

## LEARNING AND ACQUISITION: TEACHING WRITING SKILLS THROUGH LITERARY TEXTS

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### **Abstract:**

*English as an international language has become a 'language of opportunity' and 'sustainable development'. It is essential for economic growth, enjoys its supremacy in the education system and is an integral part of the Indian academic curriculum in schools as well as higher education. An integration of literature with language makes the learning less mechanical as the acquisition of language becomes more natural. The scholars all over the world have debated on methodologies of English Language Teaching, industriously moving from rote-learning to play-way techniques to storytelling and to all other possible innovative creativities. Various literary genres like Short Stories, Essays, Novels, Poetry, and Drama can be used as a study material for language acquisition. This learning carries dual mechanism syntax and semantics. The literary communication is the contact between the author/teacher and the reader/student. The text being representational in nature communicates at two levels i.e. involving learners and engaging their cognitive faculties. Thus the focus can be on learner's imagination and development of their creativity. It can help exemplify grammatical structure, presenting new vocabulary, develop various patterns. What model of literature language teachers should use with the learners is an important question? The present paper would discuss how literary texts can be used in the language classrooms to develop writing skills. A few extracts from famous writers would be discussed for reference. An emphasis would be there to analyze the language acquisition of learners through the vocabulary and usage of literary texts.*

**Keywords:** *Language, Literature, communication, Writing Skills, Structures, Patterns.*

### **Introduction:**

A literary text can be the major source of linguistic input focusing and enhancing all the four skills - Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. English, a language of global communication, is widely spoken and read and is ahead of other languages across continents and people. According to Stanley Fish a text is more likely to catch the student's/reader's imagination. Placing emphasis on reader's/ student's role in production of meaning, he proposes that a reader/student performs a kind of perceptual closure in the act of reading, irrespective of text's formal structure (qtd. in Makaryk 523). Teaching of second language is a cross cultural dialogue that takes place in non-native language with grammar exercises, communication, and discussion of texts. Language classroom is therefore viewed as a cross cultural fieldwork where two types of dialogues takes place namely - instructional conversation in which forms are practiced, and, exchange of ideas through language. Emphasizing the latter Attinasi and Friedrich remark that exchange of ideas involves both language and the use of language not only words, and sentences, but all the aspects of speech and verbal behaviour that gives language its material (pitch, tempo, interactional dynamics, also discourse style and logic of conversation) (qtd in Kramsch 29). The language/ literature dichotomy is present all over the world as literature is considered for Humanists whereas language for scientists. The learner is however forgotten in the process. But Language and literature cannot exist in isolation, both are interdependent where both can be means and target. When language teachers encourage students to read texts for information and interpreting various layers of meaning, they pick literature as a means and the

target is to learn language. In the present paper there is an emphasis on the same.

With the emerging philosophies, methodologies and theories on learning of language, there has been an opposite extreme: grammar versus functional method, teacher centred or learner centred class, cognitive or experiential learning styles. Whether there are texts of information or texts of language learning, the pedagogical question is that language teachers should teach literature as means to learn language and literature can be the medium to teach language. It becomes a state of equilibrium like a chemical reaction where action takes place in reverse direction. Language brings forth literature which develops and evolves the society and as the society develops language further transforms and develops itself. That is the probable reason why the present world witnesses various transformed languages including the language of SMSs and twitter. English a world language and curriculum language emerged in 16th century gaining importance due to political changes in Europe. It replaced Latin, a dominant language of education. Borrowing models from Latin, the curriculum of European schools in 18<sup>th</sup> century were taught. Textbooks had grammar rules, lists of vocabulary and sentences for translation. According to Titone, “19<sup>th</sup> century textbooks compilers were mainly determined to codify the foreign language into frozen rules of morphology and syntax to be explained and eventually memorized ...” (qtd in Richards and Rodgers 05). This approach was grammar translation method. Rejection of this method came in 20<sup>th</sup> century. C Marcel referred child language learning model for language teaching and focused on means in learning thus locating language in broader framework talking about teaching of basic structural patterns (qtd in Richards and Rodgers 07). Henry Sweet argued in his *The Practical Study of Languages*, gave certain principles of teaching methods: careful selection of what is to be taught in terms of four skills listening, reading, writing and speaking, grading, material from simple to complex (qtd in Rogers and Richards 08).

