

## Promoting Intercultural Competence through Literature in CLIL Contexts

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Recent approaches to English Language Teaching show that learning a language should not just involve linguistic competence but also include intercultural competence. The linguistic aspect of language learning has been played down in favour of an intercultural competence framework where learners can acquire skills that enable them to explore cultural complexity and enhance cultural understanding. It is widely acknowledged that literary texts may offer learners opportunities to develop critical reading skills that help them understand other cultures, thus acquiring new cultural frames of reference and a transformed world view. The purpose of this paper is to show how to foster students' intercultural competence by having them read literary texts in English within a CLIL context. The approach presented here aims at working with literary texts both on a cognitive and an affective level by offering creative and challenging tasks focused on developing intercultural competence inscribed in this content-based teaching methodology. In order to do so, the present article describes a case study in which a unit entitled "Gender Roles" has been developed for and implemented with students of English. Their responses have been monitored and analysed, evidencing the initial hypothesis of the relevance of literary texts for the enhancement of intercultural awareness.

Keywords: linguistic competence; intercultural competence; language learning; cultural frames of reference; CLIL.

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## Promover la competencia intercultural a través de la literatura en contextos CLIL

Los nuevos enfoques de la enseñanza del inglés demuestran que aprender una lengua no debería suponer sólo adquirir competencia lingüística, sino que debería incluir la competencia intercultural. El aspecto lingüístico del aprendizaje de una lengua ha perdido relevancia a favor de un contexto de competencia intercultural en el cual los discentes puedan adquirir habilidades que les permitan explorar complejidades culturales y promuevan la comprensión. Es ampliamente reconocido que los textos literarios pueden ofrecer a estos discentes la

oportunidad de desarrollar la capacidad de lectura crítica que pueda ayudarles a entender otras culturas, adquiriendo así nuevos marcos de referencia y una nueva perspectiva del mundo. El propósito del presente artículo es potenciar la competencia intercultural de los estudiantes a través de la lectura de textos literarios en lengua inglesa, dentro de un contexto CLIL. El enfoque que aquí se presenta pretende trabajar con textos literarios tanto en el nivel cognitivo como en el afectivo, ofreciendo tareas creativas y motivadoras que se centren en el desarrollo de la competencia intercultural enmarcada en la metodología de enseñanza basada en contenidos (*content-based*). Este artículo ofrece pues la descripción de una unidad didáctica llamada “Gender Roles” diseñada para estudiantes de Estudios Ingleses, y la presentación y análisis de sus respuestas a la misma, demostrando la hipótesis inicial de la importancia de la literatura para desarrollar la competencia intercultural.

Palabras clave: competencia lingüística; competencia intercultural; aprendizaje de lenguas; marcos culturales de referencia; CLIL.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Current approaches to Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) have shifted from aiming at proficient linguistic competence to highlighting the importance of achieving intercultural competence. Most Foreign Language (FL) teachers are in favour of introducing the cultural dimension as an integral part of FL curricula. There are, however, different opinions as to what the best methods of enhancing intercultural competence might be. Some scholars complain that few FL teachers have a deep understanding of the importance of culture teaching as a means of fostering the acquisition of intercultural skills, and contend that this should be one of the pedagogical challenges of FLT (Sercu 2005). There seems to be a consensus as to the need to nurture cultural responsiveness in FL educators so that they can make classrooms “culturally sensitive places to learn” (Porto 2010: 47). In fact, a more comprehensive view of culture, understood as the particular beliefs, ways of life, and even artistic expressions of a specific society, should obviously be the goal of current FL education.

As foreign language classrooms become more multicultural—in the case of Spain owing to ever increasing immigration from Africa, South America, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Asia—, some educators suggest that new FL teaching practices should reflect this trend by enhancing intercultural awareness and promoting cultural understanding. In this context, culture is usually considered as a dynamic process leading to intercultural encounters. Sercu, for example, contends that culture learning should be defined “in terms of the acquisition of intercultural skills, such as independent exploration of cultures or the ability to mediate successfully in intercultural situations” (2005: 120). In the same vein, Skopinskaja (2003: 40-41) aptly remarks that students should not only be aware of similarities and differences between the target culture and their own cultural background but also that they should establish a “sphere of interculturality” by learning to observe the world from the perspective of others, thus decentring their own perspective. Bredella (2003: 237) also points out that intercultural awareness makes us relativize our own cultural values and prevents fundamentalist attitudes. For this reason, Byram (2008) underlines the importance of enhancing in learners a “critical cultural awareness” since FL teaching should contribute to better understanding of other peoples and cultures. He also suggests that FL learning should be a comprehensive and deep process leading to critical reflection and consequently to intercultural communicative competence.

