The interrelationship and role of culture and literature in language development

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Abstract

Language and culture are synonymous. Language acquires value and meaning when it is integrated with cultural elements. Students can be successful in the target language learning only if the culture of the target language becomes an inherent part of the teaching policy. This paper aims to examine the interrelationship of language, literature, culture, and language development. Enhancement of language learning is carried out through literature. To achieve the aim of this study, an extensive literature review was conducted by the researcher, using data collected from previous studies. From the results of the study, culture teaches us how to think, interact and behave in a society according to the norms framed by a particular community. If the culture is not understood before one learns a new language it may lead to miscommunication and misunderstandings in cross-cultural interactions.

Keywords: Cross-cultural communication, culture, language, language development, literature, teaching- methods;

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1. Introduction

Culture begins even before acquiring a language. Language allows us to pass down the culture, beliefs, traditions, traditional dresses, food habits, and architecture from one generation to another generation (Lee & Li, 2020). It is only through language that the whole world remains socialised. Literature if used as a tool to teach language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and language areas (vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation), it would serve to enhance the student's language competence. Literature plays an essential role in language teaching. Literary works like short stories, poems, novels, one-act plays, and drama transmit the culture, internalise specific grammatical constructions, portray universal human values, encourage sympathy and tolerance, and contribute to the personality development of the learners. Literature is not only a tool for developing the language skills of the student in the target language but also a window opening into the culture of the target language.

The teacher has an important role in teaching English through literature, making it student-centred learning. The teacher can transform the classroom into a stage in which there is the real practice of the communicative language (Rose, 2019). The capturing of language in its dynamism can best be achieved by literary work. The aim is to use literary texts as a resource for stimulating language activities. The activities include debates, small group work, general class discussion, role play, mock press, and panel discussion. Just as times are changing, teaching methods too must change to make students more active in the language classroom. Introducing literature is a method that can bring radical changes in the classroom where language development becomes successful.

1.1. Purpose of study

Language acquires value and meaning when it is integrated with cultural elements. Students can be successful in the target language learning only if the culture of the target language becomes an inherent part of the teaching policy. This paper aims to examine the interrelationship of language, literature, culture, and language development.

2. Materials and methods

This study aimed to examine the relationship between language and culture by analysing previous literature and theory. The study follows a descriptive method. Instances and examples are given, to give clarity to the subject of study.

3. Results

Enhancement of language learning is carried out through literature. The English language is widely spoken in many countries by more than 350 million people, either by native speakers or second-language speakers. As a foreign language, it is used for international communication. The English language is legally designated as an official language in about 24 countries where it is not the native language. It is the official language in about 11 countries and in about 14 countries where it shares that status with one or two languages. Today there are more non-native users of English, and English has become the linguistic key used for opening borders: it is a global medium with local identities and messages (Kachru, 1996, pp. 11–14). The English language is more widely spoken and written than any other language. It is indeed truly a global language. Kachru (1997, pp. 68–69) states the increase in the use of English especially in Asia is 'overwhelming'.

The English language has two clearly defined roles to play. One is as a subject of the main study at the university level and the second is as a medium of instruction in specialist areas. The role of English, in either case, is to give access to the knowledge contained in textbooks, journals, reports, and other materials which the learners need. UNESCO (1957, p. 14) reported that 'nearly two-thirds of engineering literature appears in English but more than two-thirds of the world's professional engineers cannot read English'. This statement implies that the amount of English read by undergraduates and graduates for their general study does not equip them for specialist studies.

3.1. English as an international language

The English language has been established as an international language as it is a medium for science, technology, and literature. The new role of English led to the philosophy of English as an International Language (EIL) which emphasises the function of English for cross-cultural and cross-national understanding. According to Baxter (1980, p. 4) in the context of the EIL approach 'the use of the English language is always culture-bound but the English language is not bound to any specific culture or political system'. The learners must be taught the basic skills to communicate with perhaps the interlocutors, who may be from diverse national, linguistic, or cultural backgrounds. This approach to teaching the English language will bring integration with cultural training. This will inevitably help the language learners of one culture to interact effectively through the English language with the members of other cultures with minimum misunderstanding or miscommunication.

