

Values of Literary Texts for Language Pedagogy: A Practical Proposition

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ABSTRACT

Fiksi dan karya sastra telah diklaim memiliki potensi yang menjanjikan sebagai sumber materi untuk pengajaran bahasa kedua meskipun yang menentang gagasan tersebut beranggapan bahwa sastra tidak cocok untuk pedagogi bahasa kedua. Namun demikian, ada studi kasus empiris yang menunjukkan keberhasilan dan/atau keunggulan menggunakan sastra untuk mengajar bahasa kedua. Studi menunjukkan bahwa sastra masih memiliki banyak cara yang ditawarkan dalam memfasilitasi pembelajaran bahasa kedua. Artikel ini akan menjelaskan nilai-nilai dari tiga jenis teks sastra, yaitu novel, puisi, dan drama untuk pedagogi bahasa dan menggambarkan kegiatan kelas yang dapat diterapkan dengan menggunakan tiga contoh teks tersebut.

Fiction and literary work have been claimed to have promising potential as a source of materials for second language teaching although opponents of that idea argue that literature is not suitable for second language pedagogy. Nevertheless, there have been empirical case studies which report the success and/or advantages of using literature for teaching a second language. Studies suggest that literature still has much to offer in facilitating second language learning. This article will elucidate the values of three types of literary texts, namely novels, poetry, and plays, for language pedagogy and illustrate classroom activities that can be carried out using three examples of texts.

Keywords: *Fiction, literary text, language pedagogy.*

INTRODUCTION

Fiction and literary work, such as dramas, short stories, poems, movies, and songs, has been claimed to have promising potential as a source of materials for second language teaching. Benefits mentioned in previous studies include: 1) having rich language content, thus possibly leading to incidental vocabulary acquisition (Pellicer-Sanchez & Schmitt, 2010); 2) being intrinsically motivating (Gardner, Tremblay & Masgoret, 1997; Lazar, 1990); and 3) stimulating critical thinking.

On the other hand, opponents of that idea argue that literature is not suitable for a second language teaching context due to a number of reasons. First, although it contains authentic language, its vocabulary, genre, and register may not be relevant for students to learn, particularly those who are learning a second language for specific purposes. Second,

with its rich language and complexity, students may find it too difficult to understand and, possibly, are short of confidence and strategies to draw any interpretations of the text (Lazar, 1993, p. 101). Indeed, adjustment can be made in the process of developing materials, for example, by shortening the text and replacing difficult words with more general ones. However, on the part of the teachers, this can be impractical and consumes too much of their time.

In reality, although literature, compared to other materials, has rarely been incorporated into second language classrooms, there have been empirical case studies which report the success and/or advantages of using literature for teaching a second language, even in a specific learning situation, such as in an English for Academic Purposes program for university students (Macalister, 2007). These studies suggest that literature still has much to offer in facilitating second language learning.

This article will elucidate the value of three types of literary texts, namely novels, poetry, and plays, for language pedagogy and illustrate classroom activities that can be carried out using three examples of texts, which are the novel "A Thousand Splendid Suns" by Khaled Hosseini, the lyrics of the song "Viva la Vida" by Coldplay (see Appendix 1), and the play "Into the Woods" by James Lapine and Stephen Sondheim (retrieved from <http://www.napavalley.edu/people/LYanover/Documents/English%20123/English%20123%20Into%20the%20Woods%20Libretto.pdf>).

Novels

First, reading an authentic novel can lead to incidental vocabulary acquisition. For instance, an empirical study by Pellicer-Sanchez & Schmitt (2010) found that students could learn 14-43% of the target African words in the novel *Things Fall Apart* and that the best learned vocabulary aspect was meaning recognition, compared to spelling recognition and meaning recall. In classroom, incidental vocabulary acquisition can be facilitated through extensive reading. For example, the implementation of daily 20-minute in-class extensive reading in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programme shows that the students, even in a higher educational setting, responded positively to the practice of silent individual reading and perceived it to be useful for the development of their, among others, reading skills, vocabulary, and reading speed (Macalister, 2007). These benefits of extensive reading can be linked to Krashen's Input Hypothesis that the only way humans acquire language is through the comprehensible input they receive, meaning that the language to which learners are

exposed needs to be slightly beyond the current level of their internalized language (VanPatten & Williams, 2015, p. 26), which is in line with the main key feature of extensive reading that the reading material is usually easy (Day & Bamford, 2002 in Macalister, 2007).

