

Dil Öğretimi Sınıfları İçin Bir Edebiyat Öğretimi Yaklaşımı Önerisi

A Suggestive Approach to How to Teach Literature in EFL Classes

Aslı Özlem TARAKÇIOĞLU

GÜ Gazi Eğitim Fakültesi İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Anabilim Dalı Ankara-TÜRKİYE

ÖZET

Dil öğretim yöntemleri edebiyat öğretimine uygun olmadığı için dil öğretim sınıflarında edebiyatın nasıl öğretilmesi gerektiği uzun süre tartışma konusu olmuştur. Edebiyat öğretmenlerinin derslerini hazırlık, dilbilgisel tarama ve sunum olmak üzere üç ana bölümde planlamaları ve her bölümde edebi yetilerin gelişiminin yanı sıra öğrencilerin dil gelişimlerini hedef almaları dil sınıfları için en iyi edebiyat öğretimi metodu olarak öne çıkmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Edebiyat, edebiyat öğretimi, dil sınıflarında edebiyat öğretimi metodları.

ABSTRACT

The question of how to teach literature in EFL classes has long been the center of hot discussions since language teaching methodologies are improper to literature teaching. It seems to be the best way for teachers of literature to plan their courses in three main phases namely preparation, linguistic survey and demonstration by keeping their concentration on the development of students' linguistic skills along with the improvement of their literary competences at each step.

Keywords: Literature, literature teaching, teaching of literature in EFL classes.

1. Introduction

Although its necessity and advantages have long been discussed by authorities, in recent times it has irreversibly been accepted that the teaching of literature in EFL classes is essential and can be used as a perfect instrument to stimulate and speed up the teaching-learning process (Carter and Long, 1991: 1). So a proper EFL curriculum is supposed to combine language teaching with literature teaching appropriately. However when the fact that language and literature are “separate systems or phenomena” (Carter and Brumfit, 1986: 164) is considered, it becomes apparent that it is not possible to teach literature in EFL classes in the way language is presented.

Indeed, both language and literature teaching require the fruition of a sense of language on behalf of the students and they necessitate a particular response to the text. In addition, they both stem from man’s need to communicate and are originated from linguistic items. However, most of the approaches in language teaching seem to exhibit methodologies which are improper to literature teaching. Especially structural approaches put emphasis on accuracy in grammatical form and demand students to use and produce grammatically flawless arrangements and patterns of linguistic items. When compared to literature teaching, language teaching is a mechanistic period which is reduced to formulated structures. On the other hand, literature is “a whole social process, which, as it is lived, is not only process but is an active history made up of the realities of formation and of struggle” (Williams, 1987: 210), so rather than the linguistic items it contains, teachers tend to highlight the aesthetic, autobiographical, historical, social and/or psychological aspects while teaching a literary text, even in an EFL class. It can be said that literature has a propensity to pass over its origins as language. Therefore, it would not be wise to attempt to apply the same methodologies both in language and literature teaching.

2. When to Introduce Literature

Before starting to discuss *how* to teach literature in EFL classes, first it seems essential to reason briefly *when* to commence teaching it. In *Syntactic Structures*, Chomsky discriminates between *competence* and *performance* and he defines competence as the knowledge of the language while describing performance as the actual use of the language in concrete situations (1957, 31-33). Linguistics is interested in the speaker's competence rather than his/her performance, accordingly, in most EFL classes; the competence of the students is prior to their performances, at least at the beginning. Actually, competence can be categorized into three groups: linguistic competence, literary competence and stylistic competence. Primarily, students are supposed to have acquired linguistic competence before beginning to learn literature. That is, they should be able to read and understand the text precisely and without difficulty because it requires accuracy and fluency to develop ideas to lead advanced studies and judgment in the target language. Only in this way they can practice and gain experience in the language in order to initiate aesthetic response which is necessary to study literature. It is also to stimulate students' ability to conceptualize the ambiguities in the structures and the metaphorical uses, which lays the basis for the development of the literary competence. Hence, the attainment of linguistic competence is the first and indispensable prerequisite to study literature in EFL classes. Students, then, can start studying literature only when they acquire necessary and adequate linguistic competence in the target language.

3. How to Teach Literature in Efl Classes

Teaching literature in EFL classes requires preparing students linguistically, intellectually and motivationally. In order to achieve this, the teaching of a literary text should be designed in three steps namely preparation, linguistic survey and demonstration.

