



Teaching English Literature

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explain the different approaches of teaching literature. The stylistic approach, Moody's approach and Literature as a resource and the language based approach.

The language based approach is believed to be suitable to Libyan learners who study English as a foreign language. It focusses on reading and it is a learner-centered approach.

Learning materials are used to give examples of how to use the language based approach in teaching literature. A poem by Robert Frost has been chosen for Libyan learners as it is relatively concrete. Certain activities such as listening, reading, reading between the lines and research work are used so learners can understand. The famous story of "Animal Farm" by George Orwell is used because it is short and simple. The story also appears on video which provides further resources for motivating the learners. Certain activities are provided to show how can students do pre-reading and while reading activities which enable them to work individually and in groups to read, analyse, and appreciate literature.

الملخص

تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى شرح الاتجاهات المختلفة لتدريس الأدب : النهج الأسلوبى ونهج مودي ، ونهج الأدب كمصدر للغة وهو المنهج الذي على أساسه تدرّس اللغة. يعتقد الباحث أن النهج القائم على أساس تدريس اللغة هو المنهج المناسب للطلاب الليبيين الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، فهو يركز على القراءة ، وهو المنهج الذي تكون ركيزته المتعلم. تم استخدام مواد تعليمية في هذه الورقة لإعطاء أمثلة لتوضيح طريقة ونهج الأدب كمصدر للغة في تدريس الأدب. تم اختيار قصيدة للشاعر Frost Robert للطلاب الليبيين، وذلك لأنه بها جوانب ملموسة يمكن إدراكها



وفهمها، و تم استخدام أنشطة تعليمية مثل: الاستماع، والقراءة، والقراءة بين السطور وعمل بحثي حول الشاعر لكي يفهم المتعلمون القصيدة.

تم استخدام القصة الشهيرة "Animal Farm" والتي كتبها الكاتب جورج أوريل، وذلك لأنها قصة قصيرة وبسيطة، كما أن القصة تم تحويلها إلى شريط سينمائي، وهذا يعتبر إضافة إلى المصادر الأخرى لتحفيز المتعلمين على دراستها، وتم تقديم بعض الأنشطة لتوضيح كيف يمكن للمتعلمين أن يقوموا بالأنشطة التي يؤدونها قبل القراءة أثناء القراءة، والتي تمكنهم بشكل فردي أو جماعي من قراءة وتحليل وتقييم الأدب.

Introduction

In the beginning, it is worth mentioning that the information provided in the introduction is based on the personal description of the learning/ teaching situation in some English language departments in the University. Having studied English literature in the Faculty of Education in Gar Younis University the researcher was exposed to the different approaches of teaching poetry, prose and drama. The researcher spent few years in teaching English in the faculty of Arts and in the faculty of education in Omar Al-Mukhtar University. Accordingly, the introduction is based on the researcher's personal experience in learning and teaching English language in Libya.

English is taught as a foreign language in Libya. Learners start learning the language in the preparatory school. After this they go to secondary school which prepares them for university. Some of them go on to English language departments in the university where they start studying literature in the second year of their study. They are, however, exposed to English literature in the first year through a reading skills module.

As indicated above, first year university students in English language departments study simplified classic literary texts as part of a reading skills module. In the seventies and the eighties university students study drama, poetry, novels and short stories in addition to literary criticism. They tackled the original works of Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wild, Ibsen, Shakespeare (one play), Charles Dickens, William Golding, George Orwell, Robert Frost, Emily Dickinson, John Steinbeck, and Ernest Hemingway together with English translations of Chekov and some Arabic texts which were translated into English.

Graduates of English departments teach English either in secondary or preparatory schools where they did not teach English literature. From personal



experience, it is clear that university students quickly find out that they do not really need literature to teach English. They consider that it is not necessary to study literature to teach English textbook.

This emphasis on simplified literary texts in English has an unfortunate result. Arabic literature is very rich in form and quantity. When learners compare the literature of their mother tongue with the so-called "English literature" to which they are exposed through simplified texts they consider English literature to be boring and lacking in spirit. Simplification reduces the literary function of the works dealt with in this way. They are likely to lose their distinctive features as literature. Some carefully prepared simplified texts can be exploited to develop reading skills but they should not be used as examples of English literature because, as Carter and Long (1991:147) point out, in simplification "it is precisely the Literature which has been taken out of the texts".

