

Literature in SFL situations: Some ideas for teaching Spanish Golden Age theatre

La literatura en contextos ELE: algunas ideas para la enseñanza del teatro español del Siglo de Oro

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Resumen

Este artículo se centra en las principales dificultades que les surgen a los estudiantes extranjeros cuando tienen que enfrentarse a los aspectos fundamentales del teatro español del Siglo de Oro, así como a la lectura de las comedias escritas a lo largo de ese período. Con el fin de paliar estos problemas, se muestran en el presente trabajo algunos recursos e ideas útiles para los docentes de literatura en la clase de ELE.

La literatura es una parte de la cultura de destino, y por lo tanto es importante que el alumnado la conozca y la tenga presente; por ello, nuestro objetivo es promover el interés de los estudiantes hacia esta disciplina, a través de actividades motivadoras, y animarles a tomar un papel más activo en su aprendizaje. Un estudiante está motivado y muestra ganas de continuar estudiando literatura, dependiendo, por un lado, de la literatura en sí misma y, por otro, de cómo esta sea enseñada; es por ello que, como docentes, debemos hacer un esfuerzo para convertir el estilo de nuestras actividades en algo atractivo. Los juegos de rol o el uso de medios audiovisuales, por ejemplo, nos pueden ayudar a conseguir que el estudiante asimile los esquemas más básicos del teatro español del Siglo de Oro y a reforzar todo tipo de contenidos.

Palabras Clave: ELE, Teatro del Siglo de Oro, ludificación, literatura.

Abstract

This article focuses on the main difficulties that foreign students face when they have to learn the fundamental aspects about Spanish Golden Age theatre, and read plays written throughout that period. In order to address these problems, this paper offers some useful tools for teachers of literature in SFL situations.

Literature is part of the target culture, and hence it is important to foster learners' cultural awareness; therefore, our aim is to promote students' interest in this subject through motivating activities and encourage them to take a more active role in their learning. A student is motivated and keeps on studying literature depending on literature itself and how it is taught, that is why we, as teachers, should make an effort to turn the style of our activities into something enticing. Role plays or audio-visual aids, for instance, can help us to assist the student to assimilate the most basic schemes of the Spanish Golden Age theatre, and to reinforce contents.

Keywords: SFL, Spanish Golden Age theatre, gamification, literature.

Explaining Spanish Golden Age theatre to foreign students is a hard task which requires a great effort from the teacher. The present paper reviews the main difficulties we can find in the classroom, and shows some ideas for teaching literature in SFL situations.

Introduction

It is common to consider literature in the classroom of Spanish as a foreign language as a simple resource for language learning, however, this may be a rather simplistic point of view. We should look at this discipline as an area of study itself and not only as a tool. Unfortunately, there are not too many researches defending this position. One of the scholars who supports the aforementioned idea is Castillo (2004) in a useful and innovative paper in which she affirms that

Los textos literarios y sus respectivos análisis son riquísimos en sí y proporcionan al estudiante un conocimiento y una habilidad reflexiva importante dentro de su competencia. Además, los alumnos hablantes no nativos del español de un nivel avanzado pueden interesarse tanto en la literatura como un hablante nativo. De la literatura y de la forma en cómo esta se enseña va a depender que el alumno continúe estudiándola

y lo haga motivado. Se tendría la ventaja de estar desarrollando constantemente la destreza de la lectura [...] Los beneficios que se puedan desprender del estudio literario (como aumento del léxico o de las estructuras gramaticales) serán ventajas adicionales, pero lo importante es situar la literatura como un objeto de estudio que es parte importante dentro de los planeamientos de clase de los hablantes no nativos del español (Castillo 2004, pág. 249) [Literary texts and their respective analysis are very rich and provide students with important knowledge and the ability to reflect within their competence. Moreover, non-native Spanish speakers in advanced levels can become as interested in literature as a native speaker. The fact that a student is motivated and keeps on studying literature will depend on literature itself and how it is taught. The constant development of reading skills would be an advantage. Benefits from the literary study (such as increase of lexicon or grammatical structures) will be additional advantages, although the most important issue will be to place literature as the object of study, which is an important part within lesson plans for Spanish non-native speakers.]

