
THE IMPORTANCE OF LITERATURE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ÖZET

Bu çalışmada edebiyatın genel olarak İngiliz dili eğitimindeki önemi ve yeri Collie ve Slater (1987), Moody (1971), Povey (1972) ve Lazar (1990) gibi dilbilimcilerin ve diğerlerinin de görüşlerine dayanılarak belirtilmiş ve roman, kısa hikâye, şiir, piyes gibi edebiyat türlerinin dil öğretiminin ayrılmaz bir parçası olarak kabul edildiği görüşü desteklenmiştir.

SUMMARY

This paper points to the importance of using literary genres such as novels, poetry, drama and short stories in ELT classes referring to the works of such linguists as Collie and Slater (1987), Moody (1971), Povey (1972) and Lazar (1990) and others, and it defends the point of view that literature is an unseperable part of ELT classes.

It may be appropriate to start out with the questions which ask what language is and what is its relationship to literature.

What is language in the first place? Language is a mysterious existing phenomenon of humanity, a process which reveals a variety of qualities when observed from different points of views and the mysteries which still remain unsolved even today.

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. (1) However it should not be forgotten that even animals have their own ways of speech as the nightingales' musical twitterings that provoked the poets of many times to write poetry. Not only the complex structure of speech but also the beginning of writing and the attainment of the writing skills are the true differentiating abilities that separate human beings from other animals.

Language is not only a means of communication of the thoughts, passions, needs and senses of human beings, but also a means of transferring knowledge, namely education, on variety of professional fields ranging from science to philosophy, literature, arts, law and history. Each field of knowledge brings its own chest of vocabulary and needs special training in that field. Law, medicine, and literature as all the other fields of knowledge have their own special chests of vocabulary in the language that they are given. This in fact increases the task of the language teachers in the foreign language teaching and it is a question whether a foreign language teacher can be competent enough in all the fields of knowledge, which needs specialized study in the foreign language. To have perfect knowledge of vocabulary of the different professional fields such as mathematics, medicine and law and literature at the same time seems physically impossible for the language teachers even if they may be native speakers. Therefore learners of different professional fields have to increase their foreign language knowledge themselves in their special field of study after they acquire the elementary language skills, reading, speaking, comprehension and writing. In addition foreign language learners should be helped in developing their translation skills which require in essence a good manipulation of the knowledge of grammar, not only in the foreign language but also in the native language, because transferring or translating the foreign publications into the native language is important.

From the point of view of the social sciences the native language has primary importance as a social institution. Without a well developed language there is no possibility to form a unique cultural society. The culture of a society is revealed through its language, it is represented in fact by its tongue.

What makes a community a nation, is its language which is the strongest binding force of people in that culture. It is the language which connects the

individual to his nation and to his country. It is in fact language which communicates the past cultures to the present and to the future minds of the nations so long as they tend to live. Culture is inseparable from language, literature has always been a part of culture. Literature is one of the arts which depends on words, on the skillful arrangement of words, namely on the skill of language. Literature is an art form which cannot exist without language and with its three genres of poetry, drama and novel it can be used as a source in English Language Teaching Classes. Literature has always been capable of producing the best skillful samples of word usage, namely the best samples of language.

However until the past few years using literature in foreign language classes has been not valued. It has been noted that after the flourishing of the communicative approach, the importance of literature has been understood, since literature provides the convenient source of content for a course in a foreign language. Literature is made of best possible language, therefore studying literature means studying language in use.

