

SHOULD LITERARY TEXTS BE USED IN TEACHING AND LEARNING GRAMMAR?

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Abstract: Traditional grammar teaching focuses mainly on teaching grammar rules directly from textbooks and in return, requiring students to complete a number of activities to demonstrate their understanding and application of such rules. In order to motivate students to be able to express themselves in certain communicative situations, it is also necessary to not only master language rules but also to know the culture of target language. Literary texts are considered effective as authentic materials which can be integrated into foreign language class activities. This article is a literature review that briefly explores the use of literary texts in teaching English grammar. It also shows the practical demonstration of the use of literary texts in grammar class. It is recommended that multiple class activities are designed to incorporate the use of literary texts specifically to improve students' grammar.

Keywords: EFL, grammar instruction, literary texts, communicative competence

Abstrak: Pengajaran tata bahasa (grammar) secara konvensional menitikberatkan kepada pengajaran struktur bahasa yang secara langsung diambil dari buku teks, selanjutnya pemelajar diarahkan untuk mengerjakan latihan-latihan soal untuk mengasah pemahaman serta penggunaan aturan-aturan tersebut. Guna mendorong pemelajar berkomunikasi dalam situasi tertentu, penting kiranya bahwa pemelajar tidak hanya memahami struktur bahasa namun budaya dari bahasa target yang ada. Teks karya sastra dianggap sebagai materi otentik pembelajaran yang efektif yang dapat diintegrasikan ke dalam aktivitas pengajaran bahasa asing. Artikel konseptual ini berisi teori-teori yang membahas penggunaan karya sastra dalam pengajaran tata bahasa Inggris. Artikel ini juga menampilkan demonstrasi praktis penggunaan teks karya sastra dalam kelas tata bahasa. Disarankan pula untuk mendisain aktivitas pembelajaran di dalam kelas yang beragam dengan mengintegrasikan teks karya sastra guna memperbaiki tata bahasa siswa.

Kata kunci: Bahasa Inggris, pengajaran tata bahasa, teks karya sastra, kompetensi komunikatif

A. INTRODUCTION

Grammar instruction is considerably essential for second or foreign language learning. Its main purpose is to help students carry out either verbal or written communicative purposes. According to Thornbury (1999), grammar contains rules 'that govern how a language's sentences are formed' (p.1). Learning correct grammar rules enables students to construct acceptable sentences and avoid ambiguous and unclear meaning in the sentence production. If students fail to understand it, communicative performance will be negatively affected. Chin (2000)

adds that grammar instruction is effective when students already understand about grammar, and are able to use this knowledge in their writing. It has also been widely known that teachers have their own belief about grammar teaching. Some teachers may become obsessed by applying grammar rules in their teaching which then focuses more on correctness of sentence production as the primary consideration in evaluating students' performance. The other teachers may assume that grammar is partly important in learning second or foreign language, and prioritize more on developing students' English skills (*i.e.* listening, reading, speaking and writing).

Grammar still becomes one most controversial issue in L2 teaching (Ellis, 2006). Due to its complex rules, teachers and students are often experienced difficulties how such rules are properly and accurately applied in sentences. Considering that 'teaching grammar should encompass language structure or sentence patterns, meaning and use' (Widodo, 2006, p.122), the transition of conventional grammar teaching to communicative language teaching must also be taken into consideration. Teachers favor ways of explaining rules through deductive (rule-driven) approach and inductive (rule-discovery) approach, but the problem arises when students have poor knowledge of grammar itself and this often limit students' capacity to perform well in other language areas. Instead of only remembering rules and requiring students to complete grammar activities, literary texts are also relevant to be introduced in teaching grammar. They are authentic sources of materials which can be integrated into foreign language class activities.

