ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

INNOVATIONS AND APPLICATIONS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

Arabati Pradeep Kumar

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Literature in ELT Classroom: Concerning Approaches

Deepkumar J.Trivedi

Introduction

This chapter is an introductory attempt at some key concepts and topics in English language learning. It is directed squarely at the non-specialist, towards those who, for whatever reason, are relatively new to the study of language. Given the needs and interests just identified, literary discourse forms the main vantage point from which some topics in language are surveyed and addressed. Most of the illustrative content used in the chapter is taken therefore from poetry, prose, and drama. By looking closely at what writers are doing linguistically, textual analysis is presented as a productive means for encouraging awareness about the English language. The chapter also reflects current concerns about language teaching as well as issues to do with learning about language. It is intended to benefit both students and teachers, particularly non-native speakers. Simultaneously, the attempt here is to motivate language learners to see literature as a useful resource in language learning.

The chapter is inspired by a statement made by Roman Jakobson many years ago. In his frequently cited statement, Jakobson (1960) points out the relationship between linguistics and literary studies:

> If there are some critics who still doubt the competence of linguistics to embrace the field of poetics, I privately believe that the poetic incompetence of some bigoted linguists has been mistaken for an inadequacy of the linguistic science itself. All of us here, however, definitely realise that a linguist deaf to the poetic function of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistic problems and unconversant with linguistic methods are equally flagrant anachronisms (p. 377).

A renewed interest has emerged in the teaching of literature in the language class, and quite a lot has been written on the subject whereas, in the past, not much was discussed or thought about the use of literature in a language classroom. Things started to change in language teaching around 1980. Continuous discussion on the place of literature in the ELT/ESL/EFL (English Language Teaching/English as a

Second Language/English as a Foreign Language) classroom was accepted as a reference to the interface of literature and language. Hence, the teaching of literature is now often seen within the framework of three major dimensions as following: Carter and Long (1991)

i.   the cultural dimension

ii.   the language dimension

iii. the personal growth dimension

This chapter is to observe the 'language dimension' with its linguistic and stylistic considerations and also to see general practices in the same. Language teaching is a process where the aim changes not only from country to country and culture to culture but also from individual to individual. The problems noticed in teaching foreign languages convinced the teachers to find out and develop some new scope, methods, and techniques. The 'Communicative Language Teaching' (CLT), which is very popular these days, attributes credit to the use of 'authentic language' as it is used in a real-life reference as possible. Structured drills, which are widely used in the audio-lingual method, make the process monotonous and these boring activities direct the students to look for new tools and materials, other than the textbook, to make the learning interesting. As seen using literary texts in language teaching is an innovation, but teaching a foreign language only by using literary passages cannot, of course, be so useful. So, here, the use of literary genres in teaching a foreign language will be discussed in a specific frame.

It may look obvious to the non-specialist that literature, the most culturally valued and aesthetically prestigious form of language practice, is well-studied using the resources developed in the field of linguistics. However, this truism has not always been obvious to many other disciplines, all of which claiming a different stake in the study of the literary. Much of this contentiousness has come out of the historical references accumulated by institutionalised disciplines, out of territorial interest, and out of intellectual laziness, as well as the legitimate arguments related to the validity and scope of linguistics. Stylistics has bridged these areas, and most stylisticians have been engaged in discussion not only with literary critics, cultural theorists, philosophers, poets, novelists, and dramatists but also with practitioners of linguistics.

It is believed that the artistic endeavour of literature cannot be compliant with the kind of rigorous analytical procedures or conducts offered by linguistic analysis, and, at the same time, it is also believed that descriptive linguistics cannot be applied to artificial texts and readerly interpretations. Say, for one group, stylistics simply and reductively examines its object; for the other, the object simply cannot be described in a scientifically replicable and transparent order. The multivalent position of stylistics has its roots in the histories of language study and literary criticism, and the institutional make-up of contemporary universities and department divisions which establish specific disciplinary boundaries and configurations. Stylistics, because of

that, has come to be recognised as an essentially interdisciplinary field, drawing on the different sub-disciplines within linguistics to varying degrees, as well as on fields recognisable to literary critics, such as philosophy, cultural theory, sociology, history, and psychology. By the end of this chapter, I would like to argue that stylistics is a solo coherent discipline. It is naturally the central discipline of literary study, against which all other current approaches are partial or interdisciplinary. To establish that understanding, we must consider the history and the basis of stylistics, the status of stylistic analysis, some examples of stylistic practice, and a review of the latest paradigms and principles in stylistics research.

