

## USING LITERATURE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING (*Penggunaan Sastra dalam Pengajaran Bahasa*)

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### Abstrak

*Artikel ini membahas penggunaan sastra sebagai salah satu sumber dalam pengajaran bahasa. Berbagai isu teoretis tentang apa, mengapa, dan bagaimana sastra dalam pengajaran bahasa dipaparkan secara singkat. Puisi, prosa dan drama yang digunakan dalam pengajaran bahasa dipilih berdasar atas kebutuhan, minat, latar belakang budaya, tingkat kemampuan bahasa siswa. Beberapa alasan menggunakan sastra dalam pengajaran bahasa adalah materi autentik yang bernilai, memperkaya budaya, memperkaya bahasa, melibatkan pribadi, universal, bervariasi, menarik, ekonomis dan memiliki kekuatan sugestif, serta ambiguitas. Cara-cara penggunaan sastra dalam pengajaran bahasa bergantung pada pendekatan dan prinsip tertentu.*

**Kata kunci:** *sastra, sumber pengajaran, pengajaran bahasa*

### Abstract

This article discusses the use of literature for English Teaching. Various theoretical issues are exposed in briefly. Poetry, prose, and drama that are used in language teaching depend on need, interest, cultural background, and language level of students. Some reasons of using of literature in language teaching are valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment, personal involvement, universality, variety, interesting, economic and suggestive power, and ambiguity. The ways of using literature for language teaching depend on particular approach and principle.

**Key words:** literature, teaching resource, language teaching

### 1. Background

Literature has been a subject of study in many countries at any level of students. Literature in the language classroom has two purposes (Maley, 1989:10-11). First is the study of literature. The main focus of activity is on literature as cultural

artifact. In the second, literature becomes one source among others for promoting language learning. The primary concern will be to ensure that students interact with the text and with each other in ways which promote language learning.

Literature in language teaching has

a long history as primarily it was literary works that constituted the main tool in the process of foreign language learning. The role of literature in language teaching has been variously interpreted over the past 100 years Maley (2001:4). In earlier period, when the grammar-translation model was paramount, literary texts were the very staple of foreign language teaching, representing both models of good writing and illustrations of grammatical rules of language.

During the period of structural dominance, literature found itself sidelined. The formal properties of the language took precedence, and literature study was seen as part of the bad old 'traditional' methods. It was, moreover, difficult to justify the use of literary texts in a world where the grading of vocabulary and structures was given so much emphasis.

For a time the new functional-notional communicative movement also ignored literature. The emphasis was on pragmatic, efficient communication with no drills. Literature seemed like irrelevance.

Yet, in the last five years or so there has been a remarkable revival of interest in literature as one of the resources available for language teaching learning. In Indonesia, until recently literature has not given much emphasis in language teaching. That's why any scientific works about literature in language teaching are hoped to give many ideas for Indonesian English teachers.

## 2. Problem Statement

Considering the background mentioned above, the writer formulated some problem statements as follows.

- a. What is literature in connection with language teaching?
- b. Why use literature in language

teaching?

- c. How to use literature in language teaching?

## 3. Objective

The objectives of this paper is intended to describe about the relationship between literature and language teaching, also the reasons of using literature in language teaching, and the ways that literature can be used in language teaching.

## 4. Using Literature in Language Teaching

Having looked through the history of literature in ELT it is time to take a closer look at some of the prevailing theories of literature implementation in the language teaching. It is about what is literature in connection with language teaching, why use literature in language teaching, and how to use literature in language teaching?

### 4.1. What is literature in connection with language teaching?

#### a. What is literature?

First of all, any method or approach towards using literature in the classroom must take as a starting point the question: What is literature? The Macmillan English Dictionary gives the following definition: literature (noun) 1. stories, poems, and plays, especially those that are considered to have value as art and not just entertainment (Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 2003).

Many authors, critics and linguists have puzzled over what literature is. One broader explanation of literature says that literary texts are products that reflect different aspects of society. They are cultural documents which offer a deeper understanding of a country or countries. Other linguists say that there is no inherent quality to a literary text that makes a literary

text, rather it is the interpretation that the reader gives to the text (Eagleton, 1983). This brings us back to the above definition in the sense that literature is only literature if it is considered as art.

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 language 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 language classroom include short stories, poems, novels, plays, and song lyrics.

