

DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE

I Gusti Ayu Gde Sosiowati

University of Udayana

E-mail: sosiowati@yahoo.com

Abstract

Richards (2006) states that the purpose of learning language is to master the communicative competence, meaning that by the end of the learning process, the students should be able to produce proper language in any genre and in any situation. However, that competence alone, without accompanied by the ability to perform critical thinking will end in the conversation talking about explicit information only. It can not be denied that understanding the implicit information will be challenging and making the conversation interesting. Halpern (cited on 15 March 2015) states that critical thinking refers to the use of cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome. It is the kind of thinking which is involved in solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihoods, and making decisions. The purpose of this article is to show that literary work can be used to develop critical thinking and at the same time is able to improve the students' English proficiency. Literary works, in this case short stories are good teaching materials for the purpose since they contain implicit or unsaid information that must be understood by the students. The idea of developing critical thinking is in line with one of the skills mentioned by Harmer (2006), that is interpreting text. He says that interpreting text enables the students to see beyond the literal meaning of words in a passage, using a variety clues to understand what the writer is implying. Thus, it can be said that literary work can be used as the teaching material to improve both language proficiency and critical thinking.

Key words: critical thinking; explicit information, implicit information, literature.

1. Introduction

Learning foreign language is considered to be something desirable due to the era of globalization. Many people learn to learn English with various purposes. In general, people learning English to be able to perform the functions of the language properly (Harmer, 2006). To be put in more detailed way, the purposes of people learning English, apart from academic reasons, are to be able to mingled in the society in which the language is spoken, for economic reasons, or for travelling.

To reach the goal mentioned above, teachers of English have to be able to teach both the forms and functions of the language to reach communicative competence. In the process of teaching to reach the goal, the teacher has to build motivation so that the students will be willing to practise his language in various kinds of function. To help the students in doing their communicative activities the teacher should not do any intervention. Let them finish the task and after that, the input or correction can be conducted. The activities that can be performed in the class are among others, role play or information gap.

In real life, having communicative competence alone is not sufficient to face all the communication problems. Another important thing in relation to communicative activities is the possession of critical thinking. Critical thinking refers to the use of cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome which involves solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihoods, and making decisions (Halpern, 2002). This is in line with Chance's idea (1986) saying that critical thinking is the ability to analyse facts, and organise ideas, defends opinions, making comparison, drawing conclusion, evaluating arguments dan solving problems. When doing communication, the strategy to develop the topic of discussion into more interesting and challenging discussion can only be done when the critical thinking is applied. Critical thinking is also called reflective thinking, that is a way of thinking which has active, persistent and careful judgment on a knowledge, values based on particular reason (Dewey, 1933). Through critical thinking, someone can understand the meaning implied within utterances. This ability will lead to the situation in which misunderstanding can be reduced if not completely avoided.

Having understood the importance of critical thinking in the sustainability of a communication, critical thinking becomes the ability that must be developed. That is why it must be practised through exercises over the learning period. This paper has the aim at showing how the critical thinking can be trained through the teaching of literature.

2. Theories of Literature and Language Learning

People use language to communicate about various things which are mostly about their social environment. This topics can be found in literary work. In literary work, the readers can find various kinds of information, various kinds of stories about human beings. This is in line with what is said by Morner and Rausch (1998) saying that literature is the writing that can produce pleasure for the readers through all the devices used and it belongs to a particular era, language and people. They also say that fiction is the creation of the author's imagination. Eventhough a story is claimed as fiction, it might happen somewhere in the world with different characters. It is believed that a fiction can be a real made up story, or a mixture between imagination and facts, or it is factual but is claimed as fiction. Due to the facts mentioned above, it can be said that literary work, in this case short story is a proper material to develop critical thinking. Wimmer (<http://study.com/academy/lesson/short-stories-definition-characteristics-examples.html> cited on 11 May 2015) states that short stories are fictional works which can have the numbers of words of 1,600 – 20,000 words which can be read in 30 minutes up to two hours. They can talk about various topics and due to the fact that they have limited space, they often start without or little prior information. This limited space is also one of the causes as why the numbers of characters are limited. This idea leads to the condition that the material used is the reading text. Harmer (2006) says that there are various skills that can be applied in reading, for instance, reading to find general ideas of a text, reading to find specific information, and reading to do the interpretation of a text. When somebody interprets a text, she will not try to find the explicit information, instead she will try to understand the information beyond the text. To be able to do this, she has to use proper strategy, her related knowledge or schemata so that she can compare or draw conclusion to get the answer of her question/s. Thus, the reading done is not reading on the lines (literal), but reading between the lines (inferential), and reading beyond the lines (evaluative). Reading can have the reasons of what Harmer (2006) says as instrumental and pleasure. This is because reading can be done both to fulfil a particular purpose and for fun.

