



EFL Learners' Perceptions of a Method Allowing Subjective Interpretation of Literary Texts: A Data-Driven Approach

Seyyed Ali Ostovar-Namaghi (Corresponding author)

Shahrood University of Technology, Iran

E-mail: saostovarnamaghi@yahoo.com

Samina Alam

Pune University, India

Received: 10-09-2012

Accepted: 26-05-2013

Published: 01-09-2013

doi:10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.2n.5p.1

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.2n.5p.1>

Abstract

This study aims at conceptualizing students' views concerning a method that allows subjective interpretation of literary texts. To this end, twelve EFL learners' views were theoretically sampled and analyzed iteratively through the rigorous schemes of grounded theory. The results yielded a set of propositions all illustrating the potential of subjective interpretation of literary texts for creating a lively atmosphere for negotiation and redefining language learning and teaching tasks. The implications of the study for syllabus designers, test developers, teachers and learners are profound. However, further studies need to be undertaken in other similar contexts before the field could systematically allow the introduction of literary texts for learners' subjective interpretation.

Keywords: subjective interpretation; literary texts; learners' perceptions; grounded theory

1. Introduction

In a wide-ranging survey of trends over the past century of literature in foreign language education, Kramsch (2000) underline how in the early part of the twentieth century, learning a foreign language meant a close study of the canonical literature in that language. In the period from the 1940s to the 1960s, literature disappeared from the language curriculum entirely as more functional models of learning, with the transactional requirements of communication to the fore, displaced it. Literature was seen as extraneous to everyday communicative needs and as something of an elitist pursuit. However, in the 1970s and 1980s the growth of communicative language teaching methods led to a reconsideration of the place of literature in the language classroom, with recognition of the primary authenticity of literary texts and of the fact that more imaginative and representational uses of language could be embedded alongside more referentially utilitarian output. Just as Kramsch (2000) illustrate the movement from literature as part of an elitist study of foreign languages at the beginning of the 20th century to a view of literature as an authentic source of language at the end of the century. Hall (2005) discerns a move from a suspicious attitude towards literature in the middle of the 20th century, through attempts to incorporate it in communicative language teaching through humanistic techniques, reader response, and stylistics. This welcome resurgence of literature can be due to the following merits:

- Literature provides opportunities for extended output, and led to a great deal of interaction, characterizes by responsiveness, emotional engagement and authenticity (Kim, 2004)
- Literature improves the amount and quality of student discourse (Meskill & Ranglova, 2000).
- Literary discussions are 'more "substantial" than simply answering grammar questions (Yang, 2001).
- Literature enhances involvement and enthusiasm (Kim, 2004).
- Literature is enjoyable, that is deals with substantial and non-trivial topics, etc. (Hirvela, 2005; Yang, 2002).
- Literature introduces and encourages critical thinking (Diaz-Santos, 2000).
- Literature encourages critical literacy (Thompson, 2000; Zubair, 2003).

It should be noted, however, that these potential merits are contingent upon teachers' approach to presenting literature. Donato and Brooks (2004) demonstrate how the pedagogical stance of the teacher led to an inhibition of discussion in the classroom, resulted in word or phrase length utterances, and prevented the learners from developing topics. Investigating an intermediate level Spanish course which focused on reading comprehension and incorporated literary texts for this purpose, Weist (2004) found that 'the course seemed to follow the traditional view of the instructor as the dispenser of knowledge... the instructor was viewed as the one who knew what was important about the texts, and the students often expressed a feeling of tremendous responsibility to develop the ability to interpret the texts like the instructor.' (Weist 2004, p. 214).

One important point here is that EFL teachers normally receive no training in using literary texts in the classroom (Hirvela 1989; Belcher & Hirvela 2000). Methodology handbooks often have no mention of literature (e.g. Hedge 2000; Richards & Renandya 2002), though Ur (1996), Celce-Murcia (2001) and Carter and Nunan (2000) are exceptions, and

Harmer (2001) includes literary texts in the section on reading. Thus to optimize the use of literature in language teaching, teachers should be cognizant of more effective modes of presenting literature.

