

LITERATURE IN LANGUAGE CLASSES: A MARRIAGE OF HAPPILY EVER AFTER

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1. Introduction

There are many different answers to the question, 'what is literature?' Eagleton (1996) answers the same question with a quote from Roman Jakobson in his book titled "Literary Theory: An Introduction": "it is an organized violence committed on ordinary speech." In other words, literature transforms and intensifies language, which makes it different from everyday language (Eagleton, 2014). Selden (2016), on the other hand, argues that literature allows us to look at life from a different perspective. In fact, literature is a direct reflection of the world we live in. In this world, change is constant and inevitable. People and their needs are also constantly changing, and these changes have led to the search for different methods of language teaching in this modern age where the need to know a foreign language has increased so much. In our age, people, especially language learners, need to learn about other cultures, values, traditions, and history of different societies. Thankfully, literature is an invaluable resource in this respect. Lazar (1993) argues that literary texts have many possible contributions to language learning. A few of them are:

1. They are motivating, fun, and educational.
2. They are full of cultural elements.
3. They facilitate the language acquisition process.
4. They increase students' language awareness.
5. They develop students' interpretation skills.
6. They encourage students to express their feelings and thoughts.

Slater (2011) argues that literary texts should be used as authentic resources in language classes to support students' cultural, linguistic, and personal development.

This chapter will first present the history of the relationship between literature and language education, and then will mention various approaches to the use of literature in language teaching, and the use of different literary genres such as short story, novel, play, and poetry in language classes. A sample lesson plan will be added to the end of the chapter with an intention to showcase as to how a literary piece could be exploited in a language classroom

2. Language Teaching and Literature: A Story So Far

Language and literature have such a long and deep-rooted history that it is very difficult to treat them as independent concepts. According to Kaplan (2005), the relationship between language and literature is a direct connection, as individuals forming the society share a common culture that they create through their language, and transfer this culture from generation to generation, from nation to nation. The means of this constant interaction can only be realized through language itself. On the other hand, literature is one of the most important mediums of this transmission and is a kind of art nourished by language.

The use of literature as a technique to teach both basic language skills (i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking) and language areas (i.e., vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation) is not a new approach to foreign language learning and teaching. In fact, the history of integrating literature into foreign language teaching dates back hundreds of years.

The Grammar Translation Method is a technique that originally emerged to teach classical languages such as Latin and Greek, and therefore it is also called the "classical method" (Chastain, 1988). One of the main purposes of this method, which has been predominantly used in teaching other foreign languages since the 19th century, is to reach the level of reading and appreciate the literary works written in this language (Richard & Rodgers, 2001). According to this method, "literary language is superior to spoken language" (Larsen-Freeman, 1986, p. 15). Therefore, the translation of literary passages is one of the techniques teachers use when applying the Grammar Translation Method. In this technique, students translate a literary text written in the target language into their mother tongue and focus on the vocabulary and grammatical structures in this text (Larsen-Freeman, 1986).

However, since the early years of the 20th century, the Direct Method, which aims to purify the education of modern languages from the Greek and Latin pedagogy of the grammar-translation method and to teach language skills by associating concrete objects with actions "directly," has gained popularity (Kramersch & Kramersch, 2000). The most important principle of this method is that translation is not allowed. The meaning of words is taught through demonstrations and visual tools without the need for students' mother tongue (Diller, 1978). Thus, the importance and dominance of literature in language teaching begin to decline. After WWI, the Direct Method was replaced by the Audio-lingual Method, which caused the literature to almost completely lose its influence in the language teaching process. Schaffer (1944) defended the Audio-lingual Method, which states that a foreign language can be taught to students through imitation and reinforcement. He said: "We need a more intimate connection between life and academic studies"; we should do away with "empty sonnets and glistening nonsense" (Vittorini, 1944, p. 276).

The absence of literature in language teaching continued until the 1970s when Communicative Language Teaching emerged. This method suggested that students should be exposed to authentic materials in language teaching, thus paving the way for reintegrating literary texts written in the target language into language teaching (Aydinoğlu, 2013). Since then, the importance and function of literature in language teaching have been reconsidered. Studies on how literature can contribute to English language education have attracted the attention of teachers and researchers. The results of some studies, for example, Collie & Slater (1987), McKay (1982), and Zyngier (1994), suggested that literary texts should definitely be used in foreign language teaching.

3. Approaches to the Use of Literature in Language Teaching

3.1. Language-based approach to the use of literature

There are a variety of different approaches to the use of literature in language classrooms. It is essential for teachers and students to learn about these approaches to increase the effectiveness of using literature in the language learning process.

