

LITERATURE AS MEDIA FOR DEVELOPING LANGUAGE COMPETENCE AND BUILDING SOCIAL AWARENESS

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ABSTRACT

Literature is a kind of the artwork which uses a language as a medium. If it said that literature is a language in one side, learning literature is, at the same time, learning a language in the other side. English literature is literature written in English language. In this relation, learning English literature is, at the same time, learning English language. If literature talks about human life, by using literary works we can learn and build our social awareness, and at almost the same time we can contribute to nation character building. In this paper, the writer offers the mechanism of how the literary works can be used to develop language competence (in listening, speaking, reading and writing) and the advantages of learning the literary works in relation to the social awareness building or nation character building.

Key words: Literature, language, language competence, social awareness, and character building

In the English language learning and teaching, there are four language skills to be developed: listening, speaking, reading and writing. In this paper, why and how a language teacher should use literary texts in the language classroom, what sort of literature language teachers should use with language learners, literature and the teaching of language skills, and benefits of different genres of literature to language teaching will be taken into account. Thus, the place of literature as a tool rather than an end in teaching English as a second or foreign language will be unearthed.

The material of literature is something very general, such as 'human life'. This implies that literature can deal with every human activity, or human experience. Some of these activities are peculiar, some are more widespread, and some are universal. Therefore, we should expect that literature is "the record of human experience". As the record of human experience, literature may record may some aspects of human culture, especially, of morality.

Based on the illustration above, literature can be used as medium to improve language skill and at the same it can be used to build human character. Learning literature is learning a language and at the same time the learners are made to be aware of morality.

The Use of Literature in Language Teaching

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 other language. 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.

Literature is interesting and stimulating. It will allow a reader to imagine worlds they are not familiar with. This is done through the use of descriptive language. In order to understand, the reader will create their vision of what the writer is saying. In this sense, the reader becomes a performer or an actor in a communicative event as they read. Using literature versus a communicative textbook (conversational English) changes the learning approach from learning *how to say* into learning *how to mean* (grammar vs. creative thinking).

There are four main reasons which lead a language teacher to use literature in the classroom. These are valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement. In addition to these four main reasons, universality, non-triviality, personal relevance, variety, interest, economy and suggestive power and ambiguity are some other factors requiring the use of literature as a powerful resource in the classroom context.

Valuable Authentic Material

Literature is authentic material. Most works of literature are not created for the primary purpose of teaching a language. Many authentic samples of language in real-life contexts (i.e. travel timetables, city plans, forms, pamphlets, cartoons, advertisements, newspaper or magazine articles) are included within recently developed course materials. Thus, in a classroom context, learners are exposed to actual language samples of real life / real life like settings. Literature can act as a beneficial complement to such materials, particularly when the first "survival" level has been passed. In reading literary texts, because students have also to cope with language intended for native speakers, they become familiar with many different linguistic forms, communicative functions and meanings.

Cultural Enrichment

For many language learners, the ideal way to increase their understanding of verbal / nonverbal aspects of communication in the country within which that language is spoken - a visit or an extended stay - is just not probable. For such learners, literary works, such as novels, plays, short stories, etc. facilitate understanding how communication takes place in that country. Though the world of a novel, play, or short story is an imaginary one, it presents a full and colorful setting in which characters from many social / regional backgrounds can be described. A reader can discover the way the characters in such literary works see the world outside (i.e. their thoughts, feelings, customs, traditions, possessions; what they buy, believe in, fear, enjoy; how they speak and behave in different settings. This colorful created world can quickly help the foreign learner to feel for the codes and preoccupations that shape a real society through visual literacy of semiotics. Literature is perhaps best regarded as a complement to other materials used to develop the foreign learner's understanding into the country whose language is being learned. Also, literature adds a lot to the cultural grammar of the learners.

Language Enrichment

Literature provides learners with a wide range of individual lexical or syntactic items. Students become familiar with many features of the written language, reading a substantial and contextualized body of text. They learn about the syntax and discourse functions of sentences, the variety of possible structures, the different ways of connecting ideas, which develop and enrich their own writing skills. Students also become more productive and adventurous when they begin to perceive the richness and diversity of the language they are trying to learn and begin to make use of some of that potential themselves. Thus, they improve their communicative and cultural competence in the authentic richness, naturalness of the authentic texts.

Personal Involvement

Literature can be useful in the language learning process owing to the personal involvement it fosters in the reader. Once the student reads a literary text, he begins to inhabit the text. He is drawn into the text. Understanding the meanings of lexical items or phrases becomes less significant than pursuing the development of the story. The student becomes enthusiastic to find out what happens as events unfold via the climax; he feels close to certain characters and shares their emotional responses. This can have beneficial effects upon the whole language learning process. At this juncture, the prominence of the selection of a literary text in relation to the needs, expectations, and interests, language level of the students is evident. In this process, he can remove the identity crisis and develop into an extrovert (Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies Vol.1, No.1, April 2005).

