Teaching Writing Literary Prose through Metaphor Analysis

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Abstract

When we look at a literary text, we expect it to be deviant in various ways: phonological, lexical, syntactic and semantic. Semantic deviation is the most prominent feature of a mature literary text. Study of metaphors can be very helpful in understanding semantic deviation of a text.

This research article is a study of how metaphor-analysis can be employed in the teaching of a literary text to facilitate the learners to know how a text says more than it seems to say. To transform the teaching of literature from a dull one way traffic from teacher to student, approaching literature through language is of utmost importance as it provides an occasion for active involvement on the part of both the teacher and the student. Especially, teaching or reading literary prose demands doing something more than summarization of the themes. This paper develops a strategy to work on a text of literary prose through metaphor analysis in group work in a class room activity.

Metaphor analysis helps the students decode the second layer of meaning of the text. If the results of metaphor analyses are arranged into paragraphs to tie them into a coherent essay, it would be a worthy effort on the part of the students to get at something through personal critical thinking and to get rid of blind cramming of ready-made material, so

much needed in Pakistani environment of teaching literature in class room. The issues involved are choice of a thematically and culturally appropriate text rich in metaphors. Before assigning the students the task of writing, the teacher will have to acquaint them with some model/s of metaphor analysis and technique of paragraph writing. To enhance connotative depth, to let students decode the text for what the text says more than its apparent meaning, Geoffrey N. Leech's three stage model of metaphor analysis can be used. For briefer time span activity and for relatively better students, Randal Holme's source-domain-target-domain model can be useful. Use of a Pakistani text to work in Pakistani environment would facilitate both the teacher and the taught.

Key Words: Writing, metaphor analysis, paragraph writing, literary prose

Introduction

Teaching of literature is a problematic area in Pakistani context on the part of both the teachers and the taught. The students complain that literature is generally taught denotatively with no or a very less sensibility of its connotative significance. The teachers generally have to face the problem of teaching literature to such students as have no background of the subject at graduate and even at post-graduate level. Even at Punjab University, Lahore, the one of the oldest seats of higher education in Pakistan, the students getting admission to MA English programme do not have the necessary background in literature. It leads to poor pedagogy at Master Level.

We have been teaching literature & linguistics at GC University, Faisalabad for the last 6/7 years. It is a new university, only eight years old. Here we receive very poor stuff in terms of understanding of literature as well as grip on language, the latter being more serious problem. The assignments assigned to the students are generally unproductive, uncreative and more a formality than a true exercise in development of meditative and analytical capability.

Our experience is that students, at least at graduate level, are rarely given a genuine situation, occasion, and thinking equipment to work on literature. The teachers being the product of the same system and environment are mostly ill equipped with strategies of teaching literature. One of our students asked us whether or not Dr Crag should be considered part of sub-plot of Hedda Gabbler. It was actually a question in his mid-term examination which more than half of the students could not properly attempt. We asked him what his opinion was. He said that he did not consider him to be so but he was afraid of giving his opinion in the paper lest it should be incorrect.

Correctness or otherwise of the opinion is not our concern here. What we felt important was his fear. This fear is rooted in lack of practice in analytical writing on literature. Secondly, most of the students lack formal and systematic approach in their writing at paragraph level as well as essay level. This article offers one possible strategy of teaching

writing on literature in Pakistani context. It is meant for the students of literature at graduate level but is valid for initial phase of postgraduate level as well.

Ur's Stages of Writing Process

Penny Ur (1996, p.167-168) gives three stages of writing process. In the first stage, a short text is to be prepared preferably on paper to make possible crossing rather than erasing or deleting the undesired parts. The second stage is for personal reflection or for comparison if one is working in a group. And the third stage is for conclusion, for finalization of the results.