Carter and Long (1991) describe the use of the three main approaches to the teaching of literature:

- The cultural model: This traditional approach requires learners to explore and interpret the social, political, literary and historical context of a specific text. It encourages learners to understand different cultures and ideologies in relation to their own. This approach is rejected since it tends to be teacher-centred.
- The language model: The most common approach to literature in the EFL classroom is what Carter and Long (1991) refer to as the 'language-based approach'. In this approach learners access a text in a systematic and methodical way in order to exemplify specific linguistic features. Carter and McRae (1996) describe this model as taking a 'reductive' approach to literature since they ignore the literary goal of the texts and in that the learners have very little engagement with the text.
- The personal growth model: In this model learners are encouraged to express their feelings and opinions and make connections between their own personal and cultural experiences and those expressed in the text. Instead of passively receiving the meaning of the text, they personally construct meaning. As Cadorath and Harris (1998) point out "text itself has no meaning, it only provides direction for the reader to construct meaning from the reader's own experience" (p.188). Thus, learning is said to take place when readers are able to interpret text and construct meaning on the basis of their own experience.

Of the three models, it is the personal growth model that is theoretically justified since it is in line with constructivism, which aims at enabling students to discover their own answers and produce their own concepts and interpretations (Marlowe & Page, 2005). Constructivism is: about constructing knowledge, not receiving it; about thinking and analyzing, not accumulating and memorizing; about understanding and applying, not repeating back; about being active, not passive (Marlowe & Page, 2005).

The first two models, on the other hand, are inhibitive in that they create a teacher-centered, teacher-fronted classroom atmosphere. These approaches define teacher's role as the transmitter of information and the students' role as the passive recipient on information. Constructivism in education, which is attributed to such psychologists and philosophers as Jean Piaget, Lev Vigotsky, John Dewey, and Jerome Brunner, emerged in reaction to the traditional educational approach widely practiced in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe and America (Matthew, 2003). The teacher-centered traditional instruction strategy, also called the information transmission model, is an instructional approach in which a teacher transmits information to the students with relatively little emphasis placed on the practicality or significance of the content (Sercu & Bundura, 2005).

Compared with the cultural model and the language model, the personal growth model is conducive to thought and communication. Paul (1995) gave an interesting point that "Our students are intelligent humans with curiosity and feelings; they are not parrots. When our students communicate, they need to think on their feet, react instinctively; and use language flexibly and creatively" (p.66). Students' role in the classroom is no longer a passive one. Indeed, students' input on the teaching-learning process is paramount as it is their education that is at stake. Indeed, if we compare the similarities among the personal growth model, the constructivist learning theories and reader-oriented theories, we can claim that all of them focus on the individual in learning process. The more autonomous an education system is, the more subjective it becomes.

In effect, the personal growth model gives the learners the opportunity to be heard. This raises their own awareness about their own learning experience and the teaching process. They achieve a higher level of awareness if we give them a chance to voice their perceptions of the teaching method. Following Sidhu (2003) learners' perception and observation on the methodology and content can work in practice and become a part of exploratory studies. Thus the field is in urgent need of qualitative studies that theorize students' perceptions of the model in which literature is presented to the classroom.

2. Purpose and Significance

This data-driven study aims at theorizing students' perceptions of the personal growth model of presenting literature to EFL learners, which allows students to come up with their own subjective interpretation of the literary texts. The study is significant in that it:

- allows students to voice their concerns and evaluate the method of presenting literature to the classroom;
- signals a shift away from the transmission model of language teaching, which is the dominant approach in EFL contexts such as public and private language schools of Iran, to a constructivist model which allows learners to construct the meaning of the text rather than receive it from the language teacher;
- raises students awareness of the learning and teaching processes through participation in the dialogical process of research; and
- helps teachers modify their methodology in the light of insights gained from students' evaluation of the method.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Context

In private and public schools of Iran language teachers see their task as covering the mandated syllabus in the time-line specified by the language school. Under such conditions teachers see their main concern coverage of the syllabus rather than creating an atmosphere that is conducive to thought and communication. Final exams, which reflect the specified syllabus, rather than teaching and learning activities, have a conformist function. In effect, they act to guarantee the coverage of content. This model of education exemplifies a banking system which sees teachers' as conduits, learners as empty vessels waiting to be filled, textbook as the source of knowledge, and final exam as the guardian that guarantees the unidirectional transmission of the specified body of knowledge to the language learners. These culturally valued conditions lead to a teacher-centered, teacher-fronted model of teaching that sees learning as nothing but memorizing and accumulating knowledge and sees pass rate in the finals as the only yardstick of success.