When textbook is used as a teaching aid and mostly offered to be studied according to specific lesson, literary texts give students emotional and motivational 'enjoyment' through understanding their contents as well as plot structures. Weinrich (2003) points out that vocabulary and grammar as parts of language should be studied in and learnt through texts (cited in Weber, 2018). Understanding the meaning and structure of language can also be obtained through contextualization, or diversified contexts of literary texts. It is further explained that "literary language is of importance – not because it represents the world in a text, but because it portrays and articulates the world in a special, different way (Weinrich, 1985 p. 239 cited in Weber, 2018). Through reading literary texts, language is simply learnt in a 'real-world' situation where cultures of the target language also abound in. This paper highlights the use of literary texts which is potentially considered as an innovative way in teaching and learning grammar.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Definitions of Literary Text

The term 'literature' is derived from the Latin *litteraturae* which means writings. It has been commonly used in the eighteenth century and relates to fictional and imaginative writings—poetry, prose, fiction, and drama (Abrams & Harpham, 2012). McRae and Pantaleoni (1994) distinguish between literature with a capital 'L' - the classical texts *e.g.* Shakespeare and Dickens, and literature with a small 'l' which refers to popular fiction, fables and song lyrics. Literature is essential for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching as an instrument to engage students' minds and feelings in meaningful communication (Sage, 1987). In the

classroom, “literature not only provides exciting topics, but also often serves as an incentive for contemplation and discussion” (Dobstadt and Riedner, 2011, p.5 cited in Weber, 2018). Reading literature stimulates emotions and provide the opportunity for students to reflect and express themselves in the target language. Various topics discussed in literary texts allow students to dig deeper about what happen within the literary world more critically as well as become source of learning material in order to learn structure of the target language autonomously. Some types of literary texts that can be studied inside and outside the ELT classroom include: short stories, poems, novels, plays and song lyrics (British Council, n.d).

As authentic materials literary texts “are linked to the ‘real-world’ context of the learners and, as such, promote a more learner-centered approach” (Littlewood, 2011, p. 549) and “develop personal involvement and help contribute the readers’ both cultural and language enrichment” (Collie and Slater, 1987, p. 3-6). To include literary texts in the process of teaching and learning English emphasizes more on student-centered learning that enables students to particularly select their own reading and they greatly benefit from learning other countries’ culture. In line with this, Basnett and Grundy (1993) also mention that through literary texts, FL learners can learn and understand more about cultural aspects and different ways of life of people in a country or countries.

Nowadays, teachers and instructors of FL class must be more innovative to the development of teaching and learning materials. In Digital Era, the use of only course books in class does not guarantee the improvement of students’ language competence and interactive learning environment. The authentic documents “should be prepared for the class and independent from the course books” (Atmaca & Günday, 2016). They add that novels, magazines, newspapers, poems, songs, postcards, newspapers, magazine articles, trains, plane tickets, etc., can be used as authentic materials in FL teaching and learning. As quoted from Ataseven (1998, p.191), these documents are “Visual or auditory, but not for the classroom, because they are created to provide a communication, a knowledge and a real language concept”.

2. Reasons of Using Literary Texts in FL Classroom

It is important for teachers and FL instructors to find out reasons why literary texts are useful for foreign language instruction. Lazar (1993) proposed five reasons of integrating literature in ELT namely: 1. expanding students’ language awareness; 2. encouraging language acquisition; 3. developing students’ interpretative abilities; 4. motivating materials; and 5. educating the whole person. In addition, Collie and Slater (1990) state four reasons of using literary texts in teaching foreign language such as original course material, having cultural richness, having linguistic richness and providing total participation of students in the activities. McKay (1982) and Widdowson (1984) relate the importance of literature in teaching and learning process for it is used to develop linguistic knowledge both on usage and use level. Similarly, “literature will extend linguistic knowledge by giving evidence of extensive and subtle vocabulary usage, and complex and exact syntax” (Povey, 1972 p. 187). As cited in Khan and Alasmari (2018), Frye (1964) argued that

“literature provides encouragement of tolerance, promotion of creativity and transfer of imaginative energy to students”. Mckay (1982) listed three fundamental advantages of using literature in classroom: fostering learners’ reading skill, promoting tolerance and helping learners to become creative. It is also said that literature helps motivate learners towards personal and dynamic learning (McRae, 1991). Furthermore, literature helps enhance learners’ interests and involvement as well as stimulates their critical thinking, and transform the entire teaching process into a lively exercise (Moon,2010).

Although literature is helpful for encouraging students in FL learning, there is an undeniable fact that “understanding the structure of literary text is very difficult for non-native teachers and students” (Brumfit & Carter, 1986 cited in Atmaca & Günday, 2016, p.130). Tevdoska (2016) emphasized on the complexity of language content in literature and the distant culture of literary works. The language choice in literature sometimes seems unfamiliar and odd, and therefore it requires deep understanding to reveal the meaning. To deal with these problems, teachers should be more well-prepared and able to create interesting and effective learning environment with numerous activities so that students are accustomed to the implementation of literary texts in class activities.

