
New Publications ... Nuwe Publikasies

Reviews

C.J. Brumfit and R.A. Carter (eds)

Literature and Language Teaching. London: Oxford University Press, 1986. (Paperback, 289pp)

Despite the multitude of recent publications investigating and propagating innovative and supposedly effective means of second language teaching, it is noteworthy that most authors have either ignored or shown scant interest in the role of literature teaching in this regard. As the editors confirm in their introduction:

Literature teaching is by no means secure in many educational systems, and its role as an ally of language is not infrequently disputed.

For this reason it is heartening to find a book entirely focused on the interaction between language, literature and education. Furthermore, it boasts contributions from many respected language teachers, such as Michael Long, Christopher Candlin, H.G. Widdowson, William Littlewood and Michael Short amongst others. Although, as the editors explain in the preface, they do not pretend to offer a comprehensive or synoptic account of the relationship between literature and language teaching, the many contributors, offering different viewpoints, have presented and discussed a large variety of ways in which language and literature study can be integrated.

The book is divided into four parts. The introduction addresses a number of fundamental issues such as the exact nature of 'literary language', literature as discourse and the nature of literature syllabuses. The editors reject the term 'literary language' and the conclusions they draw about the type of language used in literature strengthens their case in favour of a more integrated teaching approach. In support of their view, they quote Widdowson:

... with literary discourse the actual procedures for making sense are much more in

evidence. You've got to employ interpretative procedures in a way which isn't required of you in the normal reading process. If you want to develop these procedural abilities to make sense of discourse, then literature has a place

...
Their argument is best summarized as follows:

... a literary text is authentic text, real language in context, to which we can respond directly. It offers a context in which exploration and discussion of content ... leads on naturally to examination of language.

The second part of the book contains eight articles on different pedagogic levels. These include Michael Long's discussion of the values of teaching literature, in which he ascribes the relative neglect of the teaching of English literature to non-native speakers, to a structural approach to language teaching. He suggests procedures which would lead to a better understanding of literary text while promoting language proficiency. He argues in favour of a 'group dynamics' approach and distinguishes between direct input by the teacher and learner-centered activities. Graham Trengove discusses the need for an awareness of varieties of English in use as crucial to an adequate teaching of literature in a foreign language, believing that literature study should enhance awareness of language functions. Graham Nash considers the use of paraphrase as a means of appreciating literary texts, while Short and Candlin focus on the kind of study skills needed by both teachers and students to effect an integration of language and literary study. Ron Carter investigates the inter-dependence of language and literature study, while recognizing the distinctiveness of each. Kachru examines the appropriateness of using English texts by non-native users in the language classroom and Guy Cook distinguishes between the use of texts and extracts, considering in particular the limitations of the latter.

Part Three, entitled "Literature in Education", contains seven articles. Burke and Brumfit at-

tempt to defend literature teaching by posing the questions: "Is literature language? Or is language literature?" Littlewood's paper tries to relate the various demands which literary texts make on readers to the needs of foreign language learners, and considers the implications thereof for the selection of texts and methods. Brumfit attempts to define the relationship between general reading ability in a foreign language and literary response. These three papers are concerned with general principles, while the other four in this section focus on specific issues. Sandra McKay illustrates ways in which a literary text may be used or misused in order to achieve 'aesthetic response'. Boyle looks critically at testing language and identifies the problem that the things we most strongly wish to teach in literature classes are not amenable to the kinds of testing procedures traditional in foreign language work. In considering the relationship between simplified and unsimplified texts, Monica Vincent suggests in her paper that the use of linguistically simpler texts need not make the process of reading easier. The last paper in this section, by the Kenyan novelist Ngugi, addresses the cultural implications of the study of literature, which he sketches in a negative light.

The final section of the book, which contains five papers, looks at the issue of fluent versus accurate reading with specific reference to East Africa (papers by Brumfit and Pettit), as well as to British education. Other issues raised in this section are: reading a few works in detail as opposed to vast amounts of reading at a more superficial level; reading speed and the design of a literature curriculum. A sample examination paper is also provided.

It is impossible to do credit to the wide range of views and the vast ground covered in this volume, in a review of this nature. It is fair to say that the reader is offered a series of exciting and thought-provoking articles so arranged as to present a progression of general principles as well as practical problems and activities. As such, it is a very useful composite of theory and ideas, making an outstanding contribution to an area of applied linguistics which is of increasing interest and concern to language teachers. I heartily recommend it.

J.J. Swartz

Winifred Crombie

Discourse and Language Learning: A Relational Approach to Syllabus Design. Oxford: O.U.P., 1985 (130pp.)

Process and Relation in Discourse and Language Learning. Oxford: O.U.P., 1985 (150pp.)

The two books are complementary volumes. The first deals with practical aspects of syllabus design, while the second provides the theoretical basis for the suggestions postulated in the first. For the purposes of this discussion, I shall deal with each volume in turn, with references being made to the companion volume wherever it seems necessary.

The first volume details the approach outlined in her entry for the 1980 English Language Competition run by the English-Speaking Union. It arises from the firm criticisms that she has of the direction "communicative" syllabus design has taken. South African course designers or those concerned with syllabus design and even curriculum development would do well to consider what she has to say. She points to the tendency among syllabus designers to elevate function at the expense of structure; to design syllabuses for specific purposes instead of general purposes; to enter into discussions on aspects which they do not properly understand; and to introduce parameters which are unrealistic or about which research has little to offer in the way of guidance.

She believes:

- 1 that structure and function are equally important;
- 2 that discussions about syllabus design should begin with a consideration of the principles involved in designing general syllabuses rather than with a consideration of needs specification for learners who may have specific communicative objectives;
- 3 that syllabus designers must necessarily restrict themselves to categories which are finite, systematizable, and at least reasonably well understood;
- 4 that syllabus designers should take as their starting point and organizational principle those aspects of discourse construction and comprehension which all learners, whatever their cultural and language background have in common" (p. x).