This study aims at exploring how learners perceive the shift away from the prevalent transmission model towards a constructivist model that allows students to subjectively interpret the literary texts rather than passively receive the meaning of the texts from the instructor. To pave the ground for students' personal interpretation of the text and encourage subjective interpretation on the part of the learners, the researcher presented literary texts as follows:

1. Presented and elicited learners' personal experience of the themes;
2. Engaged learners in listening by highlighting specific content;
3. Engaged learners in reading and allowed time to reflect on the highlighted content;
4. Elicited learners' initial response to the text;
5. Deepened learners' comprehension of the text through intensive reading;
6. Encouraged learners to construct meaning and come up with their own personal interpretation of the text.

In this study, the first five stages are taken as the means and the last stage, i.e., learners' subjective interpretation of the text, as the end. As such the bulk of the class time is devoted to students' personal interpretation of the text and their justifications for their intended meaning. The treatment took six ninety-minute sessions. After the treatment, learners shared their perceptions of allowing subjectivity in presenting literary texts.

3.2 Materials

The selection of appropriate texts is no less important than the mode of presentation. The most important criterion is of course to select texts that stimulate interest in the students. According to Brumfit (1986, p.32) "of equal importance, however, is the choice of texts that lend themselves to student discussion and personal experience". Along these lines the following texts were selected:

- Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"
- Blake's "The Sick Rose" and "The Tiger"
- O. Henry's "The Gift of the Magi"

3.3 Participants

This qualitative study sampled theoretically relevant concepts from fifteen Iranian EFL high school students learning English at one of the private language institutes in Shahrood, a major city in Semnan province, Iran. The participants were both male and female and their ages ranged from 14 to 17 years. It is worth noting that of the original cohort, the data from three participants were excluded as a result of being absent for the interview. All in all, twelve participants took the treatment and shared their perceptions with the researcher. On ethical ground, prior to the interviews they were ensured that their real identity will not be disclosed in the final research report.

3.4 Data Collection

Beginning with Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theorists have repeatedly emphasized unique features of grounded theory that make it ideal for studying practitioner fields (Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Bryant, 2007a; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). These features enable analysis of emerging data derived from the study of practice settings to drive the research itself rather than be used to test hypotheses drawn from the research literature.

To explore EFL learners' perceptions and observation of teaching methodology which was characterized by allowing subjectivity in interpreting literary texts, the researcher conducted open-ended interviews. In the initial interviews students answered the general question, "How do you perceive the method which allowed subjective interpretation of texts?" The initial interviews were analyzed and conceptualized. It was the emerged concepts that guided subsequent interviews. In effect, subsequent interviews aimed at expanding the dimensions of emerged concepts and categories and collecting evidence to substantiate these concepts and categories. When the emerged concepts and categories were saturated the researcher ended the interviews.

3.5 Data Analysis

This study aimed at inductively generating concepts and categories from empirical data, i.e. transcriptions of students' views. "Grounded theory is derived from data and then illustrated by characteristic examples of data" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 5). To this end, different coding processes were performed to abstract and relate categories to each other in the data analysis. Strauss and Corbin (1998) labeled the coding processes as open coding, axial coding, and selective

coding. Throughout the analysis, the researcher avoided the use of established theoretical categories; rather he took them as transient umbrella terms that aimed at accommodating new data. Thus, whenever it was felt that they do not accommodate the subsequent data, they were modified. To sum up, the study theoretically sampled concepts and categories from EFL learners' views, constantly compared them with the transcriptions and memos, and stopped simultaneous data collection and analysis when theoretical saturation was achieved.

4. Results

This study aimed at exploring EFL learners' perceptions of a method that allows subjective interpretation of literary texts. Iterative data collection and analysis yielded the following propositions:

- Allowing subjective interpretation of literary texts improves self-confidence
- Allowing subjective interpretation of literary texts activates imagination
- Allowing subjective interpretation of literary texts creates opportunities for use
- Allowing subjective interpretation of literary texts encourages self-expression
- Allowing subjective interpretation of literary texts arouses reasoning
- Allowing subjective interpretation of literary texts redefines teachers' role

The narrative that follows presents substantive evidence that substantiate the foregoing propositions since, following Glaser & Strauss (1967), grounded theory is derived from data and then illustrated by characteristic examples of data.

