

Developing cultural awareness through reading literary texts

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Abstract: This paper investigates the role of literature in developing cultural awareness in ESL reading classes. The first part discusses the use of literary texts and ways of reading them in foreign language education. The study presented in the second part of the paper attempts to verify the effectiveness of Hanauer's (2001) method of reading literary texts *Focus-on-Cultural Understanding* in developing cultural awareness, focusing on gender perception as one of fundamental aspects of culture. The study tested the participants' attitudes and motivation before and after the controlled reading activity of a culturally loaded text. Despite its limitations, the study confirmed the effectiveness of Hanauer's method in developing cultural understanding.

Keywords: cultural awareness, intercultural education, gender across cultures, intercultural literature

1 Culture in language education: towards an intercultural speaker

The growing intensity of intercultural contacts and interaction, as well as the use of English as the global language, pose dynamically changing challenges to ESL education worldwide. In the past the main aim of foreign language (FL) education was to develop learners' near-native linguistic competence. Nowadays, however, English, which could be scarcely qualified as standard, is predominantly used for communication between representatives of different cultures, who speak it as a second or third language. Thus, naturally, the main objective of FL education has shifted towards modelling a successful intercultural communicator instead of the native speaker.

As Kramsch (1998: 17) observes, the very notion of native speaker has become much more controversial than several decades ago. The criticism of the construct of the native speaker originated in the 1980s and its most vivid expression was Thomas Paikeday's (1985) self-published book *The native speaker is dead*. Paikeday (1985), followed by others (e.g. Davies 1991; Kachru 1985; Widdowson 1994), pointed to the vagueness of the concept and problems in setting criteria for "native speakership" which has become a rather idealised concept. In contemporary multilingual

and multicultural societies the most essential skill that speakers of foreign languages should possess is “adaptability to select those forms of accuracy and those forms of appropriateness that are called for in a given social context of use” rather than “the ability to speak and write according to the rules of the academy and the social etiquette of one social group” (Kramersch, 1998: 27). Consequently, Kramersch suggests that the near native linguistic competence as the aim of FL pedagogy has to be revisited and promotes the idea of the “intercultural speaker” who is aware of his/her own as well as the others’ cultural identity. Though linguistic knowledge is essential to communication, culture plays a referential function and, in fact, allows communication and understanding.

This goes in line with Byram and Cain’s (1998: 44) reasoning that “linguistic and cultural competences are integrated” (Byram and Cain, 1998: 44). In their view, culture is inseparable from language education since it recharges language activities with meaning and context. Byram’s (1997a, b) ideas, advocating linking FLT with cultural studies, and his Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model based on five elements, have been indeed powerful in Europe and shaped the EU policy towards linguistic and cultural education (see Council of Europe, 1996).

In this paper, however, the author refers to the concept of **cultural awareness** (CA) which in a way appears competitive to the concept of **intercultural competence** (IC). As Grotjahn (2000: 160) observes, IC “refers to and supplements the concept of communicative competence, and therefore includes a SKILLS dimension”. Moreover, the concept also involves the aspect of assessment which is generally broader and more theoretically developed. CA, however, does not stand in any opposition to IC – it is simply a more general and non-technical term, allowing a multitude of interpretations which better reflect the complexity of the content of language teaching.

The development of CA might be understood as progress from ethnocentric perception and interpretation of the reality to relativity which involves manifold perspectives (Grotjahn 2000: 160). Thus, one of the essential aspects of CA is its reflexivity. As Grotjahn further notices (2000: 161), except for viewing CA from the anthropological perspective focused on cultural representation and cultural relativism, CA might be also interpreted from the social psychological stance touching upon “prejudice, stereotypes, and social cognition” (e.g. Tomalin and Stempleski, 1993).

The term CA has been selected as a frame of reference and one of the goals of the activity within ESL class described further in this paper, as it seemed more appropriate in the context of the undertaken study which could be regarded only as a starting point in (inter)cultural education.

