



THE INTERACTION BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the interaction between language and literature in the achievement of competence among learners of English as a second language. It emphasizes the benefits of interdisciplinary synergy between language and literature in the concretization of knowledge. The paper shows the different ways in which topics in language can re-enforce the learning and understanding of literature and vice versa. It also discusses the extent to which the knowledge of literature supports vocabulary development, creativity in language use, competence in speech and discourse and essay writing. It argues that the mastery of the phonology of English facilitates the understanding of sound devices in literature. It calls on teachers of English to adopt a pragmatic approach to the teaching of language and literature such that literature teaching complements the understanding of language while language teaching complements the understanding of literature.

Keywords: Language, Literature, learners, second language, phonology.

Introduction:

Learning a second language like English is very difficult as compared to first language which is acquired with much ease since the structures of the two languages are different, and even if they are similar, the linguistic structures are arranged differently in the two languages. Because of the difficulties in learning a second language, every available opportunity requires dexterity on the part of the teacher, especially in language and literature teaching since they can complement each other. Language and literature are closely interwoven since there is no literature without language. Whereas language communicates information, ideas, express emotion and functions in social interaction in a very direct way, the language of literature communicates a message by its artistic use of language. There cannot be a better and more effective instructional material/aid in teaching and learning English than literary art.

Teachers should plan their learning lessons in language and literature in a way that interest the learners by choosing instructional materials which are appropriate to the learning situation. One appropriate material for the teaching of language skills and language components is the teaching of literary arts while one effective tool for quick understanding of literature is effective teaching of language. Language teaching takes place in language classroom while language learning is strengthened in literature classroom. The fact is that teaching is not equal to learning because teaching can take place without learning taking place (Mukhtar, 2010). With a pragmatic approach, the two subjects can fuse knowledge of language and literature into one. Literature actually promotes independent learning of language where learners are exposed to



in depth use of language when this is handled ingeniously.

Just as there are language varieties in the ordinary sense of dialectal variants, the language of literature belongs to the stylistic use of language and confirms that there is no one way of using

language. Language use in literature is called literary language while language use in the other fields is called non-literary language. Language as a means of communication has its parameters just as the language of literature does. Harnessing knowledge in the two areas enhances the knowledge base of second language learners of English and increases their intellectual capability and competence. In most second language situations these two subjects are studied separately in a straight-jacketed way

Competence in Language:

Competence is the ability to use language effectively in communication. Chomsky cited in Radford distinguishes two types of competence (i) grammatical competence and (ii) pragmatic Competence while Alocategorises competence into communicative or linguistic. He classifies communicative competence into grammatical competence as well as sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. Grammatical competence is the native speaker's knowledge of his language. Chomsky classifies grammatical competence into three levels of linguistic ability (i) syntax (ii) semantics and (iii) phonology. Syntactic competence is the ability of the native speaker to combine words meaningfully in order to construct grammatical sentences in her native language. It entails the ability to differentiate between sequences of words which can go together to form grammatical sentences and those ones which when ill-formed derive ungrammatical sentences. Developing competence in semantics is having the ability for appropriate interpretation of language structures while competence in phonology is on the mastery of segmental and non-segmental features and their applications. Pragmatic competence which is equivalent to sociolinguistic and strategic competence centres on the contribution of non-linguistic information in the use and interpretation of sentences. Such non-linguistic information includes background knowledge and personal beliefs, an aspect of competence which the study of literature inculcates in the learner of English as a second language.

In second language learning situation, teachers place so much emphasis on syntactic competence that is why so much attention is given to grammar teaching so as to enable second language learners achieve native speaker-like competence in order to express themselves in correct grammar whether in speech or in writing. Any English second language learner needs to master the different levels of competence but the school system is particular about grammatical (linguistic) competence which entails "the knowledge of linguistic forms ... and usage" (Alo, 2003, p.17 cited in Olateju, Moji & Oyeleye 'Lekan) with the belief that when the language user is able to use these linguistic conventions to make utterances and produce correct sentences then he is competent. As a result of this, sociolinguistic and strategic competence which is equivalent to Chomsky's pragmatic competence is played down, the actual areas literature employs in conveying the writer's message. It is observed that



in the language classroom much emphasis is placed on grammar teaching and the ability to write correct and acceptable expressions considered as the basis of competence.

