

NO MORE DAMSELS IN DISTRESS: THE STUDY OF GENDER ROLES IN *TWILIGHT* USING A CLIL APPROACH

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1. Introduction

This article presents a teaching proposal that has been applied in an Upper Secondary English classroom. It works on several passages of *Twilight*, the vampire-based fantasy romance novel written by the American author Stephenie Meyer and aimed at young adults. The novel tells a period in the life of Bella, a teenage girl who moves to Fork, Washington, and falls in love with a 104-year-old vampire called Edward Cullen. Although many students had not read the novel, most of them knew about the story or had seen the film, so they were familiar with the work selected. Although *Twilight* is presented as a romantic novel that has captivated millions of female readers, the story between Bella and Edward contains elements that bespeak a harmful relationship. For example, it supports the notion of domestic violence and fights the female independence in that Bella seems to be fond of living in a patriarchal society lead by domineering Edward; furthermore, it also misleads women into believing that a magical type of love relationship that only exists in fairy-tales can be possible (Hendricks, 2015: p. 1).

Twilight has already been exploited in class and numerous lesson plans have been proposed. In this paper, students examined several passages that portray Bella being rescued or commanded to do something, and Edward being both the rescuer and the commander. The study of gender roles in the classroom offers numerous possibilities for the combination of the linguistic and intercultural learning because students are more aware of the problems associated with gender inequality that exists in our society. The emotional component that may be present in a novel like *Twilight* leads to a better comprehension of its language and content. Hence, the importance of the CLIL approach lies in the fact that the learning of contents in a different language can affect our conceptual mapping, modifies our way of thinking and widens our cultural horizon. Furthermore, the intercultural speaker can acquire the cultural knowledge and sociocultural behaviour of other communities that should promote an open attitude toward the cultural diversity (Marsh 2011). It is also a valid means for investigating the way in which the literary text can be integrated into the subject curriculum (González Rodríguez y Borham Puyal, 2012: pp. 109-110). In the next sections, I offer some features about the importance of literature in the English classroom, some notions about the CLIL approach and the intercultural competence, the methodology and participants used for this teaching unit, a description of the activities that were done in class and a conclusion.

2. Literature in the classroom

In the Compulsory Secondary Education, the curriculum of English does include the study of literature as part of the contents that must be acquired. However, this inclusion is peripheral and is often restricted to the teachers' likings for the literary subjects. The use of literature in the classroom is very beneficial for the process of learning a second language due to several reasons like the following (Collie and Slater, 1987: pp. 6-8; Lazar, 1993: pp. 15-20):

- It is a valuable material that has survived throughout time. Although the meaning of a literary work does not remain static, the work itself may transcend time and culture in order to tell the speaker about historical times and countries that are different from his/her own.

- Literature is an authentic material that has not been created with a didactic purpose. Currently there are teaching materials that contain authentic language like timetables, pamphlets, comics, advertisements, blog entries, newspaper and magazine articles, etc. A literary text can thus complement these more ephemeral materials once they are not so popular.
- When reading a literary text, foreign-language students must face a content that has been initially devised for native speakers of that language. Therefore, these students can become familiar with linguistic uses, forms and conventions of the written language that they do not master like irony, exposition, narration, argumentation, etc.
- The cultural enrichment that is obtained is essential. The world created in a fiction work generally offers a real context in which characters from diverse social backgrounds are depicted, and where the reader can discover feelings, thoughts and behaviours that belong to another context.
- The linguistic improvement is evident as well. Students acquire not only vocabulary but also learn about syntactic structures, word formation, or the different ways of connecting ideas that enrich both their writing and speaking skills.
- Literature helps the learning process because it eases the personal involvement of the reader. If students enjoy the reading, this pleasure will become more important than the focus on the mechanical aspects of the language grammar.

3. The intercultural competence and CLIL

In the learning of a second language, the link between language and culture is evident. In this line, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) establishes the importance of intercultural learning. This relates to the capacity to cope with an intercultural communicative situation in which the speaker can develop sensibility or empathy toward other cultures different from his or her own one (2001: p. 43):

The learner of a second or foreign language and culture does not cease to be competent in his or her mother tongue and the associated culture. Nor is the new competence kept entirely separate from the old. The learner does not simply acquire two distinct, unrelated ways of acting and communicating. The language learner becomes plurilingual and develops interculturality. The linguistic and cultural competences in respect of each language are modified by language of the other and contribute to intercultural awareness, skills and know-how.

The CLIL methodology promotes the cultural consciousness and the fluency in a second language. Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010) offered a '4Cs' approach to CLIL where the elements of content, communication, cognition and culture are necessary to design the CLIL instruction. In the case of culture, the authors (Coyle et al., 2010: p. 64) argue that integrating the intercultural competence into CLIL should be a necessity rather than an option. As a result of this requirement, CLIL becomes a means for the expansion of intercultural understanding within a global community, and should not be restricted to practices that associate the CLIL language with a national culture (Dalton-Puffer, Nikula and Smit, 2010: p. 99).

