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**Masayuki Teranishi, Yoshifumi Saito and Katie Wales (Eds)**

*Literature and Language Learning in the EFL Classroom*

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**Reviewer**

**Chris Lima**

Although at some point in the history of English language teaching, literature and language came to be seen separately, the fact is that both have been interwoven since the beginning of the development of English literary studies as a discipline and the propagation of literacy among ‘the masses’ in Victorian England (Eagleton, 2008). Even in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), such unnatural separation is a quite recent historical phenomenon which emerged around the period of the World War II (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004). This unbecoming split and the ‘utilitarian’ approaches to EFL – which Ronald Carter mentions in the last chapter of this book – have led to a considerable gap in research and publications on the role and uses of literature in English language teaching and learning. Until quite recently, very few publications addressing the topic could be found in the field of English language teacher education. Among such valiant efforts, some of the titles that spring to mind are Carter and Long’s *Teaching Literature*, published in 1991, Lazar’s (1993) *Literature and Language Teaching*, and Hall’s (2005) *Literature in Language Education*, now with a 2015 second edition. It is not a coincidence then, that all these three pioneer writers are present in this volume.

*Literature and Language Learning in the EFL Classroom*, edited by Teranishi, Saito and Wales, thus deals with an aspect of ELT that is in much need of theoretical and research-oriented publications like this one. As stated by the editors themselves, this collection largely depends on contributions coming from Japan, as fourteen out of the nineteen chapters are written by Japanese authors. When we think about the long history of EFL in Japan – starting back in Tokyo in 1942 with A.S. Hornby (Smith, 1998) publishing the first edition of the later renamed *Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* – it does not come as

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a surprise that some innovative EFL work has been produced by educators and researchers from the Land of the Rising Sun.

As any edited book built around a theme, not all chapters are likely to equally appeal to all readers. Nevertheless, this publication offers readers a wide range of related issues and investigations in different educational contexts and readers are likely to find a particular chapter that addresses their particular interests. The book is divided into two parts: the first consists of six papers on current relevant issues and suggestions for new approaches to the teaching of literature and language; the second part consists of thirteen papers that focus on empirical research and case studies in various aspects related to classroom practice.

The first chapter is a contribution by Geoff Hall who reviews the recent developments in the uses of literature in language teaching. Hall sets the tone for the whole volume since he mentions areas that are further discussed in the following chapters. In Chapter 2, Kazuko Takahashi discusses the decline in the use of literary texts in L2/EFL classrooms in Japan, which, the author argues, is associated with the perception that lessons and materials should focus on communicative skills development and functional language. Such an approach is questioned by Takahashi, who argues that literature should be back on the syllabus if educators are to achieve the aims set by the educational authorities who call for the development of intercultural understanding, critical thinking and the personalization of the classroom experience. In Chapter 3, Aiko Saito takes the discussion further and examines how Japanese learners encounter literature in their own language before and after elementary school and suggests that L2 teachers should consider adopting good practices and classroom approaches to literature that have proved successful in L1 Japanese education.

Both Chapter 4, by Yushifume Saito, and Chapter 5, by Michael Burke, deal with stylistics. Saito proposes a methodology of pedagogical stylistics that would provide students with input and output opportunities to explore stylistic textual features, such as dramatic irony. Burke suggests a framework for the development of language acquisition that incorporates elements of cognitive stylistic analysis and conceptual metaphor theory.

Part I concludes with Chapter 6, by Gillian Lazar, on an issue I believe can be particularly relevant to the readers of this journal. It looks at the ways in which

picturebooks can be employed in second and foreign language teaching. In this chapter, Lazar adds her voice to the call for further appreciation of the contribution picturebooks can give to language learning (see Mourão, 2013). She points out that there is a general acceptance that picturebooks have a place in teaching language to children but also a quite common resistance to using them with learners of other age groups. Lazar challenges such perceptions, arguing that postmodernist picturebooks communicate to readers at visual and verbal levels and can thus lead to playful exploration of language, images, and meanings. By postmodernist picturebooks, Lazar means those that present the reader with a 'multiplicity of meaning, subversion of literary conventions, explicit focus on intertextuality leading to pastiche and parody, and self-conscious drawing of attention to the text as *text*' (p. 97). The author presents a series of arguments on why it is important to use such picturebooks with teenage and adult language learners, among which are the exposure to authentic texts (p. 98) and the 'cultural exposure' they afford (p. 99), as well as the opportunities they offer for 'classroom creativity' (p. 100). The chapter concludes by suggesting a series of activities based on three selected titles: Anthony Browne's *Voices in the Park*, Mini Grey's *The Adventures of the Dish and the Spoon*, and Shaun Tan's *The Red Tree*.