4.1 Improving Self-Confidence

In the transmission model that is prevalent in language education in public and private institutes of Iran, students find themselves as the passive receiver of information. Such a system that follows a black and white logic allows no room for mistakes and errors. Thus, instead of focusing on expressing their intended meaning, students focus on the correct use of linguistic forms they have learned. Since the class is judgmental and learners' errors are counted against them, they do not feel confident enough to use language for communication. Conversely, allowing learners to subjectively interpret the literary texts shakes the shackles of the transmission model and frees students from their concern for the correct use of linguistic forms. In the fuzzy classroom atmosphere that welcomes students' subjective interpretation, learners feel confident enough to express their thoughts. Mohammad-Reza's comments better elucidate the situation:

Talking more in class results in gaining more self-confidence since it gives you a chance to express your thoughts. In other classes teachers had to cover a book within a specific time thus learners rarely found any opportunity to talk. Thus learners, especially the ones with low self-confidence, remained silent and they had fewer opportunities to improve it. This class was student-centered and all students were asked to give their views. We felt highly confident when we could express our ideas and receive feedback concerning our ideas.

When there is no single best answer, everybody feels free to express his or her views. In traditional classes, only the teacher and a limited number of extroverts, impulsive learners dominated the classroom. Such classes allowed no room for introvert and reflective learners; rather it penalized them by negatively judging their potential. Such learners feel quite confident when they have a chance to express their views, they feel especially confident when they see that their views are welcomed by the teacher and their peers. Zahra says:

In this method, silent and shy students were asked to talk and give their ideas over the text and later when they noticed that their views were welcomed and their classmates were listening to them, they felt confident enough to talk more. When silent students were made to talk, little by little they started talking and as a result they gained more self-confidence and the class was no longer boring to them.

Whereas the judgmental atmosphere of traditional language classes eroded the confidence of introvert, reflective learners by overcorrecting them and negatively judging them by relating their silence and personality traits to their incompetency in the use of language, the fuzzy atmosphere of a class that allows subjectivity leaves room for the oft-silent group of learners and build their confidence since such a class focuses on free expression rather than best impression.

4.2 Activating Imagination

Fact and fiction complement each other. Traditional methods of language teaching focus exclusively on presenting useless linguistic facts and making students memorize them through painful repetition and meaningless practice. Literary texts, with their inherent symbolic use of language, combine the best of sound with the best of sense when they present fantasy. They free students from tedious practice of senseless forms by manipulating the imaginative function of language. Literary texts functioned quite effectively in arousing learners' imaginative power. Mahsa says:

When I read the short story I put myself in protagonist's place. Thus, I could have a general view of characters in my mind and could build a subjective relationship with them and I could laugh or cry with them. I rejected their acts when they seemed illogical and approved of them when they were reasonable. Having activated my imagination, I could put myself in the atmosphere of the poems and short stories. This helped me understand the English culture much better than before and I could learn

how the native speakers use the language in different situations, e.g. in critical, unhappy, or cheerful situations.

Compared with traditional tasks that made the student find the single best answer in the text, memorize it and parrot it to the teacher, finishing an unfinished story, or coming up with a subjective interpretations of symbols in a poem takes a high level of imagination on the part of the students. Without activating their imagination, doing such tasks is beyond reach. A quality ending or a rational interpretation is contingent upon students' imaginative power. Reza says:

When I wanted to complete the unfinished short story, I had to use my fantasy in order to write an interesting ending. When I listened to the different ways my classmates have finished the story, I knew that the best ending is the one that involves more fantasy and imagination on the part of the writer. Poems aroused my imagination in a different way. When I wanted to talk about 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' I imagined the whole poem in my mind in order to interpret the word 'stop' then my mind went through different things and gave me new insights and each time I could analyze the poem from different points. Among other things this poem reminded me of my experience of going alone to the cemeteries on a snowy evening.

Thus, allowing subjectivity helps EFL learners manipulate the imaginative function of language that complements the transactional function. While the former focuses on receiving and giving factual information that is grounded in science, the latter focuses on giving and receiving feelings and thoughts that are deeply rooted in fiction. Banning subjective interpretation of literary texts and sticking to one single meaning transmitted by the teacher limits classroom interaction to the transactional function devalues the symbolic nature of literature and turns joyous classroom interaction into tedious and painful practice.