3. Selecting Literary Texts

Selecting appropriate literary texts to include in teaching and learning activities is also crucial. It must bridge the gap between students’ needs and materials discussed in class. The criteria of selecting literary texts as proposed by Lazar (2007) are divided into type of course, type of students and other text-related factors.

a. Type of course

The selection of literary texts based on the type of course deals with particular subject and objectives of the course. This covers: 1) students’ level-- it must be relevant to students’ competence and the material itself is not too advance or too easy form students; 2) students’ reasons for learning English-- the reasons are particularly helpful for teachers to specify particular topic and keep students motivated in their learning process; 3) length/intensity of course—the selection of literary texts should not exceed the allocated time for learning.

b. Type of students

It is also important to know students’ background and information to appropriately select the literary texts in class activities. The factors related to type of students namely age, intellectual maturity, emotional understanding, interest, cultural background, linguistic proficiency, and literary background.

c. Other text-related factors

The third criterion consists of factors such as text availability—the text is available and accessible for students, length of text—the literary texts which are too long must be avoided since they will be time-consuming, exploitability—the selected texts can be devised into tasks and activities, and fit with syllabus—the literary texts can help students to reach the goals of learning in the syllabus.

4. The Use of Literary Texts in Grammar Class

In the theory of language acquisition, some experts stated that grammar teaching is less important and should be taught implicitly (Krashen, 1982), but some also revealed that grammar instruction plays an important role in FL teaching and learning, and therefore should be taught explicitly (White, 1987). Grammatical explanations and exercises continue to be prominent both in course books and in the classroom practice of teachers in school-based foreign-language courses (Ur, 2011). Integrating grammar learning and literary texts along with designing specific learning tasks provides the opportunity for students to apply grammar rules they learn from the texts of their own. The following principles underlie the relevance of the use of literary texts in grammar learning summarized from Department of Basic Education (2015, p.12) as cited in Weber (2018):

- a. Grammar should be taught for constructing texts in their context of use – it is concerned, in other words, with real language.
- b. The application of grammar should not be restricted to the analysis of isolated sentences – it should explain the way in which sentences are structured to construct whole texts
- c. Use of authentic materials ... must be encouraged.
- d. Link the language structure with functional uses of the language in different social settings
- e. Focus on meaningful tasks. Acquiring the grammatical rules of the language does not necessarily enable the learner to use the language in a coherent and meaningful way. What interests us then concerns the structure and function beyond the sentence level

From the above-mentioned principles, grammar instruction is inextricably linked with literature. Literature is not something to be taught, but used as a means of learning the target language which also covers linguistic and grammar competence. Pulverness (2003) advises language teachers to maximise the use of literature in the classroom. Students who will be gradually introduced to the culture within a story, for example, during class discussion and other class activities will learn grammar lesson “without going through the heaps of the grammatical rules (Rutherford, 1987 in Odetallah, 2013, p. 127). Furthermore, literature is “a solution to avoiding learners perceive grammar as being abstract, complicated, and boring (Weinrich, 1981, p.239 cited in Weber, 2018). Through incorporating literary texts as authentic materials in grammar lesson, students will practically learn not to only write a number of random sentences, but to construct sentences with more relevant, contextual information.

5. Summary of Previous Studies Incorporating Literature in Grammar Instruction

Literary texts in CLT develops student's communicative skills through critical, analytic and interactive activities (Kramersch, 1985). In grammar instruction, the following previous researchers have incorporated various literary texts in teaching grammar.

a. Teaching grammar through literature in foreign language learning with German as an example

