

THE USE OF POETRY IN TEFL: LITERATURE IN THE NEW LEBANESE CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I demonstrate how the analysis of the language of poetic selections could be the basis for TEFL lessons. To illustrate, I use sample selections from the poetry of two Lebanese-American poets namely Ameen Rihani's *The Chant of Mystics* and Gibran Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet*.

Nowadays, more arguments support the relevance of using literature to the teaching of a foreign language, and discuss the usefulness of the linguistic analysis of literature for pedagogical purposes.

The New National Curriculum of Education put into effect in Lebanon beginning academic year 1998-1999 differs radically from the old one in methodology, approach, and distribution of cycles. The new curriculum adopts the content-based approach, which allows for the possibility of using literary texts as one source of content. My major focus in this paper is on the use of poetry in the secondary cycle of the Lebanese English curriculum. The poetic selections handled are rich in their vocabulary and structures, which allows for a variety of activities. Whether we are teaching a foreign language or even a native one, literature is a highly recommended vehicle for a number of reasons. In such cases, focus on the language paves the way for a meaningful and rewarding literary appreciation.

KEY WORDS

ESL/EFL, linguistics and poetry, vocabulary, parallelism, coherence, cohesion, Gibran, Rihani, antonyms, awareness, cloze, curriculum, sound patterns, structures.

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RESUMEN

En este artículo, demuestro cómo el análisis de la lengua de selecciones poéticas puede ser la base de la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera. Para aclarar esto, uso muestras de selecciones de la poesía de dos poetas líbano-americanos que son Ameen Rihani (El canto de los místicos), y Gibrán Kahlil Gibrán (El profeta).

Actualmente hay más argumentos que apoyan la aplicabilidad del uso de la literatura para la enseñanza de una lengua extranjera, y un discurso del análisis lingüístico de la literatura para propósitos pedagógicos. El Nuevo Programa Nacional de la Educación que se puso en aplicación en Líbano desde el comienzo del año académico 1998-1999, difiere radicalmente del antiguo en la metodología, en el enfoque, y en la distribución de los ciclos. El nuevo programa adopta el enfoque temático que posibilita el uso de textos literarios como fuente de satisfacción.

Mi foco principal en este trabajo es el de la poesía en el ciclo secundario del programa libanés. Las selecciones poéticas manejadas son ricas por su vocabulario y sus estructuras, lo que da paso a actividades variadas. Sea que enseñemos una lengua extranjera o una lengua nativa, la literatura es altamente recomendada como vehículo por varias razones. En estos casos centrarse en la lengua facilita el camino para una apreciación literaria significativa y apreciable.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Inglés como lengua extranjera, lingüística y poesía, vocabulario, paralelismo, coherencia, cohesión, Gibrán, Rihani, antónimos, conciencia, "cloze", currículo, pautas de sonido, estructuras.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans cet article, j'ai montré comment l'analyse de la langue de quelques morceaux poétiques peut être l'objet des leçons TEFL.

Pour ce faire, j'ai choisi des extraits de deux oeuvres de poètes libano-américains: (Le Chant des Mystiques) d'Ameen Rihani et (Le Prophète) de Gibran Kahlil Gibran. Actuellement, on souligne de plus en plus la pertinence de l'analyse de textes littéraires dans l'enseignement d'une langue étrangère et on reconnaît l'utilité de l'analyse linguistique de la littérature au niveau pédagogique. Les nouveaux programmes libanais qui ont été mis en application à partir de l'année académique 1998-1999 diffèrent radicalement des anciens programmes au niveau de la méthodologie, de l'approche et de la distribution des cycles. Ils adoptent l'approche thématique et regardent les textes littéraires comme l'une des sources de contenus.

Mon principal intérêt était l'usage de la poésie dans le cycle secondaire des nouveaux programmes de la langue anglaise. Les extraits poétiques choisis sont riches en vocabulaires et en structures, permettant ainsi une grande variété d'activités. Qu'il s'agisse de l'enseignement d'une langue étrangère ou

d'une langue maternelle, la littérature est un bon outil par de multiples raisons. Dans de tels cas, mettre l'accent sur la langue facilite une approche utile et prometteuse de la littérature.