#### **b. What sort of literature is suitable for use with language learners?**

What sort of literature is suitable for use with language learners? The criteria of suitability clearly depend ultimately on each particular group of students, their needs, interests, cultural background and language level. However, one primary factor to consider is, we suggest, whether a particular work is able to stimulate the kind of personal involvement we have just described, by arousing the learners' interest and provoking strong, positive reactions from them. If it is meaningful and enjoyable, reading is more likely to have a lasting and beneficial effect upon the learners' linguistic and cultural knowledge. It is important to choose books, therefore, which are relevant to the life experiences, emotions, or dreams of the

learner. Language difficulty has, of course, to be considered as well. Because they have both a linguistic and a cultural gap to bridge, foreign students may not be able to identify with or enjoy a text which they perceive as being fraught with difficulty every step of the way. In the absence of curriculum or exam constraints, it is much better to choose a work that is not too much above the students' normal reading proficiency.

If the language of the literary work is quite straightforward and simple, this may be helpful but is not itself the most crucial yardstick. Interest, appeal and relevance are all more important. In order for us to justify the additional time and effort which will undoubtedly be needed for learners to come to grips with a work of literature in a language not their own, there must be some special incentive involved, enjoyment, suspense, a fresh insight into issues which are felt to be close to the heart of people's concerns. The delight of encountering one's own thoughts or situations encapsulated vividly in a work of art, the other, equal delight of finding those some thoughts or situations illuminated by a totally new, unexpected light or perspective. All these are incentives which can lead learners to overcome enthusiastically the linguistic obstacles that might be considered too great in less involving material.

It is therefore well worth the time spent in trying to achieve a good match between a particular group of learners and the literary work they will be asked to read. Questionnaires on tastes and interests can be useful. Another way of proceeding is to give the class a brief summary of three or four possibilities, perhaps with short extracts from the text, and let them choose the one they find the most appealing. A close runner-up can always become the text the class works with next.

Widdowson in *Stylistics and the*

Teaching of Literature, (1975) argues that by asking students to explore such sophisticated uses of language, we are also encouraging them to think about the norms of language use. Therefore, in order to understand the stylistic effect, students will need to be aware of how they differ from more common usage. However, it could also be argued that if the students are do not yet understand the norms of language, then poetical language that deviates from the norm would only cause more confusion. Obviously, the teacher must select material accordingly.

#### 4.2 Why use literature in language teaching?

There are many good reasons for using literature in the classroom. Collie and Slater (1991) states the reasons why should a language teacher use literary texts in the language classroom, they are:

a) Valuable Authentic Material. One of the main reasons might be that literature offers a bountiful and extremely varied body of written material which is 'important' in the sense that it says something about fundamental human issues, and which is enduring rather than ephemeral. Its relevance moves with the passing of time, but seldom disappears completely: The Shakespearean plays whose endings were rewritten to conform to late seventeenth-century taste, and which were later staged to give maximum prominence to the Romantic hero figures, are now explored for their psychoanalytic or dialectical import. In this way, though its meaning does not remain static, a literary work can transcend both time and culture to speak directly to a reader in another country or a different period of history.

Literature is 'authentic' material. By that we simply mean that most works of literature are not fashioned for

the specific purpose of teaching a language. Recent course materials have quite rightly incorporated many authentic samples of language say for example travel timetables, city plans, forms, pamphlets, cartoons, advertisements, newspaper or magazine articles. Learners are thus exposed to language that is as genuine and undistorted as can be managed in the classroom context. Literature is a valuable complement to such materials, especially once the initial 'survival' level has been passed. 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. And, although it may not be confined within a special network in the same way that a bus ticket or an advertisement might be, literature can none the less incorporate a great deal of cultural information.

b) Cultural Enrichment. For many language learners, the ideal way to deepen their understanding of life in the country where that language is spoken either a visit or an extended stay is just not possible. Some may start learning a language knowing that they are unlikely ever to set foot in an area where it is spoken by the majority of inhabitants. For all such learners, more indirect routes to this form of understanding must be adopted so that they gain an understanding of the way of life of the country: radio programs, films or videos, newspapers, and, last but not least, literary works. It is true of course that the worlds of a novel, play, or short story is a created one, yet it offers a full and vivid context in which characters *from* many social back-

grounds can be depicted. A reader can discover their thoughts, feelings, customs, and possessions: what they buy, believes in, fear, enjoy: how they speak and behave behind closed doors. This vivid imagined world can quickly give the foreign reader a feel for the codes and preoccupations that structure a real society. Reading the literature of a historical period is, after all, one of the ways we have to help us imagine what life was like in that other foreign territory: our own country's past. Literature is perhaps best seen as a complement to other materials used to increase the foreign learner's as a complement to other materials used to increase the foreign learners' insight into the country whose language is being learnt.

