

CREATIVE WRITINGS THROUGH PATTERN POETRY IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

Writing is a Herculean task for many ESL learners. Teaching writing is also a challenging job for many ESL teachers. In most of the cases, it is seen that learners learn writing only for academic purpose and teachers are hopefully too pre-occupied with the completion of the prescribed syllabus. Due to these factors, the concept of creative writing is hardly addressed in the ESL classroom. Writing is still taught in a rather conventional teacher-centered top-down approach in many Indian ESL classrooms where writing exercises are mostly controlled, causing learners to be hesitant to allow their creative part to emerge. How can we nurture creative writings among our ESL learners who can explore and expose their own creative processes and can also develop their language skills? In this context, pattern poetry can open the door to both creative writing and language learning and it acts as a psychological aid which fosters self-confidence among the inhibited and timid learners and relieves them of their language learning phobia.

This paper highlights the importance of creative writing in the ESL classroom and proposes pattern poetry as an effective tool for creative writing activities which language teachers can exploit to help learners break the ice and maximize their classroom involvement so as to develop their creative and linguistic competences in a rewarding way. Creativity can be simply defined as the ability to produce something original. Imagination is key to creativity. Creative writing differs from mechanical transcribing or reproducing activities. In creative writing learners need to be mentally and emotionally engaged. So, simply put, any classroom situation where the learner has the autonomy for self-expression, mental and emotional engagement is an instance of creative writing. The level of creativity of course depends on the learner's level of imagination, real-life experiences, critical thinking, reflective and analytical abilities etc. Most of these elements are innate qualities and so, sometimes it is often argued whether creativity is taught or caught. But in my opinion, if creativity cannot be caught, it should be taught.

WHY CREATIVE WRITING?

Expository writing generally gets a front seat in the ESL classroom which keeps aside the creative part. Expository type of writing is characterized by grammatical and lexical accuracy and appropriacy to genre constraints. Its aim is to be logical, consistent and impersonal in nature. Creative writing, by contrast goes beyond these limitations. Creative writing activates the aesthetic sensibility of the learners. It is intuitive, personal and is governed by self-imposed rules. Creative writing involves learner's feeling and

emotion which can make classroom environment truly democratic and humanistic in nature. Moreover, Creative writing aids language development at each and every level: phonology, grammar, vocabulary and discourse.

Creative writing can create playful classroom environment because it includes several fun activities like rhyming chants and rhymes, word games, jokes, puns etc.

It helps ESL learners to explore language individually.

It stimulates learner's imagination.

It focuses on the right side of the human brain, with an emphasis on feeling, emotion, physical sensation, intuition etc.

Creative writing task increases learner's motivation by actively promoting learner's autonomy.

It can make stimulating and enjoyable by breaking the monotony of the routine activities.

It fosters critical thinking and artistic expression.

WHY PATTERN POETRY IN CREATIVE WRITING?

According to Maley (1997), there are two kinds of creativity. One is 'H' (Historical) and the other one is 'P' (Psychological) creativity. 'H' creativity refers to something which is created or discovered which no one has ever created or discovered earlier while 'P' creativity is seen when an individual creates or discovers something which he/she has never done earlier. Generally, learners are exposed to 'H' creativity in the classroom i.e. to great works done by famous writers. They are hardly encouraged to explore their own creative potentialities using 'P' creativity which Maley terms as creativity with a small 'e'. According to Maley everyone may achieve 'P' creativity although 'H' creativity may not be achieved by all. So, in order to expose and nurture ESL learner's 'P' creativity, I have chosen pattern poetry as a creative writing strategy.

Pattern exists in each and every facet of our lives. It is evident in poetry also. Pattern poems represent a particular pattern- it can be sound, shape or sense. Patterns may consist of any grammatical/phonological/ semantic item like adjectives, adverbs, verbs, sentence structures, rhyme, discourse pattern etc. Pattern poems are relatively easy to compose and are motivating for language learners. In composing such a poem the learner has absolute autonomy in choosing the subject.

A few types

- Sound patterning: It appears in alliteration and in rhyme, For example: Rabbits running over roses',

The tall talkative man' etc.

- Shape patterning: Here lines in an unusual arranged configuration, usually to convey or extend the emotional content of the words. The learner can give the particular shape of an object to a poem like:

A

Volcano,
A huge rock,
Shooting lava up into the air!
Everyone runs for cover. Lots of thick,
Black smoke pours out of the top, giving you
a warning before the explosions start. Nothing can
stand in its way. Sometimes they don't blow up for
hundreds of years. Still thousands in the world
but they don't all work, some are even underwater.

- Excuse poem: An exercise can be given to the learners to compose a short pattern poem on the basis of classroom discourse which includes teacher's questions and learner's excuses like:

Common Excuses

Why are you late?
I missed the school bus.
Why have you missed the school bus?
I got up late in the morning.
Why have you got up late in the morning?
Last evening I watched a Hindi movie.
Where is your home work?
I forgot to do.

- Acrostic poem: An acrostic poem is one in which certain letters, often the first letter of every line, form a name or a theme. Learners can take each other's name to form such a poem. For example, if someone's name is Biki, then:

BIKI

B - Benevolent
I - Innocent
K - Kind
I - Imaginative

- 5 W poem: In this poem each line starts with who, what, when, where and why respectively. For example:

Who said what,
What is my business with that,
When I have my own business to do,
Where I need to be attentive and responsible
Why should I affect my state of mind

by entertaining those comments?

- Preposition poem: Learner can compose a preposition poem in which each line must contain at least one preposition like:

Over the tree
Under the wall
On to the stones
The frog jumped.

- Advice poem: Learners are quite familiar with the advice which they receive from their teachers, parents and elders. In this activity advice is used creatively to compose a poem

Common Advice of a Teacher
Always be regular.
Always be punctual.
Always be attentive.
Never waste time.
Never disrespect elders.

- The Sense Poem: Such a poem deals with the five senses like:

It looks like a prison.
It sounds like a devil.
It feels like a desert.
It smells like rotten vegetables.

- Adverb poem: Learners can compose adverb poem by adding appropriate adverb after the verb like:

Protesters
Protesters shout loudly
They shout loudly, consistently,
energetically
They shout rebelliously
In the protest rally.

- Rhyming poem: The learner can compose such poem by using similar-sounding words like:

Children like fun,
to play under the sun,
simply jump and run.

- Bio Poems: These are reflective and autobiographical in nature in which the learner can share his/ her personal traits.

Bio poem pattern:
First line: Name
Second line: Personal nature
Third line: Relative

Fourth line: Lover of...
Fifth line: Who feels...
Sixth line: Who need...
Seventh line: Who fears...
Eight line: Who gives...
Ninth line: Who dreams to be...
Tenth line: Resident of...
Eleventh line: Surname

A bio poem can be like the following:

Andrew
Happy, crazy, lazy and cheerful
Brother of Joseph
Lover of eating, gossiping and playing
Who feels excited among friends
Who needs money to spend
But afraid of his daddy
For his mark sheet which he gave
Resident of Juhu, Mumbai
sanai

- Haiku: A Haiku is a traditional Japanese poem which is three-lined. The first line contains five syllables, the second line contains seven syllables and the third line contains five syllables. For example:

I am first with five
Then seven in the middle
Five again to end.

CONCLUDING REMARK

Pattern poetry as a creative writing tool offers an avenue for self-expression. Learners draw on their own experiences and interests. It fosters both creativity and language learning. Moreover, learners get a forum to express their creative ideas. So, it is worth implementing in the ESL classroom as ultimately an ideal language classroom is all about risk taking, experimentation, implementation, and innovation.

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