Several scholars (Lazar, 1993; Collie and Slatter, 1994; Ur, 1996; Carter and McRae, 1996; Pison, 2000; Maley, 2001) have offered a discussion on various advantages of using literature as a language teaching resource. These reasons can be interpreted in the following ways:

i. *Linguistic reason:* Students get a chance to get exposed to real, authentic usage of language in standard literary texts; these texts have the capacity to show them a variety of styles, patterns, registers, and language learning materials at several stages of difficulty.

ii. *Methodological reason:* As the literary texts are open to end number of interpretations and therefore can create an enormous opportunity for interaction in a language class.

iii. *Motivational reason:* As literary texts are the product of the writers' particular feeling about certain aspects of life, the 'genuine feel' has the capacity to motivate the reader a lot. Students can easily be stimulated to express their opinion, to relate the topics and the characters in the literary texts to their life situations.

Methodological Approaches to Teaching Literature: The Four Models

We have some approaches to implementing literature in ELT/EFL/ESL classrooms which can be considered for our reference, which are as follows:

Maley's Approaches to Teaching Literature

The Critical Literary Approach

In this approach, the focus is on plot, characterisation, motivation, value, psychology, background, literary concepts, etc. There is an emphasis on form and structure. While doing so, the students should have already mastered the intermediate level, and they should be familiar with literary conventions.

The Stylistic Approach

This approach has an emphasis on text, description, and analysis of language before making an interpretation.

Carter and Long's approach

- Language-based Model
- Literature as Content or Culture Model
- Literature as Personal Growth or Enrichment

Amer's approaches to teaching L1 narrative texts in ELT/EFL/ESL literature

The Story Grammar Approach (SGA)

Reader Response Approach (RRA)

Van's Approaches

- New criticism
- Critical Literacy
- Stylistics
- Reader-Response
- Language-based
- Structuralism

Literature is an innately authentic source, and it provides useful and reliable input for language learning (Ghosn, 2002; Shrestah, 2008). Considering the use of literature in ELT classes and the negligence of the practical side of the above models, language teachers postulate that a task-based approach to teaching literature could encourage them to implement literature in their classes. So, the following section will be allocated to the practical aspects of integrating literature drawing on a task-based approach.

Teaching Poetry with the Stylistic Approach in Language Classroom

According to Short (1996), stylistics is the direct application of linguistic evidence to interpret and analyse literature and is a general analytical tool that uses explanations of structural and formal aspects of a poem to discuss meaning. For instance, lexical repetition can be used to strengthen the impact of a word, and the number of turns a certain speaker has in relation to another speaker in a poem indicates their relative impact or importance.

As we know language is the subject and the focus is on instruction, stylistic analysis strongly represents the ELT instructional perspective. ELT activities in which students analyse poetry stylistically can bring out opportunities to explicate the structural and formal features of English –including the levels of phonology, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse– and relate them to an understanding of the poem. There are examples of language-centred activities used for poetry teaching, where students do the following:

- highlight complete sentences in a poem with alternating colours
- categorise words from a poem into logical groups
- circle personal pronouns and find a pattern
- underline the main verbs

These are similar activities from a university ELT class in many universities, where students look at a poem and answer questions about verb tenses, possessive adjectives, and singular versus plural forms. It works effectively.

Important Terms for Stylistic Prose Techniques Applicable in Language Teaching

The prose is meant to persuade its reader by presenting facts, illustrations or evidence of a particular topic. It could be either a history chapter or an instruction manual. To be the most persuasive writer possible, it is important for learners to familiarise themselves with writing techniques that will help them write with brevity.

Organising Paragraphs

Every time learners change topics, they should start a new paragraph. The opening sentence of each paragraph should be a topic sentence that can clearly and specifically state the topic. The rest of the sentences should hang together with the topic, by giving explanations, premises, descriptions, or examples.

Point of View

Point of view refers to who is narrating and how. Students may choose to use the first-person narration because it is more casual and personal, as in writing a letter. They should use the second-person narration to give instructions; the third-person (he, she, or they) narration tells a story or describes an event, usually from an outside and all-knowing narrator.

