



A benefactor tool to develop second language learning

T.Stephen Jayamani and P.Nagaraj

Department of English and Foreign Languages Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, India.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 6 July 2012;

Received in revised form:

16 August 2012;

Accepted: 6 September 2012;

Keywords

Benefactor,
English language,
Abundance.

ABSTRACT

There has been a varied advancement in the English language teaching materials for second language learners. Even though materials are in abundance, poetry seems to lack its appropriate usage in the process of second language teaching. Traditionally poetry may have lost its function as an attractive tool to impart novelty in teaching a language; the present study focuses to teach the four basic language skills and the linguistic role in learning English Language through poetry. Teaching second language through poetry is effectual since it made the learners to stir out their own insightful thinking and to stimulate their creativity. The interpretative ability of the learners had a gradual increase when a few lines were given to interpret. Thus the paper suggests that poetry is very beneficial for the teachers of English in second language learning classrooms.

© 2012 Elixir All rights reserved.

Introduction

Teaching language through literature is an achievement among the modern teachers and the lovers of literature. The art of learning a second language has predominantly grasped, apprehended and captured the minds of young learners. Though facilitated with more methods, strategies, techniques, and notions of great scholars, there is still an open hand to welcome novelty in the field of teaching ESL. Teaching language through poetry is an integrated method that has the capability to develop the communication skills. This can impart novel ideas to students in enriching the language, linguistic forms, and concepts. The literary and language competency of the learners could be increased through the suggested method of teaching.

Characteristics of English poetry

Poetry as an appropriate teaching material brings about the kind of participation that almost no other text can enhance. When a poem is read, understood and interpreted, it remains as a vehicle to expand one's thinking and acts as an instrument to shape the target language. Poetry raises the curiosity and stimulates the confidence of the readers. Poetry deals with two sorts of subject matter.

The 'Objective poetry' deals with the external objects and the 'Subjective' deals with the poet's own thoughts and feelings. Most of the poems of Shakespeare are based on objective, making a plain statement of fact and Coleridge's is Subjective expressing the deep personal feeling aroused by that fact. The Objective writers valued the experiences of their eyes more than the experiences of the mind. Though theoretically subjective and objective poetry are two distinctive categories in actual practice they cannot be separated. (Prasad2000) The poets expressed their thoughts in the form of poetry by using various structural elements such as couplet, strophe and stanza etc. This uniqueness provides greater potentiality for the teachers and the learners of the second language.

The implications of using poetry in language classrooms

- The use of literary texts like poems improves the basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing)
- It also substantiates other areas of language such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation etc.

- Poetry serves as an authentic material through which learners are exposed to actual language extracts from real life (guide maps, diet charts, cartoons, pamphlets, advertisements, newspaper) and Poetry acts as a beneficial component to such materials.

- Poetry being representational, fosters the personal involvement of the readers, the readers tend to become enthusiastic to find out what happens next and gets attached with the text. That makes language learning more exciting.

- Literary texts make the classroom experiences appealing to the learners with different literary styles (Rana Sujatha 2009).

Methods to implement language skills through poetry

Poetry, speaking and listening:

Poetry is a powerful source to train learners with the first two basics skills. Oral reading improves the pronunciation of the readers. It helps in teaching/learning new words; recognize strategies and familiarity with vocabulary which in turn increases the comprehension. The rhythm, rhyme and refrains used in poems serve as a scaffold for deciphering its meaning and to develop fluency of the learners.

Listening makes one substantially alert not only to pronunciation, sentence formation and tone of the speakers but also to the possible errors in their speech and dialogues. Proper listening can enhance their phonemic awareness and blot out mistakes or corrections. Techniques like fostering alertness, engendering enthusiasm, rendering patience, can help the learners to develop these skills (Jackson 2012)

Poetry and reading

Short poems when read by the learners helps to gain confidence. Poems with lots of refrains, rhymes and rhythm build students' self confidence in reading. It's a perfect builder for choral reading.

Students with less reading ability and proficiency can join along with the good readers and blend along with the more confident readers. Repeated practices can make the faltering voices to sound with more confidence. Repeated oral reading and activities related to it are fluency boosting practices.

Poetry and Writing

Poems spark an enthusiasm for writing. The students writing reflect the original thinking of their understanding and interpretation. The learners can be asked to write a poem of their own using an incident which has made a greater impact. The writing comprehension will be developed when learners are motivated to write their perception using selective words to match the suggested incident. For e.g. a poem written with a thought of rowing a boat into a dark forest lake will contain words appropriate for that given situation.

Transformational linguistic features of poetry

Synoptic Structure to Dynamic Structure

Poems are written with the intended original meaning of the poets. The perceptions expressed may not be readily understandable to the readers. The teachers can take part in explaining the first few stanzas and ask the students to interpret the meaning of the following stanzas. The interpretative ability gradually increases when students are given a chance to come out of the prefixed mindset by introducing new themes and asking the students to write and interpret the poems of their own.

Premeditated to Spontaneous

The poets influence on an incident or an event would have caused the poet to write the poem. Make the students to take a diversion by asking them to spontaneously make a poem of a simple incident or an event of their life. It may seem surplus at the beginning but a continuous practice will help the learners to become creative writers.

Limited Lexis to Wide Lexis

Poems written with a cluster of words related to the incident or the prescribed events can enable learners to have a wide knowledge of context oriented words. Selected poems of different events provide the learners to enrich new words. Making use of thesaurus and dictionaries can help learners to familiarize new words and relate it to the surpassed imagination. The following poems were used in the Classroom

1. 'Because I could not Stop for Death', written by Emily Dickinson

2. 'Road Not Taken', written by Robert Frost

3. Stopping by Woods written by Robert Frost

Suggestions to use poetry in language classrooms

- Introduce the poems starting with the title
- Introduce important vocabulary and the key words.
- Highlight the background with the poet's context
- Point out the neologisms if any
- Make the learners visualize the subject of the poem
- Form groups or pairs to gain confidence for the learners

- Suggest activities that make them understand and comprehend a language
- Build up the whole class to read with proper stress and intonation on their own.
- Select poems that can enhance the basic skills, vocabulary and pronunciations.
- Careful choice of poems according to the level of learners
- Build strategies to improve interpretative(symbolic, allegorical) abilities

Precautions to use poetry in language classrooms

- Don't stress more on the neologisms
- Don't introduce too much of vocabulary to learn
- Don't ruin the nature of the poem by over emphasizing the theme
- Don't teach a poem which has words that is not easy to remember.

Conclusion

Poetry is no longer to be surpassed in the field of teaching or learning ESL. Poems are considered as one of the authentic tools that can be as a benefactor to help teachers mend and mould the learners of English. This paper highlighted the benefits that are found when using poems to teach or learn English language. This method has proved to be successful as it involved the learners to participate in the stream of learning and the confidence of the learners had a gradual increase when group works and activities were given. Poems are thus used as a medium to stir out the imagination, to make competent thinkers and acts as a rich resource in learning the second language.

References

- Hall, Geoff. Literature in Language Education. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005
- Prasad, Birjadish. A Background to the Study of English Literature New Delhi: Macmillan, 2000.
- ACY L. Jackson "The conversation Class" English teaching forum 50 (1), 2012. Pp.29-31.
- Learning English through Poems and Songs (Secondary 4-6) A Resource Package English Language Education Section Curriculum Development Institute Education Bureau .The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 12 Floor, Wu Chung House, 213 Queen's Road East, Wanchai, Hong Kong First published 2010.
- Rana, Sujatha, "Teaching Language through Literary texts in the ESL classroom" Language in India vol.9, 6th June 2009.pp.72-80.