

Exploiting Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* as a Language Reinforcement Platform

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Abstract:

Literature taught through different genres in any language provides authentic material for language acquisition by ESL/EFL learners. It offers a range of linguistic choices and multiple levels of textual engagement. It also caters to (Krashen 1985) Input Hypothesis of $i+1$ in which acquisition is presumably maximized if input is positioned at one level higher than a learner's existing level of language ability. For this research, the novel, 'The Remains of the Day' (TROD) (Ishiguro 1989) has been used to stimulate language learning. It may be noted that Ishiguro is a Nobel Laureate who depicts the harrowing struggle of the central characters resorting to memory assistance to reconcile with their past. The theoretical framework is informed by (Johns and Davies's 1983) ideas of Text as a Vehicle of Information (TAVI), Text as a Linguistic Object (TALO) and Clandfield's 2005 construct of Text as a Springboard of Production (TASP). Ishiguro's style may also be compared to Hemingway in terms of producing episodic long sentences marked by conjunctions and the associations to his Ice berg metaphor. A single textual extract, guided by TAVI, TALO and TASP will be used to answer these research questions.

How can TROD be used to teach the ESL/EFL learners' reading skills?

How can TROD be exploited to improve the vocabulary and grammar of ESL/EFL learners?

How can selective paragraphs of the novel be used by ESL/EFL learners to develop their writing and critical thinking ability?

The results of the research will probably highlight some of the ways in which literary texts can be exploited for language learning in an EFL/ESL context. The research may perhaps be restricted by its focus on a single literary text and its theoretical basis, but it will significantly contribute towards creative reimagining of the immense literary possibilities for language use.

Key words: authentic material, linguistic choices, memory, literary possibilities.

1. Introduction

Literature is often overlooked as a means of amplifying language despite its ability to expand the learning choices of EFL/ESL learners. It is often criticized for introducing complexity in language use and therefore regarded as an unsuitable choice for the novice EFL/ESL learners. This presumably results in the marginalization of such a rich source of language input.

Despite this unjustifiably critical approach towards literary texts, they provide a range of opportunities for EFL/ESL learners to develop their language ability. McRae (1994) identifies two different types of literary

texts: literature with a capital 'L' that includes the classical texts e.g. Shakespeare, Dickens - and literature with a small 'l' that relates to popular fiction, fables and song lyrics.

According to a British Council article on teaching English, literature helps to produce a range of sensory experiences that provides learners with different learning styles. The use of technology in the form of podcasts, videos, blogs etc. can probably magnify this sensory input.

Moreover, literature provides a great linguistic input for all the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing together with offering assistance towards the systems.

The use of literature also corresponds to Krashen's input theory of $i + 1$ in which he claims that acquisition in second language takes place when it is positioned one step ahead of the learner's existing knowledge in L1 (1985). Literary texts adequately serve this purpose since their level of comprehension is presumably at a higher level than the existing level of the EFL/ESL learner. They can be further adapted according to the dynamics of the students and requirements of the course being taught.

Besides, literary texts raise understanding of other cultures and build tolerance. They may potentially deal with universal themes such as love, community building etc. which are not appropriately negotiated with in the restricted world of course books. McRae (1994) says literature also provides representational materials rather than the one dimensional referential materials. The latter function at only a superficial level and are information-oriented whereas literature texts involve the learner at different levels using imagination and creativity to unlock the full range of meaning. These materials also give the readers a chance to understand the literary devices used. Therefore literary texts are expected to offer a comprehensive language input.

2. Literature review

Ishiguro's chef d'oeuvre novel entitled 'The Remains of the Day' (TROP) has been used in this study to reflect upon its possible deployment for language development.