The Pragmatic, sociolinguistic and strategic competences focus on social use of language and the use of language in context. This level of competence is acquired through discourse and extensive reading which literature readily lends itself by widening the knowledge base of learners both in language use and the application of language rules. Hymes (1972) prefers linguistic performance (knowledge of language use) to linguistic competence (knowledge of language rules). However, knowing a language is a two-pronged pack of linguistic competence and linguistic performance which is synonymous with pragmatic use of language. The advocacy therefore, is interlinking linguistic competence with linguistic performance so that the learner develops the ability to encode and decode information meaningfully. It is in literature that knowledge of language rules (the ideal) is transformed into knowledge of language use (the actual) which emphasizes the need to use literature to complement the acquisition of English Language.

According to Hymes (p. 72), "the competency of users of language entails abilities and judgments relative to and interdependent with socio-cultural features." The communicative Competence theory of Hymes postulates that a child does not merely acquire knowledge of sentences as grammatical apparatus but also acquires it as appropriate. He states that the child "acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as what to talk with whom, when, where, in what manner." In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events and to evaluate their accomplishments by others with his communicative ability." It is in the field of literature that knowledge of language rules whether in phonology, syntax or semantics and the various language skills are applied. Moreover, sociolinguistic and strategic use of language are learnt and used through exposure to various genres of literature and different texts in these genres.

Phonological Devices in the Development of Competence:

Letters, sounds and words are important in the meaning of a text but they can hardly make meaning on their own unless they are well arranged. The phonology of English is a system of sounds comprising segmental phonemes and non-segmental. Segmental phonemes consist of vowels and consonants. Most learners of English view vowels and consonants as abstract entities, therefore, far-removed from their world. Consequently, so many ESL learners are scared of the sounds of English particularly the phonetic symbols which they assume are too difficult to understand. However, in literature students are taught assonance, alliteration and onomatopoeia as literary devices (figures of speech) which they also find difficult to comprehend. These figures of speech are constructed from the same vowels and consonants they are taught in English Language class. For instance, alliteration is the patterned repetition of initial consonant sounds; assonance the internal repetition of vowel sounds and onomatopoeia relates sounds with meaning. These key terms are related so much that a sound understanding of the knowledge of consonant and vowel sounds of English can facilitate the identification and interpretation of these sound devices in literature, relate them to the context



of usage and interpret their functional significance because these literary devices re-iterate consciously for effect. Language and literature teaching should be interactive and integrated so that learners understand that the very vowels and consonants they find in English are the very ones which reiterate to assume different dimensions and colorations in the field of literature.

Apart from the scare of sounds of English because the symbols are strange and seemingly abstract, most ESL learners grapple with the concept of intonation and do not understand the whole sense of stress (accentuation) and rhythm because they are much more abstract than segmental phonemes. Whereas segmental phonemes have physical realization in what is called phonetic symbols, stress, rhythm and intonation are abstract concepts and difficult to pin down except in discourse or speech. However, these phonological devices are well and fully expressed in literature. The interaction between stress and intonation builds up rhythm commonly associated with poetry. The same stress taught in English Language as word stress, sentence stress, etc. is the same stress found in literature which gives rise to metre (iambic pentameter, tetrameter, etc.) in poetry. These devices make the language of poetry emotive. The mastery of English sound system can be enhanced through practice with stress and rhythm in poetry (Williams, 1990) in the same way that discerning rhythm in poetry may be easily accessed through the knowledge of stress and intonation in language. So, interdisciplinary between language and literature can connect knowledge areas for effective learning (Izevbaye, 2011).

Vocabulary in Competence Development:

Cumulative growth of intelligence occurs when there are words and without words this cannot take place (Odoh, 2007). Literature enriches an individual's stock of words and expands one's perception of words by enriching one's vocabulary and the capacity to associate meaning with words and expressions in context. Since literature draws from all varieties of language freelancing is its norm; and as a result has the capacity to draw from different linguistic backgrounds and ingeniously weave them together to communicate a message. Reading of literary texts develops one's vocabulary power because it exposes the reader to new words at a

Large scale. It also exposes the reader to new and other possible ways of using familiar words with refreshing insight.

In literature, different varieties of language in different language situations are woven together in the process of presenting human experiences because literature focuses on different fields of life and each field is expressed by the language of that field. Sometimes, existing words may not suffice to adequately give an account of a human experience or communicate the message as intended by the literary artist and this compels the artist to push language to its limits by breaking existing language rules then fixes them ingeniously for the purpose of communicating a message. The outcome is neither unintelligible nor ungrammatical but novel, an art which



ESL learners could imbibe to sharpen their understanding and vocabulary power. It is the novelty in the use of words which results in new words and fresh expressions.

