

A Literature Model of Language Teaching?: A Polemical Question

Stephen Conlon

Institute for English Language Education

Abstract

Picking up on the word "model" in the title, this paper examines the aspects of language that may be viewed as artistic. It makes a case that we need to think and act artistically as teachers in order to enrich the language and the pedagogy we use with our students and colleagues.

After describing some of the ways literature and language people interact or do not interact, the paper sets out three ways of explaining how language is itself an art: in everyday life, in linguistics and in pedagogy. It then describes some ways that some of our current practices are against the values inherent in artistic practice, and offers some remedies for this imbalance in our ways of talking to each other and our students, and in the ways we conceive of our action in the classroom.

The tone of this paper is conversational, as part of the argument is that we need to recognise and develop our artistic voices in English Language Teaching.

What do we mean by a literature model? A model is usually something we make with our hands. An abstract model is something we make with our minds. Either way, there seems to be an implicit recognition in our language that a model is made by people, and is therefore a work of art. It is important that we remember this when we start to look for ways of analyzing our field into pieces. Such acts are basically artistic.

I am not sure that there is a single model of literature that I would offer as a way of teaching English. Literature is not a method. To claim that it is a method is to claim too much. But if we go to the other extreme and claim that it is only material – grist in the mill – for the teacher to use is to claim too little. Literature, I would suggest, offers an experience of language. It gives us voices in which to participate in a dialogue with each other.

Another way of approaching this question of the place or role of a literature model in language teaching is to ask why we think that literature is a separate thing to language. It seems to me that if we start with an assumption that there is no difference between literature and language, we may come up with some new ways of thinking about ourselves and what we do. Such self-awareness is important for us as teachers. We need to see ourselves in the mirror sometimes in order to check what we are doing. And that image in the mirror is artistic. At present, I will argue, we seem to have stopped looking for these reflections or mediations. This may have resulted in several practices that threaten the effectiveness of our teaching. I want to suggest that an attempt to see ourselves in artistic ways offers insights in at least four areas where a reflective teacher may grow by entering into the dialogue that I attempt to develop around the question of whether all language is artistic.

In making this case, I hope to demonstrate that by considering language as an art we may make our own use of English better, think more creatively, be more critical of ourselves, and regain an understanding of the past as it still relates to what we are trying to do today.

These reflections are important because we, the community of English teachers, are showing signs of developing a short-sighted disregard for qualities of language that we need in our drive for professional development and self-respect. If we don't have these qualities, we run the risk of becoming hypocritical in our practices. In addressing this threat, I would hope that we can draw from the well of literature an ethical view of ourselves as human beings, as teachers, and as speakers of language. In my mind, I cannot really disentangle these three roles. To create these reflections, I will now try to dramatize what I imagine may be a dialogue between the literature people and the language people.

Arguably, the great divide between these two positions may only be a chimera or a false border that has done much harm to the study and the teaching of language. People have been making out cases for using literature to teach language ever since literature lost its privileged position, when the

grammar/translation method was pushed aside by other methods towards the end of the nineteenth century and on into the modern era. How far we seem to have come since then may be illustrated by the point that then grammar study and literature were basically synonymous while now they are more often than not antonymous. By the nineteen thirties, the main force in this separation was modernism, with its insistence on difficult and fragmented verbal constructions that were taken by many readers as reality. Things were meant to be broken, not put together. Witness the names of some of the periodicals that played important parts in the development of these forces – *Blast* and *Vortex*. Somehow in the rush to progress, to be modern, the break between literature and language seemed acceptable as a necessary condition of thinking in a modern way. While modernist texts were then perceived to be difficult and therefore inaccessible or irrelevant, it was not a long leap to the conclusion that all literature was so. This idea survives in the more hostile responses of some teachers to a suggestion that authentic literary texts have a place in the language classroom. For these teachers, authentic texts are not L plus or minus 1 (cf. Krashen's idea of L+1), or they are simply not related to learning a language, and are therefore to be rejected.

