Humanizing Foreign Language Instruction: Literature as a Resource

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Abstract- With the emergence of audiolingualism, the teaching of literature was glowered upon. However, most objections were linguistically based, and literature maintained its position as a source for teaching culture (Valdes, 1986). Long (1986) considers the idea of "literature for the humanist and language for the scientist" as an unfortunate split as literature and language can help one another and they should not be separated (p. 43). Along the same line, this article argues how literature can serve to humanize foreign language teaching. First, some of the principles of humanistic education are discussed. Then how literature is related to these principles is dealt with. Finally, humanistic approaches to teaching literature and language are presented.

Keywords- Humanizing, Language, Teaching, Literature

1. Introduction

The term humanism was coined by the early 19th century German educator Niethammer. It was used to refer to an education based on the Greek and Latin classics (Craig, 2005, p. 395). Lamont (1997) considers humanism as "a philosophy of joyous service for the greater good of all humanity in this natural world and advocating the methods of reason, science, and democracy"(p.13). Moskowitz defines humanistic techniques as the techniques that "blend what the learner feels, thinks and knows with what he is learning in the target language" (as cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p.90). Literature as a rich resource reflects diversity of thoughts, behaviors and feelings in different cultures. In other words, literature describes "the most significant ideas and sentiments of human beings" (Carter & Long, 1991, p. 2).Therefore, the integration of literature into second or foreign language teaching and learning can partially satisfy the requirements of humanistic language teaching in ESL/EFL contexts.

2. Humanism in education

Humanistic education is concerned with personal development, self-acceptance, and acceptance by others (Moskowitz, 1978). According to Moskowitz, humanistic education emphasizes the learner's feelings and uniqueness of each individual. In this regard, Rogers (1961) argues that "individuals should interact with one's real self, the self that underlies surface behavior"

(p.13). As a prominent figure in humanistic psychology, Rogers (1951) states that learners should not be considered as a class, but rather as a group. Along the same line, Curran (1972) argues that the learners ought to be considered as clients and the teacher as a counselor, who addresses the learners' needs.

Humanistic education is characterized by certain features. Stevick (1990) refers to five points of emphasis within humanism, which include feelings, social relations, responsibility, intellect and self-actualization (p. 23). Similarly, Kerr, (2007) discusses the basic tenets of humanistic education, which include human values development, anxiety avoidance, the learner's Personal growth, , affective and intellectual engagement, , active involvement in the learning process and responsibility for one's own learning constitute.

3. Humanism in language instruction

Humanistic language instruction is the application of principle of humanistic education in language teaching. As a humanistic method of language instruction, Community Language Learning , for instance, "represents the use of counseling learning theory to teach languages" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.90). In adition to Community Language Learning, the Silent Way, Suggestopedia, and Total Physical Response also advocate a humanistic approach to language learning and teaching (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

A number of criticisms have been leveled against Humanistic language teaching (see Gadd, 1998 and

Tanemura & Miura, 2001). However, It has its own merits and proponents. In this regard, Arnold (1998) emphasizes the substantial role played by affect in communicative function of language. Arnold (1998) maintains that humanistic language teaching does not mean to substitute the cognitive for the affective, but rather to add the affective. Similarly, Kerr (2007) refers to humanistic approaches as a reaction to behaviorism, and as a counterbalance to exclusively intellectual (or cognitive) accounts of learning.

4. Literature and humanistic language teaching

Literature as a resource in language teaching enjoys numerous advantages of which other sources are deprived. In this section, we elaborate on the advantages and applications of literature in humanizing language teaching. For this purpose, we draw on three of the basic tenets of humanistic education (Kerr, 2007) , which seem more relevant to literature as a device for language instruction.

4.1. Human values development

Literature with its ample instances of real-life language in various situations provides unique opportunities to promote cultural awareness among learners Van (2009). The values of a society constitute a part of its culture. In this regard, Valdes (1986) maintains that discerning values inherent in a literary work is necessary for understanding it (p. 138). Valdes also introduces Walter, P. Allen's Cultural cheklist (1973, pp. 12-24) as a valuable device for determining cultural items in a literary work and argues that teachers should integrate these cultural items into their lessons (p.141). Along the same line, Ghosn(2002) states that " good literature ... can contribute ... to the emotional development of the child, and foster possitive interpersonal and intercultural attitudes." (p. 173). Concerning the choice of good literature for EFL teaching purposes, Ghosn (ibid) contends that in choosing folk tales, for instance, we should choose "stories that mirror the prvailing cultural values and traditions of a people"(p.177). Therefore, selection and use of appropriate literary materials for language teaching purposes fosters cultural awareness and human values development in learners.

