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The Contentious Debate
over the Language Literature Division

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Abstract

In the early 20th century literature was woven into language curriculum to endorse learners to acquire language structures and perform drills successfully. The actual use of the target language upstaged grammar instruction as the primary focus of language learning in the fields of language pedagogy. In the late 1960s and 1970s literature fell into disuse on the grounds that it was not in conformity with standard grammar rules and the widespread perception was that literature was complex and inaccessible for learners. In the late 1970s and 1980s a decisive swing against literature was experienced and literature came into prominence to enable learners to make huge leaps in language learning. Learners can reap many benefits from the inclusion of literature in foreign language teaching. In attempting to support their arguments of incorporating literature into language teaching a considerable number of researchers offer a number of reasons why literature is an ideal medium for extending language use. By means of inclusion of literature in language teaching, learners are at an advantage to acquire profound knowledge of language. The present paper investigates the language-literature division and focuses on the three phases with regard to the inclusion of literature in language teaching. The supportive role of literature in the development of language awareness is another issue the paper deals with.

Key words: language, literature, division, phase, language awareness

Definition of the Term 'Literature'

It has always been difficult to pin down a definition of literature. Among the various suggested definitions, Carter (1995, p. 102) suggests that literature is "a body of written texts, produced by a culture and highly valued within that culture over a period of time". Williams (1977, p. 80) characterizes literature as a special text that embraces "full, central, immediate human experience". Swaffar (1992, p. 245) focuses on the view that literature repudiates accepted social conventions but rather "challenges cultural norms …enables the readers to reflect about cultural stereotypes". She opines readers are forced to rethink accepted norms by literature. Literature serves as an ideal means for expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest (Scott & Huntington, 2002). Pugh (1989) posits that literature
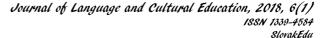
is a writing that preeminently reflects in depth and quality aspects of the human experience which is illuminated by an observer. Literature is a use of language to articulate experiences and perceptions, to transmit thoughts and feelings, and to verbalize points of view through inviting readers "to draw conclusions from characters and events, to relate thematic truths to their own lives and values" (Morgan, 1993, p. 496). Literature is rendering of life. It has boundless possibilities of discovering ourselves and others. It brings to the fore the use of various angles of vision in examining thoughts, beliefs and actions (Langer, 1995). The notion of becoming a well-rounded person lies in the learners' appreciation of literature (Morgan, 1993). Interestingly, literature opens up infinite possible worlds to the learners (Meijer, 2002) and puts to the fore life and human nature.

The Language Literature Division

The language-literature divide known as "lang-lit split" (Scott & Tucker, 2002, p. xvii) has long been contentious. Communicative and literary goals are at odds with each other in foreign language teaching (Kramsch, 1985). The widespread assumption is that literature should not be taught to learners without attaining a high level of language proficiency; additionally, literature is merely a tool to design language knowledge through passive reading (Hall, 2005). The dilemma whether literature can contribute to language learning is a controversial issue. On the one hand communicative goal reinforces the desired result of achieving negotiation with people. Literary goal on the other hand considers literary texts "as finished products, to be unilaterally decoded, analyzed, and explained or ... to illustrate grammatical rules and enrich the reader's vocabulary" (Kramsch, 1985, p. 356). Starting in the 1990s language-literature divide shifted towards teaching language, literature and culture as a continuous whole to promote advanced-level language abilities (Paesani, 2011). Literature commenced to re-emerge from exile conducing Maley (1989, p. 59) to announce that "literature is back - but wearing different clothes". There has been renewed interest in the use of literature in the language classroom. Soon after Swaffar's (2006) redefinition of communicative competence as the ability to read, write, listen, speak and develop critical reflections about cultural aspects, literary texts have been situated at the core of the curriculum and such language skills as reading, writing, listening and speaking are regarded as complementary skills (Paesani, 2011; Kern, 2008). Henning (1993, p. 24) also satisfies this concern advocating that literature must be woven into language curriculum as "students can develop a full range of linguistic and cognitive skills, cultural knowledge and sensitivity".