3.1. Preparation

In the preparation phase, the most crucial criterion is the selecting of the literary text to be studied. First of all, the text chosen should be compliant with the class level. Although students are supposed to have already acquired linguistic competence, there might be differences in the knowledge level of the students or the class as a whole since each group of students has its own characteristics peculiar to itself. So, the chosen text should be appropriate to the linguistic and conceptual level of students so that they can decipher the linguistic features and so that the ideas presented in the text can make sense for them. Even though a literary text is composed of linguistic features about which students are supposed to have obtained theoretical knowledge, still it is different from the texts used in EFL courses because the exemplary sentences and dialogues designed for EFL curriculum are generally made of grammatically flawless structures without any diversion from the standard and ideal forms. Moreover since literary texts are authentic materials they may include a variety of registers, accents, inversions and diversions, which make the text difficult to handle with for EFL students. Chapman (1973:13) comments on the same point by saying that:

Literature uses language as an artistic medium, not simply for communication or even expression. It is not spontaneous, whatever theories of spontaneous inspiration may sometimes have canvassed. It is considered and developed in a way that is impossible for everyday conversation, or even for the more deliberate registers adopted for certain styles.

While choosing the material, teachers should keep in mind that studying literature is not a reaction, but an interaction between the reader and the writer. So the text should not build up a barrier between them linguistically or conceptually. Cantarow claims that “In academia, literature is made static: poems, novels, plays are turned into so many museum pieces students acquire to paint on upper-middle-class patina on their lives” (1972: 91). So teachers of literature have to take literary works out of this definition and turn these “static museum pieces” into active and useful instruments to be used, understood and appreciated in class environment by wiping out linguistic and especially

conceptual obstacles. Students cannot be assumed to be familiar with the cultural and/or social aspects of the society to which the language they study belongs, so at least the themes in the chosen work should be recognizable to them so that students can identify them easily. Furthermore, cultural and social traits and assumption should be introduced prior to the presentation of the text in the class by comparing and contrasting with those of their own ones. Students should be prepared for social and cultural differences and variations. They should gain and extend their tolerance and flexibility to recognize and get accustomed to other peoples and cultures different from their own. These can be accomplished by choosing the correct material with which students can identify their own lives and experiences without being obstructed by linguistic and/or conceptual difficulties.

Additionally, the selected material should be in line with the general aims and curriculum of the EFL course. A literary work of art can be chosen and studied from a variety of points of view depending on the autobiographical qualifications of the writer, the period it belongs to, its social, cultural or psychological aspects, and so forth. However while teaching literature in EFL classes the main aim is to back up the objectives of the EFL curriculum which is generally directed to the improvement of the basic linguistic skills of the students. Widdowson (1986:85) clarifies this aspect as follows;

It is not necessary to select works on the grounds of aesthetic excellence or because they are representative of different schools and periods: the criteria for selection are pedagogic rather than aesthetic or historical and have to do with whether the works can be used to develop sensitivity to language in the most effective way.

It is necessary for teachers of literature to ascertain the goals of teaching a particular literary work of which content and structures are to serve to a particular purpose in compliance with the actual EFL curriculum. So rather than preferring the masterpieces or milestones of certain writers and/or periods teachers of literature ought to focus on the works on which they can exemplify the studied structure or vocabulary or introduce the variant forms of known structures. In this way they can assist students to overcome

linguistic and conceptual difficulties while improving their literary competences and enjoyment of reading literature at the same time. As Widdowson asserts, literature as a subject “has as its principal aim the development of the capacity for individual response to language use” (1986: 76). Thus, students who are supposed to have already developed a consciousness to literary discourses can express and communicate unique personal messages.

Teachers of literature should also determine the means of how to achieve his/her objectives. The best way to teach literature in EFL classes is to integrate language and literature teaching through activities such as brain storming, role-playing, word association, situational scenes and prediction. It assists students to improve their capacities and abilities to make analyses and express themselves in a variety of ways. While illuminating students about the author, the period, cultural and social aspects and literary meaning and importance of the selected work, teachers of literature should also be able to add up and brush up the linguistic skills and competences of their students. By bringing language and literature teaching together teachers are to lead students to express their opinions about general subjects, to involve in conflicts and act out immediate responses, to deduce the meaning of words when used in different contexts, to develop an understanding of abstract and/or unfamiliar concepts and to speculate about common or exceptional issues, which all serve to improve both linguistic and literary competence of students.

Planning what to do in the following weeks beforehand can also help teachers to organize and make the essential changes and attachments when necessary. It provides them with flexibility to add or eliminate particular parts. They may well determine in advance where to stop to stress a particular idea or structural item or where students are having difficulty. It will also give teachers some extra time to review the material or to compensate for the lack of any linguistic or literary knowledge of students.

