# Title: Approaches for Multilingual Teaching of Language Through Literature

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**Abstract**

Multilingualism is the need of the hour. Engagement with more than one language enriches the cognitive and creative abilities of the learners. The New Educational Policy of India 2020 (NEP) also strongly emphasises on the importance of multilingualism in a diverse country like India.

This article follows a qualitative approach on the topic "Multilingual Approaches for Teaching Language Through Literature." Literature as a representative and imaginative creative art uses language as its vehicle for conveying meanings. The "ambiguity of meaning" can be discovered when the same text is read by students from various cultures. As Wolfgang Iser mentioned that texts are filled with gaps or 'indeterminacy 'and readers fill these gaps and thereby assemble meanings -- thus becoming co-authors in the process of meaning-making. The meanings might vary based on the student's subjective, spacio-temporal, and cultural experiences which can foster collaborative interpretations and discussions in the classroom. Use of literature in the classrooms among children,

therefore, facilitates enhanced vocabulary, creativity, cognitive abilities, increased cultural-understanding and so on.

This article explores the possibilities of adopting different pedagogic approaches for multilingual teaching of language through literature, like translation method/s along with the reader-response approaches, that can be included as the basis of teaching languages through literature in multilingual classrooms. Multi-modal approaches can be utilised in the classroom for better performance. These will increase student's engagement with the text. They will become active participants in the reading and interpretation process.

Keywords: Language through literature, multilingual, Translation method, Reader-response theory, meaning-making, NEP 2020

**Introduction**

Multilingualism is the ability to understand and use two or more languages. It involves the ability to apply all the skills (LSRW) in those languages. A person who possesses the knowledge of more than two languages is known as a polyglot. According to Bloomfield (1933) "a multilingual is considered to be an individual who has a native-like control of multiple languages."

Nonetheless, such traditional concept of multilingualism has been challenged by many modern researchers. It is argued that the native-like proficiency of a monolingual person cannot be the benchmark for the proficiency level of a multilingual person. The modern researchers believe that multilingualism should be assessed with a different viewpoint. Cenoz and Genesse (1998) underline that multilingual speakers possess "a larger linguistic repertoire than monolinguals but usually the same range of situations in which to use that repertoire" resulting in multilingual speakers having more "specific distributions of functions and uses for each of their languages." They propose the statement that multilingual competency must involve using "several languages appropriately and effectively for communication in oral and written language" (1998). Noticeably this definition of

multilingualism has its own demerits as it does not specify the exact proficiency level that would make a person multilingual. Many scholars through their extensive research belief that "schools that foster multilingualism should establish different goals for individual languages based on the learners' needs and objectives associated with each language" (Cenoz and Genesee 1998). Cenoz & Gorter (2011) further assert that:

> Achieving native-like competence need not be the goal of multilingual education. Rather, the goals would differ in each language and should be based on learners 'needs in a language.

Literature is a repository of creative use of language. This article is an attempt to explore how multilingual teaching approaches can be aligned with teaching-learning of literature taking literature as a resource for language pedagogy.

**Research Methodology**

A qualitative approach is adopted in this paper. The primary source of information are books and articles. Extensive research is made to source the materials. Various writings on the necessary themes are studied to deduce how to use literature for multilingual language pedagogy.

**Language of Literature: a Pedagogic Resource**

Since time immemorial, literary story-telling like folktales has been used as a resource for teaching values and traditions to the communities. Literature is a medium of expression that creates especial effects of pleasure and meaning making – a quality which is termed as "literariness" by Jonathon Culler (2007). Through the use of language, literature expresses thought and produces evocative and didactic meanings. Culler has listed the following natures of literature:

1. Literature as the 'foregrounding' of language
2. Literature as the integration of language
3. Literature as fiction

4. Literature as aesthetic object

5. Literature as intertextual or self-reflexive construct.  (ibid, p.28-34)

Being 'foregrounded' in language, literature is said to be the best use of language, and hence, it is the best medium of teaching language and concepts. Literary expressions invoke emotion, imagination and creativity in meaning-making. Robert DeMaria (2020, p.4-5) mentions that,

