Linguistic Pathways to the Study of Literature in the Malaysian ESL Context

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Abstract

The teaching and learning of literature in English in the Malaysian English as a Second Language (ESL) context has evolved from being a core part of the English language curriculum to a point of near extinction only to re-emerge in the 21 st century in a far stronger form. Given the changed scenario of the teaching and learning of literature in Malaysia since the incorporation of literature as a compulsory and formally tested component of the Malaysian ESL syllabus for secondary schools, it is crucial that consideration be given to teaching and learning approaches. This paper proposes a pedagogical approach via language/linguistic pathways to the teaching and learning of the literature component in the ESL syllabus. The approach propagates that teaching of literature to Malaysian students begins with an introduction to and the awareness of forms and functions of the language in the literary texts. This helps create clear pathways to introduce to learners basic stylistic features in the texts and to consider their roles. Finally the linguistic pathways established through language-based and stylistic approaches may be used to develop specialised reading and interpretative techniques from personal, gender-based, cultural, national and postcolonial positions.

Introduction

The teaching and learning of literature in English in the Malaysian English Second Language (ESL) context has evolved from being a core part of the English language curriculum to a point of near extinction only to re-emerge in the 21 st century in a far stronger form. The downturn in the teaching and learning of literature is crucially marked by the change in the medium of instruction in schools from English to Malay. Since the 1970's English has been taught as a second language in all Malaysian schools, where all other subjects are taught in the Malay language. Where the teaching of literature is concerned, Edwin (1993) painted a bleak picture indicating how the resultant declining standard of English has caused a sharp drop in the students opting to do literature as an examination subject. In 1990 literature in English was incorporated as part of the English language programme beginning at the lower secondary level to promote English proficiency and the study of literature in general. The Class Reader Programme which came along with this change was aimed at 'developing reading skills and to introduce elements of literature into language teaching' (Devinder Raj and Hunt quoted in Edwin, 1993: 47). However, the programme failed to produce a significant impact on the study of literature, as it was

not a compulsory part of the English language curriculum, hence conveniently sidelined by both teachers and students.

Today there is a renewed interest in the propagation of the study of literature both by policy makers as well as academics. All the conventional arguments of the value of studying literature have been unearthed and are impressed upon. These arguments include that we should teach literature for all of the following purposes:

• pleasure
• fostering good reading habits
• developing perception and interpretation skills
• offering challenges hence achievements
• providing genuine communication of ideas
• offering linguistic models meaningfully
• developing comprehension and motivation
• balancing receptive and productive skills
• providing rich and diverse exposure to language
• improving concentration
• encouraging reflection
• allowing contact with native speaker's world
• improving vocabulary, syntax and structures
• allowing learning from what is not taught
• increasing exposure to language in a limited time
• leading to language acquisition

Today, the traditional dependence on and surrender to the canons as the sole authority in literary language and aesthetics is no longer true in the Malaysian context. The three main literature syllabi in the Malaysian Curriculum – the Literature component in the ESL syllabus, the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) Literature in English Elective Syllabus (Malaysian O-levels), and the Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (STPM) Literature in English Elective syllabus (Malaysian A-levels) -- have incorporated in the selection of texts offered works from new literary traditions in English. These include literary works in English from Malaysia, India, Africa and the West Indies. In keeping with this change, literature teaching approaches too have evolved from the traditional approaches developed to teach literature to native speakers of English to more dynamic ones that focus on ESL/EFL learners and to take into consideration the non-native speaker experience, culture and history (see also Ganakumaran.S, 2002:55-74).

Given the changed scenario of the teaching and learning of literature in Malaysia since the incorporation of literature as a compulsory and formally tested component of the Malaysian ESL syllabus for secondary schools, it is crucial that consideration be given to teaching and learning approaches. There is a need to formulate pedagogical approaches that take into account the limited English language proficiency of a majority of Malaysian students while keeping in mind the aims and aspirations of the syllabus. This need becomes more critical in considering the fact that many teachers currently teaching the literature component have little or no formal instruction to literature as subject or in the methodologies of teaching literature.

This paper proposes a pedagogical approach via language/linguistic pathways to the teaching and learning of the literature component in the ESL syllabus. The approach propagates that teaching of literature to Malaysian students begins with an introduction to, and the awareness of forms and functions of the language in the literary texts. This helps to create clear pathways to introduce to learners basic stylistic features in the texts and to consider their roles. Finally the linguistic pathways established through language-based and stylistic approaches may be used to develop

specialised reading and interpretative techniques from personal, gender-based, cultural, national and postcolonial positions.

