

BRINGING LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS INTO EFL CLASSROOMS

Insights from Research
and Classroom Practice

Edited by

Nugrahenny T. Zacharias
and Christine Manara

Bringing Literature and Linguistics
into EFL Classrooms:
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P U B L I S H I N G

Bringing Literature and Linguistics into EFL Classrooms:
Insights from Research and Classroom Practice,
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USING SHORT STORIES IN READING CLASS TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING SKILL

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Abstract

English Department of Petra Christian University (PCU) considers the importance of Literature in improving students' critical thinking skill in Reading class. One of the skill courses named *Reading Extended Text* using short stories as one of the materials. This paper elaborates how the use of short stories improves students' critical thinking skill - the ability to shape, not merely absorb knowledge. Students are encouraged to probe for motives and causes, evaluate what is most significant, notice various facets or find the underlying assumptions. Since PCU promotes gender issues, related materials are also important to discuss. Short stories entitled *Father's Sin* and *The Mother may* motivate students to think more about gender equality from male writers' perspectives. As the process is student-centered, students have a lot of chances to investigate, explore and interpret the short stories. This paper will show various activities which strengthen, refine, enlarge or reshape students' ideas in light of other perspectives. The activities may include communicating via internet, answering questions, comparing and contrasting the two short stories, summarizing, giving presentation, discussing and making poster. Students are also encouraged to produce predictions of how students think a narrative will develop. Another interesting activity is having a role play. Those activities could be either individual or group work. When students work individually, they themselves analyze the short stories from all sides before they come to their conclusion. They conduct an argument with themselves, advancing and then questioning opinions. All these processes are done alone. Meanwhile, when students work in group, they see the short stories from all sides together before they come to a group conclusion. They argue and question opinions one another. Theoretically, if every member of the group actively gets involved, better understanding will be achieved and richer analysis can be made.

Key Words: *short stories, Reading class, improve, critical thinking skill, gender equality*

Introduction

English department of Petra Christian University (PCU) considers the importance of literature in improving students' critical thinking in Reading class. One of the skills courses named *Extended Reading Text*, given in semester two, using short stories as one of the materials. Short stories are used for students to get acquainted with works of literature from the beginning because they have to choose one of the main streams, Literature or Linguistics in semester five. Short stories are deemed suitable because not all students like Literature. For those who are not interested in Literature, materials such as poetries or novels will make students not motivated to learn.

During this time some teachers complained that their students did not read the material before coming to class. There might be some causes. First, students were not fond of reading. Second, the way teachers teach was not exciting. Third, students were not motivated to think critically. In fact, it is the teacher's obligation to make the teaching and learning process interesting even to make students think critically. By training students to think critically, students are expected to be enthusiastic about their lessons. In addition, the skills of critical thinking are needed to make them better prepared to face globalization. The required skills include the ability to shape, not merely absorb knowledge, the ability to probe for motives and causes, evaluate what is most significant, notice various facets or find the underlying assumptions.

Since PCU promotes gender issues, related materials are also important to discuss. Short stories entitled *Father's Sin* and *The Mother* may motivate students to think more about gender equality from male's perspective. Students will understand that the idea of gender equality is not merely come from women but also from men. Both short stories are written by writers who come from cultures that still impose the patriarchal system. Thus, the writers attempting to express equality between men and women are expected to further motivate students to become agents of change.

In addition, students can learn from the discussion of *Father's Sin* that the balance between career and family is very much needed, especially in the era of globalization. Without it, success will be difficult to maintain. The prominent writer in this short story named Mr. Yee Min-soo proves this. From the discussion of *Father's Sin* and *The Mother*,

students also learn that the imbalance of the treatment towards men and women can hinder the progress of a nation (see Sudjono, 2008: 35).

The Synopsis of *Father's Sin*

This short story entitled *Father's Sin* tells about the life of a famous Korean writer named Mr. Yee Min-soo. The author with an international reputation is so exalted because he has dedicated his life to the world of writing at the expense of personal enjoyment and happiness of his family. On the contrary, he is not appreciated at all by his own wife so that his desire to get back together with his family is rejected by his wife. Her anger is due to the following sins he has done.

