

ARTHUR MILLAR'S *ALL MY SONS*: TEACHING COMMUNICATION SKILLS & GRAMMAR COMPETENCE

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Abstract

*The role of English as a Second/Foreign language has been changing from time to time. In the last few decades, learner's attention has switched over from learning English Literature or English for Academic Purpose to learning communication skills in English (i. e. four basic skills of communication, LSRW). By studying some literary pieces authored in English, the learners try to be familiar with the structures of the sentences and grammatical rules. They try to do some exercise based on curriculum and class-room teaching in order to develop their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills with grammar competence. The learning of communication skills in English consists of various phases of listening like pre-listening, while listening and post-listening, speaking, pronunciation, phonemes and morphemes, lexical items, sentence structure, vocabulary, communicative competence, fluency and accuracy, reading comprehension, various types of question and learning grammar in context, techniques of reading like scanning and skimming, reading comprehension, writing skills including different methods of paragraph writing and language items like sentence structure, determiners, various orders of sentences, connectives, clauses, and vocabulary. Drama is a useful literary device through which learners cannot merely develop their communication skills but they can also enrich their grammar competence with exercises of mime, role play, dialogue, simulation, and improvisation. Further, literature proves to be interesting and thought provoking to them because it develops their imagination, comprehension and communicative competence. The present paper is a discussion about the role and significance of Arthur Miller's *All My Son* in learning communication skills in English with grammar competence.*

Keywords: language, grammar, communication skills and literature.

Being medium of communication, language plays a pivotal role in life of every human being. The four basic skills of communication (LSRW) are significant for the learners of the L2. Michael Canale and Merrill Swain lay emphasis on learning of four basic skills of communication. In their opinion, “A theory of basic communication skills can be characterized as one that emphasis the minimum level of (mainly oral) needed to get along in, or cope with, the most common second language situations the learner is likely to face” (9). On the other hand, it is necessary for the learners of the second language to be familiar with the rules of grammar of the target language (L2) and develop their grammar competence. In Michael Canale and Merrill Swain’s opinion, the term “grammatical competence” includes knowledge of phonology, orthography, vocabulary, word formation and sentence formation. While the generative-grammarian Noam Chomsky explains it as: “Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance” (3). Chomsky obviously distinguishes the description of language form (competence) and language use (performance) and points out that the speaker-listener’s internal grammar that judges the grammaticality of sentences should be the main object of investigation for linguists. Thus, Communication Skills (LSRW) are intertwined with Grammatical Competence which refers to the ability that the learners of the target language (L2) are able to recognize and produce the distinctive grammatical structures of language. They also come to know how to use grammatical structures effectively in communication. It also deals with the learner’s ability to use the forms of the second language (sounds, words, and sentence structures).

Using drama in a language classroom proves to be advantageous for language teaching. In their book *Words into Worlds: Learning a Second Language Through Process Drama*, Shin-Mei Kao and Cecily O’Neill opine, “Drama does things with words. It introduces language as an essential and authentic method of communication” (4). It is through the use of drama that learners become familiar with grammatical structures in contexts and they also learn about how to use language to express, control and inform. It raises learners’ awareness towards the target language and culture. For this reason, the new language and the context of the drama should fuse into a language learning process with high interest, relevance and enjoyment. In a language class-room, learners make use of drama to enrich their comprehension level not only about language but also about their life experiences.

Alan Maley (2005) considers drama a useful literary text which helps learners to polish their language through literature. He mentions many significant points supporting the use of drama as a resource of learning Foreign Language or L2. Firstly, in his opinion, drama integrates language skills in a natural way; consequently, active and emphatic listening is possible. Further, he thinks that the spontaneous verbal expression is integral to most of the activities; and many of them require reading and writing, both as part of the input and the output. Secondly, dramatic activities integrate verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication;

therefore, they bring together both mind and body by restoring the balance between physical and intellectual aspects of learning in a language-oriented class-room. Thirdly, drama focuses upon both cognitive and affective domains; therefore, it restores the significance of feeling as well as thinking. Fourthly, by fully contextualizing the language, it brings the classroom interaction to life through an intensive focus on meaning. Fifthly, drama fosters self-awareness (as well as awareness of others), self-esteem and confidence; consequently, it fosters motivation of the learners of L2. Sixthly, drama encourages an open, exploratory style of learning where creativity and the imagination can easily be inculcated among the students.

Another advantage of using drama in a language class-room is concerned to the role-plays which are exercises given to the learners and each learner is assigned a fictitious role from which he has to improvise some kind of behavior towards the other role characters in the class-room. The two basic requirements for role-play are improvisation and fictitious roles. Role-play can be very simple and the improvisation highly controlled. The format of a role-play consists of three basic parts: the situation, the roles, and useful expressions. The "Situation" sets the scene as well as the plot which also explains the situation. It describes action to be accomplished during the course of role-play. The task or action can be simple, for example, a telephone call; it can be elaborated as settling a complex business deal. Further, through the texts of drama in the language class-room, teachers can easily encourage learners to learn dialogues, "Wh" questions, "Yes/No" questions, and question tags by choosing example from a play:

Keller: You wanted money, so I made money. What I must be forgiven? You wanted money, didn't you?

Mother: I didn't want it that way. It doesn't excuse it that you did it for the family.

(Act 3, 75).

Stichomythia is one of the dramatic devices which a playwright uses in the play. Miller uses stichomythia in *All My Sons*. Through stichomythia (which is "one line" or "one word" between the characters) the readers come to know about the sentence structures of the target language. learners can also enrich their proficiency in the target language by learning small and simple sentences The following example can be taken from the play *All My Sons*:

Chris: You felt something that far back?