Within this framework, the present article introduces a case study conducted in a Spanish university which aims to suggest means to enhance this increasingly relevant intercultural communicative competence by the use of literary texts as part of the syllabus within a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) context. This paper tries to highlight the importance of the cultural dimension in the foreign language curriculum and reflects on the potential of literary texts for promoting intercultural competence in higher education. With these goals in mind, this paper describes the advantages of using CLIL as a pedagogical approach for developing intercultural reflection through the use of literary texts.

## 2. INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS AND ITS DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

### 2.1. Relevance of intercultural competence in higher education

*The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) underscores the need to move towards intercultural education by stating that “[i]n an intercultural approach, it is a central objective of language learning to promote the favourable development of the learner’s whole personality and sense of identity in response to the enriching experience of otherness in language and culture” (2001: 1). Moreover, due to the internationalisation of higher education, FL teachers are becoming especially aware of the importance of promoting intercultural skills in their classrooms. Stier (2006: 9), when reflecting on this issue, considers that higher education should help students “operate efficiently in intercultural-interaction situations” and accordingly “increase students’ future employability”. That is, higher education will probably play an important role in providing intercultural training and preparing students to understand and accept cultural diversity. This internationalization calls for new methodologies that can help students achieve intercultural skills in order to interact efficiently in intercultural situations.

### 2.2. Literary texts and intercultural awareness

The power of literary texts to construct sociocultural images and reflect different ways of experiencing the world has been widely acknowledged. The use of literary texts can promote reflection on cultural differences, develop understanding of the home culture, and consequently enhance more tolerant and open attitudes towards other cultures. Some authors point out the potential of fictional texts to develop critical self-awareness by engaging both students’ cognitive and affective dimensions, which paves the way to intercultural awareness and understanding (Phipps and González 2004; Zacharias 2005). Such texts not only provide opportunities for developing our students’ capacity for critical analysis of foreign cultures, but also for affective response when learners vicariously experience other attitudes and values. Tomlinson and Masuhara (2004), for instance, claim that cultural awareness may be achieved through experiencing the culture, either directly through visiting a culture, or indirectly through films, music or literature. According to Thanasoulas (2010), exposure to literary texts not only helps students increase their language competence, but also helps them define and redefine their own cultural values by exploring and interpreting the assumptions and beliefs of the target culture. Furthermore, Bredella (2003: 230) contends that art contributes to self-reflection and imaginative immersion in otherness thus fostering intercultural skills. In the same vein, Corbett (2010: 6-7) highlights the importance of using literary works and other cultural forms of expression as effective ways of enhancing tolerance for diversity and empathy; while Ghosn (2002) remarks on the potential of literature as a change agent since good literature contributes to the emotional development of the student by nurturing interpersonal and intercultural attitudes.

Although the potential of literary texts in FLT has been underestimated in the past, present methodologies have started to appreciate the advantages of using them not only

for communicative purposes but for developing cultural understanding as well. Fiction would meet intercultural objectives as long as analytical and creative tasks were designed to enable students to explore different cultural perspectives and compare these to their own. In this sense, literary texts are *authentic* materials which may help discover culture-dependent beliefs, opinions, habits and viewpoints. Since there are many English language cultures, Pulverness (2004) strongly recommends teachers to use texts and materials which relate to more than one English-speaking culture and to avoid conveying the impression that they are focusing only on British or American culture. While Cai (2002) proposes different views on how to use multicultural literature to help students to vicariously experience crossing cultural borders, some research has proven that multicultural stories induce empathetic responses to the experiences of the story characters (Häggbloom 2006). Multicultural literature can then provide a wide variety of values, beliefs and different perspectives which can enrich and enlarge our students' viewpoints.

Thus, the use of literary texts avoids superficial, simplified, impersonal, or artificial ways of presenting cultural content in textbooks. Literature could then replace course-book cultural materials since it is proven to be more representative of the multilingual diversity of English language and culture. Furthermore, literary texts can be used in conjunction with new methodological innovations to facilitate intercultural learning processes within different contexts, as well as to complement other sources of information.

