

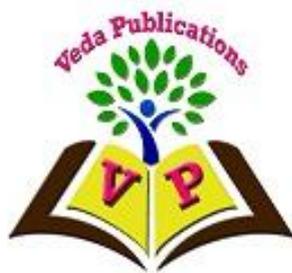


## TEACHING LANGUAGE THROUGH LITERATURE

Ms. Rajkumari Jadhav

(Faculty of English, English Language Teaching Institute of Symbiosis (ELTIS), Pune.)

### ABSTRACT



Literature offers a rich source of linguistic input and can aid learners to practise the four language skills and also to develop all essential language areas. Simultaneously, new vocabulary is presented to the learners which surely helps them enrich their speech.

In the paper, the presenter analyses the scope of English Literature in motivating second language English learners towards improving their linguistic and pragmatic competence. Though there are a few challenges which are discussed shortly in the paper, it is not really tough to use literature in language classrooms. The challenges could certainly be overcome by a skillful application of texts. To prove the very fact, the presenter tries to share her experiences and some activities as well, that she found very useful as a student and a teacher of the English language.

Mc Rae says, 'Literary texts are representational rather than referential. The representational language of literary text involves the learners and engages their emotions and cognitive faculties.' This is achieved quite possibly with the literary texts that deal with the universal themes like love, war, loss etc. Therefore the present paper tries to illustrate the points with the help of the examples based on such touching themes, specifically the examples from Indian English Literature.

English literature is abundant and rich, so it is possible to use it selectively to teach various aspects of the English Language in ESL classrooms. In this paper the overall aim is to find ways of using literature which will fulfill students expectations related to the enrichment of the target language.

**Keywords:** *Competence, Representational, Cognitive faculties, Application.*



## INTRODUCTION

Language being one of the most effective mediums of giving vent to one's feelings is obviously the sole of literature. Literature gives free expression to one's emotions using a language itself. These two entities cannot be considered separately at all.

Literature undoubtedly widens one's sense of understanding a language in a context and through effective use of a language; reader's tender interest in literature is fostered. Hence language and literature are interwoven with each other.

Student's main purpose of being in the classroom should be achieved in all possible ways while dealing with literature. As literature involves aesthetic use of language, if it is not used discreetly, there is a possibility of students getting confused or misled unnecessarily. As a result, they may lose their interest in learning the target language. That is why, teachers should provide a well-constructed path to students which leads them towards achieving fluency.

As mentioned earlier, both literature and language are completely inseparable. It is said that literature is nothing but the formal written version of the language. Teachers perhaps attempt to teach language through literature in a better way, still difficulties are obvious to some extent in this part too. To illustrate this remark let us take an example of Shakespearean literature, "How will one teach or learn syntax with it?" That would be very challenging. It clearly tells that literature and language commune with each other.

While explaining the co-relation between literature and language, Sharon Vaughn (2007:191) has rightly said, "Languages are more to us than systems of thought transference. They are invisible garments that drape themselves about our spirit and give a predetermined form to all its symbolic expression. When the expression is of unusual significance, we call it literature". In brief, literature is the symbolic expression of a language carrying unusual significance.

## CHALLENGES FACED WHILE USING LITERATURE IN THE CLASSROOM

Though the use of literature in English classroom proves to be beneficial to students, as a

teacher, one has to face many difficulties regarding selection and application of a literacy text.

Teachers need to select a text as per the scope and relevance of the topic and interest of the learners. Selection also needs to be made as per the students' level of comprehension and their age group. It is always better to prefer the shorter texts to the long ones. There are many advantages to it. Short texts can be covered in available time and there is a less possibility of students getting intimidated, seeing the thickness of books. If students are able to cope with complicated matter easily, teacher can choose longer texts too which provide more contextual details and development of characters and a plot.

