Scaffolding Linguistic and Intercultural Goals in EFL with Simplified Novels and their Film Adaptations

Currently, one can witness a new emphasis on the inseparability of language and culture in the development of policies and programs for the teaching of foreign languages. For language learners, an awareness of the cultural facets of the language makes it easier to comprehend the topics and situations they encounter when reading or listening. Exposure to the culture of the people who speak the language being learned also leads to increased understanding and tolerance.
There are many excellent sources to help teachers connect culture with the language learning process. For example, to develop English as a foreign language (EFL) program at our department we consulted the linguistic communicative benchmarks from the Council of Europe [1] and the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project [2], which provide valuable information on how to help students 1) understand the perspectives of other cultures, 2) compare the language and culture of others with their own, and 3) use the foreign language outside the classroom setting. These cultural objectives enhance an EFL program where «the true content of the foreign language course is not the grammar and the vocabulary of the language, but the cultures expressed through that language» [2, pp. 47–48].

When developing our program, we felt that literature modules would be a great way to incorporate U.S. and British cultural elements while strengthening English reading abilities. We also recognized that using literature offered the potential to create an interesting multimedia experience and to introduce variety and more extensive exposure to English. Although unabridged literature is typically appropriate for advance learners, there is a renewed interest in integrating graded literary materials that are written especially for beginning and intermediate level students. Therefore, we structured our program around graded literary readers, in this case simplified novels, as well as associated audio recordings, films, and other supplementary texts and exercises. The aim of this article is to describe the implementation and results of the cultural multimedia module that centers on the simplified novel *1984* by George Orwell [3].

The inspiration for our simplified novel module comes from Krashen [4], known for his Comprehension Hypothesis, which asserts that we acquire a language best when we receive lots of meaningful comprehensible input. The use of graded literary readers fits in nicely with his hypothesis. However one problem is that «there has been little attempt to maximize the amount of comprehensible input, little attempt to combine interesting discussions, reading aloud, recreational listening, listening to tapes, watching films, all in one educational program» [4, p. 6].

From the humanities perspective, it is important to acknowledge the educational gains coming from exposure to literature and other imaginative cultural texts like films. In addition, using audio recordings of the simplified novel strengthens linguistic skillssuch as better pronunciation, faster reading speed, and improved knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical structures — and this enhances future readings.
Therefore, we made it our goal to design our module with a multimedia approach, and to complement the printed literary text with pertinent supplemental readings, as well as audio and film recordings.

**Scaffolding linguistic and intercultural goals.** In any learning context, an important concept is **scaffolding**, to use Vygotsky's educational metaphor that comes from a social constructivist conception of learning in which the teacher creates affective and pedagogical support, including materials, experiences, peer interaction, and teacher-student interaction, through activities of increasing difficulty that systematically challenge a learner but are still achievable given his or her level of experience, which is called the «zone of proximal development». We believe that scaffolding is essential for teaching simplified novels and that it results in solid language gains and increased intercultural awareness in the learning of EFL.

**Module: 1984 by George Orwell.** His module was taught to students from the upper intermediate level of the English program. It is focused on the novel *1984* by the British writer George Orwell. We chose this novel for its relevance in understanding the role that the mass media play as elements of control and power, as well as for its futuristic description of a totalitarian society that is at times uncomfortably similar to current events in certain countries.

Written post-World War II, in 1949, the novel describes in a terrifying and visionary manner the life of Winston Smith, the central character, who resides in *Oceania*, a fictitious society where citizens are reduced to subjects of observation and control by *Big Brother*, and love and the freedom to think and express oneself are punishable by death. Erich Fromm, in the afterword to the book’s centennial edition, declares that the mood of *1984* expresses «near despair about the future of man, and the warning is that unless the course of history changes, men all over the world will lose their most human qualities, will become soulless automatons, and will not even be aware of it» [3, p. 313].

The *1984* module includes 4 stages. **Stage 1.** Students began building background knowledge at the group level about George Orwell by reading and discussing a short, informative text called *George Orwell: A Prophet of His Age* [5]. This introduction to the life and work of Orwell, which included a careful reading aloud, focused on global comprehension, the article’s discourse structure and thematic content, and the detection and analysis of the main ideas. As an assignment students wrote summaries of the article that later were presented and analysed by the class for relevance and quality of information.
Stage 2. At this stage, students used the intermediate level 4 graded reader with audio to read and listen to the simplified novel [Audio recording 1]. Students and the teacher first completed a read aloud, and then underlined, outlined, and discussed key aspects concerning the plot, characters, and context. Next, groups of students wrote information outlines. For homework, students were asked to listen to specific chapters of the audio recording. In the next class, a discussion took place regarding the chapters’ main ideas, followed by further reading aloud to zero in on intonation, fluency, and pronunciation.

Stage 3. This stage concentrated on the viewing, analysis, and discussion of the film version of Orwell’s 1984 [Film recording 2]. Although the film is in English, we used English subtitling to reinforce and facilitate the acquisition of vocabulary and idiomatic expressions. After watching the film, the class discussed the similarities and differences between the film and book. Students also described what their expectations had been prior to the viewing, how the film version did or did not fulfill these expectations, and finally, they reflected on the usefulness of the activities that positively affected their understanding.

Stage 4. The objective of stage 4 was to widen the project to extend English practice outside the classroom and prepare students to participate in multilingual contexts in their communities and in those beyond them. Therefore, stage four of the 1984 module consisted of two student readings in front of other students and teachers of the department. In the first reading, each student read segments of the simplified novel aloud, taking on the representation of all the characters and situations in their sections. In a second reading, students focused on those parts in the novel that were particularly rich in dialogue, and played the parts of the main characters (e.g., Winston, Julia, O’Brien), using appropriate gestures, intonation, and facial expressions.

Results of the module. The module met the goal by helping students to understand another culture, compare their language and culture with that of Britain, and use English outside the classroom setting. In fact, besides gaining intensive practice of communicative skills in the interpretive and expository modes, the students became acquainted with and analyzed a British cultural text that is highly pertinent for any society at any time.

Benefits to teachers. Not just students benefit by scaffolded instruction that uses literary texts to increase linguistic and intercultural skills. The creation of modules centered on a graded literary text and its
film version, with related audio recordings and supplemental readings and exercises, also benefits EFL teacher development. In using such modules, teachers who are not native speakers, could experience a sheltered and comfortable means to learn about Anglophone cultures. In addition to stimulating language development, the use of literature and film modules could help teachers enhance their own linguistic, intercultural, interpretive, and critical thinking skills in English.

**Conclusion.** Active participation in an aesthetic encounter with British culture can become an educational experience that sharpens the students’ perception of their everyday world, gets them out of their own skin, and enables them to actively enter into the real world. Furthermore, cultural, aesthetic, and narrative encounters encourage students to act and think in an intercultural way and place themselves at a critical distance from both the foreign culture and their own culture.

With the module described, students can approach and interact critically with other cultures, utilizing a graded literary reader and its audio and film versions to aid in the acquisition and strengthening of complex linguistic and cultural skills.

**Literature**


**Audio and Film Recordings**