Density, Organization and Detachment

Out of nine characteristics of writing that Penny Ur points out, three are relevant to our present purpose: density, organization and detachment (1996, p.160). A written text is denser than speech which is 'dilute and full of repetitions, glosses and fillers' (p.160). For organization Ur says: 'A written text is usually organized and carefully formulated since its composer has time and opportunity to edit it before making it available for reading' (p.161). Both these points are valid for the activity proposed in this article.

The third feature, detachment, is a flaw of writing: 'The writing of a text is detached in time and space from its reading. The writer normally works alone and may not be acquainted with his readers' (p.161). In Actual normal situation Ur is right but in a classroom activity and especially in a group activity, the writer/s will have feed back, correction, review, addition and deletion before the final draft. The teacher's feed back or interception will also compensate for the detachment problem.

Solution to the Problems of SLL (Second Language Learning) Environment

Ur is right in his observation that 'there is probably no one right system of writing that we should recommend' (1996, p.168) but in case of classroom activity, especially for the students of graduation and even those of masters in Pakistani context, they cannot be left to follow their own plans whatever to write an essay on literature. They should have a clearly defined plan at their early phase of the development of writing skill. It would be more productive practice to provide them one way of thinking to work out in group. The one way of thinking should not be interpreted as discouragement of free thinking rather in our context teaching of literature is generally via cramming which is sufficient to the purpose and spirit of the subject. Geoff Hall points out that in second language teaching environment, literature is used without coordinating the linguistic and the literary. He says:

> a. Literature is typically used in more traditional ways in university foreign language education. 'Literariness' is emphasized and linguistic elements underplayed;

b. In second language teaching situations, where language is required more immediately for communication, and at lower schooling levels, literature is more likely to be integrated into a communicative curriculum, where language issues are focused on and 'difficult' or distracting literary features are played down;

c. It follows that better balanced and better integrated approaches may have much to offer. (Hall, 2005, p.47)

He further regrets that 'the teaching of literature in second language contexts is typically not systematic… The language of the text itself is considered incidental and is not focus of attention except for some more formalist-stylistic approaches' (Hall, 2005, p.58). Analysis of metaphors could be a very fruitful activity to decode a literary text. It simultaneously covers linguistic and literary aspects of the text and leads the students to the decoding and interpretation of the text through conscious raising of the literary language.

Widdowson is right to point out that "Reading as the understanding of discourse … involve(s) recognition of the value words and sentences take on in association with each other as elements in a discourse" and he calls this ability both in reading and writing "interpreting" (1992, p.63).
Metaphor analysis also functions to mature reading to the level of *interpreting* in Widdowson's terms and this is to him the "highest level of skill: it is the ability to process language as communication and it lies under all language use" (1992, p.66).

Choice of Model for Metaphor Analysis

The purpose of this article is not to evaluate effectiveness or otherwise of a model of metaphor analysis. Any model can be taken for such purpose. But we suggest Geoffrey N. Leech's (1989) or Randal Holmes' (2004) models which are easier and more direct and target-domain focused and therefore more feasible for a classroom activity.

Language and Metaphoricity

The whole of the language is metaphorical in its nature. Even our most prosaic utterances are metaphorical. For example, *he is at home*, *the baby is cutting teeth these days,* and so on. It seems mankind is doomed to think in terms of an analogy (reference). Randal Holme (2004) goes one step ahead and unravels how even prepositions are metaphoric actually: we are looking *into* the matter; he was leaning *against* the wall, etc. But metaphors of this kind are obviously dead metaphors and it is living metaphors that make a text literary. A student of literature is after living metaphors, the other ones being too obvious to carry any meaning or any metaphoric force.