### I. LITERATURE FOR IMPROVEMENT OF LANGUAGE SKILLS

All the four language skills – LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing) are very important and need equal focus by the learners. As in the first language acquisition, one tends to listen before speaking and to read before writing. Likewise in the process of learning other tongue, more attention has to be paid to the reading and listening skills than other skills to become reasonably good at them. All this can be achieved through the balanced use of literature.

If a piece of literature is selected by a teacher considering students' age group, learning ability, scope of the lesson etc. and read out loudly with proper pronunciation, intonation and stress etc. in a classroom, students would listen to it and of course; they would grasp it accordingly. Later, they would definitely try to adopt the same ways of speaking. Hence students improve their listening as well as speaking skill.

The presenter remembers her professor, before he intended to teach any piece of literature, especially a poem, would play a recording of a few other poems based on the same theme, recorded in his own voice. We as students were cheered to listen to him carefully, paying attention specifically to accent, pronunciation, rhythm and vocabulary. The activity later would be followed by brainstorming with teacher's discretion and in a flow; we were guided towards the discussion for the prescribed poem. Undoubtedly, such a special activity



contributed, to a good extent to the development of students' listening and speaking skills.

Reading helps us understand the ins and outs of almost every area of a language. This of course happens gradually. As a new learner of a language, a student may not have a clear idea; but instead of leaving the attempt; if he /she keeps on reading constantly, in a short period of time, the complicated things in a written discourse may become comprehensible and graspable and unknowingly a person starts getting involved in it.

One's reasonable achievement in reading skill leads him / her automatically to write well. More you read more knowledge you gain and then you try to express that knowledge through words on a piece of paper.

Thus all these language skills need to be developed focusing equally on them. As they always go hand in hand, as a learner one has to work on them in a parallel manner. Literature reflects real life situations and hence readers are connected to it easily. So it can always be used as one of the aids for enhancement of language skills.

## II. TEACHING LANGUAGE THROUGH A PLAY

The traditional way of teaching a play is just to read it in the classroom, to discuss the difficult words and different traits of the characters with students, to talk on the main idea and finally to deal with the question- answers. Now, taking into consideration this methodology of teaching a play, a few very serious questions arise like, "Do students actually learn or enjoy the play?", "Does this method of teaching prove to be useful towards students' language development? "Answers would certainly be no."

A play is one of the most enjoyable elements of literature. If it is taught in a classroom with students' active involvement, it would surely be a delightful learning experience for them. Our main focus; indeed is to know how the teaching of a play affects students' language positively. It means we will have to focus on the aspects which could be helpful for the improvement of students' linguistic as well as communicative competence.

A very effective activity that is suggested commonly is role play. The fictitious lives of characters in a text can be materialised on stage by

students with teacher's influential role as an instructor. In the process itself, students' pronunciation, intonation, stress etc. should be corrected by a teacher. Students' hesitation while saying the dialogues can be reduced by motivating them. Teachers should also pay attention to students' syntax. Teachers may find it interesting to incorporate voice techniques into the teaching of Phonetics. This benefits and enables them to achieve remarkable improvement in their accent and articulation.

Along with role play, group work can be used to rewrite dialogues in reported speech using a range of verbs. (e. g. suggest, mumble, wonder etc.) In this manner, students can be motivated to use language with confidence and they may improve their linguistic competence.

## III. TEACHING LANGUAGE THROUGH A POEM

Poems are often rich in cultural references and they present a wide range of learning opportunities. For the presenter here the main aim is, to discuss briefly how English language is taught effectively through poetry.

### SOME METHODS TO BE USED FOR LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH POETRY.

- i) Students are asked to summarise a poem in less number of words and talk about it in brief.
- ii) Synonyms and antonyms of words are asked for vocabulary development.
- iii) Students are asked theme related questions. To answer them they would surely try to speak. Hence their speaking may develop.
- iv) For the speaking assignment, students are asked to talk about the poem with a partner first and then in a small group. That will later be followed by some questions to make students speak more. Teacher should not ask very general questions like "Did you like the poem?" Did you understand its theme? etc.
- v) A teacher should welcome students' personal responses and discussion of moral or cultural issues; if a poem has any.
- vi) Role plays and dramatising the poems also work well in language classrooms.

