

USING "LITERATURE" IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Faruk TÜRKER (*)

INTRODUCTION:

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 text-book, to make the learning entertaining and interesting. Realising this fact, the publishers have been trying to encourage and to eliminate this boredom by presenting simplified literary passages since 1950s. As seen using literary texts in language teaching is a new innovation, but teaching a foreign language only by using literary passages cannot, of course, be so useful. So in this research, the use of literary passages in teaching a foreign language will be discussed in detail.

WHAT IS LITERATURE?

Since it is a science using, as every science does, language as a tool, making use of literary texts in teaching foreign languages it has been one of the methods to be applied since the ancient times. There are several definitions of literature from different points of view.

The most general definition can be seen in H.L.B. Moody's approach. According to Moody literature is like an umbrella term giving information on every business (Moody, 1971;1). Therefore literature, for being interested in every kinds of written and spoken business, can be defined as expressing a specific subject e.g. literature for construction, literature for medicine, literature for child raising, literature for construction, literature for medicine, texts may express the author's style. In this case stylistically written literary texts may not be real life, whereas language use in liter-

(*) Hacettepe Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi, Yabancı Diller Eğitimi Böl. Araştırma Görevlisi.

ary texts is created by the authors and therefore may not suit classroom activities. If we go on to define "Literature" from the Language Teaching point of view, we come across a very important definition. According to Alexander Baird, "Literature is the use of language effectively in suitable conditions" (Baird, 1969; 203). To him literary texts can be used in language teaching, because the language used in literary text is suitable for the contexts of the events.

Among the functions of literature, as seen in the definitions above, the most important one is the use of language. Foreign language teachers adopt the method in accordance with the students' level and their syllabus.

THE PLACE OF LITERATURE IN EFL:

Teaching English through literature has become the fashionable phenomenon. However, the teaching is to feed student heavy, repetitive and somewhat redundant literature, which has little or no relevance to his immediate problems. This affords little opportunity for creativity. The student is told of literary terms and the meanings of words, and is finally asked to analyze the subject of literary piece, which is often too abstract a task for the non-native speaker. The process of analysis, therefore, takes the form of repeating the material understanding mostly by memorization and at best, partly by rephrasing.

Students at the intermediate level become frustrated by being able partially to understand but unable to respond. I believe this frustration is the by-product of non-involvement; the students are static participants in a one-sided process.

A technique called "Simple Story-Telling" may be used for improving the students' oral English. One of the shortcomings of that method is that in the discussion the students invariably simply repeat the story. Another problem inherent in such a method is that the reading and repeating of random stories with no contextual relevance to the students' individual interests leads to their only learning words and memorizing patterns. Similarly in the language laboratory, insipid and unimaginative pattern drills produce boredom and lower the efficiency of students who are beyond the level of learning basic English.

Although literature once played a significant role in language study, its prominence faded as linguistics became the focal point of language programs (Widdowson, 1982). Linguistics such as Topping (1968) argue that literature should be excluded from the foreign language curriculum because of its structural complexity, lack of conformity to standard grammatical rules, and remote control perspective. In other words, these linguists believe that literature does not have remote control perspective. In other words, these linguists believe that literature does not contribute to foreign language students' practical goal of achieving linguistic proficiency. Numerous teachers now believe that the heritage, whose fosters habits of "seeing proficiency. Numerous

teachers now believe that the heritage, whose fosters habits of "seing feelingly on the one hand, and sceptically rationally on the other" (Oster, 1985; 75), should not be denied to foreign language students who are intellectually and emotionally, if not linguistically and culturally, ready to examine literary works. According to Povey (1967), the linguistic difficulty of literature has been overstated; readers do not need to experience total comprehension to gain something from a text. In fact, literature, with its extensive and conotative vocabulary and its complex syntax can expand all language skills (Povey, 1967). Likewise the cultural benefits of studying literature are hard to ignore, since literature mirrors national culture (Harris and Harris 1967a, 1967b.) and can therefore acquaint students with the aesthetic, moral and spiritual values of the nation and the rules of the social system (C. Scott 1965, Adeyanju, 1978). Widdowson suggests that rather than limiting the focus of literary study to either language usage or cultural content, we should view literature as discourse and the study.

Teaching Foreign Language Literature to non-native-speaking university 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, the author's style etc. Under such circumstances, it may be absurd to believe that the students are learning anything of significance.

The idea of using plays may come as response to this situation. To have the students deal with originals in a first course, use the language creatively, improve their language level, loose themselves from the claws of the dictionary, respond positively to the subject and learn some literature. In addition contemporary literature has been considered most appropriate at initial stages (Marckwardt, 1981; 3). It will be very difficult for students to approach Chaucer or Shakespeare if they are terrified of literature and consider it a dragon keeping them from graduation.

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

The course may be structured in five stages.

1. Introducing theory and reading the plays.
2. Creative writing
3. Performative Exercises
4. Playwriting
5. Producing and Permorfing Students' Plays

In the first stage, the presentation of outline of the course, setting schedules, distributing the reading list are introduced. Plays are always a good choice for begin-

ners. They can be rather short, compact and emotionally involving. The student can also be guided into visualising the plays as he reads the text, into imagining how a character would say a certain line. Thus he can have a sense of participation. Students should be asked to bring their own contributions to class, newspaper clippings, articles, photographs, or any other material that they felt characterized the twentieth century, and present their materials to class. After this exercise, they will be able to communicate better, feel more ease, and exchange ideas about the world they live in.

