LEARNING GRAMMAR FROM SHAKESPEARE

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Abstract
In English language teaching, Literature, which in general is an inseparable aspect of a language, has been perceived more as a discouraging subject due to the fact that it is regarded more as an art rather than a unit of communication discourse. This article tries to find steps to teaching Literature as a means of elevating students’ mastery of language. Adopting and modifying Carlsen and Tovatt’s stages of reading literary works, this article presents a four-step design of presenting a literary work in a language class. The design is emphasized on exploring and exploiting language patterns toward better and more accurate understanding of a literary work in its literal level.

INTRODUCTION
There has been a dichotomy between language and literature in English teaching (Kramsch, 7). This seems to be true as seen in universities with their different departments concerning English teaching and literature. As a logical result, teachers of English would be reluctant to teach literature because they feel they do not possess the competence, and vice versa.

In the light of the pragmatic approach to Literature (Abrams, 9-27), such a dichotomy needs not exist because Literature is essentially a means to entertain and to teach. This concept extended broadly, teachers have their justifications for applying Literature as a means to teach language.

In the curriculum of English Department of Widya Mandalas Surabaya Catholic University, Literature classes are given in semester 6 or 7 to provide students with more insights about native English culture. This is designed based on the concept that learning a language cannot be separated from learning the background culture.

For several years in the past, however, the teaching of Literature classes has been emphasized on providing students with adequate knowledge and interest in writing theses on Literature. While this is not wrong, discrepancy has been seen in the increase of the number of theses on Literature and the decrease of students’ language mastery and competence.

The fact ignites questions on the effectiveness of Literature classes to enhance students’ mastery of English.

The objective of this article is to provide some possible design of conducting Literature classes to give more opportunities to students to get more and better exposure and practice in language.

DISCUSSION
Reading Literary Works
In studying a literary work, Abrams summarizes four approaches which are mimetic, pragmatic, expressive and objective (Abrams, 9 – 27). Each approach emphasizes different aspects in the relationship between a work and the three other components related to the existence of a work.

For a much simpler and practical way to people and readers in general, Carlsen and Tovatt suggest two stages of levels in reading literary works (Carlsen and Tovatt, x-xi). They distinguish reading literary works into literal level (plain sense) and figurative level (implications).

In the literal level, the purpose of reading is to get the basic facts literally written by the author. This is similar to what is referred to as comprehension reading. This level is important to get the understanding of what is exactly stated by the author.

In the figurative level, the purpose of reading is to try to grasp what is implied by the author. It is believed that authors do more than just tell stories. Authors write basing on their background
experiences. Similarly, readers read using their own different background experiences. In the reading process, good readers will test the author’s idea against their own idea in order to accept or to deny the idea.

**Learning Grammar From Literary Works**

For language classes, literary works can serve as materials to have real encounters with how language is used. Emphasis is given more on understanding the language in attempts to understand the text. In other words, students are dealing with the literal level.

To achieve the aforementioned purposes, the presentation of a literary work is divided into several steps. The steps are aimed at better understanding of the language used and more accurate understanding of the text.

The steps presented here are taken from the materials which were developed for “Prose and Poetry” class in English Department of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University. Each unit in the materials is divided into four steps, which are Previewing Language, Reading the Text, Understanding the Text, and Thinking It through.

**Previewing Language**

Before reading the literary work, the teacher previews the language aspect which students will encounter in the work. Students are first given a review of grammatical aspects. This can cover vocabulary, sentence patterns, specific expressions, or some other structural and grammatical aspects which appears in the corresponding literary text. Students are then presented with some exercises to further review their mastery.

**Reading the Text**

The next step is the encounter with the literary work. Students read the text together in class. For short texts, students can be asked to read aloud in turns. At this section, students are forced to exercise with pronunciation. Corrections will usually arise promptly from fellow students.

**Understanding the Text**

The third step is devoted to understanding the text, the literary work presented. This can be done in the form of comprehension questions or some other comprehension tasks. The purpose of this step is to guarantee students’ accurate understanding of the basic facts of the work. This indeed is the literal level of reading the work.

