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“You taught me Language and my Profit on’t is I know how to Curse”: Learning Language and Luring of the Language through Literature

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Abstract:

Literature and language are at par with each other. They are in fact complimentary in nature. Literature cannot be thought of without the medium of language through which it is fashioned. It is the scintillating command over language by the virtue of which the literary figures shape their manuscripts. Thus, the originality of any language rests on its usage in the literature written by the native litterateurs. So, using literature in language learning process makes the teaching more interesting, productive and result oriented based on originality and authenticity. On the other hand Teaching English Language through postcolonial literary texts makes the learners aware of how a particular language is lured/ensnared/denigrated under the hegemony of a dominant State. Such texts, if used and evaluated in a language teaching class can enrich the learners with the understanding of language as well as the understanding of the linguistic acculturation, thus will make the whole process inclusive. Therefore the present paper will try to evaluate how literary texts help the students to learn the language on genuine and original bases. An assessment will also be made to show how different culturally motivated literary texts help in analysing the acculturation of a certain language.

Keywords: Language Teaching, Literature, Originality, Authenticity, Colonization, Culture.

Scope of Literature in a Language Learning Process...

Literature is a multidimensional discipline. There is a variety of social, cultural or linguistic formulations. These variations when evaluated in a language class enrich the learners with different linguistic items related to the particular social and cultural setup. Thus, literature serves a role of “an ally of language”. Traditionally speaking Literature as an instrument of language teaching was an open fact. The Grammar Translation Method had provided a platform where a literary text was considered as the best model for foreign language teaching. The texts were translated and used as pure samples for learning language which served as pointed out in the book *Literature* as the “illustrations of the grammatical rules.” (Duff and Maley, 3) Though the method focussed on the formal aspects of the text not on the thematic concerns but the originality of the text served as a fruitful way. But in the modern linguistic studies the method as such lost its value and whole usage of a literary text was in turn undervalued. But as literature itself occupies a central space within the discipline of humanities, so its scope in the language learning process also gets enriched day by day, as

remark Duff and Maley, “... the interest in literature as one of the most valuable language teaching resources available has revived remarkably.” (Duff and Maley, 3) The emerging *Communicative Approach* in the Linguistic Studies worked as a shield to give a functional value of a literary text in a language classroom which now has occupied its due place as the best instrument for language teaching.

The emergence of New Criticism, Russian Formalism, Post Structuralism, Reader Response Theory and all other literary theories whereby the writer as an authoritative entity is no longer acceptable, led to the shift of focus from writer to the reader. All these theories have a common link that is to avoid the writer as a dominant force over a text and derive the meaning while emphasizing over the form of a text itself. So, the emphasis on form will itself develop the linguistic components of a learner. The text with a rich and the varieties of literary and other lexical items in turn develop the learner’s own repertoire of various linguistic items.

Although some theorists deny the literary language to be a particular type away from the ordinary, but nevertheless the thing what is termed as ‘literariness’ of a literary text does endorse such language with some sort of specificity. The literary techniques like metaphors, similes, symbols, images, assonance, alliteration, ambiguity has a profound value in literature rather than in other texts even though they are used there also, as ardently remarked by Hess:

Entering a literary text, under the guidance of appropriate teaching, brings about the kind of participation almost no other text can produce. When we read, understand, and interpret a poem we learn language through the expansion of our experience with a larger human reality. (Hess, 20)

Undoubtedly, all the genres of literature serve as the best possible models for the language learning but because of the brevity and precision of the sentences/verses and stanzas it is poetry that has a distinctive quality of being indispensable for such cause. The various literary techniques or terms used in poetry give it an appealing resonance thereby enthraling the readers cum learners who in turn derive the fullest benefits in terms of their learning and understanding. It is the aesthetic essence of poetry which since ages has been stimulating the senses of its readers. This heightening characteristic is rightly noticed in the book *Literature in the Language Classroom* as, “Reading poetry enables the learner to experience the power of language outside the strait-jacket of more standard written sentence structure and lexis.” (Collier and Slatter, 200). The dazzling imagery and ambiguous meanings engage the readers in such a way that they are lost within the narrative of the text and thereby lend this highly arresting exercise an extra merit to enhance the overall understanding of these diverse linguistic forms.