4.3 Creating Opportunities for Use

Compared with ESL situations in which learners have ample opportunities to use what they have learned outside the classroom, in many EFL situations such as Iran learners' use of English is limited to classrooms because English have no social function at all. Teaching English for no obvious reason (TENOR) is better descriptive of the context than TEFL. In the transmission, model things get even more complicated since even inside the classroom students do not find any chance of using what they have learned. In such classes, language learning is nothing but memorizing and accumulating facts about language. On the contrary, when teachers allow learners to subjectively interpret literary texts, they give learners ample opportunities to use the linguistic forms they have learned previously. Mohammad Javad explains:

In previous methods whenever we came across a new word, what we did was to write down its definition without having any chance to use it or think over it in the class. In this class, our personal interpretation of texts gives us repeated chances of using the newly learned words. Grammar was no different. In previous classes which I had participated we were taught grammar but there were scarcely any opportunities to talk and use it in our speech so I easily forgot most of the learned materials. But in this method we could use the learned materials in our talking and writing. In short, this method intertwined learning forms and using them to express our views.

Students believe that the traditional teacher-centered, teacher fronted methods allowed one-way communication: the teacher was the transmitter of information and the learners were the passive recipients of information. Since ceaseless lecturing left no room for feedback, it was not clear whether there was any communication at all. When students come up with their own personal understanding and interpretation of the text and exchange their understanding mainly through learner-learner interactions and at times through learner-teacher interactions, they play an active role in the learning process. Ali explains:

I prefer this method because students participate in the discussions, listen to each other, and play an active role. Listening to the teacher's lecture is very boring. Conversely, discussing your views with your classmates is very lively. What I learn in a discussion sticks in my mind while what I learn from a lecture I forget easily. When there is a chance for learners to use the learning material in their speaking or writing, they can send them to their long term memory for later use. In order to talk more fluently learners have to talk more in class but unfortunately most of language classes are teacher-centered, or even better to say book-centered, and there is less chance for the learners to talk and use the learned materials.

Since English has no social function, the language classroom should immerse students in the use of what they have learned. The main problem with language learners in Iran and other similar contexts is that many learners painstakingly learn English but they cannot use it even at a survival level. The reason is that class time is exclusively devoted to presentation. Even in its traditional form a language class should have three phases: presentation, practice and personalization. In many EFL situations language teaching involves presentation at the cost of practice and personalization since, as it was mentioned before, in these contexts teachers' main concern is the coverage of the syllabus in the time-line specified from the top down.

4.4 Encouraging Self-expression

In many EFL contexts, including Iran, the focus is on mastery of linguistic forms for high-stake national tests such as university entrance exams and uniform final exams. This has led to overcorrection of errors. Moreover, students' errors are counted against them. Under such conditions language is rarely used for self-expression. The motivation behind speaking is to impress the teacher with the use of correct forms. As a consequence, students sacrifice self-expression for the best impression because their main concern is passing the high-stake test, rather than being able to communicate in English. When students are encouraged to express their personal understanding of a literary text, they forget about high-stake tests and express the thoughts and feelings aroused by the text. Reyhaneh explains:

Writing assignments like opinion and descriptive essays and the tasks in which we were asked to write dialogues in which we imagined ourselves interacting with a character in the story helped us express our thoughts and feeling concerning actions, characters and dilemmas. When we were asked to complete an unfinished short story or write our opinions about the poems I could creatively come up with my own ideas and express them freely because I know that in this class we can always look at things from a new angle. Instead of passively reading the text to receive ideas, I acted as a writer who freely expresses his ideas. All the way long, I have been receiving ideas. This class gave me the opportunity to express myself.

Since there was no pressure to cover a pre-specified textbook for the finals and the teacher encouraged each and every learner to express his or her views and present evidence that substantiate his/her positions, the class was characterized by heated debate. A debate in which an outsider does not determine the right or wrong views is conducive to free expression. Parvin's comments better relates free expression to lack of pressure to cover the syllabus:

In previous classes, we worked on a textbook. The teachers' main goal was to finish the book before the final exam. Thus, he did not allow room for subjective views. He always reminded us that the test needs an objective answer that is taken from the book, rather than your personal views. Thus, the book was the master and the teacher and the learners were the slaves. What happened in this class is in drastic contrast with what happened in other classes: whereas in other classes we tried to memorize the content of the book by tedious practice and tiring memorization, in this class we tried to express feelings and thoughts aroused by the literary text.

