

Teaching “Simile” for EFL Learners Based on the Method of Text-based Language Teaching

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Abstract: *The method of Text-based Language Teaching centers on texts, which can present diverse forms and highlight authentic texts, so it is frequently used as the guidance for language teaching for EFL learners. However, many teachers fail to effectively employ this method in the practical classroom. Hence, this paper aims to explore how to implement effective teaching of “Simile” in a lesson for one specific group of EFL learners in the classroom based on the method of Text-based Language Teaching. Apart from language features in two authentic written texts, the appropriateness and interestingness of both texts for EFL learners will be mainly investigated. It can be concluded that both chosen texts in this lesson possess theoretical rationale and practical value for EFL learners, thus effectively realizing the research purpose to a large extent. Although Text-based Language Teaching seems to be traditional, teachers should select some proper and interesting texts and apply them into teaching in a productive and innovative way. More importantly, this method combined with other useful teaching methods can work more effectively.*

Keywords: *Simile; EFL Learners; Text-based Language Teaching*

1. Introduction

Texts cover our daily life in multiple forms, such as making a phone appointment and reading instructions^[1]. Likewise, using texts as a language pedagogy occurs in multimodality, e.g., storybooks, novels, jokes^[2] and different learning environments^[3]. Text-based Language Teaching focusing on authentic texts^[2] can play a significant role in teaching. Therefore, it is frequently used as the guidance for language teaching for EFL learners. However, many teachers cannot apply this method effectively in the practical classroom.

The research purpose of the paper is to explore how to conduct effective teaching of “Simile” in a lesson for one specific group of EFL learners in a classroom through the method of Text-based Language Teaching. The emphasis is put on the exploration of language features in two authentic written texts and the elucidation of appropriateness and interestingness of both texts for EFL learners. Specifically, three sections will be listed as follows: the paper will first analyze each text in terms of the Genre and Register as well as Lexical Relations, followed by a detailed analysis of teaching “Simile” for EFL learners, which also reflects the practical application of the text. Last, it will serve as an overall conclusion and recommendation.

2. Text Analysis

The definition of authentic texts has been developed over time. According to Little and Singleton (1988)^[4], authentic texts refer to original texts for a social purpose in a first language community. Ciornei and Dina (2015)^[5] further elaborate that authentic texts, non-pedagogical texts, enable learners to enhance communicative and cultural capabilities. The following two texts are both authentic texts and conform to the above requirements. To prepare for the next teaching of “Simile”, it is essential to conduct the analysis of both texts. In this section, they will be analyzed from the perspectives of Genre, Register (Field, Tenor, and Mode) and Lexical Relations.

2.1. Genre

Genre Analysis has aroused considerable attention in language research (e.g., Fruttaldo, 2017^[6];

Parkinson, 2017^[7]; Watanabe, 2016^[8].) Although these studies concentrate on different aspects, most of them have a similar definition of Genre. For instance, Genre means the texts with the linguistic similarity, e.g., structure^[9-10] as well as the same purpose in the culture^{[7][11]}. There are different Genre types, e.g., recount, narrative, procedure, and other types^[9] and recent years have witnessed some new development, e.g., poetry^[12-14].

Of the chosen texts, Text A belongs to the latter one, namely, poetry genre, while Text B is a narrative. To be specific, poetry has some unique characteristics, e.g., stanzas (a fixed number of lines as a unit of a poem similar to the division of paragraphs) and rhyme (similarity in sound, especially in the last syllable), according to Zbaracki (2015)^[14]. In the Text A, there are five stanzas and some rhymes. For example, the identical rhyme (“thing” and “sing” in the second stanza and “me” and “monkey” in the fourth stanza) as well as similar rhyme (“boots” and “cheese” in the third stanza) can strengthen reading fluency and aesthetics. Additionally, Text A is a free verse with free structure and without constraint of the regular rhythm or metre. Different from some types of poetry with fixed formats and rhymes by Zabaraci (2015)^[14], this poem demonstrates greater flexibility and easier mastery for learners. Furthermore, Ali et al. (2016)^[12] add that poetry often touches the heart due to stylistic presentation and hidden meaning. Indeed, although this poem is not so long, it is worthy digging out its underlying charm from linguistic and non-linguistic aspects.