3.2. Linguistic Survey

At the stage of linguistic survey, students should first be evaluated according to their levels of linguistic knowledge and their ability to use this knowledge in actual interaction. That is, it is necessary for teachers to be aware of the competence and performance of their students in the class before presenting the text. Thus they can better decide which activities to use and which linguistic and literary items to call attention to. Besides the consideration and attentiveness of teachers to the competences and performances of students may help them to overview the teaching strategies to be applied during the teaching process in accordance with the level of students and class.

After determining the linguistic level of students, teachers can introduce the literal and metaphorical dimensions of words, and students can be invited to discover literal and non-literal meanings of particular items contained in the work. Teachers ought to remind students of the fact that words and structures are multi-layered and multi-dimensional and it is not possible to fix them into a single meaning. Each word may well have metaphorical meaning(s) along with the literal one. Accordingly, Widdowson (1986:35) mentions about “the essential naturalness of metaphorical uses of language” as an “ability to create new values in discourse” as a part of knowledge of the language, which is not only restricted to literary personalities. He also maintains that “ungrammatical sentences in literary writing do make sense and a poem which deviates from grammatical rules as text is nevertheless interpretable as discourse” (1986: 27), which is as well applicable to daily and colloquial use of language of native people even though they are excluded from the course books designed for EFL classes. Literature with its deviations is an inevitable part of a language and cannot be kept out of language studies even though it requires an extra study to decode its meaning and messages as Kampf and Lauter (1972: 5) formulate in the extract below; Linguistic deviations do not occur randomly in a literary work but pattern in with other linguistic features, both regular and irregular, to form a whole. They are understood, therefore, not in isolation with reference only to the linguistic system, or code, but also with reference to the context in which they appear.

So students should be heartened to discover and to use both literal and metaphorical meanings in the target language while teachers of literature introduce the convenient features in syntax or lexis along with the literary aspects embedded into the text. Students should be encouraged to decode how the message of the text is conveyed by the writer/poet since the grammar in a literary work “is meant to represent the native speaker’s linguistic knowledge and so to account for his ability to produce and interpret his language correctly” (Blamires, 1991: 14).

Literary forms and literary terms can also cause problems for those who are not acquainted with the concept of literature. Taylor (1981: 23) defines literary form as “the writer’s choice of framework for the discourses . . . on a particular topic, generally in a unit which other writers have used and which critics have labeled as the species and subspecies known as genres” such as novel, short story, poetry, epic, tragedy and so on. Teachers of literature may well have students get acquainted with these forms by exemplifying them with samples from students’ native literature or from classical masterpieces. Alternatively they may find it necessary to make brief excerpts from each form either by giving related assignments to students or bringing some samples to the classroom themselves. Literary terms, nevertheless, are more in number and require expertness to recognize and handle. So it seems proper to introduce only a small number of literary terms in an EFL class only when necessary depending on the text selected.

3.3. Demonstration

The demonstration stage involves the presentation of the chosen text in the class. It is of great importance for teachers to remember that the focus and concentration should be kept upon the text itself rather than on the author or period. The literary aspects of the text are not the main concerns in an EFL class, so they cannot be the determinant for the teacher to resolve how to present the text.

At first, teachers should prepare and motivate students by trying “to activate the experience” and “to concentrate on sensitizing students to problems that can occur and to prompt them to think about their experiences and to project themselves imaginatively

into situations which might occur and which would involve them with the issue” presented (Carter and Long, 1991: 19). In other words, teachers should inflame students’ interest in the text, in its plot, theme and/or characters before presenting it by stimulating a sense of excitement and suspension, and should establish the right mental attitude for receptivity. This process is called to ‘set induction’. Students should brace themselves to encounter a new perspective over other cultures and peoples presented through a text different from the ones in their course books. However, regardless of their age and sex, all students demand to find a reason to read a text in order to feel motivated, especially if it is a long and extended one. Particularly when the reason is related to students’ world, ideas and experiences the motivation process becomes easier and more efficient as Jefferson (1983:117) also observes;

One important principle is that students will be motivated to read if the process of reading is related to them as individuals. A good starting point may, therefore, be to elicit from students as many of their own ideas, feelings and attitudes as possible before they begin reading.

Subsequently, the pre-reading activities should be connected to the text during the process of reading. Indeed, the reading process is a vital phase, because it is an active process to make students get involved in a fictional world designed by an artist. Students are supposed to conceptualize and interpret the meaning of the text and the message that the writer aims to convey. Actually it is a difficult task because “The literary representation of experience is not a direct one; it is frequently indirect. This forces the reader to make connections, to read between the lines, to seek for explanations and meanings”(Carter and Long, 1991: 16). So by combining the pre-reading activities, which is a linguistically and literally informative procedure, teachers may guide students during the reading process to better and easier understanding of some linguistic or conceptual aspects which may seem a bit ambiguous and difficult due to the metaphorical nature of literature for EFL students.

