

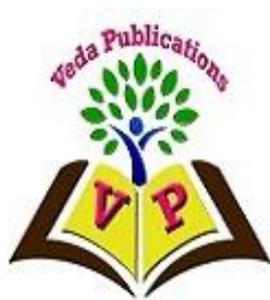


## TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE THROUGH LITERATURE: AN INTERPRETATION

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### ABSTRACT



Emerging from a colorful history, to its Darwinian capacity to evolve and adapt and changing almost beyond assumption along the way, English has come of age as the 'global common language'. It is constantly moulded and altered by new communities of users, whether geographic or digital. But as English advances to become a key basic skill for millions around the world, the world will need to invest in its own competitive advantage by sending more of its best and brightest young people out into the world to share and teach the language.

Teaching English language is a necessity in today's world. Finding innovative ways to teach English is the need of the hour. One of the best practices of teaching English is through literature, which is quiet effective and amusing. This practice does not include the tedious way of teaching English through grammar. My paper discusses few pieces of literature through which language can be taught. The paper includes discussion on poems like Telephone Conversation, Writing Curriculum Vitae and Goodbye Party to Ms. Pushpa T. S which focus on Telephone etiquettes, Resume writing and tenses. Prose texts like Toasted English, Spoken English and Broken English and Politics of the English language throw light on correction of errors, American English and language variations.

**Keywords:** *Teaching English, Language Acquisition, Proficiency Acquisition, Communication*

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**INTRODUCTION**

It is widely acknowledged that a literary text with richness and variety can be stimulating for language learners and can be used to elicit a wide range of responses from the learners which are facilitating for language teaching and learning. It can stimulate imagination of the learners, offer specimens of authentic use of language and provide ample opportunities for discussions. It ensures students' personal involvement in the learning process and bridges the gaps between the cultures and makes them familiar with the norms and behaviors of the people of the target language. Thus the use of literary text in language class can act as a means of cultural enrichment. It helps the learners to get familiar with the socio-political backgrounds of target language society and also makes them understand how communication takes place in a particular community. This broadens their horizon of understanding the common human nature. The learners are exposed to actual language samples from real life and literature acts as a beneficial complement to such materials. Brumfit and Carter (1986:15) assert the point that "a literary text is authentic text, real language in context, to which we can respond directly". Such a text securely grips the reader's imagination and makes scopes for the examination of the language as well.

According to Povey's (1972) observation "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" (cited in McKay 1982: 529). The rich context that literature provides makes individual lexical or syntactical items more memorable. A substantial and contextualized reading broadens and enriches students' writing skill by making them familiar with various features of writing style such as the formation and function of sentences, structural variation, cohesive and cohesion. Collie and Slater (1987: 4) suggest that "in reading literary texts students have also to cope with language intended for native speakers and thus they gain additional familiarity with many different linguistic uses, forms and conventions of the written

mode: with irony, exposition, argument, narration, and so on."

Canagrajah (1999: 176) emphasizes that learners should learn "to use English not mechanically and diffidently, but creatively and critically". While developing students' English language skills, literature simultaneously appeals to their imagination, develops cultural awareness and encourages critical thinking. Literature can be helpful in the language learning process by ensuring reader's personal involvement in the learning process. While core language teaching materials concentrate on language as a rule-based system and as a socio-semantic system, literature enables learners to achieve control over foreign language going beyond mechanical aspects of the language system.

**TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE THROUGH LITERATURE**

Language teaching is a process whose aim changes not only from country to country and culture to culture but from individual to individual. The problems faced in teaching foreign languages forced the teachers to find out and develop some new methods and techniques. The so-called "Communicative Language Teaching", which is very popular nowadays, gives credit to the use of the "authentic language" as it is used in a real life context whenever possible. "Structured Drills", which are widely used in especially 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 entertaining and interesting. In order to teach English language through literature, the texts should be chosen carefully, because it should not be forgotten that in these texts there may be grammatical, linguistic, and literal difficulties. Literary texts should include simple points about grammar and language. There should not be difficult and ambiguous structures in the texts. Some of the texts discussed below definitely help the students to learn language.

