

## The Use of Literature in the Foreign Language Classroom

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### **Abstract:**

*The present study focuses on the use of literary texts in teaching Arabic and English as foreign languages. It is part of an action research project that also includes the design of a literature-based syllabus for teaching foreign language skills at the Department of Foreign Languages, University of the Western Cape, South Africa. The project deals also with piloting the materials and investigating the attitudes of the learners towards them. In particular, this study investigates the use of short stories and poems in the foreign language classroom. It shows how Oscar Wilde's *The Selfish Giant* can be effectively used for teaching some syntactic constructions such as exclamation sentences. The study also explores the use of Shawqi's *al-tha'lab wa al-dik* (i.e. *The Fox and the Roaster*) in teaching vocabulary and grammatical number in Arabic. Finally, the study uses Bahjat's *Ghurāb 'ibnaī 'ādam* (i.e. *The Crow of the Two Sons of Adam*) to teach language skills and to introduce some multimodal activities such as adaptation and digital storytelling. The study has concluded that literature in general and short stories and poems in particular provide the learners with motivating resources that can assist them to develop their language skills and enhance their communicative and interpretive competence.*

**Keywords:** Teaching, Language, Literature, Short Story, Poem.

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## استخدام الأدب في تدريس اللغة الأجنبية: القصة والشعر القصصي أنموذجاً

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ملخص:

تناول الدراسة الحالية استعمال النصوص الأدبية في تدريس اللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية لغير الناطقين بهما، وتعتبر الدراسة هاته جزءاً من بحث إجرائي يتضمن تصميم منهج أدبي يمكن من خلاله تدريس المهارات اللغوية لطلبة شعبة اللغات الأجنبية، جامعة الكيب الغربي (UWC)، بجنوب إفريقيا، كما يشمل البحث في مرحلة التالية التدريس الفعلي للمادة التعليمية المقترحة، ودراسة اتجاهات المتعلمين نحوها. وتبحث هذه الدراسة بشكل خاص استخدام القصص القصيرة والشعر القصصي في تدريس المهارات اللغوية لطلبة اللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية باعتبارهما لغتين أجنبيتين، إذ قامت الدراسة بتحليل قصة "العلاق الأناني" للكاتب الإنجليزي أوسكار وايلد بغية استخدامها في تدريس بعض القضايا النحوية والأساليب الإنشائية مثل جمل التعجب، والظرف، والصفة، والجمل البسيطة في اللغة الإنجليزية. كما بينت الدراسة استعمال قصيدة شوقي "الثعلب والديك" في تدريس المفردات والعدد النحوي في اللغة العربية وتدريب السرد والمحادثة، واستخدام قصة "غراب ابني آدم" لأحمد بهجت في تدريس مهارات اللغة المختلفة، ومهارات السرد ومهارات القصة الرقمية. وقد خلصت الدراسة إلى أن الأدب بصفة عامة، والقصص القصيرة والشعر القصصي بصفة خاصة تمنح المتعلمين مصادر محفزة تساهم في تطوير مهاراتهم اللغوية وتعزيز كفاءاتهم التخاطبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تدريس؛ اللغة الأجنبية؛ الأدب؛ اللغة الإنجليزية، اللغة العربية، القصص، الشعر القصصي.

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## 1. Introduction

Literature appeals to our minds and hearts. There is hardly anybody who does not like to listen to or read stories. Many foreign or second language learners may not be so much interested in literature, but even though would enjoy a story retold in a simple language which is comprehensible to them.

As a matter of fact, many students pay a lot of attention in learning a language only if the study materials they are exposed to are interesting; they are not interested in merely practicing drills of chosen structures, even if they are of much practical value. At the school level, or even at the undergraduate level in South Africa, our goal is not to teach literature, but to teach language and this can be done through interesting pieces of literature. In other words, literature is not an end; it is rather a means to an end. At the lower level, students may be exposed to stories retold in a language which has controlled vocabulary and structures. Students may be asked to rewrite the story in their own words. They can enhance their listening skills through listening to the story, as well as their reading and speaking skills if they tell the story orally and read it aloud to others, or silently to themselves. Students may find it even easy to role-play some of the events in the story.

In a word, the educational value of using stories is not a matter of debate among educators and psychologists. Now more and more teachers of English and Arabic as foreign languages use carefully selected stories from the world of children's literature because stories cater to most of the needs of learners: linguistic, psychological, cognitive, social and cultural. Literature and short stories in particular have become part and parcel of the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) programmes throughout the world. Even in courses where stories are not there, teachers tend to supplement their core teaching materials with a variety of stories to help students learn language structures and to break the boredom that may afflict students. In this way, a story provides the starting point for developing a wide variety of learning activities involving learners creatively. In brief, there is a

myriad of activities which could be developed based on a story in a textbook. There are no better materials than literary pieces for reading assignments outside the class. Quite a few abridged and retold materials are available which could be assigned for reading outside the class. Short story collections and novellas are more useful than full length fiction. Students might be asked to pencil the words, phrases, and idioms which are unfamiliar to them. They can check with a second language learner's dictionary such as *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* or an Arabic dictionary for the meaning, usage and pronunciation of new vocabulary. They may be asked to write a brief report on the story with a view to confirming that they have indeed read it. A brief discussion about the reading assignment can also be organized in the class.

