

LITERARY VERSION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND CHOOSING ITS TEACHING BALANCE

Abdukodirova Khanifa Abdurasul kyzy,

The student of the faculty foreign languages

TashkentSPU named after Nizami, Uzbekistan

Scientific advisor: E.T.Tursunnazarova

Abstract: This article provides a review of ideas and research regarding the role of literature in the EFL university classroom. After a brief historical overview of the question of using literature in the language classroom, the article discusses the reasons for the demise and resurrection of literature as an input for language classes. Right after that, the article deals with advantages and drawbacks of using literary texts as language tools by means of drawing on recent ideas on language teaching practice and theories. Finally, in a practical move, this paper depicts the past and current approaches to teaching literature in language teaching classes.

Keywords: Literature; Curriculum; EFL; Higher Education

The last twenty years have been clearly marked by an explosion of work in literary and cultural theory, providing a strong basis for further research on the relationship between literature, language and education. Thus, a whole new paradigm involving the integration of language and culture, being literature a part of culture, emerged in the late 80-s and has developed throughout the 90-s.

Not surprisingly, in recent years, there has been a strong move towards the study of literature, mainly as culture, and its reintegration into the academic curriculum. Therefore, many researches claim the need to include literary texts into the L2 curriculum (Cook, 1994; Shanahan, 1997; Hanauer, 2001; Carroli, 2008) or alternatively advocate a content-based curriculum that would include literature components (Liddicoat, 2000; Kramersch, 2013).

The incorporation of literary works written in English into the EFL curriculum has been much debated since the sixties. In fact, an important number of attempts have been made in the light of interdisciplinary and discourse analysis studies to try to justify the use of literature as a foreign language teaching tool. Not in vain, literature sharpens linguistic and cognitive skills and enhances students' understanding of the human condition. This relevance of literature as an important tool in the holistic development of students characterizes indeed the model proposed by Horner.

Figure 1. Adapted from Best laid plans: English teachers at work (Horner, 1983) As shown in the graphic above, the factors supporting the introduction of literary texts into the language curriculum are organized into three big groups: aesthetic, psycholinguistic and socio-moral. The aesthetic area focuses on the students' aesthetic involvement into the reading process and the psycholinguistic area deals with the students' identification and internalization of certain behavior patterns. Meanwhile, the socio-moral area is centered on theme and content issues. Interconnected as they are, the three areas contribute to the development of the personal area that enhances the students' development as whole individuals.

Despite the advantages of the use of literature in the language classroom which have been mentioned in the previous section of the present work, there are also some major difficulties that require further attention such as language itself, cultural issues or text selection (McKay, 2001, Savvidou, 2004, Lima, 2005). In fact, if we stop to analyze some of the most popular literary texts “we may find ourselves in the quite uncomfortable position of having to acknowledge that some of our favourite works might cause considerable inconvenience to our language students” (Lima, 2005: 186).

The most common problem is language itself, more specifically, syntax and vocabulary. Literary vocabulary and grammatical structures are often considered to be too complicated, making reading a highly demanding activity. McKay (2001) and Savvidou (2004) criticize the language of literary texts for being far from

the conventions of Standard English established for the different levels of the students.

That is probably the reason why students often feel that literary language “does not stick to the most common usages, but exploits and even distorts the accepted conventions in fresh and unexpected ways” (Lazar, 1993: 115.) According to Lima, also, the mastering of grammatical forms and graded structures that usually guide the EFL teaching “clashes violently with the intentional bending and breaking of grammatical rules that seems to be one of the main features of literature” (Lima, 2005: 186). Lexis happens to reveal the same problem: unrestricted, creative use of lexical items “might hamper understanding instead of providing practical examples” (Lima, 2005:186). As Widdowson (1982) states, literature can provide ‘misleading models’ and this disruptive use of language, stimulating and refreshing for native speakers, might lead to possible confusions in case of FL learners.

In this article we have tried to show that literature, when used properly, can be an effective tool for developing foreign language skills. We have also tried to demonstrate that current research is being active in terms of showing the multiple benefits of using literature in the language classroom. This leads us to more easily refute the arguments of those scholars who are against the use of literature as a tool for language teaching.

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