Using Literary Texts to Teach Grammar in Foreign Language Classroom

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Abstract

Today, it is discussed that the use of literary texts in foreign language classroom as a course material isn't obligatory; but necessary due to the close relationship between language and literature. Although literary texts are accepted as authentic documents and do not have any purpose for language teaching, they are indispensable sources to be used for development of basic language skills. Here the purpose is not just to contribute to teaching basic language skills, but also to contribute to teaching the culture of foreign language and to provide different perspectives to students while teaching. It is also thanks to linguistic and grammatical structures of literary texts that they can be used as an effective course material to teach the grammar of target language in the foreign language classroom.

This study is a theoretical knowledge based on a research and it analyzes the use of literary text to teach grammar in foreign language classroom. The study consists of four parts: in the introduction part, it is discussed briefly the foreign language teaching, the place of grammar in foreign language teaching and the use of literary texts in grammar teaching. The second part discusses that it is necessary to use literary texts in foreign language teaching. In the third part, benefits that can be provided to grammar teaching with the use of literary texts are discussed. Finally, in the conclusion part, the points to take into account while using literary texts in foreign language classrooms are discussed and the suggestions are put forward.

Key words: foreign language teaching, literary text, grammar teaching, course material.

Introduction

Today it is impossible to think learning environment without technology and technological innovations. In fact, technological tools and materials have been used as assistant elements in learning environment for half a century, particularly in foreign language teaching. Especially with the internet, the learning environment is no longer limited only to the classroom and it has become more independent. Therefore, students have taken the opportunity to develop four basic language skills and grammar, vocabulary, phonetic competences outside classroom environment thanks to many different exercises and activities in more independent and more individualized learning environment. Thanks to technological

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innovations in the language environment, today the place of grammar teaching is a debated subject in foreign language education. While the implicit grammar teaching is argued by some experts and grammar teaching is thought less important, other experts emphasize the importance of grammar teaching and they argue that the explicit grammar teaching must be maintained in foreign language education. In fact all these discussions and current approaches show that grammar instruction is an important step of foreign language teaching and it must be taught in this process, because grammar instruction plays a significant role to develop comprehension and interpretation skills of students. One of the most effective course materials used to develop both reading and writing skills of students is literary texts defined as authentic documents. Using literary texts in foreign language classroom can be an opportunity to teach various grammar structures of foreign language in context and to internalize the grammar rules. However, the use of literature or literary texts in foreign language teaching has always been debated all over the world. Today, the experts still discuss the use of literary texts as a course material. But even though it's discussed currently, the use of literary texts in foreign language teaching is not new; in fact, they have been used as course materials since the beginning of the twentieth century. Used first within the grammar-translation method known also traditional method, the literary texts have been the most important integral part of foreign language lesson. As its name implies, the reading activities with literary texts and the translation studies from target language to mother tongue have formed the focal point of the method (Duff &Maley, 1990:3). With this method, it is aimed to teach the grammar rules and the words in the text through the literary texts.

The grammar-translation method has lost its significance in the face of new methods that arise with new developments and changes in foreign language teaching. Therefore, literary texts are also excluded by these methods and have lost recognition in the process. As a result, the use of literary texts, as course materials in foreign language classes has decreased.

In the 1980s with communicative approach, the main goal has been to gain students the communication skills in foreign language teaching and for this purpose; it is possible to use any authentic document. For this reason, literary texts as an authentic document, have gained importance again to contribute the development of communication and critical thinking skills and to develop four basic language skills and sub-skills of students. During that period, a lot of research has been made by researchers for the use of literary texts in foreign language teaching; Collie & Slater, 1987; Duff &Maley, 1990; Gower & Pearson, 1986; Hill, 1986; Lazar, 1993; Maley& Duff, 1989; McRae, 1991; Carter & Burton, 1982; Maley& Moulding, 1985; Brumfit& Carter, 1986; Walker &Brumfit, 1989; Carter & Long, 1991; Bassnett& Grundy, 1993; İnan&Yüksel, 2013.

The common point of all these works is the necessity of using literary texts as course material in foreign language class and it can be an effective teaching material for students to develop basic and sub-language skills. For this reason students must have adequate grammatical competence in order to use effectively the four basic language skills. According to Krashen (1982) and Shang (2000), language teaching should focus on authentic and meaningful input in order to achieve the goal of developing basic language skills. In this regard, it can be said that students with good grammar knowledge are more successful in writing and speaking skills than other students.

Why Literary Texts

Nowadays, in the foreign language teaching, the learning-teaching environment where only books are used as course material is no longer valid. As a result, technological innovations, new methods and techniques emerged with the needs of the era allow the use of many texts, visuals, audiovisual documents and multimedia tools besides books as course material.

Especially since the 1980s, with the emergence of the communicative approach and the action-oriented method in the following years in foreign language teaching, the authentic documents such as novels, magazines, newspapers, poems, songs, postcards, newspapers, magazine articles, trains, plane tickets, etc., which are not prepared for the class and independent from the course books, have begun to be used in the classroom. These documents that mentioned above; ''Visual or auditory, but not for the classroom, because they are created to provide a communication, a knowledge and a real language concept'' (Ataseven, 1998:191) are called an authentic document. The factors that require the use of literary texts in the foreign language class can be listed as follows:
- An authentic and a motivating material,
- Activate students' creativity,
- Have cultural and linguistic richness,
- Provide active participation of students,
- Develop students' critical thinking skills,
- Contribute to the development of four basic language skills and sub-skills,
- Support the development of emotional intelligence,
- Give intensive and common reading habits.

Collie and Slater describe four main reasons why language teachers are using literary texts in foreign language classes:
- Original course material,
- Having cultural richness,
- Having linguistic richness,
- Provide total participation of students in the activities.