The present paper explores how literary texts can be effectively used in teaching Arabic and English as foreign languages. It is part of an action research that, in addition, to the use of literary genres in teaching foreign language skills, it tackles the design of a syllabus for teaching language through literature, piloting it and investigating the attitude of the learners towards it.

## 2. Statement of the problem

Teaching Arabic as a foreign language thrives throughout the world. As a result, new departments for teaching it at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels were opened in various universities at many countries. Although Arabic has a good academic status in South Africa and it is taught at universities, schools and theological institutions, the researcher, who has been teaching Arabic at a South African university for more than ten years, has observed that Arabic is taught using non-authentic materials that are usually labeled by students as boring. Empirical investigations have also shown that the grammar-translation method is the dominant teaching methodology and learners are taught in a medium other than Arabic and

they are given very little opportunity to communicate in the language<sup>1</sup>. In addition, Arabic is sometimes viewed as a religious language that is mainly associated with the Muslim community. It is often taught by graduates of Islamic studies who were trained in Islamic universities in the Middle East to be *imams* and not language teachers. Those teachers focus on subjects such as *nahu and Sarf* and the teaching materials are mainly based on textbooks such as *al-Tuhfah al-Saniyyah* and Islamic stories such as *Qishaṣ al-nabiyyin* by Al-Nadwai. Arabic Grammar is taught using decontextualized sentences and is hardly taught in context. Hence, the current situation of teaching Arabic is not in line with the proclaimed policy of Arabic departments at South African universities which states that such departments aim to enhance the various language skills of the graduates and to enable them to get employment in the language industry. In other words, Arabic in the South African higher education context is not only taught for shari'a or Islamic purposes but also for general purposes.

The present study is based on the assumption that literary texts and genres can be used to assist learners enhance their language skills and their linguistic competence. In particular, the study aims to find out to what extent the use of short stories and poems can enhance the linguistic and communicative competence of foreign language learners.

### 3. Literature review

Many studies have already investigated the role of literature in teaching different languages. In what follows, we survey some of those studies and then we show how our study is different from them.

Raza & Akhtar explore possible methods and strategies that can enhance English Language skills through the use of Pakistani literature in English at the undergraduate level. The study argued that undergraduate students face certain difficulties when they learn non-

literary Language learning activities. The study concluded that students who have been given the chance to read native literary texts in English showed more confidence and creativity. Pakistani literature in English proved to be more beneficial to language learning. This is partly because postcolonial curricula do not pay attention to the use of literature as a tool of instruction<sup>2</sup>.

Hişmanoğlu investigated the use of literature in teaching basic language skills (i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking) and language areas (i.e. vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The study stressed that strict selection criteria of literary texts need to be considered. It recommended that different literary genres such as poetry, short stories, drama and novel should be utilized in language teaching with a view of improving the level of students in the above mentioned skills. The study listed a number of obstacles that hindered the ultimate application of the approach, including: the absence of clear-cut objectives which define the role of literature in ESL/ EFL, lack of training for language teachers in literature and lack of pedagogically-designed appropriate materials that can be used by language teachers in a classroom context<sup>(3)</sup>.

Tseng conducted a study on the presentations of 24 literary works to a class of 28 Taiwanese EFL senior high school students. This empirical study was conducted over fourteen weeks. It reports on those students' perceptions of the texts introduced and their attitudes towards literature in general. The results showed that most of the students like novels the most; followed by plays, short stories, and then poems. In addition, about 50% of the students showed their interest in reading literary works. Respondents were more inclined to read contemporary rather than classic literature. In so far as favorite literary genres are concerned, movie novels, realistic fiction, fantasies, and mysteries are found to be the best<sup>(4)</sup>.

Phat examined how literature can be used to effectively teach communication skills in a literature class as well as how to develop the students' inspirations in studying literature. A short story was used to show how a literary work can be used in the teaching of speaking for advanced students. A questionnaire was also given to level 2, 3 and 4 students at the English Department. The students' perceptions on the activities in a literature class as well as the benefits of studying literature were positive and statistically significant<sup>(5)</sup>.

Nair *et al.* investigated whether the teaching of literature promotes students' proficiency in the target language based on the students' feedback on the subject, teaching methodologies employed by teachers and the literary texts used in the school. A survey was conducted at SMK Bukit Besi with a view to obtaining the students' attitude towards literature as part of their English Syllabus. The study concluded that the inclusion of literature in the syllabus has helped them to improve their grasp of the target language. The study has also concluded that students view learning literature as a key component in the holistic development of language skills<sup>(6)</sup>.

