



LITERATURE AS A POWERFUL AND INEVITABLE TOOL FOR TEACHING ENGLISH AND IMPARTING LANGUAGE SKILLS

DR. PAWAN KUMAR

Assistant Professor

Dept of English

G C Raipur Rani, Panchkula

(HR) INDIA

ABSTRACT

The present article is an attempt to critically examine as to how literature has, all along the times been, and is a powerful tool for imparting language skills, and an inevitable medium of teaching English language. It goes without saying that the language of any literary piece is a well organized and wonderful choice of diction. It can therefore be quite useful in developing linguistic knowledge as it eventually and legitimately seeks to develop the reading, writing, speaking, listening, and, of course, critical thinking skills; and promotes literary understanding and general linguistic awareness among teachers and learners. The paper thus seeks to explore as to why a language teacher should use literary texts in the language classroom; and what sort of literature should be used by the teachers with the language learners. The impact of literature vis-a-vis the acquisition of language skills is fairly dealt with; and an attempt has been made to critically evaluate as to how far literature has been, and is a powerful tool rather than an end in teaching English as a second or foreign language.

Key Words: *Communication, grammatical structure, literary devices, syntax, jargon, socio-linguist.*

INTRODUCTION

Equipping oneself with a language for communication is a natural instinct of human being that explores itself through a variety of environmental interactions, and is undoubtedly a life-long process. One of these learning situations could be a judicious and deliberate exposure of the literature of that particular language that extends almost unlimited points of departure for

DR. PAWAN KUMAR

1 Page



learners to embark on various activities to stimulate critical and aesthetic responses. It ensures that not only the skills like listening, reading and speaking are explored but also the learner is thoroughly exposed to the aspects of viewing, discussing, writing and critical thinking. Besides, literature performs the wonderful task of transporting the learners to other places and other times, eventually exposing them to real-life values.

A close study of literary language would definitely reveal the infinite variety of expression available in English, which in turn can legitimately sensitize learners to its functioning and structure. Khatib, Hossein and Rahimi are quite apt to assert that "Literary works provided additional material of grammar practice, vocabulary learning and translation" (p.32). Obviously in the very process one is gradually exposed to its nuances and its beauty. Its forms and structures - the vocabulary, the sounds, the grammar and the syntax duly and relevantly cater for the learner's need to communicate effectively in a complex world. Eventually the learners do come across and learn about a wide range of styles and literary devices such as allusion, diction, imagery, simile, metaphor and personification. This in turn would surely enrich their learning canvass and sharpen not only their language skills but also that of analyzing critically. Aptly does Povey (1972), while summarizing the aims of using literature in ESL classes, argue that "literature will increase all language skills because literature will extend linguistic knowledge by giving evidence of extensive and subtle vocabulary usage, and complex and exact syntax."

Literature, it goes without saying, is a verbal art form with language as its medium, and dialogues its ultimate intention. That amounts to say that a constant and continuous negotiation between the text and its reader continues as he tries to assimilate and comprehend. It genuinely represents the most intimate and intensely-rich human experiences an individual may enjoy with written language, eventually seeking to sensitize the learners about the ways human beings communicate with each other in the garb of symbolic and metaphorical language, and finally building the very foundation for all meaningful interactions - visual as well as verbal.

Furthermore, a good piece of literature could certainly be a powerful and transformative tool as it genuinely seeks to voice the human feeling and action in all its beauty and absurdity. It provokes and jolts us vigorously into new and heightened terrains of awareness that had hitherto remained unexplored. In this way the creative and imaginative spirit of human being seeks to sprout through the very process of gradual assimilation while negotiating and interacting with a fairly chosen piece of literature. It would certainly be helpful to stimulate the imagination faculty of learners, to develop their critical abilities, and to increase their emotional awareness. The enriched terrains would make them increasingly confident about expressing their own ideas and emotions in English; that, in turn, would surely help to achieve the desired goals in unprecedented ways. The literary texts being rich in multiple

DR. PAWAN KUMAR

2 Page



levels of meaning would naturally demand the learner to be actively involved, and to look for its unstated implications and assumptions. The compulsion to grapple with the multiple meanings of the text thus seeks to develop the overall capacity of the learners to judiciously infer the meaning that, of course, could be conveniently applied in real life. It thus goes without saying that the literary piece of text needs to be target-oriented as “its aim changes not only from country to country and culture to culture but from individual to individual” (Rafiul Islam Shazu, 29).

