
LANGUAGE AWARENESS AND CRITICAL THINKING IN TEACHING LITERARY APPRECIATION

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Abstract

Reading a literary works is the main concern for the students of literature department. Their activity cannot be separated from reading any literary works such as drama, prose and poem. Moreover, reading is an activity to grasp the meaning to understand the author ideas and intention hence to appreciate what lies in it. Therefore the students should aware much with the language which is used in poem, drama and prose. Teaching literary appreciation means using language awareness to sharpen their sensitivity to the language use in certain context. Critical thinking on the other side can be used to help students aware with the use of language of the literary works. Thus the teacher should cultivate students' language awareness and critical thinking in teaching literary appreciation.

Keywords: *Language Awareness, Critical Thinking, Teaching Literary Appreciation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is not an easy thing to be defined especially in defining what it is talk about or the message that lies behind the sentences, the picture, or the expression of an actor as he/she plays the character. People may find that reading the literary works such as prose and poem is a time consuming that may bring them into many different paths and yet still cannot understand what it is about. Even though the language that is found in the literary works especially poem and prose is very common but when reading it the reader need to be aware of the language itself or has a sense of language which is known as language awareness.

The language is not only a set of words, grammar, and structure, but it also deals with the relationship between forms and meaning, the sensitivity of the language and conscious knowledge of the language. Therefore, reading the prose and poem is not the same like reading the newspaper, magazine, and textbook. The reader should aware with the language of poem and prose and the culture that lies behind them. Reading a literary is always challenging since the language is not only a reflection of the reader's thought and feeling but it also brings the emotions, the experience, and the socio-cultural background. Trying to understand any literary works means the reader is not only focus on the words and the meaning of it but what really hides behind it is the actual message that the writer wants the reader to find out.

The awareness of the language of the literature can be sharpened through reading practice. The reading practice is not only by applying all strategies in reading but the most important is by noticing every element of prose and poem starting from the title up to last line of them. The reader critical thinking is very useful in guiding him/her to understand the piece of literary works.

Readers' critical thinking can help them in searching deepest meaning of the prose or poem moreover, it also helps them to see the other side of it or what lies behind it. The critical thinking itself need to be practiced so the reader can use it not only to understand the prose or poem but also to appreciate it. In literary appreciation class, the teacher is not only assigned the students to read the prose or poem but also discuss about the relationship between form and meaning and linguistic intuition.

This paper discuss the language awareness and the implementation of critical thinking to guide students in reading literary works such as prose and poem in literary appreciation class. The paper is written based on the writers' experienced in teaching literary appreciation class.

2. LANGUAGE AWARENESS

Language awareness is widely concerned by the EFL teachers because they do not only teach English but also have a pedagogical knowledge to train the students to be aware of the language-English-that they learnt or how the language works. Since language is not a set of vocabulary in a well formed sentence and correct grammar. The idea of language awareness was promoted in 1980's by Eric Hawkins who also called as 'the father' of language awareness. But then what is language awareness and why it is important in teaching English as foreign language especially literary appreciation would be discussed first.

Language awareness is defined in many ways but the main concern is; it is talking about the intuitive of the language or the sensitivity of a language use. Donmall (1985) as quoted by Ellis (2012) states 'Language awareness is a person's sensitivity to and conscious awareness of language and its role in human life.' There are three important points that related with language awareness first; person's sensitivity to the language which means people may learn, have, and use a language but it might lose the sense if he/she has no knowledge about what the language is actually uttered by the people. For example; when a person roared 'Do that again, you're dead' while gripped the driver's front shirt the reader might think that it is a rude and mean language that is used to threatening the driver. But if the reader use a language awareness, he/she will examined the context of the language; when and where it was uttered, to who, and why and what is the cultural background and the condition that makes such word is uttered. Then, he/she will understand that it is not only talking about one person is threatening the other but it is also about the consequences that the person's would face when breaking the rules.

Second, person's conscious awareness of a language which means every sentence or words has its own purposed and meaning. Thus, a language should not seen on the surface structure but also in the deep structure. In other words, a language is not only about what message is carried but also why the message is carried in that form of sentence and the reason and purpose of it. By continuously aware of the language the people will have no language barrier while having a communication.

Third, person's sensitivity and conscious aware of the language's role in human's life, which means the language is not only a tool for communication but it is also a reflection of the people in communicating with others. How the language is uttered and used by the people is an identity of the attitude, belief, and culture that he/she has. Therefore, trying to understand the language is also means trying to understand the human itself.