2 Literary texts in foreign languages and cultural education

The crucial role of reading literary texts in developing cultural awareness has been observed by a number of scholars, including Bredella (1996, 2000), Burwitz-Meltzer (2001), Delanoy (1993), Kramersch (2000, 2003) or Soter (1997). One of the main arguments for incorporating literary texts within the second language classroom and intercultural education is concerned with the fact that works of literature enable the reader to observe the world from multifarious perspectives and cherish the diversity of individual perception. The power of literature lies in its unique ability to deeply involve the reader both at a cognitive, as well as emotional level. The subjective world of literary protagonists might not only fascinate and allure the reader, but also transfer them to a different reality, regardless of their own otherness or limitation (cf. Soter, 1997).

Hanauer (2001) provides three arguments for incorporating literary texts into second language education. Firstly, he enumerates the motivational aspects of reading literary texts which enhance personal involvement and enjoyment on the part of the students, thus leading to their increased motivation. The second argument provided by Hanauer is related to psycholinguistic aspects of reading literary texts. As argued by Chan (1999), Hanauer (1997) and McKay (1986), literary texts, through their linguistic and textual properties, interact with the process of second language acquisition, potentially facilitating the understanding of linguistic structures, as well as enhancing their use and extending semantic scopes. However, in this paper the third argument provided by Hanauer comes to the fore, namely the role of literature in developing cultural awareness, since adequately selected literary texts provide language learners with “access to cultural knowledge of the target language community” (Hanauer, 2001: 391).

3 Sociocultural aspects of literature

Literature is seen as a reflection of culture and society, portraying people’s ideas and dreams set in certain time and space frameworks in the most creative and imaginary way. It both depicts and inspires social changes and is often treated as a credible source of culture representation. Literary texts should not be, however, treated as documents presenting a society in a truthful and objective way (Schewe, 1998: 204). The world created in works of literature is fictitious, though it provides a broad and vivid context for literary protagonists, whose background, thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, values, habits and everyday life reveal to the reader codes and rules of the real society (cf. Collie and Slater in Schewe 1998: 204).

This viewpoint is, however, contested by Edmondson (1997) who questions the usefulness of literary texts in cultural education due to their subjectivity and individual perspective which is not

always representative of the whole society. Obviously, works of literature present a selected section of the society at a certain time, which would create a distorted or even false reflection of culture. This problem, however, is embedded in any attempt to generalise about cultures by drawing conclusions from individual experience. According to Hofstede, such reasoning leads to an ecological fallacy, since “Cultures are not king-size individuals: they are wholes, and their internal logic cannot be understood in terms used for the personality dynamics of individuals. Eco-logic differs from individual logic” (Hofstede, 2001: 17). In other words, cultures should not be perceived as “monolithic unitary units” (Hanauer, 2001: 396). They are composed of individuals who incorporate varying sets of values, ethics, beliefs and viewpoints, personality traits, and experience. Thus, avoiding generalizations based on individual experience, often leading to stereotypes, appears to be one of the central problems and challenges in cultural education.

How about the use of literature then? Is it a valuable source of cultural knowledge? Following Hanauer (2001: 396) “literature is a valuable source of cultural knowledge precisely because it does present a personal interpretation of the life and values as the author of the literary work experiences them”. Instead of denying the individual perspective, Hanauer (2001: 396) postulates presenting multiple individual viewpoints. Accordingly, the role of the language teacher would consist in providing a selection of texts showing a variety of individual perspectives and making language learner aware that each individual voice is just a single, though unique, element of a complex mosaic that each culture is built of. Such an approach would lead to deep understanding what culture really is, on the one hand, helping the learners grasp certain aspects of the target culture, and, on the other hand, restraining them from oversimplifications and stereotyping. It might be concluded then that literary texts used for cultural education should not be treated as “rough guides” to cultures, providing practical tips boiling down to what to do or not to do in a certain cultural context. They should rather be perceived as spring-boards for critical discussion leading to a profound understanding of selected aspects of culture from an individual perspective.

4 Ways of reading literary texts in FL classes

Recent approaches to reading literature emphasise the role of the reader in the process of text interpretation and personal ways of decoding messages conveyed by literary texts and constructing meaning. Thus, the voices of the critics should hardly be heard as literary interpretations provided by the critics who drown out the learners’ own voices and limit their personal interpretation ability and creativity. Moreover, learners, especially immature, might feel demotivated to get involved cognitively in the process of text analysis being provided a ready-to-go expert interpretation.