As mentioned above, many scholars have emphasized the advantages of using literature for language teaching. Some of these benefits are applicable to the study of the discipline itself too. In this regard, literature is a part of the target culture, and hence it is important for learners' cultural knowledge. Moreover, it can provide personal enjoyment to students, encouraging critical and creative thinking and favouring personal growth (cf. Maley 2001; Ur 1996; Kramersch 1992).

In spite of these positive points, teaching Spanish literature for foreigners can be a difficult task and it becomes even worse when the topic is Spanish Golden Age theatre¹. This subject is intricate for several reasons: we are not dealing with contemporary language, it is written in verse, situations are far from students' cultural background, etc.² Nevertheless, this kind of drama is defined by a series of features which are repeated

¹ Something similar takes place in Spanish classrooms, where, even in the case of Hispanic Studies, students show an initial demotivation to the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Martínez Navarro 2015).

² In a recent study, Martínez Navarro (2016) shares the same concern regarding her experience teaching Courses for Foreign Students at the University of Seville, in particular *Cervantes and Don Quixote* and *Spanish Literary Myths*.

more or less in all the pieces and that can help us to bring the play closer to the students.

In the present paper, we will try to offer practical methods on how to teach Spanish Golden Age theatre and promote students' interest in this subject, having in mind its stereotyped characteristics.

Materials and methods

As these plays are distant from the student's world knowledge, it is necessary to focus on their historical background using, preferably, audio-visual aids (when possible) because they are more illustrative than other kind of resources. It would be hard to understand Spanish Golden Age theatre without knowing about the values of Spanish society at that time, for example. So, for a proper interpretation of the *comedia* students should know the circumstances in which it was represented (its history, the spaces, the audience, the importance of theatre in the country, etc.). In this respect it is worth mentioning the DVD *El teatro y la vida teatral del Barroco: de la corte al pueblo* (Rull and Suárez 2009), which the teacher can use in the classroom by selecting fragments, although a subtitled version would be better for our students. Among others, the section devoted to theatrical spaces is especially appealing and significant³.

One of the noteworthy characteristics of the Spanish Golden Age theatre is the existence of recurrent characters. It was demonstrated by several scholars like Juana de José Prades (1963), who worked on a typology which shows the presence of six *personajes-tipo* or stock characters in these plays: *la dama* (the lady), *el galán* (the lover), *el gracioso* (the comic character), *la criada* (the female servant), *el rey* (the king), and *el padre* (the father). Each one of these characters can be represented "por uno, dos, tres (rara vez cuatro) personajes circunstanciales. Es decir, en una misma comedia pueden figurar dos damas, tres galanes etc" (José 1963, pág. 53) [by one, two, three (seldom four) circumstantial characters. That is, in the same comedy there can be two damas, three galanes, etc.].

³ A version of that section is also available in the website <http://www.rtve.es/alcanta/videos/uned/uned-teatro-barroco-espacios-representacion-segunda-hora/902207/> (accessed December 5, 2013).

The most interesting characters are *la dama*, *el galán*, *el padre*, *el gracioso*, and *el rey*⁴.

Damas have to be beautiful and noble. It is common to find in them

la conciencia plena de su distinción social, y las que no poseen nobleza de sangre o título nobiliario, son, al menos, lo que se llamaban mujeres principales, en las que se suponía, por tanto, una hidalguía nata (José Prades 1963, pág. 74) [full awareness of their social distinction, and those without nobility by high birth or nobility title, are, at least, what they called main ladies, who were expected to have nobility by birth].