3.2. English in Ethiopia

English in Ethiopia is used as the medium of instruction for higher education, even when it is not used at the primary or secondary levels (Gerencheal & Mishra, 2019). The knowledge of English invariably becomes a necessity for students at the higher education level. Engineering especially is the biggest field of study in the world and English is a tool that significantly affects engineering students in academic life. One of the major problems in Ethiopian universities is communicating effectively in English both at the written as well as at verbal levels. With globalisation and ever-increasing international exchanges, the gap between professional competencies has been highlighted. Adequate language and communicative skills are imperative for good professionals but the curriculum is inadequate. English for professional purposes, like facing interviews, seminars, discussions, and conference are essential. More than two-thirds of the world's scientific papers published annually are written in English. The ability to communicate one's ideas and attitudes – agreeing, convincing, ordering, and apologising – is the expected skill and not the ability to interpret the literary text. Language learning is a skill-oriented activity and needs an entirely different pedagogical approach. The students who come from different types of schools and problems need to be addressed differently in terms of materials and methodology.

 The introduction of the English language in the education system of Ethiopia dates back to 1908. According to Engidaya (1998, p. 47) initially, the mission schools were the pioneers in the teaching of English and French, in which 'while the Roman Catholic missions were vehicles for the French language, the protestant missions (English, American, German, Swiss and Swedish) were vehicles for the English language'. The period between 1920 and 1930 was an important period for English to gain ground in Ethiopian education. English as a foreign language in Ethiopia is dominantly used for academic purposes. School students and undergraduate students on average learn the English language for at least 4–7 years. The English language is learned only for academic purposes and hence less attention is paid to promoting communication skills in formal school settings. But English is a crucial skill if one wishes to stand apart in the competitive world. The demand to acquire English language competency is on the

increase as the world is becoming interdependent and where the whole world has become a global village.

 The role of the English language as a tool for communication in Ethiopia needs to be redefined. The students must be able to understand the language and be able to express their ideas in the English language. They must develop an attitude to communicate actively through the English language. They must also deepen their interest in other languages and cultures for international understanding. This could be a hypothesis for the failure to produce competent communicators in the English language. The schools have inappropriate materials and teaching methods. The other hypothetical reason could be the lack of incorporation of cultural perspectives in language training. Ambatchew (2010, p. 201) contends that following the 2005 elections, 'some regional states changed the medium of instruction from local languages to English at the second cycle of primary education'. Ambatchew (2010, p. 204) further observes that many of the political elite continue to send their children to English or French medium schools. The politics underlying language choice remain, with attitudes in favour of or opposed to local language medium instruction often following more ethnic political agenda than principles of good pedagogy (Cohen, 2007).

3.3. Implications of language policy

Schiffman (1996) defined the term language policy as the official authorisation that has been agreed upon and decided by the legislators to be implemented by the society. Spolsky and Shohamy (2000) stated that language policy is illustrated as an instrument used by the government to change the use and the status of a particular language. Language policy according to Ager (1996) is defined as the national language and culture that function as a means of education, job, training, and language status. Student achievement in the language classroom is possible only if the language policy is well-resourced and supported at the national and local levels. Due to political changes, the continuity of policy support diminishes. According to Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) 'A language policy is a body of ideas, laws, regulations, rules, and practices intended to achieve the planned language change in the societies, group or system'.

If the desired learning outcome is to be achieved, integrating appropriate language practices into education development is imperative. The institutional partners and education stakeholders' collaboration in addressing the crucial features of quality education will help in promoting successful learning. Language instruction alone does not suffice for quality education. Successful learning happens only if an appropriate curriculum and appropriately trained teachers are selected. Then the remuneration and capacity development of the teachers may be taken into consideration. The teachers on their part must create an inclusive classroom where students are encouraged to engage with one another, and share ideas. If the teachers on their part show interest and work hard in reaching out by encouraging all the students, the success of the students will be maximised.

