Poetry and the teaching of English as a foreign language

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In effetti non si può dimenticare *che si parla solo quando si recita*. Il fatto che non si reciti più [...] è il segno che non c'è più la pausa cronodetica. Torna così il pregiudizio *innocente* [...] che si possa parlare sentendosi amici, eguali, senza differenze. In questo modo non esiste più il *patico*: [...] (Mele 1995: 51).

1.   Introduction

This paper deals with discourse analysis linked to poetry in order to examine, within the foreign language teaching process, not only the linguistic aspect but also the psychological and the social field, and how they relate to each other. The aim is to focus on language growth viewed both as the main means of communication and as a tool which provokes thought, thus linking language to life as Leavis says: "A language is a life" (Leavis 1971: 15). Even though at a first glance poems seem to concentrate only on specific themes developed through a particular language, very often they cover a wide range of linguistic expressions used to describe many human perceptions and experience. Language and life become interchangeable. Poetry, stories and plays, especially with young learners but also with adult students, present the foreign language as a means of giving power to experience, since they are also a good example with which to point out how verbal and non verbal data help oral communication. In fact, reciting a poem includes particular intonation, convincing stress (high/low pitches), intense facial expressions and body movements, which together, while reflecting the cultural side of the language introduced, facilitate the comprehension of the surface meaning as well as that of the deep sense included not only in poems, but in ordinary conversation, too: *der Bedeutung* (meaning) and *der Sinn* (sense) as Frege calls them (1952).

For these reasons, I think that we should view poetry as a useful help during the foreign language learning and teaching process, because it might be considered as the essence of communication. In fact, it belongs to both current language and the language of literature. This assumption has been provoked by two inputs: one more specifically linguistic, the other more attached to the psychological trend. The former is based on Leech:

> there is no firm dividing line between 'poetic' and 'ordinary' language
> [...] most of what is considered characteristic of literary language
> (irony-metaphor) has its roots in everyday uses of language [...] the
> division between 'lit.' and 'lang.' is to be fought rather than accepted
> (Leech 1969: 5-7)

and on Quirk

> the literature cannot be examined in any depth apart from the language,
> any more than the language cannot be studied apart from the literature.
> (Quirk 1968: 160)

The latter takes into account the theory of the Scuola Antropologico-
Trasformazionale, founded by the psychiatrist Sergio Piro.[1] Leech and Quirk
establish a chain between poetic and ordinary language, and Piro also affirms that
the main core of human existence is language, which accompanies and moreover,
explicates the total transformation of both the single individual and the
environment:

> [...] il continuo trasformarsi di una serie di accadimenti umani e che
> sono utilizzabili solo se consegnati all'antica vicenda della
> *denotazione* e della *connotazione linguistica*. (Piro 1997: 42)

Here, the flexible side of language is pointed out, while the limits induced by a
prescribed grammar disappear; here the focus is on the creative aspect of
language: the wide range of linguistic expressions derived from the wide and
always changing range of human attitudes and behaviour, stimulated, in turn, by
the context that affects every individual and her/his language. Language is always
in flux and its forms and expressions cannot be controlled by prescriptive
grammar.

   In essence, this research aims at emphasizing how language necessarily
embodies anthropological and psychological details in order to encode and then

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1   The School founded in Naples in 1986 by Prof. Sergio Piro, and running a five
     year course aims at experimenting new methodologies applied to the Human
     Sciences. The School has Carlo Pastore as a Director and has also researchers
     and members of the Collegium, who regularly meet on Monday every fortnight,
     in order to organize groups and provide lessons for the students. The School
     also edits a quarterly review: *Rivista delle Antropologie Trasformazionali*,
     Pironti, Napoli, edited by B. Orlandella. Anthropology has, according to Piro,
     also a psychological aspect: "*Antropologia trasformazionale*: può rappresentar-
     si disciplinarmente con questo termine tutto ciò che è volto alla descrizione e
     alla ricerca scientifica sulle trasformazioni dell'orizzonte conoscitivo ed
     emozionale delle collettività e delle singole persone" (Piro 1993: 378).

decode the chosen message through suitable linguistic, paralinguistic and kinetic features.