The narrative is a description of events including Orientation, Complication, Resolution and Coda to entertain and instruct learners^[9], and Text B is such a genre. The first four paragraphs provide the background information (three mice lived in a peaceful house with an old lady a long time ago) as Orientation, followed by a problem as Complication in the next two paragraphs (one day, a hungry cat was brought into this house for a short-period care, so three mice discussed how to escape the cat from catching them). Then, the seventh and eighth paragraphs provide the solution to the problem as Resolution, namely, “bell the cat” so that mice could hear and run away. Finally, the last two paragraphs are used as Coda to evaluate this bell plan (all mice left the room and no one wanted to do so). Apart from a sense of humor, this narrative has educational significance since “bell the cat” is an idiom with in-depth connotation. Moreover, it can be further seen as a fable because it is adopted by Aesop’s fable. Sampson (2012)^[15] suggests that Aesop’s fables generally describe animals to reflect people’s behavior and situations. Therefore, Text B can play an enlightening role for learners.

2.2. Register

There are differing views of the relationship between Genre and Register: some researchers regard both as the same criteria^[16-17] while others differentiate them, especially many recent researchers. For example, Toffelmire (2016)^[18] claims that both are viewed from different angles. Butt et al. (2012)^[9] elaborate that Genre is related to the structural and purpose elements of texts whilst Register is concerned with the meaning and context of situation, including Field (the text’s main subject on “ideational” level), Tenor (text’s interpersonal relationship on “interpersonal” level) and Mode (the kind of text created on “textual” level). Compared with Genre Analysis, Register Analysis focusing on situational context may dig out the text in a comparatively narrow way. Here, Text A and Text B will be analyzed by employing the above theory of Butt et al. (2012)^[9].

In the Field of Text A, the author’s monologue describes that his or her attitude and feelings towards the monster under the bed change from the scary to affection. Moreover, the word “then” indicates the text follows with the chronological sequence. The author aims to express his or her emotion over time. Although the monster is unrealistic, this poem can possess practical significance, namely, sometimes the ugly appearance from people or thing is not equal to their inner quality so we should not just judge from the appearance.

From the perspective of Tenor, four kinds of relationship (between the author and the monster, between the author and his or her mom, between the monster and the author’s mom and between the reader and the author) will be discussed according to Mican’s (2017)^[19] statement that the text analysis needs exploring the power relationship. Initially, the author is afraid of and dislikes the monster, e.g., “the smell! Oh, my”, but gradually liked it, e.g., “make me laugh”. The monster is also fond of the author, e.g., “tickling me”. Finally, they have an equal and close relationship. By contrast, the relationship between the author and his or her mom is possibly unequal and distant, because the author is reluctant to tell his or her mom that there is a monster. If their relationship is intimate, the author will probably share this secret. If their relationship is equal, the mom is likely to respect her child’s view to treat it as a family member. However, it is not the case, implying the mom plays a dominant part. Furthermore, the relationship between the monster and the author’s mom is not equal and close to some extent because the

mom may dislike and expel this monster. Last, the author tells this secret to the reader using the first person, showing an intimate and equal relationship with the reader.

In addition, from the point of Mode, this text is a written form mixed with spoken language, e.g., “Oh my!” It also mainly adopts simple words and sentences from the child’s tone to promote the understanding. Some repetition words (“love” and “scared”) and sentences (e.g., the same sentence in the first and the last sentences echoing each other) can strengthen the author’s emotional expression and poetic aesthetics. Moreover, exclamatory sentence (e.g., “But how he loves to sing!”) is applied to enhance the author’s keen feeling and the contrastive conjunctions (e.g., “but”) convey his or her changing attitude.

In the Text B, the Field describes an imaginary fable where three mice lived happily in an old lady’s house once upon a time and one day they had a conversation about how to escape the danger from the cat. Though “belling the cat” was an excellent idea, no mice wanted to do so. The text aims to instruct readers to comprehend the underlying meaning of “bell the cat”, namely taking the risk for the good of others. Concerning the Tenor, there are five types of relationship. Specifically, three mice have the human behavior and expression with the personification, thus vividly expressing their feelings, making the reader understand easily and drawing distance with the reader. In this sense, the relationship between the reader and author is equal. So is the relationship among three mice. For instance, in face of danger, they had a discussion and everyone had an equal opportunity to voice the opinion. As to the relationship between the mice and the cat, we can infer it is asymmetrical because mice were afraid of being eaten by the cat and the cat has a dominant role. Notwithstanding, words (“peaceful” and “enjoy” from the sentence of “they (mice) lived together in a peaceful house with an old lady who enjoyed in good food”) possibly indicate an equal relationship between mice and the old lady. Similarly, the relationship between the old lady’s neighbour and the cat is possibly positive, since the old lady’s neighbor asked the lady to look after her cat during holiday.