The value of reading authentic novels can be significant for vocabulary acquisition, especially for students who, in their countries, have limited exposure to the spoken target language (Lazar, 1993, p. 17), such as students in Indonesia who learn English as a foreign language. However, Pellicer-Sanchez & Schmitt (2010) noted that the figures for incidental vocabulary learning in their study are not as high as what are typically resulted from intentional vocabulary learning tasks. Thus, as suggested by Schmitt (2008 in Pellicer-Sanchez & Schmitt, 2010, p. 43), explicit post-reading tasks can be carried out to combine incidental and intentional approaches in order to “consolidate and enhance the vocabulary initially met while reading.” One example of post-reading activities is giving students a copy of two particular pages from the novel “A Thousand Splendid Suns” then having them do the following instruction in groups of 3-4 students.

1. Underline any words which you don't know the meanings of.
2. In your group, compare the words you underline with the words underlined by others.
3. Make a group vocabulary learning journal titled “A Thousand Splendid Vocabulary”. On the first page of the journal, list down all the **different** words which are unknown to one, some, or all of your group members.
4. If you know the meaning of certain words unknown to your group members, tell them the meaning. After that, starting from the second page of the journal, write down the meaning next to each word.
5. Below the meaning, copy a sentence from the excerpt of the novel as an example of how the word (in step 4) is used in a writing piece.
6. With your group members, write your own sentence using the word (in step 4) and write it down below the example from the novel.
7. If there are words unknown to all of the group members, consult the dictionary. Then write down the definition as stated in the dictionary next to each word.
8. Repeat steps 6 and 7.

The above activity aims to foster independence in vocabulary learning, instead of dependence on input from the teacher, nurture collaboration and peer-teaching, develop students' skills in using the dictionary, and provide opportunities for them to apply the vocabulary knowledge they have to written production. The journal can be used only with this novel or may as well be used throughout the course with texts other than the novel.

Second, using novels can spark students' motivation, a component which can cause self-confidence and language learning strategies and can contribute to language achievement (Gardner, Tremblay & Masgoret, 1997, p. 353). A good novel contains complex themes and adult dilemmas, engaging students as readers intellectually, emotionally, and linguistically, particularly if it is linked to students' interests (Lazar, 1990, p. 204). This is due to the characteristics of a novel which, compared to a short story, may have more characters, a more complicated plot, and more complex methods of narration (Lazar, 1993, p. 89). Thus, the experience of reading the novel itself can be rewarding (Day & Bamford, 2002 in Macalister, 2007) and can pose a sense of achievement to students after they finish reading one since it is an authentic text and deemed worthwhile by native speakers (Lazar, 1990, p. 204).

It is important to note, however, that reading a novel can appeal more to some students than to the others, and learners may prefer other types of texts (Edmondson, 1997, p. 48). This is where the teacher's role lies: to encourage students to start reading and motivate them along the way. The teacher needs to emphasize the importance of reading, encourage them to start from reading what they like and/or what is easy for them, and, in line with another key characteristic of extensive reading, become a role model in the class (Day & Bamford, 2002 in Macalister, 2007).

Students' motivation to finish reading a novel can then be maintained and directed at language learning through language learning tasks which are equally motivating. Among the most motivating features of task content are personal element, relating the content to students' personal lives, and tangible outcome, asking students to create a finished product (Dörnyei, 2001, pp. 76-77). To incorporate those task elements in a post-reading activity, the teacher can ask students to form groups of 3-4 students, and each group is to be assigned the character of either Mariam or Laila. In their groups, students are asked to list down 2-3 life problems encountered by the character, find how she endures the problems, and find evidence from the novel. The teacher can then elicit answers from students in a whole-class discussion. After that, students are asked to think of 1-2 life problems they have encountered personally and how they faced the problems and to compare their experiences with those of Mariam and Laila. Each student will have his/her turn to share his/her experience and comparison to the case of Mariam or Laila to their group members.

An extension activity can also be done afterwards. First, the teacher can present quick facts about the present condition of Afghan refugees to the class and make reference to Laila and Tariq as Afghan refugees. The sources can be from news sites, such as from <http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2016/09/daily-chart-11> and

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37163857> . Then the teacher can invite students to write a postcard to refugees around the world in their respective groups by writing down a short message encouraging the refugees to endure and stay strong. The teacher can facilitate sending the postcards to, for example, <http://anyrefugee.org/> or submit the online versions of students' postcards to https://my.care.org/site/SPageNavigator/CARE_SpecialDelivery.html .

The above activities can be regarded as containing 'general comprehension' and 'personal response and impact' language-based question types, which aim to enable students to react to general situations and themes with reference to the texts and help them link the text to "possible real-world outcomes" (Carter & Long, 1990, pp. 219-220). Besides aiming at producing a tangible product, this activity can point out to students the relevance of the novel they have read with real world problems and their own lives.

