

The Assimilation of Literature and Culture in Second Language Acquisition and Learning

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Abstract

Literature is a representation of culture. It is associated with a group of people an embodiment of habits, customs, social behaviour, knowledge and assumptions. In the contemporary world we use Literature in the language classroom to teach culture in the language classroom. Hall focuses on the development of “literature studies based on classics tradition to its present day shift into cultural studies” (Hall 34). So, Literature representation means cultural representation. According to Kramersch, “culture is a membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating and action. The term culture will be used in the sense of whatever a person must have in order to function and live in a society” (Kramersch 127). Thus, literature / culture provides a framework for second language acquisition and its relevance with language skills. Thus, socio-cultural factors include in the language teaching / learning materials.

1. Introduction

Wardhagh emphasises to include socio-cultural factors in the teaching and says, “the important question about considering socio-cultural factors in our language teaching / learning is whether we should include socio-cultural factors in the teaching process or not?” (Wardhagh 1). If the answer is "yes", the next question is, how much socio-cultural information should be given to learners and what kind of techniques should be used?

While planning teaching material and methodology, a teacher should be very clear about the limitations of socio-linguistic information which should be taught to the learners. Teacher should be very careful while imparting the target literature / culture during the classroom teaching. Meanwhile, teacher should consider the learners' needs, characteristics and aims because most of the learners in India come with different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it is very difficult for the teachers to develop the lingual concepts regarding the foreign (English) material given to them. Thus, it is essential to understand that knowledge cannot take place on only one ground i.e. psychological and cognitively oriented approaches to second language acquisition. Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research is primarily based on secondary evidence-externalized language activity-followed by the use of Language in a social situation Such as: vocalization, graphical representations of language, and responses to particular stimuli in controlled setting environment. Hence, language is utilized for some purposes. The attention is drawn from `cognitive issues' to the importance of social and cultural factors.

Social practice theory applied to the problems of SLA between macro social structures and moment-to-moment practices. In this regard, socio-cultural theory approach looks at a learner as a social being, an individual, and that a language, as socially constructed rather than internal inherent only. In contrast to practice theory, socio-cultural theory applied as it is in psychology, education and SLA (Second Language Acquisition). It primarily focuses on human development and learning. So, it emphasizes that learning is a social process. It is mediated by culture and takes place in a social context. It could be said that success in language skills always depends on teachers by helping the students, talking to them about cultural borders

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and engaging them in assured learning activities. It is true fact that language does not exist apart from culture. There is no doubt in imparting cultural and literature representation in language classroom enhances the learner's motivation feels more enthusiastic towards language learning. As McKay says:

One main use is that it can foster learner motivation and conceptual development (McKay 7).

Changes in linguistics and learning theory suggest that culture can be used as an important element in language classrooms. It is known fact that, language goes beyond the knowledge of grammatical rules, vocabulary items and pronunciation. Tseng says: "successful reading comprehension requires language users to know that culture underline language in order to get the meaning across" (Tseng 11). Tseng further suggests that culture and its knowledge effects changes in individual perception and is valid for expanding an individual's perspective of the world. According to Stuart and Nocon:

Learning about the lived culture of actual target language speakers a well as about one's own culture requires tools that assist language learners in negotiating meaning and understanding the communicative and cultural texts in which linguistic codes are used. (Stuart and Nocon 431)

2. Use of English Literature With Reference To English as a Second Language

In Indian context, the critical evaluation of the materials, text books and syllabus are available for the teaching of English at School, College and University levels. It is clear that most of them are imported or books of English writers which are meant to be used for students whose native language is English. The books, novels and tragedies are written in the background of English culture. The lack of local / native materials for academic purposes and for the teaching of Functional English has made the teaching and learning of English in India is a bit suspicious. It is generally believed by a group of people that the influence of English culture through their text books is an attempt to prompt English Culture and it is a deliberate attempt to alienate the native students from their own culture. This is a strong reason that learning and teaching of English language is still strongly opposed in some parts. As Mansoor says:

highly positive attitudes and high motivational intensity to learn-teach English by learners and teachers the position and status of English in our educational set-up remains controversial. (Mansoor 56)

At present the materials used by the English teachers and learners for teaching English in India brings great difficulty for them. They have great problems relating to the foreign contexts in the Indian situation. The course designers or teachers did not make any effort to make the curriculum and materials interesting and non-judgmental for the native people. Thus, the English language teachers must be familiar with the features of both the languages that is native language and target language. They must be familiar with the different theories of second language acquisition and learning. By applying these theories they can make their teaching and learning experience of English language wonderful. Mansoor says:

research produced in this century has evolved a theory that a native culture is as much interference for SLL (Second Language Learning) learners as for native language learners. Likewise, it has been seen that just as similarities and differences have been found to be useful in language studies so too cultural similarities, once identified and understood, can be used to advantage. For second language teachers, knowledge of the commonalities between two languages or of the universal features of language appears to be useful for understanding the total language process. We can recognize not only different world-views and different ways of expressing reality but can also recognize through both language and culture some universal qualities that bind us all together in one world (Mansoor 74).