Language-based Approaches
Advocates of the language-based approaches (LBA) to the teaching of literature primarily hold to the vision that there should be a closer integration between language and literature in classroom teaching (McRae and Boardman,1984; Carter and Long, 1987a; Collie and Slater,1987; Carter and Long,1991; McRae, 1991; Lazar,1993). This approach is based on the principle that LBA can provide an entry to teaching literature with both literature and language complementing and reinforcing the study of the other.

Carter and Long (1991) argue that LBA is different from conventional literature teaching approaches because here the text is no longer seen as sacred and untouchable. On contrary, the approach encourages taking apart texts to be analysed as a process rather than a product. This includes manipulation, transformation, experimentation and dissection, as long as it meets the needs of the teaching-learning situation.

A basic pedagogical framework that may be used to illustrate the features of LBA in the teaching of literature to ESL/EFL learners is one developed by McRae (1991), see also McRae and Vethamani (1998). This framework proposes that analysis with focus on textual components will act as the bridge from the 'referential' to the 'representational' textual meaning. The framework is illustrated in the following diagram.

Lexis	choice of words in the text and their meaning potential
Syntax	word order i.e. the way words are organised together
Cohesion	system of links throughout the text-temporal, verbal, pronominal
Phonology	sounds of and within the text
Graphology	the form, the shape, the script in the text
Semantics	the study of meaning and how meanings are achieved through negotiation of textual and contextual elements
Dialect	variation in language due to operational use within boundaries such as geographical and social
Register	degree of formality associated to who is speaking to whom
Period	when the text was written, for whom the text was written, tone and style used by the writer
Function	how the text affects the reader, how it works, the message and author's intention

Essentially, the features of the above framework serve as points on which text analysis may focus. This means that teachers can develop activities that direct students' attention to these features either in isolation or in combination so that students may discover how the language of the texts works and what messages it attempts to reveal.

Some Language-based Strategies

Language-based activities need to fulfil the criterion of being; language-based, student-centred, activity-based and process-oriented (Ganakumaran, 2002). Discussed below are some language-based strategies for the teaching of literature. This section will illustrate the use of LBA based on W.H. Auden's poem 'Stop All The Clocks'. The language-based activities in this section do not follow any order of selection that is they are not arranged in order of difficulty or priority. What activities to use, when to use and how to use them will depend on criteria such as:

      a) text-type,
      b) lesson objectives, and
      c) student ability and student needs.

The activities illustrated here only serve as examples of how the language-based approach can be utilised to teach literature in non-native contexts. Furthermore, it must be stated that the activity-types illustrated here are just one of the many possible variations that are available to the creative teacher.

The Text

Stop All The Clocks

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead,
Put the crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policeman wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now: put everyone out;
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood.
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

by   W.H. Auden

Reading Aloud / Choral Reading

This activity is especially useful in the teaching of poetry. Carter and Long (1987a) state that just as poets exploit grammar and vocabulary for literary effect, they pattern sounds for expressive purposes. Collie and Slater (1987) reiterate this and suggest that students try to mark the main stresses and discuss the attitudes and feelings of the

persona, identifying particular words that bring out those feelings. The learners' attention can also be drawn to other non-linguistic features such as pause after sense units or for emphasis. Reading aloud enables the voicing of these prosodic features which in turn may evoke feelings, mood and in general 'representational' meaning (McRae, 1991). Alternately, choral reading which is endowed with elements of fun and competition will allow for implicit learning. Lazar (1993) suggests that such group reading can also make use of limited movements, gestures, facial expressions and the changing qualities of voice, that is variations in speed of delivery, loudness or softness, stress and others. An important feature of this method is the creation of a situation where the learners have to analyse and understand the text to some extent so as to be able to decide on the aspects of presentation suggested by Lazar above.

<u>Activity One - Reading Aloud / Choral Reading</u>

1) This activity can be conducted as a groupwork with students working in groups of between 4 or 5. It is best if the class is divided into four groups. Students are then asked to discuss and mark the main stresses, pauses and decide on voice quality (soft/loud, slow/fast) suitable at different segments of the poem to express the feelings and mood of the persona. Students can also use stylised movements, gestures and facial expressions to heighten the emotions in the poem. The groups are told that they will have to present justifications for their presentation style at the end of the activity.

