

TEACHING LITERATURE TO NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ARABIC: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17622705>

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the status of literature within foreign-language teaching. It addresses a number of issues raised in this context, including the disagreement among linguists and teachers regarding the usefulness of literature in foreign-language education. It also asks whether learners who are not specialists in the target language can benefit from literature courses, and whether there exists a type of literature intended for native speakers and another for non-native learners. Furthermore, this study discusses the problems related to the literary text and offers perspectives on how to resolve these issues in order to make effective use of literature in developing and enhancing linguistic competence. This paper intends to address the status of literature in the lessons of teaching foreign languages." Moreover, this topic presents the problems of the literary text, and provides insights on how to solve these problems in order to invest it effectively in building and upgrading linguistic competence.

Annotatsiya

Ushbu tadqiqot chet tillarini o'qitishda adabiyotning rolini o'rganishga qaratilgan. Unda ushbu kontekstda bir nechta masalalar, jumladan, tilshunoslar va o'qituvchilar o'rtasida adabiyotning chet tillarini o'qitishda foydaliligi, chet tili bo'yicha mutaxassis bo'lmaganlar adabiyot darslaridan foyda ko'rish-ko'rmasliklari va ona tilida so'zlashuvchilar uchun adabiyot va ona tilida so'zlashuvchilar uchun adabiyot mavjudmi yoki yo'qligi haqidagi turlicha fikrlar ko'rib chiqiladi. Bundan tashqari, ushbu tadqiqot badiiy matnlar muammolarini taqdim etadi va tilshunoslik kompetentsiyasini shakllantirish va oshirishda adabiyotdan samarali foydalanish uchun ushbu muammolarni qanday hal qilish bo'yicha tushunchalar beradi.

Introduction

I believe it is difficult for a learner of any language, when learning it as a second language, to reach an advanced level of linguistic competence without being able to appreciate, understand, and recognize the distinctive features of certain literary texts. Much literary language permeates ordinary communicative speech that we use in daily conversation. Therefore, many Arabic-language teaching programs for non-native speakers include literary texts – albeit to varying degrees – within the materials they present to learners, and some programs even assign special courses dedicated to studying literature.

Research Problem

The research problem revolves around the status and usefulness of literature in programs of teaching Arabic to non-native speakers, as well as the procedural and linguistic challenges that hinder its effective use in building and developing linguistic competence.

The problem arises from an inherent contradiction between:

1. The natural importance of literature:

Literature constitutes an essential component of language and a vital source for developing linguistic competence and cultural sensibility among second-language learners.

2. Practical and linguistic challenges:

These include the difficulty of teaching literary texts to non-native speakers due to their complex linguistic features (such as metaphor, symbolism, and historical allusions) and the varying proficiency levels of learners.

The main research question can be summarized as follows:

What is the actual value of teaching Arabic literature to non-native speakers? What are the key linguistic and cultural challenges facing its effective use, and what methodological perspectives and proposals are most appropriate for overcoming these difficulties and achieving the intended objectives at different educational levels (general and specific)?

Research Methodology

This study adopts the descriptive-analytical method. It aims first to provide an accurate description of the status of teaching Arabic literature in Arabic-as-a-foreign-language programs by identifying the most prominent linguistic challenges and practical problems imposed by the nature of literary texts (e.g., metaphor, symbolism).

The methodology then moves to a critical analysis of the differing views among linguists and educators concerning the usefulness and effectiveness of literature in second-language teaching. It also includes a thorough analysis of methodological perspectives and proposals offered by specialists – through personal experiences

and linguistic insights – to overcome these challenges. Finally, the study proposes a practical framework for effectively integrating literature into various educational levels (general and specific), in accordance with the principles of gradual progression and methodological appropriateness.

First: On the Usefulness of Teaching Literature

The usefulness of teaching literary texts in foreign-language education is a controversial issue. One viewpoint argues that using literature as a component of foreign-language instruction does not serve the desired educational purpose, but instead increases learning difficulties. Their arguments (Rady, 1982, pp. 234–240) include:

1. Figurative language

One of the major difficulties faced by second-language learners while studying literary texts is the prevalence of figurative expressions of various kinds, which the language of literature is full of. The difficulty stems from the learner's lack of linguistic experience and sensitivity needed to uncover the many paths along which figurative meaning unfolds.

Many metaphors require familiarity with the cultural and social context that produced the literature. These contexts vary significantly across societies; knowledge of one culture does not necessarily help interpret the figurative expressions of another. Even native speakers across different historical periods may struggle to understand the figurative meanings of texts produced in earlier eras.

Many Arabic learners today – including native speakers – may not understand why a woman's complaint of the "*lack of rats*" in her house is actually a complaint of poverty, or why "*the abundance of ashes*" is praise for generosity. These meanings stem from a specific cultural environment at a specific time in history.

Naturally, such meanings are even more problematic for a foreign learner.

2. Historical allusions

These are references within texts to historical events or figures, especially common in poetry and proverbs. Understanding them requires more than mere knowledge of language; the learner must also know the referenced person or event.