Part II consists of a series of thirteen empirical studies on various aspects related to the theme of literature and language learning. It starts with Takayuki Nishihara's examination of the use of achievement tests in literary and general reading courses (Chapter 7). This is followed by Soichiro Oku's chapter on approaches to digital texts through new media (Chapter 8); the effects of translation and comprehension tasks on sentence recognition by Tomohide Ishihara (Chapter 9); and the benefits of focusing on speech and presentations when teaching of fiction by Tetsuki Nakamura (Chapter 10). The following three chapters discuss the use of particular literary genres in language education: English novels (Chapter 11), short stories (Chapter 12), and the translation of Japanese poems into English (Chapter 13) by Masayuki Teranishi, Kyoko Kuze and Kiyoko Sakamoto respectively.

The chapters that caught my attention combined a discussion of reading groups and the use of literature with advanced learners, especially in higher education contexts. These include Yuka Kusanagi's piece on literary reading circles (Chapter 14); Masako Nasu's

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examination of the role of literature in EFL in the process of language acquisition of highly successful adult learners (Chapter 15); and Hiroko Sugimura's account of the benefits of book clubs in the development of critical thinking skills among Health Sciences and Information Science students (Chapter 16).

Another chapter that may particularly appeal to readers of this journal is Chapter 17 by Motoko Fukaya. The author starts by discussing the statistical data both in the US and in Japan that point toward a noticeable decline in the habit of reading among the general population in those countries. She also refers to the findings of the National Institution of Youth Education in Japan, which suggests a 'correlation between respondents' childhood experience of L1 reading and their reading amount and reading time in L1 at the time of the survey' (p. 261). Most importantly, the research suggests that readers who have 'encountered an unforgettable book' in their lives read more books and spend more hours of time reading than those who have never had such encounter. Fukaya then argues that 'this correlation might be applied to EFL reading as well' and argues that the adoption of an Extensive Reading programme can potentially increase the chances of EFL learners to encounter their own 'unforgettable book'. In this study, participants had access to a classroom library of 'more than 900 books' that ranged from simplified materials and graded readers by various EFL publishers to books written for English language readers, such as 'picture books for children, young adult fiction, biographies, mysteries, self-help books, canonical literature in English and English translations of Japanese literature' (p. 266). Although her research participants were university students, the perhaps obvious conclusion we can take from here is that the earlier EFL teachers can facilitate this encounter with extensive reading activities, the greater the chances learners will have to become more dedicated readers in their adult life.

Chapter 18 focuses specifically on graded readers. Mark Sheehan examines how graded readers can be used to motivate learners, build confidence and develop critical thinking by employing a combination of graded reading assignments, reading records and classroom activities. The volume closes with a short piece by Ronald Carter on the past, present, and future of the teaching of literature and language in EFL. Such an arrangement of the chapters gives the book as a whole a satisfying sense of spiralling continuity and soundly based progression.

It is fair to say that most literary genres and book formats are, to a certain extent, touched upon in different ways in this comprehensive collection. However, there is one glaring absence in this volume, and that is the lack of references to, or a chapter dealing especially with, Shakespeare. Such a gap was called to my attention partly because of my own interest in Shakespearean Studies, but mostly because the popularity of Shakespeare in Japan is a well-documented fact. As Uchimaru (2015) points out, since the Meiji revolution in 1868, when Japan reopened its borders to the West, the interest in Shakespeare in the Japanese EFL classroom has been an ongoing phenomenon. A similar publication focusing on approaches and research on teaching Shakespeare to EFL learners in Japan would be warmly welcome.

As a final comment, almost as a footnote, I would like to mention the book cover. It is taken as common wisdom that we should not judge a book by its cover, either metaphorically or literally. However, in my experience as a reader, I have found that more often than not, good books rest between beautiful covers and this one proves my point. The hardback edition front cover comes with a beautiful picture of cherry blossoms (*sakura*), the national flower of Japan, and I like to think of this as a symbol for a new blooming of interest in the teaching of literature and language in EFL. In the year that we celebrate the life and legacy of William Shakespeare, Charlotte Bronte and Miguel de Cervantes, it is indeed reassuring to know that academics and educators in different parts of the world have been actively and successfully teaching, researching, and disseminating their work in the field.

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