

LANGUAGE STUDY THROUGH LITERATURE- ADDING CULTURAL GRAMMAR TO THE LEARNERS

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Abstract: This paper aims at emphasizing the use of literature as a popular technique for teaching both basic language skills (i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking) and language areas (i.e. vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) in our times. Reasons for using literary texts in foreign language classroom and main criteria for selecting suitable literary texts in foreign language classes are stressed so as to make the reader familiar with the underlying reasons and criteria for language teachers' using and selecting literary texts and some problems encountered by language teachers within the area of teaching English through literature (i.e. lack of preparation in the area of literature teaching in TESL / TEFL programs, absence of clear-cut objectives defining the role of literature in ESL / EFL, language teachers' not having the background and training in literature, lack of pedagogically-designed appropriate materials that can be used by language teachers in a classroom context) are taken into account.

Keywords: Literature, Teaching Literature, The Teaching of Language Skills, Foreign Language Teaching, Literary Competence.

Introduction: In recent years, the role of literature as a basic component and source of authentic texts of the language curriculum rather than an ultimate aim of English instruction has been gaining momentum. Among language educators, there has been a hot debate as to how, when, where, and why literature should be incorporated in ESL / EFL curriculum. Vigorous discussion of how literature and ESL / EFL instruction can work together and interact for the benefit of students and teachers has led to the flourishing of interesting ideas, learning, and improved instruction for all. Many teachers consider the use of literature in language teaching as an interesting and worthy concern (Sage, 1). In this paper it is discussed why a language teacher should use literary texts in the language classroom, what sort of literature language teachers should use with language learners, literature and the teaching of language skills, and benefits of different genres of literature to language teaching will be taken into account. Thus, the place of literature as a tool rather than an end in teaching English as a second or foreign language will be unearthed.

The use of literature as a technique for teaching both basic language skills (i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking) and language areas (i.e. vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) is very popular within the field of foreign language learning and teaching nowadays. Moreover, in translation courses, many language teachers make their students translate literary texts like drama, poetry and short stories into the mother tongue. Since translation gives students the chance to practice the lexical, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and stylistic knowledge they have acquired in other courses, translation both as an application area covering four basic skills and as the fifth skill is emphasized in language teaching.

Reasons for Using Literary Texts in Foreign Language Classes: According to Collie and Slater there are four main reasons which lead a language teacher to use literature in the classroom. These are valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement. In addition to these four main reasons, universality, non-triviality, personal relevance, variety, interest, economy and suggestive power and ambiguity are some other factors requiring the use of literature as a powerful resource in the classroom context.

Valuable Authentic Material: Literature is authentic material. Most works of literature are not created for the primary purpose of teaching a language. Many authentic samples of language in real-life contexts (i.e. travel timetables, city plans, forms, pamphlets, cartoons, advertisements, newspaper or magazine articles) are included within recently developed course materials. Thus, in a classroom context, learners are exposed to actual language samples of real life / real life like settings. Literature can act as a beneficial complement to such materials, particularly when the first "survival" level has been passed. In reading literary texts, because students have also to cope with language intended for native speakers, they become familiar with many different linguistic forms, communicative functions and meanings.

Cultural Enrichment: For many language learners, the ideal way to increase their understanding of verbal / nonverbal aspects of communication in the country within which that language is spoken - a visit or an extended stay - is just not probable. For such learners, literary works, such as novels, plays, short stories, etc.

facilitate understanding how communication takes place in that country. Though the world of a novel, play, or short story is an imaginary one, it presents a full and colorful setting in which characters from many social / regional backgrounds can be described. A reader can discover the way the characters in such literary works see the world outside (i.e. their thoughts, feelings, customs, traditions, possessions; what they buy, believe in, fear, enjoy; how they speak and behave in different settings. This colorful created world can quickly help the foreign learner to feel for the codes and preoccupations that shape a real society through visual literacy of semiotics. Literature is perhaps best regarded as a complement to other materials used to develop the foreign learner's understanding into the country whose language is being learned. Also, literature adds a lot to the cultural grammar of the learners.

Language Enrichment: Literature provides learners with a wide range of individual lexical or syntactic items. Students become familiar with many features of the written language, reading a substantial and contextualized body of text. They learn about the syntax and discourse functions of sentences, the variety of possible structures, the different ways of connecting ideas, which develop and enrich their own writing skills. Students also become more productive and adventurous when they begin to perceive the richness and diversity of the language they are trying to learn and begin to make use of some of that potential themselves. Thus, they improve their communicative and cultural competence in the authentic richness, naturalness of the authentic texts.

