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Collaborative Stylistic Group Project: A Drama Practical Analysis Application

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***Abstract*—**In the course of teaching stylistics to undergraduate students of the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the linguistic tool kit of theories comes in handy and useful for the better understanding of the different literary genres: Poetry, drama, and short stories. In the present paper, a model of teaching of stylistics is compiled and suggested. It is a collaborative group project technique for use in the undergraduate diverse specialisms (Literature, Linguistics and Translation tracks) class. Students initially are introduced to the different linguistic tools and theories suitable for each literary genre. The second step is to apply these linguistic tools to texts. Students are required to watch videos performing the poems or play, for example, and search the net for interpretations of the texts by other authorities. They should be using a template (prepared by the researcher) that has guided questions leading students along in their analysis. Finally, a practical analysis would be written up using the practical analysis essay template (also prepared by the researcher). As per collaborative learning, all the steps include activities that are student-centered addressing differentiation and considering their three different specialisms. In the process of selecting the proper tools, the actual application and analysis discussion, students are given tasks that request their collaboration. They also work in small groups and the groups collaborate in seminars and group discussions. At the end of the course/module, students present their work also collaboratively and reflect and comment on their learning experience. The module/course uses a drama play that lends itself to the task: 'The Bond' by Amy Lowell and Robert Frost. The project results in an interpretation of its theme, characterization and plot. The linguistic tools are drawn from pragmatics, and discourse analysis among others.

***Keywords*—**Applied linguistic theories, collaborative learning, cooperative principle, discourse analysis, drama analysis, group project, online acting performance, pragmatics, speech act theory, stylistics, technology enhanced learning.

I. Introduction

COLLABORATIVE learning and teaching is one of the important techniques for the Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESOL) that is related to the theories of Connectionist Models of second language acquisition [1]. Collaborative learning and connectionist model both depend on interaction and interconnections among students in groups and/or networks of student learners and, also mandatory, collaborating with the teacher. It is also believed that the teacher-teacher collaboration improves student learning/ acquisition [2], [3]. While a lot of research in the different disciplines, for example mathematics [4], [5], geometry [6] and dentistry [7], employed collaborative and cooperative learning and assessed students' perception of it, online and Web-based collaborative and cooperative learning is now implemented extensively [8], [9].

There is a shift from traditional teaching and learning into collaborative learning [10] and a further shift towards the collaborative technology enhanced student centered teaching and learning in general [11]-[14], and in TESOL in particular [15], [16].

Active learning and enhancing student autonomy and engaging them in discussions and academic arguments helps motivate learning and retains it. Joint studying and collaborative learning has also a lot of psychological and sociological benefits like self-efficacy, it raises self-esteem, and therefore a lot of programs [17], [18] group projects [19] and conferences [20], [21] were initiated. Research on the effect of collaborative learning on the achievement of students studying English [22], a clear description of the characteristics and benefits of the approach/perspective was also applied.

In the area of Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language (TESOL/TEFL), research shows the importance of employing cooperative and collaborative learning. Definition and application of aspects of collaborative learning, including promoting interactive learning in pairs and group work in the EFL classroom, and enhancing communicative competence in different contexts e.g. Japanese [23], Chinese [24], Taiwanese [25], and Thai [26] was investigated and experimented. These all apply student centered, student autonomy and empowerment. Further, in an action research in South Africa [27] the experiment promoted EFL student empowerment. Beyond empowerment, research [28] moved further to critical collaborative autonomy from the student-centered perspective. This research also identified important aspects of collaboration e.g. the extension of students' cognitive skills as well as affective aspects of the sense of achievement, and self-esteem. Further, in more specific areas of language teaching i.e., the oral communication [29] and reading comprehension [30] research was also reported.

Stylistics is the area of interpreting literary texts using linguistic theories. In the present research the analysis of dramatic texts in the undergraduate year two stylistics common module, the collaborative project was one of the approaches employed for the teaching of stylistics. Recent research in stylistics also experienced a development into technology enhanced interpretation. A new shift to computational stylistics, corpus-based studies [31], authorship attribution and computational text analysis [32]-[34] measuring one author's influence on another [35], in the area of pedagogy and strategies of teaching stylistics [36]. Earlier research [37] tended to use the more traditional techniques.

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While [38] employed traditional methods applied to drama texts, much earlier, [39] started a statistical computational count to assist the pragmatic tools and theories in interpreting drama. Research of collaborative stylistics [40] worked on authorship. The present research initiates the concept and approach of collaborative stylistic for students' interpretation of drama texts. Teaching stylistics, based on drama texts using collaborative learning, was part of the teaching of stylistics to undergraduate EFL Egyptian students at the British University in Egypt, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Department of English Language and Literature.