Originality and Reliability...

The most important factor in using a literary text in a language class is that literature is the most original, authentic and reliable source of language in practice. The formalistic tendency of the literature endorses it with rich body of sentence or word structure at the primary level which is pure, reliable and original. The native writers are full of the original material to

shape their ideas and every genuine linguistic capacity is at their disposal. So, they can exploit their innovative ideas in whatever way they want. Regarding the authenticity it is stated in *Literature and Language teaching*, that “literary text is authentic text, real language in context, to which we can respond directly”.(Brumfit and Carter, 15)A learner becomes familiar with these structures and on the basis of which he/she enriches his own reservoir of such linguistic structures. Literature is an unparalleled space where almost every aspect of life is encompassed. The learners come across a rich social structure within a text. Owing to a range of characters from different social spectra used, literature has no qualms to build up the normative atmosphere within a text whereby the learners enlighten themselves with a wide range of originals like, “sociolects, regional dialects, jargon, idiolects, etc.” Hence, literature endorses a huge scope of developing sociolinguistic varieties among the learners. When a literary text of such tendency is used or read as an instrument in the language classroom the learners find it an incredible and an exciting exercise to relate their day to day life phenomenon with the textual rendering of the life aspects. A literary text depicting the society with different classes and hierarchies helps the learner to delve into the authentic language structure with which all these social structures are shaped. Therefore, such exercises in general help learners to derive their learning material from the most original and authentic reservoirs. This whole phenomenon is detailed in the book *Literature in the Language Classroom*:

In reading literary texts, students have also to cope with language intended for native speakers and thus they gain additional familiarity with many different linguistic uses, forms and conventions of the written mode: with irony, exposition, argument, narration, and so on. (Collie and Slater, 6)

Skill Development...

Literature has an enormous value to develop the learners’ in terms of the multiple aspects of a language. The essence of using a literary text for the language learning process rests on the fact that with its genuine and pure structure both in terms of form and content it develops and shapes the learners’ all the four skills of language i.e. reading, writing, speaking and listening are boasted, as observed in the study *Literature in the ESL Classroom*, “literature will increase all language skills because literature will extend linguistic knowledge by giving evidence of extensive and subtle vocabulary usage, and complex and exact syntax.” (McKay, 529)

The activity of using literature for language teaching has a kind of a stimulating merit i.e. it generates an interesting and interactive atmosphere in the classroom. This activity nonetheless spares no scope for a kind of a one way traffic rather it engages both the teacher and the students in a practical approach and aims “to provide the stimulus for interaction to take place between the learners among them and with the teacher.” (Duff and Malay, 3) This phenomenon of producing an interactive environment within the classroom with every learner along with the teacher, playing an active part has a shaping influence over the speaking skill of learners. Thus, interacting enhances speaking which is one of the most important skills in the whole language learning process without which

language development cannot be thought. The more one speaks in practice the more he improves in this skill.

A literary text makes the learning of language as an integrated process sans the isolated exercise thus every skill gets a shared benefit. So, in terms of developing one’s reading skill literary texts have an enormous value. Discussing the versatile implications of reading a literary text in a language learning class Pilar Agustin Llach in his study citing Krashen and Coady says, “it is through extensive reading, that learners acquire most of their vocabulary, and that instruction plays a rather insignificant role as the number of words learned is concerned.” (Llach, 10) Reading a literary text enhances the capacity of a learner to learn how a language is to be contextualized. To learn words or vocabulary in isolation has been always considered as more or less a weak exercise. When an original and authentic literary text is read by a learner it emancipates a learner to go through a hectic process of learning words in isolation through a dictionary rather vocabs of diverse nature are read in context, as averred in the book *Literature in the Language Classroom*:

Reading a substantial and contextualised body of text, students gain familiarity with many features of the written language – the formation and function of sentences, the variety of possible structures, the different ways of connecting ideas – which broaden and enrich their own writing skills. (Collie and Slater, 7)

The process of considering and evaluating such contextualized linguistic items in a language learning process creates an urge within the learners to dive into the text and reproduce it and come out with their own formulations.