The Nobel Prize winning author tells us the story of a butler, Stevens, who suppresses his instinctive inclinations in order to attain the highest standard of professionalism. However, during the course of his professional work, he unfortunately does not realize that he was unwittingly glorifying a person who was a Nazi sympathizer. This realization dawns upon him when Lord Darlington has been replaced by his successor. He even sacrificed the love of his life, Ms. Kenton all in the line of duty. Stevens employs all the resources of his memory to reconstruct the episodes that occurred to him and strives hard to exonerate himself from the blame through the art of unreliable narration. Towards the end of the story he attempts to reconcile with his mistakes embracing whatever 'remains of the day' in the best possible spirit.

Kern (2000) remarks that language teaching is split between scholarly and pragmatic teaching. The former focuses on grammatical and literary study correctness whereas the latter focuses on communication. He believes that literacy can be of great value towards learning a new language. He argues that the main purpose of a literacy-based curriculum is to improve the communicative ability in a new language. Besides, there is focus on developing the learners' ability to examine, interpret, and transform discourse. It also enables them to critically determine how discourse is used for various social objectives. It stresses both oral and written communication, but this communication is characterized by meta-communicative awareness of how meaning is created from the connection among different components including language use, contexts of interaction, and broader sociocultural contexts. Hence literacy lends itself to considerable development in language learning.

2.1. The salience of reading

Reading books is of central importance for language learning. Seuss (cited in David et al 2012) says “the more that you read, the more things you will know. The more you learn, the more places you’ll go.” David et al (2012) argue that reading books helps children to find new vocabulary expressed through diverse grammatical sentences, provides opportunities of collective attention and interest and offers encounters of responsive interaction with word meanings. Cultivation of this habit at an early age among children sets a solid foundation of language learning.

2.2. Meta cognition

Meta cognition relates to “one’s knowledge concerning one’s own cognitive processes and outcomes or anything related to them” (Flavell, 1976, p. 232). Flavell (1977), and Flavell, Miller, and Miller (2002) posit that the meta cognitive skills are extremely important to a proper functioning of the operational stage (in children over eleven years) consistent with Piaget’s Theory of Cognitive Development, and that metacognition also significantly helps in the development of oral skills, reading, writing, language acquisition, attention, memory, and social interactions.

2.3. Metacognitive reading strategies

Israel (2007) & Pressley & Afflerbach (1995) identify 3 metacognitive reading strategies. They are planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Planning strategies precede reading. They subsume the activation of readers’ background knowledge (Almasi, 2003; Israel, 2007). Also, previewing a title, picture, heading, or subheading can help readers to understand the main idea of the text. Readers may also preview the general information in the text and its structure (Almasi, 2003; Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991). Learners may seek a certain text structure in their reading material such as cause and effect, question and answer, and compare and contrast features. Besides, setting the purpose for reading can be classified as a planning strategy (Paris et al., 1991; Pressley, 2002)

Monitoring strategies occur during reading. They include the vocabulary questions, summarizing and inferring meaning (Israel, 2007; Pressley, 2002). Reader may also identify important linking words etc. and determination of the parts of the passage that can be considered or ignored also needs to be taken into account (Hudson, 2007). Different exercises aimed at clarifying the meaning of the content may be used. Evaluation strategies are used after reading. They try to apply their learning to other situations and develop a more informed perspective.

These metacognitive reading strategies correlate with the theoretical framework of this paper that is discussed at length at a later stage in this research piece. They provide interesting insights regarding the appropriate exploitation of reading materials for learning language and transform the reading experience into a comprehensive learning exercise.

According to the British Council article, there are, however, some challenges in using literature for language teaching:

- 1) Text choice. Text should be relevant and interesting.
- 2) Language complexity. The language should match the existing level of learners.
- 3) Length of the text. Short texts are suitable for traditional lesson duration while long texts are rich in context and allow sufficient time for the advancement of plot and character.
- 4) Cultural ease. Should be culturally easy to relate to.

5) Cultural suitability. Should not be incompatible with cultural sensitivities.