2.3. How could we address intercultural competence within current language approaches? Traditional approaches to FL teaching were often unable to raise our students' intercultural awareness since they were more focused on language training and the cultural materials provided for instruction were recurrently used to contextualise the presentation and practice of language points. Many teachers complain that most foreign language teaching textbooks rarely include consideration of culture and intercultural communication and, when this happens, cultural information is usually considered as secondary to linguistic content and is presented in an arbitrary and artificial way. Thus, Cortazzi and Jin contend that "what is needed are appropriate methods for teaching and learning culture in the EFL classroom that will facilitate a reflective use of the best available materials" (1999: 210).

Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) is a new paradigm in language education advocated by some researchers as a holistic approach which engages students intellectually and cognitively in both language and content and which may, therefore, have an impact on mental activities (Martyniuk 2008). CLIL is claimed to promote cultural literacy and fluency in the target language while students apply prior knowledge and use cognitive skills. The use of real-world topics reflecting foreign viewpoints reinforces the potential for combining language and intercultural learning. The importance of this approach lies in the fact that learning contents in another language can affect our conceptual mapping, modify the way we think, and, in addition, broaden our thinking horizon (Marsh 2011). We would suggest here that CLIL is an integrated dual-focussed approach to FL teaching that could easily include the cultural dimension in order to

provide a more comprehensive and pluralistic view of foreign cultures. Lonon Blanton contends that only content-oriented curricula can help college students develop “the deep literacy on which their academic success depends” (1992: 285). In the same vein, Wolff (2007) sustains that the educational objective of intercultural competence may be best implemented within CLIL approaches. Recent research has found that topics on ethnic diversity raise students’ intercultural awareness and ethnic tolerance (Neto 2006). It could be argued that the potential of CLIL contexts for enhancing intercultural competence seems to be high since this framework allows teachers to deal with topics linked to the construction of people’s cultural identity. Hence, “the integrative nature of CLIL classes provides an opportunity for taking not only a dual-focussed but a *triple-focussed* approach: simultaneously combining foreign language learning, content subject and intercultural learning” (Sudhoff 2010: 36).

From an intercultural perspective, the topics selected for CLIL programs might allow students to explore and to ponder on cultural topics self-reflexively. The topics organizing the syllabus in CLIL contexts seem to be ideal for introducing and exploring cultural issues connected to the themes. Moreover, as one of the aims of this pedagogical approach is to develop students’ critical thinking, it could promote an awareness of worldwide problems and consequently contribute to intercultural competence.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

CLIL contexts provide the opportunity to work with authentic materials and, consequently, they have great potential in the enhancement of students’ insights into *authentic* foreign perspectives. As a result, CLIL provides a unique framework to promote intercultural competence through the use of multicultural literary texts. Hence, this article offers a frame for integrating literary texts into FLT and dealing with intercultural skills and competencies in a systematic, natural way. CLIL is proposed as the theoretical framework within which literary texts can be used to enhance intercultural communicative competence while focusing on specific topics. We contend that literary texts should be a crucial element in content-based FL instruction since they might complement other source texts, while they also provide wider insights into the topics. By reading multicultural fictions that portray varied attitudes, feelings and assumptions on a given topic, students will acquire a richer and broader perspective of the theme. Moreover, the affective component present in literary texts will lead to deeper processing and better learning of both language and content matter. This would allow students to become interculturally competent as they explore a topic from foreign viewpoints.

With the abovementioned frame in mind, our methodological proposal consisted of organising the syllabus in terms of thematic units, and in employing a variety of texts so that the students acquire both the language and the contents. Theme-based courses are among the most common models of CLIL implemented at tertiary levels because of the lack of complexity in terms of their implementation, since “language instructors operate

autonomously from the rest of the faculty and there is no demand for organizational or administrative adjustments” (Dueñas 2004). In order to structure and develop these thematic units, texts from varied articles were used to help the students attain ideas on the topic, as well as the vocabulary or the linguistic structures necessary to express these ideas. Then, literary texts were employed to complement printed and online resources such as articles from newspapers, psychology or sociology papers, statistics, governmental reports, lectures, films, documentaries, etc. In this way, the literary texts contributed a multicultural perspective to each topic, through inviting the students to become emotionally involved and to observe the theme from different perspectives whilst taking cultural conditionings into account. The texts employed in class were structured within themes or social concerns that would allow a dialogue to be established between the different cultural groups represented by those texts, and would invite a greater emotional involvement and the existence of more points of view. That is, our proposal was to use a dialogic and multicultural model in order to work with the literary texts for pedagogical ends.