One of the leading approaches to using literature in language learning has been proposed by Carter & Long (1990). They divided their approach, which they called the Language-Based Approach, into three different categories:

3.1.1. The Cultural Model

This model focuses on literature's ability to represent a society's culture. Thanks to literature, learners have the opportunity to learn about cultural elements such as the daily life, traditions, and history of the societies described in the literary texts they read. In this way, they become more tolerant of cultural differences and more open to recognizing and understanding different cultures, ideologies, perspectives, and values (Collie & Slater, 1987).

3.1.2. The Language Model

According to the language model, considering the fact that literature is formed by language, literary texts can be considered a unique resource for students to observe the actual use of language. Teachers can demonstrate exemplary uses of a particular grammatical structure through literary works. Students can increase their vocabulary, improve their reading and interpretation skills, and see many different uses of language, as literary texts are also authentic texts.

3.1.3. The Personal Growth Model

It is a student-centered model and prioritizes the student's personal development through literature. In addition to the cultural and linguistic development aimed in the previous two models, students should be individuals with high awareness who can critically approach, evaluate and interpret different themes, events, and characters they encounter in literary texts (Bibby & McIlroy, 2013).

4. Using Short Stories in Language Teaching

Short stories not only meet the need for "authentic material" that emerged with the spread of Communicative Language Teaching but also enable students to gain awareness of different cultures and societies. Because they are shorter than novels, short stories are much more useful in the classroom environment. They can contribute to the development of four basic language skills of students from all proficiency levels (Sarıçoban & Küçükoğlu, 2011). Short stories can play an important role in the development of students' critical thinking skills as well as their language skills. Students can find the opportunity to evaluate the plot and characters in a short time and examine the events from a critical point of view (Oster, 1989). According to Wright (1995), "we all need stories for our minds just as much as we need food for our bodies." Pardede (2011), on the other hand, argues that short stories can be both an entertaining and linguistically and culturally informative activity for students. It is possible to use short stories in many different ways in language lessons to develop all language skills. For example, as a writing activity, students may be asked to continue the story or write a review about it. In addition, if there is an audiobook version of the story, it can easily be used as a listening text. On the other hand, students can be asked to retell the story and given opportunities to improve their speaking and pronunciation skills. Teachers may also use these stories to teach a new grammatical structure or a new set of vocabulary inductively.

5. Using Poems in Language Teaching

Poems differ from the other literary genres with their complex and unusual writing styles, frequent use of literary devices such as metaphors, and different sentence structures (Khansir, 2012). These differences can create opportunities for students to have different and fun learning experiences (Llach, 2017). Many studies show that poems can be used as an effective resource in many different ways in language teaching (Tomlinson, 1986; Hess, 2003; Khansir, 2012). According to Tomlinson (1986), poems contribute six different values to the educational context. While the first three of these values below are associated with academic success, others relate to students' affective skills, such as creativity and motivation:

1. Educational value,
2. Achievement value,
3. Skill development,
4. Affective value,
5. Individual value,
6. Stimulus value.

Writing and reading activities through poetry will support students' linguistic development. In addition, the different word uses and grammatical structures offered by the poem enable students to look at these language areas from a different perspective (Susikaran, 2013). It improves students' discourse skills and vocabulary (Liao, 2018). It contributes to developing listening, speaking, and comprehension skills (Mittal, 2016). It helps students recognize literary

devices such as exaggeration, metaphor, and sarcasm that they frequently encounter daily (Saraç, 2003).

Moreover, the topics of the poem, such as love, death, emotional pain, happiness, and the cultural elements it contains, are also very important for the emotional development of students (Tosta, 1996). The intensely emotional lines of the poems can encourage students to think empathetically and creatively (Çubukçu, 2001) and encourage them to be actively involved in the language learning process (Aladini & Farahbod, 2019).

Poems can be read aloud by the students as a chain drill activity, thus contributing to developing students' pronunciation skills. Furthermore, students may be asked to prose the poem and write a story inspired by it, or a classroom discussion activity can be organized about aspects of the poem that students can relate to in their own lives. It can be a very enjoyable and instructive experience for students to examine 18th-century English through the poem "The Ancient Mariner" written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and to discuss themes such as sin and punishment with students. Poetry's openness to different interpretations can lead to classroom discussions and increase students' social interaction.

6. Using Drama in Language Teaching

"Drama is concerned with the world of 'let's pretend'; it asks the learner to project himself imaginatively into another situation, outside the classroom, or into the skin and persona of another person" (Holden, 1982, p. 1). Since one of the main purposes of foreign language teaching is to encourage students to be active participants in the language learning process and to activate them emotionally and physically, drama is one of the most effective methods that can be used for this purpose (Üstündağ, 1998). Due to the nature of drama, students have to work collaboratively and interact socially with each other in a fun, creative, and stimulating environment. Through drama, students use body language as well as target language to express their imagination, creativity, and language potential.

