

Language Learning Through Literature

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Аннотация:

В данной статье рассматриваются вопросы использования полезных методов и приёмов в преподавание языка, посредством поэзии, романов и рассказов.

Annotation:

In this article, I try to define by language learning through literature, outline some of the benefits it can bring to the language learning classroom and some of the differing methods and approaches that can be utilized to fully exploit the potential of Short stories, Poems, Novels, Plays.

Key Words: *Literature, Teaching Literature, The Teaching of Language Skills, Foreign Language Teaching, Literary Competence*

Ключевые слова: *литература, обучение литературе, обучении литературного искусство, обучение иностранного языка, литературный способности*

The articles aims at emphasizing the use of literature as a popular technique for teaching both basic language skills (i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking) and language areas (i.e. vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) in our times. Reasons for using literary texts in foreign language classroom and main criteria for selecting suitable literary texts in foreign 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 are taken into account.

Teaching Literature: why and what

The use of literature as a technique for teaching both basic language skills (i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking) and language areas (i.e. vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) is very popular within the field of foreign language learning and teaching nowadays. Moreover, in translation courses, many language teachers make their students translate literary texts like drama, poetry and short stories into the mother tongue, Uzbek. Since translation gives students the chance

to practice the lexical, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and stylistic knowledge they have acquired in other courses, translation both as an application area covering four basic skills and as the fifth skill is emphasized in language teaching. In the following section, why language teachers use literary texts in the foreign language classroom and main criteria for selecting suitable literary texts in foreign 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

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?

John McRae (1994) distinguishes between literature with a capital L - the classical texts e.g. Shakespeare, Dickens - and literature with a small l, which refers to popular fiction, fables and song lyrics. The literature used in ELT classrooms today is no longer restricted to canonical texts from certain countries e.g. UK, USA, but includes the work of writers from a diverse range of countries and cultures using different forms of English.

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: Short stories, Poems, Novels, Plays, 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 practice 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 world of course books.

Literary texts are representational rather than referential (McRae, 1994). 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.

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. Duff and Maley (2007) stress that teachers can cope with many of the challenges that literary texts present, if they ask a series of questions to assess the suitability of texts for any particular group of learners:
 - Is the subject matter likely to interest this group?
 - Is the language level appropriate?
 - Is it the right length for the time available?
 - Does it require much cultural or literary background knowledge?
 - Is it culturally offensive in any way?
 - Can it be easily exploited for language learning purposes?
- Duff and Maley (2007) also emphasise the importance of varying task difficulty as well as text difficulty:
- Level 1 Simple text + low level task
 - Level 2 Simple text + more demanding task
 - Level 3 Difficult text + low level task
 - Level 4 Difficult text + more demanding task

How can literary texts be used?

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.

Pulverness (2003) provides some useful advice: Maximise pre-reading support. 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.

We often give stories to our students to read, but how often do we tell them a story? Let us look at the benefits of storytelling and gives advice on performance skills

- What can storytelling offer?
- Storytelling and intercultural understanding
- Other benefits of using storytelling in the classroom
- Commonalities of cultures around the world
- Performance techniques
- A last word

What can storytelling offer?

Children have an innate love of stories. Stories create magic and a sense of wonder at the world. Stories teach us about life, about ourselves and about others. Storytelling is a unique way for students to develop an understanding, respect and appreciation for other cultures, and can promote a positive attitude to people from different lands, races and religions.

Storytelling and intercultural understanding

There are a number of ways in which storytelling can enhance intercultural understanding and communication. Stories can...

- allow children to explore their own cultural roots
- allow children to experience diverse cultures
- enable children to empathise with unfamiliar people/places/situations
- offer insights into different traditions and values
- help children understand how wisdom is common to all peoples/all cultures
- offer insights into universal life experiences
- help children consider new ideas
- reveal differences and commonalities of cultures around the world

Other benefits of using storytelling in the classroom

Stories...

- Promote a feeling of well-being and relaxation
- Increase children's willingness to communicate thoughts and feelings

- Encourage active participation
- Increase verbal proficiency
- Encourage use of imagination and creativity
- Encourage cooperation between students
- Enhance listening skills

Commonalities of cultures around the world

Stories reveal universal truths about the world. Through stories we see how very different people share the same life experiences and how human nature can transcend culture.

Telling a story can captivate an audience; that is, with the right techniques and a little practice.

Remembering and retelling the plot:

- map the plot as a memory technique
- use story skeletons to help you remember the key events
- think of the plot as a film or a series of connected images
- tell yourself the story in your own words
- create your own version of the story (adapt and improvise)
- retell it numerous times until it feels like a story

Literature plays an important role in the English programs of many non-Englishspeaking countries. However, there are some problems encountered by language teacherswithin the area of teaching English through literature. First, there are very fewpedagogically-designed appropriate materials that can be used by language teachers in alanguage classroom. Second, there is a lack of preparation in the area of literature teaching inTESL / TEFL programs. Third, there is the absence of clear-cut objectives defining the role ofliterature in ESL /EFL. Many instructors try to include literature in their classroom, but lackthe background and training in that field.The teacher has an important role in teaching English through literature. First, heshould determine the aim of language teaching in relation to the needs and expectations of thestudents. Giving a questionnaire or interviewing with the students orally, the teacher can setup the aim and the objectives of the language teaching. Second, he should select theappropriate language teaching method, teaching techniques, and classroom activities. Then,the teacher should select the literary texts relevant to the aim and the objectives of histeaching. While selecting literary texts to be used in language classroom, the students'language proficiency, interests, age, sex, etc should be taken into account in order not to borestudents with inappropriate materials. At elementary levels, for example, students should begiven simplified or specially written stories. At advanced levels, however, students are givenliterature in its original form so that they can develop their literary competence in the targetlanguage. To put it another way, students learn

practically the figurative and daily use of the target language in the literary texts and encounter different genres of literature (i.e. poems, short stories, plays, etc.) at advanced levels. Observing how characters in a play or a short story use figures of speech, such as simile, metaphor, metonymy, etc so as to express their communicative intention, students learn how to write English more clearly, creatively, and powerfully. As Obediat (1997:32) states, literature helps students acquire a native-like competence in English, express their ideas in good English, 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. Custodio and Sutton (1998:20) explain that literature can open horizons of possibility, allowing students to question, interpret, connect, and explore.

In sum, literature provides students with an incomparably rich source of authentic material over a wide range of registers. If students can gain access to this material by developing literary competence, then they can effectively internalize the language at a high level (Elliot 1990:198). Especially, for students with verbal / linguistic intelligence, the language teacher's using literature in a foreign language class serves for creating a highly motivating, amusing and lively lesson. Literature is not only a tool for developing the written and oral skills of the students in the target language but also is a window opening into the culture of the target language, building up a cultural competence in students.

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