Following this approach, some elements of Oliver Meyer's (2010) CLIL-pyramid that concern the creation of teaching materials suitable for CLIL are presented. For example:

1. The input offered to students should be true and varied in order to help them accomplish the tasks.
2. Students should be given the necessary tools for the development of activities.
3. An adequate interaction and production of students' output should be promoted. Therefore, the designed tasks should transmit a real communication.

4. The intercultural dimension should be especially predominant since it is one of CLIL features.
5. It is essential to develop the higher order thinking skills like summary, analysis, reasoning, comprehension, application, evaluation, and their corresponding linguistic expressions in the academic discourse.
6. Both the autonomous and the group work should be taken into account.

Similarly, the following criteria that establish quality CLIL materials are useful for keeping a dual attention on content and language (Mehisto, 2012):

- Making the learning intentions like language, content and learning skills and the process visible to students.
- Fostering academic language proficiency.
- Fostering learning skills development and learner autonomy.
- Including self, peer and other types of formative evaluation.
- Helping to create a safe learning environment.
- Fostering cooperative learning.
- Looking for ways of incorporating authentic language and authentic language use.
- Fostering critical thinking.
- Fostering cognitive fluency through scaffolding of a) content, b) language, c) learning skills development helping students to reach well beyond what they could do on their own.
- Helping to learn to make learning meaningful.

4. Methodology and participants

The teaching unit was developed in IES Tamaraceite, a Secondary School located in the outskirts of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (Spain). It was designed for 4th ESO, the last course of Secondary Compulsory Education before the students take Baccalaureate studies or Vocational training. The group was comprised by 28 students who participated in the CLIL programme since they were in 1st ESO. They were around 16 or 17 years old, so they felt identified with the main characters' preoccupations, especially the girls. As to the methodology used during the lessons, the group analysed the passages selected manually and did the activities planned throughout four sessions of 55 minutes long. The evaluation was made through the observation in class, the assessment of the oral participation and the correction of the written tasks.

5. Activities layout

The activities were structured into pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities.

5.1. Pre-reading activities

1. Students made an initial questionnaire in order to find out their knowledge about the novel. They completed the list of questions individually and then a whole class feedback was generated orally.

How much do you know about <i>Twilight</i>?
1. What are the main characters' names? How old are they?
2. Is Bella a good student? And Edward?
3. Which car does Edward drive?
4. How does he get his food?
5. What is Edward's special talent?
6. How many brother and sisters does Edward have? Are they biological siblings?
7. What is the profession of Edward's father?
8. What was Edward dying from before being transformed into a vampire?
9. Is he happy as a vampire? Why?/ Why not?
10. How does Edward travel through the forest?
11. Does Bella like Edward's family? Why do you think so?
12. Does Edward want to turn Bella into a vampire? And Bella, does she wish to become a vampire? Why?
13. Who is Jacob Black? What does he tell Bella about his origins?
14. Which sport game does The Cullen family play one rainy day?
15. What is the name of the three evil vampires?
16. How does James lure Bella into the dance studio?
17. How does Edward save Bella after James bit her?
18. Who finds Bella at Prom?
19. Do you know all the book titles of the <i>Twilight</i> saga? Have you read them?
20. Have you seen the films? What is your favourite one?

Table 1. Questionnaire about the novel

2. The teacher told students they were going to explore the gender roles that Bella and Edward played throughout some parts of the novel. Before reading some extracts of the novel to discover how they felt about this current issue, they answered this questionnaire about gender roles in pairs. They decided if women were better or worse suited than men for the domestic tasks proposed and tried to give reasons for their choice. The answers were discussed in class orally.

Men	Women	Both	Reasons for your answer
Changing plugs			
Hanging up wet clothes			
Going food shopping			
Cooking			
Making the bed			
Cleaning the house			
Taking care of the children			
Washing the dishes			
Throwing out the rubbish			
Keeping the money accounts			

Table 2. Questionnaire about gender roles

5.2. While-reading activities

3. Some students read aloud several passages in which Bella was either rescued by Edward or suffered some type of verbal abuse on his part. The unknown vocabulary was explained after reading each extract and students commented upon the gender roles observed. I have included here some quotes as illustration of my analysis.

For example, in the first excerpt Bella admits to dreaming about Edward practically every night after he prevented the van from crashing her in the school parking lot. She tries to avoid being the centre of attention at school after the incident since “[she] explained over and over that he was the hero – how he pulled [her] out of the way and had nearly been crushed, too”.