MOTS-CLÉ

ALE (L'anglais en tant que langue étrangère), linguistique et poésie, vocabulaire, parallélisme, cohérence, cohésion, Gibran, Rihani, antonymes, consociation, "cloze" ou "exercices à trous", programme, récurrences phoniques, structures.

Literary selections are a rewarding vehicle for teaching a foreign language. Yet, this literary 'vehicle' is not the sole means leading to the acquisition of a foreign language. Its use alongside other means is rewarding. The literary selections give the students the opportunity to find out how the same theme could be handled in different types of texts and literary genres; and hence, they are able to compare styles and techniques. Carter (1988, p. 18) believes that "...the juxtaposition of literary and non-literary discourses in the classroom emerges as a strong teaching recommendation."

Moreover, Stern (1991, pp. 328-329) maintains that "Literature offers potential benefits of a high order for English as a second or foreign language (*ESL/EFL*). Linguistically, literature can help students enrich their vocabulary and consolidate the four language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Numerous activities involving the students' application of these skills can be developed around the reading of a literary work." "Literary texts...[are] probably the richest source of verbal context. When students encounter a word in the literary work it is enriched in a complex of meaning-generating relationships" (Boretz et al., p. 60). Carter (1988, pp. 16-17) maintains that "What is clear, however, is that there is growing recognition that integration of language and literature can be of mutual benefit in the context of foreign or second-language education..."

Furthermore, the characteristics of verse such as rhyme, meter, etc. and the elements of narrative literature namely plot, character, setting, and theme, help promote reading comprehension by presenting special challenges to readers which demand that they learn to put into practice specific reading strategies. In this respect, literary selections provide the subject matter, the context, and the inspiration for numerous written and oral activities so that a single literary work becomes the central focus of a study unit. As opposed to materials written espe-

cially for ESL/EFL, literature may motivate students and, hopefully, help them develop the habit of reading both in and out of class.

Therefore, in addition to its important linguistic potential, literature provides the opportunity for the students to get acquainted with universal human experiences through the heritage of a particular nation, and hopefully, learn to become more tolerant. Collie and Slater (1987, pp. 3-4) on their part, emphasize that literature addresses basic human concerns which transcend cultural and generational gaps, this reading experience is "an understanding of life in the country where that language is spoken". Moreover, and most importantly, literature widens the intellectual horizons and helps the learners appreciate the aesthetics of artistic creation. As Stern (1991, p. 329) quotes, "Beyond the linguistic and cultural benefits literature provides, it fosters cognitive and aesthetic maturation (Gregg & Pacheco, 1981), develops the ability to make critical and mature judgments (Hargreaves, 1969), develops a feeling and appreciation for the language (Shumaker, 1975), and has the capacity to move the reader (Slager & Marckwardt, 1975).

As a conclusion from all the above discussion on the rich potential of literature, Stern (1991, p. 330) raises a very important question, "As ESL/EEL professionals we must ask ourselves how to translate these potentials into classroom practice."

A significant role can be played by applied linguistics and stylistics in analyzing the literary texts and assisting in laying the basis for lesson planning. In other words, open venues between linguistics and pedagogy are to be widened; although those between linguistics and literature are not quite paved yet. Van Peer (1989, p. 2) maintains that "the relationship between linguistics and literature grew much colder, and it has not really been a very close one since. Sometimes happy moments are recorded, especially in the field of stylistics." Nevertheless, despite all argument and criticism, Carter (1988, p. 161) affirms "that stylistics is essentially a bridge discipline between linguistics and literature"; he adds, "it is inevitable that there will be arguments about the design of the bridge, its purpose, the nature of the materials and about the side it should be built from. Some would even claim it is unnecessary to build the bridge at all." To start building the 'bridge', it is necessary to restructure the division of some of our university departments. Some universities have two separate departments for linguistics and literature with no communication or cooperation. In such cases the bridges need to be constructed between faculty and students specially in the area of research projects.