The use of simplified texts reflects the arguments of those curriculum designers who believe that, if learners are exposed to original classical literature in English, they are exposed to texts of high quality. These texts, however, are likely to be difficult and inaccessible to them as non-native speakers of English. To solve this problem the original texts are replaced by simplified ones.

In Libya, English literature is taught on the assumption that literature and language teaching should be linked and that one should reinforce the other. What we need is an approach that reinforces an appropriate relationship between the two. As non-native speakers Libyan learners should first learn the English language then they will be in a position to deal with the literature of the language which in turn will help them to improve their language skills. We need language to communicate. Literature is language sometimes spoken sometimes written. Literature is the type of language that helps learners to express ideas, feelings, fears and the like most effectively. Literature expresses the history of humanity with its pains and happiness, relates important events and the introduction of new ideas. Literature is like a stream of water. Everybody needs water but can drink only according to his thirst and capacity.

Before talking about appropriate approaches to teaching literature, it is important, however, to mention the attitude of Libyan learners towards the English language. They realise that English is an international language, that it is one of the most important windows of knowledge and communication. Because of historical events and the attitude of the UK and USA towards Libya and towards the Palestinian- Israeli conflict, however, people have grown cynical about anything that



comes from England or America, news, ideas, culture, language, music. For instance, in one extreme case, in 1984, two main cities were bombed and many civilians were killed by American planes taking off from bases in England. One result of this event was a four-year ban on the teaching of English in Libyan schools.

In this context, if it is agreed that English language and literature has an important role to play in the education of Libyan students, it is important to avoid any clash between the cultures involved. Sensitive issues like politics and religion must be avoided. It is wise and educative to choose literary works which deal with universal issues like justice, wisdom, morals, human rights, friendship, freedom and the like. Even when appropriate topics are chosen, however, there are other difficulties to be faced.

The grammar translation method of teaching English which is still the norm in many schools in Libya leads to poor reading skills. When dealing with literary texts teachers read the chosen texts to the learners so there is no real opportunity for learners to read for themselves. Moreover, teachers do not set tasks to help learners to explore the texts for themselves. Learners tend to translate the set texts using a bilingual dictionary. This means that often they do not discover the meaning of the word in the actual context, they do not have the enjoyment of the continuous reading of a text and so do not get any benefit from the use of literary texts. It is important that teachers should develop tasks that will help learners to read effectively. As a result literary texts are more likely to help them develop their language further and to help them learn more about the world.

The situation with regard to reading skills is related to a larger problem. In common with other countries the language curriculum in Libya is teacher-centred. Teachers do most of the work and there is little opportunity for learners to speak. This means that literary texts are not used as the basis for the type of discussion which would make them interesting to learners.

Another problem is the gap between English and Arabic culture. The two cultures are quite different. To bridge this gap we have suggested concentrating on universal issues which are of interest to humanity in general.

The selection of appropriate texts is, however, a problem in itself because teachers have had no real training in English literature. They are not aware of



appropriate authors, playwrights or poets. They have little knowledge of modern literature. At the present time in the English departments texts are selected from a short list of simplified classical works. University teachers have the freedom to select their own texts but problems arise because of their lack of awareness and because books are not available to help them in their choice.

In this context, then, it is believed that appropriate literary texts for the Libyan situation are those which are about universal topics of interest to humanity in general. Once appropriate texts have been chosen it is the teachers' role to help learners to explore literary works themselves in a way that will help them make their own judgements and to develop their own opinions. Learners will not be interested unless they become participants. Learners should be allowed to express their own feelings. Classes should not be teacher-centred.

If we are to develop such an approach to the teaching of literature appropriate for our target learners, we need first to examine some current approaches.

Some Approaches to Teaching Literature

The stylistic approach analyses the language used in the literary text. One of its aims is to use this analysis to improve the understanding of the literary purpose and the function of the language used in the text. This approach assumes that accurate reading leads to fluent reading. Though this approach may be appropriate for advanced level students it is not suitable for Libyan learners who do not have good reading skills. By the time they approach literature, even at university level, their reading skills have reached only an intermediate stage.