Why Literature through Language

Traditional teaching of prose involves summarizing the prose essays, or at the most the teacher may assign one specific aspect to work on and this work mostly does not go beyond cramming a ready-made essay from a helping book. The result is that the work is neither teacher focused nor student focused, to be rudely straight-forward. At least our experience has been something like that. If we want to see the learners "motivated, relaxed, positive and engaged" (Arnold 1999; Tomlinson 2008), they should be provided with such situations as help them work personally and independently. This can be achieved by making the students work on literature through language, by refining their sensibility of language. Without this kind of strategy and attitude, the pedagogy would be far from George Eliot's conception of teaching of literature as "the highest of all teaching because it deals with life in its highest complexity" (1967, p.9-10). Working through this process, will be a liberating phenomenon and will lead to independent and creative approach to literature. Roman Jakobson observes that "A linguist deaf to the poetic function of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistic problems and not conversant with linguistic methods, are equally flagrant anachronisms" (1960, p.377). Sage (1987) is of the view that lengthy text poses a problem of how to maintain students' interest (1987, p.87). If a longer text of a novel or a drama is split into parts, the parts may not have the same communicative and semantic wholeness of significance as the total text has. Obviously texts have a lot of items of information which at the time of their first occurrence only prepare the reader for its later occurrence/s where its true significance unfolds. A text like Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* already divided into chapters facilitates teacher's work; the text is already divided into chapters for comprehension and critical work in doable chunks without disturbing the meaning's entirety.

Choice of an Appropriate Text

Choice of appropriate text according to level of the students, the availability of time and the text having the aspect necessary for the activity chosen is a significant issue because "some form of written discourse are reciprocal" (Widdowson, 1992, p.65). Duff and Maley (2007, p.12-13) suggest that teachers can cope with challenges of suitability of a text if they consider the following aspects:

- Interest of the students in the subject matter
- Suitability of the level of the language
- The right length of the text for the available time
- The extent of required cultural and literary background for interpretation of the text
- Cultural appropriateness of the text
- Potential of the text language learning activity

A Case of *Meatless Days*

Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* is a very relevant text for teaching literature through language in Pakistani context in view of the aspects and issues presented above. It is a richly cultural oriented text and then it is in memoir form rather than a novel. A novel, if it is, say, magical realist novel, it would be difficult for average graduate students to decode its metaphoricity. Or, again, if we take, say, Stephen Leacock's *Men who have Shaved Me*, it is impossible to work on its metaphoricity because it is not a metaphoric text, although it is, no doubt, universal in its treatment in the choice of the theme and exploitation of the loquaciousness of barbers.

Meatless Days is a valid choice from another point of view: In Pakistani context it would be a shared experience for the students and therefore it would pose no interpretative hurdle. Krashen's (1999) observation supports this point of view: "… the language experience needs to be contextualized and comprehensible" because mature reading involves "understand[ing] the author's intention" (Bright, 1970, p.57). *Meatless Days*, a Pakistani's writer's text, written in Pakistani context, to be taught by Pakistani teachers to Pakistani students, makes an ideal choice of the text because, as Brumfit says, it is very important the text should lend itself to the students for "discussion and personal involvement"(1986, p.32) . It therefore serves the purposes of literature in a language class: it is authentic material; it is culturally rich and that it offers an opportunity of a lot of personal involvement (Collie and Slater, 1990, p.30).

Leech's Three-Stage Model for Metaphor Analysis

Introduction to Geoffrey N. Leech's (1989) and Randal Holme's (2004) model of metaphor analysis will equip the students to think over the text for suggested meanings. Leech's model analyses a metaphor in three stages: Stage I separates literal from figurative; Stage II develops correspondence between tenor and vehicle; Stage III provides ground for correspondence. Here follows an example of application of this model:

Leech gives a three-stage model for analysis of a metaphor. In the first stage, he proposes to separate literal (L) from figurative use (F) as follows:

L : the eastern --------where the great sun begins-----------
F :   //   //   gate   //   //   //   //   his state

'Gate' and 'state' are metaphorical because literally there is no gate to be used for entrance nor the Sun is a king to have a state. Therefore, both these words have been placed in figurative section for metaphoric treatment.