II. Procedure for Project Preparation

A. Drama Text, Video Selection and Main Idea

"The Bond" by Amy Lowell and Robert Frost [41] was selected for the collaborative project since its nature lends itself to the module: Stylistics, students' linguistic and literary background, and the collaborative task.

A video performance of the play was also used [42] in the students' collaborative project as part of the technology enhanced techniques, student -entered project. The video was played in class and was available for students' use on eLearning platform for their further reference.

The script of the play was available to students in two forms: The play as a whole and the script of each of the three characters split by each character role or utterances so that the tasks would be tackled using one or another. Although the three female characters were supposed to be talking to each other, they were in fact talking across each other; addressing the audience. While the play was tackling the idea of bonding, in fact they were not bonding nor connecting in the conversation, rather they were bonding in the theme of lack of connectionism in their personal relations. Each of them was telling a different story of a sort of separation in her life.

B. Macro and Micro Tasks: Three Task Sheets for Three Specialisms

The macro task was to interpret the play stylistically using the linguistic theories they already studied in the previous years and during the present academic year. All students in the three specialisms studied a common Prep Year and a common Foundation Year One. They all have the same academic university background in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Department of English Language and Literature. In the present year, Year Two after Prep, they chose their specialisms. The students still study common modules, of which, stylistics is one of them. Students were grouped, as per their specialisms, into three groups. The Literature group were two students, the Translation group were three students and the Applied Linguistics group were six students. Addressing differentiation in a common module taught to all specialisms, three micro task sheets were created and given to each group (Appendices A-C).

The Literature students' task (Appendix A) was to analyze the play's theme, plot and the three entangled story lines of the three characters: June, Maggie and Ruth. They were to compare the play [41] with a poem, "Bond and Free" also by Frost [43]. Internally in the group, they finalize the task according to on their own scheduled meetings, discussions and research.

The Translation students' task (Appendix B) was to analyze the three characters' separate turns, speech roles and each individual's participation in the dialogue. Each of the three students in Translation specialism was given one of the three characters' dialogue roles separated from the dialogue in which they were all interacting together. Each student will follow the story line for the one character and interpret each role characterizing the assigned character. Among themselves, the students will finalize the task meeting in and outside class, as agreed and scheduled, for discussions and researching.

The Applied Linguistics students' task (Appendix C) was to use the linguistic theories of discourse analysis, turn taking rules, conversational analysis and pragmatics to show and interpret how the dialogic aspect of the play is patterned. They would be doing the analysis of the dialogue as a whole showing the breaking of communication and lack of connectionism.

Each task will be collaboratively completed first in the micro group, then shared with the other groups in preparation for a macro seminar/group presentation.

All three groups would use the macro technique of stylistic interpretation steps provided in the module. The students will all select the appropriate linguistic tools suitable for their task and will need to use the checklist of linguistic theories.

C. Division of Labor: Student-Centered Collaborative Project

The three groups were created as per the students' preference. Each group is the same specialism. Group One Literature, this included the two literature students. Group Two Translation includes three students who were each given a script of one character from the three characters in the play. Group Three, Applied Linguistics consists of six students. During class time task sheets were distributed and explained. All groups had knowledge of what the other groups were doing and they were advised to seek each other's' assistance and consultation in their own micro group and across the several other micro groups.

The instructor helped the students with the starting off meeting in which it was decided, by the participants, the scheduling of meetings and the micro tasks as per the students themselves, and the task distribution among the members of the group. Macro meeting time was also agreed for the exchange of views and support.

An eLearning on line forum was created for online discussions and group chat rooms were also created. Macro group and micro groups were created on the email system which the students also used in their communication. Time-lines and deadlines were agreed. The instructor was the facilitator and adviser at any point of time as requested. The instructor's task was also monitoring students' time management. Therefore, the instructor helped with creating the groups, structured the learning activities and facilitated the

group interaction. On the other hand, students did the work and had ownership of the collaborative learning approach.

D. Group Presentations: Integrated Project

A macro group seminar and presentation took place, where each micro group presented, as well individuals presenting their shares of the project - researching, interpreting and preparing the presentation - where there was individual accountability. A group presentation rubric was used for the students' presentation performance. The rubric includes a section for individual performance to make sure that individual accountability was measured. To measure how far they cooperated and in what areas in detail, the interview with the students addressed questions that were related to collaborative tasks.

III. After Project Questionnaire and Interview

After the students had presented their project, also collaboratively; in a group presentation, they were asked to respond to questions of two short online surveys about their experience. They were interviewed about some details and information on the advantages and disadvantages of collaborative work. In general, the student's expressed how the experience helped them understand the play and further helped them with using linguistic tools in the application to the play. Some students were more skillful with certain linguistic tools and others were skillful with other tools. They had maximum peer interaction and equal opportunities to discuss and suggest interpretations. They then taught each other and exchanged their interpretations. This was very positive interdependence. Arguing about the better tool and maybe at times using more than one tool supported their understanding. This created practice opportunities that allowed critical thinking and created a positive learning atmosphere. Moreover, the interaction without the pressure of the teacher improved and developed their social skills and sense of self worth and self esteem.