Critical thinking comes into being through a process consisting of a lot of stages (<http://www.wikihow.com/Develop-Critical-Thinking-Skills>). In the followings, some relevant stages will be stated so that clear ideas as what attitudes to develop to be critical thinker can be obtained. Those relevant attitudes are :

1. Avoid the emotional feelings since they can disturb your clear judgment.
2. Do not accept any information without any judgment eventhough it comes from a prominent figure.
3. Be careful with unspoken rules and with the non verbal behaviour when expressing ideas.
4. Stop thinking whenever under pressure.
5. Try to look at beyond whatever written in the text.
6. Be consistent and logic when considering things.
7. Listen carefully to what people say and when responding try to apply empathy.

The attitude as mentioned above should be applied when reading a literary work such as short story considering that due to limited space, a lot of information is not explicitly stated. Through reading for interpretation and developing critical thinking, the students will learn a lot of things more than just what is written in the text. However, before reaching this condition, students must understand that they have to understand the literal information first, and it can only be achieved if they master the language. Thus, by using short story as the teaching material, the students can learn both the language and how to develop critical thinking.

3. Data Analysis and Discussion.

As it was mentioned above, the literary work, in this case a short story is used for the teaching material. The story that is used for the example has the title of "The Enemy" written by Pearl S. Buck. The story is about a Japanese doctor named Sadao and his wife Hana who lived in a house by the beach. It was during the World War II. Sadao got his medical degree in America and also in that country Sadao met Hanna. One evening, a wounded American soldier was washed to the shore by the wave. He was actually a prisoner who could escape. His name was Tom. Sadao decided to help him eventhough Hana and all the servants disagreed. They were afraid of Sadao helping the enemy. Hana, whether or not she liked it, had to stay and help her husband to take care of the prisoner. Sadao's operation on the soldier was successful. When the prisoner recovered, Sadao decided to report about the prisoner to the general. The general did not go to war because he was suffering from heart problem and he only trusted Sadao to take care of him. This is the reason why both of them did not go to war. When Sadao reported about the prisoner, the General could understand why Sadao helped the American although he was actually an enemy. Like Sadao, the General used to study in America too. The General promised that he would send an assassin to kill Tom. However, after several day waiting, the assassin never came. He forgot to send the assassins because he was still weak after having emergency operation to which Sadao was called at night. Sadao decided to let Tom go and provided him

with a boat to cross the sea to an island where the Korean ship would help him. Tom had to give two flashes when he ran out of food before he was saved, one flash when he was okay but still there. Then Sadao reported to the General that the prisoner was escaped. The General realized that he did a mistake and to apologize, he rewarded Sadao. However, for Sadao, the real reward is that when he saw no flash from the island.

First of all, the teacher can talk about vocabulary and structure of the language to help the students understand the literal meaning of the story. To have better understanding about the story, questions of which answer are obviously written in the text can be given. The examples of the questions are:

1. Who is Sadao?

He is a Japanese doctor/surgeon.

2. What is the name of his wife?

His wife's name is Hana

3. Where did he get his degree?

In America

4. What was the general suffering from?

He was suffering from heart problem.

5. Who is Tom?

He was an American escaped prisoner.

6. Where is the setting of the story?

In Japan.

7. Who are the characters of the story?

Sadao, Hana, Yummi, the General

All the answers for the questions above were clearly stated in the text. After these warming up questions, the ones that can trigger the critical thinking can be put forward. The examples of the questions along with the context of situation are as follows.

1. *There is a statement in the text that Sadao met Hana in America, yet he had to wait to fall in love until he was sure that she was Japanese. His father would not accept her unless she had been pure in her race.*

Question: Why did his father say so about Hana?