The problem with such extremism is that we tend to develop an intellectual deafness to what others have been saying, and amnesia about what we used to think and do in the past. Once this occurs, certain practices seem to proliferate:

- we stop reading or accepting anything that has not been published in the past seven or so years
- teachers ask questions such as "Billows who?" or "Who is Michael West?"
- publishers sit on old classic texts such as those by Michael West and M.A.K. Halliday and refuse to republish them as they would not sell now – the market would perceive them to be obsolete because they are out of date or fashion
- only a handful of conference goers attend sessions offered by internationally renowned writers when these writers try to spark an interest in what has been thought before
- few of us seem to be interested in writing anything except textbooks and academic pieces of writing – probably under pressure for academic promotion
- teachers believe and teach their students to believe the palpable nonsense that "old" writers such as Dickens write an English with different grammar and vocabulary than we do today
- teachers become less skilled readers and writers – and consequently, I would argue, less skilled teachers
- cultural understanding becomes flat and stereotypical, which is not too far removed from being racist
- we start to believe that we now know all the answers – but this is only because we have stopped asking ourselves many questions about our own words and how we use them
- language and literature are impoverished by being balkanized or divided

Given these practices and the issues raised by both the literature and the language proponents, there is much at stake in how we respond to language as literature and literature as language. The language we use must be a reflection of our own capacities as linguists and teachers. If we sell language short in our own professional discourses, then we will probably sell our students short by teaching them crabbed or crippled English that lacks aesthetic appeal or rhetorical force. In so far as we fail in either of these areas, I would argue that we are in some ways failing as teachers. And this failure could have serious consequences for us and our students.

By looking at how these two apparently separate worlds work as one, hopefully we can see some ways of realizing the synergies and exploiting the similarities between the two practices. The rejoining of the two streams into a single river should help improve our basic understanding of the nature of this language we profess to study, teach, and love. It should also help enrich our pedagogical, linguistic and literary practices. This, I would strongly suggest, must make ELT a better thing. But first we need to see that we are all on the same page, so to speak. And this brings me back to my point that we need to re-unite literature and language.

Three faces of language

The art of language as it pertains to the practices of ELT may be observed from at least three different perspectives: everyday usage, linguistics ideas, and pedagogical practices. By perceiving the same thing from three different perspectives, perhaps we can develop a more rounded and comprehensive understanding of our art of teaching, and bring our profession out of the nineteenth century old unity where literature dominated language, and out of the twentieth century where language divorced itself from literature by and large, and into the twenty-first century where a new configuration may be in the process of development.

As we try to yoke together two things that seem to be disparate in our own consciousness, we should be aware that we are actually thinking and writing in metaphorical terms, artistically. In the metaphor, the two things become fused as one. For this reason, I am wary of offering an image of literature and language interfacing one another. While I am attracted by the masque-like effect of this image (in my mind's eye I see Janus' two faces being creatively inverted towards each other instead of away from each other) there remains what to me seems an unfortunate implication that the two faces are different. I am not so sure that literature and language are separate entities in practice. We need to find ways of putting the faces together, much as Picasso, Virginia Woolf and T.S. Eliot saw and represented the multiplicities of the individual. Then we may move beyond the post-traditional, pre-modern world of English language teaching as it is currently usually practiced.

What we may be doing with a metaphorical metamorphosis or reconfiguration of the roles of literature and linguistics in English teaching is to realize or reanimate the idea or words we seem to have forgotten when we stopped going back to what has been said before. By returning to what has been written about our subject in the past, in what we like to call the literature, we often find material that has been neglected, ignored or forgotten – and this material can strike us as pertinent today. A case in point is the central term to this essay: the word “art”. I would like to suggest that the practices of literature offer us ways of reanimating the old ideas about this word that all too often modern scientists among us dismiss as irrelevant. The word “art” comes from the Latin *ars*, which in turn comes from the classical Greek *technē* which meant “method”. The Greek word sounds very much like our words “technique” or “technology”. Nor should this surprise: artists in all the mediums have techniques, architects use technologies. Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht have both made cases for the technologies that shape all art in capitalism. McLuhan also talks of words as technologies – the medium as the message, which sounds like the idea that form is content. And that brings us back to the claim that all language is art.

