

Stylistic Approach in Teaching of Long poems to the Engineering Students

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Literature in the language classroom has been an on-going debate ever since structuralists pleaded for an exclusive course on language learning. Only the communicative approach to language learning modified it ever so little by introducing concrete personal, social official situations where language is required to be used widely. Similarly, stylistics in the early phases prided on its being a language study of literary texts. With the advent of ‘discourse’ as the chief aspect of language during 1980s language learning underwent considerable change (Ronald Carter, p. vii). The dichotomy between language and literature died out as discourse always works using all the potentials of the language in terms of context, intertext, coherence, cohesion and intention. Stylistics is nowadays generally contextualized and discourse-based (Verdonk, 2002; Simpson, 2004), focusing on issues of choices of style, register, genre, culture and identities in varying contexts.

So defined all use of language involves use of strategies and indirections. The metalinguistic reflection and discussion promoted by stylistic approaches in the second language classroom are held to contribute to deeper processing, understanding, memorability and development of the additional language in use (Stylistics in Second Language Contexts: Geoff Hall, 2007). In our day-to-day life as well as literature we use the same methods to sell our ideas and products. Studied thus literature in general and poetry in particular, are only fine tuned models of language use. Intuitively, it would seem self-evident that language learners can learn a lot from paying close attention the language of linguistically rich texts (Geoff Hall, p.3-14). Hence, they find a place in language curriculum.

However, learners have an inherent fear to take to long texts, be it prose or poetry and more so to long poems. So it devolves on the teaching fraternity to use specific approaches and methods to free learners from the fright of penetrating a long text. The teacher-centred reading and explication method would disorient the learners at once from listening and understanding the text and learning its strategies for using them in other situations.

The present paper undertakes to suggest a task based stylistic approach to teach long texts in the language classroom. Promoting critical learner interactions with such rich linguistic and cultural data, asking why these words were used in this way in this context, with an appreciation of other possibilities that could have occurred, will promote literary, linguistic and cultural

learning relevant to learners' own agendas. (Geoff Hall, 2007). It emerged from my own experience in teaching English for Engineering students in SASTRA University. In the syllabus a couple each of poems, short stories, one-act plays and prose essays find a place as one of the five units. These texts as the objectives of the syllabus spell out are not to be explained by teachers in the classroom, but allow the learners to work in groups and discover by their efforts the subtle nuances of language use. Here follows an illustration as to how a difficult and long poem such as Wordsworth's 'Resolution and Independence' was learnt by learners in my class by doing specific tasks.

During the first 10 or 15 minutes the learners were persuaded to silently browse through the poem individually and mark the paragraph numbers. Then the class of 60 students was divided into ten groups and assigned to do the following four tasks designed to facilitate the process of comprehending the text. A poem is not the fit medium to teach grammar, so the concentration is on learning beyond sentence grammar.

Task 1 was to identify the 20 statements given to be true or false with textual evidence as to which lines or parts of the text helped them to decide on their choice. The groups worked with a lot of interaction and came with their responses. Each group representative presented his/her answers. At the end of the presentations the learners came to grips with a broad idea of what happened in the poem.

Task 2 was to arrange the set of 8 sentences into a meaningful order. This made the groups to understand the relevance of coherence in a text and the use of cohesive markers to inter-relate the sentences.

On a subsequent session the groups were administered Task 3. A set of 10 comprehension questions and some brief rewrite exercises were assigned. Their responses were heard and they were encouraged to find the most impressive answers.

On the third day, they did task 4. The groups were asked to identify the narrative part where the poet and the Leech gatherer interact and that to be identified in terms of paragraph numbers. Soon after they were asked to split the poem into 3 viable units. As they had already identified the event part, namely the interaction between the poet and Leech gatherer they came out with an easy response of the section before it and the other after the event as the other two parts. These sections were identified to be more personal and meditative of the sad destiny that overtakes all of us in our young years, when we suffer pain and deprivation. The last section reconciles the poet to such loss by thinking about the perseverance of leech gatherer. They may be persuaded to provide intertext on similar theme from their exposure to daily life, media and book reading. Their attention can be drawn to A.J. Cronin's 'Turning Point of my life' which deals with an identical experience.

Further activities may be promoted among students. They may be asked to 1. paint the scene of the encounter. In such semiotic effort they would be forced to interpret the text at a

deeper level. 2. To present the dialogue they wrote in Task3 question 4 as reading or role play exercise. This would provide them to exercise their spoken skills. Students may be asked to interview the poet on his experience or any other imaginary conversation. As further tasks they may be asked to take video clippings of similar scenes of the country sides and made to relate similar events they might be familiar with.

