A Reflection on Teaching Poetic Texts to Tertiary EFL Congolese Learners through Discourse Analysis Approach: Case of Graduate Level at ISP-Muhangi à Butembo

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Abstract

This study analyzed the pedagogical approaches used in EFL poetry classes at the Institut Supérieur Pédagogique Muhangi in Butembo. It aims to sort out some causes of learners' inability to understand the essence of poetry. It also aims to provide appropriate approaches to improve poetry analysis to make reading effective and exciting. The participants' opinions showed that learners and teachers avoid learning and teaching poetry. They think that's the domain of genius people. The results show that those who attempt to experiment in this area use a traditional teacher-centered approach. An approach that pushes its users to give ready-to-use summaries to memorize from where learners cannot feel and appreciate the text. Unlike the traditional approach, the discourse analysis approach has proven to be suitable for analyzing poetry. Thus, it is recommended to use the method of critical analysis to improve not only communication but also the creative and critical thinking of learners.

Keywords: Critical thinking, Discourse Analysis Approach, language teaching, poetic texts, the traditional approach

Résumé

Cette étude était centrée à analyser les approches pédagogiques utilisées dans les classes de poésie EFL à l'Institut Supérieur Pédagogique Muhangi à Butembo. Elle vise à trier certaines causes de l'incapacité des apprenants à comprendre l'essence de la poésie. Il vise également à fournir des approches appropriées pour améliorer l'analyse de la poésie afin de rendre la lecture efficace et passionnante. Les opinions des participants ont montré que les apprenants et les enseignants évitent l'apprentissage et l'enseignement de la poésie. Ils pensent que c'est le domaine des gens de génie. Les résultats montrent que ceux qui tentent d'expérimenter dans ce domaine utilisent une approche traditionnelle centrée sur l'enseignant. Une approche qui pousse ses utilisateurs à donner des résumés prêts à l'emploi à mémoriser d'où les apprenants ne peuvent pas sentir et apprécier le texte. Contrairement à l'approche traditionnelle, l'approche de l'analyse du discours s'est avérée adaptée à l'analyse de la poésie. Ainsi, il est recommandé d'utiliser la méthode d'analyse critique pour améliorer non seulement la communication, mais également la pensée créative et critique des apprenants.

Mots-clés : Pensée critique, approche d'analyse du discours, enseignement des langues, textes poétiques, approche traditionnelle.

Introduction

Many Congolese educators have attempted to teach poetry in the tertiary EFL classroom. The fact is that this kind deviates from normal language by using some unusual ways of obscure references, odd word order, unfamiliar comparisons, nonsensical statements, non-ordinary method, or style deviation; these aspects not only makes poetry important and useful in the language classroom, but they also make it strange to both second language learners and teachers. Consequently, learners and their teachers sink into fear and are not motivated to deal with poetry.

The misunderstanding of poetry by tertiary scholarship, needs to be an appropriate analytic approach to the problem, which culminates in the lack of literary competence, which might be due to many aspects of learners. On the one hand, these aspects involve the teachers' overlooking of the linguistic approaches to literature, such as stylistics, pragmatics, and semiotics which are, at any rate, essential tools for understanding discourse. Still, while the Congolese students profit nothing from poetic texts to develop their worldview, they also add nothing to it since their teachers may have ignored some interactive conventions and operations that literary texts entail. Congolese teachers may need to be more careful about stylistics, which recommends itself as the most suitable introductory mode of analysis for learning about language, the workings of language in literature, and developing the confidence to work systematically towards the interpretations of literary texts.

Teachers at the Department of English and African Culture at Institut Supérieur Pédagogique(
ISP) Muhangi à Butembo need to be made aware of the above approaches to literature, and they also board in the same boat of fear as their students regarding poetry analysis. Besides, they might have turned their literary studies into ex-cathedra classes where the lecturer is an all-knower and the learner a passive-receiver. In order to better understand the phenomenon mentioned above, this paper seeks to answer the following queries:
- What teaching approaches are used in the poetry EFL classroom at ISP-Muhangi à Butembo?
- What approach can be suggested to promote language pedagogy, literary competence, and critical thinking?