Butler found similar findings in his empirical study that was done as part of an action research while teaching an English language module (i.e., English 100) at the University of the North West (now the Mafikeng campus of North West University in 2000 – 2001<sup>(7)</sup>).

Bobkina & Dominguez conducted a study in the Spanish context where students have the chance to speak and to listen to the target language before they get familiar with grammatical constructions. The study argued that teaching literature can play a vital role in that. However, despite the significance of literature in language teaching, it has not been given the attention it deserves in the bilingual curriculum. The study has therefore introduced an

integrative approach model for the implementation of literature in the bilingual classroom with a view to providing English teachers with a powerful tool to handle literature<sup>(8)</sup>.

Das highlighted the use of literature in the foreign language class at different stages of language teaching history. The study explored the arguments for or against teaching literature as well as the pros and cons of the use of literature in ESL / EFL class. The study concluded that literature can serve as a beneficial pedagogic tool and the successful employment of literary texts in a foreign language class is based on the careful selection of literary texts/genres and the adoption of a suitable teaching approach or teaching methodology<sup>(9)</sup>.

Llach examined how literature in general and poetry in particular can be used to enhance the communicative competence of the students in language classes. In particular, the study showed how Eliot's *The Waste Land* can be used as a tool to develop such a competence. It suggested a didactic proposal for English as a second language (ESL) instruction based on the poem<sup>(10)</sup>.

Maddin examined teacher practice using digital storytelling as an instructional approach to the common core state standards in English language arts. The study followed the work of two middle grades teachers over a period of six weeks. It is based on the initial planning and implementation of student-created digital stories within a unit centered on S.E. Hinton's novel, *The Outsiders* (1967). The study concluded that digital storytelling can play a vital role in enhancing the linguistic competence of the students. The findings support the viability of Wallace's theoretical framework<sup>11</sup> for understanding teaching with the Internet<sup>(12)</sup>.

Elbashear dealt with the teaching of literary texts in the English department at the Faculty of Education, University of Gezira, Sudan in 2017. The study concluded that teaching



literature in the English language curriculum enriches the vocabulary of the students and their critical thinking. It also enhances the communicative competence of the students. Students have shown more awareness of other cultures, tradition and habits<sup>(13)</sup>.

Bobkina & Romero adopted a multimodal framework for the implementation of literary works with film adaptations at the Master's courses for the training of EFL/ESL secondary teachers in the Complutense University in Madrid. A video/literature workshop was designed for this purpose. The study confirmed that film adaptations of literary texts facilitate the implementation of literature in the EFL/ESL classroom. An adapted version of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath*, which is by far one of the difficult texts to teach in the EFL/ESL classroom, was used to state the applicability of the framework<sup>(14)</sup>.

Based on the above survey of studies, we can safely argue that the benefits gained from teaching language through literature are undisputable. However, there is still a need to investigate the use of literature in teaching various language skills. The fact that most of the conducted studies are based on small-scale samples necessitates the need to carry out more theoretical and empirical studies to test the validity of the findings of those studies and the possibility of generalizing their findings across languages. The current study is part of a wider action research. Even though, the study in its initial stage mainly focuses on the content analysis of some literary texts and on how to use them in EFL and AFL contexts, the other phases of the project deal with empirical issues such as syllabus design, digital storytelling and the attitude of the learners towards the designed syllabi.

#### 4. Theoretical and conceptual framework

Teaching Language through literature has attracted the attention of a considerable number of applied linguists, literary critics and educators. In this section, we present some of

those key theories and we state how their conceptual frameworks are used in the current study. Maley gives seven reasons for regarding literature as a potent resource in the language classroom as follows:

- i- **Universality:** Literature deals with common universal themes such as love, hatred, death, nature, freedom, etc.
- ii- **Non-triviality:** Literature, unlike many forms of language teaching, does not tackle insignificant experiences. It mostly deals with genuine and authentic issues.
- iii- **Personal Relevance:** Themes, ideas and events deployed in a literary text can be part and parcel of the reader's experience; readers can also be part of his imaginative world and thus they do not find a difficulty in relating them to their lives.
- iv- **Variety:** Literature can provide the language learner with a myriad of topics. The characters in a short story or a play may speak different registers. You may find the attorney who speaks a frozen legal variety, or a doctor who uses a highly technical language or a preacher who speaks an appealing religious language or even a peasant who speaks a colloquial variety.
- v- **Interest:** Poets, dramatists and storytellers always put the reader in mind and thus they select themes/topics which are intrinsically interesting and engaging for the readers.
- vi- **Economy and Suggestive Power:** Literary works abound in the use of symbolism, witty remarks, implications, ellipsis and other rhetorical devices. A line or expression could generate maximum input. Literature can be used as an ideal tool for enhancing the critical thinking of language learners.
- vii- **Ambiguity:** Literature is highly associative and suggestive, and a piece of literature might be interpreted differently by different people. Literature is contextualized and recontextualized. No two readers will have completely convergent interpretations. This gives a chance for discussion in the classroom<sup>(15)</sup>.