Next, the personal experiences of students should be related to the text. Students should perceive the discriminating interaction between the conceptual framework of the text

and themselves. They should come to understand the fact that although the text they study is a fictitious one, it is also a part of the actual and contemporary world and can be associated with the experiences of real people. They may be asked to identify the characters in the text with their own acquaintances or to link the events/actions/thoughts in the plot with factual ones from their own lives. Students can see it through “an active shuttling back and forth between the ‘fictional’ world and the ‘real’ world (Carter and Long, 1991: 16). Such a perception is to make the reading of literature a sheer joy and satisfaction as well as being a new and exciting experience on behalf of students.

Teachers of literature should also encourage students to compare and contrast the previously read works and ideas. They should help students to build bridges between ideas, themes, characters and so forth. In this way, the reading of literary text can be enhanced and improved while their experience of the world, life and other cultures and peoples are also enriched. Such a comparative and contrasting study will develop students’ ability to analyze and criticize what they know and learn as well, which again supports the objectives of language classes by developing students’ productive skills.

It is of great importance that students should not be tested on the literary material until they have acquired self-confidence in reading and understanding of a literary text efficiently. It should be kept in mind that gaining literary competence is a long and arduous way to complete. It is sure that students are to learn how to enjoy the pure pleasure of reading, understanding, interpreting and commenting on a piece of literature, even though it takes a long time. They will for sure notice that studying literature also expands their linguistic knowledge with its deviations from the standard while enlarging their perception and experience of life and other people. However it takes precise linguistic and literary competence to reach such a level of conceptual maturity. So an early disillusionment, embarrassment or humiliation resulting from failing to respond appropriately may result in undesired consequences for the teaching-learning process.

When all these aspects are considered, it seems certain that aesthetic reading is preferable to efferent reading in literature teaching in EFL classes (Brumfit, 1986: 32-

36). Efferent reading focuses on the knowledge that the text includes, accordingly students are mainly involved in the information they are supposed to gain from the text. So efferent reading is not apt to the nature of literature teaching which contains much more than a simple opinion or knowledge. On the other hand, aesthetic reading leads students to trail the actions, associations and relations within the text. It directs them to bring their own experiences onto the text. Students can make judgments about the plot, characters, theme etc. by using their own social and cultural value judgments. Aesthetic reading emphasizes the use of knowledge, the knowledge of how to use linguistic rules in actual interaction (which is at the core of a literary work of art as a fruit of a particular society's authentic life verbalized by a native speaker), rather than the usage of knowledge, the knowledge of linguistic rules. The usage of knowledge is not important in aesthetic reading unless it gets in the way of comprehension or experience of the students. Hence it is much more appropriate to the literature teaching methodologies and objectives of EFL classes.

4. Conclusion

By following up the suggested steps, teachers may well lead their students to conceptualize the diversions from the standard grammar rules, different registers, accents and inversions in the target language. Students come to understand that literary works are indeed practical instruments that can stimulate foreign language learning enriching linguistic skills. They become aware of socio-cultural variations as well as similarities among societies by overcoming linguistic and conceptual barriers. While appreciating the aesthetic values of another language, students also develop an individual response to it. They also improve their abilities to criticize and analyze while sharpening their perceptive and creative skills. Students also learn to handle the meaning and metaphors both in literal and non-literal texts as well as gaining a higher sense of receptivity and self-confidence in the understanding and using of the target language.

Consequently, literature teaching is an indispensable part of language teaching in EFL classes. However it is not possible for literature teachers to follow the teaching methodologies applied by language teachers because literature is drastically different from linguistics by nature at the basis. In order to make literature useful and functional in EFL classes, teachers of literature should design their lessons in three main steps namely preparation, linguistic survey and demonstration. Literary works to be studied should be chosen in compliance with the level of the students. While studying literature, linguistic competence is a prerequisite for students, so teachers of literature should be convinced of the fact that their students have already acquired the necessary linguistic knowledge prior to their lesson because the ultimate aim of all these lessons is to provide students with proper communicative competence. Thus, the focal point of each step should be on the improvement of students linguistically rather than literally since the aim of teaching literature in EFL classes is to serve educational objectives rather than aesthetic ones. Only in this way, a literary work can be used as an efficient and beneficial means to motivate and speed up the learning and communication in the target language.

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