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PRACTICING RELIGIOUS LITERATURE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM TO ENHANCE ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

This article intends to show how literature may be used in language classes to develop student's knowledge of English. First, we examine the evolution of literature in the language classroom, then we give account of some reasons that justify its use in language classes, of the role of reading in language development, and of the way poetry is treated in the ESL classroom. This paper aims to emphasize the use of literature as a popular tool to teach language skills (i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking), language areas (i.e. vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) as well as moral teachings, which is the necessity in present time. Reason for using religious literary texts in foreign language classroom and main criteria for selecting suitable religious literary texts in foreign language classes are stressed so as to make the reader familiar with the underlying reasons and criteria for language teachers, using and selecting religious literary texts. Moreover, religious literature and teaching of language skills, benefits the different genres of religious literature (i.e. poetry, fiction and drama), and also gaining knowledge of a particular religion through language teaching but some problems had been observed by language teachers within the area of English through religious literature (i.e. lack of preparation in the area of literature teaching in TESL/TEFL programs, absence of clarity in objectives defining the role of literature in ESL/EFL), language teachers not having the background, training and appropriate knowledge in religious literature, lack of pedagogically-designed teaching material that can be used by language teachers in a classroom.

Key Words: Religious Literature, Teaching Literature, Teaching of Language Skills, Foreign Language Teaching, Literary Competence.

In recent years, the role of literature as a basic component and source of authentic texts of the language curriculum rather than an ultimate aim of English instruction has been acquiring momentum. Among language experts, there has been a debate as to how, when, where, and why literature should be incorporated in ESL / EFL curriculum. Vigorous discussion of how literature and ESL / EFL instruction can work together and

interact for the benefit of students and teachers has lead to the flourishing of interesting ideas, learning, and improved instruction for all. Many teachers consider the use of literature in language teaching as an interesting and worthy concern. In this paper, why a language teacher should use religious literary texts in the language classroom, what sort of religious literature a language teacher should use with language learners, religious literature and the

teaching of language skills, and benefits of different genres of religious literature to language teaching will be taken into account. Thus, the place of religious literature as a tool rather than an end in teaching English as a second or foreign language will be unearthed.

Literature and language are closely related and this is a fact none can deny. Literature is constituted by language and it represents one of the most recurrent uses of language. Language and linguistic analysis can also be employed to access literature from the learner's point of view. Brumfit and Carter (1986: 1) already emphasized the role of literature as "an ally of language". This technique is by no means novel, since literature has been a widely used teaching tool in different language teaching methods. However, here the perspective changes giving more relevance to the literary text as a work of art. First of all, let us go over the changing role of literature in the tradition of second language teaching to end with an account of its current situation within the communicative approach.

In the present scenario English language reflects many centuries of development. The English language has had a remarkable history. If we look back to the historical records of the English language, it is the speech of the some uncivilized tribes on continent of Europe along the North Sea. It had still earlier history, looking back before that to origins we can only speculate. The political and social events that have in the course of English history so profoundly affected the English people in their national life have generally had a recognizable effect on their language. The Roman Christians of Britain in 597 brought England into contact with Latin civilization and made significant additions to the vocabulary. The Scandinavian invasions resulted into an amalgam of the two people and their languages. The Norman Conquest (1099) made English, the language mainly of the lower class for two centuries while the nobles and those associated with them used French on almost all occasions. When English regained supremacy as the language of all elements of population, it greatly changed from what it had been earlier. Similarly, the Hundred Year's War, the rise of an important middle class, the Renaissance, the development of England,

the expansion of the British empire, and the growth of commerce and industry, science and literature contributed to the development of the language.

As the biologist and author Lewis Thomas wrote

"The gift of language is the single human trait that marks us all genetically, setting us apart from the rest of life. Language is, like nest-making, the universal and biologically specific activity of human beings. We engage in it communally, compulsively, and automatically. We cannot be human without it; if were to be separated from it our mind would die, as surely as bees lost from hive". (*Lives of Cell* 89)

From those murky and undistinguished beginnings, English has become the most widespread language, used by more people for more purposes than any other languages in the world.

The use of literature as a technique for teaching both basic language skills and language areas is very popular within the field of foreign language learning and teaching nowadays. Moreover, in translation courses, many language teachers make their students translate literary texts like drama, poetry and short stories into the mother tongue. Translation gives students the chance to practice the lexical, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and stylistic knowledge. In the following section, why language teachers should use literary texts in the foreign language classroom and main criteria for selecting suitable religious literary texts in foreign language classes are stressed so as to make the reader familiar with the underlying reasons and criteria for language teachers' using and selecting religious literary texts.