Another model for teaching language through literature came from Collie & Slater, who have given four key reasons for teaching literature in the classroom. These are valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement<sup>(16)</sup>.

### **i-Valuable Authentic Material**

Most literary genres are not designed for the primary purpose of teaching a language. The integration of interesting literary works in the syllabus exposes the foreign language learner to actual language samples of real life/real life like settings. Literature can therefore be used in the classroom as extensive reading or as a beneficial complement to the study materials. As Hişmanoğlu pointed out "In reading literary texts, because students have also to cope with language intended for native speakers, they become familiar with many different linguistic forms, communicative functions and meanings"<sup>(17)</sup>.

### **ii- Cultural Enrichment**

Even though novels, plays and short stories describe imaginary worlds, those works can tell the learners a lot about the socio-cultural landscape in the country in which the language is spoken. The plot and characters of a novel for instance can give substantial details about people, their thoughts, customs, traditions, religions, beliefs, lifestyles, behaviors, etc.

### **iii- Language Enrichment**

Undoubtedly, the language of literature enriches the learner' linguistic and communicative competence. It provides them with a wide range of lexico-grammatical constructions. They can read a text of a fair length in context. They can get familiar with the characteristics of the written text, its coherence and cohesive strategies. Literature abounds with the use of frozen expressions and proverbial statements and students can learn them in the context of the text.

#### iv- Personal Involvement

Literature can foster the personal involvement of the learner. Texts need to be selected in accordance with the needs, expectations, interests and language level of the students. More personal involvement in the literary works under investigation can help the learner to “remove the identity crisis and develop into an extrovert”<sup>(18)</sup>.

In a similar vein, Talif and Jayakumaran’s integrated approach to teaching literature suggests three common models in the teaching of literature, namely, the cultural model, the language model and the personal growth model<sup>19</sup> and we will briefly describe them below:

- i- The Cultural Model:** It encourages the language learner to explore and get familiar with the socio-political, literary and historical contexts of literary text. It therefore familiarizes them with different cultures and ideologies. In a word, this model represents the traditional approach to teaching literature.
- ii- The Language Model:** This approach aims to enhance the linguistic competence of a learner and it is widely applied in the language classroom. It helps learners to navigate a text in a systematic way with a view to illustrating certain linguistic features. This approach opts for a myriad of classroom strategies such as the use of activities which employ literary texts in order to serve specific linguistic goals.
- iii- The Personal Growth Model:** This model aims to foster the personal involvement of the learner in the text. Learners are encouraged to live and inhabit the text. They are encouraged to pursue the development of the story and express their opinions about the major characters. They can for example, judge some of the actions and make connections between the personal and cultural experiences deployed in the text and their own experiences.

In fact, the personal, language and culture enrichment of the second/foreign language learner is at the heart of the proclaimed policies of foreign languages departments and

literature can be ideal for the promotion of all of them. It is high time to design Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) materials involving various literary genres on the basis of solid selection criteria. Literature cannot be haphazardly taught in the foreign language class. In this study, however, we focus on the language enrichment value of literature in the foreign language class even though some of the activities can serve the three domains simultaneously.

## 5. Research Methodology

As mentioned earlier, this paper is the initial phase of a broader action research project. Action research can be used to find out remedies or solutions for problems diagnosed in specific situations such as the foreign language classroom (Cohen & Manion<sup>(20)</sup>; Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon<sup>(21)</sup>, Nunan<sup>(22)</sup>). It can be beneficial in in-service training contexts to heighten the self-awareness of in-service trainees and equip them with new skills and teaching methods. In addition, action research serves as a means of injecting useful innovative approaches and trends to teaching and learning. The present paper is a qualitative content analysis a some literary genres that can be utilized in teaching of foreign language. Using extracts from Arabic and English short stories and poems; we state how language can be taught through literature and how integration of language and literature can be translated into practice. Since this is an on-going project, we present our findings as a report on work in progress. Texts were selected on the basis of solid criteria such as authenticity, language difficulty (i.e., in terms of lexis, grammar, style and register), content appropriateness and cognitive load (i.e., the selected texts should not be overloaded with culture-specific terms and concepts). For this purpose, we have selected Oscar Wilde's *The Selfish Giant*, Shawqi's *al-tha'lab wa al-dik* [Lit. The Fox and the Roaster] and a Qur'anic story by Bahjat titled *Ghurāb 'ibnāi 'adam* [i.e. The Crow of the Two Sons of Adam).

## 6. Discussion

In this section, we discuss how some language skills and syntactic structures can be taught through authentic literary materials with a view to demonstrating how language learning can be made contextually relevant and interesting. For this purpose, we state the integration of teaching English syntax through Wilde's *the Selfish Giant*. Then, we explain the use of a short Arabic poem in teaching Arabic grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing and speaking. We conclude our discussion with the use of a Qur'anic story for teaching language and creative skills such as digital storytelling.

