

**Language through Literature -  
The Effectiveness of English Textbooks for Teaching  
Students Who Learn English as a Second Language**

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**Abstract**

Given to the exposition that English language can be taught in various ways the researcher finds one of the best ways is to teach ,especially , the ESL students is through the literature in the prescribed text books. This paper focuses on language teaching using one particular book prescribed by a university and encourages the teachers of English to look at the text book as a brilliant tool to teach the ESL students English.

**Key Words:** language through literature, second language textbooks, language learning, imitation, reinforcement, English patterns and structures.

**Introduction**

“The geniuses of all ages and of all lands speak different languages but the same flame burns in them all. Oh, if you only knew what unearthly happiness my soul feels now from being able to understand them.” Anton Chekhov.

One of the most remarkable characteristics that set human beings apart from the species is language. Human language is unique. Fascinating are the discoveries on language that it so utterly different from signalling systems of other living beings that are on this earth.

Talking about the use of language, Trask (2003) talks about three things that are important – *Displacement, Open-endedness and Stimulus freedom*. The former is the use of language to talk about things other than the present. For instance, describing the football match that was held the previous day. The latter is one’s ability to use the language to say anything at all, including lots of things one has never said or heard about.

In fact, most of the things one says and hears everyday are completely new to him and, may never before have been uttered by anyone. So *Open-endedness* is the ability to talk about places and things far away in space and time and to produce and understand new utterances virtually without limit which are so familiar to speaker that he never give than a moment’s thought.

Undoubtedly, the above said two phenomena are truly remarkable and absolutely vital in using a language, because, imagining a language that consisted only of fixed list of possible utterances would be a language that is inconceivably far from what one can understand languages to be.

The third phenomenon is *stimulus-freedom* which gives the speaker the ability to say anything he likes in any context. Supposing A asks B, “what do think of my shirt?” B is free to give any response like “It’s too short”, “It doesn’t go with black pants”, “Sorry I’ve no taste for clothes,” etc. One can even request to change the subject.

But non-human signals are not *stimulus-free*, rather *stimulus-bound*. A non-human creature produces a particular signal always and only when the appropriate stimulus is present. Other species signalling systems lack stimulus-freedom and so one can say that human language is unique on earth.

Acquiring human language, be it mother tongue (L1) or other tongue, i.e., other than mother tongue, here English language, (L2) is an astonishing and wonderful feat in one’s life. A child learns a language by imitation and reinforcement - as with the mother tongue, so with the other tongue - English. The imitations of adult speech become steadily better. Now, to teach or to learn English language there are many tools and aids like books, Audio and Video CDs, sources in the Internet etc., are at the disposal of the teacher and the taught. One among them is the English text book- the English text book prescribed in the schools and colleges. Be it prose, poetry, short story, one-act play- apart from the book exercises which include grammar items- the teacher can select English structures and patterns from the text and train the students to speak and write English the English way.

### A Case Study

Collie and Slater (1987: 3-6) supports the inclusion of literature in the language classroom as it provides valuable authentic material, develops personal involvement and help contribute to readers’ cultural as well as language enrichment. Here, the researcher has taken a text book — *Panorama* -Part II English text book which was prescribed in colleges which are affiliated to Bharathiar University and tries to expound its efficacy in teaching English language to the students who learn English as second language.

“My mother, *along with* the other women and children of my family, *was* evacuated from Panipat”(Saikumar 4)

The above mentioned sentence has been extracted from the prose *The Refugee*, (qtd. in K.A. Abbas) and it can be used to teach Subject-verb agreement. There are three subjects in the sentence - My Mother, women, children – (plural subject) but the verb used is ‘was’ which is a singular verb. The grammatical rule is as follows: if a sentence consists of the phrases like *along with*, *together with*, *besides*, *as well as*, *accompanied by*, the verb will agree with first subject *only* immaterial of the kind of the subject ( singular or plural). Here, in the aforementioned sentence the first subject ‘*My Mother*’ is singular so the verb used ‘*was*’ is also singular. Further, the teacher can explain to the students using the following sentences as examples.

*Tom as well as* his friends *is* attending the party.

*The students accompanied by* the teacher *are* going on a tour.

*Platinum, besides* other metals, *is* a costly one.

*The staff members together with* the Principal *are* participating in the conference

Making the students to generate more sentences on one pattern is one of the best ways to teach English language.

**“I’m awfully anxious about my future”** (Saikumar 56)

The sentence pattern is extracted from the short story *The Fortune Teller* (qtd .in. Karl Capek). Using a substitution table the teacher can bring forth the desirable results in language learning.

|           |     |           |           |               |       |                |
|-----------|-----|-----------|-----------|---------------|-------|----------------|
| I         | am  | awfully   |           |               |       |                |
| He        | is  | extremely | anxious   |               | my    | Future         |
| She       | is  | terribly  | nervous   | to know about | his   | Exam results   |
| They      | are | quite     | concerned |               | her   | Medical report |
| My mother | is  | very      |           |               | their |                |

By using the above shown table one can generate more than five hundred sentences which they will not forget.

Similarly a sentence reads like this **“this is the nicest hand I have ever seen”** (Saikumar 57) in the short story *The Fortune Teller* (qtd .in. Karl Capek). The same method – substitution table – can be used to teach this pattern also.

|      |        |                                    |                     |           |      |      |                 |
|------|--------|------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------|------|------|-----------------|
| This |        | nicest                             | hand<br>car<br>bike | I         | have |      |                 |
| He   | is the | bravest<br>cleverest<br>smartest   | man<br>woman        | they      | has  | ever | seen            |
| She  |        |                                    |                     | he<br>she |      |      |                 |
| It   |        | most beautiful<br>most interesting | place<br>novel      |           |      |      | visited<br>read |

With help of the above drawn table one can generate, minimum, few hundreds of sentences in the self same pattern.

Teaching descriptive writing is also made easy with the English textbook. By this the students will learn how to describe a person, place, an object etc. The sentence **“but then he was wonderfully good looking, with his brown hair, his clear cut face, and his grey eyes”** (Saikumar 72). Though the author has identified few descriptive writings in the text book he has referred to only one description and it is in the short story *The Model Millionaire* (qtd. in. Wilde). The teacher can facilitate the students to generate more descriptive sentences using the above cited descriptive writing. She is stunningly beautiful with her bluish eyes, her pretty face, long hair, sharp nose, and chubby cheeks- can be a description of a girl.

A place can be described in the following ways as well:

The hall is spectacular with all its painted walls, neatly arranged chairs, wonderful blinds, and gorgeous red carpet.

The stage looks magnificent with it all its lights, brilliant back drop, well placed pulpit, and colourful flowers.

Exercises like describing a school, pen, dress, car, college auditorium etc can be given to educate the students in descriptive writing.

### Conclusion

“One language sets you in a corridor for life. Two languages open every door along the way.” says Frank Smith. Though acquiring a language is an astonishing and wonderful feat, it is proved, to a certain extent, by the author, that it can be effortlessly done through imitation and reinforcement and the prescribed English text books are efficient enough for this task of training the students not only in the spoken English but also in the written English. Text books provide students with an incomparably rich source of authentic material over a wide range of registers. If students can gain access to this material by developing literary competence, then they can effectively internalize the language at a high level (Elliot 1990:198). Let the doors in the way be opened for the students who learn English.

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