In this vein, the general objectives of the units with which we subsequently worked were to reflect on culturally determined attitudes and values, to analyse the characters’ feelings to develop empathy, to compare target culture values to home culture ones, to promote critical interest in social and cultural issues, to explore and discuss cultural stereotypes, to nurture students’ tolerance and respect, and to overcome stereotyped perspectives in order to promote intercultural understanding.

Further activities were suggested in relation to the chosen texts. These included discussing scenes and situations, role-plays and dialogues, creative tasks, such as writing letters or articles for newspapers, keeping a journal, and doing project work. Taking into account Corbett’s suggestions (2010: 5) and the abovementioned considerations, these activities were designed to focus attention on sociocultural issues in order to promote alternative attitudes and to foster respectful questioning of cultural practices.

#### 4. CLASSROOM CONTEXT

The present case study was designed for and conducted in a second-year class of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the context of the syllabus of the new degree in English Studies (Grado de Estudios Ingleses). This particular course, named “Lengua Inglesa III”, aims to achieve a B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. According to the CEFR, a B2 learner can understand the main ideas of complex texts on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation; can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party; and can produce clear, detailed texts on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

The participants in the study were those students who regularly attended class and, consequently, could actively engage in classroom activities. Among the alumni were two

Chinese and three French students, as well as one from South America, evincing the growing multicultural nature of current Spanish courses.

##### 5. SYLLABUS IMPLEMENTATION

The syllabus of the course was organised into a number of didactic units which explored issues considered relevant in any society, and which we thought would engage the students' interest: gender roles, work, education, etc. Different literary texts were selected for each unit, and before-, during- and after-reading tasks were designed. Students carried out some of these tasks as classroom activities, and others as homework.

The main criterion in the selection of literary texts for the present case study was their portrayal of other ways of life within an English-speaking context. That is, they were chosen because of the potential they displayed for the development of intercultural awareness. Together with this potential, length or the possibility of exploring separate shorter chapters in the tight course schedule were also important factors in the selection process. We hoped to avoid an initial negative attitude towards the additional amount of reading the texts would imply. With this in mind, we also tried to find entertaining texts that students at a consolidated B1 level could approach without excessive difficulty. In this sense, Sandra Cisneros' critically acclaimed *The House on Mango Street* (1984) and Rakesh Ratti 'The Greater God' (1998) seemed appropriate, and, in addition, provided an insight into two different genres. To complement the reading of Ratti's poem, a film, *Outsourced* (2006), was also used to explore important issues of contemporary Indian society.

As an example, a unit on gender roles, as developed in the classroom, is described below in detail. A second unit developed within the syllabus, one which aims to improve other aspects of intercultural competency through the use of literature, can be found in Appendix 2.

##### UNIT: Gender Roles

This unit focuses on the traditionally and culturally assigned male and female stereotypes, raises awareness as to their function in different cultures, and draws attention towards the negative consequences of these stereotypes. In order to analyse the differences between men and women, we focused on Sandra Cisneros's novel, *The House on Mango Street*, which provides several chapters that deal with female roles in Chicano culture and that describe how women try to free themselves from those stereotypes. The chapter 'Beautiful and Cruel' mirrors the desire of a new generation of Chicano women not to follow the tradition of submitting to men and depending on them financially. Paying special attention to sentences such as, "I have begun my own quiet war. Simple. Sure. I am the one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate" (Cisneros 1984: 89), the following activities were suggested, as shown in table 1:

PRE-READING	WHILE READING	POST-READING	CREATIVE WRITING
Enumerate the positive and negative stereotypes that define the roles of men and women	Take notes of the attitudes or behaviours that support or destroy these stereotypes	Analyse how the influence of American films or the contact with a new culture has changed Chicano women's desire to adapt to cultural conditionings	Write a short biography about a man/woman who contributed to subverting established stereotypes, using other available sources of information.

Table 1

In another chapter, 'Smart Cookie', the submission and financial dependence of Chicano women is presented. As with the previous chapter, students examined Esperanza's mother's advice — "Esperanza, you go to school. Study hard . . . Got to take care all your own" (91)— and made connections to their own culture. Students were also asked to explain in groups their interpretation of this quotation and the one above under the light of the stereotypes and the defiance to these stereotypes as identified in the text. This kind of activities can make students aware that stereotypes are just a way of understanding what is foreign or incomprehensible from a cultural perspective.