### 6.1. Wilde's *The Selfish Giant* and the teaching of English Grammar

In this part, we have extracted some sentences from the text to explain the relevance of a specific syntactic structure in a context. We may begin with the sentences with pleonastic *it* and show how it is different from the pronominal *it*. A dummy pronoun (formally: expletive or pleonastic pronoun) is a type of pronoun used in a non-pro-drop language such as English to supply the subject to a sentence which, for some reason, does not have it. It is used when a particular argument (or preposition) is nonexistent, unknown, irrelevant, already understood, or otherwise not to be spoken of directly, but when a reference to the argument is nevertheless syntactically required.

Wilde's *The Selfish Giant* has several instances of pleonastic *it*, as in (1-4).

1a	Only in the garden of the selfish giant, <u>it was</u> still winter.
2a	<u>It was</u> a lovely scene.
3a	<u>It</u> certainly <u>was</u> a marvelous sight.
4a	<u>It was</u> a large lovely garden.

In all the sentences given above, it can be pointed out that *it* is not referring to any argument. Unlike the regular pronoun *it*, it cannot be replaced by any noun phrase. To make

this point clear, a teacher can cite other examples from the text and tell the students to underline them. He/she may ask them to write those examples on the board and explain them. He/she can contrast the *it* in (1a-4a) with *it* in (5a-7a) to show how they are different:

5a	<u>It</u> put its head over the grass.
6a	<u>It</u> slipped back in the ground again.
7a	<u>It</u> is your garden now.

It is obvious from (5a-7a) that *it* in them is the subject which represents a noun phrase. In (5a) and (6a), *it* refers to *the flower* and in (7a), it refers to *this garden*. Thus, (5a), (6a) and (7a) can be re-written as (5b), (6b) and (7b) respectively.

5b	<u>The flower</u> put its head over the grass.
6b	<u>The flower</u> slipped back in the ground again.
7b	<u>This garden</u> is your garden now.

However, (1a), (2a), (3a) and (4a) can be replaced by (1b), (2b), (3b) or (4b) respectively, and not by (1c), (2c), (3c) or (4c).

1b.	The garden of the selfish giant still had winter.	1c*	The winter was still winter in the garden of the selfish giant.
2b.	The scene was lovely.	2c*	The scene was a lovely scene.
3b.	The sight was certainly marvelous.	3c*	The sight certainly was a marvelous sight.
4b.	The garden was large and lovely.	4c*	The garden was a large and lovely garden.

It is to be noted that (1-4c) are ungrammatical sentences because *it* has been replaced by what is notionally the subject of the sentence whereas there is no such problem with (5-7b).

Another grammatical construction that can be taught by using this story is ‘subject-verb inversion’. This term designates a syntactic process that changes the order of the main constituent of a clause in such a way that the subject and finite verb shift their places. The concept is generally applied to clauses with main constituent order SVO, meaning that the inverted order is VSO. This story can be used to point out how the subject-verb inversion takes place in English in non-interrogative sentences, as in (8a- 10a).

8a	Here and there over the grass stood beautiful flowers.
9a	In the further corner of the garden was a tree quite covered with beautiful blossoms.
10a	Downstairs ran the giant in great joy.

These sentences can be contrasted with (8b –10b) respectively to show how inversion has brought the subjects of (8b-10b) into focus in (8a-10a).

8b	Beautiful flowers stood here and there over the glass.
9b	A tree was quite covered with white blossoms in the further corner of the garden.
10b	The giant ran downstairs in great joy.

It may be noted that although, the first constituents in (8a, 9a and 10a) are ‘Here and there’, ‘in the further corner of the garden’ and ‘Downstairs’ respectively, they are not the subjects of these sentences. The subjects are ‘beautiful flowers’, ‘a tree quite covered with white blossoms’ and ‘The giant’ respectively. By putting them after the verb, they have been made the focus of attention. By the time students come to college, they are familiar with the fact that the subject and the auxiliary verb of a sentence are inverted to frame questions in English, but they may not be familiar with this stylistic inversion which puts more emphasis on inverted subject than on the verb.



Wilde's *The Selfish Giant* can also be utilized to teach the various types of sentences in English. Like other languages, English has declarative, interrogative, imperative and exclamatory sentences. Most of the sentences we speak are declarative. Exclamatory sentences are rarely used in expository writing. A spoken exclamation can take the form of a single word or an incomplete sentence. Grammarians indicate that formal exclamatory sentences begin with *what* or *how*. Most of the exclamations we encounter are informal.

Oscar Wilde's *The Selfish Giant* can be used to explain the formal type of exclamatory sentences. To attract the attention of the students to them, they can be asked to underline the exclamatory sentences they encounter while reading the story. The story includes some examples of exclamatory sentences, as in (11a-13a).

11a	<u>How happy</u> we were there!
12a	<u>How selfish</u> I have been!
13a	<u>How happy</u> we are here!

These sentences can be compared with (11b, 12b and 13b) to demonstrate the similarity and difference between them.