The answer of the question (1) cannot be found in the entire text. To find the answer, the students have to think about what characteristics a Japanese woman should have; why a son like Sadao agree that he has to have a real Japanese as his wife, what is actually meant by pure race of Japanese. If they cannot have the source to answer the problems raised to answer question (1), the male students can start comparing what kind of wife they would like to have, they can start to look at their own culture and custom, as what kind of wife suitable for them. The female students might agree/disagree with the demand. By listening to the discussion about the comparison, culture and custom, they can come to the answer of question (1). Thus the answer for question (1) is because both his father and Sadao want a woman who was not only Japanese by birth or physic, but has the real characters of a Japanese woman also, among others is very obedient to her husband. The ideal of a Japanese woman was shown from the event when eventhough Hana was scared, was unhappy when her husband helped an enemy, she still helped Sadao taking care of the prisoner. Besides, the story would be different if Hana refused to help, Sadao would not have the opportunity to show that he is a good doctor and very humanistic. To some extent there might be the argumentation as why female are demanded to obey her husband without question. This situation may not be applicable in the situation of the students. However, the students have to look beyond the text to find the information that the Japanese women are expected to be obedience.

When related to literary teaching, the related question concerning Hana might be:

What characteristics does Hana posses?

To be able to answer the question, the students have to relate his understanding about the text combined with their ability to understand the implicit message. The answer can be obtained through the behaviour she showed when eventhough she was not happy when she was asked to help Tom, she did what her husband asked her to do. This shows that she is a very obedient wife who willingly put aside what she wanted to do for the sake of her obedience.

2. *Yumi, one of the maids in Sadao house did not like her master to help the enemy so she decided to leave the house. Before leaving she said to Hana that when the baby misses her, Hana could send for her. However Hana said to herself that she would not call Yumi however the baby cried.*

Question 2: Why would Hana said it to herself?

Before answering the question, the students might think that it is impossible for a person like Yumi to refuse the order of her master. Is it because she does not want to deal with a dirty body, or is it because her nationality was too strong that she refused to help an enemy, or because she was frightened to get punished by the government for helping the enemy. Yumi said to hana that it was her business to make the prisoner

awake. She said: "I am a poor person and it is not my business". What does it actually have to do between being asked to help unconscious person and Yumi's statement. The students have to be careful in analysing the statement. In real life there are quite numbers of poor people who still have pride. Yumi is one example of those. She knew that she was paid by Sadao and Hana, but that does not mean they could ask her to do whatever they want. The instruction was against her will. She did it because like the other servants in the house, she was loyal to her country. And her loyalty defeated his obedience to her master. However, this disobedience had hurt hana's feeling, that is why she said, no matter what, she would never ask for help from Yumi.

Thus it is her dignity that made Hana refuse to call Yumi no matter how hard the baby cried. This question can be made to prove that dignity can be possessed by anybody of any social status.

3. *After helping Tom, Sadao reported to the General about it. Surprisingly the General seemed very understandable, he was not angry and said that it was the reason why Sadao was indispensable.*

Question 3: Why wasn't the general angry to Sadao, and what kind of character does it show.

During the report there is a conversation between Sadao and the General. The General who knew that Sadao took his degree in America, believed that there was special bond between Sadao and the American people. He could understand it, moreover, the General himself used to study in America too. But for Sadao, that was not his reason. He said that after operating a badly wounded man with such success He could not finish his words because the General interrupt by saying that is why he cannot replace Sadao from being his doctor. By saying this, he admit that Sadao was the best doctor and the General saved the best one to take care of himself, rather than sending him to war to take care of the wounded soldiers. Another reason why he did not punish Sadao for helping an enemy was not because they both studied in America, but it was more to keep Sadao on his side to help him whenever he had problem with his health. Considering all these situations, it can be concluded that the General was actually a selfish person. His being selfish was strengthened by the fact that he forgot to send assassin to Sadao's house because he was too busy to think of his health. The discussion above can also be used to answer related question like:

What kind of person is Sadao?