Beginning a Sentence

The first word of each sentence in a paragraph should have variation. This technique helps hold the reader's attention and prevents them from sounding monotonous. If there is any trouble, the sentence can be reworded, or transitional phrases can be added to it.

Transitions

They are words and phrases that signal how ideas are linked. For example, 'and' simply presents two or more facts, while the more formal 'thus' shows a logical deduction. Other examples are 'although', and so', 'nevertheless', 'furthermore', 'however', and 'then'.

Active Voice

Active voice shows who did what, and how as opposed to showing what was done to convey the most information possible. For example, the sentence "They ate fruits" (active voice) is clearer and more interesting to the reader than its passive, and therefore vague, counterpart, 'Fruits were eaten'.

Figures of Speech: Similes and Metaphors

Similes describe a relationship between two things, such as, 'My fingers felt like ice' or 'the house was as cold as the Arctic'. The words 'like' and 'as' are often used in similes to transfer qualities of a known image (here, ice and the Arctic) to an unknown image (my fingers and the house). Metaphors also describe a relationship between two things, but are more powerful because they do not compare; they simply equate. For example, 'My house was the Arctic'.

The Language of the Novel: An Example

In attempting to make the language of the novel more accessible to students and increase their awareness of how it communicates mood and theme, I have concentrated on two main activities. The first of these is close textual/stylistic analysis and the examples of which can be found in both Carter and Long (1987) and McRae and Boardman (1984). Students can be encouraged to analyse an extract from the novel to identify how specific lexical and grammatical features produce particular stylistic effects. The second activity is more prevalent which focuses on how lexical clusters recur throughout the text to create a web of associations.

Close analysis

Example: Read the following extract and then answer the questions.

> There was music from my neighbour's house through the summer nights. In his blue gardens, men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars. At high tide in the afternoon, I watched his guests diving from the tower of his raft, or taking the sun on the hot sand of his beach while his two motorboats slit the waters of the Sound, drawing aquaplanes over cataracts of foam. On weekends his Rolls-Royce became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city between nine in the morning and long past midnight, while his station wagon scampered like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains. And on Monday's eight servants, including an extra gardener, toiled all day with mops and scrubbing-brushes and hammers and gardens hear, repairing the ravages of the night before.
>
> Every Friday five crates of oranges and lemons arrived from a fruiterer in New York – every Monday these same oranges and lemons left his back door in a pyramid of pulpless halves. There was a machine in the kitchen which could

extract the juice of two hundred oranges in half an hour if a little button was pressed two hundred times by a butler's thumb.

At least once a fortnight a corps of caterers came down with several hundred feet of canvas and enough coloured lights to make a Christmas tree of Gatsby's enormous garden. On buffet tables, garnished with glistening hors-d'oeuvre, spiced baked hams crowded against salads of harlequin designs and pastry pigs and turkeys bewitched to a dark gold. (Fitzgerald, 1953, p. 45l)

i.   What kind of verbs are used to describe the motorboats (line 5) and station wagon (line 8). Does this have any particular effect?

ii. The word 'his' is repeated many times in the passage. To whom does it refer and what effect do you think is created by using it so often?

iii. Rewrite lines 19 to 21 in the active voice. Do you think this would change the effect of the paragraph?

iv. Write down all the adverbial time phrases you can find in the passage. When are time phrases like this usually used? Why do you think there are so many here?

Lexical clusters

Examples:

i.   The following words recur throughout the book. Try to organise them into three main groups which you think have some characteristics in common: Dust, silver, Rolls Royce, music, smoke, flower, stars, yacht, money, ashes, gold, white, mansion, and light.

ii. Now write down all the possible associations you have for a particular word and the other words in its group. For example, perhaps you grouped ashes and dust together and both words made you think of death or destruction. Compare your associations with those of other students and your teacher.

iii. Look at the first three chapters of the novel again. Write down any phrase or sentence containing one of the words above. Can you find any connections between the words above and their description of particular settings or characters?

