

An Inter-Cultural Approach to Literary Text

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Lecture 03: An Inter-Cultural Approach to Literary Text

Introduction

As mentioned in the last lecture, out of the reader-response approach emerged many other approaches that sought finding an interpretation of literary text based on student's responses. As the thematic concerns of contemporary literary text diversify, there emerged a set of approaches that focus on different aspects literary text including its cultural, historical, philosophical approaches.....ect. As we are limited with time, I selected the inter-cultural approach as the focus of this lecture because it is the most used one among other approaches. As such, this lecture introduces students the inter-cultural approach by focusing on culture, the limitations of the traditional approach to literary texts and finally reading a literary text from an inter-cultural perspective.

What is Culture?

Though there are many definitions to the word culture a most succinct definition is the following "culture is a social system which compromises the values, norms, and ways of behaving in a human society". Culture can be defined as the way of life of people and a textbook or a teacher who informs people about their attitudes, norms and other systems governing their life. As such, culture touches everyday practices and in one way or another it alters different aspects of life of a given community.

Characteristics of Culture:

- 1- Culture is not innate. It is learned.
- 2- Culture is transmitted from one generation to another.
- 3- Culture is based on symbols.
- 4- Culture is subject to change.

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5- Culture is ethnocentric.

Limitations of the Traditional Approach to Literary Texts:

Many scholars opine that the inter-cultural come as a response to the deficiencies found in the traditional approach. The traditional approach to literary text is seen as not sufficient for approaching the meaning of literary text because:

- 1- The traditional approach tends to focus on linguistic knowledge and ignores other aspects of literary text.
- 2- The focus on developing native-speaker competence tends to underrate culture.
- 3- The traditional approach often ignores cultural content of any given literary text.
- 4- A literary text is seen as a means of communication and devoid of any culturally specific conditions.
- 5- Authenticity of literary text is only a feature to acquire models of language in use.
- 6- A literary text is motivating, but not culturally bound.

Reading a Literary Text from an Inter-Cultural Perspective

1- More Concerns about Cultural Content of literary Text

As a result of the limitations mentioned before, the advocates of the inter-cultural approach develop a new approach to literary text. The literary text is not a mere means to acquire the four skills. Rather, it is seen as a way to let learners discover cultural content by developing a set of strategies of observing, negotiating and evaluating culturally based content. As such, literary text goes beyond the development of native speaker competency to become a tool for developing an inter-cultural communicative competency.

2- The Objectives of the Intercultural-Approach

As a teacher, carrying out an inter-cultural approach to literary text may target the following objectives:

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- 1- A literary text is a means to understand the language and the behavior of the target culture.
- 2- Introduce the new culture to the target community.
- 3- Train learners to be *diplomats*, able to see different cultures from a perspective of informed understanding.
- 4- Know the similarities and differences between the target culture and students own culture.

3- Purpose/Purposes of the Inter-Cultural Approach

While the traditional approach is said to have a purpose which is using literary text as a means to know how to communicate, the inter-cultural approach has a set of purposes. It is worth noting that this multiplicity of purposes does not mean the total ignorance of the main objectives of the traditional approach. Rather, the intercultural approach seeks to build upon the advances made by the traditional approach to achieve a more useful and realistic understanding of literary text.

4- Addressing the Needs of Different Learners (The Role of the Teacher and Learner)

While making students able to understand the cultural content of any given literary text seems easy, the role of the teacher and student doubles as to properly approach the meaning of literary text. First, the teacher should understand that some students may have less interest in a given culture, while many others may have the desire to retain their own culture and unable to negotiate some cultural aspects. To this point, the teacher should consider the student as a member of a specific sub-cultural group who may accept or reject cultural content. After affirming these pre-requisites, the teacher can carry out literary text examination through focusing on language and its role in negotiating cultural content and second making learners able to read the literary text as a message about cultural affiliation.