In addition, students watched extracts from the film *Outsourced* (2006), by director John Jeffcoat, in which a Westerner must face the challenge of finding himself in the midst of Indian culture and of trying to understand their values, beliefs and way of life. In these particular instances, the episode chosen approached the matter of what is socially expected from women and of arranged marriages. Students then debated their impressions in class, emphasising the differences they perceived with their own culture and aiming to make sense of such cultural differences. This activity served as a warm-up for the reading of the poem 'The Greater God' by Hindu author Rakesh Ratti. This poem was used in order to analyse the dichotomy between the role assigned by Ratti's culture to women and his own way of perceiving things conditioned by his contact with American culture. Some of the proposed activities are described in the table 2.

Finally, students were asked to answer the post-reading questions in groups, as well as to attempt to write their own poem, which was considered a voluntary task. In addition, extra activities on gender roles were created to complement and further develop this unit, employing alternative texts which enhanced the variety of sources and tasks, as seen in Appendix 2. These activities could be used independently to constitute the core of the unit, or, as in the present case, as a means to reinforce the cultural awareness developed through the tasks described above.

The aim of these activities was that students should become aware of cultural differences and of their own gender constructions, highlighting the consequences of gender discrimination and empathizing with the difficulties faced by women of different cultures.

PRE-READING	WHILE READING	POST-READING	CREATIVE WRITING
Watching videos of <i>Outsourced</i> on the topic of arranged marriages and the social expectations of Indian women.	Identifying and listing the varied metaphors of the poem.	What are the female roles described in the poem? Are they the same in your own culture?	Write your own poem including what you think Western female stereotypes are.
Working on the vocabulary.	Writing an explanation for the meaning of those metaphors.	Why does the poet compare the woman of the poem with a lesser god? What does this metaphor imply? Why are women considered inferior to men in some cultures?	
		Why do you think the author ends his poem stating that the woman is to him “the greater god”?	
		In what ways do you think the fact that he grew up in America could have had an impact on his cultural values?	

Table 2

## 6. ASSESSMENT

### 6.1. Method

Two methods of assessment of the experience and of the intercultural awareness raised in the students were utilized. First, teachers employed observation as an instrument for assessing the level of students' involvement and learning by means of monitoring their participation in class and their performance in the written activities that they had to carry out in groups. After the students worked together, the post-reading activities were submitted, and the teacher marked the students' essays as part of their overall assessment. This method allowed for the collection of qualitative data and the observation of the students' learning progress. In this part of the study most of the students enrolled in the class participated ( $n=40$ ), and their performance was evaluated as part of their formative assessment.

In order to provide quantitative data, a questionnaire was used to explore our students' acquisition of intercultural competence (Appendix 1). The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale to measure the level of agreement of the students with different statements about the activities performed in class. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: the first related to cultural awareness in general and to how it had been enhanced by the

literary activities; the second related to the way in which very specific elements of the texts had contributed to developing the students' empathy or intercultural awareness; the third section looked into the students' attitudes towards literature in a language classroom. The more general items were selected in accordance with the objectives of intercultural competence described by the CEFR, while the more specific ones concerned with the readings carried out by the students focused on the outcome of the activities we had previously suggested (e.g. the focus on metaphors, which the students had worked on, or the exploration of their identification with the first-person writing). This questionnaire was handed out in class once the unit was concluded. Students had half an hour to complete it and could ask for clarification if needed. The items were written employing a language and style similar to that used in class; probably as a consequence of this, there were no doubts or misunderstandings while the students completed the questionnaire. From the students attending class, a representative sample was collected ( $n=33$ ), and tabulated and analysed in order to gauge the success or failure of the experience.

In contrast to the previous method, in this questionnaire the students reflected on their own experience and on the significance these activities had for their intercultural awareness. This emphasized the importance of self-assessment, which the European Space of Higher Education highlights, as opposed to the teachers' assessment. This part of the research was therefore presented and used as an instrument for self-awareness rather than as a class activity that could be graded.

## 6.2. Results

The response of the students was highly positive, as the results, expressed in percentages, show in Table 3.