In the second quotation, Bella is in Port Angeles and is nearly attacked by a group of young men, but Edward arrives to save her, ordering her to get in his car:

- “Get in,” a furious voice commanded.
- It was amazing how instantaneously the choking fear vanished, amazing how suddenly the feeling of security washed over me – even before I was off the street – as soon as I heard his voice. I jumped into the seat, slamming the door shut behind me.

In the next excerpt, which takes place in an Italian restaurant after the Port Angeles incident, Edward forces Bella to have dinner despite the fact that she is not hungry:

- “Drink,” he ordered.
- I slipped at my soda obediently, and then drank more deeply, surprised by how thirsty I was. I realized I had finished the whole thing when he pushed his glass toward me.
- “Thanks,” I murmured, still thirsty. The cold from the icy soda was radiating through my chest, and I shivered.
- “Are you cold?”
- “It’s just the Coke,” I explained, shivering again.
- “Don’t you have a jacket?” His voice was disapproving.

In another sequence of the same conversation, he dares to say that “[she is] not a magnet for accidents – that not a broad enough classification. [She is] a magnet for trouble. If there is anything dangerous within a ten-mile radius, it will invariably find [her].”

Edward has the ability of reading the thoughts of everyone around him except Bella’s, and that frustrates him terribly. In the following dialogue, Edward accuses Bella of not telling him all that she is thinking about all the time:

- “Do my questions bother you?” I asked, relieved.
- “Not as much as your reactions do.” He looked like he was joking, but I couldn’t be sure.
- I frowned. “Do I react badly?”
- “No, that’s the problem. You take everything so coolly – it’s unnatural. It makes me wonder what you’re really thinking.”
- “I always tell you what I’m really thinking.”
- “You edit,” he accused.
- “Not very much.”
- “Enough to drive me insane.”

4. After reading and commenting on other fragments of the novel dealing with the same subject matter, students completed the following questionnaire individually in order to know their interpretation of some gender role issues related with the main characters of the novel. The answers were discussed in class orally and the questionnaires were then submitted to the teacher for their correction:

Read these questions about the novel and try to provide different answers for each one:

1. Which physical and/or psychological characteristics do you think that make Bella a weaker female?
2. Do you think that Bella wants to be a stronger and more independent woman after meeting Edward, or she does not need to change now that she has a boyfriend? Why/ Why not?
3. Would you prefer that your boyfriend/girlfriend drives you everywhere? Why/ Why not?
4. Would you like your boyfriend/girlfriend to follow you everywhere you go in case you are in danger? Why/ Why not?
5. How would you feel if your boyfriend/girlfriend spied on you, or watched you sleep every night?
6. Do you think that Bella is afraid of Edward? If so, in which way is she afraid?
7. Does Edward encourage Bella to be an independent woman with his intimidating behaviour? Why? Why not?
8. What is Edward's usual reaction when he does not like something that Bella has said or done?
9. Do you think that your life is worthless if your boyfriend/girlfriend breaks up your relationship?
10. In *Twilight*, does Bella show the behaviour of a 21st century woman who is independent and fully capable of doing everything on her own?

5.3. Post-reading activities

5. Students were asked to make the final tasks in groups of four. They selected one among the following list of activities so as to reflect on the importance of a fair distribution of gender roles, and then made an oral presentation before the class.

- Students' dramatization of several domestic scenes where the man traditionally represents women's household chores and vice versa. The scenes should have a humorous atmosphere.
- Students' dramatization of several scenes from *Twilight* changing the roles. Bella is now the vampire and Edward is the mortal boy. How do they behave?
- Students' dramatization of several scenes from *Twilight* changing Bella's personality from wimpy to a strong minded female. How does Edward react?
- PowerPoint or video presentation about gender roles in Spain and other parts of Europe. Are they the same or not? In which way are they different? They do some research on the internet about this topic.
- PowerPoint or video presentation about gender roles in Spain and other countries from Africa, Asia or South America. Are they the same or not? In which way are they different? They do some research on the internet about this topic.
- PowerPoint or video presentation about women who defied their role in society, fought to have better opportunities and reversed established stereotypes. They do some research on the internet about this topic.

6. Conclusions

This paper has shown a teaching unit dealing with gender roles in *Twilight* to develop the intercultural competence using a CLIL approach. This methodology has offered communicative activities like questionnaires, oral discussions, dramatizations and oral presentations as a means to reflect on students' opinions about this substantial topic. Furthermore, CLIL favours the inclusion of literary texts in the curriculum of the compulsory secondary education so that students can ponder on intercultural concerns. Thus the awareness of the cultural consciousness and the fluency in the second language can become more important than the grammar knowledge. The inclusion of a literary text like *Twilight* can allow students to enjoy Stephenie Meyer's novel and ideally increase their love for reading this and other texts. However, it is also essential that, especially in the case of young women, they find their individual achievement through themselves and not through a relationship as it happens in this novel.

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