Moving further, studying the language of a literary text helps to integrate the language and literature syllabi more closely. The learners thus draw on their knowledge of familiar grammatical and lexical terrains in order to make an aesthetic judgment of the text. A holistic and meaningful interpretation of the text thus legitimately seeks to expand students’ knowledge level, and adds to their language faculty.

Literature also plays a vital role in the field of foreign language learning and teaching. The use of literature as a technique for teaching both basic language skills, that is listening, speaking, reading and writing; and language areas that is vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation carries due significance within the field of foreign language learning and teaching. The very process necessitates a piece of literature to be translated in one’s own tongue. The act of translating a literary text - say drama, poetry or a short story - into the mother tongue may be an apt and valuable exposure to practice the lexical, semantic and stylistic aspects of the language. Besides literature also provides authentic and actual language samples in real-life contexts; thus familiarizing the learners with different linguistic forms, communicative functions and meanings. Brumfit and Carter’s remark (1986) on the aspect is apt that “literary texts contain lots of meaningful contexts in which linguistic components such as lexical items and grammatical structures are used in a natural way”.

Furthermore though the world of a literary work - a novel, a play, or a short story is often an imaginary one; it legitimately seeks to present a full and colorful setting in which characters from myriad socio-economic or regional backdrops are authentically portrayed. A reader thus discovers the way the characters in such literary works see the world outside, and seeks to navigate through their thoughts, feelings, customs and traditions. The terrains of their joys, beliefs and sorrows are invariably exposed to the reader. A literary text thus legitimately serves to facilitate understanding; and could undoubtedly be a wonderful source of particular cultural enrichment besides adding substantially to the cultural grammar of the learners. Well does Van’s study (2009) on the aspect assert: “literature is full of instances of real-life language in various situations”, and continues, “it provides lots of opportunities for students to improve syntactic, pragmatic, cultural, and discoursed awareness among learners”.



A piece of literary work thus authentically enriches the language of an individual as it seeks to equip him with a wide range of individual lexical or syntactic items. Through the exposure of a substantial and contextualized body of text the learners invariably become familiar with many features of the written language. A continuous interaction with the various syntax and discourse functions, the variety of possible structures, the different ways of connecting ideas, does legitimately seek to develop and enrich the language skills of an individual. Moreover equipped with richness and diversity of the language he becomes more productive and adventurous as he tries to learn and begin the new items through the gained potential. Aptly does Loff (1988) opines in this context: “literature will extend linguistic knowledge by giving evidence of extensive and subtle vocabulary usage, and complex and exact syntax”. Literature thus seeks to improve the communicative and cultural competence of the learners in an authentic and natural way. Any good piece of literature constitutes to be a store house of myriad expressions dealing with all possible varieties of subject matter – say law, astrology, mountaineering, medicine, bull-fighting, nursery rhymes and church sermons linking with the themes and topics which are intrinsically interesting that in turn emphatically stay to draw the readers’ attention, and gracefully strives to enrich their lexical terrains. Enriching the lexical terrains of its learners thus stays to be a befitting goal of any good literary piece.

Analyzing a piece of literature demands personal involvement of the learner; and in the course of reading and comprehending the text, the learner begins to inhabit it, and is gradually drawn into it. Understanding the meanings of lexical items and syntax forms may, at times, become less significant than pursuing the development of the story itself as his mind faculties enthusiastically navigate to find out what happens until the events unfold via their logical climax. Coincidentally he can’t evade feeling closer to certain characters and share their emotional responses that benefit him in the whole language learning process. The arguments for the use of literary texts in the language classroom are obviously multifarious. Scholars like Enkvist assert that “to know a language you must cope not only with menus, laundry lists and telephone books, but also with novels, plays and sonnets”. Literature thus stays to be undisputed part of language-learning process, and as MacCabe justly opines: “unless you ‘know’ something of the literature of a language you do not really ‘know’ the language” (MacCabe, 47).

