

## **The Use of Literature in Teaching English Grammatical Structures as well as Some Linguistic Components**

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**Abstract:** Literature is one of the most important resources supporting the grammatical structure of English as a Foreign Language/as a Second Language (EFL/ESL) learners as well as the linguistic components of English language, and thus literature help students improve their English and at the same time reach communicative competence. Therefore, the aim of this study is to show how literature can be used effectively for students to improve their English and how it can support the grammatical structure of EFL/ESL learners as well as linguistic components of English language. Throughout the study, previous research and its relationship with present study has been given in detail.

**Key Words:** Literature, grammatical Structure, linguistic, morphology, phonology, tenses, syntax

### **INTRODUCTION**

There has been a debate on different approaches for FL teaching throughout the history of language teaching. These different approaches have not been the same as a result of change in theories and methods used in FL teaching especially for the objectives of language teaching (Celce & Murcia, 2001). Furthermore, language teachers have been forced to develop and use new and different methods in the process of language teaching to be effective in language teaching.

Literature is, undoubtedly, one of the main resources used as an effective means of language teaching. Particularly, literature was regarded as the most important part of foreign or second language teaching during the period of Grammar Translation Method. The purpose of this method was to enable language learners to read the classical texts successfully through the method of translation (Hall, 2005). This method helped language learners to learn the target language through translation of sentences from target language into the learners' first language and from the first language of learners into the target language. Students had a chance to practice on grammatical rules and vocabulary. Language teachers expected from their students to read and translate literary texts because these texts were assumed to represent "models of good writing and illustrations of the grammatical rules of the language (Duff & Maley, 1990:3).

On the other hand, with the emergence of other methods and approaches such as Audio-Lingual Method, Silent Way, Desuggestopedia and the Communicative Approach, literature lost its prestige. For example communicative approach focused on the language activities and effective communication. Hall explained the communicative method as "learners negotiating meaning for themselves, learning by doing things with language in authentic contexts" (2005: 51). During communicative period, effective communication was important but literature was ignored and it lost its function in the field of language learning and teaching. But there was a problem about the function of Communicative approach. The main aim was to get and convey the correct message but not to be careful about the correct grammar or pronunciation.

In the early 1980s, the attitude toward the use of literature in language teaching seemed more encouraging. Some language scholars and researchers such as Duff and Maley (1991), Collie and Slater (1987), Gower and Pearson (1986), Hill (1986), Brumfit and Carter (1986), Carter and Long (1991) and Lazar (1993)

explored that literature was neglected as a language learning material. Gilroy and Parkinson (1997), point out that literature as a language learning material “never went away and has always been a large part of EFL for many learners” (p. 213).

In addition, many language scholars stress that the language of everyday communication is significant in Communicative approach and the language of literature has no real linguistic difference. Zyngier (1994) as a language scholar also thought that “language of literary texts was not much different from the language of everyday communication” (p.3). Carter and Nash (1990) also claimed that communicative language and literary language have no real difference.

#### **Problem**

In order to motivate learners, EFL/ESL teachers are always in a challenge in the process of teaching English. Gozales (1998) points out that the important factors such as the lack of motivation of students, lack of effectiveness in the teaching resources and methodology, limited time and large classes are the main reasons of failure in language teaching.

In this sense, literature is accepted as one of the most effective resource in FL teaching. Most language teachers prefer literary texts as effective materials while some language teachers hesitate to use literary texts in their classroom (Johnson,1999). For example Lazar (1990) states that not only the language teachers are reluctant to use literary texts in their language classrooms, but students are hesitant as well. The use of literature in the process of EFL/ESL teaching requires background language of the issues presented in these literary texts, so most of the language teachers remain sceptical and lack interest in using literature in their English lessons.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

This paper aims to show the effective role of literature as a resource supporting the grammatical structure and linguistic components of English language. Furthermore, this paper aims at emphasizing the place of literature as a means of teaching the different aspects of grammatical structures and certain linguistic categories such as prepositions, tenses, and morphological, phonological, syntactical structures of English.

#### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Literature is regarded as a means of reflecting the different aspect of people’s life. It is undoubtedly certain that many linguistics, critics, and authors have been in conflict over what literature is.

John McRae (1994) defines the literature in a different way by distinguishing ‘the capital L’ and ‘small l’. Literature with a capital L represents the classical texts e.g. Marlow, Shakespeare, Dickens... and literature with a small l represents the products of popular fiction e.g. ballads, fables, elegies, lyrics...

Basnett and Grundy (1993) explain that literary texts are cultural documents and reflect different aspects of society and provide deeper understanding of a country or countries.

On the other hand, we cannot separate literature from art. Hoggart (1964) stresses that “it can never be aesthetically ‘pure’ or abstractly contemplative. There can be no such thing as ‘abstract literature’ as there is such as thing as abstract painting. By its nature –because its medium, language, is used by almost everybody in all sorts of everyday situations; and because it tries both to *say* and to *be* – literature is an art which invites impurities” (p.34).

According to Collie and Slater (1987:3-6), in the language classes literature provides valuable authentic material, develops personal involvement and help contribute the readers’ both cultural and language enrichment.

#### **Reasons of Using Literary Texts and Extracts in Foreign Language Teaching**

There are many good reasons for using literary texts and extracts as materials in foreign language teaching. According to McKay (1982) and Widdowson (1984), literature is used to develop linguistic knowledge both on usage and use level. Similarly, Povey states that “literature will extend linguistic knowledge by giving evidence of extensive and subtle vocabulary usage, and complex and exact syntax (1972: 187).

Parkinson and Thomas (2000) also state that literature provide learners to see a model of good writing. Literary texts and extracts also offer learners to practice language skills- in addition to exemplifying grammatical structures and presenting a new vocabulary. Most of the present-day literary texts assume that literature can provide a basis for extending language usage. They mainly focus on the grammatical points that are salient in the text (Fassler and Lay, 1979).

Another reason of using literature is about its motivating affect on learners. Collie and Slater (1987) stress the function of literature as an exhibition of real life language. And so, the real life situations, language and relations of people are motivating factors for the learners.

Furthermore, literature helps learners to understand the different cultures and develop tolerance and awareness of difference. Marshall (1979: 333), in using literature with Puerto Rican students, found that as she worked to help students overcome the difficulties of the text, her own appreciation of the text was clarified and

her respect for the students' own cultural framework enhanced. Marshall's experience verifies that literature promotes a greater tolerance for cultural differences for both teacher and the student.

Another reason of using literature is that it helps learners to use their imagination and lead them to develop their own creativity. The learners try to find out what happens as events and share different or similar emotion through literary text. Literature forms interaction between learner and literary text. Rich literary texts can convey multiple meaning, and cause discussions and reflection of different feelings and opinions. This can be useful for the learners in the process of language learning.

### **The Use of Literary Texts and Extracts in Foreign Language Teaching**

Regarding of the crucial part of literature in maintaining the interest of the students, teachers exploit literary texts in a large number of ways in the classroom. Using the extracts from short stories novels, dramas and poems helps maintain the interest of the students in the process of language learning. Pulverness (2003) advises language teachers to maximise the use of literature in the classroom. For him, firstly, language teachers should introduce the theme of the text, and then necessary vocabulary items and use prediction tasks to arouse the curiosity of the students. Secondly, language teacher should minimize the text so as not to disturb the students' reading. Thirdly, language teacher should draw attention to grammar and linguistic structures used by the author. Finally, s/he should encourage students to find creative views and invite them to modify, extend or add to a text.

Therefore, it is essential that language teachers bring the literature into language classroom especially for teaching structures of grammar, morphology, phonology and syntax of the target language, using their own imagination and developing the own creativity of the students.