For these reasons this study tries to analyze the language of poetry, because poetry offers the opportunity to compare its various roles within the field of pragmatics, psychology, and semantics. In this case, the foreign language student can face the foreign tongue through its essential function: communication. Too often, students think of the foreign language as a set of words fixed into patterns, into formulas which vary very little whenever they attempt to describe new situations. The foreign language, like the mother tongue, should enable the student to communicate not only external-technical information, but emotions and reactions, too:

> Il linguaggio [...] è il risultato di un processo interattivo di sconfinata ampiezza fra segnali 'brulicanti' all'interno dei corpi (flusso semantico interiore pancronico) e segnali 'brulicanti' nel campo antropico continuo (radiazione microsemiotica traversante)

Piro observes (1997: 73).

The use of poetry as a methodological device might help the purpose of treating the foreign language on a par with the mother tongue. In fact, the most impressive thing in a poem is related to the large linguistic variety one has in describing and analyzing the same event in totally different ways, in respect of the addresser's experience, which influences: 1) syntactic; 2) semantic, and 3) prosodic choices. If the foreign language teaching process emphasizes the emotional aspect of communication, young as well as adult learners might perceive similar psychological and linguistic features when confronting the mother tongue with the foreign language.

Thus, poetry, while relating the personal with the social, the informal with the formal, psychology with sociology, discourse with grammar, also encourages students to face foreign languages as being something not so far from their mother tongue. The aim of a foreign language teaching curriculum is to introduce grammar, syntax, lexicon, pronunciation, semantics through a well defined topic. In so doing, discourse analysis could more easily capture the anthropological-cultural side as well as the psychological-linguistic details coming from the context and the people involved within the speech act. The writer's attitude also has a relevant weight, because through either semantics, or syntactical choice, or punctuation, the reader will be helped to grasp not only the superficial information about the topic chosen, but also the personal, deep sense the writer wants to transfer to the reader.

The assumption of this essay is that, nowadays, foreign language teaching recognizes quite openly that the very nature of language depends on the addresser's attitude and on pragmatics: how language is used within effective,

communicative speech acts. For this reason, it might be helpful to start this essay with the poem I have chosen for my analysis. It seems to include strong communicative input through a kind of language which, while providing good poetry, also seems appropriate to illustrate my point, because it uses a simple and clear language. Furthermore, in describing feelings and reactions, the poem includes various structures and a large variety of semantic details derived from a particular human situation — the passing of time —: physiological and psychological evolution. Thus providing, through 1) lexicon, 2) grammar and 3) pronunciation/intonation-prosody and rhythm-, a comparison between the language of poetry and the language of simple interaction.

On Aging by Maya Angelou

When you see me sitting quietly,
Like a sack on the shelf,
Don't think I need your chattering,
I'm listening to myself.
Hold! Stop! Don't pity me!
Hold! Stop your sympathy!
Understanding if you have got it,
Otherwise I'll do without it!
When my bones are stiff and aching
And my feet won't climb the stair,
I will only ask one favor:
Don't bring me no rocking chair.
When you see me walking, stumbling,
Don't study and get it wrong.
'Cause tired don't mean lazy
And every goodbye ain't gone.
I'm the same person I was back then,
A little less hair, a little less chin,
A lot less lungs and much less wind.
But I ain't lucky I can still breathe in.

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2.   Grammar

This poem has been chosen because it seems suitable to show how poetry can help foreign language grammatical explanation. In fact, it is rich in: 1) **verbs** (different tenses: 'you see'; 'don't think'; 'I'm listening'; 'Hold!'; 'if you have got it'; 'I'll do'; 'won't climb'; 'I was back'; 'I can breathe in.'); 2) **adverbs** ('When

you see me'; 'Otherwise I'll do'; 'When my bones are...'; 'I will only ask'; 'When you see me ...'; 'I can still breathe in'.); 3) **semantic choice**, where metaphor alternates with common referential words in order to help the establishment of the different phases of the human age ('sack'; 'stiff and aching'; 'walking and stumbling'; 'hair' and 'chin'; 'lungs' and 'wind.'); 4) **common confidential expressions** ('Hold!'; 'Stop!'; 'Understanding if you have got it'; ' 'Cause tired'; 'every goodbye ain't gone'; 'But ain't lucky.'), and 5) **some grammatical 'deviance'** ('<u>Don't</u> bring me <u>no</u> rocking chair'; 'Cause <u>tired don't</u> mean lazy').

