

“THE ROLE OF LITERATURE AS THE CULTURAL PHENOMENON IN ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF LANGUAGE TEACHING” *

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ÖZET

Bu bildiri edebiyatın dil öğretimi üzerindeki etkilerini vurgulamaktadır, çünkü ikisi de milli kültürün ve dünya kültürünün ayrılmaz parçalarıdır. İlk olarak, dil nedir? Dil, insanlığın esrarengiz bir olgusudur. Onun sınırları bugün bile hala çözülememiştir. Biliyoruz ki dil, insan yaratıcılığından kaynaklanan bir insan ürünüdür. Uluslarda çeşitlilik olduğu gibi dillerde de çeşitlilik vardır. Birden şu soru ortaya çıkar: “Dil, insan genlerinde çoktan beri varolan ve gelişmekte olan farklı kültürlerle ve uygarlıklara göre değişen bir süreç midir? İnsanlık iletişim ve kendini ifade edebilme ihtiyacından dolayı mı dili icat etti? İnsanoğlu, bir benliğe, kendine özgü bir kimliğe ihtiyaç duyuyordu. Bu varoluşçu kimlik, farklı kültürlerle ve onların kendilerini ifade etme araçlarına, diğer bir deyişle, farklı dillere yol açmış olabilir.

Peki edebiyat neydi? Edebiyat da başından beri insanoğluyla yan yanaydı. Edebiyat bütün olarak insan hayatında, insan geçmişinde vardı. İnsanların tutkuları, duyguları, aşkları ve çileleri, tecrübeleri; insanlığın bütün gizemleri farklı ulusların edebiyatında varolmuştur. İnsanlığın efsaneleri, taş yazmalarında bulunduğu gibi, ilk çağlarda başladı. Yazı icat edilmeden önce dilden dile dolaşan kahramanlık hikayeleri insanoğlunun varlığının habercisiydi. Geçmiş, gelecek nesillere aktarmak insanlığın bir ihtiyacıydı. Bu geçmiş, o çağın kültürünü kapsıyor ve iletiyordu. Her ulusun kendine özgü ve milli bir kültürü vardır ki bu da dünya kültürünü oluşturur. Tarih, insanın öyküsünü içerecek ve iletecek kadar yeterli değildi. Gerekli olan edebiyatın çeşitliliği içindeki şiir, kısa hikayeler, oyunlar, ve ciddi makaleler ve romanlar adı altındaki olabildiğince uzun düzyazı biçimleridir. Bütün bunlar dilin basit, günlük kullanımından, daha yüksek, daha yalın ve estetik kullanımına uzanan ahenkli sanat biçimleridir. Dil edebi eserlerde gelişmeye, zenginleşmeye ve estetik mükemmelliğe ve ifadedeki iç ahenge uzanan yolu buldu. Bu nedenle farklı uluslar, dil kullanımındaki yaratıcı ahenge ve mükemmelliğe yaklaşan edebiyat çeşitlerini yarattı. Edebiyat, dildeki üreticiliğin ve yaratıcılığın son hedefidir. Edebiyat ve dil, kültürümüzün ayrılmaz parçalarıdır ve kültür bizim ulusal kimliğimizdir ve daha geniş dünya kültürü içinde ulusların onsuz varolamayacağı benlik duygusudur. Bu nedenle dil, edebiyat olmadan öğretilmemelidir ve dil öğretiminde edebiyatın önemi göz ardı edilmemelidir. Tam tersine COLLIE, SLATER, MOODY, POVEY ve LAZAR gibi yazarların da belirttiği gibi, edebi türler dil öğretimi müfredatındaki yerini almalıdır.

SUMMARY

This paper stresses the effect of literature in language teaching because both of them are the inseparable parts of national and world culture. What is language in the first place? Language is a mysterious existing phenomenon of humanity. Its mysteries are still unsolved even today. We know that it is a human production resulting from human creativity. There are different varieties of languages as there are different varieties of nations. The question instantly arises ; Is language already an existing developing process in human genes , which varies according to different civilisations and cultures? Has humanity invented language because of a very urgent need of self expression and communication? Human existence was in need of a selfhood, an identity original in itself. This existential identity may have been the very cause of different cultures and their vehicle of self expression, namely the different languages.