These comments clearly indicate that learners favor this method since the learners personally construct meaning instead of talking pains to memorize a pre-specified body of knowledge. Whereas the transmission model of education values the memorization of externally dictated knowledge, this approach values meaning and knowledge constructed in the process on learner-learner and learner-teacher interaction. It was this construction of personal meaning in interaction that encouraged free expression.

4.5 Arousing Reasoning

In our education system, as in many other similar contexts, nationally uniform high-stake tests have a control function: they guarantee that nothing but a pre-specified body of knowledge is conveyed to the students. Equally, they guarantee students' mastery over the specified context. This approach conditions learners to take the truth-value of the content for granted and never doubt their truth. Similarly, it conditions them to accept them blindly without reasoning. Such a system cripples intellect and reasoning and produces a mass of obedient citizens. On the other hand, a method that allows learners freely express their views and then defend their position in the dialogical process of a debate or discussion with their cohort, cultivates reasoning and intellect and provides the society with great autonomous thinkers. Narges comments:

When my classmate expressed an opinion which was different from mine, I could disagree with her and explain the ground for disagreeing. Along the same lines, he had a chance to challenge my views by presenting evidence. Thus we could exchange our views and it turned into a hot debate that is far from boring. When somebody disagreed with my idea then I tried to bring more indisputable reasons in order to convince the person. Sometimes the discussion grew so hot that we forgot the mother tongue and we talked in English spontaneously.

More often than not, it is difficult to challenge authority in real life since power is not equally distributed. When you are in a powerless position, the powerful are right merely because they are in the position of power. Literary texts give the learners ample opportunities to criticize kings and commons, the powerful and the powerless. They create ideal communicative acts where reason rather than power governs. Having repeatedly challenged authority through sound reasoning, they get used to reasoning and challenging oppressive power in society. Sadegh says:

There were many occasions in which I found faulty views presented by my teachers, elders, and others who are in positions of power. Although I could refute their views on firm grounds, I tried not to since I wanted to show manners or be polite. In interpreting literary texts, however, I felt free to reject views irrespective of who presented them, or verbally attack the antagonist no matter who he is. How I wish I could do that in my real life!

Any method that conditions learners to find right and wrong in a pre-determined textbook, automatically conditions them to accept the truth value of the ideas presented in textbooks for granted. Such a method mischievously cripples learners' divine gift of reasoning and intellect. On the other hand, a method that welcomes reasoning and the subjective interpretation of the texts turns little learners of today into great thinkers of tomorrow.

4.6 Redefining Teachers' Role

In the traditional mode of language teaching there are two main roles: teachers as the transmitters of information and language learners as the consumers of a pre-determined body of knowledge. On the other hand, a method that introduces literary texts and allows learners to enjoy reading them and liberally present their personal interpretations without the pressure of covering the syllabus in a specified time-limit redefines the language teacher's role as a facilitator of negation and meaning construction rather than as a conduit who mechanically transmitting a body of knowledge from the textbook to the students who are taken as empty vessels. Students welcome this redefinition of roles. Ma'soomeh says:

This method was very different from the previous methods since the teacher introduced the themes and invited learners to present their personal interpretations through group work and pair work. Only when we could not negotiate our views or ran out of ideas or kept silent, she tried to facilitate the negotiation of meaning. Otherwise as an insider she tried to present her personal views about the literary texts but hers were not the ultimate answer and the learners could agree or disagree.

Students believed that in previous methods teaching was maximized and as such there was no time for practice or negotiation of meaning. On the other hand, in this method teaching time was minimized so as to maximize learner-learner interaction through group work and pair work. Fatemeh says:

Before taking this course I believed that a good teacher is the one who devotes the whole class time to her lecture and bombard the students with information. This method changed my views because now I believe that a good teacher should minimize the teaching time and devote the bulk of the class time to meaningful communication. In this class the teacher tried to make the text comprehensible in a minimum amount of time and in the rest of the class time she acted as the initiator of themes and the facilitator of negotiation when it was blocked for one reason or another.