The inclusion of literature in English language teaching is distinguished between three phases: traditional, functional and discourse stylistics (Durant,

1993). In the 'traditional' phase the use of literature was considered worthy of concern and appropriate to the language classroom because "literary language was superior to spoken language" (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. 15). In the early 20th century foreign language learning meant a close study of the literature (Kramsch & Kramsch, 2000). In the Grammar-Translation Method, the main language teaching tool was literature, and literary texts were used to master grammatical rules (Duff & Maley, 1990). Literary works served as "illustrations of the grammatical rules" (Duff & Maley, 1990, p. 3) and samples of good writings to enable learners acquire language structures and perform drills successfully (Durant, 1995). Literature held a place of prestige and was the ultimate goal of foreign language study on the grounds that there was exclusive focus on reading and writing (Paesani, 2011).
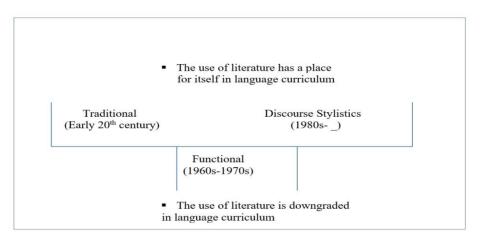
In the 'functional' phase, which covers the 1960s and 1970s the Grammar-Translation Method fell into disuse and the use of literature in the language classroom was downgraded. Though it was not entirely removed from language classes, there was a widespread perception that literature was complex and inaccessible for learners. Topping (1968) supports the exclusion of literature from language curriculum claiming that literature does not play a supportive role in improvement of language proficiency nor is it in conformity with standard grammar rules. To him, the syntax and lexical items in literary texts constitute a largely disruptive influence in language classes which directly constrains teaching of standard grammar. Another argument against the use of literature in language instruction is evident in the belief of Allen (1976) who notes that deep division exists between linguistics and literature. The presence of literature waned and its use resulted rather insufficient due to the view that "a text which is extremely difficult on either a linguistic or cultural level will have few benefits" (Vincent & Carter, 1986, p. 214). With the onset of communicative language teaching (henceforth CLT), literature was left out of language classroom and place was given to the development of communicative competence. Literary texts were eliminated from language classes and the emphasis was placed on mainly teaching language skills. Even then, some voices rose that there was place for literature in L2 classroom for instance; Marckwardt (1978) argues that literature has a 'justifiable and profitable' place in language learning. However, literature was challenged by the notion that it had little functional application. The Grammar-Translation Method was replaced by methods which aim at preparing and teaching learners manageable structure and vocabulary. Multifarious developments in language instruction did not allow the Direct Method, the Audio-Lingual Method, Suggestopedia, the Silent Way, and Total Physical Response to utilize literary works in the foreign language classroom due to intricacies of literature. New
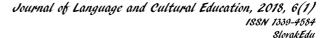
findings in language acquisition began to question the prestige of literature and literary texts grew in rather inefficiency in language classes.

In the 'discourse stylistics' phase which emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s literature made a place for itself in language teaching once again. This is the period which experienced "a decisive swing against literature in English as a foreign language" (Collie & Slater, 1987, p. 2). The mid 1980s felt the need to provide basic content knowledge for language learners therefore; literary texts came into prominence "to teach the necessary strategies and study habits to enable them to undergo highly demanding reading requirements in most tertiary level courses" (Gilroy-Scott, 1983, p. 1). This phase suggested that it was important to study a wide range of literary texts to promote CLT. A period of distrust has been overcome by literature and it has been recast as a useful medium in the development of communicative competence. As such, the reconfigured view of literature has reclaimed its primacy at all levels of foreign language instruction (Paesani, 2011) as literature covers "the greatest skills a language user can demonstrate" (Bassnett & Grundy, 1993, p. 7) and the usefulness of literature enables learners to make huge leaps in language learning.