> Writers do not make up things in order to conceal. They invent stories in order to reveal things about human nature and experience. We do the same thing when we dream. We
>
> represent inner feelings to ourselves in symbolic form. We make up situations and characters and sometimes nightmarish happenings, but these inventions are an expression of some inner truth about ourselves. One might argue that *fiction is truer than fact* because sometimes the real truth can only be told by indirection, by the invention of revealing situations. (emphasis in original)

Thus, literature reflects and represents "ourselves" as human subjects and reveal things which are "estranged" in the common perception through the techniques of "defamiliarization" and "verisimilitude" which constitute the aesthetics of "literariness". DeMaria (2020, p.8) can be quoted again in this connection:

> The raw materials of life are overwhelming and without form and meaning…. They are given form and meaning only through a process of selection. The writer does not record experience; he or she creates a work of art from the *selected* and carefully *arranged* details of experience. the writer creates a story, poem, or play. The writer's craft makes it possible to deal with a variety of things: *theme*, *setting*, *character*, *plot*, *point of view*, *tone*, *style*, *description*, *dialogue*, *thoughts*, *time sequences*, *images*, *patterns*, *and forms.* (emphasis in original)

Learning multiple languages can bring in more of literariness as well as creativity in language use in the context/s of teaching-learning a language, and expand the learners' cognitive abilities. However, such a pedagogic activity may be based on translation methods, reader-response approaches and so

on. An attempt to explore the different approaches for multilingual pedagogy for teaching language through literature is made here.

**Approaches for Multilingual Teaching**

**Reader-Response Approaches**:

The reader-response theory came into existence in the 1930s as a response to the structuralist and formalist approaches towards literary analysis. The move was made from the focus primarily on the text's intrinsic qualities to the creation of meaning from active engagement of the readers with the text. I. A. Richards discussed about one's emotional response towards literature. (Sen, Kumaran, 2020)  Padley (2006) also acknowledges that in the reader-response theory, "the reader plays the role of an agent who assigns meaning whilst experiencing the text". This theory asserts that the meaning of a text does not solely rests in the words intrinsically as an arranged structure, rather the reader's own knowledge; beliefs, culture and emotions of the reader play important roles in constructing the meaning. "…a literary text does not stand independently, but acquires significance only in relation to socio-political practices" (Baral,2002, p.61), and the post-structuralist and reader-response approaches can help to interrogate and recover the multiple and diverse meaning embedded in the literary texts.  Such practices consider the diverse and subjective nature of interpretation and meaning making. This is a kind of 'discursive' practices allow the learners to adopt their own reading strategies and meaning-making independently. Following Baral (op cit.), we can call it a "rhizomatic" practice in the pedagogy of literature and a pedagogy of "articulation and self-reflexivity" that can replace the teacher-centric authoritative study of literature and its language. Baral says, "The pedagogy of processed information should be replaced with *rhizome* method in which the learning/reading subject must, while decentering orthodoxies, awaken the possibilities of connections, turning his/her learning as ice-axe to break the sea frozen within him" (p.65).  In our pedagogic context, reader-response approaches can be integrated for teaching language through literature where the learners would be

able to reflect upon their own context/s and build meaning/s of the language of literature. In a multilingual classroom, this approach can be

immensely enriching since the collective cultural practices of the learners can be brought in in building a multicultural classroom. This would be an exercise of a learner-centric pedagogy where the learners' own knowledge and culture would form a part of the teaching-learning activities. Learners' own context of L1 can be a "referential code" which can be expanded through exposure to multilingual readings, interpretations and analysis.