English is one of the languages that there is a strong demand for learning as it is the language of international communication. Therefore new methods and approaches were sought for teaching it more effectively. Different materials were suggested and recently using literature as a source in ELT classes has gained importance in spite of the objections. In the beginning of this century, the teaching of the classics of English literature was very important in TEFL classes. The fundamental reason for using these materials was that learners would develop their own performance in the language if they were exposed to the best uses of English language. Later literature teaching began to disappear, or to be removed from the classroom because it was emphasized that literature based methods had inadequacies owing to the flight from the text. (2)

Today however, the merit of literature has been realized by the English language learners since the raw material of literature is the language, either spoken or written. In 1971 Moody indicated that language involves a wider range of activity and references than literature, as quoted below:

"Literature occupies a territory of some size and importance within the total realm of language, but not the whole field; a person (e.g. a lawyer) may be much concerned with some of the uses of language without being at

all in contact with literature; on the other hand anyone who is concerned with literature will be compelled to remember at many points that basically he is concerned with 'language.' (3)

It should be accepted that literature is constructed of highly elaborate and complex statements which would enrich student's knowledge and vocabulary and the skill of its manipulation. Language and literature are connected and literature and language study should be kept closely together.

Pickett in 1986 agrees to this point that language and literature is related, but he admits that one can learn language very well without literature or he/she can read and appreciate literature without being able to speak its language. However he cites: 'Of course in both cases something will be lacking and it is to obviate this lack that literature and language study should be kept closely together. (4)

Louw (1989) claims also the integration of language and literary study and that they should be equal partners in the new union. Both of them have to survive the process of integration for reaching success. He also points out a language lesson in which illustrations are drawn from literature, and which is easier than a literature lesson in which lengthy forays are made into the teaching of language. (5)

There are two main approaches in the study of literature. One is the stylistic approach and the other is the literary critical approach. Both of these approaches can be made useful in language teaching.

The stylistic approach deals with 'what is understood by literary language' and the literary critical approach deals with 'literature as a particular type of discourse' as was indicated by Brumfit and Carter in 1986. (6)

In the literary critical approach the focus is on the literariness of the texts- on plot, value, characterization, motivation, psychology, background etc. If this approach is used, a good deal of preparatory work on language and literariness has to be done.

In the stylistic approach the focus is on literature as text. Text is handled from marks on paper to the textual discoveries leading to the descriptions in terms of parallelism, deviancy, prominence and so on. Its main concern is with language. The interpretation of the text is to be based upon the above descriptions.

Writers like Maley and Carter and Walker in 1989 have argued the study of literature and its critical concepts in a foreign language teaching. It was indicated by them that the stylistic methods could be directed towards the study of literature as an institutionalized aesthetic artefact. (7)

The discipline of the stylistics can be used in the analysis of literary texts, attending more systematically to language organization, and aiming to offer frameworks for analysis which are explicit and replicable enough to be used on other texts as was indicated by Carter and Walker in 1989 (8)

New criticism, called practical criticism in England, influenced the dominant pedagogies of literary stylistics. They share the general underlying assumptions and avoid impressionism while describing literary linguistic effects. If learners could be able to handle the language of the text confidently they would catch the meaning of the text easily. The description of language would provide a basis both for interpretation and evaluation which come as a result of it. According to the supporters of stylistics the approach is valuable for native speakers who are often unconsciously aware of the organization of their own language and could be especially beneficial to non-native speakers.

The reason why it could be beneficial to the foreign learners is that non-native learners, in many cases, have an analytical knowledge of the target language so they would be more alert to the different uses of the language in a literary text. Stylistic analysis could be an appropriate way to the study of literary texts for such learners.

In addition, stylistic study of literary texts enables learners to make comments on the literary texts and thus they can talk about their intuitions. This would also help them to develop their speaking skills.

Learners in advanced classes always enjoy good literature even though they may not understand it completely. Explanation of some structures in poems, plays or novels through stylistic analysis of the text is possible. As leech expressed in 1969 stylistics has a prominent place in language teaching because it combines language and literary study as a bridge. (9) It has been noted that stylistics is concerned with both what the text means and why and how it means what it does. As it is understood from this statement stylistics involves both literary criticism and linguistics and also it is an area of meditation between them.