Fig. 1: Durant distinguishes the inclusion of literature in language teaching into three phases

Kramsch and Kramsch (2000) examine the role of literature in foreign language teaching in five stages. Before World War I, literature played a preeminent role in language teaching and up to 1918, literature prevailed as an uncontested source. By and large, language learning was concerned with canonical literature. The first

stage began with the emergence of social revolution after World War I ended. Literature had value and became a contributing force in social arguments of the day. The second stage began with the Coleman report of 1929 and reading fell into the domain of education; hence became the most effective way of acquiring foreign languages and replaced literature. Canonical literature was abandoned. Although teaching literature survived, the third stage that began with the end of World War II discarded literature as a noncontributing force in language instruction. The rising influence of linguistics highlighted speaking hence ability to read literary works was replaced by ability to speak the language. The fourth stage began when the National Defense Education Act in 1958 issued the split between foreign language teaching and literature achievement. Linguistics emerged as a significant discipline for language teaching. The fifth stage began after President Carter's report in 1979 and literary texts served as authentic texts which had prominence in linguistic and cultural proficiency.

Exposure to literature in the language classroom is still a matter of debate (Widdowson, 1985). A number of researchers prefer delaying the use of literature to develop language proficiency until learners become linguistically sophisticated. For instance; Davis, Gorell, Kline and Hsieh (1992, p. 321) argue that learners with low levels of proficiency in the target language are incapable of handling literature because it includes "highly abstract vocabulary, complex syntactical patterns, and sophisticated style and content". Similarly, Lee (1986) questions the use of literature in beginner-level and intermediate-level learners to promote reading skills. Edmondson (1997) presents several arguments against the use of literature in the language classroom and suggests that literary texts do not have any advantage over other texts to offer language teaching. He argues that literature does not have anything special to boost motivation to foster language learning. However, there is a growing body of researches which support the use of literature at all levels in language teaching (Kramsch, 1985; Shook, 1996; Ghosn, 2002; Weist, 2004; Liaw, 2001; Davidheiser, 2007). They all argue that the use of literature in language classes is an ideal medium for improving linguistic fluency, cultural awareness and critical thinking.

Raising Language Awareness through Literary Texts

A broad definition of language awareness has been clinched as knowledge of language. Surrounding the definition of language awareness, views reflected by linguists refer to two distinct senses, knowledge and awareness. Language awareness is "the knowledge, perception and attitude of the nature and function of language" (Chan, 1999, p.40). Literature is repository of language knowledge inasmuch as it triggers learners to explore different aspects and functions of the

language. Donmall (1985) defines language awareness as "a person´s sensitivity to and conscious awareness of the nature of language and its role in human life" (p.7). Language awareness refers to enhanced consciousness of the language forms and functions (Carter, 2003). Language awareness promotes the understanding of what has been discovered about language (Preston, 1996). Van Lier (1995, p. xi) attempts to define language awareness from a pragmatics point of view and formulates it as realizing "how language is used as a tool". James (1999, p. 102) clinches the definition of language awareness as "having or gaining explicit knowledge about and skill in reflecting on and talking about one's own language". The concept of language awareness is associated with conscious discernment and sensitivity in language learning and teaching. Language awareness is characterized by exploration of benefits that can be deduced from development of a good knowledge about language. It exposes learners to a conscious understanding of language itself; in addition, language awareness develops an impetus to conscious perception of how language is learnt and used (Ellis, 2012).

On the other hand, language awareness denotes "the awareness that learners have of language, independently of conscious reflection on language" (Nicholas, 1991, p. 78). In this sense, language awareness shapes learners' psycholinguistic endowment (Little, 1997). To put the matter at its most basic, these two phenomena differ from one another. While language awareness in the psycholinguistic sense is derived from innate capacity for language acquisition, language awareness in the educational sense ensues from language knowledge teachers impart to learners through schooling (Little, 1997).