Since this poem has a close context, the comprehension of the finite verbal phrase will be clearer. In fact, the context will trace more deeply not only the surrounding atmosphere but also the speaker/writer's mood, this latter being the most important element for establishing the temporal sequence of events, and consequently the tenses to be used ('When you see me ...', 'Don't think I need ...', 'I'm listening to ...', 'Hold! Stop! Don't pity me', '... if you have got it', 'I'll do', 'When my bones are stiff ...', 'I will ... ask', 'Don't bring me', 'Don't bring me.' 'I'm the same person I was back then', 'I'm lucky I can still'...).

Nowadays the teaching of English is viewed mainly from two different sides: one which includes the language into a cultural setting (Facoltà di Lingue e Letterature Straniere), another, instead, which uses it only for scientific, technical and commercial interchange (Facoltà Scientifiche — Facoltà di Economia). Of course, the aim pursued by these two categories is different, since the latter, while emphasizing a language for specific purposes, concentrates mostly on a set of pre-fixed structures, almost neglects cultural inputs. Thus, the surface meaning, the technical information prevails, and the foreign language is deprived of its vital core. As it has been emphasized during a recent Conference,[2] the growth of micro languages should not obscure the human side of communication: surface information – meaning – (*der Bedeutung*) as well as sense (*der Sinn*), should embrace the participants in any speech act. Thus, the teaching/learning of grammar becomes an essential aspect of the syllabus. But, of course, grammar should be meaningful and not prescriptive, so that including it into discourse analysis will offer the student the chance to create a purposeful language. I mean by this that the teaching of grammar should point out 'rule' use more than 'rule' usage: how to modify the language according to place, time, and audience. The teaching of English grammar occupies a very controversial position within syllabus design and it seems to shift between two poles: a very formal/conventional method (the grammar-translation method) and a very informal approach (functional-notional). The former pays more attention to grammatical details out of any context, while the latter, by concentrating on functions, focuses mostly on the environment.

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2   "Didattica della lingua inglese nelle facoltà non umanistiche": Università degli Studi di Salerno, Prof. Michele Ingenito 29-30 Aprile 1998.

A deep knowledge of grammar is as useful as the mastery of functional strategies, so that the speaker's mental processes can select at once the right expression to be used in order to establish a certain relationship between addresser and addressee. A precise contextual analysis is favored by a formal linguistic knowledge linked to anthropological data. It will help the choice of one expression in favor of another, in order to convey to the hearer/reader not only communicative goals, but above all, the mental processes which lead to achieve those goals.

Discourse analysis within poetry, even whilst emphasizing the role of the mental processes involved within communicative speech acts, does not neglect the study of syntax. This combination is very clear in our poem and it comes out of various linguistic provocations: 1) **punctuation** – short sentences –: 'Don't think I need your chattering.'; 'I'm listening to myself.', 'Hold!', 'Stop!', 'Don't pity me!', 'Hold!', 'Stop your sympathy!'; 2) **capital letters**: '... quietly, Like a sack on the shelf, Don't think ...' Line 1-2-3, '... got it, Otherwise ...' line 7-8, '...stumbling, Don't study ...' line13-14, '... lazy And ...' line15-16, '... then, A little ...' line 17-18; 3) **commands**: 'Don't think ...', 'Hold!', 'Stop!', 'Understanding if you've got it', 'Otherwise I'll do without it'; 4) **contractions**: 'Don't think ...', 'I'm listening', 'Don't pity me!', 'I'll do', won't', 'Cause', 'I'm the same', 'ain't gone', 'But I ain't lucky'; 5) **redundancy** both semantic and linguistic assured not only by repetition: 'When you see me sitting quietly' line 1, 'When you see me walking and stumbling' line 13, 'A little less hair, a little less chin, A lot less lungs and much less wind.' line18-19-20, but also by structural parallelism: 'a little less' versus 'a lot less', 'Don't study' versus 'get it wrong'; 6) **asyndetic connection** – a sentence is a sequence of another even if there is a full stop after the first sentence –: 'Don't think I need your chattering. I'm listening to myself' line3-4; 'Hold! Stop! Don't pity me' line 5; 'When my bones are stiff and aching And my feet won't climb the stair, I will only ask one favor: Don't bring me no rocking chair' line 9-10-11-12; 7) **syndetic connection** – two sentences are linked with the conjunction 'and', and also with a time relator, in this case 'when' – "<u>When</u> my bones are stiff and aching <u>And</u> my ...' line 9-10, '<u>When</u> you see me walking, stumbling, Don't ...' line13-14, ' 'Cause tired don't mean lazy And every ...' line15-16, ; 8) **adverbial connection** established by adverbial indicators: 'Otherwise I'll do it', and 9) **grammatical deviance**: 'tired don't mean lazy', 'Don't bring me no rocking chair'. "The creative writer, and more particularly the poet, enjoys a unique freedom [...]" (Leech 1969: 5).