- c) Language Enrichment. We have said that reading literary works exposes the student to many functions of the written language, but what about other linguistic advantages? Language enrichment is one benefit often sought through literature. While there is little doubt that extensive reading increases a learner's receptive vocabulary and facilities transfer to a more active form of knowledge, it is sometimes objected that literature does not give learners the kind of vocabulary they really need. It may be 'authentic' in the sense already mentioned, but the language of literary works is, on the whole, not typical of daily life, nor is it like the language used in learners' textbooks. We would not wish students to think that Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'How do I love thee' is the kind of utterance normally whispered into a lover's ear nowadays! The objection to literature on the grounds of lexical propriety thus has some validity, but it need not be an overriding one if teachers make a judicious choice of the text to be read, con-

sidering it as a counterpoise and supplement to other materials.

- d) Personal involvement. Above all, literature can be helpful in the language learning process because of the personal involvement it fosters in readers. Core language teaching materials must concentrate on how a language operates both as a rule-based system and as a socio-semantic system. Very often, the process of learning is essentially analytic, piecemeal, and, at the level of the personality, fairly superficial. Engaging imaginatively with literature enables learners to shift the focus of their attention beyond the more enables learners to shift the focus of their attention beyond the more mechanical aspects of the foreign language system. When a novel, play or short story is explored over a period of time, the result is that the reader begins to 'inhabit' the text. He or she is drawn into the book. Pinpoint what individual words or phrases may mean becomes less important than pursuing the development of the story. The reader is eager to find out what happens as events unfold; he or she feels close to certain characters and shares their emotional responses. The language becomes 'transparent'; the fiction summons the whole person into its own world. We believe that this can happen and have beneficial effects upon the whole language learning process, as long as the reader is well motivated, and as long as the experience of engaging with literature is kept sufficiently interesting, varied and non-directive to let the reader feel that he or she is taking possession of a previously unknown territory. Obviously, the choice of a particular literary work will be important in facilitating this creative relationship which the reader establishes with the text. It is this question

we should like to consider next. Furthermore,

Maley (1989:11-13) says that there are many reasons for regarding literature as a peculiarly potent resource. In his views literature enjoys special advantages as follows:

- a) **Universality.** No known language is without literature (oral or written). The themes literature deals that are common to all cultures, though the treatment of them may be different-death, Jove separation, belief, nature etc. And even the genres, conventions and devices employed by literature are common across cultures (though of course there is no one to one correspondence).
- b) **Non-Triviality.** Many of the more familiar forms of language teaching inputs tend to trivialize texts or experience. Literature dose not trivialize or talk down. It is about things which mattered to the author when he writes them. It offers genuine as well as merely 'authentic inputs.
- c) **Personal relevance.** Because it deals with ideas, things, sensations and events which either form part of the readers' experience or which they can enter into imaginatively, they are able to relate it to their own lives.
- d) **Variety.** Literature includes within it all conceivable varieties of the language, and all possible varieties of subject matter. Within literature we shall find the language of law and of mountaineering, of medicine and of bullfighting, of church sermons and nursery talk. Students may be exposed to as much or as little of this as is desirable but they will never lack for variety.
- e) **Interest.** Literature deals with themes and topics which are intrinsically interesting, because part of the human experience, and treats them in ways designed to engage the reader's attention.

- f. **Economy and Suggestive power.** One of the great strengths of literature is its suggestive power. Even in its simplest forms it invites us to go to beyond what is said to what is implied. Because it suggests many ideas with few words, literature is deal for generating language discussion. Maximum output can often be derived for minimum input.
- g). **Ambiguity.** Because it is highly suggestive and associate, literature speaks subtly different meanings to different people. It is rare for two readers to react identically to any given text. In teaching this has two advantages. It means that, within limits, each learner's interpretation has validity also that, because each person's perception is different, an almost infinite fund of interactive discussion is guaranteed. The very fact no two readers will have a totally convergent interpretation sets up the tension necessary for a genuine exchange of ideas.