Eric Hawkins (1984, p. 150), the founder of language awareness movement in the UK, sees language awareness as an important attribute to gain "insight into pattern". There exists a consensus view that language awareness is imparted through schooling (Little, 1997), and "draws upon metalanguage to explain aspects of the language code in the classroom" (Masny, 1997, p. 105). It should be borne in mind that, language awareness, which has been strongly advocated as a consequential component in teacher education (Wright & Bolitho, 1993), appertains to "teachers' explicit knowledge of language" (Andrews, 1997, p. 148), in this case teachers are recipients of language awareness. Language awareness enables teachers to draw their attention to similarities and differences between the native language and the target language (Masny, 1997), in order that "contrasts are not seen as separate and unconnected linguistic accidents, but as related by implication" (James, 1994, p. 209). Language awareness, which is bound up with language education, aids learners in language learning and thereby viewed as a form of consciousness-raising (Masny, 1997).

The underlying idea is that literature can increase language awareness. Literature is a resource to endorse learners to become cognizant of patterns in texts and linguistic features of the language. This approach lays emphasis on talking about language both in foreign language and mother tongue. The notion of language awareness backs learning all other aspects of language structure as they pave the way for the learning of the target language (Lasagabaster, 1999). Many studies brought to light the fact that knowing about language ushers in one's performance (Leow, 1997; Schmidt, 1995; Lasagabaster, 1999). Linguistic elements through experiential and meaning-focused language learning do not result in target-like levels (Doughty & Williams, 1998). Language learners do not notice the gap between their output and model utterances; therefore, language awareness has been advocated to enable learners to analyze linguistic forms and functions (Lasagabaster, 1999).

Simplified or informational texts have some advantages to use for pedagogical purposes as they make language more accessible by stages (Chan, 1999). However, a predominant exposure to them limit deep processing and dilute the information because the use of these texts "simply manifests language usage, put it on show disposed in a way that makes minimal demands on thoughts" (Widdowson, 1984, p. 169). The introduction of complete original texts to learners helps them become effective language users. Learners are best stimulated when they raise awareness of the operation of language in texts. Literature has the potential to build language awareness because "it would seem natural to draw on literature as a means of teaching language" (Kramsch, 1994, p. 7), thereby it makes learners realize the meaning potential of language and in the creation of meaning by dealing with real examples learners enhance their language awareness. Complex texts offered by literature are assumed to be of benefit to generate multifaceted meanings behind the events; by means of this learners are alert to subtle differences in meanings (O'Sullivan, Davis, & Billington, 2015).

Language learners need to be presented "a continuum of texts including all kinds of examples of creative and purposeful plays with the resources of language" (McCarthy & Carter, 1994, p. 167). Literary texts embody the artistic and creative use of ordinary language "with many different linguistic uses, forms and conventions of the written mode: with irony, exposition, argument, narration, and so on (Collie & Slater, 1987, p. 4). The analysis of the creative uses of language by learners leads to propagation of more functional written or spoken forms of language. Lazar (1993) defends the merits of literature as a valuable resource to denote the awareness that learners have of language. According to the account she has given of language awareness through literature reading, interaction with literature endows learners' awareness of sequencing of discourse, and

relationship between words in terms of synonymity and opposition. To put the matter somewhat differently, literary encounter helps learners recognize different uses of language at different levels.

Conclusion

Literature is a use of authentic and highly-skilled language that reflects human experience and it brings fore actions, thoughts, feelings and beliefs. Although the inclusion of literature in language teaching has long been contentious, it has prevailed as a contributing source. Incorporating literature in language teaching offers a motivating medium for profound knowledge acquisition. Literature provides an ideal context for language development because learners become cognizant of linguistic features of the language through literary texts.

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