11b.	We were <u>very happy</u> there.
12b.	I have been <u>very selfish</u> .
13b.	We are <u>very happy</u> here.

It can be pointed out *how happy* of the exclamatory sentence is almost like *very happy* of its declarative counterpart but there is a difference. A declarative sentence makes a statement (e.g. I was very happy.), whereas its exclamatory counterpart conveys more than that. Both *very* of *very happy* and *how* of *how happy* are adverbs, which are added to an adjective (i.e., happy) as its intensifier but the degree of intensity is much higher in *how happy* than *very happy*.

It may be suggested that the intensity of this emotive expression can be felt more easily in the contexts in which it occurs in this story than its occurrences in isolated sentences. This can be brought to the notice of students by comparing (11a) with (11c):

11c.	The birds ... sang so sweetly that the children used to stop their games in order to listen to them. "How happy we are here!" they cried to each other.
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If we use (11b) in place of (11a) in the context of (11c), the dramatic effect of exclamation is completely gone. We can make our students realize it by asking them to compare (11c) with (11d):

11d.	The birds sang so sweetly that the children used to stop their games in order to listen to them. "We are very happy here," they cried to each other.
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Before we end this section, we would like to point out how *so...that* construction has been used in this story. For example, we can look at sentences in (14-18).

14	It was <u>so sorry for the children that</u> it (i.e. the flower) slipped back into the ground again.
15	It sounded <u>so sweet to his ears that</u> he thought it must be the king's musicians passing by.
16	And the trees <u>were so glad to have the children back again that</u> they had covered themselves with blossoms.
17	He was <u>so small that</u> he could not reach up to the branches of the tree.
18	They were <u>so frightened that</u> they all ran away.

The story can be used to show the difference between the use of *so* as an *intensifier*, *so* as the marker of a *result clause* or a *connective* in a narrative, as is obvious in (19) and (20) below.

19	He (i.e. the giant) grew very old and feeble. He could not play about anymore, <u>so</u> he sat in a huge armchair and watched the children.
20	He was really very sorry for what he had done... <u>So</u> he crept downstairs and opened the front door.

In all these sentences, the *so adjective that* construction has been used to show why something happened. For example, in (14), the beautiful flower slipped back in the garden because it was very sorry for the children when it saw the noticeboard that no children would be allowed to play there. In (15), the giant listens to some very sweet music; it is so sweet that it is being played by the king's musicians. In (16), the children were glad to have the children back again, in fact, so glad that they covered themselves with blossoms. (17) and (18) suggest the negative impact of adjectives. The children were so small that they could not reach up to the wall and they were so frightened that they ran away. It may be pointed out here that *so* as a modifier of an adjective means "to such an extent" and the consequence of the modified adjectival phrase (e.g. *so sorry, so sweet, so glad, so small and so frightened*) is indicated by a *that* clause. It may be brought to the notice of the students that this configuration (*so-adj-that*) is different from the connective *so that* as in (21-22)

21	They whispered to each other <u>so that</u> no one else could hear.
22	The lawn was overgrown with weeds <u>so that</u> I had difficulty in moving it.

In (21) *so that* means "in order that" and in (22), it means "with the result that". As there are no sentences of the types in (21-22) in the story under investigation, there is no problem in introducing them separately to make it clear that the expression *so...that* is different from *so that*.

To sum up, we have picked up some sentence types from *The Selfish Giant* to point out how they can be appreciated in well-knit contexts. It is not the intention of this paper to present a comprehensive picture of all syntactic devices used by Oscar Wilde in this story. The aim was simply to suggest how the functional value of certain types of sentences can be well appreciated in the context in which they occur, by replacing them with other types of sentences which convey the same sense, though not so effectively. Teaching language through creative literature can easily provide us with such examples and motivate students to not only appreciate them but also use them appropriately for similar effect.

## 6.2. Shawqi's poem *al-tha'lab wa al-dik* in the AFL classroom

A short poem can be effectively used to develop vocabulary and grammatical features in contexts. Arabic abounds in the use of poetic stories, a story in the form of a poem. Such poems are not only symbolic, but they are sometimes full of witty remarks, figurative expressions, deviant collocations, proverbial statements and grammatical forms. An example of this literary genre is a short poem by the Laurate Arabic poet, Ahmed Shawqi, who is also known as 'the Prince of Poets'. The poem is titled *The Fox and the Roaster*, and it is given below.

### الثعلب والديك

برز الثعلب يوما في ثياب الواعظينا  
فمشي في الأرض يهدي ويسب الماكرينا  
ويقول: الحمد لله إله العالمينا  
يا عباد الله توبوا فهو كهف التائبينا

وازهدوا في الطير إن العيش عيش الزاهدينا

واطلبوا الديك يؤذن لصلاة الصبح فينا

فأتي الديك رسول من إمام الناسكينا

فأجاب الديك عذرا يا أضل المهتدينا!