So, if we agree that literature in general is an important source for language teaching, I believe that poetic selections in particular are very rich in their linguistic potential; yet, teachers of no linguistic background are skeptical of this challenge; it goes without saying that not all EFL teachers are expected to be trained linguists and stylisticians, nor that all the results of the linguistic analysis should and could go into the actual teaching lesson, and equally at all levels of education. On the other hand, not all linguists and stylisticians are trained in preparing EFL materials, or are expected to be sensitive to classroom demands at all levels. This raises the need for consolidating the cooperation among all parties involved, and creating a team spirit among them to achieve a global and comprehensive outcome. Hence, in preparing EFL textbooks, it is recommended that committees include practitioners in addition to linguists and stylisticians.

Furthermore, the difficulties that a teacher might encounter in a language lesson based on a literary text are many and varied. Literary texts, poetry in particular, are unique and distinctive pieces of artistic creation with complex linguistic difficulties. These merit a number of pre-reading activities and 'teaching' exercises in order to acquaint the students with this dimension of language usage. In my experience of teaching English literature to high school students, those students with linguistic training in the literary selections prior to the literary appreciation performed *significantly* better than their peers who were asked to handle the same selections without any linguistic pre-reading activities. Furthermore, in a seminar for graduate students on *Linguistic and Poetry*, students were quick to apply techniques across texts; they did linguistic analysis of assigned poetic selections, then used their analysis to plan teaching lessons to a specific grade level. The experience was rewarding to them as their attitude towards literature changed positively, and since most of them were EFL teachers, they found the information they learned in the seminar practical and relevant. Literature was no more boring and irrelevant in this age where everything is electronically programmed and remotely controlled.

The linguistic analysis of literary texts is of relevance not only for TEFL settings but also for linguistic research at large, and literary criticism and appreciation. In this paper, I will limit my analysis of literature only to poetry. The suggested exercises deal with vocabulary items and sentence structures in the selections. As Stern (1991, p. 330) believes, "In dealing with vocabulary and grammar as part of literature study in ESL/EFL, instruction should help students understand the work

being read *and* help them further master English.” We have to keep in mind, however, that modern poetry, with its variety of deviation from the conventions, offers major problems in TEFL; however, such selections should be delayed until the students are advanced enough to be able to handle them. Furthermore, recurring elements in parallel structures could be the source of a variety of exercises at different levels as shall be illustrated later. The poetic works I have chosen for analysis and lesson planning, abound in parallelism and repetition; thus, inspire a variety of language activities. Jakobson (1960, p. 602), believes that “any noticeable reiteration of the same grammatical concept becomes an effective poetic device”, and he emphasizes the importance of parallelism, reiteration, and repetition of syntactic structures in poetry. Hence, when we draw the students’ attention to these symmetries, we help them in their understanding of the whole structure, and consequently prepare them for a reliable well-grounded appreciation of the work. McRae (1996, p. 17) emphasizes that “it is fundamental to any learner’s knowledge about language and of a language system that rules, structures, and grammar be acquired”, because in handling literary texts, they will have to learn how to handle deviant structures for instance and see how “... the rules are questioned, played around with, and put to different uses” (1996, p. 17). Furthermore, certain modern poetry is an extreme case of deviant syntax and bending of rules. Students would be glad to find their imagination and creativity being challenged specially if they had been equipped with the norms against which to measure. In representational materials there are hidden textual secrets which need to be uncovered, unearthed, and surfaced with clear linguistic skills. In this masterly operation, styles and techniques differ; yet, no one solution reigns, but many seem acceptable if workable and convincingly evidenced.

On the other hand, it is important to train students in the process of multiple readings of the same text, and focusing in every reading on a specific linguistic structure or device. Birch (1989, p. 11) believes that in the analysis of any text “there is no final point at which you can declare that you have found *the* meaning or reached the final, definitive interpretation.” Faced with this fact, it is encouraging for students to know that their teacher’s response is not necessarily the one and only acceptable rendition of the text; they will be encouraged to come up with their own. They should be encouraged to participate in the learning process and get more involved in the lesson. As Carter and McRae note in their introduction (p. xxii) “the orientation is away

