

Tropes-Based Difficulties Encountering Algerian EFL Students in Interpreting Literary Texts

صعوبات الاستعارات التي تواجه طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية في تفسير النصوص الأدبية

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Abstract

Informations about Article

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EFL students

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Reading Skill

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Though literature can develop communicative competence, EFL students lack enthusiasm toward learning literature because they are unable to interpret literary text in which the meaning is transferred due to the use of rhetorical devices: tropes. This study aims at investigating tropes- related difficulties that Algerian EFL students encounter when interpreting literary texts. To achieve this goal, a questionnaire administered to 30 participants at English department- Kasdi Merbah University. The findings show that students encounter tropes-based difficulties when interpreting a literary texts. These encouraging results offer a viable starting-point for teaching EFL students tropes to increase their interpretation of literary texts and promote their reading skill.

Introduction

The main concern of English language teaching is to develop EFL students' communicative competence to use English language through its four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing (Esther Uso'-Juan & Alicia Martí'nez-Flor, 2006a). In fact, communicative competence includes the mastery of not only linguistic forms but also the ability to interpret a contextualized discourse (Esther Uso'-Juan & Alicia Martí'nez-Flor, 2006a). For this reason, the content of EFL programs and curriculum has been subjected to different modifications for assuring the development of EFL students' communicative competence.

Among the many components in EFL curriculum content, literature is included and it has a basic role. A huge number of researches have proved that literature is a powerful pedagogical tool due to the different advantages it offers to EFL students (Bredella, 2004; Carter & Long, 1991; Collie & Slater, 1987; Ghosn, 2002; Lazar, 1993; McKay, 1982; Moss 2003; Povey, 1972; Pugh, 1989; Shanahan, 1997; Spack, 1985; Widdowson, 1975; Van, 2009). Literature is considered an authentic material as it makes EFL students familiar with many different linguistic

forms, communicative functions and meanings (Collie and Slater, 1987). As cultural awareness is needed when communicating with people in the target country, literature can offer EFL students an opportunity to promote their cultural competence and helps them to understand how communication takes place in the country whose language is being taught (Lazar, 1993). Literary works can improve EFL learners' linguistic competence (ibid) and enrich their vocabulary (Wang and Guthrie, 2004). According to Dornyei (2005, p. 112), using literature in the classroom can help in "creating an overall positive motivational climate in the classroom." It is also beneficial in the learning process due to the fact that it fosters their personal involvement (Dornyei, 2005). Moreover, it develops language skills mainly reading, since literature is a rich and widely-appealing material for reading (Brumfit, 1986). However, regardless of the various benefits that literature offers, many Algerian EFL teachers prefer to discard literature from classroom for its being detrimental to the learning process of learners who show a great reluctance to reading literature as they are unable to interpret literary text. EFL students' lack of enthusiasm towards learning literature is theorized to be the result of the

difficulties they encounter when dealing with literature and interpreting a literary text (Afzali &Tahririan, 2007; Grenfell & Erler, 2007; Bouazid. T & Cheryl le Roux, 2010; Zengier & Shepherd, 2003). What lacking, however, is a research exploring the nature of the different difficulties encountering EFL students when dealing with literary text.

Literary text has many characteristics; one of them is the use of figurative language. Actually, the writer uses figurative language to achieve an aesthetic value and convey the intended meaning in more deeply way. In fact, figurative forms are divided into two parts: schemes and tropes. On the one hand, schemes are defined as any artful deviation from the typical arrangement of individual sounds and words. On the other hand, tropes are viewed as any artful deviation from the ordinary and principal meaning of a word or an idea. One among many aims of literary texts is to say as much as possible using few words to achieve a maximum effectiveness. For this reason, writers implement tropes to say what they want to give their word or sentence more implied figurative meanings. As tropes dominate literary texts, as it is supposed, there is a need for studies to probe whether the use of tropes raises difficulties among EFL students when they come to interpret literary texts. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to investigate the extent to which tropes- based difficulties make it difficult for EFL students to understand and interpret a literary texts. In other words, this study finds its central focus in analyzing the problems, caused by the overuse of tropes, which EFL students experience in understanding literary text.