However stylistic analysis have some limitations since it diminishes the aesthetic qualities of a text and emotional contours are lost. Gower in 1986 claims that stylistics is invariably mechanistic and cerebral in operation and often reduces a literary artefact to more than a linguistic object and really only helps students with analytical prociivities. (10)

The limitations of stylistics were grouped in four groups: (11)

1-Literary stylistic analysis aims at accounting for meanings rigourously and systematically through attending to language. It is thought that meanings are only contained by language and found in the words on the page. Such an approach depending on the text can not be objective as stylisticians suppose and it often ignores references to other texts.

2-As beliefs of the reader are very important in the interpretation of the text, an objective analysis can not be actualized under these circumstances.

3-A literary work exists in history therefore it is to take proper account of historical determinants on meaning to interpret a literary text, but stylistics ignores the historical cultural artefact while interpreting a text.

4-Stylisticians accept the nature of literary language without questioning the assumptions, and it does not help learners question the conventional rules of literary language.

As a result it can be said that stylistic analysis is not the only approach to literature study and it does not solve many problems arising from the study of literature.

Literary Competence and Linguistics

It was accepted that literary texts shaped a special field of linguistic communication. The language of the literary texts was different from the language of the non-literary ones. The basic language system, namely the grammatical structures, vocabularly, style and so on are used in literature, but its subtle and complex language is not always available in prectical discourse. In this case the unusual using of the language by poets, novelists and playwrights has been called 'foreground discourse' (Rodger, 1983). (12)

Learners must be endowed with the necessary information to understand and to analyse the foregrounding principles if literature will be used as a source in ELT class. First they have to be taught to recognize the special conventions used in literary texts and to make sense of the special use of the language. Namely they ought to gain first 'communication awareness' and secondly the 'language consciousness' (Rodger, 1983) (13). Both of them depend on the principle of comparison and contrast.

Thus it is clear that learners should have proficiency and communicative competence in language to understand and to interpret the masterpieces of literature. This is called literary competence. Culler (1975) defines literary competence as 'the ability to read a work of literature by bringing into the play the necessary presuppositions and implicit understanding of how literary discourse works that tell them how to read and what to look for'. (14)

Literary competence requires a recognition of such devices as metaphorical meanings. That is a sophisticated knowledge of the particular kind of language in a given text is necessary. Learners have to be aware of certain literary styles and conventions. (Brumfit (1989) Points out that literary competence demands a certain degree of linguistic sophistication and that one can not respond to a work of literature unless one has some minimal understanding of it. He also states the term 'competence' refers metaphorically to the learners' ability to respond adequately to literature as a work of art.

Culler in 1975, drawing attention to literary competence expresses that anyone who is wholly unfamiliar with the literary conventions, would be quite baffled when presented with a poem. (16) The grammatical structure and the phrases and sentences would be understood, but the underlying meaning of the references would remain unclear because of the lack of 'literary competence'.

To read an original text, not simplified or abridged series, learners must have the necessary background information as well as competence in the target language. Otherwise they will be confused when they come face to face with an authentic text. A true literature syllabus aims at developing or extending literary and linguistic competence, with the use of texts and their analysis in classes for advanced language purposes.

Lazar (1993) also argued the importance of literary competence in the study of literature. She claimed that literary competence can be attained through effective reading and acquiring background information for understanding certain conventions. Thus the meaning of the words on the page of a literary work can be interpreted or evaluated in the right manner. Sentences in a news paper and a poem need different evaluations and responses. While newspaper sentences need an objective evaluation, sentences in a poem would need exploring for certain symbolical meanings.

Lazar tries to answer the question asking the importance of acquiring literary competence for language learners. (17) This surely depends on the purpose for which literature is being used. Drawing attention to the distinction made by Maley (1989), between the study of literature and the use of literature as a source for language teaching, she answers the question. The first study makes literature itself the content, while the second one uses literature with different genres as the vehicle for teaching language. As a result of this distinction, the importance and place of literary competence are understood. If the aim of the course is the study of literature, developing the literary competence is crucial, but if literature is used as a source in ELT classes, teaching literary competence may not be the aim. However learners can acquire literary competence unconsciously through their exposure to literary texts.