from teacher-centredness towards language-based, student-centered activities which aim to involve students with the text...", adding, "the channel of communication between teacher and student will cease to be exclusively one-way, there will be a proportion of group and pair work appropriate to the nature of the activities which will in turn be those appropriate to the particular text". This will certainly enhance their critical thinking. Thorne (1989, pp. 280-281) affirms that "...Poetry...typically generates multiple meanings...This implies that both 'obvious' and 'non-obvious' meanings must emerge into a coherent interpretation". Moreover, when the students work on one selection and then are exposed to another by the same author, they will be able to handle structures of the same style by the principle of intertextuality. Besides, if they read another selection on the same theme but in a different style, they will even find more to learn about concerning the richness of language and the way genres differ in treating the same theme.

Theoretically therefore, when language activities are drawn from and built around a specific literary text, their components become thematically coherent in addition to their linguistic cohesion. So, we no more have a series of sentences in an exercise with a variety of non related mental frameworks. In this respect, the literary text is a rich resource for a language lesson which would, hopefully, become less boring and more challenging.

In this paper, I focus on poetic selections by two Lebanese writers in English; namely Ameen Rihani and Gibran Kahlil Gibran. The selections are chosen respectively from *A Chant of Mystics* (1921) and *The Prophet* (1923). While reading both, selections from Rihani's poetry in an applied linguistics seminar and *The Prophet* for translation purposes, I noticed a great deal of repeated syntactic structures and grammatical patterns; as well as a juxtaposition of ideas represented by a series of antonyms. This made me decide that such selections have high potential for teaching grammar and vocabulary within related thematic teaching units.

The exercises target the first secondary class students (Grade 10), the native language of the students is Arabic, and English is their first foreign language. The average age of the students is 16.

The poetic selection comprises one or two lessons out of ten in a thematic unit, the remaining lessons are based on prose texts dealing with the same theme; so, poetry comes as a different way of handling the same theme. McRae (1996, p. 17) distinguishes between referential

materials and representational materials with literature belonging to the latter. However, the use of referential material should precede and form the background for the use of the representational one, i.e. the output of one stage becomes the input to the following one, or at least both would be used concurrently pending the level of the learner and the level of difficulty of the text.

The actual application of the use of poetic selections in a TEFL class goes gradually through a series of steps. The exercises or activities must vary to include the four linguistic skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing; and aim as well to develop critical thinking on the part of the students, and to create cultural awareness of the content. The steps I propose are the following:

1. Create awareness of vocabulary, and poetic structures and patterns.
2. Train identification of similar instances.
3. Train production.
4. Test knowledge using similar authentic texts.

This is in line with McRae's proposition that the learning process goes through three stages of development, "... the development of language awareness, leading on to text awareness, and indeed to cultural awareness –all are seen as part of the ongoing process of helping language learners become better, more aware readers of any kind of text" (1996, p. 16).

Hence, after the students read or listen to a selection, we could begin by a short oral response to certain issues attesting comprehension. Next, we could begin by sample *teaching* exercises in which the students are made aware of vocabulary items related by association and relations of antonymy; when these items are learned, students could move on to the structures in which the learned lexical items appear. Activities then will handle those poetic structures which exemplify cases of inversion, parallelism, ellipsis, enjambment, etc. Then, we could move on to *identification* of similar instances of usage in other parts of the same selection. The next step would be one of *production* exercises in which students handle data similar to the material learned. The final step would be the *testing* exercises which the students are expected to be ready for. The types of *testing exercises* of vocabulary and structures would be built around selections from other parts of the same work by the same author. This renders the components of the exercise

thematically related and stylistically similar; hence, the vocabulary items and syntactic structures would be concordant to those learned in the lessons; thus, appropriate and relevant.

In his book *The Language of Poetry*, McRae suggests a diversity of activities related to a variety of poetic selections. For instance, McRae draws attention to the element of sound in poetry. Sound patterns in poetry contribute a lot to the establishment of the mood; moreover, the repetition of certain sounds also embody a message and intensify its connotation. Sound is one of the devices which students find interesting and respond to with enthusiasm. My students learned how to develop a sensitivity to certain sound patterns; they became aware not only of alliteration and end rhyme, but were able to identify repetition of initial sounds in consecutive verses, assonance, consonance, eye-rhyme, and other sound combinations which otherwise would have passed ignored. They were encouraged to trace such devices, and they were further challenged to find out whether such devices are functional in one way or another. It was not difficult for them to identify patterns, but they had to find out the message, if any, embodied in the pattern; otherwise, a repetition lost its aesthetic value whenever it was not proven functional.