The majority of students agreed and strongly agreed with all 25 items, which confirms the value they place on these activities in the development of their intercultural awareness. Among these general satisfactory results, we would highlight particularly relevant instances of agreement (i.e. items in which agreement was greater than 60%) as to the usefulness of literature as an instrument to raise intercultural awareness. For example, items such as "I think that the literary works used in class helped me reflect on my attitude towards gender differences in my own culture" (3), "These texts provided me with a vision of the restrictions to which females from other cultural backgrounds are subject due to conventional gender roles" (9), or "Ratti's poem helped me reflect on the extent to which these positive female roles are present in/absent from Western culture" (20), assert the importance these literary texts had in the students' reflection on their own culture, as well as on other cultures. Moreover, items such as: "By the inclusion of many female characters and voices in Cisneros's novel, I achieved a wider vision of Chicano women's issues and problems" (14), or: "These metaphors contributed to develop my empathy for the problems of Chicano women" (16), highlight the process of empathy and of sharing the other's point of view which has been rendered possible by the use of the characters' focalization or of metaphoric language, resources particular to literary texts. Finally,

ITEM (N=33)	STRONGLY DISAGREE		DISAGREE		NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE		AGREE		STRONGLY AGREE	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
	1. Cultural borders			1	3,0	12	36,4	14	42,4	6
2. Gender in other cultures					10	30,3	19	57,6	4	12,1
3. Gender in my culture			2	6,1	6	18,2	22	66,7	3	9,1
4. Question values					13	39,4	16	48,5	4	12,1
5. Gender stereotypes			1	3,1	6	18,8	19	59,4	6	18,8
6. My cultural values			1	3,0	7	21,2	19	57,6	6	18,2
7. Dangers of stereotypes			4	12,1	7	21,2	19	57,6	3	9,1
8. Approach cultures			1	3,0	10	30,3	15	45,5	7	21,2
9. Restrictions of gender roles					3	9,4	25	78,1	4	12,5
10. Low expectations towards women					7	21,2	16	48,5	10	30,3
11. Gender roles in my culture					16	50,0	15	46,9	1	3,1
12. Empathy for the underprivileged	1	3,0			8	24,2	17	51,5	7	21,2
13. Empathy for Esperanza			1	3,0	4	12,1	16	48,5	12	36,4
14. Female voices			1	3,1	6	18,8	21	65,6	4	12,5
15. Metaphors convey message					10	30,3	14	42,4	9	27,3
16. Metaphors develop empathy			1	3,0	8	24,2	21	63,6	3	9,1
17. Awareness of Chicano women's issues			1	3,0	6	18,2	17	51,5	9	27,3
18. Women's inferiority in some cultures					7	21,2	10	30,3	16	48,5
19. Metaphors of the poem					12	36,4	16	48,5	5	15,2
20. Female roles in my culture			1	3,1	7	21,9	20	62,5	4	12,5
21. Enjoyed literary texts	1	3,0	2	6,1	3	9,1	20	60,6	7	21,2
22. Enjoyed different genres			2	6,1	2	6,1	23	69,7	6	18,2
23. New vocabulary			2	6,1	6	18,2	14	42,4	11	33,3
24. Improved linguistic and communicative competence			1	3,0	11	33,3	19	57,6	2	6,1
25. Improved intercultural competence			1	3,0	8	24,2	15	45,5	9	27,3

Table 3. Distribution of frequencies

a great majority of students also agree with items that assert the value of these texts in their learning of vocabulary or grammar (items 23, 24). Moreover, the level of agreement with items like “I enjoyed reading literary texts as part of my classroom activities” (21) and “I enjoyed reading different genres” (22), allows us to assume that literature has also contributed to making their learning more pleasurable and has become an important element in their learning motivation.

In addition to the analysis of quantitative data, the questionnaire and the students' group work provides qualitative data that supports these results. The answers to the

questions “How would you feel if you were Esperanza, Esperanza’s mother or one of the women described in Ratti’s poem?” or “Do you think that Chicano and Indian women should challenge male power and cultural and social expectations? What should they do?” evidence that students’ were capable of assuming a first-person approach to the problems created by gender differences expressed in these texts. Some answers were, for instance, “If I were Esperanza’s mother I would feel disappointed with my life, and with the decisions she had to take. If I were Esperanza, I would feel hopeful [sic], because she has the opportunity of changing her life”.<sup>1</sup> While mistakes still occur at this level, both the grammatical and cultural contents have been achieved: students can employ such structures as hypothetical conditionals to reflect on the situation of other women as compared to their own. In addition, these examples can be used both to work on the linguistic contents of the syllabus, and to deepen the discussion on the students’ empathy.