As people consciously aware of the language use, then they would see the language in different way which is not merely related with form and meaning but also how it reflects and affects them. Another definition of language awareness is proposed by Schmidt (1995) who points out the language awareness into four areas of consciousness; intention, attention, awareness and control. The intention is a contrast of intentional and incidental learning, attention consists of noticing and focusing, awareness means having knowledge of and control deals with a routine task of language use. The language awareness then related with the constant use of a language and the cognitive aspect of the people. Schmidt (1995) as quoted by Soons (2008) says that a low level of awareness refers to *noticing* and a high level of awareness refers to *understanding*, which he defines as "recognition of a general principle, rule or pattern", that is to say the recognition of a deeper level of abstraction.

Association for Language Awareness (ALA) states that LA can be defined as "explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use" (ALA, 2012). Thus, it signaling that the language teacher should teach the language awareness to their students through consciously stimulating their sensitivity to the language. It clearly understood that the teaching of literature should continuously and consciously train the students to be aware to the language of the literature. The teacher should train students to talk about the language as an attitude and values as it has effective element. LA, on the other hand, involves teachers 'talking about language'; it has an "affective element – it engages and helps to evolve attitudes and values" ... it encourages teachers to become "autonomous and robust explorers of language" (Wright and Bolitho;1993 as quoted by Ellis 2012). Thus, it is important for the teacher of literary appreciation to teach students to use their intuition to understand what the poem or prose really talks about.

The literary works itself needs a lot of effort in gather all attention and intention in reading it. However it becomes difficult when the students have low motivation in reading it. The writer found

that the students often complaint that the words of the poem or prose are difficult that when they try to find the meaning in dictionary it leads to nowhere. They also complaint that reading it takes time but then they still do not get what it talks about. The problem becomes greater when the students have low motivation in reading and commit that they do not like reading as it is difficult to understand it. If the teacher does not find an active and creative teaching that makes students more active in learning the literary appreciation, the class would become passive with poor result of the learning. Therefore, to create a positive atmosphere and increase students' motivation in reading a literary works the writer stimulates students' critical thinking. By activating students' critical thinking, the teaching learning process of literary appreciation became more active that the students were involved in discussion

3. CRITICAL THINKING

A critical thinker, is a call name for those who are able to see both side of issue proportionally, talk openly on new evidence, take the conclusion by inferring to the evidence solve the problem etc. Becoming a person who has a critical thinking takes a long and complicated process that he/she should have the higher order thinking skill; analyzing the evidence and sort of information through reflective thinking, evaluating the information, evidence, and fact before taking the conclusion or making a decision, and the skill in making or creating a new idea or concept after analyzing and evaluating some information and evidence. This critical thinking skill is very essential for the students in any field of study. Teaching critical thinking skill means teaching students to be able to identifying central issue, distinguishing fact from opinion, making judgment based on the analysis and evaluation, etc.

Before discussing further about the critical thinking, let's first discuss about the definition of critical thinking. The definition of critical thinking is mainly discussed on two approaches; cognitive and educational. In cognitive approach, there are; first Sternberg (1998) in Lai (2011) who defines critical thinking as "the mental processes, strategies, and representations people use to solve problems, make decisions, and learn new concepts". Second, Willingham (2007) states "critical thinking is seeing both sides of an issue, being open to new evidence that disconfirms your ideas, reasoning dispassionately, demanding that claims be backed by evidence, deducing and inferring conclusions from available facts, solving problems, and so forth".

The cognitive psychology approach, views the critical thinking as the cognitive process that covers the strategy to learn and to separate the information or the evidence into the fact and opinion. The evidence then would be analyze and evaluate in order to solve certain problem or even make a decision. The process of achieving critical thinking itself is an open argument that the people ought to see the both side of 'story' before making a judgment. This process needs the creative thinking and patient feeling since they have to challenge the ideas with other. All of the process is called a mental process because it requires continues practice and discomfort feeling while analyzing and challenging the opinion or ideas with other people.