2) After an appropriate period for preparation (about 10 minutes), each group is asked to present their version as a poetic rendition. In the case of this poem, the groups can either be asked to present the whole poem or each group can be asked to present one stanza of the poem. If the latter is done without interruption, then students and the teacher will be able to see the difference in interpretation between groups.

3) The final stage of this activity can be a whole class discussion where the different groups' views can be heard. This may or may not lead to a consensus.

<u>Rationale</u>

This activity requires students to look closely at the main issues contained in the poem, without which they would be unable to decide on the mood and method of presenting the poem. The actual reading activity provides students with the awareness that prosodic features are significant in establishing the tone, mood and feelings in the poem. The task clearly spelled-out at the onset that the activity focuses the students' attention on not only on the presentation but also on the reasons for presenting the poem in a particular way. The function of the discussion is not so much to arrive at a consensus but to create an atmosphere for exchange of ideas as well as views. This activity fits into the phonology component in McRae's framework.

Gap-filling

Also known as the cloze procedure, this activity works on the principle of expectancy and prediction. Carter and Long (1991) explain that the basic idea behind this activity is to bring aspects of language and form to the attention of learners while making them explore their relation to textual meaning. Interesting and engaging as it may be for intermediate and advanced level students, this activity can be demotivating to less

literary-oriented students (McRae, 1991). Alternately, if the activity is planned carefully, it works towards sharpening learners' sensitivities to the literary use of specific lexical items. The principle of justification which form the basis of this activity, allows for rationalising and supporting selections made by the learners, based on the context of sentence and utterance.

Activity Two - Gap-filling

1) The students are given the poem with a blank on each line (refer Appendix 1). At the end of each line the students are provided with two choices to fill the blank with. Students are reminded that when selecting words to fill the blanks they should pay attention on how their choice relates to other words in the line and the poem.

2) Students can either work individually or in pairs.

3) At the end of the activity, a class discussion can be held to consider the choices made by students.

Rationale

This activity though seemingly simple requires students to pay attention to lexical choice and collocation. Students have to read the text completely before making choices even though the choices are at made at line level. This activity matches the lexical component in McRae's model.

Prediction

Prediction allows learners to take on board all aspects of the text; lexis, structure, form and context in making a forecast. Carter and Long (1987a) suggest a variety of prediction activities. These include predicting the title, end-rhyme scheme, outcomes and development of events.

Activity Three - Prediction

1) Students can work individually or in pairs. They are given a copy of the poem with four words deleted and asked to predict the four key outcomes as represented by the deleted words (refer Appendix 2). They are advised to consider the text and the context carefully.

2) A class discussion can be organised to reflect on the students' choices.

Rationale

The significance of this activity is to draw students' attention to key outcomes in the poem which when focused upon would highlight the general content of the poem. More importantly, this activity requires students to pay attention to textual and contextual features. This activity fits in with the lexical and semantic components in McRae's model.

Text Completion

To some extent text completion is like prediction, only in text completion the learners need to complete the text in keeping with the existing pattern and style. In other words it allows learners to work with language on a larger scale. Complementing literary studies, this activity encourages learners to use their imaginative, rationalizing and predictive skills. The analysis of contextual clues is necessary and vital to logically conclude the text.

Activity Four - Text Completion

1) Students are given the poem with the last line deleted except for the word 'for' (refer Appendix 3). Students work in groups of 2 or 3. They are asked to consider the function of conjunction 'for' which begin the last line. After a brief class discussion on this issue, students are asked to complete the final line of the poem.

2) After 5 to 10 minutes, the different groups are invited to give their version of the last line. This is listed on the board. A class discussion can be held on the validity and appropriateness of the students' concluding line for the poem. Then the teacher gives them the poet's version. Students are invited to comment on the poet's line and compare this with their own and discuss on the virtues of both.

Rationale

This activity has two important values. Firstly, in requesting the students to complete the poem, it requires them to understand the function of the conjunction 'for' in relation to all that is available before it. Secondly, students also need to consider other poetic aspects such as rhyme scheme, line length and number of syllables in writing the last line. A simple activity such as this requires a great deal of awareness of both linguistic and literary devices. This activity matches that in the syntax, cohesion and function components in McRae's model.

Lexical Chain / Cluster

In this activity learners work towards clustering lexical fields that may be associated to the general meaning or themes in the text. McRae (1991), clarifies that the virtue of this technique is that it allows learners to appreciate levels of lexical choice. The words in each field will facilitate the learners to make logical connections and bridge 'referential' to 'representational' meaning (McRae,1991).

