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Learning language and linguistic skills through literature

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Abstract

Literature and language go hand in hand, one is lame without the other. It is impossible to imagine literature without language, as language is the tool a writer employs to give vent to his expressions and emotions. Though English is a foreign language, we feel handicapped without it, we cannot imagine our life without it. The traditional teachers considered language and literature as different realms of study, but recent studies have shown that literature can be effectively employed to develop linguistic skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and to develop mastery over language as well. The present paper will throw a flood light on the relationship between language teaching and literature and will provide effective tips to the teacher to use literary texts for inculcating linguistic skills in the students.

Keywords: Learning language, linguistic skills, literature

Introduction

Language is one such trait as most decisively distinguish human beings from animals. Man, being a social animal, cannot live without society and it is a language that connects him with those around him. If a student develops mastery over the use of language, he can attain anything in this competitive world. Language plays a crucial role in the psychological, emotional, and social development of a child. Literature, on the other hand, humanizes man, it provides valuable lessons in emotions, feelings, sentiments, behaviour reading, psychological insight, and so on. However, due to poor knowledge of the English language, the students avoid reading literary treasures- poems, stories, novels, and dramas. Language teaching becomes a herculean task for the teachers of English also due to the mother tongue interference. Literature of every language is a rich treasure house of words, thus, helping students build up their vocabulary. It acts as the mirror of the century in which it was written, teaches manners and morals and serves as a true guide to the art of living.

Concepts of Language and Literature

Language is so much taken for granted that we seldom bother to think about what language in general is. Language is an abstract system of symbols and meanings governed by grammatical rules. Language has two forms: oral and written. There are also many study areas of language such as phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics.

The first editors of The Oxford English Dictionary defined language as “the whole body of words and the methods of a combination of words by a nation, people or race”

Language is a fascinating subject. Though it is governed by a set of rules, language is not a static thing; it evolves and changes every moment. The meanings of some words change over time. Some words go out of use while some new words take their place whereas Literature is a term that can be defined as, chiefly, written and sometimes spoken material. It refers to artistic works with a high and lasting artistic value. Literature is in different genres: fiction and non-fiction or verse and prose. It can be further divided into major literary formats such as poems, drama, and short stories and can be categorized based on many divisions such as period (Elizabethan, Jacobean, Victorian), geographical locations(American Literature, Canadian Literature, African Literature, Australian)

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Difference Between Language and Literature

The major difference between language and literature is that language deals with the spoken aspect whereas literature is concerned with the written aspect. Though language came first yet language throughout time has been created and evolved through literature. Language comprises sounds, words, and sentences, phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics. Literature is the storehouse of these beautiful words and phrases. Language is the basics, still one is not possible without the other.

How to use literature for teaching language?

As English is not our mother tongue, teaching English effectively is a big challenge. A good teacher of English should use the Language Model of Literature for building linguistic skills. Literature gives many words, and learning these words will enrich the vocabulary of the learner. Literary words and phrases bejewel language. The style of language used in English literature by different authors in different periods adds to the enthusiasm and joy of readers and instructors as well. A literary text can serve as a potent source of language teaching provided it is prescribed keeping in view the intellectual level and interest of the reader. Pre-reading material is quintessential for developing and arousing the curiosity of the learners. Once the learners begin to pay attention to your words, half the battle is won as listening activates other skills also.

Obstacles in teaching language

In the majority of Asian countries, English is introduced as a compulsory subject in the curriculum. The motto behind introducing English as a compulsory subject was to enable youngsters to be able to face the competitive world by developing their linguistic skills. But this purpose is not achieved because of many factors such as mother tongue interference, lack of Audio-Visual Aids in classrooms, theoretical syllabus, written examinations, use of grammar translation method, and no weightage to the pronunciation part etc. Our motto should be to enhance language proficiency in the target language to enable students to square up their communicative skills whereas presently it seems just to be the completion of the syllabus prescribed.

The teaching of the English language and literature is not less valuable than other subjects at the UG and PG levels. Despite the above facts and the greater-than-ever popularity of the language, the standards of teaching and learning English are on the decline. In English-speaking countries, spoken tests are mandatory whereas in our country the emphasis is just on written tests through rote learning. The linguistic skills should be taught in a particular order—listening, speaking, reading and writing whereas in our country Kindergarten students are introduced to the language through reading and writing, the listening and speaking skills are completely ignored at primary, middle and higher secondary levels. Even at undergraduate levels, the focus is just laid on the completion of syllabuses which comprises poems, dramas, short stories and novels. The teacher falls short of time in enabling his students to see the aesthetic part of language and cherish its beauty, and ornamentation.

English, being an international language occupies a place of prestige in our country. Decades have passed since the Britishers left this country, yet no other language could replace it. English is our window to the outer world, the

language of trade and commerce, the library language, the language of the media, the language of research and the most widely spoken language on this planet. The Father of the Nation, M.K. Gandhi, believed in Swadeshi but was well aware of the importance of the English language and once said:

“I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible”.

Since the dawn of independence, we have been putting in all possible efforts to upgrade the teaching and learning of English in India, but we have achieved quite a little. We are the third largest English-speaking nation after USA and UK. The awareness and growth of the English language in various forms in big cities in India can be accounted to the explosion of English medium schools and paying capacity of Indian parents but the scenario is not so glowing in every nook and corner of India. Today English has become a part and parcel of our day-to-day life. The burst of technical knowledge to has also been possible due to the accessibility of English. English empowers every age group and its application seems to be an unavoidable reality from the kitchen oven and military siren. Effective communication skills open the doorway to employment opportunities within and outside the nation. We can say that English Communication skills are a passport to placement. English has always been evolving, it is so flexible, so dynamic, so progressive renowned for its powerful expressions and rich literature.