**Use of Inter-lingual Literary Markers**

Literary markers, like the rhetorical devices and literary forms, are distinctive indicators or characteristics of a particular literary genre. This also include specific elements, techniques or features of the language and so on. Such exercises in language contribute to the overall meaning, tone, and aesthetic elements of the text. Some common literary markers are imagery, symbolism, allusion, metaphor, simile, personification and so on. Authors employ various literary markers to distinguish their literary writings. Different languages have different literary cultures. For example, Japanese *Haiku* is a unique practice of Japan, which now has been adopted and appropriated by writers of many other languages. Use of inter-lingual literary approaches to the study of language through literature (especially emphasising upon the literary registers and genres) can, not only familiarise the learners with the different literary cultures of different languages, but also enlarge the creative horizon of the learners. Short literary passages rich with concepts and rhetorical devices can be focal points for teaching concepts and ideas which can also be used for language teaching-learning tasks. The learners can be trained to write in the linguistic and literary styles of the target language which would be cognitively engaging as well.

**Translation Method**

Translation is an activity that aims to facilitate communication process by interpreting the information received in one language (L1) into another language (L2), and vice versa (Numan M, 2014). Learning by linking the new word to its mother-language equivalent is more effective than learning vocabulary in context (Prince, 1996). One of the best approaches in language teaching in multilingual classroom is through translation. Translation method can be used in the classroom to enhance intercultural and linguistic competence among students. This method challenges the negative attitudes towards the first language that may pertain in a foreign/second language classroom. The use of translation method in the classroom can also encompass trans-lingual practices such as code-mixing, code-switching and crossing which are used to create meaning across and beyond languages (Otheguy, Gracia and Reid 2015). The flexibility in the process of translation gives the students choice of brainstorming ideas and negotiate meanings from various kinds of texts. It is a highly cognitively engaging practice which facilitates learning of language through the study of literature. The central task in translation lies in finding the linguistic equivalences between L2 and L1. Thus, it often leads to 'transcreation.' Guy Cook (2010) points out that translation is an act that happens naturally in the brains of language learners and that should not be repressed, but rather understood. Thus, using translation method in language classroom would be beneficial for the language learners.

**Dialogic Approaches:**

Dialogic approaches have been considered revolutionary in teaching-learning in today's world. Critical pedagogues strongly emphasis upon dialogic pedagogy as it brings the learners in the fore front of learning. This is, thus, a learner-centric approach where the learner's own knowledge and understanding and background form the core of pedagogy.  Paulo Freire, the

Brazilian educator who is known as the father of critical pedagogy, identified teacher-centric 'banking model of education' as oppressive that hinders the learners' growth as human being and suggests that -

> The answer seemed to lie:
>
> a) in an active, *dialogical,* critical and criticism-stimulating *method*;
>
> b) in changing the *programme content* of education;
>
> c) in the use of *techniques* like thematic "breakdown" and "codification"
>
> Our method, then, was to be based on dialogue, which is a horizontal relationship between persons.  (p. 40).

Freire considers that dialogic pedagogy can bring in "conscientization" or critical awareness leading to a liberatory pedagogy. Through critical pedagogy, learners will be aware of their positions in the society and understand the implicit meaning of the words where the words represent the world. Teacher-centric pedagogy does not allow any space to the learners to employ their own creativity whereas teaching-learning of literature requires understanding and feeling creativity. A dialogic approach can avail a space to the learners to explore their own creative talents through the study of literary texts and exploring the use of language in them. This will be helpful in developing both critical awareness as well as creative talents. Anthony Petrosky (2011) also has voiced similar concerns regarding engaging the learners in making critical inquiries upon the texts in the classroom through talks, writings and interpretive discussions that can evoke "multiple possible responses that can be argued from the text. In these lessons, students learn to use the text to substantiate their responses, they learn to up-take from and build on others' comments in discussions, and they learn that the text is a linguistic artefact whose construction by an author is a legitimate subject for inquiry." (p.137-8). Thus, employing dialogic and discussion-based pedagogy,

multiple arenas of understanding the language of literature can be opened. This can help in bringing out the implicit "creative originality" among the learners themselves. This can help the learners "personalize" their learning and connect with the languages that they learn.