Activity Five-Lexical Chain / Cluster

1) Students work in groups of 4 or 5. They are asked to read the poem carefully and pick out words that:

a) reflect commands and instruction (e.g. stop, cut, prevent etc.) in the poem;
b) describe the deceased person; and
c) describe emotion.

They are required to fill in these words in a table provided (refer Appendix 4).

2) The students are then asked to discuss the answers to the following questions.

a) Who is making the commands and giving the instructions? Why?
b) Why is the deceased person described in such a manner? Who is doing the describing?   Why is the 'H' in he capitalised?
c) Whose emotions are presented in the poem? What kind of emotion/s is/are represented?

3) A class discussion can be held to allow students to exchange views and interpretations.

Rationale

This activity enables students to realise that analysis of lexical fields will avail them underlying nuances of the poem. The association and comparison between major lexical fields will help students see links in underlying meaning in relation to the mood and emotions of the persona. This activity can be related to the lexis, cohesion and function components in McRae's model.

Jigsaw Reading

McRae (1991), describes this method as a situation 'whereby students, singly or in groups, read separate sections of a text and then exchange information on it - usually through question and answer or oral summary - in order to build up the complete picture' (p.111). This method can work with the re-ordering of texts that have been scrambled. It necessitates the students to look closely at the language of the texts and this stimulates student interaction in solving the 'puzzle' (Carter and Long, 1991).

Activity Six - Jigsaw Reading

1) Students work in groups of 4 or 5. Each group is given four envelopes; each containing strips (according to lines) of each stanza. Students are first asked to unscramble each stanza and then order the stanzas as a coherent poem. (Alternatively, this activity can also be done by dividing the poem into sentences.)   Students are asked to pay special attention to devices such as rhyme scheme, logical cohesion and general organisation when working on this activity.

2) After about 10 minutes, each group can be asked to present and justify the organisation of their version of the poem. This can be followed by a class discussion on the features in the text that help in the re-organisation of the poem.

Rationale

This activity requires the students to focus on textual and semantic clues but also on their understanding of literary devices. It helps students to gain valuable insights into narratorial organisation. If the organisation of poems between the groups or with the poet's do not correspond, then this will result in valuable discussion .This activity can

be related to the syntax, cohesion and even graphology components of McRae's model.

Summary Writing

The extracting of key features and main points in the text leads to understanding it. Writing a summary within an approximate word limit is a practical task that allows learners to develop their ability to manipulate language structures. Carter and Long (1987b), state that summary writing should not be used as an end in itself, but as a strategy which provides a basis for valuable insights.

Activity Seven - Summary Writing

1) This activity can be done in two ways. Firstly, students can be asked to write a straight-forward summary of the poem or alternately, the activity can be made a little more creative for example; asking the students to write either an epitaph or obituary for the deceased person based on the poem. Students are asked to write / draw the obituary/epitaph on a large paper so that this can be displayed to the class.

2) Once the students' work has been displayed, the class is invited to comment and discuss.

Rationale

This activity requires the students to capture the essence of the poem in terms of meaning and emotions to be able to come up with the required version of the summary. The importance of this activity is not only the ability of students to write a summary but on their ability to promote a meaningful and contextualised discussion on the poem. This activity covers all aspects in McRae's model.

Games, Simulation and Role Play

The imaginative engagement in language learning is often an attempt to reach students and involve them precisely at the level of curiosity, fantasy, interaction and self-expression which representational materials encourage. Apart from being fun these activities have to have specific teaching-learning objectives in mind. McRae warns that such activities 'should not be too distanced from the text used; nor should the text be just an excuse for a language activity' (p.112). Activities that involve play and game-like situations should be attractive, engaging and learner-centred which can promote working with the text as a process.

Activity Eight - Games, Simulations and Role Play

The theme and tone in this poem makes it difficult to create games and role plays as teaching activities without seeming insensitive. However, students can be involved in a simulation activity.

