

Rethinking the Language of Literary Texts

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Abstract: There has been an on-going debate for centuries on the relation between modern linguistics and literature, whether the two disciplines are far apart from each other or there is an interaction between them. There are many ways in which the theories of modern linguistics are being and might be used in the study of literature mainly literary text. Linguistics finds literature interesting for various reasons. For instance, in reading literary text, one might have different interpretations toward it. What one can notice is that linguistics provides EFL learners with tools that facilitate the description of literary works. Throughout this paper, we will focus on the use of linguistics as a means of studying literary texts and how the linguistically trained reader (EFL learner) will find that he could go much further into detail and also formalise his results to a higher degree when dealing with literary texts.

Keywords: Linguistics, Literature, Literary texts, EFL learners, Stylistics

Introduction

As a matter of fact, no one can deny the tremendous place of literature in foreign language classroom. We can't imagine an English classroom without referring to literary texts such as texts of Shakespeare, Dickens or Hemingway, even a French classroom without referring to texts of Victor Hugo, Moliere or Balzac since literature represents both language and culture. So, it has a pivotal role in teaching and learning a foreign language since it provides various opportunities for EFL learners. Furthermore, it provides a rich input for EFL learners as Lazar purports, not only do these texts provide rich linguistic input, they also maximize learners' output and motivation (Lazar, 1993). "Literature has traditionally been taught across a variety of contexts as a set of particularly highly valued and supposedly engaging texts" (Hall, G., 2005, p. 39).

However, from the language teaching point of view, it is thought to be valuable because literary texts are authentic, motivating, and a 'stimulus for language acquisition' (Lazar, 1993, pp.14–15). It also provides exposure to linguistic creativity and opportunities for developing intercultural understanding. (ibid, p.12). This results in a more intricate issues of its relationship to language acquisition, especially reading development (ibid, p. x)

Literature review

A. Literature in Foreign Language Classroom

Literature, often called '*Belles Lettres*' opens a new world to EFL learners. It enhances their motivation and exposes them to culture. Reading literary works also helps you understand the cultural background of the language you are reading. (Teranishi, M & Saito Y. & Wales K., 2015, p.243)

When using literature in EFL classroom , students are exposed to a variety of literary texts from different genres and periods; poetry , prose and drama. Using literary texts in EFL classroom is of paramount importance because of the following reasons:

1- Literary texts are authentic

2- Literary texts are motivating: Motivation is a key factor in learning, and language teaching materials are among the factors that can affect motivation in a positive or negative way. Dornyei (2001) suggests that materials will be motivating to the extent that they are related to the students' 'needs, goals and interests' (Dornyei, 2001, p.66) and to their 'everyday experiences and backgrounds' (p. 66). Literature is arguably motivating in this sense because students should be able to relate the 'fundamental human issues' (Collie & Slater, 1987, p.3) that literature deals with to their own lives and experiences. Well-written stories of any kind may motivate students to keep on reading for other reasons—because of the 'suspense of unravelling the plot' (Lazar, 1993, p.15).

3- Literature makes learners focus on the form of the language
it is widely accepted that a certain degree of focus on linguistic form is necessary for the successful acquisition of a language (Picken, 2007,p.14)

4- Literature helps learners to handle linguistic creativity (Children's) literature contributes to intercultural understanding (ibid)

Language and culture are inseparable, and this makes culture an essential concern in FL teaching and learning. Languages both reflect cultures and help to construct and develop them, and this means that FL learners are inevitably exposed to culture in the form of habits, values, norms of politeness, and so on, in the process of language learning. Teachers need to help their students to negotiate their encounters with a new culture, and it is often suggested that literary and other fictional materials are valuable for this purpose. (ibid, p.16)

B. Challenges Faced by EFL Learners (Understanding Literary Language)

The sad reality that we notice in our EFL classroom today is that a large number of students have difficulties in approaching literary texts. It is our task as researchers to suggest a strategy that may contribute to enhance students' will and ability to appreciate literary texts.

As literature teachers, we are teaching our students to hate literature. And this is clearly seen in the attitude of our students towards literature mainly literary texts. There are several malpractices in our classes such as assigning reading of different types of literary texts (very long texts).

Moreover, students' lack knowledge on the importance of learning literature. They find literary texts difficult to understand because of the language, it is impossible for them to

appreciate aesthetic values of a literary text, drawing moral values, understanding deviations and even the use of imagery.