In the second stage, he suggests to "construct tenor and vehicle by postulating semantic elements to fill in the gaps of the literal and figurative interpretations" (Leech, 1989,

p.154). The blanks in the literal part of the expression are reconstructed with those elements of meaning that "might reasonably fill the gaps" (154). Both auxiliary "might" and the adverb "reasonably" indicate the multiplicity of possible constructions of tenor and bear the stamp of lack of finality and decisiveness. Leech gives the third stage as follows:

Ten: the eastern	part of the sky	where the great	sun	begins	its daily course
Veh: //	Gate	//	King etc	//	his state

Leech propounds two rules to be observed in construction of tenor and vehicle: the gap-fillers should be loose and general, not more precise than required by the context; and secondly, one had better not place metaphors in the gap-fillers because explanation of one metaphor by another will complicate the issue.

The third stage comprises of the statement of the ground of the metaphor. It is easy to perceive it after finding tenor and vehicle. The rule is to ask oneself "what similarity can be discerned between the top and the bottom lines of the analysis?"(Leech, 1989, p.155) Leech admits that answer to this question depends upon personal intuition. The ground for the metaphor as given by him is as follows:

> There is an obvious resemblance between the sun and a king: we look up to both; both are glorious and of dazzling brightness (the one literally and the other metaphorically). The eastern quarter of the sky is like a gate because it is the sun's entrance to the sky (155).

Randal Holme's Source-Domain-Target-Domain Model

The second model by Randal Holme (2004) analyses a metaphor by studying the relationship between source domain and target domain. This model shows how two domains are analogous in a metaphor by developing the relationship between them. Galileo argued that if a stone is dropped from the mast of a moving ship, it falls to the base of the mast. It shows that the ship is not moving but actually it is moving because everybody knows. He inferred that when a stone is dropped from a tower, it falls to the point exactly under the one from which it is dropped. The earth, therefore, is not moving.

But the argument is invalid like the previous one. Randal Holme illustrates this analogy by the following figure:

Source Domain	$\rightarrow$	Target Domain
Drop an object from a mast and the object falls at the base of the mast	$\rightarrow$	Drop an object from a tower and the object falls at the base of the tower.
Therefore the ship is not moving but everybody knows that the ship is moving	$\rightarrow$	Therefore the world is not moving
Therefore the argument is flawed	$\rightarrow$	Therefore the argument is flawed
The ship is moving	$\rightarrow$	The world could be moving