Students' comments indicate that optimizing learning and communication is contingent upon minimizing teaching time, and this is in turn contingent upon redefining language teachers' role as an initiator and facilitator. A teacher-centered, teacher-fronted classroom leaves no room for learning, communication, or negotiation of meaning. In other words, maximizing teaching entails minimizing learning. Optimizing learning, on the other hand, entails minimizing teaching.

5. Limitations

Students believed that although subjective interpretation of literary texts is promising in creating meaningful communication in the classroom, it does not prepare them for social communication. Thus rather than being substituted with pre-determined textbooks, literary texts should be juxtaposed with them to fulfill a complementary function and erode the possible boredom of studying such textbooks. Moreover, since subjective interpretation of literary texts lends itself to meaning-focused instruction, learners worried that they did not have any chance to improve grammar and language forms. Thus instead of exclusively focusing on negotiation of meaning, teachers should try to integrate form and meaning or allocate a portion of the class time to raising students' awareness over forms. Focusing on negotiation of meaning at the cost of language may produce a host of students who are communicatively competent but linguistically incompetent.

6. Conclusion, Discussion, and Implication

Language learning in public and private schools of Iran is instrumental; rather than learning English to communicate, language learners work hard to pass high-stake national tests such as final exams, the national university entrance exam, MCHE, and TOLIMO. These tests have a very negative backwash effect on learning and teaching: students learn only the things that help them pass the test, and teachers teach to the test since the only yardstick of success in language learning is the pass rate in the test- high-stake tests in public high schools and teacher-made tests in private institutes. Focus on pass rate has naturalized learning to pass the test as an ideal goal for learners and teaching to the test as the dominant mode of teaching, and these in turn have naturalized the transmission model as the ultimate panacea.

The postmodern's initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as 'natural' are in fact 'cultural'; made by us, not given to us (Hutcheon, 1989, pp. 1-2). It is by introducing subjectivity to language classes that we can denaturalize nationally givens such as learning to pass, teaching to the test, teaching to transmit. These givens need to be deconstructed because they leave no room for thought when they leave no room for teachers and learners' personal interpretation of content. They need to be replaced with national givens that are conducive to thought, reflection and communication. And this is possible if and only if the language education system allows teachers and learners to:

- doubt the truth value of the texts rather than take their truth-value for granted and memorize them for the tests;

- come up with their own personal interpretation of the text, share their interpretation through negotiation, defend it through reasoning, and modify it through authentic listening to opposite interpretations;
- sacrifice coverage of the syllabus for authentic communication which aims at meaning construction through negotiation, rather than transmitting, passively receiving and accumulating pre-determined, pre-specified concepts and meanings; and
- optimize their activities by minimizing the presentation time and maximizing the interpretation and negotiation time.

The results section presented deeply grounded propositions that were taken from the data and were substantiated with the data. The propositions clearly indicate that allowing language learners to interpret literary texts subjectively is an effective way of denaturalizing learning to pass, and teaching to the test, and naturalizing authentic communication that aims at empowering learners to construct personal meanings of the texts through negotiation. Literary texts proved to be ideal for this purpose because their symbolic nature allows as many interpretations as the number of participants. Multiple interpretations, when replaced with the language teachers' monotonous monologue which is inculcated to be the single best interpretation, provide learners with opportunities for self-expression. Having had substantial empirical evidence it is recommended that:

- syllabus designers select texts that lend themselves to multiple interpretations rather than texts that lend themselves to one single interpretation;
- education officials de-emphasize coverage, which leads to teacher-centered methods by focusing on continuous formative assessment rather than summative assessment through high-stake tests;
- teachers redefine their roles as the initiator of themes and the facilitator of negotiation for meaning construction among learners, rather than a unidirectional transmitter of knowledge;
- language learners come up with their own interpretation of text and negotiate it with the cohort, rather than parroting the texts as is common in language classes of Iran
- test designers design tests that demand learners' personal interpretation of the text, rather than design tests that encourage all learners to come up with uniform answers that parrot the texts.