According to Collie and Slater, "*there are four main reasons which lead a language teacher to use literature in the classroom. These are valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement. In addition to these four main reasons, universality, non-triviality, personal relevance, variety, interest, economy and suggestive power and ambiguity are some other factors requiring the use of literature as a powerful resource in the classroom context*".

While selecting the literary texts to be used in language classes, the language teacher should take into account needs, motivation, interests, cultural background and language level of the students. Religious literature is an authentic material. Most of the religious literary works are not created for the primary purpose of teaching a language. It has been observed that travel timetables, city plans, forms, pamphlets, cartoon comics, advertisements, newspapers and magazines etc. are mostly used as a teaching material of English language. Thus, in a classroom context, learners are exposed to actual language samples which are used in day-to-day life. Religious Literature, especially tales, can be very beneficial for teaching in the beginning of teaching-learning process of English language to make them familiar with different linguistic forms, communicative functions and meanings. For many language learners, the ideal way to increase their understanding of verbal/non-verbal aspects of communication, the religious literary works (i.e. parables, study of vedas, puranas, granths etc.) of different religions facilitate the understanding of communication as well as makes the learner to gain the knowledge of religions and also develops the moral values in them.

It is probably not surprising that the *Bible*, the holy book for Christians, has a large ascendancy over a large population majority. The first complete *Bible* was translated from Hebrew into English was the 'Geneva Bible' which was published in 1560. Simultaneously, Hinduism is the most largest religion in India. Mahabharata and Bhagwat Gita are the holy books of India because the culture of India is based on it. The holy book of Mahabharata was first completely translated from Sanskrit epic into English by Kisari Mohan Ganguli and Bhagwat Gita was translated by Charles Wilkins, an employee of East India Company in 1784. These holy books of both the religion influenced many famous writers from the past till recent decade. Perhaps, the two most dominating religions make the learners to know about their religion, culture as well as they will also gain moral values.

The religious myths are real but imaginary, it presents a full story, parables etc. related to religion through which a learner can understand,

enjoy and believe in customs and traditions. Perhaps, religious literature is regarded as a best compliment to other teaching materials which are used to develop the foreign language learning. It also provides learners with a wide range of individual lexical or syntactic items. Students become familiar with many features of the written language, reading a substantial and contextualized body of text. They learn about the syntax and discourse functions of sentences, the variety of possible structures, the different ways of connecting ideas which develop and enrich their own writing skills. Students also become more productive and adventurous when they perceive the richness and diversity of the language and the religion. They start trying to learn and begin to make use of some of the potential themselves. Thus, they also improve their communicative, cultural and religious competence by authentic religious texts.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that literature plays an important role in the English programs or courses of many non-native countries. However, there are some problems encountered by language teachers within the area of teaching English through literature. First, there are very few pedagogically-designed appropriate materials that can be used by language teachers in a language classroom. Second, there is a lack of preparation in the area of literature teaching in TESL / TEFL programs. Third, there is an absence of clarity in objectives defining the role of literature in ESL /EFL. Many instructors try to include literature in their classroom, but lack the background and training in that field. Moreover, teaching a religious literature in ESL/EFL classroom is very challenging for the trainer.

The teacher has an important role in teaching English through literature. First, a teacher should determine the aim of language teaching in relation to the needs and expectations of the students. Giving a questionnaire or interviewing with the students orally, the teacher can set up the aim and the objectives of the language teaching. Second, a teacher should select the appropriate language teaching method, teaching techniques, and classroom activities. Then, the teacher should select the literary texts relevant to the aim and the

objectives of his teaching. While selecting literary texts to be used in language classroom, the students' language proficiency, interests, age, etc should be taken into account in order not to bore students with inappropriate materials. At elementary levels, for example, students should be given simplified or specially written stories. At advanced levels, however, students are given literature in its original form so that they can develop their religious literary competence in the target language. To put it another way, students learn practically the figurative and daily use of the target language in the literary texts and encounter different genres of literature (i.e. poems, short stories, plays, parables etc.) at advanced levels. Observing how characters in a play or a short story use figures of speech, such as simile, metaphor, metonymy, etc so as to express their communicative intention, students learn how to write English more clearly, creatively, and powerfully.

As Obediat states: "literature helps students acquire a native-like competence in English, express their ideas in good English, learn the features of modern English, learn how the English linguistic system is used for communication, see how idiomatic expressions are used, speak clearly, precisely, and concisely, and become more proficient in English, as well as become creative, critical, and analytical learners". Custodio and Sutton explain: "Literature can open horizons of possibility, allowing students to question, interpret, connect, and explore".

Elliot says: "Especially, for students with verbal / linguistic intelligence, the language teacher's using literature in a foreign language class serves for creating a highly motivating, amusing and lively lesson". Literature is not only a tool for developing the written and oral skills of the students in the target language but also is a window opening into the culture of the target language, building up a cultural competence in students.

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