4.2. The learner's personal growth

Literature plays a significant role in personal development. A new literature constitutes a new set of practices. As Gee (1996) argues, learning new practices involves learning new values, new norms and new ways of seeing the world, and seeing oneself in relation to them. Ghosn (2002) maintains that "literature can promote academic literacy and thinking skills" (p.173). Through literacy, language learners can borrow, adapt, and appropriate elements from a range of discourses to develop their own unique voices in a second language (Zamel , 1997). Similarly Khatib and Mehrgan (2012) in

an experimental study demonstrated that appropriate use of short stories in the Iranian EFL situation can enhance students critical thinking ability.

4.3. Affective and intellectual engagement

Becoming engaged with literature will undoubtedly enhance students' interest in reading. This makes literature an ideal source for extensive reading programs in langue teaching situations (McKay, 2001). Literature is full of issues related to real world situations. Such real-life issues attract and motivate learners to interact with the text or ,as McKay (1982) puts it, enjoy "literary experence". Similarly, Van (2009) argues that the authenticity and the meaningful context existing in literary texts make them very motivating. Arguing for the use of literature in primary school ELT, Ghosn (2002) states that " authentic literature provides a motivating , meaningful context for language learning, since children are naturally drawn to stories (p.173). Such an affective engagement can foster the learner's intellectual engagement and promote their language acquisition. As Van (2009) maintains literature is able to create individual opinions and meanings in students. And this will help students to initiate , sustain and participate in classroom activities, and become autonomous learners

5. Humanistic approaches to teaching literature

In this section four approaches to teaching literature and language are presented. And how these approaches are related to humanistic language teaching is elaborated on. On the whole, in these approaches, the primary focus is on content, and language development is treated as incidental learning.

5.1. Literature as content or culture model

More and more English educators are aware that language not only reflects culture but also constitutes culture (Chiu, 1997). In the cultural model, literature is a vehicle for presenting such cultural notions associated with the given language as the history, literary theories, theory of genres, and biography of the authors (Carter & Long, 1991; Lazar, 1993). *The cultural model* emphasizes the value of literature as part of culture. Literature describes "the most significant ideas and sentiments of human beings" (Carter & Long, 1991, p. 2). Therefore, teaching literature within a cultural model enables students to understand and appreciate diversity of cultures, and ideologies. Such an understanding of the diversity of thoughts, feelings, behaviors, etc affectively engage learners when reading literary texts and make the language learning tasks an enjoyable one. Moreover, such cultural understandings can promote second language learners' communicative ability as Hall (1959, cited in Cramsch, 2001) maintains " culture is communication and communication is culture" (p. 201).

5.2. Literature as personal growth or enrichment

In this approach there is emphasis on personal experience as a way to engage the students in literary works

(Carter & Long, 1991; Lazar, 1993) and on "the personal enjoyment and emotional gain students can procure by engaging with" literary texts (Maley, 2001, p.182). Particularly, the personal growth model motivates the students to read and to improve their reading abilities by connecting to readers' experiences (Asselin, 2000). In this model literature is considered as a "resource for personal development and growth, an aim being to encourage greater sensitivity and self-awareness and greater understanding of the world around us" (Carter & Long, 1991, p. 2). Teaching literature through this model inspires students to understand themselves, their society and culture. As Carter and Long (1991) state, reading literature effectively helps students develop and grow "as individuals as well as in their relationships with the people and institutions around them" (Carter & Long, 1991, p. 3). Thus literature can promote students' "thinking skills" (Ghosn, 2002, p.173) and critical thinking ability (Khatib & Mehrgan, 2012) and understanding of others.

As personal growth constitutes one of the tenets of humanistic education (Kerr, 2007), literature as personal growth and enrichment can be used to humanize language teaching. In this approach, language development is a by-product of communicative use of literary works.