In "Doing Creative Writing" stage, students are encouraged to produce material from their own insights. The first exercise is word association. The teacher says a word, such as black, and the students immediately write down a chain of words that popped into their minds. If a student is willing the teacher the teacher read his associations and trace the different trains of thought. The second exercise consists of writing down dreams, trying to jot down ideas and images as soon as the students wake up, rather than writing logical compositions. The students are also encouraged to write down dialogues overheard on buses and in the streets (when the English speaking tourists could be found), and then read them aloud in English in class at the end of these exercise, the students are critical of 2th emptiness, or ambiguity of language, without having had to listen to long lectures.

In the third stage, the students are well acquainted and there is little embarrassment left. The time comes for performance. However, performing exercises may be very difficult for a teacher who does not feel at ease acting in a classroom. Some teachers are shyer than others and just cannot sing and dance however much these are useful activities.

In the fourth stage, after the students' writing their midterm paper on theory and the authors' techniques, one of the students' dream is selected and each one has to write a dialogue on his dream and the students improvise a sketch based on that dialogue. Three students who are reluctant to perform are asked to observe the sketch and write down the parts they consider most relevant. Some passages from the dialogue are repeated, but others are created on the spot. All communication is in English, and the students even start to speak English among themselves outside the class.

The fifth stage is the time coming for the students to define roles; who is to be the director, the producer, the program writer, the leader of the discussion, and players. Of course the staging of the play is a sort of crowning of the end. The students are so enthusiastic that they come during off-hours to rehearse. There is almost no need to memorize parts; since the students have conceived and worked on the text together. Even if they skipped a word, they would know how to control the situation. The guidelines and intention of the play is completely absorbed.

At the end, they put on two sketches of about ten minutes each and led a discussion with the audience for about twenty minutes.

Such a course can be very slippery when it comes to grading, which might represent a stumbling block that could break the empathy. However, if a teacher has to assign grades, he should do it very carefully. I believe that a grade on a written mid-term paper on theory, the twentieth century background, a second grade for the student's participation, and a third one for his work in the final performance are enough to provide a judgement on the student's proficiency.

The common arguments against using literature are as follows: **First**, since one of our main goals as foreign language teachers is to teach the grammar of the language, literature, due to its structural complexity and its unique use of language, does little to contribute to this goal. **Second**, literature often reflects a particular cultural perspective, thus, on a conceptual level, it may be quite difficult for students. **Finally**, the study of literature will contribute nothing to this goal. These arguments certainly need to be addressed if we are to reach a decision as to whether or not to use literature.

As foreign language teachers we all share the objective of promoting our students' awareness of the structure of the language. However, Widdowson (1978; 3) points out two levels of linguistic knowledge as; the level of *usage* and the level of *use*. According to his definition *usage* involves a knowledge of rules, whereas *use* entails knowing how to use these rules for effective communication.

Most present day literary texts assume that literature can provide a basis for extending language usage. Povey (1972; 18) argues that "Literature will increase all language skills because literature will extend linguistic knowledge".

CONCLUSION:

To evaluate the course by discussing the quality of the sketches produced or the acting and staging would not provide a fair assessment.

The course can be considered successful in several respects. It enables the students to improve their written and oral English. It also helps them to relax when communicating in a foreign language. They understand principles by practising them and develop a critical attitude toward cultural habits.

Looking back on these experiences, we can establish some basic criteria for the use of literature in teaching.

Literature is an art form dealing with the needs of the students. A literary piece is not an end in itself but the means of beginning a creative process in the minds and emotions of the student. If we let the student place himself in that particular literary world and atmosphere, he can relate to the sociopsychological context.

If he learns through the use of literature to control one moment of his thought processes, he feels the power and possibility of contributing positively to a larger world than just his own.

For many students literature can provide a key to motivating them to read in English. For all students, literature is an ideal vehicle for illustrating language use and for introducing cultural assumptions. The successes, of course, in using literature greatly depends on the selection of texts which will not be difficult on either linguistic or conceptual level.

The use of literary texts, from language teaching point of view, will be useful, because these texts show how language works in contexts. Beside they show how language should be used in which conditions and situations.

The use of literary texts in language teaching can be summarized as follows:

1. Literary texts will help not only to improve reading but listening, speaking and writing skills as well.
2. It is possible to understand and get general information related with experiences and events in real life by using and analyzing literary texts.
3. 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. They also remove mother tongue interferences.
4. Literary texts make the students acquire analyzing and criticising skills.

Needless to say using literary texts is very helpful for the students to acquire, or learn, how language works in real contexts. But the following criteria should be taken into consideration:

1. The texts should be chosen carefully, because it should not be forgotten that in these texts there may be grammatical, linguistic, and literal difficulties.
2. Literary texts should include the structures and vocabulary previously learned. In that there should not be difficult and ambiguous structures.
3. You should deal with linguistic and grammatical sides as well and avoid to make the lesson as if the author teaches.

To use literary texts in language teaching is, of course, very difficult. But it cannot be disregarded that to make use of easy and understandable literary passages will make the teaching business easy, effective, retainable and beneficial.

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