Poetry

First, poetry exposes students to unusual and unexpected use of language since the language of a poem is, more often than not, deviant from the established linguistic rules (Lazar, 1993, p. 99). One may argue that using poetry in language classroom can cause confusion among students who may think that the language used in a poem is the correct one or that linguistic deviation is always permissible. Nevertheless, poetry can be used as a basis for expanding students' language awareness (Lazar, 1993, p. 100) by pointing out to them negative evidence, which, according to the Interaction Hypothesis, plays an important role in the interaction-learning process to help students modify existing linguistic knowledge (Gass & Mackey, 2015, p. 183). The difference is that, instead of the teacher, students themselves can act as the ones giving overt correction. For example, with the song "Viva la Vida", the teacher can guide students to find out what is unusual with the phrases "pillars of salt" and "pillars of sand" by eliciting from students the qualities of "pillars", such as commonly big-sized and solid, and the qualities of "salt" and "sand", such as tiny particles and loose, until the class reaches a consensus that the collocation in the phrases is unusual as it pairs contradictory nouns. The teacher can provide further input by eliciting from students what usual nouns are paired with "pillars", such as rock and marble.

Second, poetry draws learners' attention to form and meaning simultaneously. Based on the interactive models of reading, poetry reading is considered to involve both bottom-up processing, highlighting the role of the formal features of the poem, and top-down processing, highlighting the role of readers' interpretative strategies (Hanauer, 1997, p. 5). Deliberately

focusing students on language features, such as word parts and grammatical constructions, will result in conscious knowledge of language items, which helps them learning from input, and subconscious implicit knowledge of language items, which is needed for normal language use (Nation & Macalister, 2010, p. 92). Using poetry as the basis for language tasks enables students to use their conscious knowledge to actively construct and negotiate meaning by evaluating the semantic and formal structures of the poem (Hanauer, 1997, 2001). For instance, following the pedagogical activity in the previous paragraph, the teacher can ask what the students think of the meaning of “pillars of sand” and relate it to the neighbouring lines in the song, such as what can happen if “castles stand upon pillars of sand”.

The above feature of poetry may eventually lead students to develop interpretative skills. Just as other types of literary texts, poetry contains multiple layers of meaning which can involve learners in forming hypotheses and drawing inferences and help them develop the ability to infer meaning, a skill which is useful and transferrable to other situations (Lazar, 1993, p. 19). However, students may lack confidence and appropriate strategies for making interpretations (p. 101). Thus, they can be encouraged to speculate the symbolic meaning of particular key words before being engaged in the interpretation of the literal meaning (p. 101). For instance, in groups of 2-3, students are asked to guess the identity of “I” or the narrator of the song without being pointed out to certain semantic clues. Instead of cueing students, the teacher’s role in presenting the task is to emphasize a challenge element, such as finding hidden information (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 76), so that students can be intrinsically motivated to take the first step of their attempts to interpret the poem. As to strategies, the teacher can guide them uncover clues hidden in the language, for example, asking them to compare the character “I” in the past and at present by looking at past and present tenses and finding examples, such as in the past “I used to rule the world”, while now “in the morning I sleep alone”. Sample questions from the teacher are “What changes has “I” undergone from past to present time?” and “What has he lost and what has he gained over time?”.

In addition, carefully selected poems can serve as suitable and motivating materials to develop students’ oral communicative skills, especially listening skills and pronunciation. Some ideas for while-reading activities are watching videos of (or listening to) spoken poetry, such as “When Love Arrives” by Sarah Kay and Phil Kaye, watching film poems, such as Peter Morse’s film (1998) of “Ozymandias” by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1818) (O’Halloran, 2015, p. 87), and listening to popular songs, such as “Viva la Vida” by Coldplay, which may “induce motivation in some student” (Hanauer, 1997, p. 11). Some poems can also be used in reading-aloud activities for particular pedagogical aims, for example, using “The Chaos” by G. N.

Trenite to demonstrate the irregularity of English pronunciation and spelling (Kennedy, 2003, pp. 14-16).

Plays

First, although the dialogue in a play tends to be ‘sanitized’, it can expose students to features of conversational language, such as the order and sequence of conversations in English and formulaic expressions appropriate to use in different contexts (Lazar, 1993, p. 137), and cultural learning and aspects of language which are subtle to grasp and use, such as how culturally accepted intonation is used to deliver humour or anger (Miccoli, 2003, p. 123). Regarding formulaic expressions, it is asserted that learners need to acquire a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions, which caters to fluency (Skehan, 1998 in Ellis, 2005) and which can be a basis for the later development of a rule-based competence (Ellis, 2005, p. 211). Below is an example of materials developed from the script of the play “Into the Woods” which can be used in a post-reading activity focusing on language after students watch the filmed stage performance of the play.

In pairs, find the language expressions used by the two characters in each row when they encounter each other for the first time in the play. Then discuss with your partner the communicative function of each utterance.