Evaluating a literary text through a language learning process is an appealing exercise in terms of attaining the understanding of how the different aspects are rendered and shaped within the linguistic domain. A learner is exposed to a huge number of linguistics items; lexical, syntactical and also a variety of phrases, idioms and quotations at times emerge from the literary text which a learner acquires and gives an additional touch to his competence. This process imperceptibly boosts his writing ability as well. Many sentences from various texts are considered the best quotes ever experienced in language studies. Shakespearean witty dialogues and Francis Bacon’s clichéd short sentences are engraved on the minds of a huge populace round the globe. Beckon’s language is the heightening and magniloquent example of wit and brevity. When such textual readings are carried out in a language learning class the students champion such stylistic and witty stuff thus help a learner to improve his own skill to write terse and succinct language. The scope of literature in a language is ensured when writing sessions are carried out in the classroom situation. The sections of the texts are chosen and given to the learners for summarising as per their own capabilities which in turn improves the learners’ creativity and also improves their diverse areas of competence. These practical sessions examining the creative ability of the learners is one of the best tools of developing the writing skill of a learner.

Therefore literature as an “alley of language” is not an exaggeration. Literature in a language class provides avenues to enrich the learners’ linguistic competence. Language learning via rote lessons cannot help in the present scenario. It is the immense and multiple shades of literature which help the learners to attain proficiency at an accelerating pace and with cent per cent authenticity and originality.

How a Language is Lured/Corrupted and how learning of this luring is significant?

The second part of this study is to highlight the tendency of how in a language learning process, the usage of a postcolonial text will help the learners to understand the impact of foreign language and culture on the indigenous linguistic and cultural identity of a certain state. It would be a sluggish exercise if the second language learner will grab the things patiently, rather he has to implement his critical faculty towards the fact that the foreignness is an overshadowing influence, under which the national, cultural and linguistic identity of the natives gets debarred. Since the emergence of post colonialism in English Literary studies, a huge corpus of literature has come into existence which de-standardises the euro-centric norms and enrich their own linguistic and cultural essences. Also, the postcolonial theorists penetrate the deep recesses of some of the classical texts and deflate the notion of the first world’s supremacy. Such texts if used and evaluated in a language teaching class can enrich an inclusive process whereby a learner can be acquainted with historical nexus of a language also. The learners should pierce the opacity of the whole process of cultural and learners towards the understanding of language as well as the understanding of linguistic acculturation. Thus, teaching English Language through a literary text of such significance is linguistic disparagement of nations through such texts. English has got definitely global dominance and is the second most spoken language across the world. But what are the theoretical and historical formulations behind? The dominance is nonetheless because of the colonial occupation of Britain under the shadow of which they invaded the world nations with their national, cultural and linguistic identities.

In his promising critical study *The Question of Palestine*, Edward Said points out that, “By 1918 it is estimated that European powers were in colonial occupation of about 85 percent of the globe”. (Said Question, 3) Under their tricky policy of civilizing the nations they had their own nefarious and ulterior hidden agendas. They marred the nations with their dignity, honour and in a marauding manner looted them of their cultural and linguistic identities. The effects of this wretched occupation remarks Frantz Fanon that colonialism, “is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity” (Fanon, 250). The artists from such nations try to narrate this agony and fatal consequences in their writings and to give voice to the trauma which their nations have been witnessing in terms of all the life aspects. Their motto always has been to take the burden of their nations and write back to the canon blatantly, as Helen Tiffin points towards, “Processes of artistic and literary decolonization have involved a radical dismantling of European codes and a post-colonial subversion and appropriation of the dominant European discourses” (Tiffin eds. Bill Ashcroft et al, 95). Therefore, through the literary discourses the hegemony is debunked and deflated by the writers from these so

called third world countries. These writers within the ambit of their programmatic canon and through their artistic calibre have depicted the whole phenomenon of the cultural and linguistic acculturation. Almost from every colonized space such cultural heroes have emerged. In the present study an effort is made to discuss some of them within their own context and to highlight the significance of using their works as samples in language learning process both to learn language and to understand how they defy their own cultural and linguistic identity.

