



Comparative Literature for Teaching Technical and Communicative English in Professional and Multicultural Settings

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ABSTRACT

Comparative literature is a popular trend and an effective tool in teaching English, as it paves the way for students to explore the nuances of language used in both literary and technological contexts. It is a known fact that language is best learned contextually. This approach considers different points of view by using details and knowledge of literary techniques that inspire and engage the students by encouraging them to analyse, compare, and draw conclusions from different works. It also allows the investigation of various cultural perspectives. Technical education approaches should be able to promote the critical thinking abilities that students need to become proficient in it. In addition to learning grammar and vocabulary, this paper explores how language can be used in different cultural contexts and situations and how it can help students develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills (LSRW).

Further, the appreciation of idiomatic complexity and the beauty of the language can be fostered in students through comparative literature. This tool can allow students to gain a better understanding of language, such as vocabulary and idioms used in the fields of engineering, science, and technology, which can also be used in other professional settings. In this paper, the researcher also proposes to simplify the use of language in various settings by applying

translanguaging in comparative literature to investigate the language and cultural background of words used in multicultural spaces. Through this method, the students will learn to communicate effectively.

Keywords: comparative literature, critical thinking skills, LSRW, translanguaging

I.INTRODUCTION

The world has become a small hamlet, and there is very little space separating the two countries. No one can limit themselves to a nation, language, or culture. The world is quickly integrating in every possible way. Therefore, Goethe's passionate argument for "World Literature" is what English literature and language now need. No specific teaching strategy has yet been proven to be completely effective for learners to learn the English Language. The teaching of language and the teaching of literature are not dissimilar but intertwined. So, to study literature, one must have a solid command of the language. In the field of teaching, literature should be as extensive and all-encompassing. Language teaching focuses on language mechanics, including linguistic and grammatical features. Still, literature imbues patriotism, motivates people to perform brave things, frees the mind, and sparks societal change through its diverse genres. Therefore, comparative literature is the need of the hour to teach language through literature. Comparative literature is an interdisciplinary academic discipline that studies literature and other forms of cultural expression from many languages, countries, and historical periods. It emphasises the connections between various literary traditions and the relationships between literature and other cultural expressions, including art, music, film, and theatre. Comparative literature has long been employed in the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL). In recent years, its application has grown in popularity. This is because it may teach a range of linguistic abilities, such as communicative and technical vocabulary, and promote critical thinking. With its emphasis on comparing and contrasting various literary works, it can aid students in learning English while enhancing their comprehension of the language. The use of comparative analysis of texts with an emphasis on vocabulary in the classroom is one way to improve students' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills (LSRW). Mastery of LSRW skills is the cornerstone of ESL instruction. Comparative literature is an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the use of certain words and

phrases in the technical context, enabling learners to express themselves in the language accurately. In the classroom setting, students can be asked to compare and contrast two stories and find out the unique themes and characters in each of them. It would encourage students to use a wide range of vocabulary, as well as learn the proper usage of those words. The acquisition of vocabulary is essential for students in understanding technical jargon, related to their field of study, such as engineering, technology, law, medicine, etc. Students may develop a deeper appreciation for the subtleties of words and the cultural context in which they belong. Students planning to study or work in predominantly English-speaking countries like The United States or The United Kingdom can contrast books written in American and British English to comprehend how the two forms of the English language differ in vocabulary, and how they can be effectively and accurately used in their respective geographical settings.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Birgit Mara Kaiser (2020) discussed the difficulties that arise when the comparative literature classroom in the Netherlands becomes both multilingual and monolingual in its emphasis on English as the major language and pursued how teaching literary texts in translation can promote linguistic differences among students and teachers. Shamna Beegum (2018) focused on how English helps to break down linguistic and cultural barriers that countries in the globalised world have established and investigated the literature of minority languages by analysing the function of translations in English and Comparative Literature. Pallavan (2017) outlined the benefits of employing a comparative approach while teaching English to students from various cultural backgrounds. Sanju Choudhary (2016) attempted to investigate the nature of the literary experience in present-day schools and the larger function of literature in life. Leah Nachmani (2015) conducted quantitative research on emerging readers learning English as a Foreign Language in small groups in a multicultural setting and their behaviours regarding reading acquisition. In *Comparative Literature: Theory, Method, Application*, Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek (1998) examined the intersection of language learning and comparative literature and provided a theoretical framework for understanding the role of language in comparative literature studies and outlined a practical method for incorporating language learning into such studies. *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism, and Education* by Ofelia Garcia and Li Wei (2013), provided an in-depth look at translanguaging, a term coined by the authors, which described the fluid process of bilinguals using their two

languages creatively and dynamically. They explored its implications for language learning, bilingual education, and intercultural communication and examined how translanguaging is used in different contexts, such as the home, school, and workplace and mutual understanding among different cultural groups.