Personal Involvement: Literature can be useful in the language learning process owing to the personal involvement it fosters in the reader. Once the student reads a literary text, he begins to inhabit the text. He is drawn into the text. Understanding the meanings of lexical items or phrases becomes less significant than pursuing the development of the story. The student becomes enthusiastic to find out what happens as events unfold via the climax; he feels close to certain characters and shares their emotional responses. This can have beneficial effects upon the whole language learning process. At this juncture, the prominence of the selection of a literary text in relation to the needs, expectations, and interests, language level of the students is evident. In this

process, he can remove the identity crisis and develop into an extrovert.

Literature and The Teaching of Language Skills: Literature plays an important role in teaching four basic language skills like reading, writing, listening and speaking. However, when using literature in the language classroom, skills should never be taught in isolation but in an integrated way. Teachers should try to teach basic language skills as an integral part of oral and written language use, as part of the means for creating both referential and interactional meaning, not merely as an aspect of the oral and written production of words, phrases and sentences.

Literature and Reading: ESL / EFL teachers should adopt a dynamic, student-centered approach toward comprehension of a literary work. In reading lesson, discussion begins at the literal level with direct questions of fact regarding setting, characters, and plot which can be answered by specific reference to the text. When students master literal understanding, they move to the inferential level, where they must make speculations and interpretations concerning the characters, setting, and theme, and where they produce the author's point of view. After comprehending a literary selection at the literal and inferential levels, students are ready to do collaborative work. That is to state that they share their evaluations of the work and their personal reactions to it - to its characters, its theme(s), and the author's point of view. This is also the suitable time for them to share their reactions to the work's natural cultural issues and themes. The third level, the personal / evaluative level stimulates students to think imaginatively about the work and provokes their problem-solving abilities. Discussion deriving from such questions can be the foundation for oral and written activities (Stern, 332).

Literature and Writing: Literature can be a powerful and motivating source for writing in ESL / EFL, both as a model and as subject matter. Literature as a model occurs when student writing becomes closely similar to the original work or clearly imitates its content, theme, organization, and / or style. However, when student writing exhibits original thinking like interpretation or analysis, or when it emerges from, or is creatively stimulated by, the reading, literature serves as subject matter. Literature houses in immense variety of themes to write on in terms of guided, free, controlled and other types of writing.

Literature as a Model for Writing:

There are three main kinds of writing that can be based on literature as a model:

Controlled Writing: Controlled model-based exercises which are used mostly in beginning-level writing typically require rewriting passages in

arbitrary ways to practice specific grammatical structures. For instance, students can be reporters doing a live newscast, or they can rewrite a third person passage into first person from a character's point of view.

Guided Writing: This activity corresponds to intermediate-level ESL / EFL. Students respond to a series of questions or complete sentences which, when put together, retell or sum up the model. In some cases, students complete the exercise after they receive the first few sentences or the topic sentence of a summary, paraphrase, or description. Guided writing exercises, especially at the literal level, enable students to comprehend the work. Model approach and scenario approach are very beneficial in this respect.

Reproducing the Model: This activity comprises techniques like paraphrase, summary, and adaptation. These techniques are very beneficial ESL / EFL writing exercises. In paraphrasing, students are required to use their own words to rephrase the things that they see in print or hear aloud. Since paraphrase coincides with the students' trying to

make sense of the poem, it is a strikingly useful tool with poetry. Summary work goes well with realistic short stories and plays, where events normally follow a chronological order and have concrete elements like plot, setting, and character to guide student writing. Adaptation requires rewriting prose fiction into dialog or, reversely, rewriting a play or a scene into narrative. This activity enables students to be aware of the variations between written and spoken English (Stern, 333).

Finding appropriate material for their writing classes is sometimes difficult for composition teachers since writing has no subject matter of its own. One benefit of having literature as the reading content of a composition course is that the readings become the subject matter for compositions. In a composition course whose reading content is literature, students make inferences, formulate their own ideas, and look closely at a text for evidence to support generalizations. Thus, they learn how to think creatively, freely and critically. Such training helps them in other courses which require logical reasoning, independent thinking, and careful analysis of the text (Spack, 777).

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