Furthermore, working in groups as well as providing an opportunity for greater reflection and creativity, also offers a valuable insight into the development of the ‘students’ intercultural awareness. To the question on ‘Smart Cookie’ asking to explain the words of Esperanza’s mother, a representative answer was:

In Chicano culture women depend economically on their male counterpart. It is the women’s role to stay in the house and raise the children while it is the male’s obligation to receive an education and work to provide for their family. . . . She wants Esperanza to prosper on her own without the help of a man. Esperanza’s mom regrets leaving school because she was ashamed that she didn’t have nice clothes and she doesn’t want Esperanza to follow her footsteps. She doesn’t want Esperanza to sacrifice her own needs and dreams in order to comply with what Chicano culture expects from them.

Answers to the question “Why do you think the author ends his poem stating that woman is to him the greater God?” include:

I think the author ends his poem by stating that the woman is to him “the greater god” because he doesn’t agree with the point of view of his culture regarding the roles of women and he has come to realise that women are even more powerful and intellectual than men and they have a very important role in our lives. They are the pillar of the family who absorb all the negative things but radiate positive things like love, light and happiness.

Moreover, some students expressed the ways in which American culture influenced Ratti and his cultural values thus: “growing up in America has helped change his point of view about women’s role in society; perhaps, by looking at how women are treated in America he has come to noticed [sic] that women in his culture are looked down on, less

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<sup>1</sup> All instances of students’ production are reproduced verbatim.

valued and not treated with the respect they deserve. He thinks that the female's role in his culture is like a punishment and it is an aberration to treat women in such a way".

Another remarkable example of this qualitative data would be the following poem, composed by three students:

'Pleasant Resignation'  
 Behind smiling faces lie the pain and grief  
 Behind those efforts to reach the degrading perfection  
     I've seen tragedy  
 A perfect complexion hides suffering within  
     Everything surrounding them  
     Treats them as disposable objects  
 But want it to keep on being the same  
 Unless they want to fade into the oblivion  
     Not trying to claim back their soul  
     And the fake smile they wear  
     The crown on their heads  
     The cross they bear  
     Will be too heavy<sup>2</sup>

This is not only an interesting piece of creative writing, one which presents a skilful use of vocabulary, but also an instance of how students perceive what is hidden behind cultural constructions. This poem is just an example of the many we could quote from the students' production.

As a final remark, under the heading "personal reflection", another group of students wrote that, after dealing with this unit, their conclusion was that "stereotypes should disappear" and "men and women should be equal", reflecting that, though discriminating behaviour has changed over the years, "there are still too many countries where women are discriminated against" and that the latter should strive to achieve change. This paragraph was not asked for, it was provided by the students voluntarily, further evidencing their awareness of the intercultural contents of the unit. Intercultural values prove, then, not merely attitudes, but potential codes of behaviour that can change the society they live in.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

Under the light of our quantitative and qualitative results, we conclude that literary texts are an excellent resource for teaching students practical language skills, as well as for helping them to develop tolerance and empathy. The fact that the students' perception of their own linguistic, communicative and intercultural competence had improved supports

<sup>2</sup> We are very thankful to our second-year students for allowing us to publish their work in this study.

our initial idea that the use of literary texts in an English Language classroom can enrich students from an intellectual and affective perspective, whilst at the same time widening their linguistic and communicative competence. Literary texts in English contribute to developing their intercultural competence, since they help to erase prejudices, to enhance empathy for others, to avoid monolithic perspectives, to reduce contempt towards other cultures, and to counter racist attitudes. The adoption of a multicultural pedagogy may help students understand different points of view, which leads to a revision of preconceived ideas. From this perspective, literary texts provide a multicultural interplay of voices that can teach students to respect the values and customs of different cultural groups. The integration of multicultural English fictions within CLIL contexts could further reinforce the benefits of these texts by encouraging reflection on different cultural representations.

Moreover, CLIL seems to be the ideal framework for developing critical intercultural awareness since it allows teachers to design challenging activities which promote the acquisition of linguistic, communicative and intercultural skills. This case study shows that CLIL provides an adequate platform from which to explore different ways in which authentic materials in general, and literary texts in particular, can be integrated into the syllabus, and can be the source of motivating tasks which promote much —needed intercultural awareness. Our syllabus, then, is just a starting point for further research and methodological implementation. In the future, for example, this highly positive experience could be developed through portfolios (Simmons 2010), in order not only to analyse the results, but also to better monitor the acquisition process of intercultural competence. The unlimited availability and richness of literary sources opens the field for teachers to implement similar experiences and to continue exploring the compelling ways in which literature can enhance the syllabus of language classes.

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*Outsourced* (John Jeffcoat, 2006)

## APPENDIX 1. QUESTIONNAIRE

Express your agreement or disagreement with the following statements, taking into account that 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5= strongly agree.