The beauty about literature as a tool for language teaching and learning is that writers create very many new words and give fresh insight to words; the reason the language of literature is characterized by neologisms whereby the morphological process of word formation is well applied to invent new words in much needed circumstances (Wales, 2011). Because of poetic license in literature, rule of word formation is applied with much ease than is commonly known to satisfy the demand of a given circumstance (George Leech). This is practised in Wole Soyinka's (a Nigerian Nobel laureate) creative use of words such as *matterdom* patterned after "martyrdom"; *optimistology* coined by analogy with such words as "psychology" and "sociology"; *intellectual quotient* patterned after intelligence quotient, and *philosophy immunity* coined by analogy with diplomatic immunity, among others (Oluwale Adejare, 1992).

Chinua Achebe's (a renowned Nigerian writer) artistic prowess in the use of Igbo syntax and thought patterns in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* to relay information on cultural conflict during the coming of the white man to his Igbo community has been exceptional and widely acclaimed. The achievement is predicated on the fact that, first, he has a good mastery of English Language (that is linguistic competence) by virtue of good quality teaching he received at school, a time when much emphasis was on literature teaching as a complementary tool for the development of competence in English. He uses Igbo syntax but with English as its medium of expression with a superlative linguistic performance. He went to school at a period when literature was taught with greater intensity. Eustace Palmer commends Achebe for producing something new and valuable to the English Language with his narrative style using African thought patterns. Achebe's literary prowess lies in his unimaginable ability to manipulate English language structures through tonal manipulation, proverbial expression and the use of Igbo nuances through peculiar structural patterning of words and unique sentence style as in the following:

- (a) Eneke the bird says since men have learnt to shoot without missing, I learn to fly without perching.
- (b) A child who washes his hands well dines with the elders.
- (c) A chick that will grow into a cock can be spotted the very first day it hatches.

These proverbs are properly captured with the same nuance they are used in the local language, an art which is called transliteration. Achebe justifies the fact that creative use of language in literature does not lead to breakdown in communication but rather illuminates the language of the text and foregrounds the message of that text. Chomsky says that normal language use is largely creative by producing utterances which have never been used by anyone else. It is so because any native speaker of a language engages in novel use of expressions, whether as words or sentences by p. We also realise that even though language is used ingeniously in literature, the reader still relates instinctively with the writer's special use of language. It is this level of competence that integrated approach to language and literature



teaching inculcates in the learners. The knowledge of language as used in literature, if well harnessed, strengthens aspects of inferential and textual meanings commonly taught in reading comprehension thereby developing the cognitive ability of learners of English. Experience has shown that in comprehension passages, learners easily answer questions which require direct answers from the text but experience difficulties with questions which test their cognitive ability, that is, questions which bother on inferences, an area which effective teaching of literature can enhance.

Reading Comprehension and Summary in Competence Development:

Reading enables a person to receive information from others. A person who is able to read is a full man/woman, and the one able to write is an exact man because he is able to receive information, retain, interpret and deploy same when the need arises. Reading skills are sharpened in literature class through oral reading to develop fluency and eloquence in speech and silent reading for a high level of comprehension. Reading of literary text is not van reading but a reading that boosts the vocabulary power of the reader and his/her knowledge base. New words are learnt, different ways of using known words are experienced and interest in reading

is cultivated. In literary arts, learners are asked to narrate the story in a literary text which corresponds to narrative essay in English or narration of the story in comprehension passages. Narration, whether in language or literature follows a sequence since it chronicles events as they occurred. This promotes logical reasoning and critical thinking. The potential for inter-subject benefit is therefore very high if this integrated approach to language and literature teaching is adopted.

In reading of literary texts, learners are normally asked to give a summary of events in the text which corresponds to summary writing in English. This aspect needs the ingenuity of the teacher because summary writing in English emphasizes topic sentences and does away with extraneous material, an aspect which should be incorporated into teaching of summary of texts in literature and summary writing in English. This incorporates teaching summary with topic sentences and summarizing with key details.

Also, in reading of literature, learners are led to discuss different incidents in a text by stating when an incident took place, where, and why, following the sequence of events which is called the plot in literature, an area of teaching which is analogous with expository essay. In expository essay, a detailed explanation of a word, an idea or a concept is done and such an essay is successful only if the writer has a rich mind and has the capacity to present his ideas in a rich stock of words in order to give sufficient insight about the topic, idea or concept. Other aspects involved in literature texts involve commenting on the diction, language use in the text and characterization which enables learners make inferences far beyond what the writer had intended. All of these correlate with reading comprehension and summary which emphasizes reading with understanding and the ability to sift information from



materials written by others and communicate same to others effectively through careful selection of words and meaningful arrangement to bring out the expected information.