Regarding the *galán*, he must be a

caballero de buen talle, linajudo, eterno enamorado de la dama, pero turbado en su amor por la obsesión de celos y por la preocupación de honor; será, además muy valiente y generoso (José Prades 1963, pág. 251) [slim gentleman, of distinguished ancestry, eternally in love with the lady, but confused due to his obsessive jealousy and worried about honour; he will also be brave and generous].

It is also an essential requirement for the *galán* to belong to the aristocracy (even more than for the *dama*). Furthermore, his beauty is a requisite too, but it is showed in the text less explicitly than in the case of the *dama*. On the other hand, his bravery is constantly highlighted, since his gallantry is

una de las condiciones más indispensables, absolutamente integradora del personaje que llamamos *galán*. El valor, la valentía, la osadía hasta la temeridad es uno de los rasgos más acusados de este personaje (José Prades 1963, pág. 96) [one of the most necessary conditions, absolutely essential for the *galán*. Daring gallantry and bravery are the most typical features in this character].

The *personaje-tipo padre* in these plays is

un anciano caballero, muy valeroso, pero sometido de por vida a un inflexible código de honor que le convierte en pesquisidor y juez de los actos de sus hijos, preferentemente de la hija, en quien más peligró el

⁴ The character of the female servant in the Spanish Golden Age theatre is the least common one and her role is seldom relevant. The *criada* is the lady's counselor and covers up for her (José Prades 1963, pág. 240). Sometimes she has a love affair with the *gracioso*.

patrimonio de honor (José Prades 1963, pág. 251) [an old gentleman, very brave, but subject to an inflexible honour code which may become an inquiring judge in his offspring's actions, especially in his daughter's, whose honour is most at risk]

This role is interpreted predominantly by the *dama*'s father.

As Romanos (2011, pág. 385) affirms “la comicidad es, sin lugar a dudas, uno de los rasgos constitutivos del teatro barroco español”. This comic element resides almost exclusively in the *gracioso*. According to José Prades (1963, pág. 251), this character has to be the

criado fiel del galán, que secunda todas sus iniciativas, *consejero sagaz, pleno de gracias y donaires*, solícito buscador de dádivas generosas y de la vida regalona (*codicioso, glotón y dormilón*), cauto en los peligros hasta la cobardía, desamorado [galán's loyal servant, who supports all his initiatives, wise counsellor, full of graces and wits, obliging fortune-seeker and comfort lover (covetous, greedy and fond of sleeping), cautious in danger up to cowardice, cold-hearted]

Navarro González (1981, pág.124) provides more details on the *graciosos*' description and points at how they “exhiben con humor su cobardía, deshonor y egoísmo, y con desairadas actitudes e ingenioso lenguaje defienden su pobre y desatendida persona” [show themselves in a humorous way as coward, dishonest and selfish, and defend their poor and unattended personality through disdainful attitudes and ingenious language]. Another feature of the *gracioso* is his simple-mindedness. In relation to this defect Chauchadis (2000, pág. 158) notes: “Lo que hace del villano un bobo es generalmente su incapacidad de entender lo que se dice o lo que se hace”. Moreover, this character is also defined by his way of speaking, “[c]on la palabra se define, con la palabra hace reír y con la palabra se convierte en moralista impenitente” (García Lorenzo 2005, pág. 124).

The characterization of the *rey* depends on his age. If the king is old, he will be prudent and concerned about honour, but when we find a young monarch in the play, he will be a kind of *galán*. The *rey-galán* is arrogant and unfair and

se muestra también como perpetuo enamorado, pero en este estado afectivo es aun mucho más impulsivo e impaciente que cualquier otro galán. Su pasión es rápida, intensa y ansía soluciones inmediatas (José Prades 1963, pág. 102). [also shows himself as eternally in love, although in this state he is even more impulsive and impatient than any

other *galán*. His passion is fast, intense and he looks forward to immediate solutions]