Literary interpretation is thus bound to be modified by the socio-cultural background, identity and position of the reader. Goncalves-Matos (2005) pinpoints to the difficulties text interpretation poses to representatives of various cultures as well as native readers, who finally construct meaning on the basis of their personal experiences and a broader social perspective (cf. Kramsch, 2003, Fäcke 2003). Literary text remains open to the reader who signifies it through the prism of their subjective perception of reality. The asymmetry between the intention of the writer and text perception by the reader reflects, according to Goncalves-Matos (2005: 59), differences between cultural reality and cultural imagination, defined by Kramsch (2003: 207-210). Along with the reality created by facts and events, the building blocks of history and culture of a nation, an imposed cultural imagination or public consciousness might be identified, which is also tangible and has been formed through centuries by works of art and literature and the discourse of the press and other media. Moreover, a significant role is played by myths which influence the perception of others by learners of a foreign language which appears to be the reflection of their self-perception regardless of any “objectively transmitted facts” (Kramsch, 2000: 2007). For this reason, Kramsch (2000) argues that a FL learner will never be able to read a text from the position of a native speaker since text interpretation seems to be a synthesis of linguistic and cultural reality of a foreign and native culture. This space, between the two cultures, has been labelled by Kramsch (2000) as **third space** and has become one of the key terms in intercultural communication.

According to Goncalves-Matos (2005), third space as a place from which literary texts are read brings essential merits to the reader: it stimulates a range of questions, reflection, criticism and confrontation with the otherness, creating a favourable environment for cognitive and affective development of language learners (cf. Kramsch 2000, Byram 1997b, Purves 1993).

5 Hanauer’s method: Focus- on- cultural understanding

Hanauer (2001: 395), however, argues that “(...) literary texts are not self-explanatory. Quite the opposite is true. Literary texts tend to be ambiguous and polysemous. These texts are open to a multiplicity of meaning construction options.”. Thus, for the purposes of cultural education, aimed at raising awareness of students’ native and target cultures, Hanauer has developed a systematic method of reading literary texts labelled *Focus-on-cultural understanding*. The key role in this method is still played by the reader who subjectively interprets the text from the perspective of their own culture and personal experience. Hanauer (2001), however, proposes to confront such an interpretation with interpretation(s) of experts, understood here as native speakers of the target language and culture. Thus, at the first stage of work FL learners are presented an original text and

asked for its interpretation in the light of their own culture. Secondly, they are exposed to cultural experts' interpretations of the text they read and compare them with their own reading. The final stage involves a teacher-moderated discussion which aims at realizing culture dependent differences in perception of the reality and conclusive text interpretation as well as addressing the question of the impact of cultural factors on a certain text interpretation. As regards text selection, Hanauer (2001) recommends texts which enjoy a recognised status and importance in the target culture. The method has been previously tested by Zapata (2005: 272) who reported it to be a potentially effective "tool for achieving cultural understanding in cases in which students cannot spend physical time in the target culture".

6 Method: research aims and questions

This paper reports on a study designed to test the effectiveness of Hanauer's method in developing students' cultural awareness in the Polish higher education setting. The study focused on one aspect of culture, namely gender as a cultural construct. The undertaken study addressed the following research questions (RQs):

Research questions:

RQ 1a: What is the perception of gender roles in participants' native culture (Poland)?

RQ 1b: Does the perception of gender roles change after the activity?

RQ 2a: What are the participants' attitudes toward their native and target cultures?

RQ 2b: Does the activity influence the participants' attitudes toward their native and target cultures?

RQ 3a: What is the participants' motivation of cultural education?

RQ 3b: Does the activity influence the participants' motivation towards cultural motivation?

6.1 Participants

The subjects participating in the study were 29 first year undergraduate part-time students of English philology at Stanisław Staszic Higher Vocational State School in Piła (Poland). There were 10 men and 19 women aged 20-25 (61%) and 26-35 (39%). All participants were native speakers of Polish and their level of English might be rated as advanced. The activity was designed as part of the obligatory course in advanced reading, one of the components of ESL training.