The writer of this poem combines different levels in respect of her goals and those of the addressee, starting from: 1) the evaluation of the context; 2) the addresser/addressee's expectations; 3) their relationship, and 4) their mental processes when coding and decoding the message. For this reason the linguistic

provocation achieves a colloquial register even for so weighty a matter as the one stressed in the poem: 'aging'. The link between the language of poetry and that of everyday use might be viewed on the basis that language, in order to be really communicative, should be coloured with certain emphasis. Speech achieves meaning only when it contains phatic elements (Mele 1995: 51). Effective communication, in fact, is reached not only in planned/formal but also in unplanned/informal text/discourse, when one, while pursuing an object, goes along the intricate and complicated mechanism her/his language offers to fulfill communicative functions. Even formal, written communication cannot neglect these rules "which the literary artist also must take as basic in his expression" (Fries 1957: 40).

The dilemma of the English language is that this is a language where every pattern, every structure, every intonation seems possible, if it is justified by the speaker/listener's attitude. But how can we explain this attitude during a teaching program, which, as all the human feelings, always changes according to a variety of motivations? Of course, the level of the students is an important aspect to consider. Once we have found a kind of methodology which combines the students' expectations (achieving spontaneous communication), with the knowledge of grammatical formality, we can proceed by balancing context and grammar: informal and formal language, meaning – *der Bedeutung* – and sense – *der Sinn* – (the speaker's real intention).

After consulting certain authors who focus on the many possibilities the English language offers to express the same idea, because of the great simplicity and flexibility of its grammar, because of its rich and teeming vocabulary, because of its highly idiomatic structures, I think that English might be defined a very emotional language, not only regarding semantics "semantica emozionale" (Mele 1995; Piro 1967: 11) – very rich in vocabulary, so that the English speaker can describe with a few words not only nuances of meanings reached by the Italian speaker, for example, through subordinate clauses –, but also considering grammar (emotional structures): e.g. the position of time adverbs; adverbs versus adjectives, tense use for fact/non fact, believes – wishes – suppositions, possessive genitive; gender, *do* with positive imperatives; requests expressed by questions and statements; negative/positive structures, adverbs versus adjectives (Gethin 1990). Interjections (*oh, ah, aha, wow, yippee ouch, ugh, ooh*), exclamations, repetitions, stress on the operator, nuclear stress on other words, the use of the emphatic do (*you do look pretty, Do be quiet!*), intensifying adverbs and modifiers, the to-infinitive clause- or that clause to establish the cause of the emotion, sentence adverbials, likes and dislikes, adverbs of degree to indicate the strength of the emotion, the distinction between obligation and compulsion, the different structures linked to the future action in order to express nuances of volition, intention, planning etc., emphasize that

> ... the English language is not only a means of giving and receiving
> information ... but more than this: it is communication *between*
> *people*. It often express the emotions and attitudes of the speaker and
> he often uses it to influence the attitudes and behaviour of the hearer.
> (Leech - Svartvik 1975: 134)

Mood, emotion and attitude influence the speaker's idea of time very often, so
that verbal tenses do not necessarily coincide with the actual time: subjective
versus objective time. They follow the speaker's idea of time rather than the
sequence of events as occurring within objective time: e.g. present perfect/past
tense; future tense: present progressive/simple present, to be going to/to be to,
shall/will. Nothing seems strictly prescribed; anything, except of course for a
few points, is possible. Quirk calls these kinds of structures "irregular sentences
or non-sentences"). "Make a move and I'll shoot"/ "Don't make a move or I'll
shoot" are the two examples Quirk uses when he wants to specify the role of
content/context:

> These two sentences convey the same meaning, but the positive
> imperative carries a stronger expectation of the hearer's readiness to
> move" (Quirk *et al.* 1989: 832)

He gives us some more examples: verbless sentences ("Not bad, that salmon");
block language ("falling rocks"); sentences with optative subjunctive used to
express a wish ("Long live the Republic"); exclamatory noun phrases ("You and
your statistics!"); noun phrases with the force of command, inquiries, offers or
invitations ("The door! *might mean 'Shut the door!, 'Watch the door!, Open the*
door! or even 'Leave the room' etc.) (Quirk 1985: 850). The focus is on context,
on people's mood, memories and expectations: on the interaction established by
anthropological (psychological and sociological) fields (D'Acierno 1997). In
most cases perhaps, where the role of illocutionary, locutionary and
perlocutionary force is stressed, the learner needs to know grammar very well in
order to be able to follow the functions required by the content/context. If the
learner has not achieved an adequate contextual competence, the grasping of the
deep sense of the message becomes difficult either if the listener applies
interpretation (*massimo allontanamento*) or if s/he applies transfert (*massimo*
avvicinamento) (Piro 1993: 221).