Now what was literature? Literature also existed side by side from the very beginning of human species. Human life, human story was there as a whole. Human passions, human feelings , loves and sufferings, experiences- all the human mystery existed in the literature of the different nations. Human legends started out right from the very stone ages found in the stone scriptures. Before writing was invented oral stories of legends carried on the news of human existence. It was a human need to communicate the past to the future generations. This past contained and communicated what was there as culture. Each nation has its own original and national culture that makes up in fact the world culture. History was not sufficient enough to contain and to communicate human story. What was needed was literature in its varieties of rich forms , as poetry, as short stories, as plays and as longer forms of prose, namely novels and serious essays. All these forms were art forms of harmony where language was used from simple everyday usage to higher more refined and esthetical measurements . Language found its way to development, enrichment and aesthetic perfection and inner harmony of expression in literary works. Different nations therefore created varieties of literature advancing perfection and creative harmony in language

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usage. Literature was the productivity and the final goal of creativity in language. That is literature and language are inseparable parts of our culture and culture is our national identity and selfhood without which nations would not be able to exist within the larger world culture. Therefore it is urgent that language should not be taught without literature and it is urgent that literature should not be rejected in language teaching. On the contrary, as many writers such as COLLIE, SLATER, MOODY, POVEY and LAZAR, indicated, literary forms should find their way into language teaching curriculum.

ANAHTAR SÖZCÜKLER

Language, Literature, Cultural Phenomenon

This paper stresses the important role of literature in enhancing the quality of language teaching because both of them – language and literature are the inseparable parts of national and world culture. There are different varieties of languages as there are different varieties of nations. The question instantly arises; Is language already an existing developing process in human genes, which varies according to different civilisations and cultures? Has humanity invented language because of a very urgent need of self-expression and communication? Human existence was in need of a selfhood, an identity original in itself. This existential identity may have been the very cause of different cultures and their vehicle of self-expression, namely the different languages.

Now what was literature? Literature also existed side by side from the very beginning of human species. Human life, human story, that is human passions, feelings, loves, sufferings and human history existed in the literatures of the different nations. Human legends started right out from the very stone ages recorded in the stone scripts. It was human need to communicate the past to the future generations. The past forming the very national culture, was and is still communicated through literature, to future generations by a variety of rich literary forms. Therefore language and literature are inseparable alloys within the cultural phenomenon of human race. This leads us to consider literature, to a greater degree in enhancing the quality of language teaching.

Literature, like any art form, engages the reader in a complex set of emotional, symbolic, moral, intellectual and social considerations. It uses normal means of communication – language, images, symbols, codes, stories – but uses them with complexity and distinction than in normal in everyday communication. A certain sensibility which may be called the ‘aesthetic’ can be attained through the use of form, sensual experience, rhythm, repetition and contrast. One can profit from the reading and study of literature. In the case of literature, as with any art form, reading and studying are closely allied. The more one learns how literature works, the more one gains competency as a reader, and literature and language becomes richer and more engaging for one.

An argument is often made that the artist has heightened sensibilities, or powers of perception and that she or he feels, experiences, images, intensely, richly, complexly, and so can convey a richer, deeper sense of experience. It is argued that writing, to be considered “literature”, requires a use of language, images and ideas which is refined, precise and self-reflective, and that as language and imagination are more fully and consciously used, the world itself would be imagined and perceived more accurately and deeply. Literature carries the expressions that can have more than one meaning, such as contradictions, symbols and ironies. The variety of expressions bring out the richness, density and complexity of human experience.

Literature is produced in various traditions and genres, and these traditions and genres have their own, original topics, themes and patterns of representation and reflection, which have a rich history and background and have accumulated wisdom and insight, as many people have contributed to their evolution. Literature then builds on previous literature, in the cultural atmosphere, to establish rich histories of thought and expression in language.