I will begin with selections from Rihani's *A Chant of Mystics*, then move to selections from Gibran's *The Prophet*. It is important to note that the style of the poet recurs in more than one section of his work; therefore, the students' attention is first drawn to the vocabulary items used as well as to certain structures and patterns; then, the students would be asked to identify similar instances of vocabulary use and similar structures and patterns in other parts of the same work; they are further asked to complete a cloze test and supply missing vocabulary, and to construct structures or patterns similar to the ones learned; and finally, tested on selections which contain the same vocabulary and similar constructions. It is true that Rihani's language as well as Gibran's language are rather 'archaic', but I thought that including these passages, along others from different periods, is important for many reasons. I want our students to get acquainted with Lebanese-American writers and at the same time heighten their awareness to extreme cases of patterned poetic structures.

SELECTIONS FROM RIHANI'S *A CHANT OF MYSTICS*

I

1. *FROM the Mist of Arcana we rise,*
2. *Through the Universe of Secrets we come,*
3. And we enter the Tavern as Lovers,
4. Whose features are *pale as the false dawn,*
5. Whose statures are *lean as the new moon.*
6. *Like unto a jar is the body,*
7. And the soul in the jar
8. Is the silvery voice of the Fountain,
9. Is the rose-scented breath of the Mountain,

It is interesting to study the order of the structures in *lines 1 & 2*, the similes in *lines 4 & 5*, and the inversion in *line 6*. Later, students could be asked to identify similar structures in other parts of the same selection. For example, in *lines 10-22*:

10. For your sake we have come
11. In the shape of a jar from the Sea;
12. For your sake we have come as Disgrace,
13. But glory incarnate are we.
14. For the sake of the world we dance (99)
15. O'er the flame, on the point of the lance.
16. Think us not mortal, for we
17. Are the light on the foam of the sea. (100)
18. And into the skies
19. From the Universe of Secrets we're hurled.
20. We are the Truth,
21. And into the skies
22. From the Mists of Arcana we rise.

Section II of the selection, contains interesting use of vocabulary:

II

1. In the light of the day, in the stars of the night we behold
2. The face of the Master, the feet of the Pilgrim of old;
3. In the sigh of the wind and the voice of the thunder we hear
4. The plaint of the bard and the rhapsodic chant of the seer.
5. Without them, alas, we are dumb,
6. Though not deaf to the flute and the drum. But the vision is true,
7. Allahu, Allahu!
8. They are garbed in blue,

9. Allahu, Allahu!
10. They are drenched with dew,
11. Allahu, Allahu! (101)

I. This section contains the following associations which could be the basis of many activities both oral and written:

- a* light and day, stars and night (1)
- b* face and Master, feet and Pilgrim (2)
- c* sigh and wind, voice and thunder (3)
- d* plaint and bard, chant and seer (4)
- e* deaf and flute and drum (6)

The sets in a & b are associated with the sense of sight. The sets in c, d & e are associated with the related senses of hearing and speaking. The words associated with the senses are: behold, hear, dumb, deaf, vision. After creating awareness of the use of vocabulary in section II, the students could be asked to tabulate the information in columns of senses, of related sense organs, and of the derived verbs e.g. the sense of sight, the eyes, see or behold.