The advanced learner, in fact, should acquire additional variety of expressions,
the purpose being to add emphasis to the sentence and to induce the grasping of
deep sense. For example, the standard subject – verb inversion occurs in
questions, but if the speaker wants to heighten the effect of her/his speech, s/he
can introduce, even in an affermative statement this optional inversion by adding
certain lead words (*well, never, seldom*, etc.).

When approaching the study of English grammar, it is essential to focus, even with beginners, on how native speakers actually do use the language in natural, practical conversation. This is the main controversial area which divides those who believe in "correctness", because they think that the language should be taught according to the rules rather than to encourage liberties of usage, and those who, instead, accept all sorts of errors whenever these errors do not interrupt communication (Fries 1957).

Because poetry concentrates on provocation, its aim to express and to illustrate sense more than meaning becomes evident. For this reason, what might be considered linguistically 'deviant' is accepted, because it encourages the deep understanding of the writer's feeling. On the contrary, a prose emphasizes meaning first and then sense. I know that at the beginning of the course, it might be confusing to illustrate the different ways used to express the same concept; it would be misleading, too. But I would say that the aim of any teaching process should be to stress that language includes psychological and sociological data as well. It will be difficult to achieve any purpose of communication if both the speaker and the listener do not try to emphasize both the surface meaning and the deep sense linked to discourse.

3. Semantics

By focusing on the mental process in order to link language and experience, we need to examine the role of metaphor as used in the language of poetry.

Poetry – the emotional language encouraging free associations both mental and linguistic –, being rich in metaphors, is usually considered a kind of language expressing emotions and feelings better than everyday language, which, instead, appears, at first sight, poor in metaphors. For this reason, poems seem a good 'field' for metaphors and grammatical deviance. If we want to follow Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors might be considered a means used to colour

> poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish – a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. Moreover, metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action. [...] We have found, on the contrary, that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. (Lakoff and Johnson 1981: 3)

Taking for granted this assumption – the language of poetry and its use of metaphors are attached to each other, because they express our common way of thinking and acting –, it is easy, now, to recognize how they belong to common

language, too. But I would like to join them again in order to claim that, during a foreign language teaching program, since poems seem to stress various linguistic details which, instead, belong to language in general even though under faded shapes, they might be introduced as a useful device focusing on the main ingredients which regulate the emergence of language: creativity. And since the growing of a foreign language within a formal setting should follow particular strategies, the language of poetry seems one of the most fruitful. Thus, while the teacher emphasizes some particular linguistic aspects, students acquire the skill to use a purposeful language in a purposeful context.

Another good reason to link metaphors to common language is that, as again Lakoff and Johnson (1981: 6) attest, "the human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined" so that "metaphor is not just a matter of language, that is, of mere words". The two authors, while focusing on this notion: "how metaphorical expressions in everyday language can give insight into the metaphorical nature of the concepts that structure our everyday activities" –, proceed with the analysis of the metaphorical concept linked to the expression:

> Time is money as it is reflected in contemporary English [...]. Within our culture the expression 'Time is money' entails that TIME IS A LIMITED RESOURCE, which entails that TIME IS A VALUABLE COMMODITY. (Lakoff and Johnson 1981: 7)

This is to prove that metaphors characterize

> a coherent system of metaphorical concepts and a corresponding coherent system of metaphorical expressions for those concepts. (Lakoff and Johnson 1981: 9)

Metaphors give students a relevant input, which encourages them to create novel meanings through novel structures combined with novel words; words which the student constructs by attaching to them new details – intimate illusions – according to her/his experience and to her/his culture.