As was expressed in the past by an author ⁽¹⁾, literature as an art form, is valuable not because it is educational, not because it is creative (though it may be), not because everyone enjoys it (for everybody does not), not even because it has to do with beauty, but it is valuable because it has to do with order, and creates little worlds of its own, possessing and creating original and internal harmony. In our present day this evaluation on literature has not been altered. Strikingly in the similar way another scholar ⁽²⁾ mentioned in 1998 that literature creates “possible worlds” of its own which would envelop dramatic embodiments of experience that reveals the artist’s explorations of basic rules of human nature and of the structure of the world and universe. In *Lord of the Flies* for example Golding explores the nature of

human kind where evil destructiveness rises to action under appropriate conditions, namely in the wild beauty of nature and under the deceiving appearance of innocence of a badge of school kids from church chorus. Here Golding created a world of anti-utopia, an artistic world of nowhere, pleading the anti-utopia not to take over – but take over it did, Golding said. ⁽³⁾

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) is an other anti-utopia where Huxley had envisaged a future human world of artificially colonised people in the laboratories who were conditioned to become adaptable citizens to the world state and its Motto "identity, stability and community". *Brave New World* reflected a universal world of human beings, where genetical engineering had completed the process of human evolution. Today's genetical production, that in the colonisation of the little lamb Dolly brings into mind readily, the Huxleyan world of colonised human beings which he imagined in 1930's. Would Huxley's artistically imaginative world of nowhere be actualised in near future? Huxley gives the message: Let it not happen! It is observed here that such examples of literature may shed light to future experience of human condition as a universal truth. Parallel examples of artistic creativity of possible worlds in harmony, could be enriched and expanded endlessly throughout the history of not only English literature, but also world literature.

Literature is "mimetic" that is to say, represents "reality", "nature" or "the way things are". It portrays moral and other experiences in a concrete, immediately felt and perceived way through its aesthetic devices and powers. In return however, reconsideration and reflection on the given experiences is always possible, while the reader joins in and is separated at the same time from the world evoked through literary works of art. It is important to understand that literature can represent experience as we genuinely experience and imagine, by the use of affect and symbol, because human experience is affective and symbolic. Secondly literature works through the senses immediately with the use of sounds and rhythms and the words used evoked magical associations and images. There is a concrete as well as a symbolic presence.

Because of a number of reasons as the traditions of thought in the culture, the representational role of literature, the use of cultural codes, the insight into human experience, literature represents and explores the way in which the world is viewed and experienced by the people in that society or social group: that is it tells us a great deal about how the world is actually understood by the society to which the artist belongs, understood not only intellectually but symbolically and emotionally. Because of its imaginative and technical richness and its expressive power, literature is a very affective way of understanding a culture of particular time, or of a particular class, or social ethnic group. Thus literature can let us understand the state of differences or similarities of diverse times, cultures and classes. Without this understanding of the range of human experience in its possibilities we would be living in an enclosed ivory tower in which we cannot make meaningful discriminations. Only awareness of the differences of social changes through the experiences allows us to define what is.

Because of this relation between literature and social experience we can use literature not only to understand the past and other cultures and classes (and therefore to understand ourselves), but to evaluate as well – that is we can analyse causes and affects and evaluate social change, social values and so on. For instance it could be argued that the rise of the emphasis on individual experience in the Romantic movement was a result of the ideological imperatives of industrial capitalism, which for its purposes turned a once cohesive society into a set of separate and thus easily manipulable and exchangeable entities, called "individuals".

It is acknowledged that human experience is coded. That is we have systems of signs which establish meanings and relationships. Our clothes are coded, for instance – we can tell social class from the types of tastes and kinds of clothes that people wear. In fact our whole environment and everything we do that has meaning only has meaning because it conforms to codes. The argument is made that literature uses codes more densely, subtly and complexly than other communication modes: again this is one thing among others which makes art. If the use of codes of literature can be mastered, the control over the codes of everyday life could be attained to a higher degree.

It is argued that as literature creates defined imaginative worlds of human experiences within a conscious design, it also leads the way to the awareness of the nature of codes, what they mean and their implications. This enables us in fact, to be more conscious of our cultural environment, more alert to meanings, more flexible, more analytic. Can this be considered as a large part of liberal and thus active education which may produce better performers who tend to be analysing and flexible social

communicators? For this reason don't we need an ability to conceptualise and an accurate, fresh and an agile use of language in our power? A function of literature is to use the means of communication in precise effective ways, and to engage oneself in literature is to engage oneself in continuing process of refining one's capacities to use language and one's sensibilities to good language use. Literature, the argument goes, teaches us to be more alert to the whole range of ideas, feelings, images and symbols which ground our political, social and private lives.