Literature Review on Language Teaching Approaches
Traditional Approaches to the Teaching of Poetry

Traditional teaching approaches are teacher-oriented rather than learner-oriented approaches. Earlier research on classroom communication evolved in two separate directions in response to different practical problems. In the Birmingham School, lessons were teacher-fronted, where knowledge was typically transmitted by the pupils answering the teacher's displayed questions, questions to which the teacher already knew the answer. Matthiessen & Slade (2002) built a model for analyzing primary classroom discourse with the following characteristics:
- The teacher begins the lesson with "now then," a discourse marker that indicates a boundary, the starting point of something new.
- Learners cannot shout their answers; the teacher nominates who speaks next.
- The teacher reinforces the answer by repeating it and evaluating it as good, for example, by saying: "It's a bucket, not a basket. Yes, it's a bucket."
- The discourse proceeds in units of three parts: the question, the answer, and the feedback or follow-up.

In a nutshell, this model deals with discourse markers such as "Now then", and "Right" as transactional boundaries at the top phase of the lesson. The next stage is about interactions, that is, question-answer-feedback combinations. The following phase concerns moves represented by

single actions of questioning, answering, and feeding back. Finally, there are micro-actions such as pointing at the pupil to speak, the pupils put their hands up, and pupils stopping making noise.

In the traditional approaches to poetry teaching, teachers focus on the background information about literature; that is, teachers transmit their knowledge to learners about the poet's life, masterpieces, and general ideas about the poem under study. As a result, the understanding and appreciation of poetry floats since the teacher either relies on readymade materials or due to students' lack of interest or even teaching poetry by dissecting technique: here is a metaphor, and here is alliteration.

The traditional approach to discourse learning and teaching has been criticized by many scholars in the fields of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and English Language Learning (ELL), such as Rivers (1973), and Paulston (1974), who drew upon Hymes's theory of communicative competence to critique the dominant model of language instruction at the time, the Audio-lingual Method (ALM), for its narrow focus on grammatical accuracy rather than authentic communication. These scholars claim that second language learning should be interactive for learners to successfully cope with the language appropriately.

Learner-centered Versus Teacher-centered Approaches

There is a panoply of such approaches which, unlike the traditional approaches, target the learner as the center of interest. These approaches are classified according to previous research, as declared by Van (2009); Lazar (1993); Carter & Long (1991); and Ngwaba (2013) that all approaches are interdependent and complement each other. Below are sketched the most used approaches when teaching literature, chiefly poetry.

Wellek & Werren's (1973) Models

For Wellek & Werren (1973), two approaches are described: the extrinsic approach and the intrinsic approach. In the former, the reader focuses on the biography of the author, historical background, and social aspects. The extrinsic system is biographical, historical, aesthetic, and philosophical. Still, it expresses a general attitude towards life, for poets answer queries that are also philosophical themes. Yet, as poetic texts address different issues and situations at different periods, the poetic mode of answering also differs. In the intrinsic approach, on the other hand, the reader focuses on the structure, language, form, images, symbols, style, binary oppositions, and plot development in the narrative text. All aspects of language, such as grammatical, lexical, phonological, structural, and cultural, are considered through the intrinsic outlook in discourse analysis. The inherent approach to discourse analysis embodies all the above approaches. Among these approaches, let us mention the New Criticism approach and Structuralism.

Van's (2009) Approaches

Van (2009) considers the following approaches which have contributed much to the advancement of language teaching: The Stylistic Approach, Reader Response Approach, the Language–Based Approach, the Critical Literacy Approach, New Criticism, and Structuralism. Van's approaches include Carter and Long's stylistic approach in the name of the language model and the reader-response, which, like the personal growth model, aims at the independence the learner must embody when analyzing a literary text. The language-based approach views literature as an excellent tool for communicative language teaching (CLT), like Carter and Long's approach.

