One objection to using literary texts in language education often voiced is that literary language is difficult, specialised, out of date or just in some way ‘different’. The view is not totally misguided but the distinctness of literary language has been exaggerated sometimes, and in any case the language of a text is only one element in successful or productive reading. Discussion of this issue in this chapter will lead us back to the ‘discourse’ of literature in both the sense that literary text comes to mean in an environment of other texts, and in the sense that any literary text has a reader, and contexts or reading.

**Question addressed in this chapter:**

- Does literature have a language of its own, perhaps rather unrepresentative of, or rather different from ordinary language (e.g. old-fashioned, obscure, pretentious, generally ‘difficult’)?

Does literature have a language of its own, perhaps rather unrepresentative of, or rather different from ordinary language (e.g. old-fashioned, obscure, pretentious or generally ‘difficult’)? The simple answer to this old question is, ‘No, there is nothing uniquely different about the language of literature.’ But a fuller answer will reveal why the language to be found in literary texts is often particularly interesting for language learners. Of the three broad areas surveyed in Section 1, Culture and curriculum (Chapter 3), Reading of literature (Chapter 2) and the language of literature, in this chapter, research to date has told us most about the language of literature. This is a well researched area, and some
issues and conclusions are already relatively well defined, though ongo-
ing research, particularly in corpus linguistics (discussed below), is also
opening up fascinating new dimensions of the topic.

- there is no clear and obvious literary/non-literary divide to be
defined on strictly linguistic principles
- literary language cuts across dichotomies like spoken/written (oral/
literate) and formal/informal
- creativity may be a larger category than the literary, and with more
explanatory power across both literary and more everyday discourses
- it is now recognised that discourse types such as metaphor or narrative
are central to all language use, whether literary, professional or more
everyday spoken interactions
- literature, especially modern literature, is kind of writing unusually,
perhaps distinctively, tolerant of linguistic variety, including incorpor-
oration of many features of spoken language.

Overview of Chapter 1
This chapter reports six influential areas of research into literary
language:

- ‘literariness’ in Russian, Czech and other ‘Formalist’ writings.
- oracy and literacy, and variety, including corpus linguistic findings
- linguistic creativity: metaphor, idiom and formulaicity.
- style and variation, and register
- the study of narrative
- dialogics: literature as discourse (language in use).

Paradoxically, the linguistic study of literary language has indirectly
provoked a better understanding of language and language use as a
whole, just as diverse areas of descriptive linguistics, cognitive linguis-
tics and discourse analysis have unexpectedly shown us the pervasively
poetic and creative nature of everyday language use, and in doing so
confirmed what once sounded like wild speculation in Derrida and
other literary theorists. Far from a peripheral concern, in sum, language
used in literature is in many ways central to understanding language
and language use in more general terms. Literature is made of, from,