6.2 Instruments

6.2.1 Analysed text

The text that students were instructed to analyse applying Hanauer's (2001) method was an extract from the novel *Japanland: a year in search of wa* by Karin Muller (2005: 173-178), which focused entirely on gender-related issues. The main protagonist, Karin, is an American journalist who is spending a year in Japan in order to understand and familiarise with the Japanese culture she is fascinated with. One of the most striking differences between her native American culture and her host Japanese culture is the gender identity and gender roles. For the purpose of her investigation she surveys a sample of Japanese women on male-female relations, gender roles in the Japanese society, expectations concerning marriage and marriage partners, etc. After completing her survey, Karin comes to the conclusion that women in Japan are inferior to men and their life roles are limited to those of mothers and wives and marriage resembles more a financial contract than a relationship based on love. The text used in the study was culturally loaded as it presented a representative of the target culture (an American) confronting another culture (Japanese). Thus, it was not only informative of the American and Japanese views on gender as an essential cultural aspect, but also illustrated a culture clash and the protagonist's experience of culture shock.

6.2.2 The pre- questionnaire

Another instrument used in the study was the pre-questionnaire, distributed among the participants before the reading activity. The pre-questionnaire contained 9 items. The first three items were statements concerning the perception of gender roles, two of them concerning women's position and rights in students' native culture and one testing students' awareness of cultural differences in gender perception across cultures. The next three items measured students' attitudes towards their native Polish culture, as well as American and Japanese cultures which were discussed in the analysed text. The final three items tested the students' motivation to read and learn about other cultures.

6.2.3 The post- questionnaire

The post-questionnaire, distributed at the end of the activity, was composed of two parts. In the first part of the post-questionnaire all the items from the pre-questionnaire were repeated in order to study any change in the students' attitudes and motivation after the activity. Moreover, in the latter part the questionnaire contained further five statements probing for the students' perception of the

influence of the activity on the development of their cultural awareness and motivation. Finally, in the last section the participants evaluated the activity by use of a semantic differential scale.

6.3 Procedure

In order to prepare the participants for the text analysis, the reading was preceded by a pre-questionnaire which the aim to determine the participants' attitudes towards their own culture, as well as American and Japanese cultures, and to find out their beliefs concerning gender roles in Poland. After completing the first part of the pre-questionnaire, the students were instructed to exchange their opinions about gender roles in Poland.

The second stage of the activity involved text reading and analysis. Then, the participants discussed the text in pairs and small groups, mainly exchanging opinions about cultural differences. At the end of the discussion, students were assigned to read the experts' interpretations of the story, which had been collected by e-mail from 3 Japanese 'experts' (one man aged 68 and 2 women, aged 31 and 35). The opinions of the Japanese experts were delivered in English by e-mail.

After completion of this stage, the participants were asked to fill in the post-questionnaire.

7 Results and discussion

In order to facilitate the interpretation, the results of the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire have been compiled in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Results of the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire (part 1.)

QUESTIONNAIRE QUESTIONS	MEAN PRE-QUESTIONNAIRE	MEAN POST-QUESTIONNAIRE (PART 1)	DIFFERENCE
1. The position of women in Poland in comparison to men 1= inferior...5= superior	2.3	2.7	+0.4
2. Women in Poland enjoy the same rights as men 1= strongly disagree ... 5= strongly agree	2.9	3.6	+0.7
3. Gender roles are the same in all cultures 1= strongly disagree ... 5= strongly agree	1.4	1	-0.4
4. Gender roles differ across cultures 1= strongly disagree ... 5= strongly agree	3.8	4.2	+0.4

5. Attitude towards Polish culture 1= negative ... 5= positive	3.3	3.8	+0.5
6. Attitude towards American culture 1= negative ... 5= positive	3.3	3.3	-0.1
7. Attitude towards Japanese culture 1= negative ... 5= positive	2.1	2.2	-0.1
8. I find reading about other cultures interesting 1= strongly disagree ... 5= strongly agree	3.9	4.3	-0.4
9. I want to find out more about other cultures 1= strongly disagree ... 5= strongly agree	3.3	4.1	-0.8