#### **Using short stories**

Using short story as a material will be a useful technique for language teachers not only to provide various rules of grammar, syntax and phonology but also to improve the students' creativity. As all known, short story as a genre is always simple and short. Therefore, It will not distress the students and lead to understand the theme easier. According to Ariogul (2001), short story used as a material in ESL\ EFL curriculum offers these benefits: (a) provides more creative, encrypt, challenging texts that require personal exploration supported with prior knowledge for advanced level readers, (b) promotes critical thinking skills, (c) makes the students' reading task easier due to being simple and short when compared with other literary genres, (d) facilitates teaching a foreign culture (i.e. serves as a valuable instrument in attaining cultural knowledge of the selected community... (pp 11-18). Furthermore, short story makes contribution to the development of cognitive analytical abilities by bringing the whole self to bear on a compressed account of a situation in a single place and moment (Sage, 1987: 43).

A teacher can follow up these activities while using short stories in his\her lesson :

- want students to predict what will happen next, or what happened just before.
- want students to select familiar structures of grammar, morphology, syntax.
- ask students to choose unknown words and to try to guess the meaning of them before looking at dictionary.
- want them to write a background character description of one of the characters.
- ask students to imagine they are in the same story as a character and ask whether they have different reaction against the events in the story.

In brief, using short story give a chance to raise the students' awareness towards the target language and culture, and become familiar with different structures of grammar, morphology, phonology and syntax of the target language.

#### **Using poems**

The advantages of including poetry in teaching a foreign language can be beneficial for the students to see different uses of language in relation to vocabulary, syntax, morphology and grammar structures (Lazar, 1993:15). The activities about the use of poetry as a material in ESL\EFL curriculum have been developed and tested by many experienced language teachers in their classrooms around the world (Bassnett&Grundy, McRae&Boardman, McRae&Pantaleoni, Maley&Moulding, Lazar, Maley&Duff, Collie&Slater, and Gower). Arnold (1999) stated that using poetry give a chance to exercise freely students' imaginative and cognitive ability, while working with texts creatively, subjectively, and collaborately, is very invaluable to enable them to improve their overall language and discourse competence.

A teacher can follow up these activities while using poems in his\her lesson :

- ask students to check their pronunciation while they are reading the poem loudly to each other and then to do the same thing for the whole class reading in chorus.
- ask students to rewrite the poem using the same structures but not in the same meaning.
- ask students to predict the possible story behind the poem.
- give an opportunity to discuss on issues the poem.

These ideas can be beneficial for students to be familiar with different structures of grammar, vocabulary and they can undoubtedly be useful for their pronunciation. Moreover, students have a chance to exercise freely their imaginative ability and to discover their inner world.

Along with the above mentioned benefits, poetry comprises so many cultural elements-allusions, vocabulary, idioms, tone that are not easy to translate into another language ( Sage, 1987: 12-13).

### **Using plays**

As well known, ESL\ EFL learning becomes internalized as a direct relation of the learners to the real situations and specific purpose of communication for the learners. Through the use of drama in foreign language teaching, students learn about the daily expressions of the target language and have the chance to use both receptive and productive skills. Lenore (1993) explains that using drama in ESL\ EFL classrooms (a) promotes language development, (b) develops both critical thinking and listening skills, (c) stimulates the imagination, (d) reinforces positive self concept, (e) fosters self respect and group cooperation.

A teacher can follow up these activities while using dramas in his\her lesson :

- ask students to prepare a play extemporarily in company with their friends.
- ask students to read out the dialogue but to give the characters special accents. It will be useful for them to acquire different aspects of pronunciation.
- ask them to read out dialogues loud and listen other friends' dialogues.
- ask them to write a new version of the play using the daily expressions used frequently.

In sum, the use of plays is a very beneficial technique in today's ESL\ EFL classrooms. As it is a colourful language learning technique, it is also a motivating factor for the learners to promote their comprehension of grammar structures in context and verbal or nonverbal aspects of the target language.