1) Students work in groups. They are asked to come up with a creative presentation of the poem keeping in mind that they have to express as far as possible the meaning and emotions expressed by the persona. They are allowed to be creative in the

presentation but not digress too much from the content of the poem. They are encouraged to use costumes and music if they feel it will enhance their performance. A time limit should also be set for each presentation (e.g. 10 minutes). This task needs to be set to them in advance so that they can come to class prepared.

b. Each group is asked to make their presentation. Each student is given an evaluation sheet to assess the performance of each group except their own (Appendix 5). The evaluation is based on the following criteria:

a) clarity of performance,
b) accuracy with regards to content of poem,
c) appropriacy of music and costume, and
d) ability to represent the persona's emotional state.

c) At the end of all the presentations, students are invited to comment on the performance based on the evaluation criteria.

Rationale

This activity while allowing for the creative nature of students to be expressed also makes them carefully analyse the poem so as to present it in another form and through another media. Activity can be both fun and thought provoking. The evaluation sheet requires all students to be involved the activity all the time. Students, while evaluating other group performances are constantly camparing them with the poem and their own interpretation of the poem. This activity is related to the semantic and function components in McRae's model.

Creative Writing

Creative writing promotes the learners' sensitivity and interpretative skills through the exploitation of language awareness 'from the inside'. The exploitation of patterns is designed to enhance awareness of the interrelationship between meanings and form (Carter and Long, 1991). This activity can be worked as an extension to the text studied but at the same time keeping with the topic, theme and form where possible.

Activity Nine- Creative Writing

1) Students can either work individually or in groups to write an acrostic poem related to what they think is the main theme or idea in the poem. Each line in the poem will begin with letter of the word/s they choose to represent the poem e.g. A TRIBUTE. The poem would depict their respective interpretation of the poem. The final product can be displayed in class and students can be called upon to explain and be questioned by their classmates.

Rationale

This activity allows students to move beyond the text taking with them only the themes, ideas and concerns in it. It also provides an avenue for students respond creatively to the poem putting to test their own ability to write poetry. This activity fits in with the semantics and function components in McRae's model.

Paraphrasing and Re-writing

Carter and Long (1991: 88), consider this technique a relatively simple juxtaposing of two or more versions from the texts which are being read or to be read-one the original and the others a re-written alternative version. The process of comparing the alternative versions leads to an active involvement with the text and to sense the text as something dynamic and fluid, opens to creative exploration.

<u>Activity Ten - Paraphrasing and Re-writing</u>

1) This activity requires students to rewrite the poem paraphrasing it into prose. Students are asked to write a short-story of between two to four hundred words based on the poem. They can create fictional characters but the general atmosphere and emotions in the poem must be kept intact. This activity can be done individually or in groups and can be set as preparation for the next class.

2) Students or groups are invited to read their story. Other members of the class can comment on or ask questions.

3) A class discussion should follow to exchange ideas and interpretations.

<u>Rationale</u>

The re-writing by students allows for students to reevaluate their interpretation of the poem and gives the teacher access to the mental perceptions that students have of the poem. This activity helps the students rework hypotheses through discussion and the creative process of re-writing the poem in another form. It draws out the memorable elements in the poem which are then highlighted in the story. This activity is related to almost all aspects in McRae's model

The focus in Malaysia is the teaching of English as a second language; hence the teaching of literature has to take off from this position. Learners are to a large extent familiar with language-based activities in the language classroom and the extension of this approach to the literature teaching situation is likely to be accepted with little apprehension. The tension and pressure involved in the literature lesson is eased by directing learner attention to the language of literary text before moving on to demonstrate how the language has been used to achieve particular designs. LBA offers a variety of activities which allows learners the opportunity to participate actively in process of working out the interpretation of texts. Activities can be made less pressurizing by allowing learners to work in groups. In this way learners can test and discuss their ideas and hypotheses on other learners before facing the intimidating questions from the teacher. Collie and Slater (1987) state that active discussion builds tolerance and develop in learners a sense of security to venture and explore their own interpretations which might   encourage them to 'reread and ponder the text on their own'. More importantly, this approach will offer the learners some analytical tools 'to secure access to literary texts' (Carter and Long, 1991).

The usefulness of the language-based approach in the teaching of literature especially to non-native learners is supported by Carter's (1986:127) insistence that a natural resolution to develop language use would be to take an approach in which language

and literature teaching are more closely integrated and harmonized. Carter and Long (1987b) also assert that the language-based approach engages learners in activities that 'lead on to higher-order skills such as interpretation, evaluation and to literary, contextual awareness.'