II. Antonyms.

The words used are antonyms of different kinds:

- a* light/stars, day/night (1)
- b* face/feet, Master/Pilgrim (2)
- c* sigh/voice, wind/thunder (3)
- d* plaint/chant, bard/seer (4)
- e* deaf/flute and drum (6)

In section III, the poet uses other antonyms which the student can be asked to identify:

III

1. Yea, Man is as near the Beloved
2. As far from the world he may be;
3. He is full of the beauty of Allah
4. As he's void of the *Thou* and the *Me*. (104)
5. And taste of the ecstasy.
6. Come to the Tavern where nectar
7. And wine are a-flow as the sea.
8. For only the drunken are sober,
9. And only the fettered are free. (105)

These antonyms are:

- a* *near* and *far* (1 & 2),
- b* *full* and *void* (3 & 4)
- c* *drunken* and *sober* (8)
- d* *fettered* and *free* (9)

These can be the basis for a cloze exercise in which the students come up with antonyms. Other sections from the same work could be used for further testing sentence structure and vocabulary. For example, in the following section below, we also have a number of vocabulary items associated with each other or with the senses. This section can also be used for teaching/testing exercises such as a cloze exercise; e.g. we could delete some of the items in italics:

What place have your *meat* and your *bread*
 Where we were first *born*, and first *fed*
 Through our *eye* and our *ear*?
 And now, without *eyes* we can *see*,
 Without *tongues* we can *speak*,
 Without *ears* we can *hear*.
 And when the *clouds* and the *storms* of the Mind
 Darken and shut out the skies,
 We kindle the torch of the Heart,
 Which we give to the mighty and wise. (112)

SELECTIONS FROM GIBRAN'S *THE PROPHET*

The following selections are from Gibran's *The Prophet*. It is important to note that the variety of themes, referred to as 'sermons', around which *The Prophet* revolves allows for using selections in many teaching units.

On Love

1. When love beckons to you, follow him,
2. Though his ways are hard and steep.
3. And when his wings enfold you yield to him,
4. Though the sword hidden among his pinions may wound you.
5. And when he speaks to you believe in him,
6. Though his voice may shatter your dreams as the north wind lays waste the garden. (10)

We notice that Gibran in this selection uses parallel structures. Each structure begins with a When-clause setting a condition which must be fulfilled, followed by 'warning' of or 'notwithstanding' a certain fact; thus, the structure 'When... action, ... reaction, though ...' is repeated three times:

1. when ... beckons, ... follow, though ...
2. when ... enfold, ... yield, though ...
3. when ... speaks, ... believe in, though ...

After the students are made aware of this perfect perfect parallelism, they can be asked to look for other parallel structures later in the text. For instance, the selection continues with parallel structures of comparison based on the pattern '*even as ... so*':

7. For even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you.
8. Even as he is for your growth so is he for your pruning.
9. Even as he ascends to your height and caresses your tenderest branches that quiver in the sun,
10. So shall he descend to your roots and shake them in their clinging to the earth.

In lines 7-10, we notice the following repeated structures; these structures, in addition to their repeated syntactic forms, contain three parallel patterns of antonymous relations:

1. even as ... crown, so shall ... crucify
2. even as ... for growth, so is ... for pruning
3. even as ... ascend, so shall ... descend

We also notice the following pairs of antonyms:

1. crown/crucify
2. growth/pruning
3. ascend/descend
4. caress/shake
5. branches/roots

The selection On Love continues as follows:

11. Like sheaves of corn he gathers you unto himself.
12. He threshes you to make you naked.
13. He sifts you to free you from your husks.
14. He grinds you to whiteness.
15. He kneads you until you are pliant;

16. And then he assigns you to his sacred fire, that you may become sacred bread for God's sacred feast. (11)

We notice that in this section, Gibran uses an extended metaphor built around the complete process of preparing bread; it begins by gathering sheaves of corn, and continues in the processes of threshing, sifting, grinding, kneading, and finally assigning to fire. So, the students can learn all this related vocabulary. Besides, we could scramble the lines and ask the students to reorder them guided by the normal process of bread-making. They could further be asked to develop a well-organized process paragraph.

Other selections from *The Prophet*, reveal similar repetition of parallel syntactic structures and related vocabulary. Such selections could be the basis for building awareness as well as teaching/testing exercises.