Through all such activities students participate in the process of their learning. They are likely to carry vivid memories of the experience. One step in the right direction will make the teachers to be innovative in the classroom.

Unit I

The Poem

Resolution and Independence – William Wordsworth

1. There was a roaring in the wind all night;
The rain came heavily and fell in floods;
But now the sun is rising calm and bright;
The birds are singing in the distant woods;
Over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove broods;
The jay makes answer as the Magpie chatters;
And all the air is filled with pleasant noise of waters.

2. All things that love the sun are out of doors;
The sky rejoices in the morning's birth;
The grass is bright with rain-drops;—on the moors
The hare is running races in her mirth;
And with her feet she from the plashy earth
Raises a mist, that, glittering in the sun,
Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run.

3. I was a Traveller then upon the moor;
I saw the hare that raced about with joy;
I heard the woods and distant waters roar;
Or heard them not, as happy as a boy:
The pleasant season did my heart employ:
My old remembrances went from me wholly;
And all the ways of men, so vain and melancholy.

4. But, as it sometimes chanceth, from the might
Of joys in minds that can no further go,
As high as we have mounted in delight
In our dejection do we sink as low;
To me that morning did it happen so;
And fears and fancies thick upon me came;
Dim sadness—and blind thoughts, I knew not, nor could name.

5. I heard the sky-lark warbling in the sky;
And I bethought me of the playful hare:
Even such a happy Child of earth am I;
Even as these blissful creatures do I fare;
Far from the world I walk, and from all care;
But there may come another day to me—
Solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty.

6. My whole life I have lived in pleasant thought,
As if life's business were a summer mood;
As if all needful things would come unsought
To genial faith, still rich in genial good;
But how can He expect that others should
Build for him, sow for him, and at his call
Love him, who for himself will take no heed at all?

7. I thought of Chatterton, the marvellous Boy,
The sleepless Soul that perished in his pride;
Of Him who walked in glory and in joy
Following his plough, along the mountain-side:
By our own spirits are we deified:
We Poets in our youth begin in gladness;
But thereof come in the end despondency and madness.

8. Now, whether it were by peculiar grace,
A leading from above, a something given,
Yet it befell that, in this lonely place,
When I with these untoward thoughts had striven,
Beside a pool bare to the eye of heaven
I saw a Man before me unawares:
The oldest man he seemed that ever wore grey hairs.

9. As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie
Couched on the bald top of an eminence;
Wonder to all who do the same espy,
By what means it could thither come, and whence;
So that it seems a thing endued with sense:
Like a sea-beast crawled forth, that on a shelf
Of rock or sand repositeth, there to sun itself;

10. Such seemed this Man, not all alive nor dead,
Nor all asleep—in his extreme old age:
His body was bent double, feet and head
Coming together in life's pilgrimage;
As if some dire constraint of pain, or rage
Of sickness felt by him in times long past,
A more than human weight upon his frame had cast.

11. Himself he propped, limbs, body, and pale face,
Upon a long grey staff of shaven wood:
And, still as I drew near with gentle pace,
Upon the margin of that moorish flood
Motionless as a cloud the old Man stood,
That heareth not the loud winds when they call,
And moveth all together, if it move at all.

12. At length, himself unsettling, he the pond
Stirred with his staff, and fixedly did look
Upon the muddy water, which he conned,
As if he had been reading in a book:
And now a stranger's privilege I took;
And, drawing to his side, to him did say,
"This morning gives us promise of a glorious day."

13. A gentle answer did the old Man make,
In courteous speech which forth he slowly drew:
And him with further words I thus bespake,
"What occupation do you there pursue?
This is a lonesome place for one like you."
Ere he replied, a flash of mild surprise
Broke from the sable orbs of his yet-vivid eyes.

14. His words came feebly, from a feeble chest,
But each in solemn order followed each,
With something of a lofty utterance drest—
Choice word and measured phrase, above the reach
Of ordinary men; a stately speech;
Such as grave Livers do in Scotland use,
Religious men, who give to God and man their dues.

15. He told, that to these waters he had come
To gather leeches, being old and poor:
Employment hazardous and wearisome!
And he had many hardships to endure:
From pond to pond he roamed, from moor to moor;
Housing, with God's good help, by choice or chance;
And in this way he gained an honest maintenance.