To conclude with Brumfit's point of view (1986), that is, if literary text is used in relation to a serious view of extending literary competence, it will provide a particularly suitable base from which motivated language activity can develop. (18) As a result even if the literary text is used only to improve literary competence, the learners will gain both literary competence plus the language skills which would be developed due to the motivation provided through the interesting and enjoyable activities.

Contribution of Literature to English Language Teaching

Language has two basic functions for human beings: first it enables them to think in very complex ways and second, it enables them to communicate with each other. Since two functions are related with thinking and communication, the purpose of learning a language is directed towards these functions.

Both literature and language teaching aim at giving informations and taking responses in return in written and spoken discoursés. Teachers may employ

order to attain the right kind of responses from the learners. The importance of learning was emphasized rather than teaching and literature was supposed to create a feeling for language as was expressed by Long in 1986. (19)

One of the contributions of literature to language teaching is to provide input data and also taking output responses. The importance of teaching literature in language classes was admitted by Collie and Slater in 1987. The reason why the language teacher can use literature as a source in ELT class is that 'literature offers a bountiful and extremely varied body of written material which is important in the sense that it says something about fundamental human issues and which is enduring rather than ephemeral' (20) That is literature provides learners with a wide range of situations and predicaments which seem to stimulate some kind of emotional response.

Another benefit of using literature as a source in ELT class is that literature provides authentic material to learners. Collie and Slater drawing attention to this point say that learners are exposed to language that is as genuine and undistorted as can be managed in the classroom context:

"In reading literary text students have also to cope with language intended for native speakers and thus they gain additional familiarity with many different linguistic uses, forms and conventions of the written mode: with irony, exposition argument, narration and so on..." (21)

It has been denoted that the conventional way of teaching literature in the class by teacher-centered techniques, such as question and answer or giving introductory information which is necessary, would not be completely adequate. These approaches may foster detailed comprehension, but learners may not penetrate the text and share their views with their classmates, if they do not use their chance to speak in such an approach as it was noted by Collie and Slater (1987). (22) However although question and answer technique may seem teacher-centered it is a way to provide the student into a conversation on the literary text. One of the purposes in using literature as a source in ELT classes is to complement more conventional approaches and so diversify the repertory of classroom procedures.

As emphasized by Littlewood (1986), literature is not qualitatively different from any other linguistic performance. Literature is the pattern of the productive use

of linguistic structures. It aims at achieving communication. Literature uses all available styles to gain its effects or give its representation of life. In literature, writer represents his or her own vision of the events and world view. (23)

Literature presents instances of grammatical use of language, it presents varieties of language such as in the work of a regional writer, that is providing access to local dialect or it presents the earlier state of the linguistic content of a classical work.

In case of literature language creates its own context and thus the authentic situation is given. The world presented in the work of literature is the foreign world so it provides the cultural background about foreign literature. Finally when the structure, the style, the subject matter are completely understood, the reader can penetrate into the author's vision denoted in the symbolization of the language.

Linguists such as Moody (1971), have made different classifications to express the benefits of using literature as a source in ELT classes. (24) Such skills as listening, speaking, reading and writing can be developed through the use of literature, because literature offers variety of opportunities to learners for using these skills. Moody (1971), Collie and Slater (1987) and Povey (1972) agree to the above point that literature teaching develops the four language skills. (25)

Literature deals with many subjects so that there are various language styles in it. Learners can find the language of law, of mountaineering, of medicine and of church sermons to nursery talk. Literature can also include different types of everyday talk according to its purpose. Literature can involve different types of knowledge as in the novel *Moby Dick* where descriptive knowledge of whales are given in a whole chapter. Thus literature can be always useful in teaching the language of variety of subjects.

Moody (1971) indicated that literature can provide suitable materials and encouragement for the development of the principle faculties of learners. These faculties are the senses, namely of sight, hearing, taste, scent and touch. (26)

Although it was accepted that the training of the intellect is related with the non-literary subjects such as mathematics and other sciences, it has been understood that the operation of the rational faculties can be practised in the study of literature.