Despite the fact that methodological rigor of grounded theory yielded undeniable merits for allowing learners to interpret texts subjectively, more studies in similar contexts would better illustrate and verify the potential of literary texts in creating a delightful atmosphere for the negation of personally constructed meanings. It is hoped that by allowing subjectivity into the language classes language teachers in the education system of Iran and similar EFL contexts redefine their role and pave the way for entering the post-modern era.

References

- Belcher, D. & Hirvela, A. (2000). Literature and L2 composition: Revisiting the debate. *Journal of Second Language Writing* 9.1, 21–39.
- Brumfit, C., & Carter, R. (1986). *Literature and language teaching*. Oxford & New York: OUP.
- Bryant, A., & Charmaz, K. (2007a). Grounded theory research: Methods and practices. In A. Bryant & K. Charmaz (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of grounded theory* (pp. 1-28). London: SAGE.
- Cadorath, J. & Harris, S. (1998). Unplanned Classroom Language and Teacher Training., *ELT Journal*, 52/3, 188.
- Carter, R & Long, M. (1991). *Teaching Literature*. Longman.
- Carter, R. (1997). *Investigating English discourse*. London: Routledge.
- Carter, R., & McRae, J. (1996). *Language, literature and the learner, creative classroom practice*. London: Longman.
- Carter, R. & D. Nunan (eds.) (2000). *The Cambridge guide to teaching English to speakers of other languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Celce-Murcia, M. (ed.) (2001). *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (3rd edn.). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Corbin, J. and Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. 3rd ed., London: Sage.
- Diaz-Santos, G. (2000). Technothrillers and English for science and technology. *English for Specific Purposes* 19.3, 221–236.
- Donato, R., & Brooks, F. (2004). Literary discussions and advanced speaking functions: researching the (Dis)connection. *Foreign Language Annals*, 37 (2), 183-199.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New York: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Hall, G. (2005) *Literature in language education*. London: Macmillan.
- Hanauer, D. (2001). The task of poetry reading and second language learning. *Applied Linguistics* 22.3, 295–323.

- Hedge, T. (2000). *Teaching and learning in the language classroom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hirvela, A. (1989). Five bad reasons why language teachers avoid literature. *British Journal of Language Teaching*, 27.3, 127–132.
- Hirvela, A. (2005). ESL students and the use of literature in composition courses. *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, 33(1), 70–77.
- Hutcheon, L. (1989). *The politics of postmodernism*. London: Routledge.
- Kim, M. (2004). Literature discussions in adult L2 learning. *Language and Education*, 18(2), 145-166.
- Kramsch, C. (2000) Social discursive constructions of self in L2 learning. In J.P. Lantolf (ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning*. Oxford University Press.
- Marlowe, B. A. & Page, M. L. (2005). *Creating and sustaining the constructivist classroom* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Matthews, W. J. (2003). Constructivism in the classroom: Epistemology, history, and empirical evidence. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 30(3), 51-64.
- Meskill, C. & Ranglova, K. (2000). Sociocollaborative language learning in Bulgaria. In M.
- Warschauer & R. Kern (eds.) *Network-based language teaching: concepts and practice* (20–40). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J.C. & Renandya, W. A. (2002). *Methodology in language teaching: An Anthology of current practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sercu, L., & Bandura, E. (2005). *Foreign language teachers and intercultural competence. An international investigation*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Sidhu, G. K. (2003). Literature in the language classrooms: Seeing through the eyes of learners. In Ganakumaran & Edwin Malachi (eds.). *Teaching of literature in ESL/EFL contexts* (pp. 88-110). Petaling Jaya: Sasbadi-Melta ELT Series.
- Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1994). Grounded Theory methodology: An overview, In Denzin, N., K. & Y. S. Lincoln, (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 1-18). Sage Publications, London.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (2nd Ed). London: Sage
- Thompson, C. (2000). Critical literacy and text selection in English for academic purposes courses. *Prospect* 15.2, 39–47.
- Torrance, E. P. (1995). *Why fly? A philosophy of creativity*. Greenwich, CT: Ablex.
- Ur, P. (1996). *A course in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Weist, V. D. (2004). Literature in lower-level courses: making progress in both language and reading skills. *Foreign Language Annals* 37.2, 209–221.
- Yang, A. (2001). Reading and the non-academic learner: a mystery solved. *System* 29.4, 450–460.
- Zubair, S. (2003). Women's critical literacy in a Pakistani classroom. *Changing English* 10.2, 163–173.