### **Using extracts from novels**

The use of extracts from novels in ESL\ EFL classrooms is a beneficial resource for language teaching. Novel as a literary genre not only reflects the daily lives of characters but it also provides to evaluate the events in different points of view. Helton et al., (1998: 1-5) stressed that the extracts used in ESL\ EFL classrooms have an important educational role as it (a) develops oral and written language skills, (b) helps students get information, identify problems and events, (c) motivates them to learn different structures of the target language without getting bored.

Through the use of extracts from novels, students build vocabulary and develop their reading skills. Like other literary genres, novel is a very effective way of acquiring grammar structures, and morphological, phonological and syntactical aspects of the target language.

### **Criteria for choosing literary texts and extracts in foreign language teaching**

Choosing an appropriate text to be used in ESL\ EFL classrooms should be carefully considered. Because the success in using literature in the classroom depends on the works selected for the lesson. First of all, language teachers should not forget that the aim is not to teach literature but to teach language and they must be aware of the difficulties of choosing the appropriate literary texts or extracts for students.

Lazar (1993: 56) listed some criteria according to the type of course and students, and other text-related factors as follows:

Type of course

- level of students
- students'reasons for learning English
- kinds of English required
- length\ intensity of course

Type of students

- age
- intellectual maturity

- emotional understanding
- interests and hobbies
- cultural background
- linguistic proficiency
- literary background

Other text-related factors

- availability\ length of text
- exploitability
- fit with syllabus

To know about the cultural and literary background of the learners will help teacher to pay attention to the needs and abilities of the learner group. In addition, knowing the linguistic proficiency of the learners and an appropriate choice of text will provide the students with examples of many features of the written language, the structure of sentences, different usages of structures and the different ways of connecting ideas. Similarly, the use of imagination particularly while discussing literature “enables the learners to shift their attention beyond the more mechanical aspects of the foreign language system” (Collie & Slater, 1987: 5). Apart from its motivating affect, using literary texts and extracts can gain learners the awareness of different cultures. About this function, Lazar states (1993) that “although students may find it easier to respond personally to a text from within their own culture, there is a strong argument for saying that exposing students to literature from other cultures is an enriching and exciting way of increasing their awareness of different values, beliefs, social structures, and so on” (p. 63). This situation is substantial to motivate students, but language teachers should not select culturally dense texts so as not to prevent learners from understanding the essential meaning.

## CONCLUSION

There is a known fact that literature used as a source for teaching ESL\ EFL in classroom has been in the key position. In this context, the teacher has an important role in the process of teaching English.

First of all, while choosing the appropriate text for the students, the teacher should consider not only the appreciation of the student but s/he also think about her/his own appreciation. Likewise, Povey (1979) states that “literary text is one that the teacher himself or herself enjoys” (p. 164).

Secondly, the students’ age, intellectual maturity, emotional understanding, motivation, needs, language proficiency, cultural and literary background should be taken into account so as not to bore them using inappropriate materials. At the same time, for many students literature has a duty of motivating them to learn English. If the literary work has simple language and short in length, this will facilitate the comprehension of the literary text and be a crucial factor for motivation of the students towards learning English.

Furthermore, literature provide students to look at the situations and events from a different aspect. Custodio and Sutton (1998: 20) stated that “literature can open horizons of possibility, allowing students to question, interpret, connect and explore”.

Apart from these benefits, “the use of literature helps students, acquire a native-like competence in English, express their ideas in English well, learn the features of modern English, learn how the English linguistic system is used for communication, see how idiomatic expressions are used, speak clearly, precisely, and concisely, and become more proficient in English, as well as become creative, critical and analytical learners” (Obediat,1997: 32).

There is no doubt that there are many good reasons for language teachers to use literature in ESL\ EFL classrooms. But the selection of appropriate texts and extracts is, of course, very difficult. As long as to be careful about some factors such as age, intellectual maturity, emotional understanding, motivation, needs, language proficiency, cultural and literary background of the students, teaching a foreign language won’t be so complicated, contrarily it will be enjoyable and advantageous.

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