III.A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO TEACHING COMMUNICATIVE VOCABULARY AND ITS USAGE IN MULTICULTURAL SPACES

Literary works provide an incalculable source for teaching ESL learners in pursuing careers and higher studies in multicultural spaces. In classrooms, works of fiction can transform into teaching materials for learning English vocabulary, because they provide students with a fruitful learning experience and also improve their reading and writing abilities. Students can broaden their vocabulary, improve their command of English grammar, sharpen their critical thinking abilities, and apply it contextually. Novels stimulate learners' abilities to explore a variety of themes, settings, and characters, making English instruction more participatory and enjoyable. Finally, by offering a real-world setting for speaking and writing, novels can aid students in developing a connection to the language and a fun approach to increase their vocabulary and English language proficiency. Students will be given books of the same genres from different literature for comparative analysis based on their levels of English knowledge. For Beginners, fantasy fiction such as J.K Rowling's *Harry Potter* (ruefully, reckon, tawny, exasperated, rummage) and Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson & The Olympian* series (outcropping, pulled up, nickered, subtle, crude, cathartic) may be ideal, as both authors introduce numerous words that can be added to the reader's everyday vocabulary and wordplay offer beginners a method for learning simpler English. For the Intermediate level, a comparative study of coming-of-age novels, also called Bildungsroman such as Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (amiable, resolute, impudent, haughty, endearment) and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (reproach, cacophony, disconsolate, despondent, foreboding) can be considered. Both these novels are classic works of art on womanhood and offer a language style that will enrich the vocabulary of ESL learners. A study of adventure fiction for comparative analysis, such as Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (discernment, intrepid, scrupulous, tenacious) and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (bemused, detrimental, iniquity, macabre, adrift) can be used for learners at the advanced level. ("The novels mentioned here are the major works of American and British Literature")

IV.COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AS A TOOL IN TEACHING ENGLISH FOR DISTINGUISHING FORMAL AND INFORMAL COMMUNICATION

Comparative literature is an invaluable tool that supports learning in a meaningful context and helps in differentiating formal and informal language. The main drawback for ESL learners is the misuse of vernacular English in a formal setting, especially the African-American English (AAE) dialect. It may be deemed improper and rude to use slang in a professional context. It can also be the result of cultural appropriation, which many people in the African-American community find insulting. It's critical to be conscious of the power dynamics of language and the cultural context of communication. Some of the features of African-American vernacular English that ESL learners tend to use are i) Nonstandard Verb Forms: AAE frequently substitutes "he be" for "he is" or "he's" in its verb tenses. ii) Distinct Pronunciation: AAE pronounces several words differently, such as "been" as "bin" and "pin" as "pen". iii) AAE's unique intonation patterns include rising intonation at the ends of phrases. iv) The use of double negatives, as in "I ain't owe you nothing,". v) AAE often uses "Gonna", "tryna", and "wanna" instead of "going to", "trying to", and "want to". vi) "Been", "done" and "had": AAE frequently utilises these verbs in the past tense, as in "I done finished my schoolwork". vii) AAE often uses "gimme" and "temme" instead of "give me" and "tell me". To initiate the methodology, the facilitator may adopt a comparative approach to African-American, British, American and other literary works and distinguish formal and informal English. A comparative study of novels or plays from African-American literature and other World literature can be offered to students. The following texts may be considered for a comparative study: i) Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (heck, jeez, galavanting, dang) and Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Betrothed, Fervently, Sordid, Indignation), ii) Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (mosey, skedaddle, fussin' - this speech style is also known outside academic circles as Ebonics, black dialect, or Black English Vernacular and its origin has been controversial because it mostly refers to the vernaculars of descendants of slaves in the United States of America) and George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (countenance, fervour, discourse, impertinence, unscrupulous). It must also be noted that class distinction plays a role in the speech patterns of the characters in the above-mentioned works of literature.

The purpose of teaching and differentiating African-American vocabulary from World literature is not to discourage its use but to assist students in understanding the conditions under which it can be used and where it cannot be acceptable.

V.A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO TEACHING TECHNICAL VOCABULARY AND IDIOMS USED IN PROFESSIONAL SETTINGS

Students should be able to understand the text they are offered, irrespective of its difficulty. The content should challenge their language abilities without being complex to the extent that it becomes stressful or discouraging. They should be provided with concrete examples of how the words and phrases are used in professional contexts. It can help students comprehend how vocabulary and idioms are employed in literature and real-life situations. The facilitator may offer a comparative study of the following texts for ESL students to learn professional vocabulary for different workplaces: 1. Engineering and Technology: i) H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (automation, accelerate, inertia, propulsion, piston, cogwheel, accelerometer) and Ray Bradbury's *A Sound of Thunder* (chronometer, time stream, temporal flux), ii) Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* (prototype, apparatus, circuitry, fabrication, algorithm) and Arthur C. Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (gyroscope, thruster, insulation, telemetry, airlock) are some of the science fiction novels that make use of technical vocabulary. 2. Medicine: i) Sidney Sheldon's *Nothing Lasts Forever* (myocardial infarction, tachycardia, hypoxia, dyspnea, syncope) and Arthur Hailey's *The Final Diagnosis* (arteriogram, bronchoscopy, Haematology, intubation), ii) Dennis Lehane's *Shutter Island* (Neurosis, Psychopathy, Delirium) and Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Schizophrenia, Catatonia) are few examples of medical fiction and psychiatry in fiction that offers a variety of medical terminology. 3. Law: i) John Grisham's *The Firm* (complicity, malfeasance, Appellate Court) and Scott Turow's *Presumed Innocent* (Plea Bargaining, Precedent, Circumstantial Evidence), ii) Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mocking Bird* (Bailiff, Contempt of Court) and John Grisham's *A Time to Kill* (Plaintiff, Defendant) are some of the courtroom fiction that features law jargon as a prominent aspect of the story.