Research Questions

To achieve this objective, the following research questions are raised:

Do tropes create difficulties among EFL students in interpreting a literary text?

How can tropes-based difficulties affect EFL students' understanding and interpretation of a literary text?

Research Hypotheses

In the light of the aforementioned questions, the following hypotheses are drawn:

Tropes may create difficulties among EFL students in interpreting a literary text.

Tropes-based difficulties affect at highly level EFL students' understanding and interpretation of a literary

text.

Research methodology and procedures

As mentioned previously, the present research serves to explore tropes-based difficulties encountering EFL students in interpreting literary texts. To achieve the study aim, a questionnaire was administered to 30 participants. The participants are EFL second- year students at Kasdi Merbah University of Ouargla. The selection of participants is based on random convenience sampling method which "includes participants who are readily available and agree to participate in a study" (Frey, Carl and Gary, 2000, p.131). The questionnaire consists of three sections each of which is devoted to attain a certain sub-objective related to the general objective.

1-Data Analysis and Interpretation

1-1-The first section

The first section is about EFL students' attitudes towards learning literature.

Table N°1: EFL Students' Attitudes towards Learning Literature

Q N	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Q1	66%, 26	16,66%	56,66%
Q2	26,66%	20%	53,33%
Q3	33,33%	13,33%	53,33%
Q4	33%, 23	10%	66%, 66
Q5	20%	6,66%	73,33%
Q6	23,33%	33%, 13	63,33%
Q7	10%	16,66%	73,33%
Q8	23,33%	16,66%	60%
Q9	96,66%	3,33%	00%

Table 1 presents EFL students' attitudes towards learning literature. For the first question, 55, 66% of the participants don't like reading English literature. The second question shows that 53, 33% of the participants have a negative ideas about English literature which does not help them to develop their proficiency in English language. The results obtained from question three indicate that 53, 33% of the respondents say that they don't enjoy reading a literary text in the classroom. For question four, the table reports that 66, 66% of the participants hold negative attitudes towards reading literary work as an activity at home. For question five, 73, 33% of the respondents disagree with

the view that reading a literary text is a motivating activity. The sixth question shows that 63, 33% of the participants answer that they don't like to participate in English literature- based activities in the classroom. The results obtained from the question seven indicate that 73, 33% of the respondents dislike implementing literature in English language classroom. Question eight reports that 60% of the participants view learning literature is not important and it has no contribution to their future professional career. For the last question, 96, 66% of the participants believe that learning literature is a demanding task. Based on the results obtained from the first section we can conclude that the majority of participants have negative attitudes towards learning literature as they consider it a demanding task. Additionally, they view reading literature a detrimental activity to the learning process of English language, and it does not contribute their future professional life.

1-2-The second section

The second section is about difficulties encountering EFL students when coming to interpret a literary text.

Table N°2: Difficulties Encountering EFL Students when Interpreting Literary Text

Q N	Always	Sometimes	Never
Q1	76,66%	13,33%	10%
Q2	70%	16,66%	13,33%
Q3	66,66%	20%	13,33%
Q4	83,33%	16,66%	00%
Q5	90%	10%	00%

For the first question, 76, 66% of the participants responded that they always find difficulties when dealing with English literary works. For the second question, it is reported that 70% of the respondents always find difficulties to understand a literary text due to their low proficiency in English language. The results obtained about the third question show that 66, 66% of the participants fail to understand a literary text by reason of lacking of English vocabulary. For the fourth question, 83, 33 % of the respondents answer that they always fail to interpret appropriately a literary text their underdeveloped cultural competence. The fifth question shows that 90% of the participants respond that they find difficulties to appropriately interpret literary text as they are unable to decode the figurative language. Comparing the results

obtained from all questions, we report that there are several difficulties encountering the participants when interpreting literary text, but their failure to appropriately interpret a literary text is caused by inability to decode figurative language, as it takes the highest percentage in the table.

1-3-The third Section

The third section is about the affect of tropes-based difficulties on EFL students' exam and classroom performance.