According to Owens and Barber (1998), drama can be used not only for learning but also to make the classroom environment interesting and enjoyable. It also helps to diversify learning activities for a teacher who aims to address different learning styles in the classroom. At first glance, it may be thought that drama only contributes to developing listening and speaking skills, but it can also be very useful in developing reading and writing skills (Clipson-Boyles, 1998). For instance, when students are asked to write their own dramas, it will contribute to the development of students' creative thinking skills as well as their writing and reading skills.

Even Shakespeare's famous plays can be turned into a great tool for students to develop their cognitive and affective skills as well as their language skills. For instance, students may be asked to write and play a parody of the tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*. As another activity, students may be asked to write down what they might be in a scenario where Romeo knows that Juliet is not really dead and does not drink the poisonous potion that led to his death. One can only imagine the joy and excitement these activities will bring to the classroom.

7. Using Novels in Language Teaching

Novels are authentic sources that can be very useful in terms of language teaching because they contain the social and cultural characteristics of the target culture. They offer students the opportunity to gain insight into other people's lifestyles and daily lives by comparing them with their own cultures.

According to Vural (2013), novels can contribute to language classes in many different ways since they are authentic materials and can be a source of inner motivation for students. Moreover, it showcases cultural diversity and promotes the development of critical thinking skills. However, the effective use of novels in language classrooms depends on teachers choosing a novel suitable for students' needs and proficiency levels. While choosing the novel, the teacher may need to consider the students' experiences in an environment and prevent possible "cultural shocks" that may be encountered in the classroom. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel that reflects the characteristics and cultural and social norms of the period in which it was written. Through this novel, character analyses can be made in the classroom, discussions can be made on the value judgments of British society and the daily lives of people living in the 19th century, or students can be encouraged to write critical articles on these issues. Moreover, as a listening activity, the movie version of *Pride and Prejudice* can be watched in class, and the differences between the novel and the movie can be analyzed.

8. A Sample Lesson Plan

The literary work chosen for use in the language classroom is a simplified version of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (Easy Classics). While preparing this lesson plan, the authors have prepared it to be applied to intermediate-level 9th-grade Turkish EFL learners.

- Age of students: 15-16 years old
- Students' proficiency level: intermediate
- Education year: 10th grade (first year of high school)
- Social background: middle class

Pride and Prejudice is a novel of manners. In this type of novel, a certain social class's social customs and traditions are explained in detail. In these novels, social norms and traditions have a great deal of control over the characters (Harmon, 2012). Therefore, it can be claimed that it is an ideal novel genre for a teacher who aims to increase students' cultural awareness while teaching the target language. Since the novel's language was simplified enough to suit the level of the students, metalinguistic explanations were not needed.

8.1. The activities

The activities included in the lesson plan are divided into three main categories suggested by Lazar (1993):

- a) Pre-reading activities
- b) While-reading activities

c) Post-reading activities

It should be noted that in order to make the reading process easier for the students, the students read the novel by dividing it into two parts. While Part 1 covers the first four chapters of the novel, the remaining four make up Part 2.

8.1.1. Activities for part 1*8.1.1.1. Pre-reading activities*

Through these activities, students are motivated to read and become curious about the story's topic. The teacher reveals the students' background knowledge on the topic by asking various questions. Moreover, students can be taught new vocabulary and grammatical structures they may encounter while reading the story at this stage.

Exercise 1: The title of the novel *Pride and Prejudice* is written on the board. *What do you think of these two concepts, and what might be their significance in the story?*

Exercise 2: The teacher asks the whole class the following questions, and the students give answers orally:

- a) Does anyone know anything about this novel? Have you ever heard of Jane Austen?*
- b) The protagonists of our story are the five sisters, Elizabeth, Jane, Mary, Kitty, and Lydia, respectively. What might happen to them in the story based on their names and the order in which they were born?*
- c) What do you know about balls that used to be held in England? Have you seen these balls in the movies you have watched so far?*
- d) What do you think was the role of women in society in the 19th century?*
- e) Do you have any idea how women dressed at that time?*

Homework:

Read the first four chapters of the novel.

8.1.1.2. While-reading activities

According to Lazar (1993), at this stage, students understand the plot and characters of the story. In addition, they encounter words they did not know before and recognize the language and writing style of the literary text. Considering these features, the following activities are planned for the students.