If you wish to use the poetry genre in the language classrooms as a teacher, try to avoid very long, vague, obscure and archaic poems. Students



should find the poems involving, engaging, inspiring and memorable.

Thus by implementing various innovative ways especially the skillful use of poetry in ESL classrooms, students' sense of appreciation could also be aroused.

#### **IV. TEACHING LANGUAGE THROUGH NOVEL AND SHORT STORIES**

There is a lot of scope for improving language with the help of one of the popular literary genres i.e. a novel. Along with it, short stories could also play an important role.

Gallian Lazer (1993:29) has suggested the activities which are fairly typical language based activities and may make use of novels and short stories effectively in English language classroom. They are as follows as quoted in the book-

##### **Activity 1**

Students are given a piece of descriptive writing from a novel or a short story from which all adverbs and adjectives are removed. They rewrite the texts adding those they think will liven it up, and compare their version with the original. They may use a dictionary to help them.

##### **Activity 2**

After they have read it, students are given three different summaries of a novel or a short story. They have to decide which summary is the most accurate.

##### **Activity 3**

Students read a dialogue from a novel and then improvise their own role play of what happens next.

##### **Activity 4**

Students are given an extract from a novel or a short story in which all tenses are removed. They are provided with the actual verbs to fill in. After completing this task, they compare their test with the original.

As a teacher of the English language, if the above activities are employed properly, students' interest in learning the language would definitely increase and the overall teaching learning process would become amicable.

#### **V. LITERATURE AND STYLISTICS**

Stylistics involves a close study of a literary text and has two main objectives-

- i) To enable students to make meaningful interpretations of the text itself.
- ii) To expand students' knowledge and awareness of the language in general.

The use of language differs from culture to culture, region to region and even individual to individual. As we know, individuals and social groups make a choice in their use of language. These choices show differences mainly with respect to their dialects and tone. It is said, "Language changes every twelve miles". It means that the style of language speaking undergoes subtle changes as it crosses boundaries.

Stylistics specifically focuses on idiolects (individual dialects), the use of dialogues and syntactic structures in them. The analysis of a particular language register and the distribution of sentence lengths are also the features of Stylistics.

Literature has a wide scope to be studied with stylistic perspective and it is quite interesting. For M.A. there was the detailed study of G.B. Shaw's play, 'Pygmalion'. The book helped us a lot to be studied with stylistic approach. Our professor trained us assigning the roles of different characters in the play with their original dialects (native) and tone. We adopted speaking styles of the characters in the play and performed the play in the classroom in an exciting manner.

The presenter mentions the experience purposefully to emphasise the effective use of literature in the study of stylistics. Thus, although the aim of using Stylistics is to help students to read and study literature more competently, it also provides them with excellent language practice.

#### **VI. LITERATURE AND PRAGMATICS**

Pragmatics is simply defined as the study of how utterances have meanings in situations (contexts). Language use is rhetorical so as a speaker one has to get such ability of using language as per the context, following all the principles of language (cooperative principles, politeness principles, etc.) directly or indirectly. Pragmatic competence is achieved only by close study of language. Otherwise there a possibility of students committing mistakes while using the language. Unless students become



competent users of the target language, as interlocutors they cannot communicate successfully.

There are ample examples in literary texts which make clear the differences between the superficial level meaning and implied meaning of utterances, when they are used in different contexts. As a speaker, language use has to be made carefully and appropriately; so that the listeners can get the hidden meanings and implications etc. very easily to make the communication effective.

The presenter has done pragmatic analysis of Bapsi Sidhwa's 'Ice Candy Man' for her M.Phil dissertation with almost thirty eight examples from the novel. The novel is based on the theme of partition (India- Pakistan) and full of indirect speech acts and implicatures.