An important theme, based on the shared knowledge of objective illusions as well as on personal, intimate illusions, is that of 'aging' as considered in our poem. While 'aging' describes objective illusions, it also offers a large variety of interpretations, again personal but also open to social and cultural identifications: e. g. 'Like a sack on the shelf' (line 2) illustrating subjective-cultural illusions. In fact, poems, while reflecting a social view of the world, also transfer the addresser's personal attitude, mixing in this way the two anthropological sides, which are the fundamental points constructing an adequate communicative speech act.

In a sense, even common words and simple structures, because of the deep meaning contained within the whole message, seem to acquire metaphorical weight – the ability to move from one field into another – (Orlandella 1996: 119). In the poem examined, the metaphor of the whole content/context is: I can cope with aging. As a consequence: '... stiff and aching bones; 'And my feet won't climb the stairs'; '... no rocking chair'; 'And every good-bye ain't gone', and 'A little less hair, a little less chin, A lot less lungs and much less wind' should be considered metaphors.

4. Culture

In brief, poetry in foreign language teaching and learning, since it emphasizes interpretation, enables the student to think about linguistic as well as cultural and personal features. Analyzing a poem also gives the student the chance to go deeply into the writer's world, so that through the segmentation of the language it will be easier to face the analysis of a specific age, a specific problem connected to that period, a specific reaction, etc. I am saying that to segment a language does not necessitate avoiding context and driving the text/discourse away from cultural influences, but rather it gives a logical-cultural reason to the linguistic structures used.

Poetry helps to construct the environment around the speaker/writer, and interpretation, in a foreign language setting, involves directing students to understand how to transfer all the addressee's interest into the addresser's world. By so doing students will be able to acquire many interesting cultural and personal data concerning the context involved within text/discourse. While approaching somebody's else cultural and personal situation, expressed in a foreign language, the learner will focus on her/his own situation, too, and, through contrastive analysis, s/he will emphasize not only contrasts, but also those similarities which inevitably exist between the mother and the foreign language/culture.

Language, in this case, will result as a whole 'corpus', where it is difficult to distinguish among the many sections in which usually it is divided: grammatical explanations are related to the interpersonal-textual aspects of language, which in turn are related to pragmatics, so that it seems very difficult to me, in accordance with Piro, Halliday and Leech to trace individual furrows within the language field (Halliday 1973, 1980; Leech 1974; Piro 1993). Language, in fact, even acting with different purposes either within the three World division as seen by Popper (1972), or within the four World division as seen by Leech, achieves communication, they say, only if it comes across personal, social, formal and informal means belonging to verbal, non verbal and prosodic data. The problem related to communication is always connected to comprehension, and

comprehension is in turn related to and based on knowledge – the shared encyclopedic knowledge as attested by Shütze (1962). These common entities permit the people involved within speech acts to interact, because their common knowledge reveals not only the sense of what is explicit, but also the sense of what is implicit. Poetry seems to concentrate on these details because of the language (metaphors) and because of perceptions (macro perceptions): 'aging' is our case.

Starting from Heraclitus's assumption[3] as introduced by Sergio Piro's analysis, where Piro emphasizes the intimate relationship between the single subject and the whole community, we face the problem of communication viewed through either historic-hermeneutic comprehension or phenomenological comprehension.

Since we cannot separate personal anthropological events from social anthropological happenings, and language seems to be the main means encouraging this connection, language needs to choose, construct, create, organize new forms suitable for describing either an intimate or an open situation, according to the text/discourse in which these linguistic points interact: an irrepressible creation of metaphors Piro says (*"una metaforicità insopprimibile"* (Piro 1997: 41).

The knowledge of culture – being aware of the link existing between cultural and linguistic means, the acquiring ability of thinking, of expressing ideas typical of the people who speak the foreign language and then mix them with their own –, is as essential as the learning of grammatical rules, of lexicon, of phonetic and phonological inputs, and of all the formal scheme in general.

Learning a foreign language means interacting with people in order to understand how they think, how they behave, how they react to stimuli, how they face life, how they work, how they suffer, how they lie, enjoy, love, eat, feed their children, construct their houses, walk, look at animals, watch television, read, write, etc.: how they improve, transform themselves and their environment: the cultural side carried by poetry.

> Language consists of grammar and pragmatics. (...) Grammar is
> functionally adapted to the extent that it possesses properties which
> facilitate the operation of pragmatic principles. (Leech 1983: 76)

> Il piano linguistico del significato implica costantemente il rinvio al
> sociale della convenzione costitutiva e, dall'altro lato, il rinvio
> all'interiorità del flusso semantico personale. (Piro 1993: 43)

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3   "Contatti sono le totalità e le non totalità, il convergente e il divergente, il
     consonante e il dissonante: e fuori da tutte le cose sorge una sola e fuori da una
     cosa sola sorgono tutte" (Heraclitus in Piro 1993: 41).