The non-English student who reads English well may have no difficulty in understanding denotations. However, he may find that sometimes the words bring to him different meanings or associations. Mastering a language is a matter of degree; and knowing the meanings of all the words may be not enough for a full response to

literature. The first step in understanding a word is to know its denotative meaning. The next step is how to understand its connotation.

Literature, Reading and Writing

Reading skill can be developed from reading literary work. Reading literary work is more beneficial than reading non-literary work. This is because the former shows specific forms, diction and collection of the given language; it also shows a kind of creative, imaginative and symbolic written work. Reading literary work is not meant to understand the denotative meaning but at the same time it is meant to find out the connotative meaning. This is to say, reading the literary work is meant to understand what is explicitly and implicitly stated in the work.

English teachers should adopt a dynamic, student-centered approach toward comprehension of a literary work. In reading lesson, discussion begins at the literal level (denotative meaning) with direct questions of fact regarding setting, characters, and plot which can be answered by specific reference to the text. When students master literal understanding, they move to the inferential level (connotative meaning), where they must make speculations and interpretations concerning the characters, setting, and theme, and where they produce the author's point of view. After comprehending a literary selection at the literal and inferential levels, students are ready to do a collaborative work. That is to state that they share their evaluations of the work and their personal reactions to it - to its characters, its theme(s), and the author's point of view. This is also the suitable time for them to share their reactions to the work's natural cultural issues and themes. The third level, the personal / evaluative level stimulates students to think imaginatively about the work and provokes their problem-solving abilities. Discussion deriving from such questions can be the foundation for oral and written activities.

Literature can be a powerful and motivating source for writing in English, both as a model and as subject matter. Literature as a model occurs when student writing becomes closely similar to the original work or clearly imitates its content, theme, organization, and /or style. However, when student writing exhibits original thinking like interpretation or analysis, or when it emerges from, or is creatively stimulated by, the reading, literature serves as subject matter. Literature houses in immense variety of themes to write on in terms of guided, free, controlled and other types of writing.

Literature, Speaking, and Listening

Listening skill can be developed through literary works. The learners are exposed to recorded literary works or those that are read loudly. Using these, they can acquire how the language is spoken. In the other words, they can acquire knowledge on pronunciation according to the sound systems of the target language.

The pronunciation problem is one of the problems in learning English. The problem is often faced by the learners because (1) since they were children, they were used to

produce speech sounds in their own language, (2) their habits to produce speech sounds in their own language make them difficult to produce in the other language, and (3) there are different sound systems in the two languages (native and foreign languages).

Through listening activity, the learners can improve their pronunciation in foreign language (English) by imitating the foreign language texts. The texts may be taken from the literary work. This activity of learning may result in improving not only pronunciation but also intonation, stress, vocabulary mastery and sentence patterns, which are, in turn, useful for developing writing and speaking competences.

The study of literature in a language class, though being mainly associated with reading and writing, can play an equally meaningful role in teaching both speaking and listening. Oral reading, dramatization, improvisation, role-playing, reenactment, discussion, and group activities may center on a work of literature (Stern 1991:337)

Speaking skill can be developed through the activities of reading and listening to literary works such as poetry and fiction prose. A teacher may ask his student to read the texts and at the same time the other students listen to it. Then, each student is asked to make an oral report based what has been read or listened to. But the most appropriate literary work is drama. Drama consists of dialogues. By using a role play technique, drama may be used for developing speaking skill.

Advantages of learning the literary works in nation character building.

The term *character building* also refers to *character education*. The Character Education Partnership (CEP) has identified 11 broad principles as defining a comprehensive approach to character education. One of them is to promote core ethical values as the basis of good character.

Since teachers are already using literature with students, it is imperative that they make their instruction more meaningful by engaging their students and promoting important moral values. If children are exposed to character-rich literature in a manner that can serve those dual purposes, character education can be taught, encouraged, and promoted in our classrooms. Role-playing is another type of teaching tool that has shown to have positive effects when promoting values. Character education can be very affective, when used with role-playing and children's literature since both have such promising outcomes on affecting students' value development.

There are many strategies teachers can incorporate when utilizing literature that have important character building issues. One particular study indicates that teachers should preview the books used carefully. Having background knowledge of the issues involved in a piece of literature with a moral dilemma, helps teachers "guide" class discussions. Teachers should ask questions and provide details that will have students begin thinking about the circumstances or the story's dilemma.

