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TRANSLATION AS A FOREIGN-LANGUAGE SKILL, HOWEVER ALSO A VEHICLE OF PRESERVING THE L1

Learning to comprehend a new language to any degree of sophistication is a lengthy and demanding process, in which reading in a foreign language as a skill in itself remains an activity of utmost importance. There is not much value in being able to produce grammatical sentences if one has not got the vocabulary that is needed to convey what one really wishes to say. At the same time, a language cannot be separated completely from the culture in which it is deeply embedded. Any authentic use of the language, any reading of original texts will introduce cultural aspects into the classroom whether the students are conscious of them or not. Added to these truths comes one's own personal teaching experience in secondary and high-level education, gained predominantly in working with intermediate, upper intermediate and advanced levels, i.e. with students in their final years at comprehensive secondary schools. One's own vocation as a translator and experience in translating from English into Serbian also largely contribute to the feeling that problems of vocabulary should necessarily be viewed in a broad applied-linguistic frame, and that the search for the virtues of lexis in literary works bears most fruit when growing from the fertile soil of studying and mastering vocabulary in general. On every level and in every sense, efforts constantly aimed at exercising, practising, acquiring, broadening and specialising vocabulary benefit from competently and successfully chosen support in the form of a literary text, while already existing and current literary output supplies an unlimited choice of samples. In the strong intermingling of available materials and said interests and needs, functional access to the quality of creation by individual authors, i.e. to their concrete texts chosen and recommended for the teaching of lexis can only come after insight has been gained into the theoretical positions and current attitudes shaping the criteria of selection, as well as into what is essentially and initially expected from teaching the lexis of English as a foreign language.

One important use of translation that has been much neglected in all this in recent decades is actually in teaching the skill of translation itself. The need for this depends upon the determined objectives, but it is really important to accept the possibility of translation as an objective in language learning. It is certainly useful to be able to translate a foreign language, and anyone who has spent some years learning a foreign language is sometimes asked to translate something for someone who has little or no preparation in the language. Translation is a language activity that has to be learned through experience like any other, connecting it to the proper command and mastering of one's own mother tongue and culture.

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