To help ESL students acquire appropriate professional idioms for various workplaces, the facilitator may suggest comparing the following works of literature: i) Lauren Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada* (in which the protagonist uses idioms like "It's a double-edged sword"

and "It's a no-brainer" to explain the expectations of her staff) and Jordan Belfort's *The Wolf of Wall Street* (the main character employs idioms like "it's a slippery slope" and "it's a wild goose chase" when describing his outrageous schemes). ii) Walter Kern's *Up In The Air* (uses idioms such as "it's a game of cat and mouse" and "it's a piece of cake" when explaining the job as a corporate downsizer) and Nick Stone's *The Verdict* (employs English idioms such as "in the nick of time," "all bets are off," "between a rock and a hard place"). Idioms from some of the plays of Shakespeare can also be used in professional contexts. The following plays may be incorporated for a comparative study. *The Taming of the Shrew* ("Break the ice" - this expression is used to imply alleviating tension or becoming acquainted with someone better, typically through small talk or a thoughtful gesture to begin a new connection), *The Merchant of Venice* ("All that glitters is not gold"), *Henry IV Part 1* ("Discretion is the better part of valour"), *As You Like It* (All's well that ends well), *Twelfth Night* ("What's done is done", "Familiarity breeds contempt"), *Hamlet* ("Neither a borrower nor a lender be"), etc.

VI. APPLICATION OF TRANSLANGUAGING IN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE TO TEACH ENGLISH

Translanguaging is an educational strategy that encourages learners to use their native language to better understand the context and meaning of the target language. This strategy can be used in the field of comparative literature to assist ESL students in discovering the distinctive cultural influences and subtleties of various works. For instance, facilitators can encourage students to compare and contrast the narrative components of a literary work written by an author from a different cultural background to works similar to that of the students' vernacular. This will stimulate students to comprehend the cultural nuances of the author's background and how it affects the plot of the story. For example, *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy and *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry are two Indian novels that serve as excellent examples of translanguaging. These two books are both set in India and have characters with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Characters in both books make use of language as a means of understanding and bridging cultural gaps. Roy employs the English language from the point of view of characters who do not speak English as their first language and manipulates the English language with Malayalam to examine the intricacies of the Indian caste system. In *A Fine Balance*, Mistry examines the challenges of India's lowest classes using both Gujarati and English.

Therefore, translanguaging can be utilised to overcome the language barrier between cultures, enabling richer, more effective communication. It ultimately has the potential to contribute to the development of a more inclusive and balanced space for the study and appreciation of literature.

VII.FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Data was collected by employing the quantitative methodology in the form of a questionnaire in Google Forms. Students were provided with open-ended questions. The questionnaire aimed to examine the reading habits among students, their attitude towards comparative literature and the use of translanguaging in ESL classrooms. Some of the questions included were i) What do you do when you come across unfamiliar words while reading? ii) Mention at least five newly acquired words. iii) Do you think comparative literature can be an effective tool for learning English? iv) Have you ever used translanguaging to learn or communicate in English? Inferring to the data collected, most students prefer to read fiction and non-fiction books, with a slightly higher preference for fiction. The widely popular genres are fantasy, mystery, and crime thriller. While 70% feel that reading is important, 30% feel that they do not read enough. Their preferences were mostly neutral towards comparative literature in learning English to enhance their English language skills and an effective way to build vocabulary and gain insight into different cultures. The majority of students are in favour of the use of translanguaging in comparative literature. Approximately 80% of students reported that translanguaging helped them to understand the concepts better. Hence, it can be concluded that most students are comfortable with the use of translanguaging in the ESL classroom.

The study of Comparative Literature can provide ESL students with an expansive, broad-minded perspective on the English language and its many uses. Not only does it allow students to gain a more comprehensive understanding of a variety of literature, but it also provides them with the tools needed to interpret and analyse texts from a diverse range of cultural contexts. Ultimately, Comparative Literature serves as an invaluable asset for teachers in helping to create a more culturally aware and literate generation of English speakers. Thus, the inclusion of comparative literature in the curriculum of ESL students that pursue professional courses provides a break from their normal study of technical subjects.

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