Discussing Drama: A Useful Application

Poetry and fictional prose have been the focus of interest for most scholars who depend on the study and practice of style and structure. However, as far as dramatic texts are concerned, it is interesting to see how little attention has been paid to the style of a given dramatic text by the stylisticians. To some extent, part of this hesitance might lie in the prevailing opinion which deems spoken conversation 'as a debased and unstable form of language'. As a consequence of this inclination, dramatic texts, with a lot of emphasis on speech, have been liable to be undervalued

by the scholars who were more occupied with stylistics. Furthermore, the fact that the classics which were–in many cases–written in verse gave rise to many scholarly works most of which treat these works under the umbrella of 'dramatic poems'. Even though poetry analysis can provide a lot of information in terms of understanding the style of a given dramatist, it is more or less confined to the limits of linguistic inquiry. Yet, stylisticians working within the domain of cognitive stylistics have been quick to observe this fundamental dilemma, and consequently, the research done on the subject after the 1980s has generated many stylistic frameworks for the analysis of the dramatic texts. Be that as it may, one can still find Peter K.W. Tan's observation in 1993 regarding the issue quite valid: "the stylistic analysis of drama is really in its fledgling state at the moment" (Peter & Tan, 1993, p. 18). Indeed, the drama is still the neglected child of stylistics.

Literature as a Language Learning Source

Khatib et al. (2011) mention that "Literature is considered as a promising tool for language learning purposes (p. 202). Scholars in the field have proposed various advantages for the use of literature in EFL/ESL classes. The first advantage of literature that merits paying attention to is its function in language learning. Literature can offer different aspects of language authentically within itself including not only syntax and lexis but also pragmatic and cultural points not easily found in non-literary texts. Van (2009) conveys that, since literature carries a lot of instances of real-life language in various situations, it provides unprecedented opportunities to improve syntactic, pragmatic, cultural, and discoursal awareness among learners. Similarly, McKay (2001) persuasively asserts that, since certain syntactic patterns and certain stylistic word order reversal or exchange occur more frequently in literature, it can be an ideal reading source for ELT classroom because it involves the combination and integration of four language skills, it also promotes students' close reading habits of texts, and it is probably the best source for comprehensive reading programs in L2 classroom because becoming engaged with literature will certainly increase students' interest in reading. Referring to the writing skill, Stern (2001) says that literature can be a rich and provocative source for writing in ESL/EFL/ELT contexts.

As literary texts are much opulent in terms of style and manner of writing, the scope of vocabulary and range of grammatical points, it is highly probable that upon using them ELT learners may encounter more difficult structures and learn many more vocabulary items in terms of denotative as well as connotative meanings, idiomatic expressions, proverbs, slangs, and colloquialism. One more benefit that literature brings about is cultural awareness. McKay (1982) cites Allen (1975, p. 111) as judiciously arguing that it is important that students understand cultural issues by saying: "Literature is a facet of a culture." In other words, literature and culture are

well-bound together. So, students come to understand cultural similarities and differences through diverse literary texts.

Literature, moreover, also promotes cultural and intercultural awareness (Van, 2009) especially in the era of globalisation (Tayebipour, 2009). In the era of globalisation, there is a serious concern of universally shared requirements and wants rather than individual needs. Since literature deals with universal concepts (Maley, 1989), there is a need to grab on literature as a valuable input source for flourishing language learners' competence. Globalisation cries for joining hands not only in economy, politics, sociology, etc. but also in language-related fields such as ELT.

According to Maley (1989), literature deals with universal concepts such as love, hatred, death, nature, etc. are common to all languages and cultures. The similarities and even differences between cultures and languages can further our understanding of the whole world. The researchers have experienced that through the medium of literature we can provide our learners with a good number of language opportunities and relevant experiences that not only encourage, motivate, and enhance oral language skills but also strengthen and deepen their writing abilities. By giving summaries, dramatisations, simulations, and role-plays, students will have a lot of oral practice which, in turn, contributes to writing enhancement.

Literature as a Source of Motivation in ELT Classroom

The second advantage of literature which is highlighted here is its impetus to bring about desirable motivation on the part of the learners. Literature is a journey of discovery since it involves a range of new experiences, all of which are applicable to real-world situations. When something is peculiar to the real-life situations, it arouses interest and enthusiasm in the learners; consequently, they become motivated and immersed in the experiences of any kind they wish. The result of this immersion and engagement is what all of us are seeking, i.e., learning.

Students enjoy reading literature, as it may increase their motivation to interact with a text and thus, ultimately increase their reading proficiency. We may also argue that literary texts are very motivating due to their authenticity and the meaningful context they provide. As experience shows that motivation is especially achieved when students are exposed to what they enjoy while learning. They are highly motivated when they are exposed to literary texts for language learning purposes. The paramount significance of motivation and authenticity that short stories bring about is uniquely significant. Moreover, the appeal of the stories to students substantiates that the power of literature is formidable in attracting them through its superb illustrations to clarify and extend the language. It also magnifies a visually aesthetic experience in the learners. Therefore, learners' motivation is augmented, and learning is facilitated as a result.