Literature deals with ideas, thoughts and sensations, that is the emotional side of human beings. Thus learners can be able to explore and experience the qualities of being human as involved in a literary text.

As literary texts involve social and religious subjects, learners can gain the comprehensive awareness of fundamental social and religious problems from textual analysis.

Literature can be dealt in language classes because it provides meaningful and memorable contexts for processing and interpreting new language. Learners can acquire many characteristics of new language almost in passing through literary material, used in language class because it absorbs learners in the plot and characters of an authentic text. Learners can always share their feelings and opinions with their classmates through the use of literary texts.

In spite of the many benefits of literary texts in language teaching classes, there have been many objections to the use of literature in language classes. All these objections have originated from misconceptions about literature, because literature and language are inseparably integrated as a whole. Language is the material of literature as stone or bronze is of sculpture or as notes are of music, or as colours are of the art of painting. Literature is in fact, that art of using language in the best way possible. Literature has always contained the best samples of the use of language and there is no doubt to the teaching of language through the use of literary texts in ELT classes.

Learners want to be acquainted with the different genres of literature in the learning process. They would like to read short stories, novels, plays and poems in ELT classes.

The common features of novels and short stories are more than their differences. Both of them are written for the general reader and for that reason, learners can perceive common varieties of the language in them. Like the novel, the short story follows a cause and effect relationship, while telling the events, but short stories are shorter than novels. The events focus on a place or an object, used as the symbol of a way of life. The brevity of the short story gives an opportunity to learners for reading different stories.

Both Moody (1971) and Lazar (1990) point out the benefits of use of the novel in ELT classes. Lazar (1990) draws attention to the fact that if a novel has been carefully selected by considering learners' interests and needs, it may provide a more involving source for pedagogic activities than the narratives which can be founded in course books. She comments that.

"A good novel addresses itself to complex situations and dilemmas. It engages our students intellectually, emotionally and linguistically, and as such it can provide the basis for motivating variety of classroom activities, ranging from extensive reading tasks to close textual analysis. Related to this is the fact that if the novel selected by the teacher does indeed motivate learners, then students may feel a very satisfying sense of achievement at having successfully read and discussed a text which is not only authentic, but is also considered worth while by native speakers of English." (27)

Learners will have to pay more attention to the kind of language used in the novel than usual to understand and to interpret the subject of the novel. Thus they can observe the multiple meanings of the words that are used symbolically. They would evaluate the text intellectually and emotionally.

While teaching novels the teachers should consider the length of the novels which will be used in ELT classes. It is important to choose a novel which is short enough to be handled in the classroom time, otherwise learners have to do home readings. If a long novel is chosen, selected chapters can be read in the classroom and classtime can be spent on activities.

The class-time is limited with 50 or 60 minutes, therefore the teacher may use extracts from novels, but using extracts may not be always helpful to the students if they are to be taken incidentally from the middle of the work. The novel is important as a unit and the superiority of the style may be destroyed by the act of extraction. Extracting the text may be thought to spoil cohesion and the semantic relations between the sentences. However it is always possible that the teacher can maintain a sense of wholeness by choosing selected sections and by weaving them into long or short essays, which would tend to explain and to comment on the whole context of a novel. At the same time the students should be encouraged to join in the study, by writing each an essay on the chosen novel, by doing a careful

analysis and research of second hand literature, so that they would be prepared to learn the technique of writing a thesis. Writing a thesis on a carefully analysed novel, will not only enrich their chest of vocabulary and knowledge, but will also help in developing the skill of writing and manipulation of the language in exactness.

It is clear that reading and analysing genuine novels is for advanced language learners, but for developing language learners, the use of simplified texts at certain stages can be advised, because they are brief and short, they save time and they are syntactically less complex. Alderson (1984) and Vincent (1986) defend the use of extensive simple texts in the early stages of developing reading skills. (28) However there have been many objections to the use of simplified texts, because they were not genuine or alternative to the original texts, but a different discourse altogether. In suite of the objections it can be said as Widdowson (1978) had done, that simple accounts would be preferable to simplified versions.