**Discussion and Analysis**

Rosenblatt (1995) pointed out that reading literature in an exploration, in which readers avail themselves of emotions and histories with the intention of meaning construction. Iser (1972) said that meaning is constructed through a transaction between the reader and the text and throughout the transaction, learners bridge the gaps in the text employing previous knowledge and disposition. According to various modern researches, use of literature to construct active meaning making in the classrooms have proven to be beneficial for advancing student's language skills. Kim (2004) pointed out that quality talk, which is of great value in language development, comes from literary discussions by the desire to negotiate meanings.

Literature can be used in a multilingual classroom to bring discussions on certain aspects of the literary text. The students can be asked to find equivalent literary markers present in the L2 with their L1. An often-quoted example of the same is the teaching of the poem "Daffodils" by William Wordsworth in an Indian classroom. As Indians we might not have seen a daffodil flower in our immediate surroundings. Thus, understanding the poem and appreciating the beauty of a daffodil might seem difficult for the students without knowing what a daffodil looks like. The teacher in this scenario can make use of the cultural differences in the classroom and ask the students to find an equivalent from their personal experience. The students can be engaged to find a flower from their immediate surrounding whose beauty would mesmerise them like the daffodils did to Wordsworth. This way, the students can come up with various examples from their socio-cultural background and this can open ways of discussions in the class. The students can further be questioned on why they

find that particular flower beautiful and through these discussions the students can enhance their language skills as well as expand their horizon of learning.

Similarly, citing a simile from a literary text, the students can be asked to find an equivalent in their own language. This can help the students understand the structure of a simile in depth and then find similar examples in their language. The answers can be evaluated based on their understanding of the structure of a simile. For example, if the students are given the idiom 'To rub salt in the wound' and asked to find an equivalent in their native language, then an Assamese student might come up with the phrase *kata ghat kala khar xana* (to apply acid upon wound); a Bangla speaker would say *kata ghay e nuner chhite* (rubbing a pinch of salt upon an injury by a cut). Here, the student would understand the idiom, then trace back his/her knowledge of his/her native language and find an equivalent. Similarly, the English proverb 'To cherish a serpent in one's bosom' can be presented before the students and the students can be asked to present another proverb with similar meaning/s. A Manipuri student would give the proverb *khurek ki one lai saba* (doing undesirable things by one's own people). An Assamese student would give the response *gakhir khuwai xap puha* (to nurture a snake by feeding milk). A comparative understanding of such linguistic employment would help the learners explore the beauty of different languages and also help them in expanding their understanding of literature and linguistic creativity. One can safely put it that this process would help the students understand the second language better and at the same time help them in finding a connection between the L1 and L2. This can also help the student translate other idioms from L1 to L2 in an easier way which can increase their vocabulary. Thus practices can also lead to inter-cultural understanding.

The selected examples that are discussed in this article do not exhaust the wide range of applications that one may find in a language classroom. Thus, using reader-response theory and translations in a multilingual classroom can aid in enhanced vocabulary, creativity, cognitive

abilities, increased cultural-understanding and so on. These approaches of teaching can also help in register building among students. This article thus highlights that multilingualism can be used in a second language teaching classroom by using the said approaches to teach students the L2 in reference to L1 by using literary texts.

**Conclusion**

The New Educational Policy 2020 stresses upon multilingualism as one of the foremost educational objectives. It has mandated the mother tongue as the medium of instruction till Class 5. This is clearly aimed at building and enriching the multicultural ethos that we have in India. Our endeavour in this article is to explore how the language of literature can be a means to fulfil the larger objectives as emphasised by the NEP 2020.

Literature can be used to teach language in a variety of ways focusing on all the skills of a target language. However, the material designer has to keep in mind while selecting and grading the materials and tasks that the culturally sensitive and politically discriminative language items may not be included that may possibly cause hinderances and misunderstanding. The aim solely should be to widen the language and literary skills and generate respect and appreciation for all the languages and the cultures of the different linguistic communities. If a right discretion is employed giving way to learner-centric and dialogic approaches, then it would be immensely beneficial in preserving and developing the rich multilingual heritage that we have in our country.

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