The individual being is a social creature. Our social roles within the society to which we belong, dictate in fact how we act and feel as men or as women, as children, friends and as outsiders and insiders. Literature examines the positions of the individual and models it, so that we could enter those model worlds imaginatively as far as we would be allowed to fuse in. Our social roles within the society intensifies and builds up our subjectivity or self-hood. Literature then allows us to examine the mature and integration of our self-hood we occupy, more critically put – this is what might be called a moral effect of literature, as we can develop a sense of a self which would be able to deal with the limitations and possibilities that society can offer us.

As revealed above with its variety of functions, literature is a form of cultural discourse, and has function within the culture as a whole. Literature is not only a form of discourse controlled by the elite, but also it stems out right from the very bosom and creativity of the folk to which it belongs. One thing is clear, literature directly integrates with the language and culture of the nation from which it originates. Literature uses the power of the language and its symbols, enriching the vocabulary and its semantic qualities.

To sum it up literature enriches the expressive capacity of the culture from which it originates. It is a communicative, artistic power with its varieties of rich forms. It enriches and uses the power of language in which it is created. It is an unspeakable alloy of the language to which it belongs and from which it generates. Literature reflects the life and living motives of the cultures. It enables us to experience human complexities and human values. It explores the conflicts of the culture and self-hood of the human being. It dramatises the human life as a whole, not only as a part. It is sensitive and sympathetic of the human existence and life itself as a whole, literature is universal, inherent in each nation's culture as old as human existence and it is the very product of human need and human creativity as an art form.

What is language then? Language is considered to be a mysterious human phenomenon, a process which reveals a variety of qualities when observed from different points of views. From the human point of view, language determines the place of man in the world. The ability of speaking as a means of urgent communication, which appeared before the skill of writing in the primitive communities, is considered to be the main quality that differentiates human beings from animals. However it should not be forgotten that even animals have their own ways of speech as the nightingales' musical twittering that provoked the poets of many times, to write poetry and musicians to compose beautiful music. Not only the complex structure of speech but also the beginning of writing and the attainment of the writing skills are the true differentiative abilities that separate human beings from other animals.

Language is defined as a system of conventional spoken or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture communicate ⁽⁴⁾. Henry Sweet, an English phonetician and language scholar, stated: "Language is the expression of ideas by means of speech-sounds combined into words. Words are combined into sentences, this combination answering to that of ideas into thoughts." ⁽⁵⁾ The U.S. linguists Bernard Bloch and George L. Trager formulated the following definition: "A language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group co-operates." ⁽⁶⁾ The first definition lays the emphasis on thoughts and the second stresses the social significance of language. Generally, systems of vocal communication are recognised as different languages if they cannot be understood without specific learning by both parties, that is different systems of vocal communication constitute different languages. The differentiation of variety of languages could be understood only if they are considered in relation to the society or the community wherein these languages are created and used. Human language is infinitely productive and creative within the culture to which it belongs.

It has been related that language and culture are closely related. Culture covers a very wide area of human life and behaviour, and language is manifestly a part, probably the most important part of it. Society and language are mutually indispensable. Language can develop only in a social setting. The

culture of a society is transmitted very largely through language and human cultures are as divergent as human languages over the world, and they do change all the time.

Both language and literature, which carries and transmits national culture to the generations, are inseparable partners of a social existence. Literature cannot do without its original language. Could language do without literature? Where would it be then?

Using literature in foreign language classes has been always valued in the colleges of high school status and at the Faculties of Sciences and Letters of the Universities in Turkey for the very reason that literature is made of best possible language, therefore studying literature means studying language in use.

Literature is valued in the classroom abroad as mentioned in 1995 New York: Teachers College Press in CELA ⁽⁷⁾ A group of teachers took part in a research about teaching strategies for literature. Middle and high school teachers, elementary teachers, college instructors and bilingual educators joined in the group. Being in and moving through an environment as thus gave the experience of reading, writing, discussing and thinking on the chosen literary text. Students also joining in the group, shared the experiences and processes of rethinking, environment building through literary experience.

CELA director Judith A. Langer explained that their goal was to help middle and high school teachers across the country (USA), to improve literature instruction by exploring how people read and write literature. She said:

“Studying literature is one of the constant occupations of students at all levels, and it is “by becoming engaged in literature”, that we become part of a larger world. Literature enables students to explore possibilities and consider options for themselves and human kind. They come to find themselves, imagine the environment building.” ⁽⁸⁾

The research on Envisioning Literature was successful with valuable contributions of well known authors such as August Wilson, Maxine Hong Kingston and A. R. Gurney.

