

Creative use of literature for L2 teaching

Applying the Task-Based Approach on teaching “The City” from C.P. Cavafy to lower level adult students.

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Notion and Aspects of Task as a Pedagogical Model

- Ellis (2003, 16): task is a “work plan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed”
- Richards & Rodgers (2001, 223): learners acquire language through engaging in tasks that require them to negotiate meanings and involve authentic, relevant and real -life communicative interactions.

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Task Typologies for authentic texts

Task type	Description	Examples
Expansion/ Reduction/ Prediction	Add or remove something from the text, predict the development/ outcome of event, situation presented via language input.	Add or remove specific language items (e.g. adjectives, verbs), sentences, paragraphs. Add comments, combine sentences, identify with a character in the text and develop characterization.
Response/ Reaction	Response or reaction (written, oral, kinaesthetic) to input of emotive and non-emotive nature.	Make/alter plans on the basis of weather forecast, listen to instrumental section of a song and write a prose piece, poem, or draw a picture to illustrate what it evokes.
Transference/ Reformulation	Transference (translation or paraphrase) μεταφράζω from one medium, genre, or culture to another. Express the same meaning in a different form, rewrite the text in a different style, mood or format.	Transfer prose into visual form, poem or screenplay, a poem into prose or advertising slogan, a headline into proverb, a story in a different format e.g. telegraphese. Retell a story from notes/memory/keywords.
Reconstruction	Restore coherence/completeness to an incomplete or defective text	Remove sentences which do not «belong» in the text, insert appropriate words/phrases into gapped texts, reorder jumbled words, lines, paragraphs etc.
Analysis	Awareness-raising of linguistic forms and functions and of emotive/figurative/subjective use of language.	Analyse conversational strategies on basis of dialogues from interviews, films. Put words into semantic groups.
Matching Interpretation/	Find a correspondence between the text and something else	Match text with a visual representation, a title, another text, voice, music
Inferencing Comparison/	Engage with the text relating it to personal knowledge/experience, interpret, infer, information/concepts.	Associate text with ideas, images, formulate questions for the text’s author, infer the setting, basic story etc.
Contrast	Identify points of similarity/difference between two or more texts.	Identify, compare common words/expressions/ideas/facts in both texts.
Creating Text	Use the text as a springboard for the creation of others.	Use the same story/outline/title to write a new text, write a parallel text on a different theme.
Extraction	Extract factual information (including cultural indicators) from the text.	Extract factual information (e.g. price, unique features of product) from advertisements.

Tasks

The task – based approach
was engendered within the frame
of the communicative approach
and is supported by the findings
of SLA research.

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Taxonomy of Tasks

- Real-world tasks:** e.g. read an article and write to the editor about it
- Pedagogic tasks:** e.g. answer comprehension questions on it
(Nunan, 1989, Richards & Rodgers 2001)
- Focused tasks:** employed to elicit use of specific linguistic features
- Unfocused tasks:** designed to elicit general samples of learner language (Ellis, 2003)



Teaching Scenario

Level: A2 up

Duration: 90 min

Aims and objectives: to come into contact with an authentic literary text and experience a “dialogue” with it, to practice all four language skills, to see partial understanding as a perfectly natural situation and use it as a lever of progress, to collaborate, communicate and interact in the process of carrying out the activities

Method: Task-based approach

1. Warm-up/Prediction: content and language preparation in 2 parts

i. Present a painting which gives a hint of the content/atmosphere of the poem. Attentive/Creative observation through questions (D. Perkins Model): what are you noticing? What does it make you think? How does it make you feel? Does it remind you of another painting/melody? Is there something missing? How do you describe the person on the painting? Where is he? What is he doing? Where was it before or where will it go afterwards? Which are its thoughts/feelings?

ii. Text production in groups: Give to each group **a set of words** included in the first verse of the poem. (photo). The person on the painting can speak. Use some of these words and write in first person what he said.

The lonely man

Here I sit alone. On me the watchful eye of God.
They call me Hector.
I am from the beautiful island of Ithaca.
I spent so many years in the city.
I want to go to the land of my house.

To the land of my childhood.
I'm afraid I do not have a second chance.
I'm sorry I hesitated.
I'll go to Ithaca.