The source domain is the conceptual domain used to develop metaphorical expressions and target domain as the conceptual domain that is implied, suggested and understood. This model decodes a metaphoric expression by mapping "the systematic set of correspondences that exist between constituent elements of the source and the target domain and are not pre-existing". Conceptual metaphors function through the set of mappings that apply to a source-target pairing. Conceptual metaphors employ a more concrete or physical concept as their source and explain more abstract concepts as target. While applying this model, the researchers have observed the principle of unidirectionality which states that metaphorical process goes from the more concrete to the more abstract, and not the other way round. Hence, abstract concepts are understood in terms of prototypes of concrete processes. This model unfolds a metaphor by locating one to one relationship between source and target domain, between concrete and abstract. Now if a group of, say, five students is assigned *Papa and Pakistan*, a chapter from *Meatless Days* by Sara Suleri and each of them analyses ten metaphors, it will be a good preliminary exercise to be matured into an essay in the next phase. A teacher can use the following group exercise/ activity:
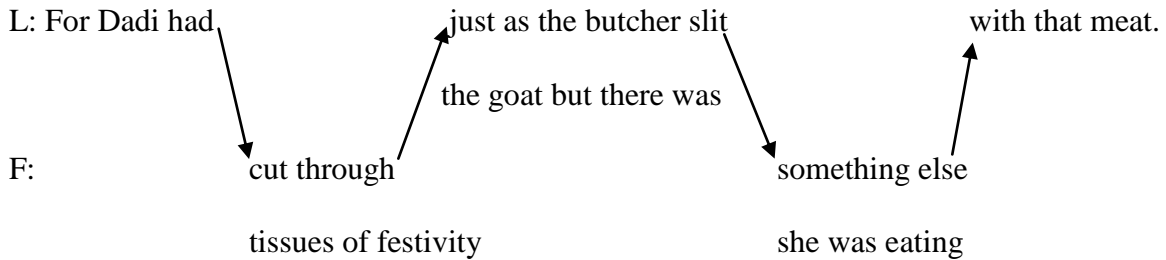
Strength of the group: 5 students
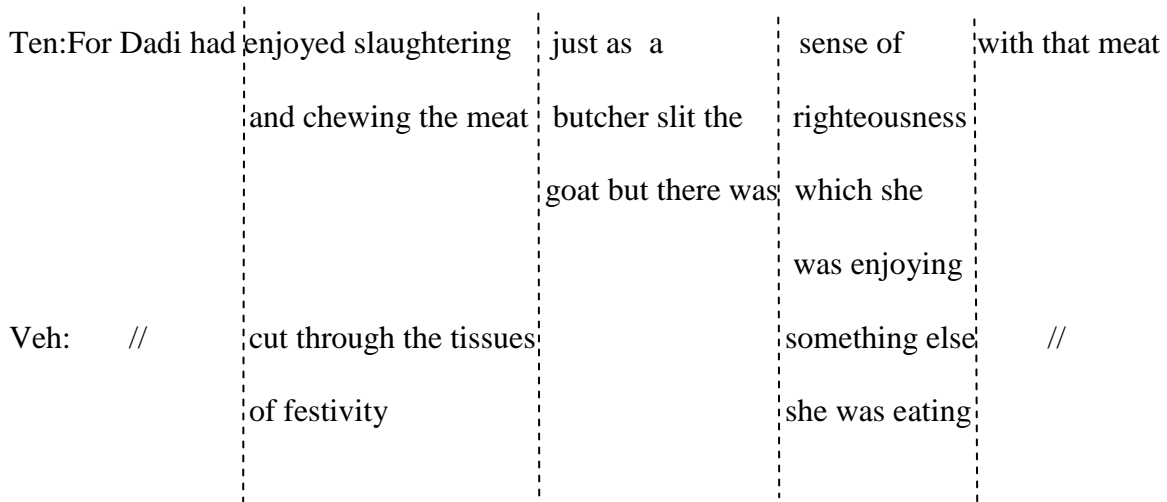Activity: Each student should find ten metaphors concerning food and analyze them.

Here follows an example:

> For Dadi had cut through tissues of festivity just as the butcher
> slit the goat, but there was something else that she was eating
> with that meat. (Suleri 1990, p.5)

Stage I

L: For Dadi had   just as the butcher slit   with that meat.

           the goat but there was

F: cut through   something else

        tissues of festivity   she was eating

Stage II

Ten: For Dadi had	enjoyed slaughtering and chewing the meat	just as a butcher slit the goat but there was	sense of righteousness which she was enjoying	with that meat
Veh: //	cut through the tissues of festivity		something else she was eating	//

Stage III
Ground:

Dadi's extremely assertive religiosity is compared with a butcher's cutting the tissues of the goat. It is this sense of self assertion which Dadi enjoys in addition to the taste of meat. Sacrifice is compensation for her being a non-entity.

(a) Source Domain → **Target Domain**

Cutting through the tissues of an → Consummation of getting pleasure
animal's flesh while butchering it.   from the festival.

 Butcher is to goat → What Dadi is to festivity.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
12 : 2 February 2012
Ghulam Murtaza, Ph.D. (English) Scholar & Abdul Baseer, Ph.D. (English) Candidate
Teaching Writing Literary Prose through Metaphor Analysis   503

A butcher slaughters the goat to → Dadi enjoys the festival and self-assertion;
earn his living; religion is   religion is peripheral.
something peripheral.