In order that students become familiar with the stereotypical roles in these plays, we can elaborate cards with some famous characters' pictures⁵ and attribute the name of the *personajes-tipo* to them. Thus, students can establish associations and remember the information better. Moreover, we will make another card with twelve descriptions with different degrees of linguistic complexity depending on the learners' level. Six of them contain the characteristics of each *personaje-tipo* and the other six include false information (in order to avoid making the task too easy). In groups, they should find out which is the right description for every character and provide reasons for their choice. Below, there is an example of how these cards could be:



Figure 1. Cards with famous characters' pictures

⁵ The pictures were extracted (and later modified) from the website <http://www.profedelee.es/> (<http://www.profedelee.es/2013/08/fichas-personajes-objetos-lugares.html>).

After identifying how every character is like, the content will be reinforced with a role play. Each group has to imagine a situation and act as a *personaje-tipo* keeping the main topics in the Spanish Golden Age theatre (namely love and honour) in mind. The task can be done throwing a dice like the one in Figure 2 below:

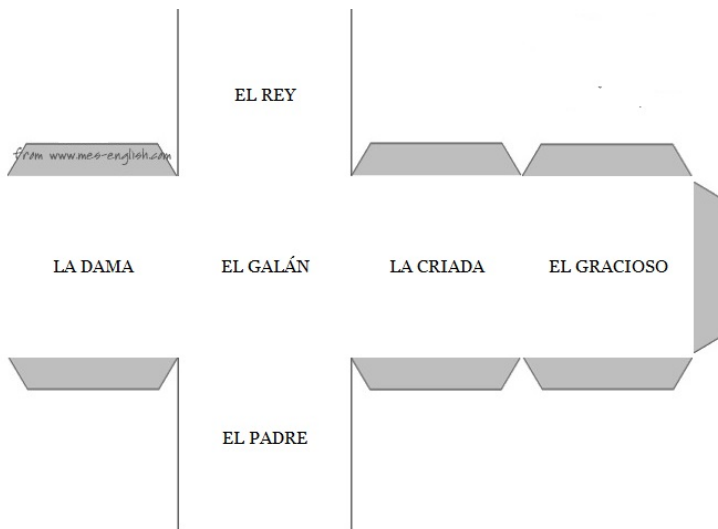


Figure 2. Dice made on the website www.toolsforeducators.com⁶

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Es bella. • Pertenece a la alta sociedad. • Es fiel y recatada. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Es valiente. • Pertenece a la alta sociedad. • Es fuerte y guapo. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Es un hombre anciano. • Está preocupado siempre por el honor de su hija.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Es guapa, alta y delgada. • Trabaja en el campo. • No es cobarde. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No tiene cultura. • Es valiente y rico. • Es fuerte, pero dormilón. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Es un criado glotón y dormilón. • Es cobarde. • Deforma las palabras al hablar.

⁶ Only two *damas* and two *galanes* at most are allowed in each group.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Si es joven será tirano y apasionado. • Si es viejo será prudente y sabio. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Es simpático. • Pertenece a la alta sociedad. • Es poderoso. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Es un criado viejo. • Es valiente. • No es poderoso.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Está enamorada del rey. • Es guapa y trabajadora. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conoce todos los secretos de la dama. • Puede enamorarse del gracioso. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Es un hombre anciano. • Está enamorado de la criada. • Lleva una corona.

Table 1. Cards with true/false descriptions

Moreover, we can provide them with some cards in which the teacher reflects about some typical situations of these plays. For instance, the first one could be a card for a *dama*, the second for the *gracioso*, the third for a *galán* and the last one for the *padre*:

1. Amas a un hombre y necesitas saber si él también te quiere a ti. No puedes declararte directamente porque no es propio de una dama.

2. Tienes mucho miedo y, como estás nervioso, no puedes parar de hacer bromas.

3. Amas a una dama, pero hay otro hombre que también la quiere. Tiene que ser tuya.

4. Quieres casar a tu hija con un noble de la ciudad, pero hay un galán que quiere tener relaciones con ella. Debes impedirlo.