IV. Interpretation of Questionnaire Results

Items of the questionnaire questions were analyzed statistically, automatically. Question results were grouped by intended question target:

1) On the question on whether any of the students had "participated in a collaborative learning training course on collaboration" 78.57% said they did and 21.43% said they did not.
2) On the question about "what is the most important element of collaborative learning," 50% said "the ability to cooperate with the group members" 42% said "clear division of tasks", and 7.14% said "the group size".
3) On "how they found the experience of working collaboratively", 58.33% said "I learned from my group", 41.67% said "I learned to work in collaboration with others", and none selected "I clashed with my group". Therefore they had no clashes in the process of collaboration rather leaned from each other and learned how to collaborate.
4) On the group size preference, 58% said "I like to choose the group I want to work with", 41.67% said it does not matter, and none said they prefer the teacher to assign the groups.
5) On the group preference, 72.73% said they preferred the same specialism colleagues and 27.27% only said "working with members of different specialism.
6) On the group size, 61.54% say they prefer 2-3 in the group, while 38.46% selected 4-6 in the group, and none selected more than 6.
7) On "who encouraged students to help each other more during the group work", 66.67% said the students and 33.33% said the teacher.
8) On how the teacher assessed them, 41.67% said as a group, 50% said both; as a group and individually, and 8.33% said individually.

In summary, all are positive results and show interest and appreciation of the collaborative experience from different perspectives.

V. Interpretation of Interview Results

A. Application to the Benefits of Collaborative Learning

Since collaborative learning enhances certain social and linguistic development as they achieve communicative competence, students experienced these benefits of the collaborative learning process. Students in the three specialisms agreed that they preferred collaborative learning. They were asked in the interview whether they used collaboration in other modules. They were also asked about whether they used the same techniques that were employed in the collaboration project at hand in stylistics. They all agreed that four other modules did employ collaboration making use of the same techniques but with little variations. The present research was the most intensive, organized and properly structured. The project was the most enjoyable part of the module. It marked an unforgettable interactive communicative experience of learning by themselves. The students also all agreed that the clarity of the task was their support, and that the interpretation of the play was like a jigsaw puzzle that they all had an active part in, and also that each of the participants was reassured by others' feedback.

Multiple intelligence, multiple views and multiple peer teaching away from the seniors'/teachers' pressure allowed one to make mistakes and be corrected and taught by a peer. This removes any feeling of embarrassment. High self esteem for both, the advanced student and the weaker shy student, is promoted by student cooperation and collaboration. In spite of the multiple micro tasks that needed to be carried out, the autonomy of dividing and distributing the tasks among them, they were all committed and prompt with executing their role. The interviews were done in a seminar collaborative talk in which they all participated and spoke up frankly.

B. Relating Questionnaire and Interview Results

Both questionnaire results and interview conclusions show how all students preferred and enjoyed the experience of

working collaboratively, where they: 1) learned from each others' ideas and views, 2) all experienced autonomy of their own learning, 3) preferred collaboration to traditional class learning, 4) experienced a sense of achievement and productivity, 5) created supportive and committed relations with their peers both of the same specialism and other specialisms groups, 6) started acquiring better social skills and improved their self esteem from others' reassurance, and 7) acquired interactive, social and cognitive skills.

C. Recommendations

A number of obstacles might be a hindrance to achieving the targets proposed by the collaborative technique. Some of these obstacles weather observed by teachers [44] or by students implementing the technique need to be considered and avoided by practitioners. Students might be lacking collaborative skills. They might be the 'free riders' not contributing any work, or they might afraid of competition, or maybe shy. In reality, the collaborative learning itself could solve these problems since it addresses them all. Collaborative learning enhances and encourages asking questions, asking for help, giving support, negotiating ideas and viewpoints, and promoting cooperation. Coordinating cooperating in a group targets student support and encourages the shy and the student with low self esteem. Other colleagues reassure by listening to their problems and addressing them away from embarrassment.

One of the solutions suggested [45] is to employ 'inquiry-based learning approaches' and 'to facilitate the positive learning'. This can be possible if there are equal amounts of asking questions, asking for help and giving help as well. Interaction and argumentation and resolving opposing ideas, all support negotiated learning.

Three important aspects or components necessary for learning are cooperation, collaboration and interaction [46]

To reassure teachers and students who are or wish to use the technique, they can use online resources as support [47], [48].