Duff and Maley (2007) stress teachers can address these challenges by asking these questions before selecting a text:

- Is the subject matter interesting for the group?
- Is the language of the text compatible with their existing language level?
- Does the text suit the length of the class lesson?
- Does it require a huge amount of literary and cultural knowledge?
- Is it culturally suitable?
- Is it culturally easy to understand?
- Can it be easily used to develop language?

Duff and Maley (2007) also suggest the usage of varying difficulty levels for the tasks and texts:

- Level 1 Simple text + low level task
- Level 2 Simple text + more demanding task
- Level 3 Difficult text + low level task
- Level 4 Difficult text + more demanding task

How can literary texts be used?

Pulverness (2003) provides some effective tips in terms of using literature to teach language:

1. Maximize pre-reading assistance:
 - A. Teachers can familiarize the students with the topic or main idea of the text
 - B. Pre-teach important vocabulary
 - C. Give prediction tasks to stimulate interest.
2. Minimize the teacher distraction for the students
3. Draw attention to stylistic uniqueness
4. Help students understand how the writer uses language to create certain effects
5. Arouse creativity
6. Invite learners to empathize and try to add meaning to the text

There are three research question that have been formulated in order to exploit the linguistic elements offered by TROD.

1. How can TROD be used to teach the ESL/EFL learners different reading skills?
2. How can TROD be exploited to improve the vocabulary and grammar of ESL/EFL learners?
3. How can important paragraphs of the novel be used by ESL/EFL learners to develop their writing and critical thinking ability?

3. Theoretical Framework

This paper intends to harness the ideas of Text as a Vehicle of Information (TAVI), Text as a linguistic object (TALO) (Johns & Davies, 1983), and Text as a Springboard of Production TASP (Clandfield, 2005) to exploit certain sections of Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989) to stimulate ESL/EFL learning. It also corresponds to the meta cognitive reading strategies mentioned earlier.

In TALO the texts are selected by their ability to show the syntactic structures that have been taught till that time in the classroom and a proportion of new vocabulary. There is a greater focus on language learning.

With the TAVI method there is an emphasis on comprehending the meaning. In this method information within the text is used to augment learning and takes the form of comprehension questions from the passage or summarizing a part of the text. The selection of texts depends on the immediate needs or deferred needs of the learners. If it is immediate the text will be selected by the students themselves but if it is deferred then the process of content acquisition is emphasized to a certain extent.

In TASP, most often a writing or a speaking task is assigned to the students. It can be used in the form of a role play, discussion of topics, writing a response to the text or writing a similar text.

3.1. Some Methodological reflections

According to Ahmad, et al, all the orientations and the activities are based on a single text extract from TROD (2018). They have to be completed in a single one hour lesson and need to follow the following sequence:

A. Pre-Reading Activity; B. TAVI Tasks, C. TALO Tasks, and D. TASP Tasks. (2018) Aryusmar, suggests that meaning should precede form so the pre-reading activities are followed by TAVI-type tasks. TALO type activities with a focus on grammar and vocabulary succeed the TAVI TYPE activities. (2010)

3.2. Excerpt from TROD

However, if a butler is of any worth to anything or anybody in life, there must surely come a time when he ceases his searching, a time when he must say to himself: "this employer embodies all that I find noble and admirable. I will hereafter devote myself to serving him." This is loyalty intelligently bestowed. What is there undignified in this? One is simply accepting an inescapable truth. That the likes of you and I will never be in a position to comprehend the great affairs of today's world and our best course will always be to put our trust in an employer we judge to be wise and honourable and to devote our energies to the task of serving him to the best of our ability. Look at the likes of Mr. Marshall, say or Mr. Lane- surely two of the greatest figures in our profession. Can we imagine Mr. Marshall arguing with Lord Camberley over the latter's latest dispatch to the Foreign Office? Do we admire Mr. Lane any the less because we learn he is not in the habit of challenging Sir Leonard Gray before each speech in the House of Commons? Of course, we do not. What is there undignified, what is there at all culpable in such an attitude? How can one possibly be held to blame in any sense because, say, that the passage of time has shown that Lord Darlington's efforts were misguided or even foolish. Throughout the years I served him it was he and he alone who weighed up evidence and judged it best to proceed in the ways he did while I simply confined myself quite properly to affairs within my professional realm and as far as I am concerned, I carried out my duties to the best of my abilities, indeed to a standard which many may consider 'first rate.' It is hardly my fault if his lordship's life and work have turned out today to look at best a sad waste and it is quite illogical that I should feel any regret or shame on my own account. (Kazuo- Ishiguro, 210-211)