Based on the analysis of Mode, this text is a written form mixed with spoken language, e.g., the spoken conversation among mice. This fable is organized from the narrative to evaluative pattern, because the previous paragraphs serve for the last evaluative paragraph on the idiom of “bell the cat”. Furthermore, simple words, sentences, and tenses (e.g., simple past tense and present tense) may increase the text’s readability and become closer with the reader. Using personal pronoun (e.g., “she”, “me” and “he”) is a way of personification, engaging and entertaining the reader.

2.3. Lexical Relations

Different from Genre and Register, Lexical Relations center on the vocabulary. In both texts, a distinctive characteristic is “Simile”. According to Zbaracki (2015)^[14] and Ashby, Roncero, de Almeida, and Agauas (2018)^[20], “Simile” refers to the comparison of one thing with another using the words “like” or “as”. In Text A, there are a multitude of such instances as “He looks like a ugly bat”, “with ears like green broccolis” and “it makes me laugh like a “chirp” monkey”. The first two examples vividly show the ugly and strange appearance of the monster with concrete images while the last one reveals the author’s great joy and affection towards the monster. Besides, the word “chirp” is an onomatopoeia word. Onomatopoeia is not only an interesting word by Zbaracki (2015)^[14] to arouse the reader’s interest, but also a useful means of expression. In Text B, the example of “Simile” can be found (“She ...as white as snow”, “She was as pretty as a picture” and “It was as fast as wind and as cunning as a fox”). Here, these examples in the Text B employ “as” different from “like” in the Text A, but they all make a lively comparison with a sense of humor.

Moreover, the collocation means regular word combinations to form a specific meaning^[21]. Orlandi and Giacomini (2016)^[22] further expound that lexical connotation is different from the grammatical collocation (e.g., a dominant word and a preposition). Here, only lexical connotation is studied both in Text A (e.g., “football boots”, “blue cheese (meaning rotten cheese)” and “tell the truth”) and Text B (e.g., “go on a holiday”, “loud voice” and “solve the problem”). With respect to multiword sequences, Baumgarten (2014)^[23] suggests that idioms are not in this category, but Cacciari (2014)^[24] and Yi, Lu, and Ma (2017)^[25] oppose to this view. For instance, Yi et al. (2017)^[25] claim multiword sequences also include the collocation, phrasal verbs, speech formulae, lexical bundles and other things. Hence, multiword sequences are in a larger scope compared with collocation. In the Text A, the phrasal verbs (e.g., “tell off” and “keep awake”) belong to the multiword sequences. In Text B, the idiom (“bell the cat”), phrasal verbs (e.g., “sneak up on” and “take care of”), speech formulae (“tell me”) and lexical bundles (“once upon a time” and “It gives us a chance to”) are also in this category.

At last, in the Text A, the word “beautiful” and “ugly” is a pair of Antonymy and the word “ears” is a part of the monster, reflecting the application of Meronymy (“ears – monster”). In contrast, in the Text B, the word “beautiful” and “pretty” and “small” and “big” are pairs of Antonymy. Moreover, Hyponymy is used, because Snowflake, Rose and Peanuts are different mice (“Snowflake-mice, Rose-mice, and Peanuts-mice”), illustrating the relationship from more specific to more general.

3. Teaching of “Simile” for EFL Learners

Teaching of “Simile” in a lesson is designed for twenty to thirty English as a foreign language (EFL) learners aged between thirteen to fourteen years old, Year Eight, in a middle school in China. This lesson is scheduled to last 45 minutes in a classroom.

3.1. Reasons for the Chosen Texts

Text A and Text B are viewed as the main teaching materials because both texts with the distinctive characteristic of “Simile”, on one hand, have simple words and sentences easy to understand for young learners. On the other hand, Text A (poem) and Text B (fable) seem to be novel forms with some interesting words, sentences, and contents. For instance, Text A uses “Simile” to depict the smell of monster (“He smells like my football boots. Also like blue cheese.”), thus turning abstract “smell” into concrete daily items and bringing great amusement as well as stimulating learning interest. Concerning Text B, the content itself can be interesting since all mice spared no effort to think of a great plan but no one wanted to realize it.

More importantly, both texts are full of educational meaning (Text A tells learners not to judge from the appearance and Text B makes them gain insight into the underlying meaning of “bell the cat”, namely taking the risk for the good of others). Furthermore, there are other enlightening points, e.g., the mom should respect and make friends with her child and the monster in Text A, advocating an equal and loving culture while Text B may connote that just having an ideal plan is not enough, so it is essential to be a brave doer. Moreover, doing something dangerous for saving others may demonstrate a selfless and collectivistic culture. The context of culture in the text is a higher level than the context of situation^{[9][26]}, so studying the context of culture can give learners more room to explore in-depth meaning from both texts.