### **Writing Skills:**

While dealing with the writing skill, the most important communication skill, certain questions become pertinent: Why teach writing? What type of writing should we teach? Should the teacher focus on accuracy of the language? How to exploit or use literary text to teach writing skills? Writing is in fact a creation of meaning in visual language. In order to have writing skills one needs to be a focused listener and reader. In order to create a text Oshima and Hogue mention four divisions of writing including *pre-writing*; *planning*; *writing and revising*; and *final writing*. The ability to write is not naturally acquired; it is usually learned as a set of practices in formal institutions, or other environments settings. Brooks remarks that “*writing is much more than an orthography symbolization of speech; it is more importantly a purposeful selection and organization of expression*” (167). Furthermore, it is not a production of graphic ciphers but a method of thinking to formulate ideas, exploring and arranging them into statements and paragraphs. Written language needs to be more explicit, accurate, appropriate, and effective. A writer has to structure and integrate information into unified and coherent form. Bell and Burnaby explains that writing is a complex cognitive activity in which writer demonstrates control of various variables. At sentence level it includes control of content, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, letter formation. Beyond sentence the writer must be able to structure and integrate information into cohesive and coherent texts and passages (qtd in Nunan 36). Similarly, Hartley divides written texts into a hierarchy of three levels: social Process (text production and writing purpose), cognitive ability (reproducing of ideas) and final writing. James Briton describes three kinds of writing: Transactional writing (advice or persuade), expressive writing (writer's immediate thoughts and feelings) and Poetic writing (language as an art form). The most common linguistic elements as referring devices in a textual environment are pronouns, articles, demonstratives, comparatives, conjunctions. Halliday and Hasan in an important work on *Cohesion in English* discuss lexical cohesion as an important element in writing. For them it is a semantic relation between an element in the text and some other element is crucial for interpretation to it (qtd in Moran and Jacobi 86).

The literary genres have specific tone and texture and from academic point of view, fiction is an important genre as it helps in categorizing and inventing experiences and can be considered as the peripheral activity. Through short stories and novels the students of literature are taught vocabulary, sentence structures and patterns with grammar and various forms of literary devices, figure of speech etc. Imitating models can be given to the learners to explore and discover new words, phrases, literary devices. The second language writing can benefit from pre-constructed expressions, discrete words and phrases in the text. Chomsky while differentiating between 'competence and performance' in his *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965) explains the distinction by elaborating that 'competence' is speaker's knowledge of language and 'performance' is the actual use of language in concrete situations(2). Thus performance can be said as the written ability of the individual. Here, there are few extracts and expressions picked up from the famous authors such as George Orwell, Jane Austen, Raja Rao, and Mulk Raj Anand etc. Two of these authors are English whereas the other two are Indian English authors. The extracts or sentences of selected authors can teach the students sentence patterns, structure, choice of words, use of speech and styles giving them insight into author's writing skills.

*George Orwell in Animal Farm uses animal fable to satirize on totalitarianism of Russia. It is a form of literature that uses definite mode of stylistics through author's experiences. Instead of directly producing a narrative or argumenta non-fiction form of literature, the experienced author turns it into a fictional work. At the farm the Old Major says: Is it not crystal clear to you... Why, work night and day, body and soul, for the overthrow of the human race! That is my message to you, comrades: Rebellion! I do not know when that Rebellion will come... (Animal Farm 8-9). 'Comrades and Rebellion', the words are verbal and non-verbal codes in a text, further sub-divided into linguistic and para- linguistic codes. Linguistic code is a symbolic code whereas text is an iconic super sign, within which there is transmission of symbolic and indexical signs and they have been iconicised into a fictional model of real communication. Literature is 'dynamic', introducing fictive dialogue between author and reader giving space to the reader to form his/her communication. Apart from the literal meaning i.e. denotation, the hidden or derived i.e. connotation is concealed as well as revealed beneath the regular sound of sentences as Orwell does in his writings. He uses personification in *Animal Farm* to portray bourgeois and proletariat. Another sentence uses rhetorical device: What is the nature of this life of ours?...But is this simply the order of nature?..(Animal Farm 6). The author makes the students aware of another sentence pattern in rhetorical form. He uses rhetorical device /personification/satire to facilitate access to the narrative of *Animal Farm*. The aim is to involve the reader/listener/learner in a cognitive mode with a view to augment narration. Thus, the semantic creativity is both linguistic and psychological. A literary device is made more functional than decorative by the author's art. These are the features of language which could be learnt by the students with such a form of fiction writing.*