Q1.Pre reading task

- A. What are the qualities of a good employee?
- B. What are the qualities of a good employer?

Q 2. TAVI text orientation

- A. Who are Mr. Marshall and Mr. Lane?
- B. Can Mr. Lane or Mr. Marshall be blamed for not questioning their master in the view of Stevens?
- C. What reason does Stevens give for not questioning Mr. Darlington at all?

(Q-3) TALO text orientation

- A. Match the words to the meanings

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 1) Ceases | Understand |
| 2) Embodies | Stops |
| 3) Bestowed | Unavoidable |
| 4) Undignified | To represent an idea or a quality exactly |
| 5) Inescapable | Disgraceful |
| 6) Comprehend | To give something as an honour or a present |
| 7) Devote | Blamable |
| 8) Dispatch | To happen in an unexpected way |
| 9) Culpable | To give all of your time, efforts etc. to someone. |
| 10) Turned out | To send something for a particular purpose |

- B. Find one example of a simple, compound and complex sentence from the text.

Q-4. TASP text orientation

- A. Do you think that Stevens blames himself for serving lord Darlington?
- B. According to Stevens who is an ideal butler?

These activities based on the principles of TAVI, TALO and TASP answer the three research question to a reasonable extent. They also direct the attention of the readers to the efficacy of using literary texts in classroom to assist language teaching and in doing so establish the credibility of literature as a useful device for this purpose.

4. Comparative elements between Hemingway and Ishiguro

Hemingway and Ishiguro are both literary icons in their own right. However, their writing styles lend them to some comparative analysis.

Burns (cited in pbs learning media) suggests that Hemingway's writing style is informed by a succinct approach. He used the Iceberg theory of writing. Not in common knowledge, an iceberg is only one eighths visible on the surface. The rest of the iceberg, about seven eighths, is hidden from sight. Likewise, Hemingway believes that writers should only expose the bare minimum of characters and plot and implicitly emphasize the hidden information allowing the readers to imagine it even more intensely than the writer's own description.

The same sentiment is conceptualized by Proust (cited in Rebecca, 2001) "Great literature is written in a sort of foreign tongue. To each sentence we attach a meaning, or at any rate a mental image, which is often a mistranslation. But in great literature all our mistranslations result in beauty."

So in other words, Proust is stressing the importance of readers' interpretation against a scenario of hidden information.

In Ishiguro's novel 'Unconsoled' the residents of the city who are plagued by different anxieties, believe that Mr. Ryder will provide some relief. The anticipated event is Mr. Ryder's visit, the most exciting part of the story which the reader does not see in the end. Ishiguro purposefully holds back this scene and replaces it with the heightened expectation that it creates throughout. Therefore, paradoxically, we observe more intensely when the episode is not exhibited and also learn more by the absence of it subjecting it to a wider range of interpretations.

At another place in TROD, the person sitting on the bench says that "the evening is the best part of the day. Yes, you have done your days' work, now you can put your feet up and enjoy it" (256)

This line captures the summary of the whole novel but when one subjects it to superficial reading then it seems as if the writer is only literally referring to the end of the day. But on deeper examination one finds out that this relates to life in general and to Steven's life together with all the implications of his association with his master.