D. Other Recommendations

It is further recommended as a follow up research, to study the effectiveness of reflective/reflexive action and its relation to collaborative teaching from the teachers' perspective.

Collaboration of teachers is related to action research [49] and reflexive [50] teaching and learning methodology. This could be discussed in a further research as a follow up on the present research.

VI. Conclusion

The students' experience of applying collaborative learning in the stylistics module was important for the interpretation of an ambiguous symbolic play. Students found it enjoyable and useful. Weak students shying off came forth with contributions that were useful and creative, while the advanced talented students were experiencing a new situation where they had to become teachers supporting their peers. Both the weak and the advanced students felt useful which can improve their self esteem. They all practiced stylistic analysis interpretation in a context relieved from the pressure of making mistakes. The argumentation, interaction and collaboration is becoming the way of learning with enjoyment and positive learning. The final product of the project was the students' group presentation of their collaborative interpretation. The sense of achievement, pride and learning was acknowledged and appreciated by both students and teachers. Collaborative and cooperative learning should be recommended as a teaching approach to replace traditional instruction techniques that are teacher centered. Collaborative learning is student-centered and promotes student autonomy.

Appendix

A. Task Sheet 1: Literature Group

Material: you will be provided with:

- ✓ the play script.
- ✓ Tools checklist.
- ✓ A video of the play performance (we will all watch as we start the class). The class reads the play's script while watching the video.
- ✓ Copy of a poem with a similar title 'Bond and Free' by Robert Frost.

Task: Analyze the text stylistically using the appropriate linguistic tools that you find appropriate (use the check list that we created in class (attached). Compare and contrast the two texts (the play and the poem) from the following perspectives:

I. Theme (purpose)
II. Plot (story)
III. Character

Texts:

A. The Bond by Amy Lowell & Robert Frost adapted for the stage by Walter Wykes Copyright © 2008.
B. 'Bond and Free' by Robert Frost.

Steps:

1. Read the play and answer the brain storming questions that will help you in your stylistic analysis:
   - ✓ Who is the main character?_____
   - ✓ Who are the other characters?_____
   - ✓ Who are they speaking to? _____
   - ✓ What are they talking about? _____
   - ✓ What is the repeated prominent word?_____
   - ✓ What does the title 'The Bond' refer to according to each character?
   a. Maggie:_____
   b. June:_____
   c. Ruth:_____
2. What are the linguistic tools that should be used for the analysis?
3. Use them for your interpretation.
4. What is your preliminary interpretation and comparison?

B. Task Sheet 2: Translation Group

Material: you will be provided with:

- ✓ the play script of each of the characters separately(Maggie-June-Ruth)
- ✓ copy of the play script without editing (if needed)
- ✓ tools checklist
- ✓ the video of the play performance (we will all watch as we start the class). The class reads the play's script while watching the video.

Task: Analyze the text stylistically using the appropriate linguistic

tools that you find appropriate (use the check list that was created in class (attached). Find **the story told** by each character separately. What does the story say about:

1. Each character.
2. The meaning of the story as related to the title.
3. The speech act of the story in total, the theme.
4. The definition/translation of 'bond' in each story

Texts:

The Bond by Amy Lowell & Robert Frost was adapted for the stage by Walter Wykes in 2008.

Steps:

1. Read the play and answer the brain storming questions that will help you in your stylistic analysis:
2. Who is the main character?_____
3. Who are the other characters?_____
4. Who are they speaking to? _____
5. What are they talking about? _____
6. What is the repeated prominent word?_____
7. What does the title 'The Bond' refer to according to each character?
8. Maggie:_____
9. June:_____
10. Ruth:_____
11. What are the linguistic tools that should be used for the analysis?
12. Use them for your interpretation.
13. What is your preliminary interpretation of each of the characters from their turns at talk?

C. Task Sheet 3: Applied Linguistics Group

Material: you will be provided with:

- ✓ The play script.
- ✓ Tools checklist.
- ✓ A video of the play performance (we will all watch as we start the class). The class reads the play's script while watching the video.

Task: Analyze the text stylistically using the appropriate linguistic tools that you find appropriate (use the check list that we created in class (attached).

Text: The Bond by Amy Lowell & Robert Frost adapted for the stage by Walter Wykes Copyright © 2008.

Steps:

1. Read the play and answer the brain storming questions that will help you in your stylistic analysis:

- ✓ Who is the main character?_____
- ✓ Who are the other characters?_____
- ✓ Who are they speaking to?_____
- ✓ What are they talking about?_____
- ✓ What is the repeated prominent word?_____
- ✓ What does the title 'The Bond' refer to according to each character?

d. Maggie:_____
e. June:_____
f. Ruth:_____

5. What are the linguistic tools that should be used for the analysis?
6. Use them for your interpretation.
7. What is your preliminary interpretation?

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