**"TELEPHONE CONVERSATION" BY WOLE SOYINKA**

"Telephone Conversation" is a poem which throws light on the concept of racism. Though the



poem appears to be simple, it is highly sarcastic. Here the poet who is an African man is conversing with a white lady regarding the premises for rent. The lady humiliates the man by querying about the skin color and the man is offended and replies to her in a very ironical tone. The poem ends with a thunderclap of phone by the lady. When it comes to language learning, this poem helps us to learn how not to communicate over phone with a stranger. The poem is also an evidence of how the styles of telephone conversation and communication in English differ with the Third and the First world. The points to remember about the etiquettes of Telephone conversation through this poem are as follows:

1. Avoid an awkward silence while talking
2. Begin the conversation by polite form of address
3. Speak clearly and be audible [don't shout]
4. Don't underestimate the person you are talking to
5. Don't end the conversation abruptly

#### **"GOODBYE PARTY TO MS PUSHPA T S" BY NISSIM EZEKIEL**

"Goodbye Party to Ms Pushpa T S" is a humorous poem on the wrong usage of English by the Indians. As the title goes the poem is about a goodbye party held for Ms Pushpa wishing her bon voyage. The poem indirectly hints on issues like Indian culture, gender and Indian English which are revealed through the speaker. The poem is popularly known for the wrong usage of English which is an alien tongue. When the aspects of language are studied in this poem, the poem has errors in the formation of sentences and tense forms. The poem can help us in framing the right sentences by using the right tenses. The points to be learnt are

1. Do not translate your thoughts in mother tongue into English as every language has its own semiotics and that reflects artificiality
2. The continuous tense should be used according to the time
3. Mention the numbers with a preposition in between [not two three]
4. Proper usage of 'only' and 'also'
5. Language and culture are interrelated

6. Expressions are natural and fluent in mother tongue and not in the other tongue

#### **"WRITING A CURRICULUM VITA" BY WISLAWA SZYMBORSKA**

"Writing a Curriculum Vita" is an amusing poem dealing with the technique of writing in a very satirical way. As people usually tend to boast and appraise themselves more and more in a CV, this poem ridicules such CVs and showcases the right way of writing a CV. The aspects to be learnt are

1. A Curriculum Vitae should be concise and short
2. Should include facts and fixed dates
3. Mention references. Who knows you is more important than whom you know
4. Mention travels abroad and awards
5. Write the CV in a very formal way

#### **"SPOKEN ENGLISH AND BROKEN ENGLISH" BY G B SHAW**

"Spoken English and Broken English" is a radio talk delivered by Shaw who elucidates on correct English, broken English and rules of English language. Shaw states and stuns the listeners by openly rejecting the English language and that declares it's the best language that can be used in the most confusing way. The talk is definitely relieving for the Third world who struggle to speak English as the natives do. Some aspects about language learning, mentioned in the talk are

1. There is no such thing as ideally correct English
2. Speech and pronunciation differ with every person, culture and country
3. Language in private and public vary from each other
4. English is not a perfect language with fixed rules
5. Do not try to imitate the native English
6. There is only presentable English which is called good English
7. Use broken English that is English without grammar

**"POLITICS AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE" BY GEORGE ORWELL**

"Politics and the English Language" is an elaborate essay on the rules of writing English language. George Orwell very elegantly discusses in detail, the factors about using written English in a proper way. He very surprisingly reveals the correlation of language and politics and how language loses its charm by too many made up applications and figures which fail to disclose the original beauty of a language. This essay is all about language learning. Some of the important views are

1. Decline of the language is caused by political and economic reasons
2. Consistent imitation of language declines the creativity and is clichéd
3. Staleness of imagery and lack of precision ruin the meaning of language
4. Dying metaphors, verbal false limbs, meaningless words and pretentious diction must be avoided
5. Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print
6. Never use a long word where a short one will do
7. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out
8. Never use the passive where you can use the active
9. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent
10. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous

**"TOASTED ENGLISH" BY R K NARAYAN**

The essay "Toasted English" by R K Narayan illustrates the varieties of English that are born out of necessity. It expresses the purviews of British, American and Indian English by exposing the differences. The tone is ironical and funny. The essay ponders over the vanity of English language and R K Narayan opines that language should be nativized and branded. The points discussed are

1. Language should be always simple and not exaggerated

2. Change, alter, suit and localize the language according to the local needs
3. Language should be simple enough to communicate
4. Indians have to seriously consider the question of a Bharat Brand of English
5. Maintain the rules of grammar with a *swadeshi* stamp on it
6. Mongrelization of English language should be prevented

**CONCLUSION**

Teaching Foreign Language Literature for non-native-speaking students is not always an easy task. In some cases, it is itself a situation taken from the absurd, in which the students are supposed to read books in a language they hardly understand and then they discuss structure, author's style etc. Literary texts will help not only to improve reading but listening, speaking and writing skills as well. It is possible to understand and get general information related with experiences and events in real life by using and analyzing literary texts. Literary texts will help to realize the individual and societal developments. They make the readers to improve themselves culturally and educationally in accordance with their emotional features.

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