For example, the meaning of poems referring to Ká'b ibn Mámamah, Ibn Sa'dá, or Hatim al-Ta'í cannot be understood without historical background. Similarly, many proverbs are entirely opaque unless their original stories are known.

Even native speakers may require effort to understand these allusions, and naturally such difficulty is doubled for foreign learners.

3. Symbolism

Symbolism is especially prevalent in poetry and represents another layer of difficulty. Symbols draw meaning from various sources, including history, myth,

religion, or nature. Symbolism is more frequent in modern Arabic poetry than in ancient forms.

Understanding symbolic meaning is difficult even for native speakers, and much more so for foreign learners.

4. Special forms and structures

Literary language – especially poetry – often includes nonstandard grammatical structures known as “poetic licenses.” These forms contradict the rules students are taught, creating confusion and difficulty.

5. Variation in learners’ levels

A literary text may contain structures or vocabulary that have not yet been introduced in the learner’s curriculum, creating gaps in comprehension – particularly at beginner stages.

In contrast, another viewpoint holds that literature is extremely beneficial

(McKay, 1991, pp. 191–192), for reasons such as:

1. Literature enhances all language skills by providing authentic examples of vocabulary, grammar, and stylistic usage.
2. It develops linguistic sensitivity and awareness of how language rules and stylistic patterns operate.
3. Cultural complexities in literature stimulate students’ creative capacities.
4. Literature compensates for the lack of natural linguistic environments in foreign-language contexts by creating culturally rich linguistic worlds.

Second: Approaches to Solving the Problems of Literary Texts for Non-Native Speakers

Although some educators argue against using literature due to its figurative nature, everyday language also contains metaphors – often more than some literary texts. Metaphor is not exclusive to literature; rather, language in general oscillates between literal and figurative use.

A famous story from *al-Aghani* illustrates this point. When al-Nu‘man ibn al-Munadhir told the Persian envoy: “*Are there not enough māhā and ‘ayn in Persia to satisfy Kisra?*” the interpreter mistakenly translated *māhā* and *‘ayn* as “cows,” while the intended figurative meaning was “beautiful women.” Kisra became angry because the figurative dimension was lost.

Thus, misunderstanding figurative expression can lead to serious miscommunication.

Many linguists and language teachers have proposed solutions to mitigate these difficulties.

Professor Abdul-Hakim Rady (1982, pp. 243–244) emphasizes **gradual progression** in selecting texts:

- simpler, more literal prose texts for beginners
- increasing complexity at higher levels
- reducing poetry at early stages due to its density of rhetorical devices

Sandra McKay (1991, pp. 193–194) proposes additional strategies:

1. Simplifying texts

Although helpful, simplification risks:

- breaking textual coherence
- removing essential meaning clues
- limiting learners to familiar vocabulary

Dr. Tuaima warns that simplification must not distort the literary nature of the text.

2. Selecting relatively easy texts

Text readability should match learners' levels in vocabulary familiarity and syntactic complexity. Choosing appropriate texts is difficult and requires careful judgment.

3. Avoiding chronological selection of texts

Presenting texts based on historical order contradicts the principle of progression from easy to difficult. Classical texts are linguistically harder than modern ones; thus chronological arrangement is pedagogically inappropriate for early levels.

Third: Teaching Literature Between General and Specific Purposes

Language is an integrated whole; its components – grammar, literature, reading, writing – cannot be isolated. The integrated curriculum approach emphasizes unity of knowledge and discourages fragmentation.

Studies show that literature can benefit learners at all levels. For example, 96 percent of Arabic learners in a study cited by Hani Ismail reported sensing the musicality of Arabic poetry.

Tuaima recommends simple, rhythmic texts resembling chants for beginners, with gradual progression toward more complex texts at intermediate and advanced levels.

The fundamental criterion is **text suitability for learner level**, not avoidance of complexity altogether. Gradual exposure enhances linguistic growth.

Fourth: Literary Objectives of Teaching Literature

According to Dr. Rushdi Tuaima (1989, p. 206), the objectives include:

- Helping learners derive new meanings from life through exposure to Arab cultural perspectives.
- Providing opportunities for learners from different cultures to express experiences and exchange ideas.

- Developing learners' ability to appreciate and enjoy Arabic literature and encouraging extensive reading.
- Connecting learners with the works of Arab writers and thinkers and motivating them to follow contemporary literary production.

For advanced learners or those studying literature specifically (Al-'Alimat & Masnad, 2014, p. 226), literature becomes a central component because they possess the linguistic proficiency required for authentic literary engagement.

Fifth: Conclusion, Findings, and Recommendations

The literary text is an aesthetic manifestation of language that performs communicative functions. To overcome the challenges associated with presenting literary concepts, this study recommends: developing learners' literary taste fostering strong motivation and active engagement inside and outside the classroom adopting gradual progression in presenting literary texts using conditional simplification focusing on the learner's sensitivity, experience, and artistic appreciation avoiding strict chronological or historical approaches to literary selection ensuring that literature contributes to strengthening linguistic abilities and expressing creative insights Ultimately, integrating literature into Arabic-as-a-foreign-language programs should aim to enrich learners' linguistic competence and stimulate their creative potential.

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