#### **4.3 How can literature be used?**

Once a poem, a novel or a play has been chosen, how best can the teacher and students works with it. There are some general principles. Firstly, some of the approaches that are often used when literature is taught. Then, the outline some of the aims that have guided the quest for ways of supplementing or even, in some cases, replacing these approaches.

- a) Some commonly used approaches to teaching literature. The perennial problem of how to teach language has in recent years become increasingly guided by the dominant aim of promoting the learner's communicative competence. When, however, the teacher introduces students to the literature of the foreign language, this communicative ideal too often vanishes. The way literature is presented often has a num-

ber of typical features.

Sometimes the teacher falls back upon a more traditional classroom role in which he or she sees him or herself as imparting information—about the author, the background to the work, the particular literary conventions that inform the text and so on. Learners are somehow expected to have the ability to take all this in and make it their own. Often the sheer difficulties of detailed comprehension posed by the intricacy or linguistic subtlety of the language turn the teaching of literature into a massive process of explanation by the teacher or even of translation, with the greater proportion of available classroom time devoted to a step by step exegetical exercise by the teacher.

At more advanced level of work with literature, the teacher may resort to the meta-language of criticism and this may both distance from their own response and cause them to undervalue it, whatever the gain in analytical terms. Even if the teacher hopes to do more sharpen students' own response to the literary work, there is often little guidance on how to do so. The time-honored technique of question-and-answer can provide some help. But, unless questions are genuinely open-ended, there is often a feeling on the part of the students that the teacher is slowly but surely edging them to particular answers that he or she has in mind. There is little room for either their own responses or their involvement during such sessions. In short, personal investment is minimal. All these teacher-centered approaches may foster detailed comprehension but students will probably not have made the text their own. Now will the classroom process have encouraged them to share their own views with each other, and they may not have used the target language very much.

b) Aims that underlie the approach. In

general terms, the aim is to complement more conventional approaches and so diversify the repertoire of classroom procedures. We hope this way to put fresh monument into the teaching of literature, to stimulate students' desire to read, and to encourage their response.

First step is maintaining interest and involvement by using a variety of student-centered activities. In establishing a number ways in which a text could be explored, we have tried to bear in mind that any approach used exclusively can turn to tedium in the classroom. We have found that role-play, improvisation, creative writing, discussions, questionnaires, visuals and many other activities which we use successfully to vary or language classes can serve a similar purpose when we teach literature. An array of enjoyable student-centered activities is particularly important when working with student who are not literature specialists and who may not as yet have developed a wish to read literature in the target language on their own initiative. Moreover, the availability of a variety of activities enables the teacher to concentrate on meeting students' weaknesses in particular skill areas in speaking or listening, for example.

Second step is supplementing the printed page. In devising activities for integrating language and literature we have borne in mind the notion that learning is promoted by involving as many of students' faculties as possible. By itself, the printed page can be a fairly cold, distancing medium appealing to a restricted part of the reader's visual sense and to he intellect. And yet, of course, the words that make up that printed page can create a whole new world inside the readers' imagination, world full of warmth and color. As teachers we try to exploit as fully as possible the emotional dimension that is

a very integral part of literature, though it is so often lacking in more neutral language learning texts.

Third step is tapping the resources of knowledge and experience within the group. Pair and group work are now established as a means both of increasing learner's confidence within the foreign language and also of personalizing their contact with it. Although it may seem paradoxical we have found that shared activity can be especially fruitful in helping the learner find a way into what is usually an intensely personal and private experience, that of coming to terms with and inhabiting an author's universe. In the creative endeavor of interpreting this new universe, a group with its various sets of life experiences can act as a rich marshalling device to enhance the individual's awareness both of his or her own responses and of the world created by the literary work. On a more practical level, working with a group can lessen the difficulties presented by the number of unknowns on a page of literary text. Very often someone else in a group will be able to supply the missing link or fill in an appropriate meaning of a crucial word, or if not, the task of doing so will become a shared one. Shifting attention away from the text itself to such shared activity is often conducive to the creation of a risk-taking atmosphere. With the group's support and control, the individual has greater freedom to explore his or her own reactions and interpretations. Above all, we hope that the group will stimulate learners to reread and ponder the text on their own.

Fourth step is helping students explore their own responses to literature. This aim has been strongly hinted at within those already discussed. Our activities try to help students to acquire the confidence to develop, express and value their own response. Through this process, we hope

that they will become less dependent on received opinion, therefore more interested in, and more able to assess other perspectives. Students who have had to accomplish a range of tasks and activities centered on literary text, often as a shared activity in groups, may come to be more personally familiar with that text. The effort they have brought to it and the personal investment they have made in it will sharpen their own response, making it more likely that they will want to extend their understanding of it by personal reading at home.