Advantages and Limitations of Using Literary Texts

Literary texts are authentic works that can be used at every level in the classroom. For example, fairy tales and stories can be used in a foreign language class as a very effective course material for children. Likewise, the classical novels and poems known all over the world can be used also by teacher in the class as teaching material that will make the lesson more fun and enjoyable for adults. In this context, Mckay (2001) mentions three basic benefits of using literary texts in the language class:
- Prove the importance of type selecting of the author to reach specific communication targets,
- Being the ideal source for the adaptation of the four basic language skills,
- Increase mutual cultural awareness.

In addition to the advantages mentioned above, Lazar (1993: 4) talks about advantages of using literary texts as follows:
- Motivating and authentic material,

- Have common educational value,
- Being included in most of curriculums,
- Help students understand the target culture,
- Develop students' interpretation skills,
- The lesson becomes fun for students,
- Increase linguistic awareness of students,
- Encourage students to express their opinions.

Using literary texts in the foreign language class has some limitations as well as all the advantages and benefits mentioned above. The most important problem for the use of literary texts in language teaching, as stated by Brumfit& Carter (1986), is that the understanding the structure of literary texts is very difficult for non-native teachers and students. At first, this means that both teachers and students need to have knowledge of the target language literature and culture at a certain level. The second is the readiness level of the students. The third limitation is text choice. Choosing any type of text for the course may not be suitable for students; because each culture has its own unique values and it should be paid attention to the choice of text in the classroom where students from different cultures participated (Brumfit& Carter, 1986:25). There are some criteria while choosing text: The cultural background of students, the linguistic competence of students, the literary background of students, the suitability of texts, the length of texts and the level of the texts (ease-difficulty).

The Use of Literary Texts in Grammar Teaching

As the most important component of four basic language skills, grammar skill has always been debated in the process of foreign language teaching. Grammar teaching has lost its importance in the 1960s and 70s, but from the 90s it has become important again with the communicative method. Starting from Krashen's (1982) theory of language acquisition some specialists have argued that grammar teaching is les important and should be taught in an implicit way. On the contrary, some other experts have argued that grammar instruction is important in the foreign language teaching process and that it should be taught in an explicit way (White, 1987). Larsenn-freeman (1995) mentions that although grammar is learned in the natural process, it is necessary to explain grammar rules in order to improve it. As can be seen, different opinions are dominant among the researchers.

In terms of being an example for the use of literary text in teaching grammar, the poem of 20th century French poet, J. Prevert in which Peasani (2005, 20:21) taught French pronouns, was analyzed below.

Figure 1: The French and English version of poem.

Le Message	Message
La porte quequelqu'un a ouverte	The door that someone opened
La porte quequelqu'un a refermée	The door that someoneclosedagain
La chaiseoùquelqu'uns'estassis	The chair someone sat in
Le chatquequelqu'un a caressé	The cat someonestroked
Le fruitquequelqu'un a mordu	The fruit someone bit into
La lettrequequelqu'un a lue	The letter someone read
La chaisequequelqu'un a renversée	The chair that someone knocked over
La porte quequelqu'un a ouverte	The door that someone opened
La routeoùquelqu'uncourtencore	The route someonerunsdownagain
Le boisquequelqu'un traverse	The woods that someonerunsthrough
La rivièreoùquelqu'un se jette	The river someonethrowshimselfinto
L'hôpitaloùquelqu'unest mort.	The hospital where someone is died.

1. Activity: the title of poem is given to students. The students, in small groups, try to generate creative ideas spontaneously using the title and later they share them with the others.

2. Activity: The teacher writes a few words of poem (door, letter, chair, open, hospital) in the table, he demands students to find the topic and theme of poem by using this word list.

3. Activity: In small groups, the students can choose one word from list and they can try to find the other poems, stories, films written with this word.

4. and 5. Activity: The teacher distributes the pictures about the events in poem to the students. While the teacher is reading loudly the poem, the students try to put in order the pictures. The students can read the poem in pairs and teacher asks them if they agree with the teacher about the themes and topics of poem.

6. and 7. Activity: The teacher can ask the students what are the similar structures in poem. The students can reread the poem and they try to find the relative pronouns in poem.

8. and 9. Activity: The teacher expects that the students can make the rules for the use of relative pronouns. Then, the students try to find the difference between two relative pronouns.

10.-11.-12. Activity: The students are redirected to the poem. In pairs, by using given example, the students try to make a sentence with the poem without using the relative pronouns. Later, the teacher gives them vocabulary activities in which the students can make a sentence with relative pronouns. In pairs, the students can do the sentence completion activity.

13. Activity: the students, in small groups, try to answer the questions in which there are the points of view of the poet about the poem and the topics to analyze the themes of poem. The students can share their feelings about poem.

14. Activity: The teacher can direct the whole class to brainstorm through themes such as books, family, love.

15. Activity: Students select one from the themes and each student prepares a list of the words, then they share their word list with the other students in the class.

16. Activity: Students may be asked to write their own poems.

Conclusion

As a result using the literary texts in grammar teaching:
•   It can be provided meaningful information input that supports the learning of grammatical structures. So conscious learning can be realized.
•   Language awareness of the target language can be increased.
•   Students may be encouraged to communicate meaningfully.
•   Students' literacy text reading skills and strategies can be improved.
•   The ability of the students to understand, comprehend, analyze and interpret can be improved.
•   Critical thinking and problem solving skills of students can be developed.
•   Inductive learning can be provided.
•   Learning autonomy can be increased.

In order to achieve the above-mentioned results, the criteria of the text selection must be considered first. Teachers must have a very good literary background on the target language. In the foreign language departments, the lessons like ''language teaching with literary texts, literature and language teaching'', etc. should be taught and if similar courses are available, they should be made more functional.

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