Characters	Language Expressions	Communicative Function
Mysterious Man and Jack	For example: Mysterious Man: (<i>stepping from behind a tree</i>) Hello, Jack. Jack: (<i>frightened</i>) How did you know my name? (Act 1, Scene 2)	For example: “Hello, [name]” is used to greet a person that you know.
Wolf and Little Red Ridinghood		
Baker and Jack		
Baker’s Wife and Cinderella		
Rapunzel’s Prince and Cinderella’s Prince		

Second, a play provides students a justified reason to use language, allowing them to make linguistic and cultural analyses of characters (Smith, 1984 in Miccoli, 2003, p. 123) as they use English in meaningful contexts. It can be a basis for developing activities focusing on pragmatic meaning, which, according to many theorists, are helpful for language acquisition since acquisition can take place only when learners are engaged in the contexts of actual acts of communication and since meaning-focused activities provide learners with the opportunities to develop true fluency in an L2 and are intrinsically motivating (Ellis, 2005, p. 212). Below is the illustration of while-reading and post-reading activities that can be done.

1. Students focus on the opening scene of the play by looking at the script and are asked to find the motives of the main characters in the story.
2. Students are asked to discuss whether the motives of each character are achieved until the end of the play. Sample questions from the teacher are “The play puts emphasis on “wish”. What is the wish of the character Jack?”, “Is his wish fulfilled along the story?”, “If fulfilled, what aid(s) does he receive to help him achieve the motive he has in the beginning of the play?”, “If unfulfilled, what barriers does he face that hamper him from achieving the motive?”
3. Each student in every group is to be assigned a character to act out one particular scene from the play.

The aim of a close reading like the above activity is for students to be emotionally involved with the text (Fish, 1989, p. 73) and perform their lines in a meaningful way, just as how they will do in an actual communication context, instead of taking the lines for granted. Besides to develop oral skills, the goal for the students is to “deliver lines at the right time, with an adequate intonation and appropriate body language, capturing characters’ feelings and motivations” (Miccoli, 2003, p. 126). Another example of post-reading activities is inviting students to read aloud a certain line but assigning each student a different emotion that he/she needs to express through the line. For example, five students are asked to read aloud Little Red Ridinghood’s line “My Granny made it [this cape] for me” (Act 1, Scene 2) in informative, sad, excited, confused, and angry tones, and this can be preceded by letting them develop a small scenario of why Little Red Ridinghood says the line in, for example, an angry tone.

Last but not least, involving students in a mini-production of a play fosters a sense of involvement among them and, eventually, boosts their confidence in oral production (Lazar, 1993, p. 138). It brings motivation and fun to the classroom, and, in fact, students with a low level of English proficiency can embrace acting in a classroom performance since the activities involved, such as voice and body-language exercises, tend to encourage risk-taking and

decrease inhibition (Miccoli, 2003). However, musicals, such as “Into the Woods”, may be impractical since students also need to practice singing the songs, so the teacher may opt for plays which are not musicals, such as “The Importance of Being Earnest” by Oscar Wilde and “Pygmalion” by George Bernard Shaw.

CONCLUSION

This essay has elucidated the value of literary texts, which includes novels, poetry, and plays, on language pedagogy. Although the pedagogical tasks illustrated in this essay aim to facilitate language learning, the use of literary texts as a basis for developing those tasks is certainly hoped to have positive impacts not only on their language learning but also on their personal lives, suggesting a greater value of literary texts for learners beyond language classroom.

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Appendix 1

“Viva La Vida”

by Coldplay

I used to rule the world
Seas would rise when I gave the word
Now in the morning I sleep alone
Sweep the streets I used to own

I used to roll the dice
Feel the fear in my enemy's eyes
Listened as the crowd would sing
Now the old king is dead long live the king
One minute I held the key
Next the walls were closed on me
And I discovered that my castles stand
Upon pillars of salt and pillars of sand

I hear Jerusalem bells a-ringing
Roman cavalry choirs are singing
Be my mirror, my sword and shield
Missionaries in a foreign field
For some reason I can't explain
Once you'd gone there was never
Never an honest word
And that was when I ruled the world

It was a wicked and wild wind
Blew down the doors to let me in
Shattered windows and the sound of drums
People couldn't believe what I'd become
Revolutionaries wait
For my head on a silver plate
Just a puppet on a lonely string

Oh who would ever want to be king?

I hear Jerusalem bells a-ringing
Roman cavalry choirs are singing
Be my mirror, my sword and shield
My missionaries in a foreign field
For some reason I can't explain
I know St Peter won't call my name
Never an honest word
But that was when I ruled the world

Hear Jerusalem bells a-ringing
Roman cavalry choirs are singing
Be my mirror, my sword and shield
My missionaries in a foreign field
For some reason I can't explain
I know St Peter won't call my name
Never an honest word
But that was when I ruled the world

Source: http://www.coldplay.com/recordings/viva_la_vida/viva_la_vida/