**Thinking It Through**

The last step is devoted to understanding the figurative meaning of the work. This is done by discussing and revealing literary elements the work presents. Students can be asked to discuss figures of speech used by the author. Students can also be invited to contemplate the tone of the author in the work. Students can also be assigned to reveal the symbols. Several further analytical and interpretive activities can be done.
Unit 5
Longer Poems

A. Previewing Language: Inversion

Poets frequently use inversion of structural elements of sentences in their poems. This is done to achieve the expected rhyme as well as rhythm.

Examples:

Oh, Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder
consider all the works Thy hands have made.
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.

The ordinary lines will appear:
Oh Lord, my God, when in awesome wonder I consider all the works Thy hands have made,
I see the stars and I hear the rolling thunder. Thy power (is) displayed throughout the universe.

The writer, however, inverts the phrases in order that wonder rhymes with thunder and made does with displayed.

In grammar, inversions are often made after initial negatives or after other structures.

Now, try to rearrange the structure of the following sentences so as to make them easier to read, showing the ‘natural’ or ordinary constructions.

1) Only through love is life sustained and nourished.
2) So high is Mount Everest that climbers can take only a couple of steps per minute as they near the summit.
3) Into the water went the diver almost without a splash.
4) After dinner, into the room walked Jennifer without the promised turkey.
5) Beyond the meadow, flows a beautiful river.
6) So difficult was the test that most students did not finish it.
7) And no sooner had the young man thundered out through the palace gate, than the Sultan himself went into the garden.
8) Never in the course of human history was so much owed by so many to so few.
9) Whose woods these are I think I know.
10) Little have I read concerning nanotechnology.

B. A Sonnet

Now, read the following sonnet.

SONNET 116
(William Shakespeare)

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no! It is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.

Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle’s compass come:
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man e
(www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174373)

C. Understanding the Text

1. The sentences in the sonnet are not written in natural or ordinary constructions. Rearrange the construction of the lines to make it easier for readers to read.
2. After all lines are rearranged into natural sentence order, paraphrase the poem. That is, tell or report what the speaker says.
3. How is the first quatrain (four lines) different from the second and third?
D. And Thinking It through
   1. With what does the speaker compare true love?
   2. Do you find the comparison reasonable?
   3. How can you accept the speaker’s concept of true love regarding the demands in this modern world?

E. Another Sonnet
   Now, read another sonnet by the same writer.
   Try to understand the sonnet following the steps we took in the previous sonnet. Then, try to find some other sonnets by different writers and try to see how Shakespeare’s sonnets are similar to or different from them.

   **Sonnet XVIII**
   (by William Shakespeare)
   Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?
   Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
   Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
   And summer’s lease hath all too short a date;
   Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
   And often is his gold complexion dimm’d;
   And every fair from fair sometime declines,
   By chance or nature’s changing course untrimm’d;
   But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
   Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow’st;
   Nor shall death brag thou wander’st in his shade,
   When in eternal lines to time thou grow’st:
   So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
   So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.
   
   (http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174354)

   In the writer’s experience, however, the steps could not be finished in one session of the lecture. A thorough discussion on the previewing language section lasted more than the first half of the allocated time. Similarly, thorough discussion of the work required more than the second half of the allocated time. Once or twice, the writer was tempted to cover all the steps, while ideally to achieve the purpose, concentration and emphasis should be given to the first three steps. In other words, when time is not enough, the last step can be given as an enrichment task.

   From the experience, however, the writer learned that careful and thorough time management is indeed necessary.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Enlightened by the pragmatic spirit that the essence of Literature is to “imitate both to delight and teach, and delight to move men to take that goodness in hand”, this article is an attempt to present a pattern of presenting literary works as a means of learning and improving English language competence. In this pattern, the session is devoted to making use of grammatical aspect to improve literary interpretation.

Careful design and time management can be both challenges and obstacles to the successful instruction. When it is successful, students will get double advantages. When it fails, however, students may get none of the two.

**REFERENCES**