Weber (2018) explored the potential of literature in grammar teaching and learning that helped students write response text. The participants were first-year level students at a German class at Univesity X. The researcher translated the poem written by Austrian poet Erich Fried (1921–1988) into English. Using question prompts, she aroused students' curiosity towards the word 'slaughter'. Students had the opportunity to give their impression and opinion. Next, they were asked to identify passive voice from the sentences and the function of using it. Finally, the conclusion was made regarding the pattern of passive voice: auxiliary verb + past participle. The discussion was continued by identifying literary devices such as repetition and contrast until group of learners created a series of sentences. According to Weber (2018) in her study, incorporating literary texts in teaching and learning FL is not limited only to learn passive voice, but literary texts are used as a *pattern drill*. As Huneke and Steinig (1997) implied, the language mastery is learnt through "repeating phrases correctly over and over again" (Weber, 2018, p.85).

b. Teaching of grammar through short stories

This study was conducted by Biswas and Anis (2017) which focused on the effective use of short stories in teaching grammar. Out of 100 students participated, through a selection test, only 40 students with similar grammar competency level were selected. The data were collected through the survey and quiz result. Two short stories entitled "The Gift of the Magi" by O'Henry and "The Luncheon" by W. Somerset Maugham were selected because both content and language are considered simple for the participants. Based on the survey questions regarding the use of grammar textbooks and the ability to understand grammar rules and examples provided in the textbooks, the results revealed that around 67% students found that grammar textbooks were not interesting to read and 77% students thought that grammar textbooks covering rules and exercises do not provide real life examples to ensure better understanding of rules and interest among students. In another question regarding whether grammar rule memorization, it was found that 82% students agreed that they memorized grammar rules without knowing how they are applied in a real life. Most students (81%) responded that they enjoy reading short stories and half of them were highly motivated in learning grammar using short stories. They had better understanding of applying grammar rules within context that were taught using short stories.

Not only students' responses, this study also presented teachers' opinions regarding the use of literature in grammar class. Most of them agreed that literature can be used as a means of teaching grammar and short story is appropriate to teach contextualized grammar. Short stories offer several benefits if implemented in FL class: (a) providing more creative, encrypt, challenging texts that require personal exploration supported with prior knowledge for advanced level readers, (b) promoting critical thinking skills, (c) making the students' reading task easier due to being simple and short when compared with other literary genres, (d) facilitating teaching foreign culture (i.e. serves as a valuable instrument in attaining cultural knowledge of the selected community (Arioğul , 2001, pp 11-18).

c. Teaching the regular and the irregular verbs through a cultural-based literary discourse in an ESL grammar classroom

Odetallah (2013) explored the role of literature in teaching practical grammar to ESL learners by using various literary texts and how literature can be an asset in learning the culture of the target language for the means of communication. The popular story, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, helped students to understand the story and provided a number of exercises in past simple. Before practicing grammar exercises, the students were introduced to story elements such as characters, setting, and others to ensure that they had an idea of what they were reading about, analyzed and criticised the texts especially related to cultures. The reasons of choosing literary texts here are: teaching the students the language of the text, relating the text to the target grammar and introducing students the culture of the language indirectly. The teacher then followed up by asking questions by comparing between students' real activities and the fictional character's activities. This open discussion successfully motivated students to learn about the other culture through interesting manner.

Activities were continued by working on grammar exercises in regular and irregular verbs through story. It is learnt from this study that literary texts provide students with an entertaining and practical lesson without focusing more on completing grammar workbook. Collie and Slater (1987) in Odetallah (2013) point out the reasons of using literary texts in class such as cultural enrichment, language enrichment, and personal involvement.

C. CONCLUSION

Rule memorization in grammar is considered ineffective without knowing how to apply it correctly in real context. Utilising literature as a material resource offers FL teachers and instructors a great deal of language learning activities that can stimulate learners' engagement and motivation to learn the target language. Literature allows students to be more critical and communicative because it is open to multiple interpretations. Teachers and students can build more interactive teaching and learning activities which are not only required to provide feedback of grammar correctness, but also to discuss deeper the aspects within literary texts. Besides literature also helps enrich vocabulary and learn culture of different countries. The criteria of the text selection must be considered first to match with lesson objectives and students' needs. Teachers are also suggested to design various activities that incorporate literature in teaching and learning FL. The types of literary texts are recommended to be introduced to create more enjoyable learning environment.

D. LIMITATIONS

This study, however, is subject to two limitations. First, the theoretical consideration provides no historical background of grammar instruction and teaching approaches which play significant roles in constructing the use of literature in grammar. Second, the academic performance in grammar class before and after incorporating literature in learning activities results in lack of exploration.

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