The selection of a literary text ought to be target-oriented as it has to justly cater for the needs, expectations, interests, and language level of the learners. As the ideas, sensations and events explored through literature do constitute part of the reader’s experience they are able to relate it to their own lives. A judicious and prudent selection of literary text thus may prove to be a boon for the reader, and may even help resolving the issues like ‘identity crisis’ of the individual, eventually pushing him to be an extrovert. Literature, it is said, knows no boundaries; and many of its themes are obviously common to all cultures whatever their ways of treatment may, however, be. The experiences like that of Death, Love and Separation are

DR. PAWAN KUMAR

4 Page



part and parcel of the life which constitute to be the universal themes that seek to explore through literature. “A careful text selection”, is what McRae opines “fundamental to the successful use of any kind of representational materials” (McRae, ..)

One of the great strengths of literature is invariably its suggestive power. It continually invites the reader to go beyond what is said to what is implied; and sincerely seeks to suggest numerous ideas with a few words. Moreover it’s highly suggestive aspect seeks to subtly suggest different meanings to different people. In other words it is rare for two readers to react identically to any given text. Its suggestiveness thus guarantees almost infinite interactive discussion for each person does form a different perception.

One of the main functions literature could serve is its ability to nurture and nourish the sociolinguistic veins. Needless to say literature extends a wide range of language varieties in terms of regional dialects and jargon. The terms and literary constituents are certainly different in different socio-economic contexts like schools, hospitals, gyms, parlors or theatres. Also the language used does change from one profession to another; that is, a doctor would have entirely different kind of language than an engineer, a cartographer or a socialist. All this exposure is made possible through literature that would certainly develop the socio-linguistic competence of the learners in their target language. Khatib here pertinently quotes Shang in this context: “literature is not only facilitative for language learning purposes in general but it can also accelerate language learning in content-based instruction. (Khatib, 202)

CONCLUSION:

The foregone arguments sufficiently affirm that a carefully chosen literary text legitimately seeks to expose the learners to a variety of unexpected uses and types of linguistic expressions. It exposes them across the extensive and subtle vocabulary usage and complex syntax, and eventually opens the routes to develop their communicative competency as it strives to accelerate due classroom discussions and interactions. The real-life language exposure provides the readers lots of opportunities to improve their syntactic, pragmatic, cultural, and discoursed awareness exposing them not only to complex themes, expressions and emotions but also to novel grammatical usage in the target language. It thus goes without saying that a judiciously selected piece of literature contains lots of meaningful contexts in which linguistic components such as lexical items and grammatical structures are used in a natural way. That amounts to say that in the process of analyzing such a literary piece the students would invariably gain familiarity with different linguistic uses, conventional forms of written mode; and develop their communicative capabilities. A consistent and careful exposure of a worthy literary piece would thus prove to be a boon for learning a language and acquiring its complex skills.

DR. PAWAN KUMAR

5 Page



REFERENCES

1. Povey, J. "Literature in TESL Programs: The Language and the Culture". *Teaching English as a Second Language*. Ed. H. Allen and R Campbell. McGraw-Hill, 1972.
2. MacCabe, C. "English Literature in a Global Context". *Teaching and Learning the Language and Literatures*. Ed. Quirk, R. and Widdowson, H. G. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
3. Khatib M. Hossein, A and Rahimi. "Literature and Language Teaching". *Journal of Academic and Applied Studies*, Vol. 2(6) June 2012.
4. Rafiul Islam Shazu, "Use of Literature in Language Teaching and Learning: A Critical Assessment". *Journal of Education and Practice*, Vol.5, No.7, 2014
5. Khatib M. 'Literature in EFL/ESL Classroom'. *English Language Teaching*, Vol. 4, No. 1. Canadian Center of Science and Education, 2011.
6. Brunfit, C. J. & Carter, R. A. (Eds.) *Literature and Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
7. McRae, J. 'Applying the Buzzwords: Literature for Language Learners'. *British Book News*, July 1991, pp. 432-37.