Table 2. Example of situations for a role play

Once they are familiar with the circumstances of the performance, the topics and the characters, students can proceed to read the play or selected fragments of it, trying to avoid, insofar as possible, a linguistic analysis. We should find appropriate texts depending on the level, so that the chosen passages will be more or less easy and extensive. In a B1 level, for example, we should not use plays (or fragments) containing too many lines

of the *gracioso* speaking in *sayagués*⁷, because for obvious reasons it would be very difficult. We must look for the simplest dialogues and let those more complicated for students with a C1 or C2 level. In this sense, let us compare for instance the following texts:

TEXT 1	TEXT 2
<p>CAZADOR</p> <p>Dime el camino en que estoy, que ni sé por dónde voy ni sé la senda que sigo. Corriendo el monte venía con otros monteros yo y en el monte me cogió el crepúsculo del día.</p> <p>TOSCO</p> <p>Lleve Barrabás el nombre. ¿El qué le cogió, señor?</p> <p>CAZADOR</p> <p>El crepúsculo.</p> <p>TOSCO</p> <p>¿Es traidor o es encantado ese hombre? ¿Y cómo le cogió? ¿Hay tal? ¿Aquesto en el monte había? ¿Crepúsculo tiene el día? Y diga, ¿no le hizo mal?</p> <p>(Calderón de la Barca, <i>Amor, honor y poder</i>, vv. 454-468)</p>	<p>TOSCO</p> <p>Preguntar, señor, quisiera qué delito cometí para que su jamestá con tanta regulidá se acuerde también de mí.</p> <p>(Calderón de la Barca, <i>Amor, honor y poder</i>, vv.2016-2020)</p>

Table 3. Texts with interventions by the *gracioso*

For the highest levels, it is advisable to read the complete play. At lower levels, we should select representative pieces of text and work with them. In this article, we will illustrate some of these ideas with examples extracted from the play *Amor, honor y poder* written by Calderón de la Barca in 1623. It is a simple piece, relatively easy to understand, which

⁷ *Sayagués* is the stereotypical language of Spanish rustic characters which combines popular traits with regional Leonese forms. See Stern (1961) for more information about its use in the Spanish theatre of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

reproduces the main topics of the Golden Age *comedias*. It also presents the aforementioned *personajes-tipo*.

The action of this play takes place first in the countryside, near the Salveric castle, and later in the Court of England. Enrico and Estela, the Count of Salveric's son and daughter, see a horse plunging down a mountain, carrying the infanta Flérída, the king's sister. Enrico saves Flérída and falls in love with her. She reciprocates Enrico's love.

The king, Eduardo, thanks Enrico for saving his sister and meets Estela. At that moment she becomes an obsession for the monarch and he will try to abuse her. In the end, Eduardo, moved by Estela's threat of suicide, realizes that to get Enrico's sister, he must marry her. The play concludes with the king announcing to his courtiers their forthcoming marriage and conceding Flérída her wish to marry Enrico instead of Teobaldo, her former fiancé.

First of all, the chosen passages, which appear below, are presented to the students, omitting the end and providing additional information in prose if necessary.

Primera jornada	Segunda jornada	Tercera jornada
<p>ENRICO No salgas, Estela, al monte;] vuélvete al castillo, hermana,] que por estos campos hoy ha salido el Rey a caza. (vv. 1-4)</p> <p><i>Mientras están en el monte, ven como una mujer se cae de su caballo (la Infanta, hermana del Rey). Enrico la salva y se enamoran.</i></p> <p>ENRICO (Cosa estraña que no pudiese encubrirlo).]</p>	<p>REY Tu gusto solo es (¡qué blanca mano!),] Estela, el que deseo. ESTELA Suelta la mano. REY Si en mis labios veo su nieve hermosa y bella... ESTELA ¡Suelta! (vv. 1876-1880)</p> <p>ENRICO Aqueste atrevimiento tuyo ha sido.] REY Fuiste desvergonzado y atrevido.] <i>Dale un bofetón.</i></p>	<p>CONDE Solo tu quietud procuro, pues, viéndote el Rey casada,] estarás más respetada y tu valor más seguro, (vv. 2385-2388)</p> <p>Estela va a pedirle al Rey que perdone a su hermano y amenaza con suicidarse si el monarca la deshonra.</p>