3.4. Definition of culture

Culture is derived from the Latin word 'cultura' means to 'cultivate'. Culture is the social behaviour and norms found in human societies. Cambridge English Dictionary states that culture is 'the way of life especially the general customs and beliefs of a particular group of people at a particular time'. Culture as a whole is transmitted absolutely through language. Human culture always includes language and human language cannot be conceived without culture. Culture in linguistics is described as socially acquired knowledge of the world, as well as attitudes towards it. Depending on the culture in which a

speaker is brought up the number of words available in a language in describing certain phenomena varies.

According to Hantrais (1989), culture is the beliefs and practices governing the life of a society, for which a particular language is the vehicle of expression. Culture changes the perceptions of people living in different areas, as there is an influence of that particular culture. Through the knowledge of a language, the culture of its people can be understood. Linguists and anthropologists have recognised that the forms and uses of a given language reflect the cultural values of the society in which the language is spoken. Language learners need to be aware of culturally appropriate ways to address people, express gratitude, make requests and agree or disagree with someone. It would be a challenge to gain a deep understanding of the culture of any country without learning about their native language and traditions. The two are always connected. According to Allwright and Bailey (1991) learning a new language involves learning a new culture. Emmitt and Pollock (1997) say that language is rooted in culture and culture is reflected and passed on by language from one generation to the next.

3.5. Definition of language

Human life is determined by language. Other species do not have rational capabilities. While animals can express pleasure and pain through their cries, humans and only humans possess speech which enables them to make judgments of what is beneficial and harmful, right and wrong (Barnes, 1995). Language helps to develop the knowledge, skills, and values for participation as active citizens. Language promotes communication and a tolerant attitude towards different cultures and different religions which helps in understanding multicultural society.

Language is a system of signs that has a cultural value. Speakers identify themselves and others through their use of language. The speakers view their language as a symbol of their social identity. The prohibition of the use of language is often seen as a rejection of their social group and their culture. Language is variable and changing. The rules of a language change in response to different social factors. To understand language in any particular society one must understand the socio-cultural networks. If there has been no language, it would have become difficult for human beings to communicate with fellow human beings. The educational activity would have been non-existent. The world would have existed in chaos without any written rules and laws to live as civilised people. One can imagine a life without books and the exchange of ideas in a spoken language. Man would have continued to exist in the early period when communication was through gestures, facial expressions, and cries. It is the intelligence of man that they came out with written symbols which through a period formulated into language.

3.6. Relationship between language and culture

There is a very close relationship between language and culture. Culture has a direct effect on language. Language and culture are intertwined to such an extent that one cannot survive without the other. One can't teach language without teaching culture. A language teacher must know the culture of his/her native country and also be aware of the culture of the target language. The language teacher must surely be aware and considerate of the student's culture too. The teacher must also inform the students of the cultural differences in the language classroom to promote understanding. Learning a new language includes learning the culture of the target language. If one becomes aware of a culture it would be easier for one to get involved and learn the new language.

The culture and philosophy of any country can be propagated to the rest of the world only with the help of the English language. Tucker (1973, p. 246) stated that the ability to communicate fully in a second language depends on the degree of non-ethnocentrism of the learner. The successful learner must develop 'an awareness of and sensitivity toward the values and traditions of the people whose language is being studied'. Incorporating culture into language teaching in a foreign language classroom is as important as trying to teach a foreign language. Introducing the typical customs, behaviour, attitude, norms, and traditions of the target language country is a part and parcel of teaching the target language. Hall (1976, p. 55) states that to understand the culture of any country 'one must transcend one's own culture [which] can be done only by making explicit the rules by which it operates'.