The reflections of a first grade teacher Mary-Louise (T) Warner was interesting. After studying literature in the class of children, she found out that, reading short stories followed by authentic discussions in the classroom, enabled the children to exchange ideas and to communicate; “Children are deep thinkers and they make surprising observations and decisions. I believe that helping children develop environments empowers them as thinkers and gives each a chance to shine in the classroom.” ⁽⁹⁾

Other teachers of grade 7 observed that there were 28 other unique ways of examining a work of literature. Each of the students came with a different perspective and experimental knowledge that tempered the understanding of the work. Many of their backgrounds were rich in literary experiences from the lower grades and the contributions from their home environments and cultures. All of these had affected their own understanding of a piece of literature.

A similar type of approach to literature can be actualised in foreign language teaching classes as were applied in colleges which use English in their education system and even in others which use Turkish at Elementary Junior High and High School levels.

Many other scholars such as Moody in 1971, who said: “One who is concerned with literature will be compelled to remember at many points that basically he is concerned with language.” ⁽¹⁰⁾ In 1986 Brumfit and Carter ⁽¹¹⁾, in 1989 authors like Maley and Carter and Walker ⁽¹²⁾ argued the study of literature and its critical concepts in foreign language teaching. They have discussed the stylistic approaches to the study of literature and hence the critical concepts in foreign language teaching. However Gower in 1986 ⁽¹³⁾ claimed that stylistic approaches to literary analysis had limitations since it diminished the aesthetic qualities of the text and the emotional contours were lost. It was tiresomely mechanistic and reduced the text to only linguistic object, ignoring the thematical qualities.

Some of the writers such as Rodger (1983) and Brumfit (1983) discussed that the language of literature including poetry, novel and drama was different than the language in practical discourse ⁽¹⁴⁾. Therefore literary competence should be attained through practice. It is clear that learners should have proficiency and communicative competence in language to understand and to interpret the masterpieces of original texts. Literary competence is the ability to read, to understand and to rewrite a given text in

evaluation. The attainment of literary competence would be especially difficult in understanding difficult poetry if one is wholly unfamiliar with literary conventions, as symbolic references to cultural background and the measurements of a poem. In the same way reading of the difficult symbolic and long novels may be difficult to understand in the process of foreign language learning, but the simplified editions of the classical novels were always helpful in the enhancement of language learning and in the acquirement of the cultural background and literary competence. In the same way reading a variety of dramatic works of plays would always help the development of the skills of conversation. Literature in general would unquestionably enhance the skills of reading, understanding, conversation and writing. It is impossible to separate a language from its cultural world namely literature which is a mirror of the cultural phenomenon. It is therefore impossible to separate language learning from its cultural origin and creativity. Each language is the product of human creativity and human culture.

Notes:

- 1- Forster, E. M.: "The Challenge of Our Time" in 1946 in **Two Cheers for Democracy**, p. 57 (Great Britain, first published in 1951)
- 2- Professor Lye, John: "On the Uses of Literature" URL of this page: [<http://www.brocku.ca/english/jlye/uses.html>] p. 2/5 Feb. 19, 1998
- 3- Golding, William: **A Moving Target** (Faber and Faber, London, 1982, p. 183)
- 4- **Encyclopedia Britannica** in [www.language.britannica.com] (March 27th, 2001, p.1)
- 5- Ibid p. 1
- 6- Ibid p. 1
- 7- Langer, J. A. : "Envisioning Literature – In the Classroom and Out" (1995) New York: **Teachers College Press – CELA** [<http://cela.albany.edu/newslet/winter01/close.htm>]
- 8- Ibid, p. ½ (Judith A. Langer had said.)
- 9- Ibid p. 2/3
- 10- Moody, H. L. B. (1971) **The Teaching of Literature** (Longman, London) p. 2
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- 12- Brumfit, C. J.; Carter, R. A. and Walker, R. (1989) "Literature and Learner: Methodological Approaches", **ELT Documents 130 Modern English Publications in Association with the British Council**, p.1
- 13- Gower (1986) cited in Carter and Brumfit (1989) p.2
- 14- Brumfit, C. J. (1983) **Teaching Literature Overseas: Language – Based Approaches** (ELT Documents 114, Oxford, Pergamon), p. 38, no/2, p. 39.