16. The old Man still stood talking by my side;
But now his voice to me was like a stream
Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide;
And the whole body of the Man did seem
Like one whom I had met with in a dream;
Or like a man from some far region sent,
To give me human strength, by apt admonishment.

17. My former thoughts returned: the fear that kills;
And hope that is unwilling to be fed;
Cold, pain, and labour, and all fleshly ills;
And mighty Poets in their misery dead.
—Perplexed, and longing to be comforted,
My question eagerly did I renew,
"How is it that you live, and what is it you do?"

18. He with a smile did then his words repeat;
And said that, gathering leeches, far and wide
He travelled; stirring thus about his feet
The waters of the pools where they abide.
"Once I could meet with them on every side;
But they have dwindled long by slow decay;
Yet still I persevere, and find them where I may."

19. While he was talking thus, the lonely place,
The old Man's shape, and speech—all troubled me:
In my mind's eye I seemed to see him pace
About the weary moors continually,
Wandering about alone and silently.
While I these thoughts within myself pursued,
He, having made a pause, the same discourse renewed.

20. And soon with this he other matter blended,
Cheerfully uttered, with demeanour kind,
But stately in the main; and, when he ended,
I could have laughed myself to scorn to find
In that decrepit Man so firm a mind.
"God," said I, "be my help and stay secure;
I'll think of the Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor!"

Unit II

Task 1

State whether the following statements are True /False and indicate what part of the text helped you decide your choice.

1. Chatterton is a Scottish poet.
2. Jay, Magpie and stock-dove are animals.
3. The Leech gatherer was younger to Wordsworth.
4. We feel dejected when we are delighted.
5. The Leech gatherer was not courteous.
6. Despondency and madness comes at the beginning of one's life.
7. The Leech gatherer stirred the fresh waters to gather leeches.
8. The poet heard the whole story narrated by the Leech gatherer.
9. The poet thought of him as a devil sent to harm him.
10. The poet was eager to know the livelihood of the Leech gatherer.
11. The poet knew of the thoughts and dreams that were disturbing him.
12. The poet was sure of the distress and poverty that is about to come one day.
13. The poet compared the Leech gatherer's speech to that of people living in Scotland.
14. The Leech gatherer carried with him a sword.
15. The Leech gatherer was gathering centipedes.
16. The pleasant mood of the poet is compared to summer season.
17. Leeches are used as food.
18. The poet is constantly disturbed by fear and pain.

19. The Leech gatherer was a decrepit man.
20. Distant waters mean the waterfalls in the woods.

Task 2

Arrange the following sentence in the order in which they appear in the poem.

1. I found in him a firm mind and I felt that he is sent from heaven to give me strength.
2. He said that he moved from pool to pool and continued his search with perseverance.
3. When I started conversing with him, I learnt that he was looking for leeches.
4. As I was pondering, I saw an old man bent over a pool with a wooden staff, looking for something.
5. I was also remembered of the sad end that Chatterton faced.
6. I remembered my happy days and worried of the end that everyone faced.
7. But I was occupied with some unknown fears.
8. One day as I was walking through the moor, I saw birds chirping and hare playing in the bright sunlight, inspite of the heavy rain the previous day.

Task 3

Comprehension.

1. What are the two points of time referred to in stanza 1?
2. Find the words (adjectives) that describe the beauty of the morning in the 1st and 2nd stanzas
3. How does the poet describe the day break? Stanzas 1 – 3 (the morning activities of animals and birds)
4. Find the words that describe the mood of the poet in stanzas 4 and 5.
5. Find the lines that speak of the poet's deceased friends in stanza 7. (or)
Stanza 7 speaks of Chatterton and one other. Who are they and what has happened to them?
6. What is the mood of the poet at the early stages of the poem upto stanza 8?
7. Stanza 9 speaks of a stone. What is its relevance?
8. Stanza 8 to 18 records the poet's encounter with an old man. Who is he? Where does this encounter take place? When does this encounter take place?
9. Find the words that describe the physique of the Leech gatherer in stanza 10 and 11.
10. Render the conversation reported in stanzas 12, 13, 17 and 18 into direct speech and stanza 15 into indirect speech.
11. What is described in stanza 14?
12. Is there a change in the poet's attitude at the end? Give the expressions that help you identify it.

Task 4

Identify the stanzas where the author narrates his encounter with the leech gatherer. How are the other two sections different from the Narrative part?

Find where the poem can be divided meaningfully. (3 splits) meditative- narrative – post-meditative.

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