Every language policy is culture-specific. But it becomes extremely difficult for the learner to understand the words or their specific meanings without understanding the culture of the target language. The learner will never be able to get a full comprehension of the meaning of the words. For example, if there is a group of Ethiopians talking in English for the benefit of one Indian sitting among them, the whole group may laugh at a particular joke but it does not make sense to the Indian and he does not laugh. This is a clear indication that the Indians have not understood Ethiopian culture. Culture affects meaning. Ward Haugh (2002, pp. 219–220) states that the relationship between language and culture is:

The structure of a language determines how speakers of that language view the world or, as a weaker view, the structure does not determine the world-view but is still extremely influential in predisposing speakers of a language toward adopting their world-view. The culture of a people finds reflection in the language they employ: because they value certain things and do them in a certain way, they come to use their language in ways that reflect what they value and what they do.

To prevent cultural misunderstandings, the promotion of cultural understanding is vital to language learning. Communicative misunderstandings can often occur between two people from different countries (For example men and women shaking hands are common in Ethiopia. But in India touching women is frowned upon). Culture-specific language differences include countries that have different meanings for similar phrases. The phrase 'a good day' in European culture refers to a sunny day. But in the African culture, it means a rainy day. The term 'good' has a different meaning in the two cultures.

3.7. Importance of literature in a language classroom

In recent years, the role of literature as a source of authentic texts of the language curriculum has been gaining momentum. Many teachers consider the use of literature in language teaching as an interesting and worthy concern (Sage, 1987, p. 1). For a long time, literature has not been included in the curriculum of teaching English since teaching a foreign language has been regarded as a matter of linguistics. 'In the sixties and seventies there was a distinct reaction against the use of any literary English at all in the classroom, but now the pendulum has swung the other way' (Hill, 1994, p. 7). As mentioned by Hill (1994), there is a growing interest in the use of literature in EFL/ESL classes in recent years, and there are studies on how to use literature in EFL/ESL classes in the world.

Literature is a good model of language that a learner is exposed to in the world. Literature engages the learner in the use of language. If the works prescribed in the literature course had literary qualities, then the learning of language through literature would not have moved far from the contexts of life. The literary work provides a context for a language where the learner is engaged with or without his attention being focused on the language itself. Several learners try to understand and interpret literary work and learn how to use the language.

Theorists in ELT even in the early 1960s had sensed the significant role of literature in language learning. Arthur (1986) remarked that 'ESL teachers have generally agreed that literature can aid language learning in three different ways. First literature helps build vocabulary secondly certain syntactic patterns occur more frequently in written than in spoken English and finally, literature helps to teach the culture, habits, and language of people'. Brumfit and Carter (1986, p. 1) emphasised the role of literature as 'an ally of language'. Brumfit and Carter (1986) and Lazar (1993), reject the idea of the existence of a specific literary language and claim that the language used in literary texts is a common language with a high concentration of linguistic features like metaphors, similes, poetic lexis, unusual syntactic patterns, etc.

3.8. Role of literature in the language classroom

Literature can play a significant part in acquiring a foreign language. The study of English literature stimulates personal growth and encourages moral education. It is commonly accepted that literature is studied primarily for content rather than for structure. But literature is as suitable for language study as any other form of written material. The primary aim to use literary texts as a resource in a language classroom is for stimulating language activities. We can teach literature as a central part of our language curricula as literature is language and language are communication. Enkvist, Nils, Spencer, and Gregory (1964) claims that a study of a variety of texts will provide a shortcut to the extended experience of linguistic items in a context that native speakers acquire by direct exposure.

Collie and Slater (1987) state that the four main reasons that a language teacher uses literature in the classroom are for its (i) valuable authentic material (ii) cultural enrichment (iii) language enrichment and (iv) personal involvement. Some of the other reasons are universality, variety, personal relevance, ambiguity, and non-triviality. Literary works such as short stories, novels, plays, and one-act plays facilitate the understanding of how communication takes place. Some of the reasons for regarding literature as a potent resource in a language classroom according to Maley (1989) are universality, variety, ambiguity and economy, and suggestive power. All possible varieties of subject matter are found in the literature.

The study of literature is not merely concerned with skill acquisition. It contributes to an understanding of ourselves and our relations with our fellow beings. Through literary studies, we learn to become more mature, liberal, and responsible people. The learners can attain growth in understanding and flexibility of mind. In a literary work, content is communicated in many different ways. The learners get absorbed in the story and the language is understood easily when explained. Designing stimulating activities that motivate learners is the greatest challenge for language teachers, and literature has a strong motivating power due to its appeal to personal experience.