Monica from Switzerland

Read the students texts in the class. Reveal that these words belong in a C. Cavafy poem starting with the words: “you said”.

2. Reception/Response/Interpretation in 3 steps

1st verse

- Audio reception of the first verse (recitation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENi9CrX7UYE>) twice.
- Response: Did you like it? Did you understand its words? Was it positive or negative? First thought/picture? Did you keep a word? Were you expecting this? Was it close to your story?
- Silent reading (first part of the poem)

The City

BY C. P. CAVAFY (TRANSLATED BY EDMUND KEELEY)

You said: “I’ll go to another country, go to another shore,
find another city better than this one.
Whatever I try to do is fated to turn out wrong
and my heart lies buried like something dead.

How long can I let my mind moulder in this place?
Wherever I turn, wherever I look,
I see the black ruins of my life, here,
where I’ve spent so many years, wasted them, destroyed them totally.”

iv. **Interpretation:** content analysis questions: e.g. what’s the hero’s strong desire? Why does want to leave? Where to? Did he try to leave? Which words in this verse match to the verbs “feel”, “think”, “see”? What is the hero looking for? Why will the new city be “better”?

v. **Extension:** are you familiar with the mind state of the hero? Are you identifying yourself with his dilemma? Could the hero be one of us? Work in groups and create his profile.

The profile of the hero

His name is
He is from..... but he lives
He works
He loves
He doesn't like.....
Every day
His dream is
He is afraid of
He feels sorry that
He often says to his friend : “.....”

vi. **Inferencing:** Who says this “you said” at the beginning of the poem? To whom is the hero addressed? What would be your answer to him?

When we leave we take ourselves with us.
If you do not like Alexandria
you will not like any city.
You see only the shady streets
And the prostitutes
You see only the ruins around you
You forget to breathe the air of the sea.
But you will not leave this place
You need this very darkness.
It troubles you, but it reassures you.
You cannot leave this old one
And a loyal companion
You'd be even sadder than before.

Catherine, Switzerland

I replied: why are you complaining, old man?
Why are you looking for your salvation in other places, in other cities?
When did you turn your gaze away from yourself?
When did you understand the beauty around you?

Never.
Because with the ruins of your failure you are burying your heart
Until it dies.
With the black walls of your fear
You keep the light and hope away.

Thortsen, Switzerland



2nd verse

i. Audio reception of the second verse (recitation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENi9CrX7UYE>)

ii. Silent reading (second part of the poem)

iii. **Response/Interpretation:** How did you find the answer that the poet gave to the hero?

How close was your answer? Is there a new city waiting for him? Why will this city always follow him? In which way will the city follow him?

Who is responsible for his destroyed life?

Which words in the last line are creating an intensive antithesis?

iv. **Analysis:** Which grammatical types are creating an atmosphere of inevitable, eternal repetition?

Total response to the whole poem

i. Audio reception of the whole poem (link)

ii. Reading in chorus or in two groups. One reads the 1st verse (the statement) and the second the 2nd verse (the answer).

iii. **Inferencing:** Give a title to the poem. What does the City symbolize? What is your relationship with your City? Which characteristics of your City are you carrying inside you? Are you identifying yourself with the feelings of the hero? Where would you like to escape from?

iv. **Transference:** Write a dialogue out of the poem, associate the poem with one of the paintings, make a drawing out of the poem, put a melody to the poem: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKB-bopAk44>), retell the poem as if it was a fairytale, acting the poem, take an interview from the hero, translate the poem, find one with similar subject in your language.

v. Creating new text: Write a letter to the poet.

vi. Analysis: Gap filling exercise.

Να συμπληρώσετε τα κενά με λέξεις ή φράσεις που θέλετε

«Θα _____ σ’ άλλ(η) _____, θα _____ σ’ άλλ(η) _____.

(Μια) _____ άλλ(η) θα βρεθεί καλλίτερ(η) από αυτ(ή).

Κάθε προσπάθειά μου είναι _____

κι είν’ η καρδιά μου σαν _____.

Ο νους μου ως πότε _____.

Όπου το μάτι μου γυρίσω, όπου κι αν δω _____

_____ βλέπω εδώ _____

που τόσα χρόνια _____ και _____ και _____.