

Language and Culture through Literature

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Abstract

Learning another language is a tough task for students who are not native users of the language. In order to learn another language, it is necessary to learn the culture and social context of the target language first. One of the most challenging kinds of material for English classes is literature. Literature forms the basis which will help one to learn the culture of a particular language; it also seems to be the best way to teach culture and thus literature teaching acts as the foundation for learning the language. There is a relationship between culture and literature; it is said that culture and language are interrelated. This paper provides the benefits of reading literature and the relationship between language and culture which is of much importance for ESL students.

Keywords: language and literature, language learning, language and culture, critical thinking, intercultural relationship, interpersonal relationship, communicative competence, linguistic competence

Introduction

The English language is the global language; it can be native language or second language, but it is the administrative language of many countries including South-Asian countries. The importance of introducing English in the educational system is obvious. English seems to be a communicative, wide ranging and dynamic subject that can be best learned in an environment, which encourages socio-constructive learning. Literature plays a vital role in teaching English language and culture. It is necessary to learn the culture of a specific language

that one is going to learn. Language and culture are interrelated; language is something that people use in their daily lives and something they use to express, create and interpret meanings and to establish and maintain social and interpersonal relationships. Learning to communicate in an additional language involves developing an awareness of the ways in which culture correlates with language whenever it is used.

Literature – A Mode to Learn Language and Culture

The literature is a dynamic source in English language learning because it helps students to develop critical thinking, build valuable skills and expand their worldview. There are some factors that need to be taken into consideration when teaching literature, such as cultural value, expanding horizons, building vocabulary, improving writing skills, teaching critical thinking. Literature offers students a second language which enables them to communicate in a broader social-economic context. It also gives students a tool to directly access scientific, technological and humanistic information, and in this way expand their knowledge of the world.

The cultural value is about learning through stories, it can be real or fictional, ever since the first writers came up with their stories; literature is the perfect way to picture certain aspects of different cultures and the perspectives of the ones who dedicate their lives to share the stories and connect the world. Chinua Achebe, the great African novelist says, “it is not difficult to identify with somebody like yourself, somebody next door who looks like you. What's more difficult is to identify with someone you don't see, who's very far away, who's a different color, who eats a different kind of food. When you begin to do that then literature is really performing its wonders”.

Another important benefit of literature is critical thinking, because with right reading the students can see how to analyze and question the situations they may face in the society. With literature, the students can develop the habits of thinking and analyzing what is happening around, as well as also check whether it is right or wrong. In the words of C. S. Lewis,

Literature adds to reality, it does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides; and in this respect, it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already become.

Introduction of Culture in Literature Classes

Culture can be introduced in literature by implementing authentic materials in the context. This brings positive motivation in students as they get interested. Providing authentic information about the target language is necessary. They provide exposure to real language. Literature creates exactly the environment for the English learner. One's main focus should be on how to interact with the situation one encounters, and through this interaction, develop the knowledge of English.

Language Learning

Language is made up of words and a series of rules that connect words together. Language learning involves learning vocabulary and the rules for constructing sentences; this understanding of language is, however, a very narrow one. It sees language as fixed and finite and does not explore the complexities involved in using language for communication. An understanding of language as open, dynamic and energetic, encompasses the rich complexities of communication. This expanded view of language makes educational experience more engaging for students. Language is not a thing to be studied but a way of seeing, understanding and communicating about the world and each language user uses his or her language in very different ways to do this.

Purposeful Communication

People use language for purposeful communication and learning a new language involves learning how to use words, rules and knowledge about language as well as its use in order to communicate with speakers of the language. Literature is beneficial to language development. It is a good source of accurate diction, diverse sentence patterns, and passionate narratives. Since literature is related to real-life situations, it deals with accurate diction. The language employed in literature is the language of its audience, so it cannot be inaccurate. Also, since literature deals

with different moods as well as situations, it is filled with diverse forms of sentences. Truly different people talk as well as write differently. As such, literature contains all these various forms of use of language. Besides, passion has its own value in literature. When reading literature texts, the reader is engaged with this passionate aspect of the text.

Culture as the Body of Knowledge

As a matter of fact language and culture are closely related, the use of language makes sense only in context, and culture is part of that context. Understanding the nature of the relationship between language and culture is central to the process of learning another language. That is, language is the carrier of cultural messages. It is language in its cultural context that creates meaning: creating and interpreting meaning is done within a cultural framework.

One way in which culture has been understood is as the body of knowledge that people have within a particular society. This body of knowledge can be seen in various ways: as knowledge about cultural ornament or works of art; as knowledge about places and institutions; as knowledge about events and symbols; or as knowledge about ways of living. Literature is culture. Narrations are often built upon the perspective of one main character, who experiences the pains of growing up. This makes reading literary texts a drastically dramatic experience. In this way literature prepares a fund of resource and context to contextualize these activities. A good story book not only informs ESL students about the situation and development of an event; it also connects readers to the event to gain an insight, rather than an overview of English culture and society. Students find the social and historical contexts of the event and become familiar with culture in the literary texts. The piece of literary work amuses and opens the eyes of students as they see how other people think, interpret, and act on a variety of things, especially those things that ESL students are familiar with. Literature is one of the most interesting and significant expressions of humanity.

Conclusion

Knowledge of cultures is important for facilitating communication with people. Therefore, learners of languages need to learn and understand the cultures of the target language.

This means not only the learners develop knowledge about another culture but the learners come to understand themselves in relation to some other culture. This shows a contemporary emphasis on ‘intercultural’ relationships. Learning to be intercultural involves much more than just knowing about another culture; it involves learning to understand how one’s own culture shapes perceptions of oneself, of the world, and of one’s relationship with others. Learning another language can be like placing a mirror up to one’s own culture and one’s own assumptions about how communication happens, what some particular message means and what assumptions one makes in one’s daily life. Literature forces them to read more and more and deeply.

In learning about culture, one needs to draw one’s own experience of language and culture when trying to create and interpret meanings. The ability to learn beyond the classroom is probably developing the skill of reading literature. In order to understand the piece of material in front of them, they have to read it again and again and to think deeply about all its parts to find out the interrelation within each part. Literature helps in the incorporation of linguistic competence into communicative competence by putting language into use in different social situations.

References

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