7.1 Pre-questionnaire

RQ1a

The results of the pre-questionnaire given in Table 1 show that generally the participants rated the position of women in Poland as slightly inferior to men. The mean result, however, does not reflect the diversity of voices raised in the discussion. The students' opinions varied to a great extent, from those evaluating women's position as inferior to superior. Similarly, a disagreement towards the perception of rights of women in Poland could be reported. Although the mean result suggests that the rights of women in Poland were generally perceived as equal with those of men, in reality, the participants' opinions were not unanimous. The discussion that followed was indeed heated due to a variety of opinions. The conclusion from the discussion was that reaching unanimous agreement concerning the perception of gender roles and expectations was indeed very difficult. This conclusion from the perspective of cultural education was in fact crucial: it made the students aware of the fact that cultures are not "monolithic blocks" but a mosaic of different perspectives and reaching an agreement even on one aspect of culture by a group of individuals is quite a challenging task. As regards the awareness of different perceptions of gender roles across cultures, all students strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement that gender roles are the same in all cultures (mean= 1.4). Although the participants were aware of the fact that gender roles are culture-dependent, when asked to elaborate on the issue in reference to American and Japanese cultures, they were only able to form general statements that the position of women in the US is superior to that in Poland and the status of women in Japan is lower to that in the US or Poland.

RQ 2a

As far as the attitudes are concerned, the students' attitudes towards Polish and American cultures were on average rated 3.3, which corresponds to a rather neutral attitude. On the contrary, their

average attitude towards Japanese culture was rated as rather negative (2.1). This result might be interpreted as unexpected since Japan, geographically a very distant country to Poland, in a historical perspective has never had really negative relations with Poland, being rather politically and economically neutral. In the pre-reading discussion, students generally admitted that they perceived Japan as an exotic culture and their knowledge about it was limited to a bunch of stereotypes typically strengthened by the media (geisha, samurai, workoholism).

RQ 3a

Finally, as concerns motivation, the students agreed that they regarded reading about other cultures interesting and expressed their willingness to find out about other cultures.

7. 2 Discussion after reading the story

After reading the extract the students were asked to comment on the gender issues presented in the text. Most of the students expressed their surprise or even indignation at the status and expectations towards women in Japan. When asked to identify what surprised them most in the text, they focused on expectations towards marriage in Japan, which, according to the text, should be based on the socio-economic status of the partners and the man's earning potential. This approach sharply contrasted with the romantic myth deeply enrooted in European and American cultures treating love and deep feelings as an essential prerequisite and motivation for marriage. Moreover, numerous students admitted that they had been almost shocked by the fact that women in Japan bear the entire responsibility for household matters and children, including their health and education, as well as well-being of their spouses. For example, one of the students stated: "In Poland housework, bringing up children and daily life problems are divided by two". Another aspect vividly discussed by the students was the required obedience of Japanese women towards their parents and spouses which was summarised in the following statement: "in Poland women are more independent". These words show that when confronted with another culture people automatically compare it and evaluate it against their own cultural values. Although the text inspired very heated and emotional discussions, obviously beneficial to developing the participants' linguistic competence, it also triggered off an avalanche of stereotypes, prejudice and rash, ethnocentric judgements – unwanted demons of intercultural education. Thus, it should be stressed here that the exposure of students to culturally loaded texts without any further guidance on the part of a culturally aware teacher instead of meeting certain educational goals could bring quite the reverse outcomes. Thus, at this point

turning the students' attention to the next stage of Hanauer's method, i.e. reading the experts' opinions, seemed highly motivated.

7.3 Experts' opinions

The next stage of the activity involved exposing the students to the experts opinions who had been asked to deliver their interpretations and comments on the text. Two of the experts, women aged 31 and 35, agreed that the extract to a great extent reflected the reality of male-female relations and roles in Japan. They both, however, stated that matchmaking practices, undertaken by parents in order to find a marriage partner for their children, are seen as outdated nowadays and treated as the last resort for those who are unable to find a partner by themselves. This opinion was not shared, however, by the male expert, aged 68, who believed that matchmaking was still widely practised in Japan. All the experts agreed that the hierarchy of social roles in Japan was fixed with the role of mother in the first place followed by that of wife. A career was an option for unmarried women, though unmarried women over 30 were considered a "failure". One of the experts, aged 31, married to a Polish man, commented that she did appreciate the involvement of West-European and American men in household duties and bringing up children as well as the multiplicity of life options for women. The fact that the experts were not unanimous in interpretation of social rules discussed in the text, specially those concerning matchmaking practices, made the students aware of the role of personal experience as well as membership to a certain sub-culture or age group within a national culture, discouraging them from forming false generalisations and stereotypes.

7.4 Results of the post-questionnaire

After the activity, the participants were instructed to fill out the post-questionnaire. As the first 9 items were identical with the items from the pre-questionnaire, all the results were presented in Table 1, in order to illustrate any possible changes.