Moody's approach is based on the belief that the aim of teaching literature is to teach learners how to read and interpret literature to become "reasonable, skilled and sensitive readers able to feel and judge for themselves" (Moody 1983:15). To achieve this aim he distinguishes between extrinsic and intrinsic elements which help in evaluating literary texts. That is information from outside the text and information from inside the text. Although he states that the literary text is subject to different opinions and commentaries we believe that this approach makes the literary text sacrosanct and less learner-centred than a language-centred approach. This is because as the categories are relatively fixed, there is little space for learners to use their own judgement. They are more likely to concentrate on learning about fixed elements like the cultural background or the autobiography of the writer.



Literature as a resource is a language-based approach. The study of literature involves reading literary works. Such works provide interesting materials involving ideas, thoughts and cultural information which can be used to stimulate learners to talk and write. Literature can be a resource which provides teachers with an opportunity for developing language learning tasks based on materials that will enable learners to get involved mentally and emotionally in appropriate literary texts.

Carter and Long (1991) mention a potential disadvantage of this approach when teaching and examining shift focus from knowledge of literature to knowledge about literature. Then, learners will be concerned with facts about the literary context like dates and information about the writer. As in Moody's approach they will not be led to respond to the literary text itself. The inclination to concentrate on information about literature hinders the learners from relating to and being deeply involved in the text. They are likely to miss the enjoyment and excitement of reading literature. Instead, learners should be invited to read the text and contribute their own opinions and feelings. Needless to say learners who are exposed to and motivated by different literary texts are more likely to develop literary competence. As they develop their reading skills they are likely to discover the pleasure of reading literature.

A language-based approach focuses on reading as a process. It is a learner-centred approach which enables learners to explore literary texts for themselves. The teacher intervenes to ensure that the experience of direct involvement in the text is meaningful. In the next few pages we will look at two examples of learning materials which illustrate the appropriateness of this approach to Libyan students in the English department.

Learning Materials

(1) Fire and Ice by Robert Frost

This poem has been chosen as suitable for Libyan learners as it is relatively concrete but at the same time deals with emotions that are universal and can thus be tackled by our students.



Before the poem

- With your group discuss what the two words *fire* and *ice* bring to your mind.
- Have you ever experienced anything that brings together fire and ice?
- With your partner discuss the good and bad aspects of both fire and ice.
- When do you think that people can feel like ice? When can they feel like fire? Write your own notes.
- Compare your notes about fire and ice with your partner's notes.

Listening

Fire and Ice

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favour fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

Robert Frost

Listen to your teacher reading the poem and find out how many times you hear the words fire and ice.

- Listen again and write down words which have the same sound at the ends of lines. You will need three lists:

(1) fire (2) ice (3) hate



Listening and Reading

- Now listen to your partner reading the poem. As you listen, look at the poem and underline all the words in group (1); circle the words in group (2); put brackets around the words in group (3). (Both learners should read the poem)

[Check in the Key]

Reading

- With your partner find the lines which contain the following meanings:
 - (a) Desire is like fire
 - (b) Hatred is like ice
 - (c) Desire is destructive
 - (d) Hate is destructive
 - (d) Fire is stronger than ice

Reading between the Lines

- What does fire symbolise in the poem? What does ice symbolise in the poem?
- Why does the poet use these symbols?
- What message does the poet wish to convey through his poem?

The teacher should choose two or three views about the poem's message to be reported to the whole class as a way of showing that there are many different reactions possible to a literary text.

Research Work

Go to the library or search the Internet and find the following information about Robert Frost:

- 1) When he lived.
- 2) His nationality.



- 3) The main events in his life.
- 4) The titles of some other works.

Choose one of his other short poems to present to the class. Be ready to

- 1) Read it to your group.
- 2) Explain what you think its purpose is and why.
- 3) Say why you chose it.

(2) Animal Farm by George Orwell

Choice of Text

This novel has been selected because it is short and because the story is relatively simple. This means that it will not be too demanding for Libyan learners who are, on the average, at an intermediate level. From Arabic literature learners are familiar with the convention of animals being characters in a story. This means that they will not find the idea unacceptable.

The story also appears on video which provides a further resource for motivating the learners. It is important to note, however, that the use of the video comes after reading the story and that the script of the video differs somewhat from Orwell's story. This ensures that the video does not make the activity of reading redundant.