Stylistic Approach to Literature

Halliday and Hasan (1976) described language as a "social semiotic" to link integrally language to all social reality as we know it. Literature on the other hand has been described as language in use and a depiction of human conditions textually. Hence it stands to reason that the relationship between the two subjects is symbiotic. The study of literature that combines the inquiry of style with that of linguistics is called Stylistics (Widdowson 1975). Widdowson (1975:4) sees Stylistics as "a means of relating disciplines and subjects…which can provide for the progression of a pupil from either language or literature towards either literary criticism or linguistics"

Stylistics as a method of studying literature is focused on the study of linguistic and pragmatic elements in the text. Stylistics is basically interested in the way language is used in a text and how meanings are constructed and communicated (Carter and Long, 1991). The approach proposes that the close and systematic study of these elements assist in supporting or modifying the intuition the reader forms when reading a text. The thorough and methodical approach of stylistics may reveal from what appears to be insignificant features of language, information that are crucial to the interpretation and comprehension of the text. Stylistics as a method of studying literature is more superior to LBA in terms of being objective, scientific and thorough. However, teachers and ESL practioners have to be warned against the tendency to get carried away by the mechanistic analysis of language and reducing the literary text to an object rather than focusing on the text as a holistic meaning structure.

In the Malaysian ESL context, Stylistics may be viewed as an excellent extension to language-based strategies and to activities in the language classroom. Its nature of using linguistics as a tool of analysis allows teachers to use forms and structures focused on in the language classroom as starting points to analyse literary texts. And, by the same gestures extend language learning into the literature class by reinforcing the understanding and use of the very linguistic structures that may be chosen to act as analytical tools. Stylistics places no limitations on the types linguistic and pragmatic tools that may be called upon for literary study, hence making the stylistic approach extremely flexible and anchored in the sound theories of the establish disciples of linguistics and pragmatics. This discussion will consider three linguistic features; transitivity, modality and lexical selection, to exemplify the usefulness of stylistics as an effective analytical and teaching tool.

Exploration of Transitivity Patterns

The study of transitivity patterns is incorporated in the Malaysian ESL Syllabus. Students have been thought to identify, construct and transform transitive (active) and intransitive (passive) clauses in their language classes. They are also taught when and for what purposes these clauses may be used. In their literatures classes this knowledge of transitivity may be put to use to explore the style and ideas in literary texts.

Halliday (1985, 1994) states that the clause apart from being   of action, of giving and demanding goods and services and information   is also a mode of reflection, of imposing order on the endless variation and flow of events.   The grammatical system by which this is achieved is "TRANSITIVITY". The transitivity system construes the world of experience into manageable set of process types. Transistivity function is composed of three elements:

(a) the process, represented by the verb,
(b) the participants, the roles of persons and objects,
(c) circumstantial functions, in English typically highlighted by the adverbials of time, place and matter.

The study of literary texts by way of transitivity analysis may assist in revealing the following:

(all examples that follow are taken from K.S. Maniam 1993 *In A Far Country*)

• *omission or avoidance of information ,*

This is demonstrated in three structure-types:

• omission of actor/agent,
Example :
Who kept it from public notice?
Look where we are now.

In the above examples the actor or agent of the process is omitted. Readers of texts need to be aware of this and to ask if these omissions are conscious and done with specific intentions. If so, why?

• marked avoidance of accurate definition for actor/agent, and
Example :
the people who ruled the land ...
The men talked, scolded...
We are doing society a favour ...

In the above examples the actor/agent are inaccurately or ambiguously defined. The question that may be raised is who referred to by *the people, the men,* and *we* and why have readers not been told explicitly who these agents/actors are.

• marked omission   or avoidance of stating the circumstance, subject, cause, etc.
Example:
Why had he given up?
Everything was destroyed.
Why are they everywhere?

The above examples show a lack of clarity or avoidance of explicating the circumstance, subject, cause, etc. of the above clauses. The suggestion is that these details have been avoided consciously and with a purpose. The critical reader is lead

to investigate the reasons of these acts and to speculate within reason about what has not been said.

• *avoidance of direct/human responsibility for actions* ,

Occurs when the actor/agent is inanimate or abstracts objects.
Example:
Tree making him pay...
ideas that can even destroy the tiger
habits built up walls

The examples show that by assigning agency to inanimate or abstract objects the writer is able to avoid pointing to the human agents responsible for these actions. Critical readers should be directed to ask why and speculate logically on the actual agents of these processes.