One of the main functions of literature is its sociolinguistic richness, where the use of language changes from one social group to another and from one geographical location to another. Depending on the social context like theatre, police station, school or office, the speech may be informal, formal, intimate, or casual. Since literature provides learners with a wide range of language varieties like jargon, idiolects, and regional dialects, it develops their sociolinguistic competence in the target language. Incorporating literature into a foreign language teaching classroom gains importance for reflecting the sociolinguistic aspects of the target language.

3.9. Benefits of literature in a language classroom

Literature has been proven as a great tool for approaching the English language and English culture. The inclusion of literature in the language classroom is supported by Collie and Slater (1987) because it

provides valuable authentic material. It also develops personal involvement and helps in contributing to the enrichment of the culture and language of the learner. Lazar (1993) states five reasons for using literature in English language teaching. The five reasons that literature promotes in the classroom are that literature becomes a motivating material, encourages language acquisition, expands students' language awareness, develops students' interpretative skills, and educates the whole person. All literature stimulates thinking by giving readers substance for reflection, which facilitates cognitive development (Kelly, 1996, p. 10).

Hadaway, Vardell, and Young (2002) suggest three benefits of using literature for teaching language. The first benefit is the contextualisation of language where the students get familiar with the application of language in various conditions when they read a literary work. The second benefit is the social factors that are embedded in different genres of literature. The third is the natural and meaningful application of language which is accomplished via illustrations and the use of descriptive language in literature.

According to Obediat (1997), literature can help learners obtain competence in the target language, learn the usage of idiomatic expressions, speak accurately, and become more fluent and creative in the target language. Literature is a rich source of authentic material that enables learners to internalise the language (Elliot, 1990).

3.10. Language teaching and learning

Learning a second language is in effect, learning the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Listening and reading are receptive skills and speaking and writing are productive skills. All the skills can be developed through systematic teaching. Language teaching is helping the learner to get a reasonably good command over the four important language skills. Language is learned only through use or practice. The objective of English language teaching is to help the students to learn a language. Language learning demands strong motivation on the part of both the teacher and the students. It is important to remember that learning a second language involves much more than learning the words and sounds of a language. Communication breakdowns may occur as a result of cultural assumptions regarding age, forms of address, authority and respect, touching, eye contact, body language, invitations, and punctuality. English has certain characteristics in pronunciation that are absent in other languages. Many people cannot make out the differences between some of the tenses in English, simply because these may not exist in their languages.

The teacher himself is a variable factor in the scheme of teaching a second language; his skill and personality are instrumental in creating the necessary conditions for learning. The teacher should be proficient in the language; his knowledge and expertise in methods and techniques of language teaching should be of a reasonably high standard. The object of teaching is to produce learning. Learning may be defined as the change that takes place in the individual's behaviour as a result of experience. Teaching involves planning, selecting, grading, and directing experiences so that the desired targets may be attained. The most important single factor in the learning process is still the teacher.

The teacher of ESL/EFL should adopt a dynamic, student-centred approach toward comprehension of a literary work. Reading helps the second language learner acquire not only more vocabulary and more meanings and uses of the words already known (lexical competence), but it also contributes to developing syntactic knowledge (Brumfit & Carter, 1986). At the literal level, a discussion begins with direct questions of fact regarding setting, characterisation, and plot which can be answered by specific references to the text. When students master literal understanding, they move to the inferential level. The students make speculations and interpretations concerning characterisation, the theme, and the

setting. Comprehending the literary text at the literal and inferential levels, the students are ready to do collaborative work. The persona level stimulates the students to think imaginatively about the work and provokes their problem-solving abilities. Discussion deriving from such questions can be the foundation for oral and written activities (Stern, 1991, p. 332).