RQ 1b

After the activity, students rated the position of women higher than before the activity (+0.4). Similarly, more students agreed with the claim that women's rights in Poland are the same as men's (+0.7). Moreover, the statement that gender roles are the same in all cultures was more strongly declined (see Table 1).

RQ 2b

As regards the attitudes towards national cultures, the students' attitude to their native culture appeared more positive (+0.5), the attitude towards American culture remained stable, and the attitude towards Japanese culture was reported slightly more negative (-0.1). This observable change in attitudes might be a direct result of the content of the activity which focused on gender aspects of Japanese culture which were difficult to understand or accept for Polish students, and which was expressed by them in the discussion that followed.

RQ 3b

The activity, however, raised the participants' interest in reading about foreign cultures (+0.2) and their motivation to find out about other cultures (+0.3).

Table 2. Part 2 of the post-questionnaire

POST- QUESTIONNAIRE: PART 2	MEAN
1. The activity has made me more aware of my own culture. 1= strongly disagree ... 5= strongly agree	3.4
2. The activity has helped me understand the foreign cultures. 1= strongly disagree ... 5= strongly agree	4.2
3. The activity has made me aware that the perception of gender is a matter of culture. 1= strongly disagree ... 5= strongly agree	3.9
4. The activity has raised my interest in intercultural issues. 1= strongly disagree ... 5= strongly agree	3.1
5. The experts' opinions have helped me interpret the text. 1= strongly disagree ... 5= strongly agree	4.5
6. I consider the activity:	
Boring 1 2 3 4 5 Interesting	4.6
Demotivating 1 2 3 4 5 Motivating	4.2
Useless 1 2 3 4 5 Useful	4.6

As concerns the evaluation of the activity itself (see Table 2), most of the students agreed that it raised their awareness of their own culture, strongly agreed that it helped them understand foreign cultures they were exposed to by the text, and agreed that it made them aware that gender is a

matter of culture. The students also strongly agreed that the experts' opinions helped them interpret the text. Generally, the activity was evaluated as interesting, motivating and useful.

8 Limitations of the study

Although the study has indicated that the application of Hanauer's method *Focus-on-Cultural-Understanding* has exercised certain influence on the participating students' attitudes and motivation, as well as enhanced their understanding of selected aspects of culture, some limitations of the study must be discussed.

Firstly, one of the main drawbacks of the present study lies in the number of participants and their profile. All participants belonged to a particular class of an obligatory course at an institution of higher education and originated from similar socio-economic background which does not allow generalisation of the results of the study.

Another essential limitation concerns the data collection. The effectiveness of Hanauer's method has been assumed on the basis of the students' opinions expressed in the post-questionnaire and during class discussion and has not been verified in any other way. Thus, there is still a need to test the effectiveness of the method by incorporating other tools (e.g. interviews, cultural knowledge quizzes, role plays, etc.).

The final limitation is related to the selection of a literary text for analysis. Instead of the text of core national importance, as recommended by Hanauer, an extract from a popular travel fiction was used. Such a selection was purposeful as the author of the present paper advocates the use of less challenging texts, both conceptually and linguistically, which indeed enable students to comprehend them and identify with the discussed issues and protagonists and, as a result, help the learners focus on cultural content. Additionally, introducing popular fiction motivates students, who often lack literary criticism skills and feel discouraged, to provide their own interpretations and make the activity more involving.

9 Conclusion

All of these considered, Hanauer's method might be successfully incorporated in cultural education, although the limitations of the study, especially concerning the data, do not allow generalising and hypothesising about the influence of the method on attitudes. The participating students reported that the activity inspired their interest in intercultural matters and raised their awareness of their

own and foreign cultures. The participants especially appreciated the use of the experts' interpretations which made the story and its setting more realistic and provided an insider's perspective on the matters discussed in it, making language learning more motivating. Experts' interpretations also made the students aware that literature is not a report on life it provides an individual, personalised perspective which should not become a building block for generalisations and stereotypes about cultures. A variety of the experts' subjective, personalised interpretations helped students understand the complexity of culture and the mechanism of creating stereotypes and discouraged them from making too hasty generalizations. Moreover, it must be highlighted here that reading per se does not automatically lead to cultural understanding. Literary texts might also be powerful tools of persuasion and for this reason the teacher's guidance and moderated group discussions seem essential to avoid pitfalls of stereotyping. During the activity a critical moment appeared after reading the text which inspired participants to discuss its content vividly, instigating simultaneously their expression of depreciative comments on the Japanese culture which could, in fact, end in strengthening ethnocentric views. The development of such negative attitudes did not follow due to a teacher-moderated discussion and further confrontation with experts' interpretations that provoked the participants' reflexivity.