Literature as an Agent of Change

Literature has the potentiality to change attitudes and perceptions and to diminish negative attitudes and prejudices while boosting catharsis, empathy, sympathy, forgiveness, tolerance, etc. That's why literature is treated as literature of power. Since different stories include diverse themes, students get familiarised with these insightful themes which can be extrapolated to real-world situations. Through literature, learners come to appreciate and perceive themselves and others more thoroughly so that they can sympathise and empathise with the characters in the stories. Then, they can generalise the feelings and emotions to real-world contexts. It is also believed that literature has a well-rooted pedagogical value since it can involve learners in problem-solving tasks through resolving conflicts.

Stories also replete with perceptible conflicts for readers to identify with, which empower learners to commiserate with characters experiencing challenging conflicts in hazardous situations. Having elaborated on the themes, plots, characterisations, points of view, symbols, and allegory, the teacher can empower the learners to conceive their world better, to discover their solutions, thus boosting the skills and insights they are in need of while dealing with conflicts themselves. The experiences in the classes run by the writer of this chapter substantiate that learners develop rapport through literature, have a strong predilection to sympathise and empathise with others through dramatisations and role-plays, have a proclivity to negotiate the conflicts and resolve them and feel like cooperating and collaborating with others. In short, upon an in-depth review of literature on consensuses and controversies of literature in ELT classes, we may conclude that the current consensus regarding the integration of literature in language programs is extraordinary, and by far exceeds the points of conflict. This consensus confirms great promises as it is informed by current research in language teaching, language learning and acquisition, and psychology.

Task-Based Approach to Teaching Literature

To understand in brief, what exactly is a 'task'? How does it possibly differ from other terms such as 'activity' or 'exercise' or 'drill' which have overwhelmingly dominated our classes for many years, to teach learners language and to facilitate the process of learning? There is enough evidence in the history of language teaching that there is no consensus about the definition of a 'task', and its definition is a bit controversial. Nunan (1989) explicates that a communicative task is "a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form" (p. 10). The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand as a communicative act in its own right. Skehan (1996) defines the task as "an activity in which meaning is primary; there is some

sort of relationship to the real world; task completion has some priority, and the assessment of task performance is in terms of task outcome" (p. 38).

In our model, a task is defined as a piece of language that linguistically, physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially, critically, meaningfully, creatively, consciously or subconsciously, aesthetically, spontaneously, motivationally, and experientially involves learners in the process of learning. This is what we call 'Whole Literary Engagement' or simply WLE. Literature is a means through which this whole engagement could easily be achieved provided that teachers contemplate upon different ways through which their learners can be wholly involved. It also requires them to scrutinise different aspects and components of the desired task such as goals, setting, activities, teacher's role, and learner's role. Having done this meticulous scrutiny, teachers are in a position to think of the procedures to achieve WLE.

Conclusion

Language through literature is a debatable subject among academicians and scholars for a long time. The idea of language through literature raises a few eyebrows in India and other parts of the globe as well. Many schools, colleges, and universities in India and around the world offer a great number of literature courses at school, college, undergraduate, and postgraduate level. Teachers teaching these courses usually use the traditional method of lecturing on topics like theme, characterisation, diction, symbolism, summary, plot, motifs, etc. They rarely give any emphasis on the stylistic/linguistic aspect of the literary texts. Of course, students must be taught literature, and it must be taught by creating an awareness of linguistic possibilities and sensibility.

Teaching and learning language through literature demands the dynamic involvement of both the teacher and the taught in bringing the literary text to life. George Eliot calls it aesthetic teaching, "I think aesthetic teaching is the highest of all teaching because it deals with life in its highest complexity" (George Eliot, 1866/1967, p. 9-10; cited in Beauchamp, 2017). The medium is language and the context and form of a literary work arouse interest in the meaningful use of that medium, and this is the idea of George Eliot's aesthetic teaching. But in this technique, the role of the teacher is very crucial and important. His role is to support the students' efforts to establish an intensive relationship with literary texts without interfering too much in their act of creating meaning.

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