## CULTURAL AWARENESS

1. I believe literary texts facilitate crossing cultural borders
2. I think that the literary works used in class helped me reflect on my attitude towards gender differences in other cultures
3. I think that the literary works used in class helped me reflect on my attitude towards gender differences in my own culture
4. After working on gender roles in other countries, I am willing to question the values and presuppositions of my own cultural environment
5. These texts have helped me understand that gender stereotypes have a cultural construction
6. After reading these texts, I am aware of how my cultural values affect my approach to gender stereotypes
7. After reading these texts, I am aware of the dangers of generalizing individual behaviours as representative of the whole culture

*THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET*, BY SANDRA CISNEROS, AND "THE GREATER GOD", BY RAKESH RATTI

8. These texts allowed me to approach cultures very different from my own with which I had had little previous contact (Chicano and Hindu)
9. These texts provided me with a vision of the restrictions to which females from other cultural backgrounds are subject due to conventional gender roles
10. These texts have helped me reflect on the low expectations existing in certain cultures towards women
11. These texts helped me reflect on the restrictions owing to conventional gender roles existing in my own culture
12. These texts helped me develop empathy for women from underprivileged backgrounds
13. The fact that *The House on Mango Street* is written from Esperanza's point of view and written in first person contributed to creating a better understanding of her situation as a Chicano woman
14. By the inclusion of many female characters and voices in Cisneros's novel, I achieved a wider vision of Chicano women's issues and problems
15. The metaphors employed by Cisneros's heroine contributed effectively to explaining the real situation of Chicano women
16. These metaphors contributed to develop my empathy for the problems of Chicano women
17. Cisneros's text contributed to my awareness of the role of education and literacy in the liberation from constrained gender stereotypes
18. The poem by Rakesh Ratti made me reflect on the fact that in some cultures women are considered inferior to men
19. The metaphors used in Ratti's poem helped me discover new positive female roles and expectations

20. Ratti’s poem helped me reflect on the extent to which these positive female roles are present in/ absent from Western culture

LITERATURE IN THE CLASSROOM

- 21. I enjoyed reading literary texts as part of my classroom activities
  - 22. I enjoyed reading different genres
  - 23. I feel I have learnt new vocabulary by means of these literary texts
  - 24. I feel my linguistic and communicative competence has also improved through the performance of these activities
  - 25. I feel my intercultural competence has improved through the performance of these activities
- Answer the following questions and justify your answer.

How would you feel if you were Esperanza, Esperanza’s mother or one of the women described in Ratti’s poem?

Do you think that Chicano and Indian women should challenge male power and cultural and social expectations? What should they do?

APPENDIX 2. ALTERNATIVE INTERCULTURAL UNITS BASED ON LITERARY TEXTS  
UNIT: Education.

In this unit, students must become aware of the importance of education to prevent discrimination and to enhance their life.

The chapter entitled ‘No Speak English’ from Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street* describes the feelings of a Latin-American immigrant that is incapable of communicating in English, told from the perspective of the girl that lives on the same street. The following activities would be proposed:

PRE-READING	POST-READING	CREATIVE WRITING AND ROLE-PLAY	PROJECT WORK	JOURNAL WRITING
Have a look at the title and make predictions about the content of the story, the characters, etc.	Analyse the woman’s feelings and possible motives for being so sad. Explain the meaning of the expression: “her voice sounds like a seagull.”  Reflect on why she is reluctant to learn English; why she is unhappy when her son’s first words are pronounced in English.	Students write a dialogue between the woman and the narrator. The girl should ask the woman about her feelings, her expectations, etc. and she should also try to convince her of the necessity of speaking English and educating her son to master the target language and culture.  Students role-play the dialogue in front of the class.	Students will work in groups and gather information from different sources about the way in which education can function either to empower or disempower people. Then, they should give an oral presentation summarizing relevant information.	Students write about the problems that can arise when children are educated within a different culture than that of their parents.

In terms of intercultural competence, students would once again develop their capacity for empathy, while they reflect on the sense of belonging to a specific culture and hence also improve the awareness of their own culture and that of others.

Together with the text by Cisneros, Leslie Marmon Silko's short story 'Lullaby' could also be used to analyse the impotence and defencelessness of Native Americans that cannot read or write, nor use English to express their opinions or to challenge what is being imposed on them. Therefore, it also provides the opportunity to explore relevant intercultural issues with similar activities to the ones described above.

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