C. Literary Texts: Background

Literary texts use language to transmit their messages to the readers. Thus, language is of great importance in literature. Writers, poets and even playwrights use language in an aesthetic way to convey their messages and to make their texts unique. According to Carter (1997), literary language is the language of literature, it is found in literary texts (p.123). Most of the studies researching on literary language have defined literary language from different perspectives formalists such as Shklovsky, Tynyanov, Eichenbaum and Jakobson said that literary language is deviant language (Carter, 1997, p.124)

They add that language used in literature is therefore different because it makes strange, disturbs, upsets our 'normal' view of things and thus generates new or renewed perceptions. For example, the phrase ' *a grief ago*' would be poetic by virtue of its departure from semantic selection restrictions which state that only temporal nouns such as '*week*' or '*month*' can occur in such a sequence. (ibid)

Literary language in this view is flowery (or, more positively, 'elevated'), unusually figurative, often old-fashioned and difficult to understand, and indirect (for example, 'symbolic'); all in all totally unlike the language we use and encounter in everyday life. Readers and teachers of literature will recognize a limited validity to these kinds of charges. Those who resist the introduction of literary texts into language learning classrooms have often relied on such characteristics of literary language. Those who advocate literature in language classrooms need to be able to offer an informed response to these charges of linguistic irrelevance and inappropriate difficulty. In practice, as we shall see, research has found it difficult to identify any clear boundaries between literary and non-literary uses of language, or to catalogue any definitive list of distinguishing features. Although some tendencies undoubtedly emerge from linguistic investigations into the language of literary texts, even these do not quite conform to the stereotype with which (Hall, G., 2005: 10).

D. Characteristics of Literary Texts

According to Lazar (1993), literature involves a special, or unusual, use of language. Literary Language has the following linguistics features : metaphor, simile, assonance, alliteration, repetition of words or phrases, unusual syntactic patterns e.g. reversing the order of subject and verb ,double or multiple meaning of word, poeticisms (poetic lexis), mixing of styles / registers (Lazar ,1993,p.7).

From the language teaching point of view, it is thought to be valuable because literary texts are authentic, motivating, and a 'stimulus for language acquisition' (Lazar, 1993, pp.14–15). It also provides exposure to linguistic creativity and opportunities for developing intercultural understanding (ibid, p.12). Widdowson (1975) in particular is credited for providing 'an impressive intellectual foundation for such procedures' (Parkinson & Thomas, 2000, p.6).

Like the formalists, Widdowson draws attention to the carefully crafted patterns of figurative language that are characteristic of literary texts, and he suggests that by drawing students' attention to these patterns in a systematic way, teachers can provide students with a starting point for an interpretation of a given literary text. In the process, they help students to develop their interpretative skills. This should benefit them directly as language learners because interpretation is necessary with all discourse. Widdowson also emphasizes the importance of comparing and contrasting literary and nonliterary discourse in order to raise students' awareness of the different ways in which linguistic resources may be deployed (ibid, p.19)

Another important feature that characterizes a literary text is 'literariness'. Jakobson is the first who used this term considering it one of the characterizing properties of a text (Erich, 1981, p.628). He advocates that literariness stands for linguistic and formal properties which discriminate non-literary or ordinary language from literary language. (ibid)

E. Stylistics

To overcome the aforementioned challenges, we use stylistics as an approach that enhance reading literary text. As (Simpson, 2004) advocates that The purpose of stylistics is to connect linguistic analysis with literary criticism (Simpson.,2004,p.3). The term stylistics covers a diversity of practices. In one sense, it is an approach to literary criticism and interpretation that has its roots in the formalist tradition. Short, Freeman, van Peer, and Simpson (1998) characterize it as an approach to interpretation that is based on an 'analysis of the linguistic structure of texts' (Picken, p.46).

Wales (2001) also emphasizes its focus on interpretation in her definition of stylistics as an approach that typically involves an analysis of formal features of literary texts 'in order to show their FUNCTIONAL significance for the INTERPRETATION of the text' (Wales, 2001, pp. 372–373). Stylistics is a method of applied language study which uses textual analysis to make discoveries about the structure and function of language (ibid, p.4).

According to Simpson (1997), stylistics also has a specifically linguistic function. It offers an invaluable testing ground for theories and constructs in linguistics. Many linguistic theories are highly abstract and do not rest easily beside actual language usage. It allows different readers to come to an interpretation to the literary text. Stylistics is an empowering tool, because it helps explain the multiple and varied responses to linguistic patterning which different readers experience when reading texts.(ibid). "This paper shed lights on the value of stylistics in educational situations where learners are reading, discussing and re-working texts in an 'additional' language" (Block, 2003, p.57). All in all, stylistics enriches students' ways of thinking about language. And it enables them 'to act as a linguist and literary critic at the same time which in turn make them competent users of the language.

Conclusion

This paper attempted to show how literature is a resource that helps students to shift from teacher-centred learning to student-centred learning. Such learning experience promises improvements in language fluency and communicative competence, and raises literary awareness of EFL learners.

In a nutshell ,EFL learners become more responsible about their own learning, enlarge their language acquisition beyond the classroom boundaries , and develop their critical thinking. On the other hand, to help their students gain these benefits, EFL teachers are requested, not only, to develop their knowledge about FL pedagogy but also to adopt approaches provided by modern linguistics mainly stylistics which serves as the suitable pedagogical tool in this context.

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