After reading stories that have important values embedded in them, there are a wide variety of activities that teachers can utilize to help students comprehend and get personally involved in the story's dilemma. Role-playing, using open-ended questions, identifying with characters and their feelings, providing an emotional release, group discussions, story expansion, and written responses are just some of the different strategies teachers can use after reading literature to promote good character in children or students.

Promoting core ethical values as the basis of good character.

Morality always refers to something good or bad or positive or negative. People always have two choices: bad or good thing or behavior to do. If they want to be good persons, of course, the good ones must be adopted in their life. Literary works offer moral values that can be adopted by the readers in facing their life. In this relation, the writer uses Richard Wright's *Native Son* as an example of promoting moral or ethical values. The novel shows us white domination toward black people in United States.

In general the white's domination over black people as implied in *Native Son* can be deduced from the following quotations: "They got things and we ain't", "They do things and we can't (Wright, 1966 : 23), "They got everything," and "They own the world" (Wright, 1966: 25).

Understanding the negative impacts of white domination toward Black Americans, the students may –and they are expected to– behave on the basis of good moral values. They are, for instance, expected not to look down on someone (prejudice), to discriminate, to pressure, and to do the similar behavior.

Richard Wright, through his characters in *Native Son*, presents a lot of social injustice committed by the white people such as racial prejudice, discrimination, segregation, and bad or unfair treatments such as subordinating, oppressing, exploiting, and violence against African-Americans.

His protest against all the injustices is reflected in *Native Son* on the relationship between Bigger Thomas, a black man, and Mary Dalton and Jan Erlone, white Communists. Mary Dalton assumed that Bigger was a Communist. With curiosity Bigger responded to Mary's statement:

"After all, I'm on your side. I'm going to meet a friend of mine who's also a friend of yours" (Wright, 1966 : 65).

The narrator describes Mary as "she was an odd girl, all right. He [Bigger] felt something in her over and above the fear she inspired in him. She responded to him as if he were human, as if he lived in the same world as she. And he had never felt that before in a white person. ... The guarded feeling of freedom he had while listening to her was tangled with the hard fact that she was white and rich, a part of the world of people who told him what he could and could do." (Wright, 1966 : 66). Bigger had never been touched by, and so close to white persons but Mary Dalton; he had never sat in

the same seat (place) with white persons but with Mary and Jan; and he had never eaten together with white persons but with Mary and Jan (Wright, 1966 : 68 - 71). Then, Mary Dalton says: "You know, Bigger, I've long wanted to go into those houses and just see how your people live. You know what I mean? I've been to England, France and Mexico, but I don't know how people live ten blocks from me. We know so *little* about each other. I just want to *see*. I want to know these people. Never in my life have been inside of a Negro home. Yet they must live like we live. They're human.... There are twelve million of them. They live in our country.. In the same city with us." (Wright, 1966 : 70). Almost in the same attitude as Mary Dalton, Jan forbade Bigger not to address using 'Sir', and he shook Bigger's hand and regarded Bigger as human (Wright, 1966 : 70).

Mary's and Jan's statements and the narrator's description of Mary Dalton as above implies that Mary Dalton, a white woman, was concerned Bigger, a black man. It also implies that a black man was regarded as a human by some white people but as an apelike animal by some others. And, it also denotes that black and white people should live as equals, should have the same rights, and should have the same opportunities. These are the sameness that the black people never enjoyed.

To maintain white domination or white superiority and black inferiority, white people keep social or physical distance with black ones by using the mechanisms of racial prejudice, discrimination and segregation. Thus, they try to avoid shaking hands, being addressed by their first name, and sitting at the same place and living in the same area and eating at the same table with the blacks. Richard Wright shatters the symbols of respect and of white superiority through characterization of Mary Dalton and Jan Erlone.

It is through Mary and Jan that Richard Wright protests against white domination in which the white people regarded themselves as superiors and regarded the blacks as inferiors. Through Jan, he says: "And when that day comes, things'll be different. There'll be no white and no black; there'll be no rich and no poor" (Wright, 1966 : 69). In other words, Richard Wright claims that both white and black people should be regarded as human beings; and as equals between one and another; they should be treated and protected in the same manners as the whites. Thus, he protests the inequality and inferiority of the blacks. Richard Wright employs "Communism" represented by Mary and Jan Erlone as a means of protesting and refusing social injustice, inequality and inferiority against the blacks. According to Alan H. Carling in his *Social Division*, Communism differs from all previous movements in that it overturns the basis of all earlier relations of production and intercourse and for the first time consciously treated all natural premises as the creatures of hitherto existing men, strips them of their natural character and subjugates them to the power of the united individuals. Its organization is, therefore, essentially economic, the material production of the conditions of this unity; it turn existing conditions of unity. The reality, which communism is creating, is precisely the true basis for rendering it impossible that anything should exist independently of individuals, insofar as reality is only a product

of the preceding intercourse of individuals themselves (351). Thus, a certain society regards individuals as "creatures" of its social and material conditions, but in communism, social-material conditions are the "creatures" of the individuals. The sameness or equality of individuals is imperative in communism. This such equality derived from communism is adopted by Richard Wright in *Native Son*. It is based on the fact that the Communist Party had targeted the struggle against racism as its priority (Henretta, et al., 1993 : 770). And, some black figures such as Langston Hughes was interested in Communism for they believed the Communists had awakened black people, and not the leaders whose schools and jobs depended on white philanthropy (Robinson, 1997 : 21). So, Richard Wright finds it easy to talk about social injustice and inequality.