The second approach namely educational approach is promoted by Benjamin Bloom and his associates. Their taxonomy is well-known as the higher order thinking skill that promotes the critical thinking. The Bloom's taxonomy of the higher order thinking skills covers; analysis, synthesis and evaluation. The analysis and synthesis skills require the teacher to activate students' critical thinking by seeing the thing not as it is seen in barely eyes but to dig inside and find out what actually lies behind the surface. The synthesis is a skill for the students to distinguish certain category of information and then taking the conclusion. The last skill is evaluation that is the students evaluate the evidence and information to get the idea of its actual message. Burden and Byrd (1994) quoted by baker (2001) categorize critical thinking as a higher-order thinking activity that requires a set of cognitive skills. This definition is in accordance with Bloom's taxonomy that categorized as promoting critical thinking.

The two approaches that defined the critical thinking show that the critical thinking is related with the cognitive domain which is activated as the people get knowledge at the school. The teacher in this case has a big contribution in activating students' higher order thinking skill which is then requires students to think critically. The teacher teach the students some sets of critical thinking skills such as; making inference, distinguishing between verifiable facts and value claims, distinguishing relevant from irrelevant information, claims, and reasons, determining factual accuracy of a statement, determining credibility of a source, identifying ambiguous claims or arguments, identifying unstated

assumptions, detecting bias, identifying logical fallacies, recognizing logical inconsistencies in a line of reasoning, and determining the strength of an argument or claim. Those skills are strongly needed when the students read any kinds of material and think critically about some set of evidence or information.

In short, critical thinking is an outcome of students' learning. It helps students in facing the world and the workplace. The students need to think critically in order to grasp the real message and in engaging in the global issues. Therefore, the teacher should have the skill of critical thinking and then train students to activate their critical thinking.

4. TEACHING LITERARY APPRECIATION

Reading a literature is not merely reading the lines of prose or poetry or simply an effort to understand what the writer or poet carried in each line. But it is reading a literary text (prose, poem, or drama) using all the language function, the knowledge of language and emotion while interpreting and responding to the text. The process of reading a literary work is considered personal but yet it is more than just an art that entertains the reader that deals with language and linguistic features. Then, literary appreciation is a process of searching the meaning, sifting, selecting, and evaluating the idea. The literature is an art of a language represents the language and the socio-cultural. Moreover, it is important not only in learning a language but also in understanding the language. According to Olufunwa (2001) literary appreciation refers to 'the evaluation of works of literature as an academic and intellectual exercise. It is the process by which the recipient of a work of literature acquires an understanding of its theme(s) and subject matter, and obtains insights into the ways in which its formal structure helps realize them.' In other words, the appreciation of any literary work is clearly done through the evaluation of their elements such as the rhyme, rhythm, sense and sound devices, figurative language etc (poetry) and character, plot setting, theme, language, etc (prose).

Reading a literary work should be a pleasurable activity to understand the whole concept or ideas which is hidden in a language of it. However, the writer found that the students are not really interested in reading it. The reading of literature is like torturing them which then loses their attention and intention in discussing the prose especially poem in literary appreciation class. The students know that reading a literary work is the main concern for them in literary appreciation class but when looking at the pages of prose and types of poem-even the language that they use- they instantly decided that they would not understand them at all. Reading prose and poem would then become a time-consuming, flat and bored activity.

Teaching literary appreciation should be carefully choosing the material and the strategy. It is not simply saying that they have learnt English literary but there are certain things; reading habit and strategy, knowledge of the language, language experience, and knowledge of English culture. In other words, just because the students have learnt English as a second or foreign language it cannot guarantee that they can understand and yet 'like' it. Therefore, the teacher should have a 'sense' and 'aware' with the language especially in literary works. Zhen (2012) states that before teaching the literary appreciation, the teacher should carefully consider that firstly; English is not the native or first language. Here the purpose of literature teaching is to improve learners' English ability instead of literature appreciation only. Secondly learners in the EFL context have a limited command of English, which will result in a poor understanding of English literature esp. in the original way without simplification. Thirdly learners in the EFL context lack necessary knowledge of English culture.

5. DISCUSSION

Teaching literary appreciation is basically to introduce the students to English literature, read it to grasp the meaning or message or emit the hidden message and finally the students will like it and enjoy it. However, those purposes will be flown away if the teacher blindly selects one of the literary work from a famous poet and writer without considering the language and cultural barrier. The teacher will start to complain that the students do not read it seriously or use their ability in reading or have no sense of arts. Meanwhile, the real problem might come from the language of the story or poem and the differences of cultural background that they carried on. As the students have difficulties in understanding the language and the culture of the story it will slow them down in reading and interpreting the meaning. In this case, the teacher is a tool of teaching literary appreciation itself that he/she should actively prepare the material by considering the language, the cultural background, teach

students to be aware with the language and figure out what the story or poem talk about by activating their critical thinking.