Table N° 3: Tropes-Based Difficulties' Affect on EFL Students' Performance

Q N	Always	Sometimes	Never
Q1	80%	13,33 %	06,66%
Q2	90%	10%	13,33%
Q3	90%	06,66%	03,33%
Q4	93 ,33%	03,33%	03,33%
Q5	93,33%	03,33%	03,33%
Q6	86,66%	06,66%	06,66%
Q7	83,33%	06,66%	10%
Q8	83,33%	06,66%	10%
Q9	83,33%	10%	06,66%
Q10	83,33%	06,66%	10%
Q11	06,66%	06,66%	86,66%
Q12	83,33%	03,33%	13,33%

For the first question, 80% of the participants reply that they stop reading if they find it difficult to identify figurative forms implemented in a literary text. The second question shows that 90% of the respondents stop reading just as they fail to decode the figurative meaning of an expression or a word. The third question reports that 90% of the participants stop reading if they fail to identify the type of figurative forms employed in a literary text. In the question number four, the majority of the participants 93, 33% are unable to make a difference between metaphor and simile. The results obtained from the fifth question indicate that 93, 33% of the respondents are not able to identify the figurative meaning of a word or an expression whether metaphor or symbol. For the sixth question, the majority of the participants 86, 66% can not understand other figurative meanings that an expression or a word in a literary text has. The results obtained from the question number seven show that 83, 33% of the

respondents get bad marks in the exam by the reason their inability to decode figurative language. For the eighth question, 83, 33% of the participants get bad marks in the exam due to their inability to identify the figurative forms employed in the literary text. The question nine shows that 83, 33% of the respondents spend a long time during the exam to identify the figurative forms. For the question ten, 83, 33 % of the participants spend a long time during the exam to interpret the figurative meaning of a word or an expression. The eleventh question indicates that 86, 66% of the respondents do not participate in the activities based on the identification of tropes employed in a literary text. For the question number twelve, 83, 33% of the participants keep silent if they are asked to identify or interpret the meaning of figurative forms in a literary text. The results obtained from the third section demonstrate that the participants are not able to identify the figurative forms and to interpret the figurative meaning of a word or an expression. Additionally, they fail to make a difference between the closer figurative forms such as metaphor and symbol. Moreover, tropes-based difficulties encountering the participants affect their performance in the exam as well as in the classroom.

Conclusion

To develop EFL students' communicative competence,

literature is proposed as powerful pedagogic tool. However, EFL students lack enthusiasm towards learning literature due the difficulties they encounter. As a literary text is based on figurative language in which meaning of words and expressions is transferred due to tropes as we suppose in this study. Accordingly, this study has reached some significant conclusions. First, this study proves that EFL students show negative attitudes towards literature which they consider detrimental to English language learning. Second, it also demonstrates that the inability to decode figurative meaning of words and expressions in a literary text makes is difficult for them to give a literary text an appropriate interpretation. Third, consequently, trope- based difficulties affect EFL students' exam and classroom performance.

Recommendations

The results of this study showed that EFL students have negative exam outcomes and attitudes towards literary texts because of their inability to decode meanings of sentences and words. Further research is recommended to conduct experimental studies to determine the maximum achievable enhancement in appreciating and reading literary texts through teaching EFL students explicitly tropes.

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Student Questionnaire

Dear students

I am presently conducting a research on tropes- based difficulties encountering EFL students when interpreting literary text. The purpose of this questionnaire is to investigate tropes- based difficulties encountering EFL students when interpreting literary text and the extent to which the aforementioned difficulties negatively affect EFL students' understanding of literary text and, then, their attitudes towards learning literature. I would be very grateful if you could answer these questions. Your responses will be used for research only and will remain confidential.

Section one

EFL students' attitudes towards learning literature. Please put a cross (X) in One of the boxes depending on how much you agree or disagree with the statements.

N	Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	I like reading English literature					
2	English literature helps me to develop my proficiency in English language					
3	I enjoy if I'm asked to read a literary text in the classroom					
4	I enjoy if I'm asked to read a literary work as a home activity					
5	Reading literary text is a motivating activity					
6	I like to participate in English literature- based activities in the classroom					
7	I like using literature in the classroom when learning English language.					
8	Learning literature is important because it contributes to my future professional career.					
9	Learning literature is a demanding task.					