Linguistic strategies and provocations, while providing coherence and cohesion of discourse, also point out the relationship between the addresser and the addressee's cultural flux and thought process. Personal and social plane balance within the speech act, so that a compromise arises between the speaker and the hearer. The former, when applying a series of strategies which lead to the organization of the discourse in a certain way, the latter, when accepting linguistic provocation (dative-movement; left-dislocation; high deixis-low deixis; named referent-unnamed referent; the choice of pronouns; low pitch-high pitch; stress; intonation; gestures; body movement, etc.).

To touch the extreme side of linguistic analysis I would maintain that even very formal messages cannot avoid going through personal interaction, because some unplanned details interact within planned discourse. Maybe, only technical information, when based on no more than two or three words, eludes private interference.

In order to focus better on the link between personal and social, I introduce again the example of "special languages" and that of poems which, while they seem opposite, actually merge. The former, even using 'a set of pre-fixed and limited structures' cannot avoid neglecting the personal field, since language, inevitably, reflects culture, and culture is linked to the ways of living and thinking of a people: its tradition, its emotion, its past. The latter, by their own peculiar nature, shows this connection very clearly: language becomes a creative object, always renewing and always reshaping, according to the context (Cecioni 1995: 51-55).

Communication is regulated by the principle of textuality, by illocutionary, locutionary and perlocutionary force, as well as by performative criterion; they all balance between a subjective and an intersubjective social world, between grammatical formal explanations (language viewed as a thing in itself) and pragmatical functional perspective (language viewed in relation to society). Moreover, language is affected by both the principles evidenced by formalists (Chomsky), who viewed language mostly from the personal point of view as an autonomous system, or by functionalists (Halliday), who, instead, used the language as strictly linked to society; in other words, the psychological and social traits combine within communication.

To sum up, I would say that the foreign language cannot be deprived of the personal level, which inevitably flows into the social plane. By so doing, informality and formality, text/discourse and grammar are related: communication is assured.

5.   Prosody

In this section I would like to outline the link between prosody and gestures: paralinguistics and kinetics.

   The language of poetry is essentially an oral language, since the 'extension' or 'restriction' of the meaning usually attached to common words acquires meaning from both the voice and the gestures of the speaker. A poem achieves its highest expression through declamation, and declamation, of course, is linked either to kinetics or to paralinguistics. Thus, poetry is conditioned by both these features, since poetry depicts emotions; these, while following general feelings, also mirror cultural details.

   Language includes a variety of non-verbal details, which the native speaker unconsciously adopts when speaking or hearing a message. In a foreign language setting, the teaching of paralinguistics and kinetics features is one of the most difficult traits to explain, lacking the opportunity to use language for spontaneous conversation.

   As a consequence, the foreign language teaching schedule should stress them in order to attract the learner's attention. Poetry, by emphasizing the oral language through written expedients, might have this role. By doing so, it provides clear evidence of grammatical points, of prosodic details and of gestures as well: poetry links pronunciation and signs.

   Roach and Kingdon starting from the shared premise of "the notoriously confusing nature of English spelling" (Roach 1983: 3) and "a language so abominably spelt as English" (Kingdon 1994: 2), then part and go along different roads in order to prompt a theory for achieving communication in oral discourse. The former, by concentrating on an accurate study "in terms of phonemes", claims the primacy of sounds on tones/tunes for didactic purposes; the latter, instead, by focusing on an adequate intonation as a means of helping to overcome difficult pronunciation, asserts the opposite view: "Kinetic (or Moving) Tones [...] give colour to the utterance on which they are used" and moreover they "give added meaning to the words" (Kingdon 1994: 4). A slight change in pitch, or the lengthening or shortening of tones, or the increasing or decreasing of the volume of the voice, or the changing of its quality as well as different nuances linked to a sound might help or compromise the achievement of all the shades of feeling and attitude conveyed by a poem. Poetry thus seems to unite these two theories, since it focuses on phonemes but also on intonation with the same strength.

   Listening to poems helps students to participate actively in discourse, because this skill unifies the different components of a speech act. Poetry seems to facilitate this process, since a poem, while stressing redundancy and rhythm, emphasizes correct pronunciation as well as stress and intonation. Intonation is

achieved also by stressing the most important words related to the message, and those words are, of course, the key words responsible for carrying the main meaning related to feelings and sensations.