The teacher is not only has a function of teaching literary appreciation but also to serve language learning which means the language learning is the first target while literature appreciation is the second. Then, what should the teacher do? Before teaching the subject of literary appreciation at first the writer studies the syllabus and the students after that observed the students' reading ability and interest. These are very crucial because the teacher should aware much with the topic of literary appreciation subject and think of the material that merit with each topic discussion. While choosing the material, the teacher prepare a set of question that leads students to carefully analyze every line and guide them to be aware of the language and activate their sense of language. The teacher might start with the simple poem and story but reflects the culture and the language that commonly used in real life.

As the writer examined the students reading ability, she found that most students have low intention and interest in reading activity. There are many reasons that had been collected. Generally, they said that first; the vocabulary is difficult and is not familiar or commonly used in any reading material such as text book and magazine. Second, reading a literary works is torturing them because they have to read it several times that slowing them down and even lose their passion in reading it. Third, reading takes time that it is hard for them to have a quality time to read because 70% of the students are part time worker. Thus, considering these fact the writer decided to train students to be aware with the language-in this case English- and activate their critical thinking to grasps the meaning and message. Critical thinking in addition is also valuable in train students to be aware with the language of the poem and the prose. Meanwhile for the poem the writer started with the simple poem rather than the famous poem with 'heavy' language.

The first poem that the writer brought to the class is 'It is Impossible' written by Ross Falconer. The poem was given with absent title and the students was directed to read it and take a quick response about what the poem is about. Surprisingly even though the word choice is considered common but they have difficulties in understanding it. However few of the students said that it is about the kids and their parents, the employee and the employer, or the children selfishness. Then, the writer guide students to get the whole meaning by giving several question to activate their critical thinking such as; How do you know it is about children and parents? What is the clue?

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE

It is impossible
for anyone to enter
our small world.
The adults don't
understand us
they think
we're childish.
No-one can get in
our world
It has wall twenty feet high
and adults
Have only ten feet ladder
 'Ross Falconer'

The next step is finding out how the kids describe their world or life. The writer asks the students to drive their memory back to the time when they were a kid and ask them to figure out how they see them self through the interaction with the people around them. They have to make a list on their paper and then make another list about the life of the kids that the poem talks about by asking them to search from any sources that they have-the simple way is from the movie. The students are guided to figure out the relationship between the kids and their parents. At the end of the session they have a clear understanding that this poem is not talking about the children who protested the parents to

be treated like adult but to understand that just like adult their life has a meaning. Even by playing it has a meaning and their world just like adult is often bored, flat, and exciting.

The material then can be moved to a bit difficult and in this case the writer chose “Ballad of Birmingham”.

BALLAD OF BIRMINGHAM

“Mother dear, may I go downtown
Instead of out to play,
And march the streets of Birmingham
In a Freedom March today?”

“ No, baby, no, you may not go,
For the dogs are fierce and wild.
And clubs and hoses and guns and jails
Aren’t good for a little child.”

This poem has a cultural background of black people in United States of America and describing about the time when USA struggle from racial issue when apartheid. To be able to understand the poem then, the writer gives brief and short story of the condition in Birmingham ‘a city where apartheid was very strong. Several of questions were given such as why the mother prefers their children to church? What can the children have there? Does it save in church? In your country which places that your parents think the safeties place. The focus attention first on the two first part or stanza then to the last two part of the poem where the agony of a mother losing the children is told.

For hen she heard the explosion,
Her eyes grew wet and wild.
She races through the streets of Birmingham
Calling for her child

She clawed through bits of glass and brick,
Then lifted out a shoe.
“o, here’s the shoe my baby wore,
But, baby, where are you?”

The same process was done but this time the students were asked to make a question related to those lines and then discussed the answered in a small group. After half of the semester, the writer found that the students enjoyed reading the poem even prose. When they were ask to make a questions based on the poem and then discussed the answer in small group they cannot wait to have another one in the following meeting

6. CONCLUSION

Reading a literary works is not blindly using the skill and strategy in reading. But it is about make the feeling works together with the skill and strategy. The sensitivity of language should be first be introduced and trained. Once it works then the students will begin to realize the language awareness is needed in reading and appreciating the literary works. Meanwhile, the critical thinking can be used to make students more aware with what they read and what information that can be find in any material they read.

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