A Textual Overview...

Edmund Spenser works as no less than a foundational figure in depicting the colonized ‘other’ in a wretched and denigrated manner. In his most outspoken text *View of the Present State of Ireland (1956)*, his superior attitude towards the Irish Culture is a heightening sample to understand the whole nexus of the dichotomies constructed by Europe in order to mar the existence of the so called third world countries and to be more precise Ireland is thought of in the same paradigm due to the longest ever colonialism they were subjected to though themselves belonging to the same geographically demarcated space. Spenser’s infamous lines speak of the same unjustified and ideologically motivated outlook, “they must convert their mantles into conventional cloaks, and above all they must speak the English tongue.” (Spenser, 1956) The Irish people were no less than the brutes for this colonial voice. But with the emergence of postcolonial studies there were counter discourses. The whole hegemony was crushed by the vehement voice on which the whole narrative was formulated. Within the Irish intelligentsia, a cultural and linguistic renaissance took place which ran parallel to the national movement in the political sphere. There emerged a bunch of writers who devoted themselves to their programme of denying the whole degradation their nation witnessed in terms of political, cultural and linguistic subjugation. Their works created sensation in the world literature. The whole narrative of the English discourses got shaken. One of the recent names in the long series is Seamus Heaney whose place-name poems are central to the linguistic acculturation process. His works exhibit an unwavering formulation of what is termed as Irishness whereby he successfully shuns the English-centric models. On the one hand narrated the trauma and atrocities the British led Ireland into and on the other hand he through his artistic merit by nativizing and de-standardizing the English language. Heaney has mastered the technique what is known as *Dinnshenchas* (Dinnshenchas or Dinnseanchans, “developed from onomastic (place-name traditions) and aetiological (origin legends) discourses derived from early Celtic culture, it enjoys the same meaning with place-names, and both of them can spontaneously refer to the name of place as well as the poetry of place-name.” (Smyth, 33-34)

Seamus Heaney’s technique of Dinnseanchans does enrich his own cultural and linguistic identity. *Anahorish* from *Wintering Out (1972)* is one the outstanding poems of such merit. The title itself is a replication to negate the dominance of Englishness on the native idiom. Anahorsh is a Gaelic derivative of “*anachfhioruisce*”, which means “place of clear water”. (Corcoran, 44) The word is comprised of four vowels full of native taste and passion. The word is prevalent in multiple aspects of the Irish life. Anahorsh is also a

small town of Count Derry, Northern Ireland, very close to Mossbawn and also there is a school named as Anahorish School where the poet himself got his primary education. In his study *Language and Landscape: Dinnshenchas in Seamus Heaney's Poetry* Yaorong He, situates the word Anahorish within the Irish culture and tradition, "Although Anahorish belongs to Great Britain in regional division and political affiliation, it is with distinct Irish characteristics, and it carries on Irish tradition." (10-11) Another poem of the same resonance in Heaney's oeuvre is titled as Broagh. The Gaelic origin of the word is "bruach", which means a "riverbank":

In Heaney's view, though the word "Broagh" corresponds to "riverbank" in English, they cannot be equal totally because of the varied pronunciation and Irish people's unique understanding and experience for the word "Broagh"... The place-name poetry is an indication that British colonists are excluded from Irish tradition despite they live in Ireland. Though Northern Ireland belongs to Great Britain in political division, it is closely related to ancient Irish people. British colonist's failure in pronouncing gh[g] suggests that identity recognition between British and Irish can be completed via language and pronunciation. Therefore, the word "Broagh" with the Gaelic pronunciation trait has become a kind of Irish identity, arousing Irish national consciousness. (He, 12)

Another interesting poem which suggests the same tendency of nativization within its discrepant use of language is titled as *Toome*. Toome is nonetheless also name of a town which lies in Antrim, Northern Ireland. The word is a derivative of an Irish word "Tuaim" and also has some homophonic tone of "tomb" and English word. At the outset of the poem the tone is set for such native taste.