The stylistic approach subscribes to viewing how literary texts exemplify the system of language (Khan & Alasmari, 2018), the language-based approach enhances collaborative learning, interaction, peer teaching, and student independence. In addition, this approach triggers the

learners' communicative competence through role play, poetry debate, cloze, prediction, and ranking tasks. To state it otherwise, Mcrae & Clark (2004) argue that the main aim of stylistics is to explain how our understanding of a text is achieved by examining in detail the linguistic organization of a text and how the reader needs to interact with that linguistic organization to make sense of it.

Maley's (1989) Critical Literacy Approach and the Stylistic Approach

Khan & Alasmari (2018) put forward two models: the critical literacy approach and the stylistic approach. The former studies literature as a cultural component and stresses background, plot, literary concepts such as point of view, characterization or characters' psychological features, value, and so on. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a critical literacy approach that focuses on text and the study of texture, sociocultural practices, and the concept of culture (Fairclough, 1995). Thus, applying the Critical Literacy Approach to teaching poetry, the learner will pay attention not only to textual form but also to structure and organization at all levels: phonological, grammatical, lexical (vocabulary), and higher levels of textual organization in terms of exchange systems (speaking turns, and politeness), structures of argumentation, and generic structures.

The stylistic approach, like the critical literacy approach, studies literature as discourse from a linguistic perspective; stylistics is the source of learning language and focuses on the text's description, analysis of language, and critical interpretation of texts. This approach is worth applying in an EFL setting, for it urges learners to comprehend literary and non-literary texts through literary analysis and appreciation. According to Lazar (1993), stylistics approach involves the close study of the literary text itself. It helps learners make meaningful interpretations of the texts and expand their awareness and knowledge of the target language.

New Criticism-Formalistic Approach

New Criticism is another text-oriented and reader-oriented approach, also called the Formalistic approach. This approach puts much focus on close reading, mainly for poetry, to explore how a literary text works as a self-referential, self-centered piece to be interpreted by readers (Khan & Alasmari, 2018). It helps the reader unravel foregrounded or linguistic deviations or other socially accepted norms enveloped deliberately in poetic texts (Mbokani, 2019). Poets' primary function is to defamiliarize or "make strange" (*ostranenie*) the language in poetry. Thus, new critics focus on analyzing aspects of language such as irony, metaphor, paradox, imagery, and symbolism, as well as content elements such as themes and statements on themes as presented in poems.

According to Hall (2005), New Criticism is invaluable not only for the fact of focusing on the poem itself but also for the fact that ambiguities, paradoxes, and ironies are posed and resolved in the language of the poem itself. Thus Kiura & Ngitsi (2018) advise learners and teachers to consider the following terms when analyzing texts through New Criticism:
- *Tension,* the integral unity of the poem, results from binary oppositions;
- *The intentional fallacy* is the belief that the author's intention may determine the meaning or value of a work;
- *The effective* error is the belief that the importance or value of a work may be determined by its effect on the reader;
- *External forms* include rhyme scheme or rhythm, meter, stanza form, etc.
- *Objective correlative* is a collection of objects, situations, or events that instantly evoke particular emotion or effect.

Structuralism

Both New Criticism or Formalism and Structuralism view texts as a set of intertextual connections that should be analyzed, considering the particular conventions and operations that make the texts meaningful. For instance, Structuralist semioticians think of language as a set of arbitrary signs that embody signifiers or denotative or explicit meanings by contrast with signifieds or connotative or implicit meanings of signs (words, body expressions, archetypes (colors, symbols, etc.).