We read to extract meaning and communicate by giving and receiving information. Emmanuel Ekah remarks that knowing English is when “a learner is able to communicate; when he can

read, understand and interpret, paraphrase or summarize what he reads from textbooks and literary works” (102). This, of course, is the target of language learning – the ability to read and write, understand and interpret as well as relate effectively with the environment. This pattern of language teaching boosts the interconnection between competence and performance. While Chomsky refers to competence is the tacit knowledge which the speaker has about his language, performance is the actual use of language in concrete situations, according to the same source. According to Chomsky the grammar of a language is a theory of “I – language” (22). I meaning internalized. He avers that a native speaker has a cognitive system internalized in his brain/mind. Andrew Radford states that it is this internalized linguistic system or I – language which makes a native speaker proficient in his native language like English.

In studying the grammar of English, the learner is striving to attain native-like competence in the language in the same way that a fluent native speaker of English does. The second language learner is concerned with developing grammatical competence, that is, to know what the native speaker knows about his language and to develop pragmatic competence, that is, to be able to use the language in the same way that a fluent native speaker does. In language and literature teaching therefore, the teacher should realize that the second language learner in his class seeks to attain the same mental state possessed by the native speaker, or a very close semblance of it since it might not be possible to achieve native-like competence because of certain inhibitions in the learners' environment like first language interference.

Intensive and Extensive Reading in Competence Development:

In addition, through literature the whole gamut of intensive and extensive reading is concretized so that learners develop interest in reading beyond class texts to the reading of other reading materials in order to achieve fluency in reading in the same way that he seeks to achieve fluency in speech in phonology class. In teaching reading skills, especially in the early stages of language learning, emphasis is on oral reading or reading aloud so that the learners may develop fluency both in reading and in speech. This gives training in the proper articulation of sounds, correct pronunciation of words, phrase reading and sentence reading. As the class level increases, other aspects of reading like identification of words, vocabulary development, grammar teaching and vocabulary development are incorporated so as to make the learner a total person (Maria-Helen Ekah, 2015). Story telling is also introduced to generate interest in reading and develop learners' speaking ability both in words and in ideas. This is why story telling is an aspect of teaching and learning English. Pupils tell stories



and also read story books to widen their imaginative ability and to put more new words, ideas and expressions in their minds. The stories may be dramatized.

Dramatization is an aspect of language teaching in the lower classes. Apart from making a lesson realistic, drama is dialogue in action, so learners learn to talk (speak, communicate) and act thereby developing speaking skills. Consequently, drama encourages massive participation in what goes on in the classroom which prepares children for participation in the social, cultural, religious and political life of their society (Emmanuel Ekah, 2007). This aspect of teaching makes children vibrant and active and what is learnt through dramatization is stuck in the brain for a long time. Literary arts (drama, prose, poetry) is imbued with the potential to change learners from passive to active participants within and outside the classroom and gets them ready for full participation in the larger society as future leaders, according to the same source.

The language of literature is both figurative and connotative while language in the ordinary sense it is mostly denotative. Denotation gives the dictionary meanings of words and expressions while connotation gives the extended and figurative meanings of words and expressions. It is literature that brings freshness into language through the use of figures of speech which exhibit patterns of usage which deviate from the norm, patterns only understood by rich minds and literature enriches and develops the mind. In addition, literature teaches how to make use of idioms, proverbs and words in a manner that adds aesthetics to what is said as well as expand vocabulary base of the individual which complements vocabulary development in English Language class.

Literature develops communicative ability and sharpens creative potentials, the very reasons schools set up press clubs, debating societies and dramatic clubs which in time past were training grounds for the development of efficiency in speech order thereby doing away with stereotype imitations of the language of others. Furthermore, literature as an art form has aesthetic values which can be enjoyed and has a social effect in the society. As an imaginative writing, emotionally moving, highly connotative, with symbolic, figurative and unorthodox use of language with an aesthetic, its function has the potential to train the individual to be able to read and write, communicate; have finesse in his relationship with others and sharpens one's emotions and sensibilities, aspects which the language classroom cannot develop independently of literature.

Summary and Conclusion:

Effective teaching of literature is of immense benefit to learning English because literature enriches the minds of the learners by exposing them to so many lexical items, diverse use of words, new ideas and different patterns of sentence construction, creative use of words and different modes of expression which enliven their minds to very robust discussion and writing. Quite often, learners find it difficult to write essays in English because their minds are impoverished due to weak vocabulary base and poor communicative abilities in the diverse



use of language. Their mindswill be enriched through integrated teaching of language and literature. Language use requires the ability to speak, read, write and interpret and give reasonable responses in every situation of language use

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