بلغ الثعلب عني عن جدودي الصالحينا

أنهم قالوا وخير القول قول العارفينا

مخطئ من ظن يوما أن للثعلب ديننا

This short interesting poem is a dialogue between a fox and a roaster, but it is a symbolic poem with the moral lesson “once bitten, twice shy”. Students can collaboratively work on some synonyms and antonyms from the poem. A game in which a flash card with a word and another with its synonyms or antonyms can be used as shown in Tables 1 and 2 below.

Word	Synonym	English meaning
Baraza	Dhahra	Appeared
Yasub	Yashtum	Insult
’Izhadū	Itrku	Leave alone
Baligh	’a’lim	Inform
Al-wā’idhīn	Al-naṣhīn	Preachers
Al-makrīn	Al-mukhadi’in	Cunning
dhana	’i’taqada	Think
dīnan	’ahdan	Covenant

Table 1 Synonyms Activity

Word	Opposite/Antonym	Synonym/Antonym
baraza	ʾikhtafā	Appear/disappear
Al-ʾish	Al-maut	Life/death
yasub	yamdaḥ	Insult/praise
khayīr	Shar	Good/bad
ʾajāb	saʾāl	Ask/answer
yadhun	Yūqin	Think/believe
Al-taʾābīn	Al-muthnibīn	Repent/ commit sins

Table 2 Antonyms Activity

The same poem can be used for teaching the concept of grammatical number in Arabic, especially singular vs plural, as we see in the following example.

Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
thaʿlab	thaʿalib	Thawb	Thīyāb	wāʾidh	wāʾidhūn
Maker	makirīn	ʾabd	ʾibād	Kahf	kuhūf
tāʾib	tāʾibīn	Zahid	Zahīdīn	Al-ṣalāt	Al-ṣalawāt
Nasik	nasikīn	Muhtadī	Muhtadīn	Jad	ajdād
Al-ṣaliḥ	Al-ṣaliḥīn	ʾimām	ʾimah	Dīn	adyān

Table 3 An activity for teaching grammatical number in Arabic

A list of collocations, idioms and allegorical expressions such as *yā ʾibād Allāh*, *kahf al-taʾibīn*, *izhadū fi al-ṭayir* and *ʾimām al-nāsikīn* and proverbial statements such as *Khayr al-qaul qaul al-ʾarifīn*, etc. can be extracted from the poem and their symbolic, figurative and rhetorical significance can be discussed in the classroom.

Learners can also do a group work activity in which they read the poem and discuss its theme. The poem can be supplemented with a number of pictures that state its theme. Learners can be asked to listen to the poem and arrange the pictures with an aim to tell the story of the poem as we see in figure 1 below . The activity can be round off by the teacher by summarizing the story of the poem, its theme and moral lesson. This would ensure that the students have understood the gist of the poem.





Figure 1 A visual representation of Shawqi's *the Fox and the Rooster*

Students can also be given an interactive technology-enhanced quiz to check their comprehension of the poem and its theme as follows.

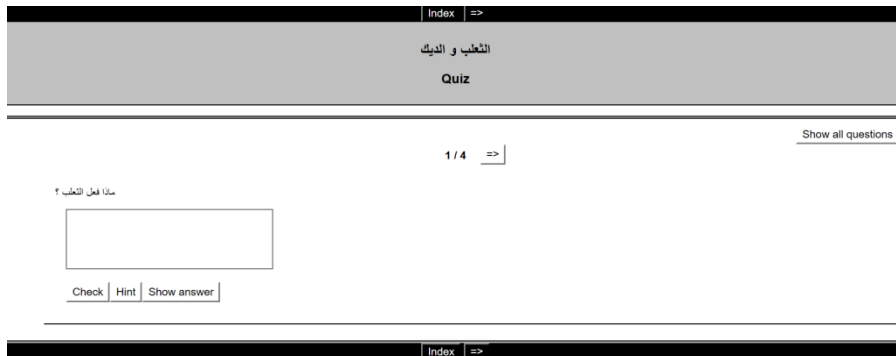


Figure 2 A snapshot of an interactive comprehension Quiz

The lesson may be concluded with a written question. Students may be encouraged to write the summary of the poem or to turn the poem into a story.



### 6.3. Bahjat's *Ghurāb 'ibnāi 'ādam* in AFL context

To show the valuable use of literature in developing the linguistic and communicative competence of the foreign language learner, we analyze the following Qur'anic story taken from Bahjat's collection of stories titled *Qiṣaṣ al-ḥayawān fī al-Qur'ān* (Lit. Animals' stories in the Qur'an) (Bahjat's, 2000). The selected story revolves around the first murder on the face of this earth (i.e., the story of Cain and Abel). The story can be given as an extensive reading activity, in which students can read the story for pleasure and they can do a quiz to test their comprehension. The story can also be used as a fully-fledged reading lesson. A pre-reading activity can be given to the students. They may be asked for instance to search the internet for a brief note about the author, or they may be asked to present a story they know about inter-family murder and they can state the motifs and consequences of such a murder.