(b) Source Domain   →   **Target Domain**
Belief in God gives a sense of having → Something else she was eating.
a right faith.

Sense of right faith gives   → Eating gives satisfaction and satiation.
self-assurance.

Belief in and performance of a   → Eating gives Dadi sense of accomplishment.
religious ritual gives relief and
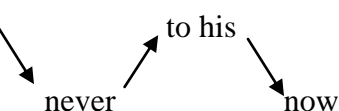spiritual accomplishment

Now, how to carry out this activity if there are five students in a group? If each of them analyses ten metaphors, the group activity will provide analysis of fifty metaphors. The group then can mature this activity into an essay on the chapter which will give a fair cross section of how and what the text carries under the denotative layer of the language.

Consider the analysis of three metaphors form *Papa and Pakistan*, a chapter of *Meatless Days:*

Example1
        It was hardly simple playing the part of never to his now (Suleri 1990,

p.110).

<u>Stage I</u>

L: It was hardly simple playing the part of   to his

 F: never   now

<u>Stage II</u>

Ten: It was hardly simple playing the part of | extreme | to his | extreme

| submission | | assertion

Veh: // | never | // | now

Stage III
Ground

These metaphors show Suleri's use of bathetic: she develops the narrative about critical moment in history and then lets the situation fall to her home to reveal the respective status of man and woman there and by implication in Pakistan in general. In this sentence, the adverbs of frequency, never and now, metaphorically represent the condition of living of women and men respectively in Pakistan. Suleri takes "now and never" (110), the title of the pamphlet published by three students at Cambridge, develops it into a sentence "Are we to live or perish forever?"(110), feels it to be a particularly Pakistani question, and then concretizes and specifies it with reference to the example of her father who always occupied the assertive position of 'now' and placed the members of his family, especially women, at suppressed position of 'never'. He ate up his family's 'now' leaving behind 'never' to sustain his 'now'. In Mr. Suleri's frame of mind women could never step beyond the limits of the commodity meant to serve man. This was normal and any other pattern of thought, a marked situation that proposed a different status for her was unthinkable for him:

Example 2

> The Quaid, with an added twist, in my Pip's impassioned discourse at home became the father (Suleri 1990, p.113).

Stage I

L: The Quaid with an   in my Pip's impassioned
                               discourse at home became

F: added twist   the father.

Stage II
Ten: The Quaid with a(n) reverential   in my Pip's impassioned   his second self
                          semantic addition discourse at home became
Veh: //   added twist   //   the father

Stage III
Ground
Sara Suleri's father made Mr Jinnah the father from the Quaid , thus bringing him down to his own level: Mr. Suleri, a father, can best see Jinnah as the father so that both of them be mutually inclusive.

Suleri herself has manhandled lexis in the given chunk of language. Comments on Jinnah serve as an indirect satiric attack on her father: Despite that Jinnah manhandled Pakistan into being, that he acted his pretentious role excellently to maintain his distinguished position in history, Mr Suleri, unable to see through the surface, was swept away by his charismatic personality because he himself was Jinnah at heart in the sense that he manhandled his family as long as he could: he divorced his cousin wife, married a white-legged lady in England, maintained his god-like position at home, always dealt with his home as if it were his world and he liked the children to congregate in his room at tea time(Suleri 1990, p.7). Mr Suleri's glorification of Jinnah is actually glorification of a part of himself, the part that always exercised unquestioned authority at home. The next two metaphors support this interpretation of Suleri's character.

Example 3

> Papa's delight in the babies often implied that they were a respite after he had dealt with the day's true significance (Suleri 1990, p.118).

Stage I

L: Papa's delight…they were a   after he had…true significance.

F: respite

Stage II

Ten: Papa's delight…they   provided leisurely time of after he…true significance

                                no significance for vane

                                   hobby-like activity

                                    for relaxation.