First, he is a man who is not responsible. He dares to get married and have children but he does not feed them. He even did not know when his children were born. Moreover, as a father he does not try to establish good communication with his children or show affection to them. He delegates all his responsibilities as a father to his wife. He also does not fulfill his responsibility as a husband. In other words, he makes his wife's life unbearable. He promises to take care of his sick father but he throws his responsibilities to his wife. He also has promised to support his stepmother and his stepbrothers after the death of his father but he does not keep his promise.

Second, he is a good pretender. One time he did not want to receive her friends at home. He seemed very friendly to his friends but he told his wife that he actually did not like them. He forced his wife to serve his guests with unfriendly manner. To improve the play, he slapped his wife in front of them so they left.

Third, he is a man who is disrespectful towards his wife. He treats his wife as an object. He does not try to listen to her or know her needs. Instead, she must always serve him and fulfill his desire. Moreover, he never gives her a chance to get involved in decision making.

Fourth, he has affairs with other women. Until the end of his life, he is in a relationship with another woman. With captivating performances, a very good reputation and wealth, it is easy for him to get beautiful women.

Fifth, he is a selfish man. During his married life, he spends most of his energy chasing his dream and neglecting his family. He comes and goes as he pleases. When he is

wealthy, he spends his money for himself but when he is poor and sick he wants to return home. In his heyday, it is difficult for his children to see him.

Sixth, he is a cunning man. In order to find his family, he involves a well-known newspaper reporter whose newspaper's circulation is over a million each day. In reality, that means about three million people read his newspaper daily. The newspaper reporter will report the latest news about him and how he has finally returned to his family after his long Bohemian life. So, the attention of the entire world will fall on him and his family. If his family refuses him, the entire world will curse them. Thus, his family is forced to accept him. Besides, he returns to his family because he has been abandoned by his lovers. In short, without money and without women he makes a way to return home.

Seventh, he is a coward. Actually he is the one who is afraid of telling his father that he disagrees with him. In other words, he does not dare to argue with his father. On the contrary, he makes his wife argue with his father. As a result, his father hates her very much. Eighth, he is more concerned with other people than his own family. For example, when he did not have money to entertain his friends, he told his wife to buy wine. His wife had to try to make his friends happy although her children were starving.

His wife's explosive anger is actually a pile of her hidden anger. Previously, the wife does not dare to protest all the arbitrariness of her husband towards her. Finally she can show her anger because her submission has been proved futile. Moreover, she realizes that her husband actually has removed his family from his life.

In the end the wife is willing to accept the writer in her house because of these three considerations. First, she wants to maintain the reputation of his son. As a businessman her son must maintain his reputation as a dutiful son. If he does not accept his father, the public will hate him and of course, this will negatively impact his business. Second, she would like to request an explanation from her husband.

The synopsis of *The Mother*

A short story entitled *The Mother* tells about the sufferings, both mental and physical, of an Egyptian woman. This woman named Nagiyya is sick and her illness does not go away because her husband, Khalifa, did not immediately take her to the hospital. The attitude of her husband's indifference and brutality makes Nagiyya suffer inwardly. Both kinds of sufferings

are giving birth anger. Because not daring to vent her anger to the husband, Nagiyya vents her anger to her daughter and her old father-in-law. They are considered not care whereas when she was in good health, Nagiyya always cared about them, working hard in the field and at home. She is angry to her husband and father-in-law since they don't want to do the household chores although they have nothing to do. In other words, she feels neglected.

The same feelings experienced by Hafiza, Nagiyya's daughter. She is angry with her husband and parents who give her excessive burden. She gets angry with her husband since he does not pay attention to her and their baby. He does not want to take care of their baby although Hafiza is busy doing the household chores or taking care of her sick mother. Unlike Nagiyya, Hafiza does not dare to show her anger to anyone. Instead, she only dares to imagine another man's sweet attitude.

