

TEACHING LANGUAGE THROUGH LITERATURE

Anita Anamika Talesara

Research Scholar, Jayoti Vidyapeeth Women's University, Jaipur

Prof. (Dr.) Mini Amit Arrawatia

Director, Research & Development, Jayoti Vidyapeeth Women's University, Jaipur
janamika17@gmail.com

“Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degrees”.

Abstract: This paper aims at emphasizing the use of literature as a popular technique for teaching because language is the fundamental unit of literature whereas literature is produced by writers of the language. A language comprises of sounds, words and sentences. The manner in which the words combine and express is truly the emotional, imaginative and sensitive world of literary expression. Literature is a form of Human Expression whereas Language is a system that consists of the development acquisition, maintenance and use of complex system of communication. Reasons for using literary texts in language classroom and main criteria for selecting suitable literary texts in 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. Moreover, literature and the teaching of language skills, benefits of different genres of literature (i.e. poetry, short fiction, drama and novel) to language teaching and some problems encountered by language teachers within the area of teaching English through literature. 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. Literature is a published chunk of some part of language with specific purpose and aim whereas language is universal expression. The primary mission of preparing students for a study and vocations, we must emphasize literary art and English language which ultimately improve their speaking and writing skills.

Key Words: Literature, Teaching Literature, the Teaching of Language Skills, Foreign Language Teaching, Literary Competence.

Introduction: This paper asserts the value of literature in teaching language from several aspects, primarily, literature as an agent for language development and improvement. “Language is the blood of the soul in to which thoughts run and out of which they grow.” Whereas Literature is a verbal art that leads readers to appreciate the beauty of language. Literary texts offer a rich source of linguistic input and can help learners to practice the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing – in addition to exemplifying grammatical structures and presenting new vocabulary. Literary texts provide opportunities for multi-social classroom experiences and can appeal to learners with different learning styles. Literature is beginning to be viewed as an appropriate vehicle for language learning and development since the focus is now on authentic language and authentic situations with more practical approach in social and cultural understanding. Literature is the art of discovering something extraordinary about ordinary people and saying with ordinary words something extraordinary. Indeed, Literature always anticipates life. It does not copy it, but mould it to its purpose. So to study language with literature receives concrete

outlook and transparent experience. Literature is written through the medium of a language. It is a vehicle to express one's thoughts, feelings & imagination. Without language, how can literature be possible? Even oral form of literature uses oral language. Literature also aims at preserving itself for future and this preservation is done through written form of language. How did Vedas reach to us? In both formats, language is indispensable.

Language and literature –A close association- Language is associated with culture. That is, language is the carrier of cultural messages. As such, literature is very significant when employed in teaching a language. Literature is culture. Narrations are often built upon the perspective of one main character who is experiencing the pains of growing up. This makes reading literary texts a drastically different experience from that of reading explanatory articles, the most commonly seen type of literature in ESL reading. Undoubtedly, "the English curriculum is a place for enjoying and reflecting on . . . cultural resources, debating their values, and imagining and designing . . . futures". A good story book not only informs ESL students the situation and development of an event; it also connects readers to the event to gain an insight, rather than an overview, of English culture and society. English teachers should acquaint themselves with language use to develop their own competence and understand language as a social phenomenon, and not just as an exclusive branch of learning. It is literature that creates this acquaintance in English teachers. As the teachers find out this point, they transform the classrooms as the stage in which there is real practice of communicative language. In other words, teachers should consider language as entailing social acceptability; that is, they should look to English classroom as carrying resemblance with the outside language. Besides, non- native students need to be exposed to various literary texts in order to be able to consider the others' culture in their international communication.

Literature in teaching language: The use of literature in the ELT classroom is enjoying a revival for a number of reasons. Having formed part of traditional language teaching approaches, literature became less popular when language teaching and learning started to focus on the functional use of language. However, the role of literature in the ELT classroom has been re-assessed and many now view literary texts as providing rich linguistic input, effective stimuli for students to express themselves in other languages and a potential source of learner motivation

What do we mean by literature? Literature is a term used to describe written and something spoken material. Derived from Latin word LITERATURE meaning "writing formed with letters, "Literature most commonly refers to works of the creative imagination , including poetry , drama, fiction, nonfiction etc. "In literature the ambition of the novice is to acquire the literary language....."

Literary texts can be studied in their original forms or in simplified or abridged versions. An increasing number of stories in English are written specifically for learners of other languages. The types of literary texts that can be studied inside and outside the ELT classroom include:

- 1 Short stories
- 2 Poems
- 3 Novels

4 Plays

5 Song Lyrics

Why use literature in the ELT classroom? Literary texts provide opportunities for multi-sensorial classroom experiences and can appeal to learners with different learning styles. Texts can be supplemented by audio-texts, music CDs, film clips, podcasts, all of which enhance even further the richness of the sensory input that students receive.

Literary texts offer a rich source of linguistic input and can help learners to practise the four skills - speaking, listening, reading and writing - in addition to exemplifying grammatical structures and presenting new vocabulary.

Literature can help learners to develop their understanding of other cultures, awareness of 'difference' and to develop tolerance and understanding. At the same time literary texts can deal with universal themes such as love, war and loss that are not always covered in the sanitised world of course books.

Literary texts are representational rather than referential. Referential language communicates at only one level and tends to be informational. The representational language of literary texts involves the learners and engages their emotions, as well as their cognitive faculties. Literary works help learners to use their imagination, enhance their empathy for others and lead them to develop their own creativity. They also give students the chance to learn about literary devices that occur in other genres e.g. advertising.

Literature lessons can lead to public displays of student output through posters of student creations e.g. poems, stories or through performances of plays. So for a variety of linguistic, cultural and personal growth reasons, literary texts can be more motivating than the referential ones often used in classrooms.