Fifth step is using the target language. One of the principles which fashions our classroom approach to literature is that of using the target language which the range of activities chosen. We want to give learners the maximum chance of entering the universe of any selected book. This will be facilitated if, instead of trying to transpose it into their own language and cultural experience, they try to put themselves imaginatively into the target situation. The main difficulty with this approach is, of course, that some learners may not yet possess the richness and subtlety of vocabulary and structure in which to couch their response in the target language. We feel that there are a number of ways in which students can be helped to express this response either non-verbally or by making a limited linguistic repertoire go a long way. If, however, in the discussion following a shared activity there is a reversion to the native language, in groups which have a common first language, then we feel that this is not a disaster. First of all, it usually indicates that the learners are enjoying the task and are engrossed in it; then, too, it shows that learners are bringing their knowledge and experience to bear on the new language, thus identifying with it and personalizing it. In order to achieve this aim of using the target lan-

guage at much as possible and framing about approach to the literary text consistently within its own language, we have tried hard to avoid the meta-language of critical discussion. We feel that concentration on this kind of language can undermine students' confidence in their own response especially when they are working in the target language.

The last step is integrating language and literature. The overall aim, then, of our approach to the teaching of literature is to let the student derive the benefits of communicative and other activities for language improvement within the context of suitable works of literature. Sharing literature with students is a spur to their acquiring these benefits, providing the teacher makes a balanced selection of activities and presents them with confidence.

There have been different models suggested on the teaching of literature to ESL/EFL students (Carter & Long). How the teacher will use a literary text depends on the model they choose. The cultural model stresses the target culture cognition as the language class priority. Students are to explore cultural phenomena so often widely present in literary works. The teacher plays a crucial role as he shows the importance of a given text and sheds light on given aspects inherent in the text. The text is viewed as a product whose background needs to be analyzed, whereas linguistic analysis is not considered vital.

The language model draws students to the text itself, to the structures and vocabulary used. It is student-centered and develops students' grammar and lexical skills as the focus is placed on comprehension and language exercise to enrich students' lexis. However, the perception of concepts, emotions and ideas that enliven the text disappear due to the fact that there is no time for their appreciation.

The personal growth model is

about fostering in students "a continuous love and appreciation of literary texts, which would continue beyond the classroom" (Carter and Long 1991: 3-6). Literature is about emotions and it provides a multitude of problems that can be subject to discussion. Then, the teacher should choose the texts that suit students' language proficiency level as well as their maturity. Enabling students to express their opinion on subject they do not treat indifferent to contributes to learners' involvement in class (Carter and Long 1991: 16-19).

It is the teacher's role to decide which model to adopt in their class. If possible, the implementation of all the three shall bring the best results. A literature-based activity may start with the language model, which focuses on the surface of the text. Next, a discussion may follow to encourage students to express their views, which is in the framework of the personal growth model. Finally, the teacher may highlight cultural aspects vivid in the text, in this way encompassing the cultural model. Taking the above into consideration, the teacher is the person to involve students in a given subject, while the models proposed above are the guidelines to be applied. As Ezra Pound said once "Great Literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree".

## **5. Conclusions**

The above discussion has shown that literature can be one source among others for promoting language learning. The important things that we have to take into account are the following.

Literary works that can be used for language teaching are short stories, poems, novels, plays, and song lyrics. The criteria of choosing the literary works depend ultimately on each particular group of students, their needs, interests, cultural back-

ground and language level.

The reasons for using literature in language teaching are valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment, personal involvement, universality, non-triviality, personal relevance, variety, interesting, economy and suggestive power, and ambiguity.

The ways of using literature for language teaching depend on the approaches that are often used when literature is taught. Then, the outline some of the aims that have guided the quest for ways of supplementing or even, in some cases, replacing these approaches. The aim is to complement more conventional approaches and so diversity the repertoire of classroom procedures. First step is maintaining interest and involvement by using a variety of student-centered activities. Second step is supplementing the printed page. Third step is tapping the resources of knowledge and experience within the group. Fourth step is helping students explore their own responses to literature. Fifth step is using the target language. The last step is integrating language and literature. Three suggested models of the process of language teaching are the cultural model, the language model and the personal growth model.

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