- **Exercises to understand the plot**

Exercise 1: *Read the first four chapters and come up with titles for each chapter.*

Exercise 2: *Working in pairs, write a summary of Chapter 1 and present it to the class.*

Exercise 3: *Listen to your friends' summaries and identify the missing parts in your summary.*

● **Exercises to understand the characters**

Exercise 1: *Rank the characters in the book's first part from the most important to the least important to the story.*

Exercise 2: *Answer the following questions related to Part 1:*

1. *What is Miss Bennet's most important purpose in life?*
2. *Why did Charlotte accept the marriage proposal made by Collins?*
3. *Who do you think are the antagonists of the story?*

Exercise 3: *Describe each member of the Bennet family with two adjectives.*

● **Exercises to teach new vocabulary**

Exercise 1: *Underline the words that make it difficult to understand the story while reading the first part.*

Exercise 2: *Work in pairs and match the following words with their meanings.*

a) tempt	1) embarrassing someone too much
b) mortify	2) making someone want to do something even though they know it is wrong
c) conceal	3) something you say when greeting someone
d) salutation	4) hiding something or someone

● **Exercises to work on the language**

Exercise 1: *Circle the best option to connect the sentences.*

- *Mrs. Bennet deigned not to make any reply **but/and** unable to contain herself.*
- *Miss Bennet will receive every possible attention **while/when** she remains with us.*
- *It is very improbable that they should meet at all **unless/if** he really comes to see her."*

8.1.1.3. *Post-reading activities*

According to Lazar (1993), through post-reading activities, students should be able to interpret the reading text, understand the author's point of view, develop their language skills, and express their thoughts on the text. The following activities are planned in accordance with these purposes:

● **Exercises to interpret the text**

Exercise 1: *"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."*

What does the quote above say about the role of women in society at that time?

- **Exercises to improve language skills**

Exercise 1: *Write a 100-word letter to one of the characters in the novel and give them some advice about their life.*

Exercise 2: *In pairs, interview one of the characters in the novel that interests you the most. Student A becomes the interviewer, while student B roleplays this character and answers questions in front of the class.*

- **Exercises to understand the author's point of view**

Exercise 1: *What do you think about the idea that women have to marry to be happy? Do you think the author wrote this novel to support or criticize this idea?*

8.1.2 Activities for part 2

8.1.2.1. Pre-reading activities

Exercise 1: *Do you think Elizabeth's prejudice against Darcy will be overturned in the second part of the story?*

Exercise 2: *For which characters do you think the story will have a happy ending and for which ones will the story end with an unhappy ending? Make a list.*

Homework:

Read the remaining chapters of the novel.

8.1.2.2. While-reading activities

- **Exercises to understand the plot**

Exercise 1: *Were your predictions about the course of the story correct? What were you wrong about?*

Exercise 2: *As you read, underline where you think the story's turning point is.*

- **Exercises to understand the characters**

Exercise 1: *Which of the characters in the story do you think are "proud" and which are "prejudiced"?*

Exercise 2: *What do you think of Mrs. Bennet's relationship with her daughters?*

- **Exercises to teach new vocabulary**

Exercise 1: *Underline the words that make it difficult to understand the story while reading the second part.*

Exercise 2: *Work in pairs and explain to each other the meaning of the words in the story that you think are the most interesting.*

8.1.2.3. Post-reading activities

- **Exercises to interpret the text**

Exercise 1: *Compare and contrast the male and female characters' perspectives on the concept of marriage.*

Exercise 2: *How does the concept of social class affect the story's characters, especially the relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy?*

- **Exercises to improve language skills**

Exercise 1: *How do you think this story would have ended if it had taken place in Turkey? Write an article of 150-200 words.*

Exercise 2: *Imagine Mrs. Bennet being here. What would you say to her to convince her that not every married woman is actually happy? (Group discussion)*

- **Exercises to understand the author's point of view**

Exercise 1: *What does the author think about the society she lives in? Write a slogan that summarizes the author's opinion.*

9. Conclusion

In language classes, literature can be a very important resource for students to get to know the culture of the target language and to observe the actual use of the language. Literature can also be used as a more motivating and entertaining tool for students to learn languages. Moreover, these authentic materials will enable students to see different uses of language and will also improve their vocabulary and grammar skills. As seen in the sample lesson plan in the previous section, the activities done through literary texts can be planned in a way that will improve the students' four basic language skills. These activities will be very beneficial not only for the academic success of the students but also for their personal growth. For example, they can acquire a lifelong reading habit that will make every stage of their life easier for them. In addition, by analyzing literary texts, students will have the opportunity to increase their empathy for others, as well as their critical thinking skills and imagination. Last but not least, thanks to literature, students can go a long way toward becoming 'global citizens' who embrace cultural differences and accept them not as threats but as valuable resources.

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