Nagiyya is eventually escorted to hospital by Hafiza. The idea for taking Nagiyya to the hospital is in fact indirectly comes from her son-in-law, Hafiza's husband, who is tired of Nagiyya's condition. Together with her baby, Hafiza manages to take Nagiyya to Kasr ai-Aini hospital in Cairo by train. The struggle of both women is not over because the hospital does not receive Nagiyya. Fortunately, after pretending to faint in the street, Nagiyya is successfully treated in hospital. The idea that brings success is coming from a man whom they meet on the street. While in Cairo, the two women must take some important decisions. Of course it is not easy because they are not accustomed to taking important decisions.

Feminism in Father's Sin and The Mother

In both short stories we see the influence of the patriarchal system on the attitude of male characters towards female characters. We also see that the suffering of the female characters is caused by the privileges owned by the male characters. In this case, men have the power of law, economy, emotion, and libido (Kramarae, 1993: 397-8).

Having the power of law means having the right to make important decisions. Men are entitled to take decisions without involving their wives. Then, the wives should submit to their husbands. In this case, we can see how Nagiyya not be treated in hospital before getting approval from her husband. Although in a very precarious situation, Nagiyya has to wait for her husband's decision. Many times the wife of Mr. Yee Min-soo, who was never involved in decision-making, suffers because of her husband's decision.

Having the power of economy means that men are supposed to be breadwinners. That is why men have no obligation to do the household chores since the job is not making money (see Bhasin and Khan, 1995:27-8). It is assumed that if they do the household chores, they will have no energy for working in the following day (Dini, 1989: 89.268). Hafiza's husband is an excellent example. He does not take the initiative to help his wife do the household chores despite her fatigue. He might think that taking care of his baby and taking his mother-in-law to the hospital in Cairo are not profitable in terms of money. In other words, he cannot make money by doing those activities. If a wife decides to work, she still has to do or be responsible for the household chores, after work while the husband does not have to. In this case, the woman has a double-job (a paid job as a career woman and an unpaid job as a house wife). The wives in both short stories experience this kind of burden.

Men also have the right to show their emotion. One example, when Mr. Yee Min-soo slaps his wife in front of his friends, he is not blamed. On the contrary, they blame his wife because she serves drinks with a sullen face. We can also see how the son of Mr. Yee Minsoo rebukes his wife although she does nothing wrong.

In addition to the above three privileges, men also have the right to satisfy their libido. They can find another woman if their wives cannot satisfy them and people can accept that. We see how Mr. Yee Min-soo moves from one woman to another woman to satisfy his sexual lust wherever and whenever he wants. Instead, he's not thinking about his wife's sexual satisfaction.

Men have those privileges since they are considered more valuable than women (Williams, 2000: 6, 105; Hellwig, 1997: 14). They have the right to be served but not vice versa. Even the society gives negative assessment if a wife does not serve her husband well (Dini, 1989: 89, 268). That is why, the wife of Mr. Yee Min-soo always serves her husband, especially in front of her husband's friends although he does not deserve it.

Through their works, both writers want to motivate all women to fight tyranny with speaking out or doing action. In *Father's Sin*, the wife of Mr. Yee Min-soo does not dare to protest against her husband. That is why she is not appreciated by her husband. In *The Mother* because Nagiyya dares to speak out, she is taken to the hospital. Meanwhile, her daughter continues to suffer because she does not dare to speak out. These women need to speak out or do something to help themselves because, as being stated by Leclerc, oppression cannot be

fought by doing nothing. Instead, it should be resisted by speaking out or doing action (Leclerc, 2000: vi; Hellwig, 1997: 15-6).

Both writers also want to give enlightenment that women need to be given the opportunity to become decision makers. In *Father's Sin* we see that the wife of Mr. Yee Min-soo is able to make good decisions when the opportunity is open. Why are women not given the opportunity to make a decision? Because women are considered unable to think logically as it is spoken by the Khalifa. Why can women be considered not be able to think logically? Because women are not given the opportunity to express their opinions. They are only required to be totally submissive to their husbands. If women are not constantly given the opportunity to take important decisions, they surely will not be ready to face globalization. In fact, women can do a lot to improve the life of their family, community and country. In *Father's Sin*, the wife of Mr. Yee Min-soo is proved to be capable of making good decisions.

