to streamline the learning to what is quantifiable, and can be standardised.

At various times there have been debates on linguistic competence, fluency versus accuracy, the differences between written and spoken English and the vexed question of standard and non-standard English. These will no doubt continue. Their relevance to the present discussion is considerable. Homelands for English have become more and more ‘imaginary’, as the language becomes more of a lingua franca and less a language whose ownership is in some way predetermined (CRYSTAL 1997; GOODMAN / GRADDOL 1996; GRADDOL 1997, 2006; KACHRU 2005; KACHRU [et al.] 2006; KING 2005; KIRKPATRICK 2007; MOORE 1999; PARAKRAMA 1996; PENNYCOOK 1994, 2006; PHILLIPSON 1992; PRODROMOU 2008; RUSHDIE 1991; SAID 1979, 1984, 1993; WILSON 2003).

The new element which Five Skills English brings to bear on these debates is the concentration on how the language works rather than what it says: on how it means, in
whatever dialect or variety or local English it is expressed, rather than simply on what it means.

In order for such a system to be implemented teachers and administrators have to see the potential skills development that can be achieved. This might be done by listing in advance a series of potential goals/skills/sub-skills to be targeted, but in my experience in various countries where variations on this approach are being or have been implemented, using the general over-arching five skills approach and then developing such sub-skills as discussing opinions, contrasting arguments to reach a conclusion, processing the meaning potential of texts, and a host of further related activities, makes these goals more reachable (CULPEPER 1998; HOEY 1991; LAZAR 1999; McGUINNESS [et al.] 2008; SARACENI 2003; SHORT 1989, 1996; THORNBORROW / WAREING 1998).

Basically we want to help our students become better readers, as Jonathan CULLER (1977: 64) put it, many years ago, in his essay “Structuralism and Literature”, “Our examinations are designed not to test whether or not students have read and remembered certain texts, but to evaluate his or her progress as a reader of literature”.

This opens up two areas of vital interest: firstly the vexed question of testing and evaluation. The distinction to be drawn between testing and evaluation of learners’ progress is immensely important. Testing suggests a closed system of right/wrong, starting with a concept of all correct answers and taking marks off, whereas evaluation implies a more open system, perhaps starting from zero and rewarding the candidate (BLACK [et al.] 2004; SALAZAR NOGUERA 2002).

For students to make significant ‘progress as readers’ (and notice CULLER 1977 uses the small ‘l’) we have to begin an evaluative process which is continuous, and is process-based rather than product-centred.

CULLER’s basic thrust is very significant and merits reflection on the question of what actually constitutes progress as a learner of language, as well as progress as a reader of literature or of any other material, and the abilities and skills that are required of language learners after the so-called communicative language teaching ‘revolution’. We have mentioned the basic reading skill, but immediately we go into areas of inference, interpretation, connotations, culture, and it becomes clear that the enabling language required has to be based on modality rather than assertion – ‘it might be’ rather than ‘it is’. Our students are not trained to use modality in English nearly enough, yet it is what constitutes the greatest part of the language of opinion-sharing, discussion, and cultural interaction, as recorded in recent corpus work.

Grammar rears its ugly head here. Literature is language in action – grammar is everywhere. And the teaching of grammar has undergone significant changes in recent years: Creativity has become a buzzword, and ways of studying descriptive grammar rather than prescriptive grammar have flourished (CARTER / MCCARTHY 1997, 2006; CAMERON 2007; GERNGROSS [et al.] 2007; HUGHES 2005). The link between a lexical approach and this development in grammar teaching and learning is self-evident (LEWIS 1993, 1997; NATTINGER / DE CARRICO 1992).

This is a sea-change in perceptions of how language is learned – the cultural and interactional elements thus begin to take over from the referential and purely transactional
elements. Language learning benefits from imaginative intelligent content, learner response and creativity benefit from having something to think about, to process, to evaluate – and there are very few correct answers!

The ability to think critically about language and text has come to be recognised as an integral part of language education. Critical thinking and its terminology are now applied in many areas – asking the right questions, evaluating issues and formulating responses are part of a great many intellectual and educational disciplines (BROWNE / KEELEY 2004). The use of representational materials in language teaching is, I would suggest, a practical application of critical thinking methods.