Indian students are afraid of this ‘Queen’s language as they confront a lot of difficulty in learning this language. It is all Greek to most learners. Language learning can be made easy if students are taught effective linguistic skills. A teacher must know that his job is to build up the proficiency of students in the English language, it is certainly not just confined to the completion of literary texts prescribed in the syllabus. The syllabus to be covered is so vast that the teacher feels handicapped in implementing effective teaching strategies while delivering his lecture and, if he does, he fails to complete the prescribed syllabus in time. Sometimes the teacher himself does not have sufficient knowledge of concepts of language, so it becomes another obstacle in effective teaching of English. our objective of teaching English should be practical and should emphasise teaching through activities such as reading and understanding language through books, journals and other reading material.

As teachers of English, we must be aware of recent developments in the field of linguistics and theories related to teaching and learning. What matters is the result of the students not the in-depth knowledge of the language. Students get their graduation degrees without developing sufficient communicative skills. The result is that they find themselves eligible for many jobs but fail to qualify in the interview round. The fault lies with the faulty methods of teaching and learning. Different books are prescribed for language and literature. A smart teacher teaches language through literature. English language teaching has its importance in framing the future of the child. A teacher should teach according to the need and interests of his students. Using different methods of teaching English in classrooms has always been a challenge for teachers. A good teacher can impart quality education to his students by teaching language through literature because most literary

works especially develop the spoken skills of the learners. Students come to know about the relevance of intonation, its rise and fall, without which a language becomes flat.

Teachers who teach the English language through literature usually use the traditional method of lecturing on theme, characterization, setting, symbolism, diction, plots and motifs. They do not give any emphasis on the linguistic aspect of literary texts. Of course, the students must be taught literature and it must be taught by creating an awareness of linguistic possibilities and sensibilities. This way the idea of literature through language and language through literature becomes relevant. The teacher should encourage reading various literary texts and reference books to understand literary concepts and literary devices used therein. Students will understand and develop intellectual calibre about different characters if they start reading literary products. It will help develop critical thinking and creative writing ability amongst the students and will chisel their communicative skills too. Further, coming to language in literature, the main concern of a teacher is not to teach about language but to develop learners' abilities to make them capable of using language for a variety of communicative purposes. There is a difference between teaching and language and communicating in the language. The language can be developed through dialogues in drama, recitation of poems, short stories and novels.

Language learning and linguistic skills through different genres of Literature

Poetry

Poetry can pave the way for the learning and teaching of basic language skills. There are at least two learning benefits that can be derived from studying poetry. First is that the appreciation of the writer's composition process, which students gain by studying poems by components. And second is Developing a sensitivity for words and discoveries that may later grow into a deeper interest and greater analytical ability. It also makes students familiar with figures of speech such as simile, metaphor, irony, personification, imagery, etc. Students become familiar with the suprasegmental aspects of the target language, such as stress, pitch, juncture, and intonation by studying poetry.

Short Stories.

Short stories develop reading skills among learners. It gives them a glimpse of different cultures depicted in different stories and builds their vocabulary. It also sharpens the faculty of imagination in students and develops their critical and creative powers of the students. Students come to know about different points of view used to narrate stories. They get acquainted with the concepts of surface meaning and hidden meaning inherent in the text.

Drama

Teaching language through literature a drama in a language classroom is a good resource for language teaching. Drama can be effectively employed to sharpen the listening and speaking skills of the learners and made them aware of the significance of pronunciation, clarity in speech, pitch, intonation, facial expressions and body language in conveying the intended meaning. It also gives students sufficient practice in memorization of literary words and famous quotations. Thus, they develop a flair for language use.

Novel

Teaching language through literature a novel is a beneficial technique for mastering not only the linguistic system but also the life of the target language. In the novel, characters reflect on what people perform in their daily lives. When assessing comprehension, teachers may employ novel tests requiring students to develop the sub-skills of written language like spelling, handwriting, grammar, and punctuation. Essay-type tests written by teachers help students gradually improve their writing and organise material into paragraphs with acceptable sentence structure.

Techniques for using Literature to master language

Following are the techniques which can be effectively employed by a teacher to teach language and linguistic skills through stories, poems, novels and dramas as the chief purpose of English language teaching is to enhance listening, speaking, reading and writing skills among the language learners

1. Students should be told to read the poems with proper pitch and intonation as it will develop their speaking skills of the students. Rhythm and Rhyme also indicate the use of proper pauses for enjoying the poem. It will also improve the pronunciation of students.
2. After completing a literary piece, students should be told to describe the central idea, summary or main characters in their own words. It will enhance listening as well as speaking skills. Moreover, it will enhance my presentation and organizational skills. Students will remain attentive in class which will promote language learning.
3. To build up writing skills, the students should not be prescribed any printed notes. Rather, they should be encouraged to write the answers in their own words. It will give an edge to the creative powers of the students and will increase their vocabulary.
4. Students should be encouraged to read the textbook on the podium to develop their speaking and reading skills with proper stress and pronunciation.
5. Teachers should assign some paragraphs to the students to identify the synonym or antonym of particular words in the paragraph. It will improve their skimming and scanning ability and strengthen their grammar.
6. Students should be encouraged to participate in poem recitation and dramas as it will not only help students to learn a literary work by heart but will also allow them to converse and communicate effectively.

Conclusion

Thus, at last, literature helps students acquire a native-like competence in English, express their ideas in good English, learn the features of modern English, and also 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. 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 cultural competence in students. Most of us do not focus on language use already present in the literature part. This has made both the teacher and the student ignore the literature and rely on grammar books to learn the language. The above paper will assist language teachers in

using literature as a tool to teach the structure and skills of the language.

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