In the last section the writer of *The Mother* presents a figure of man named Hussein who is described to respect women. His action is compared to the previous figure, Hafiza's husband. From these two figures we can conclude that the writer really wants women to be treated well, especially by their husbands.

Activities which improve students' critical thinking skills

In thinking critically we need to conduct an argument with ourselves, face objection to our own beliefs, accept views opposed to our own and see things from other people's perspective (Barnet and Bedau, 1996: 4). That is why the activities improving critical thinking should cover individual and group activities. The following activities are designed for individual work.

Since students enjoy communicating via email and chatting, assignment given in the same ways will be preferred. One example, related to the short story entitled *Father's Sin*, students are asked to get information supporting the reading material directly from their acquaintances from Korea. For the material deals with feminism, students are given a sample question, such as: What do you think of emancipation in your country nowadays? Or students may ask their acquaintances to investigate, explore and interpret the short story together. Then, students have to share the information they get when this short story is discussed in class. In this way we motivate students to work independently. In order to keep the interaction

proceeds smoothly and get the information, students will try hard to give good questions. There is a possibility of new questions arise from the answers received. From the interaction students also get a confirmation for their exploration and interpretation of *Father's Sin*. Besides, such task can also increase student's ability to build international networks. This kind of communication skill is absolutely necessary in the era of globalization (Sudjono, 2008: 3-5, 35).

Asking students to answer questions related to the reading material is still a useful technique to measure the students' comprehension. For example, questions related to the literary devices, such as repetition and simile will help students understand the writer's intent (see Rosenthal and Rowland, 1986: 176; Lye. 1997: 6). The questions that are given should encourage students to shape the knowledge they gain, examine motives and causes, or find the underlying assumptions (Colombo, Cullen and Lisle, 1995: 2). Questions that are imaginative, analytic and evaluative are appropriate to sharpen student's critical thinking skills (Barnet and Bedau, 1996: 4).

Some questions about *Father's Sin*

1. What does the title *Father's Sin* imply?
2. What do you think of Mr. Yee Min-soo as a writer?
3. What do you think of Mr. Yee Min-soo as a husband?
4. What do you think of Mr. Yee Min-soo as a father?
5. Why does the life of Mr. Yee Min-soo end tragically?
6. Is Mr. Yee Min-soo's decision to live in the slum right? Explain.
7. Why can Mr. Yee Min-soo's son easily forgive his father?
8. Why is it difficult for Mr. Yee Min-soo's wife to forgive her husband?
9. Do you agree with her attitude? Explain.
10. Why does Mr. Yee Min-soo leave his family?
11. Do you agree with his action? Explain.
12. Why is it difficult for Mr. Yee Min-soo's son to see him?
13. What is Mr. Yee Min-soo's motive to return to his family?
14. What would you do if you were Mr. Yee Min-soo's wife?
15. What would you do if you were Mr. Yee Min-soo's son?
16. If you were Mr. Yee Min-soo, what would you do to balance your life?
17. If you were Mr. Yee Min-soo's wife, what would you do to create a harmony in your family?
18. Do you think what happens in the story may exist in real life?
19. What did you learn from this short story?
20. How are repetition and simile used in the short story?
21. Is there any conflict, either inner or outer, in the short story? Explain

Some questions about *The Mother*

1. After reading the title, what issues do you believe is going to be discussed in the article?
2. What does Hafiza usually do after work?
3. How does Khalifa treat his wife?
4. What do you think of Nagiyya's attitude towards Hafiza?
5. Why didn't Hafiza go home that night?
6. Why wasn't Nagiyya taken to the hospital since the beginning?
7. What would you do if you were
 - a. Khalifa
 - b. Nagiyya
 - c. Hafiza
 - d. Omran
 - e. Hafizats husband
8. Why does Nagiyya get angry with Omran?
9. Why does Hafiza get angry with her husband?
10. What should the husbands of Nagiyya and Hafiza do to extinguish the anger of their wives?
11. Is there any conflict, either inner or outer, in the short story? Explain.
12. Did you find any simile? If yes, why does the writer use it?
13. Is there any repetition? If yes, what is its function?