How can literary texts be used?

There are a lot of reasons why to use literary texts when teaching and learning a foreign language, and one of them is that "...literature, which speaks to the heart as much as to the mind, provides material with some emotional colour that can make fuller contact with the learner's own life, and can thus counterbalance the more fragmented effect of many collections of texts used in the classroom"(Collie, Slater, 1996, p.2). As a result of this, students working with literature are able to think about different possibilities in solving problems that occur in the text of particular literature. Situations described in literature are often closely related to their own experiences. This helps them to be inventive and come up with various ideas that could be used even in their real life. Teachers can exploit literary texts in a large number of ways in the classroom. Classroom work with literary works may involve pre-reading tasks, interactive work on the text and follow up activities.

Teachers can introduce the topic or theme of the text, pre-teach essential vocabulary items and use prediction tasks to arouse the interest and curiosity of students.

- Minimise the extent to which the teacher disturbs students' reading.
- Draw attention to stylistic peculiarity.
- Help students to appreciate the ways that writers use language to achieve particular effects.
- Provide frameworks for creative response.
- Invite learners to step into the shoes of the writer or invite them to modify, extend or add to a text.
- **Reasons for regarding literature as a potent resource in the language classroom as follows:**
 1. Universality
 2. Non-triviality
 3. Personal Relevance
 4. Variety
 5. Interest
 6. Economy and Suggestive Power
 7. Ambiguity

1. Universality - Because we are all human beings, the themes literature deals with are common to all cultures despite their different way of treatment - Death, Love, Separation, Belief, Nature ... the list is familiar. These experiences all happen to human beings.

2. Non-triviality- Many of the more familiar forms of language teaching inputs tend to trivialize texts or experience. Literature does not trivialize or talk down. It is about things which mattered to the author when he wrote them. It may offer genuine as well as merely “authentic” inputs.

3. Personal Relevance - Since it deals with ideas, things, sensations and events which either constitute part of the reader’s experience or which they can enter into imaginatively, they are able to relate it to their own lives.

4. Variety - Literature includes within it all possible varieties of subject matter. It is, in fact, a battery of topics to use in ELT. Within literature, we can find the language of law and of mountaineering, of medicine and of bull-fighting, of church sermons and nursery talk.

5. Interest - Literature deals with themes and topics which are intrinsically interesting, because part of the human experience, and treats them in ways designed to engage the readers’ attention.

6. Economy and suggestive power -One of the great strengths of literature is its suggestive power. Even in its simplest forms, it invites us to go beyond what is said to what is implied. Since it suggests many ideas with few words, literature is ideal for generating language discussion. Maximum output can often be derived from minimum input.

7. Ambiguity- As it is highly suggestive and associative, literature speaks subtly different meanings to different people. It is rare for two readers to react identically to any given text. In teaching, this has two advantages. The first advantage is that each learner’s interpretation has validity within limits. The second advantage is that an almost infinite fund of interactive discussion is guaranteed since each person’s perception is different. That no two readers will have a completely convergent Apart from the above mentioned reasons for using literature in the foreign language class, one of

the main functions of literature is its sociolinguistic richness. The use of language changes from one social group to another. Likewise, it changes from one geographical location to another. A person speaks differently in different social contexts like school, hospital, police station and theatre (i.e. formal, informal, casual, frozen, intimate styles speech). The language used changes from one profession to another (i.e. doctors, engineers, and economists use different terminology). To put it differently, since literature provides students with a wide range of language varieties like socialists, regional dialects, jargon, idiolects, etc., it develops their sociolinguistic competence in the target language. Hence, incorporating literature into a foreign language teaching program as a powerful source for reflecting the sociolinguistic aspects of the target language gains importance.

What are some of the challenges to be faced when using literature in the classroom?

Literary texts can present teachers and learners with a number of difficulties including:

- Text selection - texts need to be chosen that have relevance and interest to learners.
- Linguistic difficulty - texts need to be appropriate to the level of the students' comprehension.
- Length - shorter texts may be easier to use within the class time available, but longer texts provide more contextual details, and development of character and plot.
- Cultural difficulty - texts should not be so culturally dense that outsiders feel excluded from understanding essential meaning.
- Cultural appropriacy - learners should not be offended by textual content.

The benefits of teaching language through literature:

Literature is hoped to be able to provide rich and diverse exposure to language, improve vocabulary, syntax and structure, develop perception and interpretation skills, develop comprehension and motivation. The study of literary texts is meant to inculcate values and broaden learner's outlook. It also enhances students' overall linguistic competences including their knowledge of morphology, semantics and phonetics. Developing respect for self and others and encouraging one to become aware of one's audience are learning gains to be derived from the study of literature. Literature expands language awareness. Literature is motivating, holds high status in many cultures. It is important to stress that when teachers use artistic literature as a supplementary material in the teaching process they can be sure that their students can hear, read and work with the real language. Articles from textbooks are usually simplified or changed and this may have a negative effect on the learning process as well. Working with textbooks only can make children unable to cope with real texts and less able to understand and grasp new ideas. They need to be exposed to the real language that is used in real life and is not just made up for learning.

Conclusion: Teaching English through literature is an effective method especially if it is done through effective tools. The teacher is the catalyst in this process. And student is the corner stone in the process of teaching through literature. The literary text should be up to the needs of the students. Motivation encourages talented students. Literature texts are varied and they should meet the talent of students. Some methods to teach English through literature such as role playing, singing songs, libraries and the audio-video aids etc. are very effective because they break out the monotony of the class environment. It is right to say that literature is authentic material and it is even good to expose learners the source of unmodified language in the class room. The study of

language and literature stressing the benefits of using literary text to explore the best use of language and linguistic functions with integrated approach.

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