
LITERATURE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

ORIGINAL TEXT vs. SIMPLIFIED VERSION

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ABSTRACT

An investigative study of how simplified / authentic literary texts affect the acquisition of a second language (or, target language, in this context) in Sri Lankan university undergraduates who are at a low level of proficiency in that language, was carried out in the research in connection with this thesis.

The study focuses on whether it is simplified or original literary texts which help better in enhancing the acquisition of a second language. It also focuses on whether (if either type of the above – simplified or original - texts help better acquisition) a developmental sequence could be detected in the acquisition of certain grammatical categories of the L2.

The study raises the question that authentic literary texts which suit the learners' level of knowledge of target language vocabulary, structures, etc., that is, texts which are not too much above the learners' level of competence, could be used in the classroom, instead of distorting a literary text by simplifying it in order to make it suitable for the learners' level of knowledge. It also suggests that short stories, particularly those based on a background which the learners are familiar with, and discussing issues which they can identify or empathize with could be better material as complete literary texts in the language classroom. The possibility of using post-colonial short stories was suggested in this context.

Learners' proficiency was tested before and after the teaching of literary texts, simplified versions to one group and authentic ones to the other, by means of both quantitative (i.e.

cloze tests) and qualitative (i.e. informal conversation / discussion, classroom observation) assessment methods. The qualitative methods were used to support further and strengthen the data obtained by quantitative means.

The main findings of the study suggest that original literary texts have a better effect on ESL (English as a Second Language) learners who are at a lower proficiency level in enhancing their acquisition of the second language, at least a little more than simplified versions do. This study also reinforces the point that there is a sequence in the acquisition of different grammatical categories.