Since short stories are brief and time saving, they may be ideal for using as a source in ELT classes. Although they may be less involving, it is possible to give more things in economy of language and imagery in short stories. Through short stories learners are invited to see the universe in a grain of sand to use Collie and Slater's terms (1987) (29). However it can be difficult for the foreign readers to solve the problems of meaning and references in such a compression. Thereby the appreciation of the text would be difficult and for that reason the teacher must help learners to comprehend the 'grain of sand' and to respond to it on an emotional level.

Another genre which can be used in ELT class is poetry. Since poems have the advantage of length, using them seem more practical than the novel or drama. They deal with the themes of universal concern in economy of words and they represent life itself. Poems involve brilliant concision and strong imagery for providing powerful effect on the readers. Apart from these features, they include stress, rhythm and similarities of sound. It has been noted that poetic language is organized with great care and skill. In some ways it represents language at its more perfect and its most meaningful. Poetry represents memorable instances for self-expression. A further incidental advantage of poetry is that it is composed with close reference to the spoken forms of the language. It can be very helpful in the development of effective readiness of speech.

Using plays in language classes would be also very useful, because plays consists of dialogues which provides learners with conversational language. Of course, dialogues used in a play is designed in an order and it may be different from everyday conversation, but still it will consist of important aspects of conversational discourse as also noted by Lazar in 1993. (30)

Aristotle has defined drama as the recreation of life so that it makes use of all the elements of real activity. Drama included not only language but also movement, position, gesture and facial expression. Since drama deals with the spoken language, the subtle expressive resources of language, such as intonation, pitch, stress, volume, hesitation, and so on can be experienced in the language of drama.

Since the dramatic language consists of dialogues, the teacher should take into consideration whether the language of the text is easy for learners or not. The study of Shakespeare, for instance, is very difficult both for native speakers and for pupils learning English as a foreign language. The language of his plays is complex due to using of archaism, witticism, unexpected metaphors and extravagant hyperboles. Edward Sapir a distinguished linguistic philosopher indicated that 'it is not the least likely that a truly great style can seriously oppose itself to the basic form patterns of the language. It not only incorporates them, it builds on them. The merit of such a style is that it does with ease and economy what the language is always trying to do.' (31) Thus it is possible to teach Shakespeare in more advanced classes of language in order to enrich the learners' skill of interpretation and language manipulation.

It has been claimed also that the use of classics is useful for providing an awareness of the ancient literary values. While using the classics, learners have to be helped both with structure of the language and with the vocabulary of the text which is full of rich expressions of its time.

The reasons why drama should be used as a source for language classes is to provide learners with a meaningful context and to foster a sense of involvement through active participation. Participating the play, learners often observe the use of new phrases and study their use by the characters in a play so that they can utilize the language themselves. The human conflicts and moral dilemmas or political issues communicated in a play engage students intellectually and emotionally, can always provide a valuable source of discussion. Students in experiencing the

Learners have different aims in learning a language and one of them is to express their thoughts and ideas and to communicate with people who speak English in another part of the world. As a result, the aim of English language teaching focuses on this aspect, namely to develop the learner's communicative competence. Literary texts provide learners with a variety of useful materials to actualize this aim. It also offers the authentic text of the language by the use of which the learners can develop vocabulary, grammar usage and the four language skills, reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Literary texts deal with universal subjects and motivate the learners of English language. The study of literature is interested in stylistic analysis of the text and the close study of the linguistic features as well as the thematic approach which includes social, political and psychological analysis.

It is no doubt that the aim of the use of literature offers tremendous potential to ELT classes, linguistically, communicatively, aesthetically. Literature will motivate the learners, will tempt their interests to language learning and thereby will progress their skills in language learning. Therefore literature should always have an important place in ELT curriculum in the future in spite of the many objections to its usage.

Notes:

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