Section two

difficulties encountering EFL students when coming to interpret a literary text. Please put a cross in the appropriate box depending on how frequently encounter difficulties when you come to interpret literary text.

N	Statements	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	I find difficulties when dealing with English literature.					
2	I find it difficult to understand a literary text as my low proficiency in English language.					
3	The lack of English vocabulary raises troubles when coming to understand a literary text.					
4	I fail to give a literary text an appropriate interpretation because my cultural competence is underdeveloped.					
5	I find difficulties to appropriately interpret literary text because I'm unable to decode figurative language.					

Section three

The affect of tropes- based difficulties in EFL students' performance. Please put the cross in one box depending on your reaction when tropes-based difficulties make interpreting literary text a difficult task for you.

N	Statements	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	I stop reading, when I find it difficult to identify figurative forms implemented in literary text					
2	I stop reading, when I fail to decode figurative meaning of an expression or a word					
3	I stop reading, when I fail to identify the type of figurative form employed in the literary text					
4	I stop reading if fail to identify comparison based figurative forms whether metaphor or simile					
5	I stop reading if I fail to identify the figurative meaning of a word or an expression whether metaphor or symbol					
6	I stop reading if I find difficulties to understand the different figurative meanings that an expression or a word in literary text has					
7	I get bad marks in the exam because I'm unable to decode figurative language					
8	I get bad marks in the exam because I'm unable to identify the figurative forms employed in the literary text					
9	I spend long time during the exam to identify the figurative forms					
10	I spend long time during the exam to interpret the figurative meaning of a word or an expression					
11	I participate in the activities based on the identification of tropes employed in a literary Text					
12	I keep silent when I'm asked to identify and interpret tropes used in a given literary text					

صعوبات الاستعارات التي تواجه طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في تفسير النصوص الأدبية

ملخص

الكلمات المفتاحية

طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية
النص الأدبي
مهارات القراءة
التفسير
الصعوبات المستندة إلى أدوات

الأدب مفيد لتنمية الكفاءة التواصلية لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. ومع ذلك يفتقر الطلاب الجزائريون في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية إلى الحماس تجاه تعلم الأدب لأنهم غير قادرين على تفسير النص الأدبي الذي يتم فيه نقل معنى الكلمات والعبارات بسبب استعمال المحسنات البديعية والبيانية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التحقق من الصعوبات المتعلقة بالتعاليم التي يواجهها الطلاب الجزائريون في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية عند قراءة وتفسير معنى النص الأدبي. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف، تم تقديم استبيان على 30 طالبًا يدرسون الأدب في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية - جامعة قاصدي مرباح. تظهر نتائج هذا البحث أن الطلاب الجزائريين في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يواجهون صعوبات عند محاولة تفسير معنى النص الأدبي. توفر لنا هذه النتائج المشجعة نقطة انطلاق قابلة للتطبيق لتدريس طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من أجل زيادة تفسيهم للنص الأدبي وتعزيز مهارات القراءة لديهم.

Difficultés basées sur les tropes rencontrées par les étudiants EFL dans l'interprétation de textes littéraires

Résumé

Malgré que la littérature puisse développer la compétence communicative, les étudiants d'anglais comme langue étrangère manquent d'enthousiasme pour apprendre la littérature à cause de leurs incapacités d'interpréter un texte littéraire dans lequel le sens est transféré à cause des tropes. Cette étude vise à étudier les difficultés liées aux tropes que rencontrent les étudiants lorsqu'ils interprètent un texte littéraire. Pour atteindre cet objectif, un questionnaire a été administré à 30 étudiants dans le département d'anglais de l'Université Kasdi Merbah. Les résultats montrent que les étudiants rencontrent des difficultés basées sur les tropes en essayant d'interpréter le texte littéraire. Ces résultats encourageants nous fournissent un point de départ viable pour enseigner aux étudiants tropes afin d'augmenter leur interprétation du texte littéraire et de promouvoir leurs compétences en lecture.

Mots clés

efl students
littérature
lecture
interprétation
difficultés basées sur les
figures de style



Competing interests

The author(s) declare no competing interests

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