My mouth holds round
the soft blastings
Toome, Toome
as under the dislodged
slab of the tongue" (Heaney, 54).

This fantastic use of native expressions and names forms an essential part of a language learning process in order to enrich the learners' consciousness about the diversity issue concerned with language.

The purpose of give a brief overview of such texts is to exemplify the scope of these indigenous texts and how they familiarize the hegemonic order in the world literary canon and it is pertinent to make the use of such texts in the language classroom to show this linguistic warfare. Such a practice does endorse a twofold aspect. To learn the language and to learn the luring of a language in order to make the whole process a conclusive activity.

One of the most prolific postcolonial writers and the prominent cultural voice of Nigeria is Chinua Achebe. Achebe an acclaimed artist is one among the long series of those

anticolonial writers who penetrate the imperviousness of the colonial discourses and their guise of civilizing the so called third world countries and enriched their national, cultural and linguistic identity. His flagrant and revolutionary artistic figure had a path breaking merit which triggered the national and cultural consciousness of the African people. His salubrious value as a postcolonial writer is heightened by his commitment towards holding the responsibility of his nation in terms of reclaiming the lost, national, cultural and linguistic identity, as he himself averred in his essay *The Role of the Writer*:

African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans...but...they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African peoples all but lost in the colonial period...The writer’s duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost. (Achebe. *The Role*, 8)

This theoretical formulation comes into practice in his novels whereby he captures his national, cultural and linguistic tradition and reaffirms and reclaims a space to situate this otherwise unfamiliar world. The imposition of Igbo culture in his ground breaking novel *Things Fall Apart* does puncture the Empire’s hypocritical and overshadowing malice. A series of culture specific terms debased the foreign influence in an overwhelming artistic manner. The cultural mishap that swallowed the Nigerian indigenous identity is conscientiously compensated in this novel.

These were some of the instances of the postcolonial texts in which the cultural and linguistic identity is the concern. Apart from these theorists even now revisit the classics i.e. like Shakespearean *The Tempest* where in the hegemony is deflated. Prospero in the play controls the Island and capture Caliban a monster and brings that also under his control. Caliban represents all that populace which have been traumatized under the colonial occupation. The postcolonial theorists bring forth the claim that this depicts the age old Eurocentric hegemony. That what the purpose of putting this agonizing verse from the play in the title of this study, "You taught me language; and my profit on’t is, I know how to curse". (Shakespeare, 19) This shows the implicit and subtle process and strategy of the colonizer to subjugate his subject.

In the Indian context also there are writers like Raja Rao who in his magnum opus and path breaking novel *Kanthapura* nativizes the English language by imposing his own culture specific terms in order to enrich his own cultural identity and say no to the hegemony of English models. Thus, introducing this type of texts also will help a foreign language learner to penetrate the entire process of linguistic acculturation.

Conclusion

Therefore, Literature in a language learning process serves as an indispensable tool. It authenticates the linguistic formulations available in the entire process of learning. On the other hand also the necessity of the use of postcolonial text exhibits the linguistic decolonisation and the historical shaping of a language. The purpose of the study pertains to the fact that introducing such texts would not devalue the learning of English language

but it will add to the critical understanding of the learners. Language learners ought to understand the whole narrative of how one language gets dominance over other languages and how the same hegemony is broken through the textual discourses. The first part of my study imperceptibly will help still help and remain full of scope but rather to become Lord Macaulay of the Indian context in their own ways who in his infamous minute as note by some one of the presenters yesterday where he says:

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect..." (Macaulay, 13)

Thus, the foreign language teacher ought to build up the consciousness of the students to understand the whole narrative of the linguistic and cultural shaping of a nation.

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