Veh: Papa's delight…they   were a respite.   after he…true

                                                            significance

Stage III
Ground

The similarity between respite and babies is insignificance of both for Mr. Suleri who as a father took his children worth no consideration in life. The last clause of the sentence directs the reader to interpret the word "respite" in this sense. The babies, it seems, were only unwanted by-products of his emotional and physical catharsis. As a natural reaction, they were to leave their father and they left which he could only ill-afford and ill-digest.

Example 4

>He still believed he had a veto power over his children (Suleri 1990,
>
>p.121).

Stage I

L: He still believed he had a ↘ ↗ over his children.

F: veto power

Stage II

Ten: He still believed he had a (n) ┆ absolute unquestioned power to reject. ┆ over his

                                                        children.

 Veh: //   veto power.   //

Stage III

Ground

Mr Suleri's role in the family is the same as that of a permanent member of "security council": any proposition is accepted or rejected depending upon veto power bearer's arbitrary sweet will. Mr Suleri enjoyed absolute authority at his home throughout his life but towards the end of his good days, things started falling apart and the centre started losing its certitude and sanctity. But Suleri is unable to see, recognize and admit the change.

Example 5

>He could not understand that he made a separation in his head between himself and Ifat's children. "They belong to their father", he told us angrily, "you cannot interfere" (Suleri 1990, p.126).

Stage I

L: They ↘ ↗ their father

F: belong to

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
12 : 2 February 2012
Ghulam Murtaza, Ph.D. (English) Scholar & Abdul Baseer, Ph.D. (English) Candidate
Teaching Writing Literary Prose through Metaphor Analysis   507

Stage II

Ten: They	are property of	their father
Veh: //	belong to	//

Stage III

Ground

As woman herself is a commodity to be owned by man, she cannot own anything else, another commodity, namely children, nor can a commodity inherit anything to another commodity. When she ceases to exist, she loses her recognition in parents and roots in children. All privileges in Pakistani society fall to the father who is the owner of the things like wives and children, and no one can interfere in his ownership.

When all the students will complete their analyses, the class will have a joint session to share what they have done and to be able to put in one paragraph the overlapping interpretations. In this process new groups can also be formed. The students number can preferably be fixed to keep equal number of students in all the groups to encourage sharing and sense of team work but of course it is not the last word; the teacher knows his class and individual differences and caliber of the students. And this article is offering only one possible strategy for class work expecting all innovations and adjustments.

Here follows an example of a paragraph developed out of a metaphor-analysis following the given model:

Papa was a man of absolutely dictatorial temperament. His inspiration from history was Muhammad Ali Jinnah whom, in his impassioned discourse, he called the Father, a counterpart or second self of Papa himself. Referring to him as the Father meant that Papa wanted to occupy the same status at home as he carried in history. He extended this authority, got from historical analogy, to his home as well: he behaved towards his children as though they were something insignificant as compared to his political activities and he exercised his veto power over his children reducing them to a powerless minority pushed to the margin. They were bound to play secondary and subordinate role to Papa's unquestionable authority.	Introductory sentence Supporting Detail Exemplification Conclusion

With the required modification Bright's group activity for Parents' Day can be adjusted to our need of classroom activity (Bright and McGregor, 1970, p.174):

Group 1   Papa's Domineering Temperament
Group 2   Papa's Attitude towards Children
Group 3   Papa's Air of Self-Importance
Group 4   Attitude towards Dadi
Group 5   Attitude towards Mamma

Then through a brain storming activity introductory paragraph of the essay can be developed by interaction between the teacher and the students in which the students would of course play the central role and the teacher would be a facilitator. Or the group leaders can be given the joint task of developing the missing links and introduction and conclusion of the essay. The teacher would at the end give his own input to make some addition or deletions or corrections if necessary. The final manuscripts would go to library and its copies would go to every student. It will of course evolve by repeated errors and inputs and it may take a week or so but it will contribute towards making the classroom activity meaningful.

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