

## **Teaching Poetry in the ELT Classroom**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this article is to present how poetry may be taught in English classroom to develop learner's knowledge of English language. Poetry can be used to teach structure, grammar and vocabulary. Aside from these benefits, using poetry to teach English can also promote creativity and a more positive learning environment. This paper examines in detail the three most influential items in teaching poetry: Literary Language, Literary Competence, and Deviation of Language. Sarac (2003) explains the educational benefits of poetry: a) provides readers with a different viewpoint towards language use by going beyond the known usages and rules of grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. b) triggers unmotivated readers owing to being so open to explorations and different interpretations. c) evokes feelings and thoughts in heart and in mind. d) makes students familiar with figures of speech ( i.e. simile, metaphor, irony, personification, imagery, etc.) due to their being a part of daily language use.

**Keywords:** Literary Language, Literary competence, Deviation of Language.

### **1. Introduction**

Poetry has been characterized as deviating from the norms of language. It has been argued that poetry frequently breaks the rules of language, but by doing so, it communicates with us in a fresh original way. The use of language in unusual context is what marks the literature. Poetry is example of a more intense use of language. In other words, the association of meanings which language is familiar or conventionally used is not necessarily always to be found in poetry. A poem, therefore, is not an individual experience or a sum of experiences, but only a potential cause of experiences. Thus, the real poem must be conceived as a structure of norms, realized only partially in the actual experience of its many readers. So it is probably true to say that poetry employs a higher concentration of devices or effects than other deviating from the norms of language. But the question that arises is why we use poetry with the language learner? Firstly teachers may feel that the knowledge of correct language is not yet sufficiently well established in students. Secondly, teachers worry that exposing students to more creative uses of language could legitimize the use of deviant language in the classroom. Reeves (1963) argues that "in the teaching of poetry basically there are four factors to be considered. The pupils; the poems to be taught; the methods adopted and the personality of the teacher. But, personality of teacher is not only elements of taste, judgments and training which determine a teachers choice of poems and attitude towards poetry, but also the impact, he makes on the class when handling the subject".

## 2. Literary Language

The language of literature is considered to be special and extra-ordinary and beyond the grasp of any objective linguistic analysis. Furthermore, literary language involves a much greater degree of imagination than the language common use. It is more so with poetry. The language of poetry transforms and intensifies ordinary language and deviates systematically from every day speech. The Russian formalists of the 1920's were the first to draw attention to this aspect. Their efforts were concentrated on two main topics: the language of poetry and the structure of narrative discourse. They saw poetry as a special kind of language, set apart from ordinary prose by its use of certain devices metaphor, metonymy, rhyme, alliteration etc., which focused attention on its formal or aesthetic attributes Samreen (2003). Perrine (2002, p560) argues that ordinary language is kind of language that people use to communicate information, and it is only one dimensional. It is directed at only part of the listener, his understanding. It is one dimension is intellectual. Whereas, poetry is kind of language can be used to communicate experience, and it has at least four dimensions. If it is used to communicate experience, it must be directed at the whole man, not just at his understanding, it must involve not only his intelligence but also his senses, emotions, and imagination. Poetry can not be only to the intellectual dimension but also be a sensuous dimension, an emotional dimension and imaginative dimension. Abrams (2001, p. 103) argues that there is difference between the literary (or poetical) of language and the ordinary (or practical) of language, he also suggests that central function of ordinary language is to communicate to auditors a message, or information, by references to the world existing outside of language. Whereas the function of literary language can be used, is not to convey information by making extrinsic references, but to offer the reader a special made of experience by drawing attention to its own "formal" features, he adds that the linguistic of literature is differs from the linguistic of practical discourse because its laws are oriented toward producing the distinctive feature that formalists call literariness. Rezai (2001, p5) "points out that the language of poetry is used for a special way. Poets choose words not only for their senses, but also for sound, and the word pictures they create. The language of poetry makes senses and sound, rhythm, music, and vision, whereas ordinary language only makes sense".

## 3. Literary Competence

Linguistic competence defines the system of rules that governs an individual's tacit understanding of what is acceptable and what is not in the language they speak. The concept, introduced by linguist Noam Chomsky in 1965, was intended to address certain assumptions about language, especially in structuralist linguistic, where the idea of an unconscious system had been extensively elaborated and schematized. Competence can be regarded as a revision of the idea of the language system. The empirical and formal realization of competence would be performance, which thus corresponds to diverse structuralism notions parole, utterance, event, process etc. Chomsky argues that the unconscious system of linguistic relations, which F, Saussure named langue, is often mistakenly associated with knowledge or ability (or know-how). Chomsky is concerned to establish a science that would study what he calls "the language faculty" in analogy with other mental faculties like logic, which as kind of intuitive reasoning power requires no accumulation of facts or skills in order to develop but rather seems to be present and fully functional in speakers fluent in a language. So competence in Chomsky's sense implies neither an accumulated store of knowledge nor an ability or skill. Culler, in his structuralizes poetics, moves away from the idea of the underlining Competence of literary works, and considers instead the literary competence of readers. Culler (1975) points out that, anyone who has not internalized "the grammar" of literature would be baffled if he encountered a poem, because he would be unable to convert the linguistic sequences into literary structures. He also admits that it is difficult to find the exact place where linguistic

competence ends and literary competence begins, because literature is a second-order semiotic system. He (1975, p115) insists on “the special conventions for reading poetry which the reader has to acquire and to master, such as: 1) The rule of significance: reading the text as expressing a significant attitude to some problem concerning man and / or his relation to the universe. 2) The rule of metaphorical coherence: assuming a sense of coherence at the levels of both the tenor and the vehicle; 3) Inscribing the text in a poetic tradition: this code provides a set of symbols and types with universal meanings; 4) The convention of genre which provides norms that classify texts to categories; 5) The rule of totality, stipulating coherence at all levels.” Culler argues that effective readers of a literary text possess “literary competence’ in that they have implicit understanding of and Familiarity with, certain conventions which allow them to take the words on the page of a play or other literary work and convert them into literary meaning. However, literary competence is used as a set of conventions for reading literary texts is in no way to imply that authors are congenital idiots who simply produce strings of sentences, while all the truly creative work is done by readers who have artful ways of processing these sentences.