Advocates of critical thinking strongly believe that there is an intimate relationship between language, identity, power and intercultural relations. The belief is that language and reality construct each other, that language creates ideas and values and it changes dynamically according to different contexts. Therefore, the analysis of the language of the text and of how meaning is created by words is fundamental to the making of meaning of the text; and similarly vital is the analysis of how texts are read by individuals and groups in their contexts (AITCHISON 1998, 2002, 2007; ANDREWS 2007; CAMERON 1995; CARTER [et al.] 1997; FAIRCLOUGH 1995; MONTGOMERY [et al.] 1992; REAH 1998; STOCKWELL 2002). Emotions, and the affective element must obviously be brought to bear on the reading process here (ARNOLD 1999; STEVICK 1990, 1998).

A lot of recent research, culminating in two major books by Ronald CARTER (2004) and Rob POPE (2005), has emphasized how creativity has come to be seen as a natural part of language use. This is something that seems to be an inbuilt human capacity, and ties in with the work of popular academics like Steven PINKER (1995, 2007). We will look more deeply into this in the next section.

However, many ways language teaching has been conditioned by how language learning is tested. With the five skills approach there are many more areas which can be evaluated over and above the language or vocabulary acquired.

The famous checklist proposed in Literature with a small ‘l’, as long ago as 1991, (MCRAE 1991: 95–96, MCRAE 1996, MCRAE / VETHAMANI 1999: xii) has now been used by thousands of teachers and learners worldwide and seems to have proved wholly adequate to the task of moving students away from the ‘tip of the iceberg’ preoccupations with vocabulary and syntax and leading them on to areas which allow them to explore the richness of the movement of the text, its cultural and historical influences, its possible effects and its actual impact. The checklist headings (after lexis and syntax), cohesion, phonology, graphology, semantics, dialect or varieties of English(es), register, period and function all come together to give a reading of what constitutes or goes to make up ‘style’ in what has come to be seen by many as a realistic pedagogy of stylistic approaches to reading. The indefinable ‘style’, the Holy Grail of so much study, is encapsulated in these headings, the chimera catchable, albeit within the context of the single piece of text. Some have even gone as far as to call this ‘pedagogic stylistics’, although I find the term rather too heavily jargon for my own taste.

The question arises, pace Mick SHORT above, are we ‘doing stylistics’? And the answer has to be, if that is what we want to call it, let’s not fight shy of the word. It seems
to me that the earliest stages in reader development using the Five Skills approach is the basic grounding in language awareness and text awareness that any reader needs to proceed confidently into the area of stylistic analysis – as with any academic discipline there are many levels at which the subject can be tackled. A great many very good applications of stylistics are entirely appropriate to the context of Five Skills English, and the progress currently being made in cognitive poetics and similar areas of study such as Text World Theory, amply show how the area of ‘creative reading’ is growing (BEX et al. 2000; BLACK 2006; CLARK 1996; GAVINS 2007; GAVINS / STEEN 2003; GOATLY 2000; LAMBROU / STOCKWELL 2007; SPIRO 2004, 2007; WATSON / ZYNGIER 2007). It must be encouraged to grow and develop from the bottom up rather than from the top down if it is to be pedagogically useful.

We are moving away from a world wherein there is a language called English to be taught in a prescriptive manner. There are (and I would argue there have always been) Englishes, a range and variety of uses of the language, almost as infinite as the range of discourses and typologies available to users of the language in speech and writing (COOK 1995; CRAWFORD 1992, 1998; GRADDOl 1997, 2006; FOWLER 1975, 1981, 1997; MOORE 1999).

Reading in English should not only involve referential, transactional, textbook language – it has to go beyond that purely black and white mode. Language is culture, not just a mechanism for transactional communication (BYRAM / GRUNDY 2002; BYRAM / FLEMING 1998; CORBETT 2003; GERBIG / MÜLLER-WOOD 2006; KRAMSCH 1993, 1998; REICHL 2006).

And culture demands some kind of cross-cultural understanding in today’s world, bridge-building rather than stressing difference. We ignore the thinking skill at our peril.

Of course it can be unsettling for learners to be deprived of the security blanket of there being only a right or a wrong answer – but moving beyond that restricted referential level is a vital step forward in progress as a language learner. The analogy is of a driver learning to drive and never moving out of first gear.

Until recently the jump from referential language learning to an awareness of representationality in the language teaching context has been left to a late stage in the proceedings, if it has been faced at all.