All in all, the activity also facilitated fulfilling core aims specified by Byram and Risager (1999) for the cultural dimension in language education: it helped students understand their own cultural identity, developed their ability to see similarities and differences between cultures and stimulated critical thinking and interest in social issues. Therefore, the application of Hanauer's method for developing cultural awareness seems well-grounded.

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Developing cultural awareness through reading literary texts

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Summary

This paper investigates the use of literature in ESL reading classes and its role in developing cultural awareness. The theoretical part focuses on the role of understanding students' own culture as the fundamental step in developing cultural awareness. Thus, reading literary texts is understood here as text interpretation from native and foreign linguistic and cultural perspectives, defined by Kramersch as "third space". The study presented in the second part of the paper attempts to verify the effectiveness of Hanauer's (2001) method of *Focus-on-Cultural Understanding* in developing cultural awareness, focusing on gender perception, as one of the most fundamental aspects of culture. The study describes 1st year English philology students' work with selected extracts from the novel *Japanland: a year in search of wa* by Karin Muller. It aims at identifying students' perception of gender roles in their own culture and comparing and contrasting them with those dominating in other cultures, namely Japan and the United States. Firstly, students' attitudes

concerning gender roles within their own culture are measured by a pre-questionnaire. Then, after reading the selected extracts and expert's interpretations, students' attitudes are investigated again in order to verify the effectiveness of the tested method in cultural awareness education. Despite its limitations, the study showed that the application of Hanauer's method *Focus-on-cultural-understanding* increased students' cultural awareness, specially in respect to gender-related issues, and led to their reflexivity on their own native culture.

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Santrauka

Straipsnyje aptariamas grožinės literatūros anglų kalba panaudojimas kultūrinio sąmoningumo ugdymui skaitymui skirtų užsiėmimų metu. Tyrime taikomos teorijos požiūriu, gimtosios kultūros suvokimas yra esminė kitų kultūrų skiriamųjų bruožų įsisąmoninimo dalis. Skaitomų literatūrinių tekstų interpretacijai neabejotiną įtaką turi sava ir svetima lingvistinė bei kultūrinė aplinka, Kramsch apibrėžiama kaip „trečioji erdvė“. Antroje straipsnio dalyje aprašomas tyrimas, kuriuo buvo siekiama patikrinti Hanauerio (2001) „kultūrinio suvokimo principo“ (*Focus-on-Cultural Understanding*) efektyvumą. Šiame kontekste ypač akcentuojamas skirtingų lyčių požiūris kaip vienas svarbiausių kultūrinės aplinkos suvokimo parametrų. Duomenų šaltinis – pirmo kurso anglų filologijos studentų darbas su Karinios Muller romano *Japanland: a year in search of wa* ištraukomis. Tyrimo metu pirmiausia buvo bandoma nustatyti, kaip studentai suvokia lyčių vaidmenis savojoje kultūroje, vėliau – lyginant juos su vyraujančiais vaidmenimis kitose kultūrose, t. y. Japonijoje ir Jungtinėse Amerikos Valstijose. Studentų požiūris į lyčių vaidmenis savojoje kultūroje buvo nustatomas atliekant išankstinio klausimyno analizę. Dar kartą perskaičius kūrinio ištraukas ir ekspertų pateiktas teksto interpretacijas, vėl buvo analizuojamos studentų nuostatos, kad būtų galima įvertinti bandomojo metodo efektyvumą kultūrinio sąmoningumo ugdymo procese. Nepaisant kai kurių tyrimo trūkumų, analizė parodė, kad Hanauerio metodo taikymas praplėtė studentų kultūrinio sąmoningumo ribas, ypač susijusias su lyties problemomis, ir paskatino naujai apmąstyti kai kuriuos savosios kultūros aspektus.