Sarac (2003, pp. 17–20) explains the educational benefits of poetry. It makes students familiar with figures of speech like metaphors, irony, and imagery. Sage (1987, pp. 12–13) says that poetry employs language to evoke and exalt special qualities of life and fills the readers with feelings. Poetry is one of the most effective and powerful transmitters of culture as it comprises so many cultural elements like idioms, vocabulary allusions, and tone.

In teaching language through drama there are many benefits. Some of them are role-playing, dramatisation, and improvisation. They are developed around the characters, plots, and themes of a literary work. When the students are made to read aloud in the classroom, it contributes to the development of communication skills. It also improves the pronunciation of the students. It exposes the learners to the target culture as well as the social problems a society may be undergoing. Drama promotes the verbal and nonverbal aspects of the target language that the students are trying to master. To make language learning more colorful, motivating, and interesting, drama must be included in the language classroom for the benefit of the students.

The drama also promotes paralanguage and offers good listening practice. Paralanguage is the non-lexical component of speech specific to every culture. Non-verbal language refers to tone, intonation, emphasis, facial expressions, gestures and hand movements, distance, and eye contact. It is a silent language. Appropriate use of nonverbal language can assist understanding in the classroom. Nonverbal communication is influenced by several factors including cultural background, education, gender, age, personal preferences, and idiosyncrasies (Varner & Beamer, 2005). In the Philippines beckoning someone with the fingers is seen as a gesture fit only for dogs. In Iran and parts of the Middle East giving a thumb-up sign during a conversation is considered bad.

Short stories or fiction is also a supreme resource for observing not only language but life itself. According to Ariogul (2001, pp. 11–18), the benefits of including short fiction in the ESL/EFL curriculum are it makes the students' reading tasks easier due to being simple and short. Short fiction facilitates teaching a foreign culture. It serves as a valuable instrument in attaining cultural knowledge of the selected community. After the analysis of the short story, the teacher may bring the grammatical rules to the student's attention.

Literature is an appropriate material for writing classes, where sometimes the teachers find it difficult since writing has no subject matter on its own (Spack, 1985, p. 719). Based on literature as subject matter the teacher discusses its theme and the students write about it concerning their own experience. The writing assignments before and after reading are derived from class discussions. The other forms of writing include 'adding to the work', 'changing the work', and 'Drama-Inspired writing'. To develop the student's writing skills, the teacher can ask the students to write a composition of similar experiences to the subject matter of the work, write another story using the characters in the story, or write a different ending to the work.

3.11. Language development

Learning is a process that increases knowledge. An individual learns and accumulates knowledge from parents, relatives, teachers, books, surroundings, and above all from nature. Development on the other hand happens after one has learned something. Development is practicing the skills that one has

learned. Repeated and constant practice alone can bring refinement in any individual. It further helps the individual in the application of new ideas and develops his analytical skills. Language development occurs in the language classroom when cultural elements are incorporated. In most language teaching courses, the language is taught by sentence pattern. There are very few pedagogically designed appropriate materials that can be used by language teachers in a language classroom. But through the integration of inspired activities into the second language classroom the effectiveness of language teaching can occur. The aim here is to improve the quality of language teaching which can be done if the teachers use the best available approaches and methods.

4. Conclusion

There are numerous benefits of using literature in the EFL classroom. An integrated approach to the use of literature in the language classroom offers the learners to develop their communication skills. Through the integration of inspired activities into the second language classroom, it is evident how literature and language learning may be combined within a broader unit of study. Grammar and language skills are not taught separately but are integrated. If the teacher uses the best available approaches and methods, the quality of language teaching can be improved evidently for the benefit and development of the student's language skills.

Many exercises found in textbooks at the school or university level must be radically revised. The teacher has an important role in teaching English through literature, making it student-centred learning. There is a practical need to design the syllabus that suits the needs of the learners. The students can benefit from a balanced combination of both learner-centred and text-centred approaches. The teachers must motivate the learners and advise them about the opportunities and benefits of learning English as a second language. The students' abilities will surely flourish in a rich and stimulating environment. English has become the need of the hour for better jobs and better careers. The use of spoken and written English in the right grammatical form is important for the development of an individual in his career in a highly competitive global village.

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