The Functional Approach, likewise, deals with functional structure defined pragmatically at a tridimensional aspect: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. In other terms, this approach relates language and its speaker, i.e., the functional or discourse approach considers the way ideas are generated to be communicated through interactants and how this discourse interaction takes place between the implied author and the implied reader (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983; Short & Leech, 1981) in written literary texts. One can concur with Carter (2005), Ngwaba (2013), & Padurean (2015) that discourse stylistics is worth using due to its eclectism. That is, the discourse analysis approach alone takes into consideration all the schemas: world schemata, text schemata, and language schemata (Ngwaba, 2013). In this respect, Leech (2008) holds that within stylistics, the formal and functional textual aspects are inseparable, as are the two sides of a coin. That is, discourse analysis should be approached so the reader can appreciate both style and form of signs (words, phrases, clauses, etc.).

The Rationale of the Discourse Analysis Approach

According to Derin et al. (2020), discourse analysis is worth applying, for it provides learners with new skills and strengthens these skills in language interpretation within their sociocultural context. Furthermore, as the teacher's role is of a guide and facilitator, discourse analysis is helpful in teaching since teachers can develop their teaching process by looking further at the language used inside and outside the classroom, such as students' online and informal interactions.

With regard to what has been said above, Discourse Analysis Approach is worth applying in an EFL classroom context for the following reasons:
- It is language-focused, i.e., it deals with stylistics and speech acts
- It is text-centered, focusing on structure, texture, and aesthetics.
- It is eclectic, i.e., it involves many literary approaches such as Formalism/New Criticism, Structuralism, and Functionalism.

Methodology

As said earlier, this study aims to pinpoint and examine the methods and approaches used by Congolese tertiary teachers at ISP-Muhangi à Butembo (Muhangi Teachers' Training College (TTC)). In this perspective, a qualitative design was adopted to check the opinions of both learners and teachers about poetry teaching in the Department of English and African Culture at Muhangi Teachers' Training College (TTC). The purposive sampling guided the researcher to select 11 second-graduate-level learners that took part in the study together with 8 literature teachers A questionnaire was used to collecting information from informants.

The questionnaire was supplemented by an observation of some lessons taught on poetry in different classes of the English department. In addition to observation, document analysis was applied to researcher checking the objectives assigned to the course through learners' notes and how the lecturers managed to teach their different literature lessons. A simple descriptive statistic was made through Microsoft Excel 2007 to determine the percentage. The questionnaire consisted

of ten questions: six for learners and four for teachers. The former checked the learners' motivation for poetry and their appreciation of teaching techniques, and the latter contained the methods used.

Findings and Discussion
Learners' Questionnaire
Poetry is so complicated that only genius people can cope

The data analysis has shown that some factors which hinder poetry teaching in the English and African Cultures at Muhangi Teachers' Training College are from psychological to pedagogic. The former reason concerned is that learners are not motivated; for the latter reason, teachers do not use appropriate techniques to enhance language learning through poetry. Majority (83%) of the respondents think that poetry is so complicated that only genius people can cope with it. This meets the observation of Mbokani (2018), who confirmed that many learners and teachers think that poetry is a complicated arena of genius and that the role of the teacher should be to demystify it by making it a source of enjoyment instead of a daunting and brains cudgeling enterprise.

I don't like poetry because it is useless for me.

None of the respondents agreed nor disagreed that they did not like poetry. This means their interest in poetry needs to be improved by something else. Their dislike might be due to either the choice of texts or the techniques used by lecturers. McCarthy (1991) makes it clear that if the teacher could give simple cues and response drills to learners for pair work, it would encourage recognition of the communicative value of lexical relations at an early stage in language learning. Thus, learners are trained to associate synonyms and antonyms or a superordinate item with its hyponyms and vice-versa.

During a class observation, it was noticed that the choice of texts in the first graduate was a problem for learners, for the teacher taught Shakespeare's texts which were far from the learners' context. Besides, there was a great use of old English in those texts.

The teacher gives their understanding

This figure proves to what extent some literature teachers must consider the learners' view of the poem. In this regard, majority (83%) of the respondents have agreed that their teachers give what they believe to be the poem's meaning.

The teacher asks us to write our poems.