• *positioning of power and domination, and*

Generally power and domination are deemed to reside in the discourse participant who has the major share of spoken discourse. Further to this, the action processes assigned to discourse participants have to be considered in terms of actualisation, i.e., if the action processes have been completed, remain uncompleted, or are merely intended. It is deemed that the unequal distribution of actualised action processes among discourse participants in this text is a depiction of the distribution of power (ability) and domination in relation to the context.

• *foregrounding.*

Transitivity analysis is significant in the understanding of how speakers/writers encode their experiences (Simpson 1993). This often involves taking on and presenting a particular perspective of the world. This perspective is often foregrounded by way of thematization, repetition or emphasis. One way of analysing foregrounding would be to consider the consistency with which a character is placed in the position of actor or agency. Writers often use this strategy to draw attention to the general message they intend to convey.

Exploring Modality Functions

The study of modal verbs within the English language class in Malaysian schools in not uncommon. In fact the form and functions of modal verbs is studied repeatedly and progressively throughout the secondary school years. The stylistic approach to literature enables teachers and students to use their knowledge of modal verbs in studying literary texts.

However in order to define the class of modals, or to provide the set of environments in which a modal may be correctly or appropriately used, one must refer to many levels of language; the purely syntactic environment, the logical structures, the context of utterance, the social situation assumed by participants in the discourse, the impression the speaker wants to make on the addressee and so on (Lakoff, 1972).

Halliday (1985) defines modality as the speaker's judgment of the probabilities, or the obligations, involved in what he is saying. A proposition may become arguable by being presented as likely or unlikely, desirable or undesirable. Modality refers to the area of meaning that lies between yes and no - the intermediate ground between positive and negative polarity. What this implies more specifically will depend on the underlying speech function of the clause. Simpson (1993) further defines modality as the speaker's attitude towards, or opinion about, the truth of a proposition expressed by a sentence. It also extends to their attitude towards the situation or event described by a sentence.

Two main categories of modality commonly considered in literary analysis are deontic and epistemic. Deontic modality is the modal system of duty as it is concerned with a speaker's attitude to the degree of obligation attached to the performance of certain actions. It involves the expression of permission, obligation and requirement. Epistemic modality is concerned with the speaker's confidence or lack of confidence in the truth of a proposition expressed (Simpson 1993).

In literary analysis modality analysis may assist in revealing the following:

<u>Epistemic modality</u>

• the speaker's/narrator's degree of confidence/certainty in the statements made.

<u>Example:</u>
Let us go home! Our mother there <u>will</u> feed us, clothe us, give back to us our dignity.

The above example demonstrates the confidence the speaker has in his beliefs. As such the speaker is unlikely to change his mind or opinion on the matter. The statement is a demonstration of the speaker's absolute belief in something that has yet to happen.

• the speaker's/narrator's degree of discontentment in the statements made

<u>Example:</u>
<u>Didn't</u> the temple and the toddy shop satisfy him?

The above example clearly indicates a degree of discontent for if the speaker were sure of content he would not be asking such a question.

Deontic Modality

• the speaker's/narrator's demonstration of confidence and certainty in statements/comments
<u>Example:</u>
And we <u>had to</u> make the sacrifices .

This example demonstrates the speaker's absolute belief in having to commit himself to the sacrificial action. Hence the sacrifice is made without considering an alternative possibility.
• the demonstration of distribution of power and domination.

Example:
You <u>must</u> moult

The above example is an imperative statement. This shows that the speaker has the power to order or instruct someone else commit an action. When such modals are regularly ascribed to a particular character in a text then that character may be deemed powerful.

Lexical Choice

The study of literature cannot avoid the close study of the lexical choices the writer makes in expressing thoughts, ideas and issues. One way of studying lexical choice is by considering their status as core or non-core vocabulary (Carter 1988). Carter (1988), defines core vocabulary as "lexical items which are the most central, 'nuclear' or 'core' in the lexicon". Core refers to what is neutral and unmarked in a lexical item (p.171).

The following are some of the main features that may be used to distinguish core vocabulary:
• core vocabulary has few associations with the context and, therefore, does not exhibit affective overtones - attitudes, beliefs, feelings etc. (Carter: 1982);

- core ("nuclear") vocabulary is pragmatically neutral and provides little information about the situation of utterance (Stubbs 1986b);
- core vocabulary may be used to "talk about other words, to paraphrase them and define them and to organise them in communication" (McCarthy 1990: 50);
- "core words are higher order superordinates in hyponym trees" (McCarthy 1990: 51).
- core words cannot easily be defined by non-core words. Thus antonyms may be easier to find (Carter 1987);
- core words collocate with more lexical items (Carter 1987);
- core words are generic (Carter 1987);
- core words have limited use in culture specific context (Carter 1987);

The non-core vocabulary used in texts offers a host of information that will be indicative of the ideology of the text. Non-core vocabulary, which is effectively marked (evaluative and attitudinal) allows the analyst access to the point/s of view present in the text drawn from a constant referential identity (Carter 1987). Essentially non-core vocabulary is characterised by features in opposition to the features of core vocabulary listed above.

