Integration of poetry into foreign language classes

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Poetry is a genre of literature that evokes our feelings and senses. Poetry is very versatile that it can be an indispensable part of language classes. Poems offer a rich, varied repertoire and are a source of much enjoyment for teacher and learner alike. [Collie, Slater: 226] A poetry is rhythmically and gorgeously arranged words that rhyme with each other. Poetry demands deep concentration and skills to be clearly understood. Thus it is can be used to promote language teaching and learning. First and foremost aim of using poetry in the language classes is to encourage learners to use the target language freely. In process of mastering the cognitive aspect of a foreign language culture, the following tasks are solved by integrating poetry:

-Cultural cognition: history, culture, literature, traditions of the country which language being studied;

-Acquisition with mentality of other peoples in comparison with their own;

-Linguistic acquisition: phonetic, lexical, grammatical, stylistic and translation;

There are numerous ways of using poetry in language classes. It gives wide chance for bettering spelling and pronunciation, for developing reading and listening skills, for enriching vocabulary stock, and for improving writing skills. Depending on the aim instructor uses poems, it can be a subject or an object of the lesson. When it is used as a source, the poetry comes as theme of lesson. For example, poem of Great Poet and Thinker of the East Magtymguly Pyragy “The Land of the Turkmen” can be taken as the subject, and used for working on during the whole lesson for analyzing the style, expressive and stylistic means that are used in the language, the ancient Turkmen language that is used in the poem with its words rooting to the Arabic and Persian languages, and at last but not less important is for understanding the philosophy and vision of the poet. Furthermore, the same piece of poetry can be used as an object in the lessons such as translation theory as a piece for translation practice, history of language as a piece for analyzing language changes during centuries, theory of grammar as an example of different usage of sentence structures.

Choice of poetry in the language classroom differs according to the age group of the learners, language knowledge level, skills teacher wants to develop, and the interests of the students. The first advice to be given is to prepare students for poetry usage as giving short information about poetry types, forms, construction, rhyme and rhythm. Activities for integration of poetry can be divided into three:

-pre-reading activities for drawing attention to the poem and for activating interest. It includes background information about the poem, as biography of the author, key words used in the poem, jigsaw puzzles used by dividing learners into small groups, thus to present all that teachers can use multistep flashcards, presentations, wallpapers, audio files, as the main task of these activities is to get learners interested;

-while-reading activities for getting the meaning and practicing the lexical items of the poem. In this part learners analyze the given poem by linguistic point of view, thus they pay attention to the structure of the poem, vocabulary usage in each stanza, types of stylistic devices used there, rhyming words and their role in reading the poem, and translation peculiarities of the poem by trying to give the meaning and not changing the form, specially paying attention to converting stylistic devices and expressive means correctly;

-post-reading activities for creative usage of the target language considering the poem. Example to this step can be as conducting debates between learners, role playing, continuing or adding some ideas into poem, writing essays about their own vision of certain situation, or writing about prose version of the given poem. Main task of post-reading activities is producing response by motivating them to represent their own thoughts not only by agreeing but also by disagreeing with author’s point of view.

Taking as an example the poem of Rudyard Kipling “If”, pre-reading activities can include questions about the chosen poem as: What is “ideal man” in your opinion? What is triumph and disaster? While-reading activities can be as following: match the words with their definitions, fill in the blanks, write collocations with the given words, and find derivatives of the given words, search for the figurative words in the poem. Post-reading activities can be various as acting out the poem, debating about the perfect way of living life, trying to answer the poet and writing response to him, writing short review of the poem. Comparing Rudyard Kipling and Halyl Gibran, as two poets differ in their views of the notion of “defeat”. After analysis learner gets to synthesis and forms his own vision on the issue the aforementioned poets put forward. The shown procedures of activities can make sure that students correctly comprehend the poem and can show their own opinion about it.

As M.B.Willmott puts forth, “Literature demonstrate language at work… it also helps the pupils and stimulates linguistic responses of various kinds. English teachers not only present literature, they also exploit it, because it can generate language as well as exemplify it”[Willmott: 57]. Poetry and related activities can play vital role in language teaching and learning, so it must be an integral part of language classes.

References:

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