In the selection entitled *On Work*, Gibran ends one line with a word which appears in the line which follows somewhat in a spiral pattern; the syntactic structure is also repeated with all its elements:

1. And I say that life is indeed darkness *save when there is urge*,
2. And all *urge* is blind *save when there is knowledge*,
3. And all *knowledge* is vain *save when there is work*,
4. And all *work* is empty *save when there is love*;
5. And when you work with *love* you bind yourself to yourself, and to one another, and to God. (33)

In the following selection, lines 1-4 reveal repetition of parallel structures, and coherence through recurrence of the same words/ideas; line 5 wraps up the discussion, thus:

1. life is darkness *save when* there is *urge*,
2. *urge* is blind *save when* there is *knowledge*,
3. *knowledge* is vain *save when* there is *work*,
4. *work* is empty *save when* there is *love*;
5. And when you work with *love* you bind yourself to yourself, and to one another, and to God. (33)

These are some activities that could be used in teaching poetic selections, and as McRae rightly says, "there can be more!" (1998, p. 141), and as many as the texts suggest, and depending on the level of the students. Yet, after all these pieces which constitute a poem

and all these elements which contribute to its structure are examined, it is vital to move one step forward and find out how the interaction and interplay of these elements contribute to the over all structure and to its cohesion. The study of the interrelations between the components is essential for putting life into the text and understanding how it functions, and how it realizes its message. Only after this step has been accomplished can we explain, justify, or revise our first impressions. All these activities do not only aim to accomplish linguistic competence or appreciation of the aesthetic elements, but also to create cultural awareness on the part of the students. Therefore, the literature text is not to be used exclusively as a source for teaching a language; so after careful study of its linguistic structures, vocabulary, etc., due attention should be given to a text's 'literary' characteristics. This aesthetic dimension of the literary work would certainly, as hoped for, become a source of joyful activity after its linguistic obstacles have been surpassed.

It is also hoped that all these techniques will be transferred across similar texts, as well as in comparison with other genres of texts which handle differently similar themes. Furthermore, it is safe to say that these activities can be used not only in TEFL/TESL situations but also in the native language setting. Sensitivity to the language of poetry requires training which pays. When readers of poetry, for whatever purpose, focus on the intricacies of language, they become sensitive to language in any text, in any context, and in any language. When teachers, students, linguists, translators, and all those who use language as a means, or a tool, or an end develop sensitivity to texts, they will be able to understand not only *what* is being said but also *how* it is said. Literature is not necessarily easier to tackle in the native language because of its inherent characteristics or what is referred to as literariness. So, if students have the chance to read literature in their native language, and to get training in analyzing its structures and the various connotations of its lexis, this will have positive repercussions on the EFL classes. Certainly, attaining a 'threshold level' in literary competence in the native language facilitates the transfer of the necessary techniques into the foreign language literature.

Such classroom activities, as outlined above, relate positively to the objectives outlined in the new national Lebanese curriculum put into effect beginning academic year 1998-1999. This new curriculum represents a radical change from the old one. In the old curriculum, the elementary and intermediate classes were pure language classes; whereas syllabuses for the first and the second secondary classes were pure lit-

erature-based. In two years, students were required to “study, enjoy, and appreciate” (I quote the old official curriculum) 94 literary *canons* in the literary section (58 poems) and 48 in the scientific (30 poems). However, in the third secondary year, the last before they enter college, English classes focused around introductions to philosophy, logic, and ethics. The secondary classes had no language component in their syllabi. Vocabulary, grammar, and all the linguistic skills were mentioned in the objectives, but were never directly taught or tested.

Hence, after the pure language classes of the elementary and intermediate cycles, the students jump over a deep abyss into pure literature classes, poorly equipped both in their linguistic proficiency as well as academic writing. Moreover, after two years of almost exclusive literature training, students are completely cut off from literature per se to face a new component no less difficult and challenging where they have to handle philosophy, logic, and ethics. So, by the end of the secondary cycle, the students are laden with information in a language framework which does not quite match that bulk of knowledge.

So, and based on my own personal teaching experience according to the old curriculum, “...the students’ proficiency in English did not help them to handle literary texts in general and poetry in particular. They were asked to read and understand poetry without having had any preparation for what, at times, seemed to be another foreign language.” Furthermore, “poetic works included inherent problems, linguistic and otherwise, which have proved to be a real obstacle to the process of comprehension, and consequently literary appreciation” (Nasr 11). Needless to say that the linguistic and content problems get even more intense in the selections from psychology, logic, and ethics.