Ishiguro begins the Mississippi Review interview by emphasizing that he uses a form of language that actually suppressed meaning and tried to hide away meaning rather than chase after something just beyond the reach of words." (Cited in Gehlawat)

Sim (2010) echoes the same sentiment when he comments that Ishiguro's language is steeped in understatement.

These statements are indicative of the fact the Ishiguro reveals only a fraction of the information and leaves the remaining part on the examination of the discerning reader. Rebecca (2001) claims that the missing information actually serves to magnify the stylistic effect of the novelist and in the words of the James (cited in Rebecca, 2001) provokes the reader to think about the possibility of exploring "ever so many more of the shining silver fish afloat in the deep sea of one's endeavour than the net of widest casting could pretend to gather in." The task of the reader is to unfold the layers and realize the hidden meaning that will help him to understand the exact purpose of the novelist but it may not be apparent at the first reading and may need multiple rereading endeavours.

Even the Nobel Prize giving committee while conferring him with this award noted that his novels are of "great emotional force which uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world." This line establishes how what seems to be real on the surface is only a false signal to reality.

Another area of similarity between Hemingway and Ishiguro is the introduction of a number of conjunctions to prolong one sentence.

Here's an example from Hemingway: "After a while we came out of the mountains, and there were trees along both sides of the road, **and** a stream and ripe fields of grain, **and** the road went on, very white and straight ahead, **and** then lifted to a little rise, **and** off on the left was a hill with an old castle, with buildings close around it and a field of grain going right up to the walls and shifting in the wind" (The Sun Also Rises, Chapter 10).

Ishiguro follows the same strategy and this is illustrated by the following quotes from his texts. Stevens says in TROD: "a great butler can only be, surely one **who** can point to his years of service **and** say he has applied his talents to serving a great gentleman-**and** through the latter to serving humanity." (123) Again this hides the truth from the reader as he is actually regretting it but the reader cannot detect the regret. There is some unreliable narration as well.

Sharma (2017) argues that an Ishiguro novel refrains from linguistic jugglery. It does not make use of word play or a sentence that draws attention by its density. The opening lines of Never Let Me Go capture this theme perfectly.

My name is Kathy H. I'm thirty-one years old, and I've been a carer now for over eleven years. That sounds long enough, I know, but actually they want me to go on for another eight months, until the end of this year. That'll make it almost exactly twelve years. Now I know my being a carer so long isn't necessarily because they think I'm fantastic at what I do. There are some really good carers who've been told to stop after just two or three years. And I can think of one carer at least who went on for all of fourteen years despite being a complete waste of space. So I'm not trying to boast. But then I do know for a fact they've been pleased with my work, and by and large, I have too. (Kazuo-Ishiguro, 1)

Ishiguro's prose is extremely simple from the outside. His characters describe how things look at face value. However, there is so much substance that underlies this simplicity which surprises the reader completely as he begins the daunting task of interpreting it.

5. Conclusion

Book reading, in the first place, gradually introduces children to meaningful linguistic encounters and they begin to appreciate the reading comprehension in a reasonably accurate way. By the same token, the use of literary texts offers affordances to EFL/ESL learners to develop their language in different ways. This research piece shows that by using the TAVI, TALO and TASP method, Ishiguro's novel TROD can be effectively used for language learning purposes. This theoretical framework is consistent with the metacognitive reading strategies. Despite literature's utility in teaching language, it sometimes poses challenges for the teachers in terms of different factors. However, these concerns can be effectively addressed by the suitable choice of the text and the teaching method. In terms of the novel under discussion in this research piece, Ishiguro's tendency to wrap his message in understatement that frequently leads to unreliable narration can be restrictively compared to Hemingway's use of ice berg metaphor. Another ground of similarity is both writers' deployment, in varying degrees, of a long sentence interspersed with conjunctions. As the final word, it will not be an inaccurate extrapolation to claim that literature, if optimally used can be a great asset for language teaching.

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