1. Language as an art

Here, we need to explain some of the ways in which all language is an art in our everyday lives, in what could be characterized as either a sociolinguistic or a social-semiotic sense. The following points are raised to demonstrate that there are many ways of approaching our practices as art that we have yet to fit into the perhaps more narrow models we currently use when describing characteristics of our language. I am not advocating these points as a single, unified perspective that ties up all the loose ends into the next “one-best-way” of imprisoning language as *the* answer:

1. Words are metaphorical. The word “chair” is not a chair, but a sound picture that makes us see a chair.
2. The etymology of the word “literature” demonstrates that it is basically written language.
3. Language, as M.A.K. Halliday says, is “a natural human creation”. And, of course, creation is an artistic act.
4. Another idea from Halliday is that our language grows with us. This would suggest that we cultivate our language, much as we cultivate the vine. Such cultivation seems to me to be a civilized art.
5. It follows from the previous point that as we grow we learn to liberate our language from its immediate social environment by changing it in the act of applying it to something, some task, for which it does not apparently seem intended. This act is artistic in two ways; it is

imaginative as we have to see things that are not before us, and it is utopian when in our imaginary new uses, say, conversations that have yet to happen, we happily play with new words, expressions, attitudes as we rehearse them in our thoughts – we create ideal conditions and outcomes in our minds before we try our words out on others.

6. To speak “well” is an aesthetic act, choice and achievement that is shared at some level by everyone. Our voices are our most powerful art. Halliday stresses the artistic features of the voice when he comments on its musical, polyphonic make-up: “[A]ll speech other than the protolanguage of infancy is polyphonic: different melodies are kept going side by side, and each element in the sentence is like a chord which contributes something to all of them.”
7. The ways to language are creative insofar as through or along them we create our culture, society, human spirit and identity.
8. All things that are made by us are artificial and therefore are works of art. Even Linguistics and the other disciplines are made and are therefore works of art. (Is it going too far to argue that the most stultifying, boring textbook is still a work of art – albeit a bad one?) This argument for art stems from William Morris and the folk-art people who know that when an artisan decorates the axe-handle or apron then that person is saying that he or she knows that tool or product is important and useful. The wood chopped with the wooden axe-handle may become another, even more beautiful axe, an artifact.
9. An extension of this folk-thinking is made by Sapir when he writes: “It is the manifest form [of language] that is never twice the same, for this form, which we call linguistic morphology, is nothing more nor less than a collective art of thought, an art denuded of the irrelevancies of individual sentiment.” What makes this art possible is the view that: “Language is the most massive and inclusive art we know, a mountainous and anonymous work of unconscious generations.” He explains the technical aspects of this art: “Every language is a collective art of expression. There is concealed in it a particular set of esthetic factors – phonetic, rhythmic, symbolic, morphological – which it does not share with every other language.” And finally he comes to the proto-sociolinguistic point that: “Language is itself the collective art of expression, a summary of thousands upon thousands of individual intuitions. The individual goes lost in the collective creation, but his personal expression has left some trace in a certain give and flexibility that are inherent in all collective works of the human spirit.”
10. Writing is in a way a transformation of our vocal sound and words. There is a literary alchemy in this act that turns our words into things they were not – symbols and signs. This transformational power in language is basically artistic – an art strongly influenced by our religious impulses. The religious and artistic spirit or breath survives in the ideas of morphology.
11. As sounds and signs are arbitrary, so are they art. But it is a mistake to assume along with the Post-Modernists that the signs stay arbitrary. By using these signs to identify ourselves we are transforming an arbitrary, given thing into a product or a cultural practice, much as we transform an arbitrary tree into an axe or a book.
12. Once we use language to shape our group identity, we are transforming things by creating fictional versions of them. In doing this, we are transforming ourselves. All of this is artistic and creative.
13. By saying that language is more than one thing – a tool, a creative force, a system of organization, a way of thinking, a utopian model of social reality, an experience – we seem to be saying more: that language is an art. Only art does all these things without losing its specificity. Moreover, we seem to be suggesting that our ways of visualizing language, representing it, discussing it, shaping it, are artistic.
14. In so far as language is a game we play as we learn to move in our world, then language has a sense of lightness that may be linked to the role of the imagination in our everyday lives and activities. As the Elizabethans accepted as a truism, the world is a stage.

The role of the imagination in how we put our world and our experience into words needs to be recognized and considered in Applied Linguistics. This means that we need to open up how we conceive of our theories and beliefs as teachers and students of language. What follows is an attempt to reconsider some aspects of Linguistics in a new light – as art.

2. Linguistics practices as art

The next step is to investigate the ways that the practice of Linguistics may be seen as an art. The flow of the argument is that if language is an art, then whenever we use language to study language we are practicing an art. The mirror-like quality of our art may be sensed in the ring of doubleness in the chunk of words “language about language”.