In addition to the above questions, students are also assigned to compare and contrast both short stories. Students compare and contrast relevant points about one subject with corresponding aspects of another (Hirschberg and Hirschberg, 1997: 10). These tasks may hone their sensitivity to recognize the link of events that occur around them. Thus, they can anticipate the negative impact and identify profitable opportunities.

The ability to summarize an argument accurately is another skill needed in critical thinking (Barnet and Bedau, 1996: 8). It helps students to clarify and simplify in their own words the main ideas and supporting details (Rosenthal and Rowland, 1986: 150). From the summary, the teacher is able to check the student's comprehension. Writing a summary of both short stories is considered not an easy task because of these following reasons. Firstly, both writers do not reveal their intents explicitly. Secondly, students themselves have to examine for motives or causes, evaluate what is most important and detect the underlying assumptions (see Colombo, Cullen and Lisle, 1995: 2). Thirdly, the two short stories are related to patriarchy, a concept that maybe they just know.

Students may also have the opportunity to make changes to certain parts of the short story. This activity is helpful because students can express their feelings properly, increase their power of imagination and become problem solvers. To improve the quality of the changes, students are asked to provide reasons for the changes.

Another critical thinking skill is the ability to effectively present one's ideas (Barnet and Bedau, 1996: 8). This capability can be enhanced by having students give presentation. The presentation material is a combination of the results of their talks along with their acquaintances, either from Korea or Egypt and the analysis or evaluation of their own. This data processing task is certainly requires them to think critically. Besides, they have to give an interesting presentation. The presentation session is followed by a question and answer session. In order to encourage students to participate, students who can provide excellent questions or help the presenter answer questions properly will get scores.

In addition to working individually, students are also equipped to be able to work in groups. They can get involved in group discussion, role playing and poster making. Through these activities students can improvise, make prediction, argue, question one another opinions and see things from other perspectives than their own. They can act in accordance with what is depicted in the short story or make some changes. In connection with the making of posters, students are able to illustrate their predictions, expressing their protests or propose any improvement. If students do not understand the reading material, they will have difficulty in completing this kind of task. In recognition, the excellent posters will be on display, either on campus or in the Education Exhibition of PCU.

Conclusion

What has been presented above is an attempt to improve the teaching and learning process of the Reading class in Petra Christian University. The ideas are expected to resolve complaints, both from teachers and students. Activities which are designed have been adjusted to the interests and abilities of students who come from various parts of Indonesia. There are several activities that have been carried out and received good response from students so that teaching and learning process becomes better. Other activities are planned to be held in the coming semester. The activities which are tailored to the student's perspective and current trends are expected to improve student's critical thinking skills. Even though the idea presented above is so simple, there is a possibility that it can give a significant contribution to the teaching of Reading in the English Department of Petra Christian University,

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The articles presented in this book bring together educators' work and experiences from around the world (Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, and Australia) in the context of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This publication, therefore, offers a richness and diversity of contexts and experiences to its readers. What sets this book apart is its balance between and explicit coverage of both research and the theoretical and practical aspects of teaching. This project has been prompted by the increasing split between the fields of linguistics, literatures and English language teaching, and will uniquely address this gap. Additionally, the volume gives practical applications on how to use theories of linguistics and literary texts in the classroom.

This book provides undergraduate and graduate students, teacher-learners, practicing teachers, and teacher educators some theoretical and contextual knowledge of English language teaching practices and settings. Articles in this book can be used as supplementary texts for courses in the areas of English Language Teaching, pre-service and in-service teacher education, applied linguistics, literature, and language and culture studies.

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