**For instance:**

"If anyone is to blame, blame the British! There was no polio in India till they brought it here"! ( P 18 )

This indirect speech act is very suggestive. Before English came to India, India was a united nation. People from different religions lived harmoniously without any discrimination. The British came and everything changed. People from different communities started quarrelling. They wished to be separated from each other. Friends became enemies. When Lenny's (the narrator) mother starts blaming herself for her daughter's polio, Col Barucha (one of the main characters) stops her and asks her to blame the British. According to him, British came and ruined India. They brought polio in the country. Here one sees not only the disabling body, but also minds of people.

The example clearly proves how the indirect or implied meaning differs from the word to word meaning; but to get this ability one has to study the language in use closely. That is quite possible with the help of literature.

## VII. ENHANCEMENT OF LANGUAGE WITH MUSIC AND SONGS

Arthur Krystal (2009: 41) has rightly said, "Literary means not only what is written but what is voiced, what is expressed, what is invented in whatever form- in which case, music and songs huddle surely beneath the literary umbrella".

Teachers can use music and songs in the language classrooms to motivate students to learn the second language with excitement. For this, they should choose the material prudently and use it appropriately. Musical notes enhance students' listening skill. Songs help them to understand the lyrics, accent, vocabulary and intonation; of course with rhythm. By listening to English songs students can acquaint themselves to native pronunciation which improves their ability to understand the native accent as well as the language. This indeed; inspires them to sing tunefully. Thereby, they tend to utter the words and automatically get speaking practice, to some degree. Hence students can improve their listening as well as speaking potential to the beat of the music and songs.

While researching on this particular topic, the presenter came across the related paper of Ms. Sharmishtha Basu (2016:155). There, she mentions her experience of language enhancement through some short term project which she had undertaken. She succeeded in building frustrated students' confidence for speaking English, by playing the songs of the popular English movie 'Sound of Music' in the classroom. Her experiment is really awesome and delightful. It surely motivates English teachers to use songs and music to a large extent and hence make students learn the language with immense pleasure.

## CONCLUSION

When one learns English as a foreign language, after getting adequate fluency, one has to pursue consistently to be accurate at its use. Literature plays an unbelievable role in students' journey from fluency to accuracy.

Literature also helps ESL learners to understand and develop their love towards the target language. The selection of literature should suit the age group and grasping ability of the students and should be apt to draw their attention too.

The present paper is an attempt to underline the significance of literary texts for the development of all essential language skills and two most important language areas like Stylistics and Pragmatics. The tactful use of music and songs which huddle beneath the literary umbrella is also not negligible.



Despite some difficulties in implementation, if literature is used thoughtfully and skillfully, learners' efficiency in language use can get improved remarkably.

#### REFERENCES

- [1]. Basu, S. 2016. Let's Enhance our Listening Power with Musical Notes. Paper published in *AJES*, Vol-5, Issue no.1&2: 153-159.
  - [2]. Brown, J.2006. Rhymes, Stories and Songs in the ESL classroom. The internet TESL Journal. Available at: [ <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Brown-Rhymes.html>]
  - [3]. Ching, et al.1980. *Linguistic Perspective on Literature*, Routledge and Kegam Paul, London.
  - [4]. Fowler, R. 1981. *Literature as Social Discourse: the practice of linguistic criticism*, Batsford, London.
  - [5]. Gillian, L.1993. *Literature and Language Teaching*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
  - [6]. Krystal, A. 2009. *Except when I Write: Reflections of a Recovering Critic*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
  - [7]. Sharon, V.2007. *The study of English Language*, Anmol Publications, New Delhi.
  - [8]. Sidhwa, B.1988. *Ice Candy Man*, Penguin Book, New Delhi.
  - [9]. Thorat, A. 2002. *A Discourse Analysis of Five Indian Novels*, Macmillan, Delhi.
-