In the age of reason, most writers simply knew that all rational thinking was scientific. That was a basic cultural assumption which made the world livable then. The unfortunate implication is: We should study everything objectively, scientifically, while forgetting that all science is simply a method, just like every other art. By looking at the irony implicit in the claims of rigorous science we may relax about the adversarial positions that seem to be taken by both sides:

1. The distinction between art and science is fictitious. There are many beautiful models that are caste in the scientific genres; some of them are even entertaining. In so far as every language and every user of language divides the world and establishes categories or classes of experience simply by using words, then every language and user shapes the world and the words used as tools in it – and that is an artistic, creative activity. It could also be said to be poetic, in the Greek sense of the poet as a maker.
2. Linguistics does not claim to interpret language, language with a small l. It does not try to tell us what language means. Instead, it tells us what Language with a large L, as a concept, means. I am not rehashing here the arguments about syntagmatic and diachronic approaches that the Structuralists and the Post-Structuralists tried to use to divide language against the wishes and expressed intentions of the authority they all misrepresented to do this (Saussure). Nor do Linguistics people offer to translate language. These are artistic activities, and as such they are literary. Here, the linguistics camp seems to be defining itself as the people who do not try to be artistic or creative... a curious badge to proffer for any thinking person. Behind the apparently disarming rhetorical implication that I am telling the truth because I am speaking without art is the ironic sense that that too is an artistic achievement. Only great artists can get away with such an ironic view, just as only great singers can pull off singing badly.
3. In Second Language Acquisition studies, the transfer of L1 words or grammatical *patterns* could be read as versions of parody or comic play – but it isn't. The need to imitate sounds and patterns in order to be recognized as a speaker of a language initially requires a playful willingness to accept the fact that one will sound slightly ridiculous. The learner also needs to justify transforming his or her own language into the target language. The psychological barrier to such a make-over is often affected by excusing the act as parody. This claim for the artistic acts of mimesis and parody would appear not to be serious. Scientific seriousness that does not recognize these acts may mask the learner's insecurity when he or she does not want to be laughed at in a foreign language. This insecurity inhibits our creativity. Why is this laughter taboo? Why is it all too often dismissed as flim-flam or padding? Where is the linguistics of laughter and comedy? This comic response will be raised again in relation to metaphors adapted from novels that are used to express possible student roles in the class room.
4. In the arena of World Englishes, where non-native English speakers are encouraged to artistically adapt English to their own brand of Singlish, Thaienglish, or Inglish, there is a critique of the power of English. What has not been explored so far is the rise of parody in such a critique – the more powerful any language becomes, the more open it is to being imitated, parodied, mocked. This humor is usually missing in the speech of many prestige users of the power-language. I must admit that the current gurus of World Englishes seem very staunch, at the cost of some sense of lightness of touch in their discourses that are basically unreadable to

many outside of the educated elite they claim to attack. This irony is unfortunate as the more seriously and therefore hypocritically the language views itself, the more destructive will be the laughter. This laughter has been hidden in Western cultures for too long. It is possible that at the heart of the Western quest for language is an untold secret: The crumbling of the Tower of Babel may have been the result of God's laughter, not his anger. The more we try to repress a part of language, the more powerful it seems to become as an underground force. Its eventual eruption is all the more powerful.

5. Is there any such thing as a "non-artistic shape"? Isn't that term oxymoronic if we understand shape as an artistic characteristic? It could be argued that all models, as shapes, are inherently architectural and sculptural – and therefore artistic. The use of models in Second Language Acquisition studies reflects this basic artistic, even aesthetic, urge in even the most scientifically minded of us.
6. In psycho-linguistics we seem to be saying that we want to know how the brain works as a language storage and retrieval system or as a transformative-generative machine. But it seems to me that this is just studying a phenomenon, not a cause. So, when we give such phenomena a priori conditions as chemical patterns, we may be taking signs for wonders and missing the point that such a project is fundamentally an artistic conception: language artistically reflects the brain patterns in a mimetic sense. By turning our backs on the centuries of interpretive experience in the practices of mimesis, we are missing the point that words reflect the ways of the brain as an organism. Our refusal to admit to the fundamentally artistic practice of psychology may explain why we haven't progressed far in finding anything very useful in our "non-art".
7. Paradoxically, the chemical actions of our brain that somehow store our "memory" of words, or even our creative faculties, may be understood scientifically. But to say that these storage areas and chemical ferment are language – the thing itself – seems faulty logic. It is tantamount to saying that the production plant is the product made in the plant. Such a statement may be fancy rhetoric, but it is hardly an objective scientific way of thinking. Analogy is more of an art than what we now like to call a science. QED: scientific discourse and thought ultimately disembrace into artistic expression. And this is only natural when all language is artistic.