Ann: Every day since.

The use of drama texts in the classroom to teach English as a second language results in real communication, involving ideas, emotions, feelings, appropriateness and adaptability. The conventional method of teaching English in a language-teaching oriented class-room hardly gives an opportunity to the students to use language in this manner and develop fluency in it. It is because learners lack adequate exposure to spoken English outside the class as well as the lack of exposure to native speakers who can communicate with the students on authentic matters. Therefore, teaching English through dramatic texts proves to be fruitful because it gives a context for listening with meaningful language production, leading the students or forcing them to use their own language resources, and thus, enhancing their linguistic abilities. Using drama in a language-oriented classroom also provides situations for

reading and writing. By using drama techniques to teach English as a foreign language, the monotony of a conventional English class can easily be overcome and the syllabus can be transformed into one which prepares learners to face their immediate world better as competent users of the English language because they get an opportunity to use the language in operation.

The key to successful communication is speaking nicely, eloquently, efficiently and articulately with effective voice projection. For this, drama activities have positive contribution to the general education process and that these activities improve speaking skills. Role play is one of the drama activities which is considered to be a valuable classroom technique that encourages learners to participate actively in language learning class-room. The role-playing activities also help the teacher to create a supportive, enjoyable classroom environment in which learners are motivated to learn the target language effectively. Drama is also one of the tools for pronunciation teaching because various components of communicative competence (discourse, intonation, pragmatic awareness, non-verbal communication) are practiced in an integrated way in the language class-room. Further, drama activities have obvious advantages for language learning. They motivate learners to speak, to communicate, even with limited language, using non-verbal communication like body movements and facial expressions.

Shin-Mei Kao and Cecily O' Neill consider mime as a useful tool of learning second language. They define mime as: "Mime or pantomime is a more familiar procedure to most L2 teachers. . . . Again working in mime releases students from the constraints of language" (30). In a language class-room, mime builds up the confidence of learners by encouraging them to be ready to do assigned tasks in front of one another. Mime boosts up the power of imagination and observation among the learners. The teacher or the facilitator also plays a significant role in mime activities. The teacher places a box in front of the class and mimes taking something out of it and asks learners to take a guess at what it could be. The teacher then invites a learner to approach the box and whispers the name of the object to the learner who in turn mimes taking the object out of the box while the rest of the class guesses. In this way, learners learn language with curiosity.

By simulating reality, role play allows learners to prepare and practice for possible situations. Ideas for role play are based on situations that teachers and learners experience in their own lives, from books, audio-visual programmes and movies or from their daily interactions with other people in private and public places. In a language class-room, it is important for the teacher to consider learners' background of language proficiency while using and implementing role play activities in the second language classroom. There are many types of role-play like dramatic play, story dramatization and socio-drama, seminar style presentation, debate competition and interview.

In a language class-room, use of drama can be useful to encourage the learners to involve in simulation activity where they discuss a problem within a defined setting. In a simulation activity learners are either playing themselves or someone else. Simulation activities also indulge in dialogues. Simulation exercises teach learners how to function in a social situation with the appropriate social niceties. Further, in a simulation activity learners

can practice various communication skills like asserting oneself, expressing opinions, convincing others, arguing eliciting opinions, group-problems-solving and analyzing situations. In a simulation activity, behaviour is not controlled and the participants bring to the situation their own skills, experience and knowledge. Thus, simulations are particularly useful in practicing and evaluating the use of procedures and language (vocabulary, and structures) specific to communication skills of the target language.

Improvisation has proved to be an excellent technique in learning English as a Second Language because it encourages learners to be active and conscious participants in authentic situations in language class-rooms. At the beginning learners feel hesitation and shy to participate in the activities but after a few sessions they are confident and they show their interest. Robert Landy (1982) defines the term "Improvisation" as, "Improvisation is an unscripted, unrehearsed, spontaneous set of actions in response to minimal directions from a leader, usually including statements of whom one is, where one is, and what one is doing there" (5-6). Improvisation not only provides learners with an opportunity to improve their communication skills but it also improves their confidence which leads to the development of positive concepts among them. For this, the teacher or the facilitator has to involve the establishment of a context which serves to inform the learners where they are and what they are expected to portray in their inter-relationships with other characters. Since improvisation is an unscripted, unrehearsed drama exercise, the learners have freedom to make their own spontaneous contribution as the play begins. Further, improvisation exercises involve learners either in small groups or the whole class. Once the context is introduced to the learners, they participate in the exercise spontaneously. The teacher's role is to provide the context and the learners act their roles accordingly. But it is significant to keep in mind learners' background and experiences during the improvisation activities in a language learning class-room. Further, spontaneous improvisation exercises enrich learners' communication skills as well as they provide an opportunity to them to develop their emotional range by playing roles unfamiliar to them and outside their own experience.

It is obvious from the above discussion about use of drama in developing communication skills and grammar competence that drama is one of the appealing teaching tools which promotes cooperation, collaboration, self-control, goal-oriented learning as well as emotional intelligence skills. It enriches the bond between thought and expression in language and develops good listening, reading and writing skills. If drama is considered as a teaching method in the sense of being part of the eclectic approach to language teaching, then it can become a main aid in the acquisition of communicative competence. Drama activities facilitate the type of language behaviour that leads to fluency as it provides a variety of situations, attitudes, roles and worlds. One of the best advantages of use of drama in the language class-room is that learners gain confidence in their use of English by experiencing the language in operation, consequently, drama in the English language class-room is ultimately indispensable because it not only provides an opportunity to the learners to use their own personalities but it also focuses upon learners' natural abilities to imitate and express themselves by using their imagination. It also encourages adaptability, fluency and communicative competence among the learners.

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