Now, in the new curriculum, which adopts the content-based approach, literature is no longer an independent component; the focus is on the teaching of language, and a literary selection may or may not be included in the teaching unit. The new curriculum integrates language and content based on the conviction that this is effective in improving proficiency both at the linguistic level and in the content framework; “consequently, students acquire language proficiency while they continue to develop cognitively and to reinforce their knowledge of content by further exposure to the content presented in new forms” (E. L. Cur, p. 59). Hopefully, this new national English curriculum is expected to bridge a series of gaps. These are the gaps between all the cycles especially between the intermediate and the secondary, and

between the second secondary and the third secondary, and without doubt between the final school year and the first year of college.

The Lebanese official Decree no. 10227, issued in 1997 gives the details of the English Language curriculum (English as both First and Second foreign language), lists the curricular objectives, outlines the corresponding instructional objectives, and details the grammar objectives. A list of thematic themes chosen from current issues is also provided, and this is supposed to heighten the motivation of the students. The new objectives introduced are the Thinking Skills Objectives which have to do with logical reasoning, the Study Skills Objectives focusing on the "ability to synthesize information from different sources," and the Cultural Awareness Objectives which emphasize "understanding of cultural attitudes and situations... and universal themes." These objectives focus on "developing students' critical thinking skills (analytical and synthetic), developing intercultural understanding and appreciation, promoting students' positive attitudes toward the target language and culture, and enhancing students' abilities to work with others" (General ed. Cur, p. 148). The emphasis of the New Framework for Education in Lebanon drawn in 1995 is "on creating a citizen who is proficient in at least one foreign language in order to promote openness to and interaction with other cultures" (General ed. Cur, p. 146).

Hence, one of the challenges is that students will have to change their study habits. Another challenge is that the long-implemented teaching methodology has to change as well. This latter change is the more difficult because teachers who have been used to a certain methodology for years of teaching need training in a new methodology and a positive attitude towards change which many still oppose and resent. So, sometimes an old methodology is used in applying the new curriculum, which definitely beats the objectives.

However attractive it may seem, this approach faces further challenges and problems. A major concern is to handle a probable change in the attitude of the students who might end up liking the 'content', physics, history, geography, etc., of the lessons taught in their English classes more than the actual content courses. Or, the students get to hate the English classes which become a repeat of the other courses of which they have had enough. It is therefore recommended that language teachers collaborate with the teachers of the content courses to coordinate teaching of common themes and the level of presentation.

Accordingly, another challenge is the selection and development of the appropriate materials. It is not enough to *select* the materials which

are thematically appropriate, but many times we need to *supplement*, *adapt*, and *develop* our own materials to suit the levels and language-teaching purposes (see Brinton et al., p. 89). It is generally agreed upon that all selected authentic texts were not originally intended for teaching language. "It follows from this that the choice of a literary text has to be as carefully considered as does the method of teaching. Clearly, the first criterion has to be accessibility whether this is viewed as linguistic accessibility or cultural accessibility" (Bex, 7). Furthermore, any cultural-specific content bears further inherent problems. Thus, selections for teaching should have in addition to the linguistic potential those values and moral ideals which have a global appeal, and create cultural awareness without prejudice or harm to any group.

The variety of selections in a content-based approach makes this approach attractive. Selection may include "cereal box logos and single-page advertising copy in popular magazines, etc." (Brinton et al., 89). These are the type of 'authentic' materials which McRae refers to as literature with a small "l" which include ads, jokes, newspaper headlines etc. In addition to all the above challenges, the availability of supporting aids such as videos, computers, etc., is another factor to be considered. Finally, after deciding on the selections, comes the step of planning the actual lessons and making sure that the texts include "a range of language functions and structures ...[which] map neatly unto the language syllabus" (Brinton et al., p. 90). Here comes an urgent need for a thorough linguistic analysis of the text at hand, which requires the cooperation of linguists, stylisticians, and practitioners. Thus, with the incorporation of more literature into the language syllabus, we are, as McRae suggests "on the threshold of a new phase in the history of language teaching" (1996, p. 21).

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