#### 4. Deviation of Language

Nowotny (1962, P. 1) points out that” poetic language has been called a deviation from the Linguistic norm, the norm being the ordinary ( spoken ) language and the language of prose”. Levin ( 1962, p. 226 ) classifies deviation of language in two types that they are internal and external deviation in poetry , the first type of deviation which takes place against the background of the poem, where the norm is the remainder of the poem in which the deviation occurs. The second type of deviation is to be explicated against some norm which lies outside the limits of the poem in which the deviation occurs. Chhibber (1987, p. 157) argues that there are two types of the norms or regularities language. First, those that govern the form of a string are the rules or constrains; second those that characterize the meaning of a string are mere tendencies. For example, verb like ‘permit’ in the transitivity- norm have to take an object, is a rule ;on the other hand, requirements like [ + ANIMATE ] subject etc. ,the rule that verbs like ‘eat’ ‘admire’, ‘love’ etc., take a[ + ANIMATE ] subject is not a rule in the sense the transitivity- rule is; it is statement of tendencies. Palmer ( 1986 ) argues that there are some sentences that are clearly an grammatical and are simply to be ruled out or corrected, while others are add in a lexical way and can with some imagination, be contextualized. But there are others that are half way, he points out that one is not really sure whether this deviance is lexical or grammatical. Seeing following example of such a border line case:

The dog scattered

The verb of scatter is normally used only with plural nouns. It would seem, therefore, that a grammatical rule is being broken and that we should amend it to the dog scattered (the dog was scattered). If far fetched contextualization for the dog scattered, we have found a possible, the deviation of language can be lexical rather than grammatical. But, in these sentences we are not sure that these sentences are grammatical or lexical, the best decision according to palmer is that, they are on the border line of grammar and lexicon.

According to Ramsaran (1983, p.36) “Phonological deviation commonly takes the form of marked pattering, the most obvious example being that of rhyme, which is repetition at regular intervals of stressed syllables containing the same vowel and consonant phonemes in the same sequence. (This definition accounts for the difference between ‘feminine rhyme’ (e.g. saying and sewing), where the repeated syllable is unstressed and ‘Pararhyme’ (e.g. round and hand), where the vowels differ though the consonants are the same.) Rhymes (and other similar types of pattering) introduce the important concept of parallelism (partial correspondence between pieces of text) as seen in

Where –e’er you walk, cool Gales shall fan the Glade,  
Trees, where you sit, shall crowd into as shade;

Where'er you tread, the blushing flow'rs shall rise,  
And all things flourish where you turn your Eyes”.

Widdowson ( 1975, p. 17 ) considers another kind of violation that is extremely common in literary writing for a description of English language somewhere, there are rules which specify that certain verbs require their subjects or objects or both to contain nouns of a particular kind. For example, the verb ‘see’ requires that its subject contain a noun which is animate, the verb ‘hurt’ requires that an animate noun operates in the object and the verb ‘assault’ requires animacy in both subject and object. According ‘selection’ restriction rules or collection rules are available in the language description they prevent the generation of such sentences as the following:

“The thistle saw the gardener,  
The gardener hurt the thistle,  
The thistle assaulted the cauliflower.”

We are sure that the generations of the sentences are as follows:

“The gardener saw the thistle,  
The thistle hurt the gardener  
The gardener assaulted the housemaid.”

Widdowson ( 1975, p.15 ) considers a rule of deviation of language within a grammar is based on Shakespeares’ sentence (“ and I shall see Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness I’ the posture a whore”) that this rule a distinguishes between different parts of speech. For example, boy would, of course, be specified as a noun in a standard description of English. Here, however, it operates as a transitive verb. But, Shakespeare is consequently guilty of violating a grammatical rule. But if the grammar is used to account for the fact that these lines are perfectly intelligible we will have to alter the specification of boy so that a sentence which uses it as a transitive verb will be generated. If we do that, however, we must accept that the grammar will now generate a whole host of other sentences in which boy functions as a transitive verb: sentences perhaps like:

“Ethel was boying her hair in the bathroom,  
Maggie has boyed her dolls again.”

## 5. Conclusion

The outcome of the paper from what has been discussed above can be a positive learning experience in order to help the learners improve their English language and use English flawlessly. All of the three items can be considered as important factors in teaching poetry in ELT classroom. . In conclusion, it is important to bear in mind that assesses the contribution of the concept each of these three items to learners’ understanding of the process of English language learning.

As Cubukcu ( 2001, p1) mentions, poetry is rewarding and enjoyable experience with the properties of rhyming and rhythm both of which convey” love and appreciation for the sound and power of language”. At this juncture, it can be stated the leaners become familiar with the suprasegmental aspects of the target language, such as stress, pitch, juncture, intonation by studying poetry. Obediat ( 1997,p 33) “states, literature helps students acquire a native – like competence in English , express their ideas in good English , learn the features of modern English , learn how the English linguistic system is used for communication, see how idiomatic expressions are used, speak clearly, precisely, and concisely, and become more proficient in English, as well as become creative, critical, and analytical learners ( cited in Hismanoglu , 2005”).

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