3.2. Lesson Design

This lesson will mainly employ the method of Text-based Language Teaching, accompanied with Cooperative Learning Teaching as well as Task-based Language Teaching. First, learners are formed into five groups (each group with 4 to 6 students) to conduct Cooperative Learning. Cooperative Learning is beneficial to learning^[27]. Therefore, group learning possibly promote learners’ performance and interest.

Altogether, there are seven activities. The lesson will start with a game of Riddles and Brain Twisters. This game consists of 2 Riddles and 2 Brain Twisters with question types (single choice and open-ended questions), but they all have the usage of “Simile” with the word “like”. Hence, as a warm-up task, it can trigger interest and bring pleasure for learners to a large degree. More importantly, it also serves as a Conscious-raising task. After this task, learners will be asked what four questions have in common, thus eliciting the topic of this lesson, namely, “Simile”.

But the meaning of “Simile” will not be explicitly stated and learners will know it in the Activity 2 (Text A) with a Text-based Language Teaching. Based on Mickan (2017)^[19], Text-based Language Teaching contains four stages (observe and understand, respond to texts, analyze texts, and formulate and compose texts). Consequently, learners will first read the poem named *The Monster under My Bed* to observe and understand it. Then they close their eyes to answer the fill-in questions linked with “Simile” (e.g., “His head is like _____”) to respond to the text. Next is to analyze the text with the bottom-up method (questions from the detail of “Simile” to the text general meaning). In this way, students will gradually gain insight into from the specific and shallow to the general and deep. They could dig out the hidden reasons for using “Simile” and multiple connotations of this poem. Moreover, all the questions will be discussed within groups to strengthen learners’ understanding. The last step is to formulate and compose the text, so Activity 3 is designed to create a poem based on the above poem, namely, imagine that a monster is under your bed and create your own poem as a group. On one hand, creating their own poems could enhance the mastery of “Simile” using the word “like”. On the other hand, it could arouse their interest and promote Cooperative Learning.

The above activities are concerned with one usage of “Simile” with the word “like” while the Activity 4 will shift this focus to the other usage of “Simile” with “as ...as”. This activity is to listen to the song named *Everything at Once* covering many instances of the latter. It is also as a Conscious-raising task to arouse learners’ attention to the usage of “as...as”. Then, Activity 5 (Text B) will concentrate on this usage. It is worth noting that Text A in Activity 2 and Text B are both inserted with vivid pictures so that learners can become more interested and have a better understanding. In the Activity 5, the bottom-up method in Text-based Language Teaching is also employed because they, as young learners, may accept this method more easily. First, students need to find the sentences using “as...as” in the Text B to observe and understand the text, followed by changing them into “like” sentences to formulate and compose the text. More importantly, bridging the linking between “as...as” and “like” can deepen learners’ understanding of “Simile”. Then, learners read in roles of three mice (Snowflake, Rose, and Peanuts) to entertain themselves and gain insight into the text. Next is to answer the questions from the details to the whole meaning. Furthermore, some questions seem to be interesting (e.g., “If you are one of the mice, who would you like to be? If you are the fourth mice, what will you do in this situation?”), providing learners with room for imagination.

The following Activity 6 is about Task-based Language Teaching (Work in groups to describe a student from other groups using “Simile” and draw his or her portrait and the other group students guess who he or she is). It will be fascinating for learners to voice their views on familiar topics in their own life [28]. Therefore, students depict their familiar classmates, thus increasing learning fascination. Additionally, using “Simile” mixed with “like” and “as...as” to create sentences can synthesize what learners have learnt in this lesson. Considering drawing the picture and guessing the game as a group activity, they could make this activity more interesting and collaborative.

Last is the homework in the Activity 7. Different from the above activities focusing on “the imaginary monster” or “personified mice or “a familiar classmate”, this homework requires students to describe “a familiar pet” that they have had or “a dream pet” that they want to have using “Simile”. This topic related to their daily life is also interesting. Moreover, it can give students more flexibility and due to optional homework.

4. Conclusion

Given the above theoretical analysis, both chosen texts can be appropriate and interesting for this group young learners to a large extent. In the practical classroom teaching, these texts used enable learners to master the usage of “Simile” in an interesting and effective way. Apart from the main Text-based Language Teaching, Cooperative Learning Teaching and Task-based Language Teaching can enrich the class content, enhance the teaching effectiveness, and engage the students’ attention. During this whole lesson, four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) will be cultivated. Therefore, although Text-based Language Teaching seems to be traditional, teachers should select some interesting and proper texts and apply them in teaching in a productive and innovative way. More importantly, this method combined with other useful teaching methods can work more effectively.

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