Students can then be given the chance to read the text and do some comprehension questions. They can do some matching, fill-in-the gaps and true-false activities to test their scanning and skimming reading skills. Students can also be asked to translate some extracts from the story into English. They can also be given a written task about domestic violence or a story about family murders.

Students can also work on a collaborative activity/project. They may be asked to read the story and turn it to a play. In this case, they will have to read the story carefully first and they may add or delete parts of it to come up with the adapted version. In the following dialogue, a character of a shepherd was created to engage in a conversation with the crow, which is the narrator of the story.

الراعي: اخفضي صوتك يا حبيبة حتى لا تزعجي العصافير  
خذي الطعام ودعيني أراقب الطيور وهي تبني اعشاشها  
الحمد لله الذي أعاننا على اطعامهم فقد أكلوا جميعاً بفضل الله.

الغراب: انتظر أيها الراعي أنا لم أتناول طعامي بعد.

الراعي: لمن هذا الصوت المزعج؟

الغراب: أها... هل أزعجك نعيقي الى هذا الحد؟

أنت شعغت مثل معظم الجهلاء.

الراعي: أنا لم أقل هذا... معاذ الله لقد نهانا ديننا عن التشاؤم وتصديق الخرافات.

الغراب: مجرد كلام ... لا يكاد ينعق أحدنا فوق شجرة الا ويشعر الناس بالضيق والغوث والتشاؤم

قد يكون صوتنا أقل في جماله من صوت البلبل غير انه لا يمت بنسب إلى الشؤم.

الشؤم كلمة إنسانية تنطبق على تصرفات ابن آدم.

الراعي: هاها... شكراً على اية حال.

الغراب: العفو... أنا لا أذكر الا الحقيقة... أحياناً يتصرف الإنسان تصرفاً شريراً فإذا صرخ الغراب فوق

شجرة نسي الإنسان تصرفه وذكر صوت الغراب ونسب إليه الشر.

الراعي: كفى أيها الغراب... لقد نفذ صبري معك.

لن أتحمّل المزيد من الإهانة... لماذا تكره الناس إلى هذا الحد؟

الغراب: قل لي أنت أولاً... لماذا تكرهون الغربان؟

الراعي: نحن لا نكره مخلوقات الله ولكن نكره الطباع السيئة. انصرف لن أعطيك طعاماً.

الغراب: ومن قال إني أحتاج طعامك أيها المسكين. أنت الذي تحتاج الى اطعامي لتنال الثواب. لن أمنحك

شرف اطعامي.

الراعي: لقد كان الغراب على حق. أنا الذي احتاج الى اطعامه تقريباً لله عزوجل.

لم يكن من الأدب أن أمن عليه برزق أعطاه لنا الله<sup>23</sup>.

Using an activity of this type will not only enhance their language skills such as reading, writing and speaking but it will also offer them an opportunity to get familiar with the special stylistic features of short stories and their generic conventions. Students will have to summarize the story, plan outline and rephrase the speech of some characters to fit the dialogue conventions. They are also required to proofread the adapted text, rehearse it, listen to their peers and much more.

Another interesting collaborative activity is to encourage the students to turn the story under investigation to a digital story. In turn, they will require preparing a script or a storyboard, recording it, collecting images and commenting on them and producing a video. Such an activity can be utilized to enhance the various language skills and improve the learner's information and communication skills.

## 7. Conclusions

This paper has examined a proposal for integrating literature in teaching Arabic and English as foreign languages. An English short story, an Arabic poem and a Qur'anic story have been used. The study concluded that literary genres, if well selected, can be used for effective teaching of all language skills, grammar and vocabulary. The study has shown how Wilde's *The Selfish Giant* can be used for teaching syntactic constructions and grammatical concepts such as pleonastic *it*, subject-verb inversion, exclamatory sentences, *so...that* constructions and the like. The study has also shown the possibility of teaching Arabic vocabulary (e.g., synonyms and antonyms), frozen expressions as well as the grammatical number through a poetic story by Shawqi, namely *al-tha'lab wa al-dik*. Moreover, the poem can also be used for enhancing the speaking and writing skills of the learners. The study has also indicated that a Qur'an-based story such as Bahjat's *Ghurāb 'ibnāi 'ādam* cannot only assist learners to learn the language more effectively, but it can also develop their creative skills through role-playing and digital storytelling.

Apart from the language skills, literature can undoubtedly develop personal and life values, enrich their socio-cultural and interpretive competence and contribute to their character-building.

The study recommended that literature needs to be incorporated carefully to teaching language skills. Literary texts cannot be taught haphazardly; they must be selected on the basis of solid criteria. Materials need to be authentic, interesting and learner friendly. For instance, texts should not be crammed with excessive use of cultural, religious, or historical allusions that impede the comprehension of the text and put more cognitive load on the part of the learner.

### Endnotes:

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<sup>23</sup> The above extract has been taken from the transcription of the adapted version of the story that can be found here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHobRabok1s>.