Animal Farm deals with a universal issue one that is important to our learners. It relates to an experience that is typical of the third world. People are filled with ambitions and dreams of freedom. Towards this end they may participate in a revolution. Often they find that they have replaced an old master with a new one that does not seem to be better. Further, George Orwell is a writer known in the Arab world. Thus, centrally, the linguistic level and cultural background of the learners has influenced the choice of the text in terms of difficulty and topic. The goal is to find a text suitable for helping them to improve their English as the same time as they enjoy reading English literature.

The Tasks

We believe that there is no one right way to explore a literary text. The most important thing is to stimulate learners to read literature, explore the ideas expressed and express their own opinions. This indicates the approach used in this assignment. It is a language-based approach in which we use the text of Animal Farm as a resource for learning.



The story is divided into ten chapters. Tasks are set for each chapter. Each chapter is relatively short so learners are able to read them fairly quickly as they follow the tasks. The assumption is that the tasks will direct the learners to read the text, discuss relevant issues and write up their own summaries and views. Finally, they are led to read between the lines and appreciate the writer's purpose. Accordingly, it is believed that learners are led to use literature as a vehicle for improving their linguistic competence. It is also intended that this will be an introduction to their literary competence which will develop as learners are exposed to more and more literary texts in a similar way. That is, as our learners are non-native speakers, we assume that linguistic competence comes first and so our approach should be a language-based one which will provide the basis for later literary competence.

The first two chapters are selected to exemplify how the book might be treated in a Libyan classroom.

The Book

General Introduction

Before reading the story the teacher should encourage the learners to predict what the story is about. For instance,

Animal Farm is the title of a story written by George Orwell.

- 1) What do you think this story might be about?
- 2) Do you think that human beings might take part in the story?
- 3) Imagine that some farm animals tell you that they need help. What would you do?

Chapter One

Pre-reading

Imagine that some farm animals are invited to a meeting:



1. Where will the meeting be held?
2. Who will run the meeting?
3. What will be the main issues of the meeting?
4. What might be the common dream among the animals?

Make notes so that later you can compare them with George Orwell's ideas.

Reading

Work with a partner. If you have problems with any words try to guess the meaning. Do not use your dictionary.

1. List the characters in the story. To do this complete the first column below.

	The characters	their names
1	the white boar	Snowball
2	_____	
3	_____	
4	_____	
5	_____	
6	_____	
7	_____	
8	_____	

[Check in the Key]

2. Find the names of the animals who attended the meeting. Write them in the second column above. The first one has been done for you.



[Check in the Key]

3. Find out what happened in the story. To do this, read chapter 1 and put the following sentences in the correct order. Write the numbers 1-20 in the brackets. Number 1 is done for you.

- () The lights went out
- (1) Mr Jones arrived home.
- () He went to bed.
- () The animals joined in.
- () Major cleared his throat and began to speak.
- () He talked about the misery of their lives.
- () He told them to rebel.
- () He fired his gun.
- () The animals decided that the rats were comrades.
- () The animals gathered in the barn.
- () Major repeated the animals' duties towards each other.
- () The animals fled to their sleeping places.
- () The dogs chased the rats away.
- () He told them about his dream.
- () He sang them a song.
- () He said that Man was the cause of their problems.
- () They woke Mr Jones.
- () Major held a vote.
- () They made themselves comfortable.
- () The animals joined in.

[Check in the Key]

4. Find the following statement:

"Comrades, you have already heard about the strange dream that I had last night."

- Who made this statement?
- Where would we expect to hear the term *Comrade*?
- Why has the term *Comrade* been used here?



- Would you call your classmate *Comrade*? Why?
 - What was the dream?
5. According to Benjamin, why had God given him a tail?
6. Find the following statement
- "Man is the only creature that consumes without producing"
- Who made this statement?
 - What do you think it means?
 - Do you think it is true?
7. When Major was a little pig his mother used to sing him a song. Find the song and read it.
- What is the name of the song?
 - What is the purpose of the song?
8. In the song, find the statement
- "For that day we all must labour"
- What day are all the animals hoping for?
9. Find out how the meeting ended.