5.3. Reader response approach

The Reader Response Approach (RRA) to reading literature is a process-oriented approach paying attention to the learners' role. It encourages "students to draw on their personal experiences, opinions, and feelings in their interpretation of literature" (Van, 2009, p. 2). Similarly, Amer(2003) maintains that RRA encourages the learner to respond to the text and express his own ideas, opinions and feelings about it freely. Such an approach can develop learners' emotional intelligence, which Goleman (1995) defines as understanding ones own and others' feelings.

As Carlisle (2000) contends, RRA is having an increasing influence on EFL literature classes (p. 12). Ali (1994) incorporated RRA into the teaching of short stories to a group of advanced learners of English.RRA encourages EFL learners to study literature for literature's sake, rather than for the mere attainment of language skills (Ali, 1994, p. 289). However, Reader response theory is criticized for emphasizing personal interaction with texts and neglecting the notions of alterity or otherness (Bakhtin, 1984), in other words, for not recognizing the essential otherness of texts from different cultures and seeing text essentially as extensions of the analyzing self (Kern, & Schultz, 2005).

5.4. Critical literacy approach

Literacy encompasses complex interactions among language, cognition, society, and culture (Kern & Schultz, 2005). Critical Literacy facilitates students' critical awareness about the role of language In producing, maintaining, and changing social relations and power. (Fairclough, 1992, p. 9). Pennycook (2010) treats critical literacy as one of the seven domains of critical applied linguistics.Critical literacy seems not to have received the attenttion it deserves in second and foreign language teaching situations.

> *... what surely lacks in questions of concern to L2 teachers is a view of the social, cultural, political and historical context and implications of language teaching. Language is reduced to a system for transmitting messages rather than an ideational, signifying system that plays a central role in how we understand ourselves and the world. (Pennycook,1990, p.304)*

The critical literacy approach was not explicitly developed to teach literature. However,it has important implications for teaching both language and literature as it reveals the interrelationship between language use and social power (Van, 2009). If teachers only select texts that are within the known schemata of students to facilitate their reading process, teachers are not doing them justice. such texts may facilitate the reading process. However, they open up new worlds and new experiences to students (David & Norazit,2000). Literature as a rich resource can develop critical literacy in students and enhance their communicative ability in the second culture and language.

5.5. Whole literary involvement

Khatib, Derakhshan, & Rezaei (2011) introduce their own model, which they call "Whole Literary Involvement". They elaborate on how to utilize and integrate literature in language classes drawing on task-based approach. In their model, they define task as "a piece of language that linguistically, physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially, critically, meaningfully, creatively, consciously or subconsciously, aesthetically, spontaneously, motivationally, and experientially involves learners in the process of learning" (p.216). Furthermore, they argue that literature is a device that can foster learners' whole engagement in the learning process. Khatib et al's Whole Literary Involvement is ralated to the humanistic approach to language teaching. The humanistic approach to language teaching views the learner as a whole person consisting of physical, emotional, social and cognitive features (Tanemura & Miura, 2011). Similarly Richards and Rodgers(2001) state "Humanistic techniques engage the whole person, including the emotions and feelings (the affective realm) as well as linguistic knowledge and behavioral skills (p.90).

6. Conclusion

Many ESL/EFL teachers are critical of literature as a language teaching resource for its so-called drawbacks and seem not to be cognizant of the significant role literature can play in teaching English.They often consider literature as bewildering and difficult to

understand. Literature as a resource for language teaching is criticized for its syntactic and lexical difficulty as well as non-standard structures (Robson,1989; McKay,1982 and Savvidou, 2004). As Maley (1989) maintains, lack of familiarity with and lack of knowledge about literary genres and concepts can compound the complexities of literature.

However, Use of the right text with the right reader can ensure text-reader interaction. The reader must be cognitively, emotionally, and psychologically prepared to interact with the text. In other words, to enjoy literary experience (McKay, 1982).Therefore, literary texts can constitute a rich source of ESL/EFL materials if they are exploited skilfully and judiciously. Literature enjoys many features of humanistic language teaching. Skilful use of literary texts in ESL/EFL teaching situations can lead to human values development, the learner's personal growth, and affective and intellectual engagement. Moreover, ESL/EFL teachers need to be trained in using literature for humanizing language teaching.

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Vitae

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