Similarly, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* has been given an antithetical title. The work is wildly popular all over the world not only because of its impressive characters but also because of its unique writing skills. For instance, this book is full of abstract nouns like "Truth universally acknowledged", where truth is an abstract noun. Norman Page remarks Jane Austen was an innovator in prose syntax and narrative modes (9). Convinced as Elizabeth now was that Bingley's dislike of her had originated in jealousy... (PP 243) The syntax is highly patterned with its inversions. Like the reader of Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*, the reader of *Pride and Prejudice* is faced with the task of extracting truth from given narrative clues. Austen's famous opening sentence establishes the ironic narrative voice, and it is one, that the reader hears throughout the novel: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife" (*Pride and Prejudice* 15). Sometimes she juxtaposes words or phrases that produce more convincing effects. Austen uses 'free indirect speech' a technique pioneered by Henry Fielding and Frances Burney and later developed by her. This stylistic device occurs when the reader hears the character's thoughts, not in the

style of the omniscient narrator. There is never any deviation into the unnatural or exaggerated. She is capable of attracting any reader towards her writings. Austen's selection of her characters and skillful treatment in the management of them makes her an effective writer. Her texts allow us to study recurrent phrasal patterns which are widespread in the language as a whole. The structure in her sentences allows the paragraph to flow. Austen's lexical choices contains words like genteel, agreeable : *It was first broken by Mrs. Annesley, a genteel, agreeable looking woman, whose endeavor to introduce some kind of discourse, proved to be more well-bred than either of the others...* (*Pride and Prejudice* 243). Austen's diction can work as a model to create patterns and sentence structure and the learner can use vocabulary too. The word order is capable of enhancing her narrative skills: *what think you of books?* It is through her experimental narrative techniques, dramatic interplay, nuances of tone, revelatory dialogue and the compelling design of her novels that students of English language can discover many styles of writings.

Mulk Raj Anand the Indian author in English is well known for his writings about underprivileged classes. In his Story 'The Liar' he states: "Accha", he would say .....heard a pebble drop. Up he darted on the stormy ridge in the direction whence the sound had come, jumping from crag to crag, securing foothold on a small stone here and sure one on a boulder there, till he was tearing through a flock of sheep, towards a little gully where a ram has taken shelter in the cave, securing the belief that it would escape its pursuer (*Contemporary Indian Short Stories in English* 22). The writer uses inverted sentence pattern by adding preposition 'up he darted on the ...' The inclusion and usage of Indian vocabulary 'Accha', long sentence structure, use of words like flock of sheep, crag to crag can make the student imitate the model. Also an exercise to shorten the sentences can be given which can serve as a learning writing material.

Raja Rao the Indian fiction writer in English is known for his crafty articulation. In his short story 'India A Fable' he states that: Never was Luxemburg so beautiful as on that fragile spring day. March had come and gone boist- erroneously cold winds blew in April, then the immense sunshine came (*Contemporary Indian Short Stories in English* 201). The imagery and descriptive writing can be taught through this story. The students are introduced with the techniques of narrative writing such as first person, second and third person respectively. They might be asked to use the imagination to write a description of their surrounding by carefully following the sentence patterns. The Indian culture and texts by Indian Writers can help the student learn language easily and effectively as they can prove to be better models since it is easy for them to understand their own settings and environment.

#### **Resultant output of the exercise:**

- The students shall construct, examine and extend the meaning of the literary text, informative and technical.
- There shall be an effective decoding of the meaning/ text.
- The sentences of long and short and paragraphs shall be reframed by giving model text. They shall learn the usage of conjunctions, connectors, clauses by developing exercises.
- They shall further understand word recognition, phrases, idioms, Inversion of sentences etc.
- The literary devices like metaphor, paradox, satire, irony are introduced and learnt for their writing.
- A response of the text making inferences about word choice, style and content shall be observed.
- There shall be explanation of narrative structure through plots, events, theme etc.
- While learning the first person narrative technique they shall be asked to connect with their own experiences by writing a description of their own surroundings.
- Culturally diverse texts shall provide them insight into various styles of writers.
- They shall know and develop through hints, outlines, notes making, comprehending etc.
- Their imagination power shall get increased.

The focus of language should be learner centered with receptive features of learning, constructing, structuring, restructuring of knowledge to connect ideas. The creative analyses of literary texts are means of looking for pattern in the sentence structures e.g. opening prepositional

phrase/subject/compound/predicate/closing prepositional phrase used by any author. The choice of sentences refers to intentions, assumptions, and pre-suppositions of the speakers and listeners. The paper has tried to explore the creativities of language learning through literature thereby enhancing the communication skills with a focus on writing skills, sentences structures and styles.

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