Chapter Two

Before you start reading

- Remember how the meeting in Chapter 1 ended:

Mr Jones



- In light of this, do you think the animals will be able to reach that day for which they "must all labour"?
- How do you think they might do it?

While you read

1. Find out what happened to old Major.
2. In the light of Major's speech in Chapter One, how did the animals prepare themselves for revolution?
3. Who became the new leader?
4. List the names of the three most important pigs. To do this write each name in the spaces provided.

- () He was "a large, fierce-looking boar. He was not much of a talker, with reputation for getting his own way."
- () He was "a brilliant talker who could turn black into white. He was very persuasive pig."
- () He was "full of high spirits, quicker than Napoleon in speech and more inventive but he had not the same depth of character."

In groups

1. Having read about the leadership issues of *Animal farm*,
 - List the characteristics it gives for a good leader
 - Should we have "persuasive leaders who turn black into white"? Give reasons for your opinion.
 - Who said "ribbons are the badge of slavery"? Why did he say it? Do you agree? Why?



2. Think about the idea of "Sugar Candy Mountain":
 - What does it mean to you?
 - Can human beings dream of such a place?
 - Who is described as "a spy and a tale bearer, but he was a clever talker"? How is this related to the idea of "Sugar Candy Mountain"?
3. List the events which lead the animals to break down the store shed.
4. "The animals had destroyed anything that reminded them of Mr Jones". List these things.
5. Explain the following statement:

"Hunger influences one's behaviour"

Are there any such implications in Chapter Two of *Animal Farm*?
6. Find and read the Seven Commandments. What implications are there for human beings in these statements?

After finishing Chapter Two

Think about why the pigs took over the leadership of the other animals. Write notes so that you can compare your ideas with those of your neighbour.

The Video Tape

As mentioned above one of the interesting things related to adopting *Animal Farm* as material for teaching literature is the existence of the BBC's animated cartoon of the story. This provides a good opportunity for language teachers to vary



the activities of their learners and point to other sources of literature - films, recorded plays, taped readings. This video can be exploited to improve listening skills and note-taking as well as being the basis for speaking activities recycling the ideas already presented through the reading of Orwell's story. In the material presented here it is important that work with the video comes after the reading of the story. The watching of the video should not hinder learner's reading and enjoyment of the written text. We note that the animated cartoon is based on Orwell's book but it does not use his actual dialogue. It outlines the same actions but moves towards a different ending. It can thus be used to reinforce the happenings of the story and lead to further discussion of possible outcomes.

Possible Tasks

The class can be divided into groups, each with its own tasks to carry out as they watch the video. For instance,

- 1) The film begins with Major's speech. Outline the main points he makes.
- 2) Describe how the seven commandments change throughout the film.
- 3) When the animals had difficulties, who always made the resolutions? Summarise the main resolutions.
- 4) Describe the main events.

After watching the film groups should produce a final version of their notes and appoint a spokesman to report back to the rest of the class. This can lead on to a comparison between the book and the video with some speculation as to why the two mediums are rather different.

KEY

(1) Fire and Ice

- Rhymes:
- (a) fire, desire
 - (b) ice, twice, suffice
 - (c) hate, great



(2) Animal Farm

A) *The characters*

- 1 the white boar
 - 2 the two cart-horses
 - 3 the white goat
 - 4 the donkey
 - 5 the white mare
 - 6 the farmer
 - 7 the three dogs
 - 8 the raven
-

B) **the characters** **their names**

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 the white boar | Old Major |
| 2 the two cart-horses | Boxer and Clover |
| 3 the white goat | Muriel |
| 4 the donkey | Benjamin |
| 5 the white mare | Mollie |
| 6 the farmer | Mr Jones |
| 7 the three dogs | Bluebell, Jessie, Pincher |
| 8 the raven | Moses |

3. The story

Mr Jones arrived home. He went to bed. The lights went out. The animals gathered in the barn. They made themselves comfortable. Major cleared his throat and began to speak. He talked about the misery of their lives. Then he said that Man was the cause of their problems. He told them to rebel. Then the dogs chased the rats away. Major held a vote. The animals decided that the rats were comrades. Major repeated the animals' duties towards each other. Then he told them about his dream and he sang them a song. The animals joined in. They woke Mr Jones. He fired his gun. The animals fled to their sleeping places.



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