Protest against the inequality of black people is also launched by Richard Wright through Boris A. Max. Max is characterized as Bigger's lawyer, provided by a Communist-front organization. He defended Bigger in the court. He argued that society was to blame for Bigger's crime, but he does not succeed in saving from death punishment. He showed Bigger that his enemies white people were also driven by fear and should be forgiven.

In his effort to defend Bigger, Max explained the whites' wrongdoings such as oppression (Wright, 1966 : 360), discrimination (Wright, 1966 : 362), segregation (NS, 363), unjust law enforcement (Wright, 1966 : 369 - 370). African Americans' protest against inequality or inferiority can be drawn from Max's defense toward Bigger when he said: "When we said that men are 'endowed with certain inalienable rights, among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,' (Wright, 1966 : 365). In this relation, African Americans demanded their rights in order to have better life as the whites do.

Furthermore, Richard Wright through Bigger Thomas protests toward the unfair or unjust treatment committed by the whites toward the blacks by using the word "blindness" as metaphor to illustrate the relationship between the blacks and the whites. In *Native Son*, Bigger is characterized as a black man who has blinded white people. The reason why he behaved in such manner is that he was fearful of the whites and this aroused his hatred.

Such hatred toward the whites caused him to regard them as being "blind" or commit violence against them. In short, hatred and blindness directed by Bigger Thomas toward the whites were in fact aimed at protesting against the white domination in which they were reluctant to see blacks' existence, to understand blacks' sufferings and to hear blacks' complaint.

The history of the United States of America shows that black Americans or African-Americans and the other minority groups are positioned as the second-class citizens.

In the past, most African Americans were brought, sold, and then enslaved to work on plantations. As slaves, they were badly treated and severely punished whenever they did wrong. When they did something wrong, they were severely punished.

When slavery was abolished, the freed blacks did not automatically obtain equal rights as the whites. In every aspect of life, they were predominated by the whites. Such condition continued until the appearance of Richard Wright's *Native Son* in 1940.

Through *Native Son*, Richard Wright pictures white domination upon black people manifested in the ways of racial prejudice, discrimination and segregation. These manifestations result in the ill treatment of the blacks by the whites.

White domination can destroy all aspects of life such as cultural, social, educational, occupational, and political aspects, and in law protection or law enforcement between black and white people. As a result, white domination brings about injustice in all aspects of life. Thus, if there is still injustice toward the black people, democracy in America has not been completely developed. Democracy is based on equal rights in all aspects of life.

The black people's social protest toward social injustice caused by white domination is related to their difficulties in achieving their rights in education, employment, and political participation, and in other aspects of social life.

The history of the United States of America also shows that the whites commit violence against the blacks such as beatings, whipping, and lynching. Violence committed by the blacks is a response to that done by the whites upon them in the past. The death of Mary Dalton in the hands of Bigger Thomas is a reaction of violence committed by the whites to whom he hates and fears of. Mary Dalton symbolizes 'white power' which Bigger regards as an oppressor upon black people.

Richard Wright considers that a black man represented by Bigger Thomas in *Native Son* is always in a dilemmatic condition leaving him without any options. Whatever he chooses, will have negative consequences.

Richard Wright also demands for the 'equality' doctrine as stated in the Declaration of Independence, that 'all men are created equal'. The blacks must strive for equality but as depicted in *Native Son*, the struggle for 'equality' through 'violence' will result in a 'tragic fate'.

Richard Wright through *Native Son* also implies that the black people yearn for freedom from white domination. They also desire good education, good employment, and equality in political opportunity, law enforcement/law protection, and in other socio-

cultural life.

CONCLUSION

Literature is a kind of the artworks that uses a language as its medium. Therefore, it can be used for developing language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Because, literature also talks about human life and offers moral values, learning and teaching literature may result two positive impacts: developing language skills and promoting moral values. If we do so, both learners and teachers are expected to be aware of character building.

Through Richard Wright' *Native Son*, we have a moral teaching about freedom from domination. We can give good education, good employment, and equality in political opportunity, law enforcement/law protection, and in other socio-cultural life.

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