Nothing in the short story mentions about Sadao characters. However his characters can be decided through making use of what the other characters say, his attitude, his decision. When Sadao helped the enemy, Yumi and the other servants said that Sadao already forgot about his country since both Sadao and Hana used to live in America for a long time. Sadao was upset when he heard this and he later proved that it was his job as a doctor that made him save the needed, no matter where the person came from. He was loyal to his profession and this indicates that he was a good doctor. After helping the enemy and saved Tom's life, he reported about this to the General and this means that he was doing his duty as a Japanese and at the same time his eagerness to get rid of Tom was because he did not want Hana worried about keeping an enemy in their house. This shows that Sadao was a loyal citizen and caring husband. His decision to help Tom even though through silent disagreement from his wife and his servants shows that he was a strong minded person.

4. *During the process of helping the Prisoner, Sadao was doubting himself as why he should help the enemy. He also shows different attitude towards the prisoner.*

Question 4: What is actually happening in his mind and what does it prove at the end?

When Sadao decided to help the Enemy, he experienced the pro and against in his mind. It has been explained above as what kind of person Sadao is. The fact that he is a Japanese, a citizen of a country that was in the middle of war with America, put him into a dilemma. However, his loyal to his oath as a doctor who had to save life instead of taking it, made him forget about the war. There was nothing that could make him happier than knowing that someone he was saving was safe. After Tom was safe, again Sadao reported about his "escape" to the General who realized that it was his fault. The General rewarded Sadao but it was given given for Sadao's willingness not to tell anybody about the General's breaking his promise to send assassin to kill Tom which led to his escape. It can also be proved at the end that it was not the reward from the General that made him happy, but the fact that Tom was safe was a real reward for him. Another thing that can prove that Sadao was a good man was his question why he could not kill Tom, but helped him to escape. He did not realize that his conscience that stopped him from killing people.

Since all the answers of the given questions were not stated in the story, the application of the rules as how to be a good critical thinker must be done. For instance, the students have to have clear idea as why a Japanese doctor should help an enemy instead of leaving him to die. They might think from different point of view considering they come from different background with different experiences. Maybe some of them think that helping an enemy is very risky since he might kill the one helping him, others might think that the main job of a doctor is to save life. They should put aside their own personal judgment and use all the information given in the text to find the solution of the argument. Do not just rely on the given information, but try to make it sensible by making use of their knowledge. When expressing the idea, for instance why a

wife should obey her husband, the students needs to start looking at the situation from the point of view of the Japanese. What is not logic in their culture is not necessarily illogical in Japanese culture. Obeying husbands is a good thing to do, then when any student is expressing the idea about feminism, be careful for not making it a kind of provocation. Listen carefully to what other students say and make a logical, and consistent respond. Thus critical thinking can be well developed when the situation of the class is comfortable, in which the students are free to express their ideas, however in proper manner.

4. Conclusion and Suggestion

Based on the discussion above, it can be said that critical thinking is very much needed and must be developed. The reason for this is that without the ability of critical thinking, the communicators can only understand the explicit information, while in reality, there are a lot of implicit meaning that must be understood to avoid miscommunication. Through the use of literary work, the students can be trained to use all the environment either inside or outside the text so that they could understand the unsaid utterance. Teachers and students have great responsibility to develop the critical thinking. Teachers can provide the students with questions of which answers are not explicitly stated, develop the habit of making use of all the information, and providing the comfortable situation of the class while students can do the reading, listening, discussion, and drawing conclusion about the questions/problems offered by the teachers.

References

- Buck, Pearl S. *The Enemy*. In Knickerbocker, K.L., Reninger H. Willard (1963) *Interpreting Literature*. New York: Holt, Rinehartand Winston
- Chance, P. (1986) *Thinking in the classroom: A review of programs*. New York: Instructors College Press.
- Dewey, John (1933). <http://www.hawaii.edu/intlrel/pols382/Reflective%20Thinking%20-%20UH/reflection.html>
- Halpern, Diane F. (2002) <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/tl.v1999:80/issuetoc>
- Harmer, Jeremy (2006). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Essex: longman.
- Morner, Kathleen & Rausch, Ralph. (1998). *NTC'S Dictionary: Literary Terms*. Chicago: NTC Publishing Group.
- Richard (2006). *Communicative Language Teaching Today*. Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.
- Wimmer, Joshua (<http://study.com/academy/lesson/short-stories-definition-characteristics-examples.html>)