Thus, the Inclusion of local culture in the curriculum, methodology, and teaching materials of TESL would make learning easier and more meaningful for Indian students. The most obvious influence of language and culture on thought is that of vocabulary.

3. Second Language Learning and Second Culture Learning

While discussing Indian context and considering the connection between second language learning (SLL) and second culture learning (SCL), the phenomena of acculturation arises. Kottak says:

acculturation is the exchange of cultural features that results when groups come into continuous firsthand contact; the original cultural patterns of either or both groups may be altered, but the groups remain distinct. (Kottak 4)

Hence, it is very important to consider various types of second language learning contexts because each type involves different degrees of acculturation. SLL in a foreign culture clearly involves the deepest form of acculturation. SLL in the native culture varies in the sternness of acculturation experienced by the learner, depending on the country, the socio-political status of the language and the motivation, desires and needs of the learners. Kachru says “learning English in India does not involve taking on a new culture, since one is acquiring Indian English in Indian School” (Kachru 21).

I think that, the same is true of India where English enjoys a high status and plays a key role in the educational, official and business set-up. It is therefore very importance that students be taught Indian English that reflects their own culture as well as provides local contexts for using the language. So, literature is not something consisting of facts to be learned, but literature is a helpful tool to make learners feel the need to speak and use the target language. In selecting language teaching material, English teachers have a lot of choices in terms of authentic material but it is surprising that many Indian teachers rely on uninteresting textbooks based on literature that focus student's attention on grammatical structures and obsolete vocabulary and the activities chosen are based on teacher-talk and student-listen routines. The practices are unlikely to lead students to develop a genuine interest in comprehending the text. Teachers should think innovative methods to create interest among the learners. They should simplify the context into the native cultural so that learners pay more attention towards learning the new language.

The long experience of teachers show that the students lack motivation to learn a language and need variety of excitement while learning. So, the duty of the English language teachers is to help the students and notice that learning a language is not just learning its grammatical rules, vocabulary items and so on. It is evident that cultural content material will foster learner motivation. McKay, like many other experts, believes that, there should be a variety of culture in the materials. If the role of literature in ELT classroom is just to create learner interest towards content and thus towards language, that is highly desirable but the overuse of it is not appropriate. In other words, home and target culture should be integrated. It is also helpful in developing schemata, which is very important for the improvement of language skills.

4. Conclusion

Language through literature is a debatable subject among academicians and scholars for long time. The idea of language through literature raises a few eyebrows in India and other parts of the globe as well. Many schools, colleges and universities in India and around the world offer great number of literature courses at School, College, Undergraduate and Post Graduate level. Teachers who teach these courses usually use the traditional method of lecturing on topics like theme, characterization, diction, symbolism, summary, plot, motifs etc. They don't give any emphasis on the stylistic / linguistic aspect of the literary texts. Of course, students must be taught literature and it must be taught by creating an awareness of linguistic possibilities and sensibility. So in this way, the idea of literature through language becomes relevant.

Teaching and learning language through literature demands dynamic involvement of both the teacher and the thought in bringing the literary text to life. George Eliot calls it AESTHETIC TEACHING, “I think aesthetic teaching is the highest of all teaching because it deals with life in its highest complexity” (George Eliot 9).The medium is language and the context and form of a literary work arouse interest in the meaningful use of that medium and this is the ideas of George Eliot's "aesthetic teaching". But in this technique, the role of the teacher is very crucial and important. His role is to support the students' efforts to

establish intensive relationship with literary texts without interfering too much in their act of creating meaning. According to Jakobson:

A linguist deaf to the poetic function of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistic problems and not conversant with linguistic methods, are equally flagrant anachronism. (Roman Jakobson 377)

The time has come to realize that the ultimate objective of teaching and learning language through literature is the study of words, idioms and syntax at the highest level of thought and imagination. It is not language through activities that is to be emphasized, but language through literature. The focus should be on the exercises depicting, how words and sentences are made and moulded in order to communicate.

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