Majority of respondents (82,5%) have strongly agreed that the teacher asks them to compose their own poems are those who have been initiated into creative activities of writing poetic texts. Among these, we have learners from the teacher who has an idea of the discourse analysis approach.

The teacher tests our knowledge of the poem, not our ability to feel it and appreciate it.

Majority of the respondents (67,0%) confirmed that their teachers test knowledge rather than the learners' abilities to feel and appreciate the poem. In other words, these teachers need to consider the different levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, such as comprehending, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

Readymade summaries are given by the teacher to be memorized for exams.

Majority of the respondents (80,0%) agreed and strongly agreed that language teachers do not pay much attention to teaching literature per se; they teach about it. Learners must be allowed to find and talk about their ideas about the poetic text under discussion. Learners cannot be able to theorize on the matter of how people display identity (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006).

Teachers' Questionnaire

Do you know the Discourse Analysis Approach to learning and teaching literature?

Majority of teachers (83,0%) said they know nothing about Discourse Analysis Approach. They all said they had no training in teaching literature. Mbokani (2019) asserts that teachers who adhere to the generic method talk about literature instead of teaching it. Literature teaching should first and foremost be concerned with enhancing communicative competence, interpretive abilities, and procedural skills, enabling one to read, understand, interpret, and cogently comment on any literary work through an objective evaluation.

How often do you use Discourse Analysis Approach?

Always = Everyday; Never = Zero time; Occasionally: Sometimes

The majority of the respondents had never heard of Discourse Analysis Approach. Only one respondent over five has said that he occasionally uses it, whereas two of the respondents said they always use it. This fact corroborates to the respondents' opinion, who said they have never had any training in literature teaching and poetry learning. The one respondent who attested to applying Discourse Analysis still needed to understand it, how it is used, and the like.

Notions you've ever taught in poetry analysis.

Findings show that majority respondents agreed on aspects used for teaching that include: themes (90,9%), figures of style (90,9%), and characterization (90,9%). Less than half reported that the aspect used for teaching concerns point of view (45,5%). The scansion and the poetic devices were never used for teaching. For Kiura & Ngitsi (2018), the absence of those aspect reveals the fear of teacher to reveal their tone and mood.

What methods or techniques do you apply when reading and teaching poetic texts?

The findings show that John Peck's Approach is the most used method applied at ISP-Muhangi à Butembo. The other techniques are Structuralism and Discourse Analysis Approach (13,0%), respectively, and Stylistics (12,0%). The results show to which extent language teachers for poetry ignore the Discourse Analysis Approach to literature. This remark enjoins McCarthy (1991), who observed that language teachers do not consider the following aspects of discourse analysis: cohesion, coherence, situational, intentionality, acceptability, adaptability, and intertextuality, also called standards of textuality. However, in the focus group, the respondents agreed that they used somehow those techniques applied helter-skelter in one aspect of them, the level of listing figures of style without elucidating their effects on the reader.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It was been observed from findings that learners and teachers at ISP-MUHANGI ignore the Discourse Analysis Approach to literature teaching and learning. It has also been observed from the findings that language and literary teachers come to the classroom with pre-analyzed poems to make them swallowed by learners. Document analysis has shown that during the learners' assessment, teachers must consider the six facets of Bloom's Taxonomy not putting much concern on comprehension questions, ignoring other factors such as creativity, critical thinking, etc. Results from two lessons on poetry have proved that teachers come to the classroom with pre-established materials not considering students participation.

Therefore, to better understand the aforementioned described discourse analysis approach, the following recommendations are formulated:

- To capacitate teachers through seminars and workshops on language and literature teaching methods, for the teachers did not have enough training in literacy teaching of poetry;
- Teachers of literature should make research teams and embody the great sense of research to solve their problems collaboratively;
- Schools should select enjoyable or interesting text books to allow teachers be empowered with teaching materials;
- ISP-Muhangi's authority should make a good selection of teachers during personnel recruitment
- The Congolese legislator should design curricula and syllabi well adapted to the Congolese context and assign their materials to be taught at each level.

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