<p>Aquí está, señor, mi hermana,] que también del campo gusta.]</p> <p>REY Mucho le debe a la fama, que dicen que es muy hermosa.] (vv. 198-201)</p> <p>ESTELA Aquí está el agua... Mas ¿qué miro? ENRICO Estela es esta, que cuando cayó la Infanta] fue por agua y viene ahora.]</p> <p>REY Mejor dijeras que el alba, vestida de resplandores o de rayos coronada, otra vez al campo sale (vv.216-223)</p> <p>TEOBALDO Porque tu alteza pueda descansar, aquí queda el Rey aquesta noche. INFANTA Debo a Enrico la vida. (Enamorada estoy y agradecida).] TEOBALDO (¡Oh, quién fuera el dichoso] que la vida te diera! ¡Oh, quién Enrico fuera! ¡Mil veces venturoso quien por estraños modos</p>	<p>ENRICO Ofenderme pudiste, no afrentarme.] Y, pues en ti no puedo, que eres mi rey, vengarme,] satisfaré mi ofensa en los testigos.]. TEOBALDO Todos somos, Enrico, tus amigos.] ¡Oye, Enrico, detente! ¡Ay de mí, triste!] <i>Saca la espada y hiere a Teobaldo.</i> (vv. 1941-1948)</p> <p>CONDE ¿Quién a Teobaldo hirió, señor? ¿Qué es esto?] Pues ¿vuestra majestad tan descompuesto] con la mano en la espada y la de Enrico, ay cielos, toda en sangre bañada? REY Enrico hirió a Teobaldo; sustanciad el delito y castigaldo.]. (vv. 1982-1988)</p>	
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<p>hoy da la vida a quien la quita a todos!). (vv. 516-526)</p> <p>REY Estela. ESTELA Señor, advierte que soy... REY Estela, mi bien, quien me da la muerte y puede] darme la vida, ¿por qué a un rey desprecias que humilde] te adora? (vv. 901-906)</p>		
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Table 4. Representative passages from *Amor, honor y poder*

After a careful and individual reading of the texts, the students, in the groups that we had previously established, should try to reconstruct the story and create their own ending. These endings will be shared with the rest of the class. Learners can even vote to choose the most appropriate proposal. Then, the teacher will give them the last fragment of *Amor, honor y poder*. It will be commented in class and we will proceed to a more detailed analysis of the play and the theatre of this period.

Results and discussion

To sum up, the main idea exposed in this article is to simplify Spanish Golden Age theatre and reduce it to its most basic schemes in order to get the students attracted to this topic. Our aim is to capture their interest with more motivating activities (in which the learner has an active role) than the simple reading of the text without any pre-activity. Thus, as they progress in the study of language they can gain more in-depth knowledge of seventeenth-century theatre and stop seeing it as an unexciting subject. Moreover, this kind of tasks can help to stimulate our students' imagination and to develop their critical abilities.

This was only a selection of possible activities to experiment active learning into the classroom. The possibilities are greater. Martínez Navarro

(2016) suggests, among other interesting proposals, preparing a gymkhana in Seville with the objective of learning more about *Don Quixote* and the *Exemplary Novels*. The idea is to give priority to practice over theory and to bring foreign students closer to Spanish heritage through meaningful learning.

We should not forget that the way in which we show the didactic material affects the assimilation of contents and that is why it is important that we, teachers, make an effort to turn the style of our activities into something enticing.

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