Compared to the past, when communication was achieved mostly through the written message, nowadays oral communication has again affirmed its natural role, as de Saussure pointed out when he said that "écriture" is *"l'artificiel"* while *"mots"* represent *"le naturel"* (De Saussure: 1966). Poetry, by joining semantics to mimicking, *"phoné"* to intonation, establishes verbal and non-verbal communication. Thus, language will result natural as well as creative, and not artificial and fixed: *"l'écriture tend à rester immobile"* (De Saussure: 1966: 48). Because the language of poetry is a kind of language "written" to be spread orally, it has to have a direct linguistic relationship to ordinary speech, so that it would be easier for the poet to follow the changing society. T. S. Eliot focuses on this notion, which reflects what Oldham, Waller, Denham and Dryden had already said. In *The music of Poetry* (Eliot: 1942), Eliot says that "... the task is to catch up with the changes in colloquial speech, which are fundamentally changes in thought and sensibility". Even though Eliot recognizes the poverty of ordinary speech and the gap existing between speech and poetry, he promotes this link in order to achieve better communication: "... the poet must, like a sculptor, be faithful to the material in which he works" (*id.*).

If we come back to our poem and consider the prosody contained in it, we realize that, though rhyme does not seem to follow any prescription (it is neither alternate nor couplet), it points up the writer's instinct: e.g. 'shelf' (line 2) attached to 'myself' (line 4); 'me' (line 5) attached to 'sympathy' (line 6); 'got it' (7) attached to 'without it' (8); 'stair' (10) with 'favor' (12); 'wrong' (15) with 'gone' (17); 'chin' (19) with 'wind' (20) and with 'in' (21) as well. In brief, the foreign language teaching schedule, especially of a language such as English, where pronunciation and listening appear to be the most difficult skills, should stress them in order to attract the learner's attention: poetry might have this role, and by doing so, it provides clear evidence of both grammatical points and prosodic details.

Conclusion

Reading, listening to and composing poems, used as tools during formal language learning, while introducing literature and connecting different worlds, also focus on the learner, who becomes the main subject within a speech act.

In essence poetry helps to construct a text/discourse, because a poem, in order to be effective, follows cohesion, as previously seen in our poem, through: 1) syndetic and asyndetic connection; 2) structural parallelism – more strongly achieved when the order is not the normal one –; 3) connection assured either by

sequence or by a psychological close relation between the parts; 4) rhematic connection, and 5) punctuation and prosody.

Through the analysis of poems, songs and rhymes, while establishing a link between syntax and discourse analysis, the learner will be able to perceive the deep sense of the message, the feeling it carries as expressed not only by the speaker, but by all of the conscious and unconscious inputs sent and received. Language, even the foreign tongue, cannot leave aside: a) personal reactions; b) socio-contextual stimuli; c) pragmatic-conversational implicatures; d) past-present data and future expectations.

Discourse analysis tries to make evident these problems and, only when the teaching and learning atmosphere is affected by verbal and non verbal data, the foreign tongue asserts its authority as language, and not as a mere tool for achieving sterile communication.

The student should learn to create novel sentences, sentences which reflect her/his own feelings. If instead, the student uses sentences which reflect a standard language, a language which follows a standard combination of words adaptable to a large variety of situations, to a multitude of contexts, and to a multitude of people, the foreign language will prove feeble and unreal. We 'must' consider differences, those within ourselves and those belonging to others. That is the reason why phatic features should attain to everyday language, too.

Finally I consider that poetry – while balancing verbal, analytic, symbolic, logic functions with non-verbal, synthetic, concrete, intuitive functions – also balances the cerebral activity of the brain. In fact, poetry, by giving access to a bi-modal approach, stimulates both simulation and interaction, thus providing language with a natural setting (Albert and Obler 1978; Cossu 1987: 26-40; D'Acierno 1987: 318).

I would like to end this discussion by quoting what Jespersen wrote in 1924, because it seems to focus on what remains still today, a crucial debate:

> Let me only express the hope that elementary teaching of grammar in future may be a more living thing than it has been up to now, with less half-understood or unintelligible precept, fewer "don't's" fewer definitions, and infinitely more observation of actual living facts. This is the only way in which grammar can be made a useful and interesting part of the school curriculum. (Jespersen 1924: 346)

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