In literary analysis the features of core and non-core vocabulary cannot be not been considered in isolation but as semantic units and, therefore, as words, phrases or clauses. The study of lexical choice in literary texts may assist in revealing the following:

• the speaker's/narrator's presentation of truth/fact-like phenomena, confidence and certainty

Example:
It went deeper
We offered you what we had

The lexical choices in the examples above indicate complete belief in the propositions. Such expressions may be misleading because the actuality may be contrary to what is expressed. By making such categorical statements the speaker /writer may be attempting to convert the listener/reader to his way of thinking.

• the speaker's/narrator's expressions of attitude and opinion through the use of adjectives and adjuncts.

This is often noticeable with close analysis of the choices of adjectives and adverbs used by the writer. These choices indicate the position the writer takes with regards to ideology and attitude.

The above discussion offers a brief insight on the potentiality of using stylistics as a means of teaching and learning literature. As vast many features that may be analysed have been left undisclosed for lack of space. These include the study of deixis, parallelism, deviation, theme and rhyme, speech acts, speech and thought presentation.

Conclusion

It is important to note here that for the literature teacher and student in Malaysian school, LBA and Stylistics offer easily available and familiar pathways to the study of literature. These pathways if utilised effectively can then connected to more literary modes of text study and criticism that fit in with the objectives and expectations of the Malaysian English language and Literature syllabi. Students who have thoroughly analysed the language of the literary texts will certainly be better placed to embark on criticism based on personal response, reader response, gender and cultural perspectives. For the language teacher turned literature teacher as is true for many Malaysian teachers today, the language and linguistic pathways of LBA and Stylistics offer familiar starting points that allow them to embark on literary analysis from positions that they are knowledgeable about and have expertise in. For ESL learners embarking on literary studies using LBA and Stylistics would seem simply as an extension of activities in the language classroom. The journey from the known towards the new can only breed confidence and motivation.

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Appendix 1

Read the poem carefully and fill blanks with the appropriate words provided in the brackets.

Stop All The Clocks
Stop all the clocks, cut off the _____, (wireless , telephone)
Prevent the _____ from barking with a juicy bone, (dog, wolf)
Silence the pianos and with muffled _____ (drum, guitar)
Bring out the _____ , let the mourners come. (band, coffin)

Let _____ circle moaning overhead (aeroplanes, kites)
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is _____, (Gone, Dead)
Put the crepe bows round the _____ necks of the public doves, (brown,white)
Let the traffic policeman wear black cotton _____. (shirt, gloves)

He was my_____, my South, my East and West, (World, North)
My working week and my Sunday _____, (sleep, rest)
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my _____; (song, voice)
I thought that _____ would last forever: I was wrong.(love, friendship)

The stars are not wanted now: put out _____; (all, everyone)
Pack up the _____ and dismantle the sun; (moon, noon)
Pour away the _____ and sweep up the wood. (water, ocean)
For nothing now can ever come to any _____. (good, use)

Appendix 2

Read the poem carefully and fill in the four blanks with words you think are appropriate with general meaning of the poem.

Stop All The Clocks

      Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,

Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the_____, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is _____,
Put the crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policeman wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that _____ would last forever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now: put everyone out;
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood.
For what now can ever come to any _____.

Appendix 3

Read the poem closely and complete the missing last line.

Stop All The Clocks

Stop all the clocks
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead,
Put the crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policeman wear black cotton gloves.

He   was   my   North,   my   South,   my   East   and   West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now: put everyone out;
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood.
For _____

Appendix 4

Read the poem closely and locate words that identify the following.

- Words depicting commands
- Words describing the deceased Words describing emotions

Appendix 5

Watch the performances presented by each group and award marks for each of the categories presented in the table below. The marks should be out of ten for each section.

- Clarity of performance
- Accuracy to poem
- Appropriateness of costume & music
- Representation of emotions and mood

Biodata

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