Teachers have to begin the awareness raising process as early as possible in the language learning career of the student: left too late, bridging that gap becomes progressively more difficult. If representational materials are introduced from the very earliest stages of language learning, the learner’s imagination is called into play, there is an awareness that judgment and response are part of language development, and a confidence is built that the learner does have something worth saying, something to bring to the text, some personal contribution to offer, rather than simply being at the mercy of the materials and the teaching of an unknown subject. Visual texts are a vital part of these early stages of reader development, and learners can rapidly move onwards and upwards into the wider range of texts available in the current range of teaching materials (ALBERS 2007; HOLMES / MOULTON 2001; MUTH / KITALONG 2004; SAYRE 2003; STYLEs / ARZIPE 2002).

Around the world now, in the context of language-teaching textbook research and
writing, several areas have already emerged where process-based representational methodology can be applied. All the genres are now being included in this approach, and it is even usefully applied to the reading of canonical and historically significant texts (Almond 2005; Bamford / Day 2004; Chambers / Gregory 2006; Holliday 2005; Martin 2006; McRae / Carter 2004; Thornbury 1997; Tomlinson 2008; Tyson 2001; Widdowson 2004). These applications and points to consider might go on to include:

- materials selection: where texts come from, when they were written;
- are they examples of current English? Spoken or written, or a mix of registers?
- are they British, American or another local English?
- techniques of reading such as the finding of binaries and opposites; and following through of verb tenses to find the movement of the text, individual cohesive features which create phonic flow, etc.;
- if translation is used, how does the text translate into the learner’s own current language, or back from that language into current English? Contrastive language awareness of how both languages work is fundamental to process-based methodology;
- continuous variation of question-types is necessary: from lower-order to higher-order questions, and with as much variation in question-types as possible, according to the requirements of the individual text;
- formulation of questions for open response rather than pre-determined correct answers;
- perceptions of interpretation, ideology and ‘spin’ contained within the text;
- implicatures and cultural assumptions;
- evaluation of lexical choice, rather than an emphasis on vocabulary acquisition – consideration of how frequently usable a new lexical item might be, for example;
- learner awareness of teaching/learning outcomes;
- perception of the text-book as a starting-point rather than an end-point;
- the importance of graphology, layout and visual stimuli as part of the process of meaning creation and response;
- the question of thoroughness versus flexibility, standardisation versus individuality;
- the evaluation of appropriateness of response: best answers rather than a single possible right answer;
- the contextualisation of closed and open choices.

Clearly all these areas merit considerable reflection and research, and there will be many more which will emerge as work on Five Skills methodology expands. All four currently recognised skills will require separate work on process-based approaches, and a priority will be the testing and evaluation system and the need to overcome and go beyond its rather inflexible approach to presumed ‘correctness’ of response – there is, as we have seen, in the discussion of representational texts hardly ever one ‘correct’ answer.

Robert Louis Stevenson (1885), as a reflective practitioner, expressed the whole problematic in glowing late-Victorian terms when discussing what might be meant by style and by how a text ‘works’. What he was saying is as true today as it was when he wrote it over a century ago. Only now we have the creative educational tools, the ways and means to do it for ourselves:

Conclusion.– We may now briefly enumerate the elements of style. We have, peculiar to the prose writer, the task of keeping his phrases large, rhythmical, and pleasing to the ear, without ever allowing them to fall into the strictly metrical: peculiar to the versifier, the task of combining and contrasting his double, treble, and quadruple pattern, feet and groups, logic and metre – har-
monious in diversity: common to both, the task of artfully combining the prime elements of language into phrases that shall be musical in the mouth; the task of weaving their argument into a texture of committed phrases and of rounded periods – but this particularly binding in the case of prose: and, again common to both, the task of choosing apt, explicit, and communicative words. We begin to see now what an intricate affair is any perfect passage: how many faculties, whether of taste or pure reason, must be held upon the stretch to make it; and why, when it is made, it should afford us so complete a pleasure. From the arrangement of according letters, which is altogether arabesque and sensual, up to the architecture of the elegant and pregnant sentence, which is a vigorous act of the pure intellect, there is scarce a faculty in man but has been exercised. We need not wonder, then, if perfect sentences are rare, and perfect pages rarer. STEVENSON (1885: web source)

I will end by quoting Clifford GEERTZ:

Believing with Max WEBER, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be, therefore, not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning. GEERTZ (1977: ???)

With authorities such as these behind us, and decades of practical teaching work to encourage us, the world of language teaching previewed by Judit ZERKOWITZ (2007: 157) in the epigraph to this article seems not some distant prospect, but one which can readily be realised and brought to fruition.

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