While these points may suggest that there is a case for seeing Linguistics as an art, we should also recognize that our refusal to address these qualities may cause a blindness to the aesthetic values which seem to drive the students and teachers who want "good" English. It is difficult to see how, given the current divisions or sub-disciplines in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics, we can address in a straight forward and methodical way the major effects every teacher and student wants to know about and produce or create. Concretely, as a teacher I want to know what makes language:

- clear
- effective
- beautiful
- powerful
- usable

I am not convinced that much progress has been made towards providing techniques for helping us create this language in our own worlds of experience. Nor do I think we will develop such techniques while our discipline is divided into literature and language studies fragments. We should be learning how to utilize the artistic energy of our teaching tools. This brings me to the art of learning.

3. The art of teaching and teacher education

Once we as students or teachers take what we have "learned" or been "taught" in a classroom outside and try to put it into practice by experimenting with it in an artistic (playful or not) way, we

don't seem to approach the act as a test-tube exercise – we perform it as an art...intuitively, emotionally, imaginatively, tentatively, personally, flexibly, creatively. And once it works and we are inspired to go on, we learn how to do it ourselves, as every artist must so learn to create – independently. The drive to create or actualize ourselves in language is fundamental to our motivation to learn and to develop our language. We underestimate or ignore this power to our detriment as teachers.

If we are going to try to teach this art, then I believe it should be through fostering a profound humanistic *milieu*. To bring this about, we need to round ourselves and to relax about ourselves. One way to approach this building of our world is by not taking ourselves so seriously as we seem to do all the time. This is one of Erasmus' lessons. Against the seriousness of those who speak in the voice of science, we need to balance the comic, or at least light-hearted, voices of art. This balance needs to be addressed in the dialogues of Applied Linguistics.

We should study how to develop the comedy of learning, with its discovery scenes, reconciliations and sometimes foolish laughter. And to do this will require teachers who are able to facilitate the students' artistic expectations and productions – such teachers will lead by example. They will not hypocritically impose practices on students that they, the teachers, are incapable of demonstrating. Our job is not to program our students' brains, but to elicit, interpret, appreciate, evaluate and critique our students' performances in English.

These actions require literary critical skills. And these skills are not being prominently featured in any MA in TESOL as far as I am aware. What is at issue seems to me to be important in the evaluation process, and it is something our students know and believe, even if we ignore it. It is the beauty of the voice, written or spoken. If I can't recognize the beauty of my students' voices, how can I recognize the student in English as an autonomous creative person instead of seeing him or her as a machine? How can I understand that student's basically aesthetic priority to have an attractive English-speaking voice? When we can teach our student-teachers to be aware of the power offered by art, especially the power to change what is presented as set in stone, then that student-teacher is on the way to developing flexible, interesting and effective approaches to teaching and learning.

If language really is an art, then it seems common sense to say that the practice of it should also be an art. And if that is so, then shouldn't we be teaching it and learning it in ways and contexts that are evaluated in artistic terms? That we are not so doing is suggested by the absence of references to titles such as "The Art of Teaching" in the bibliographies of Jeremy Harmer, Penny Ur, or Tricia Hedge, arguably the three most important textbook writers on ELT methodologies over the past decade. That there are many references to this art in the literature begs the question of why these references are silenced in the current debates. My answer to this question is that such works are ignored or left out as they are old or "out of date." However, when we look at the frequency and density of distribution of words drawn from art in the lexicon of our profession (for instance, "performance", "role-play", "tone", "pitch", "genre approaches", "pattern", "discourse", "dialogue") we should not be asking, "Why *should* we use literature in language teaching?" but, "Why *can't* we see that as language users and teachers we are all artists and act accordingly?" These words in our metalanguage – a language-game created by academics – suggest at least some subconscious artistic frames of reference in our professional lexicon. It stands to reason that anyone using these words should be aware of the powerful artistic reverberations in his or her language and activities as a teacher. When we are deaf or insensitive to these possibilities, we are in danger of succumbing to cant or techno-speak. And that, it seems to me, is another form of hypocrisy. Such a lack of awareness of the tools we use, our instruments to create art, is still art – only bad art or self-defeating irony.

This is not an argument against science or the use of scientific ideas. I have actually been arguing that science and art are indistinguishable as language. However, there has been an imbalance in the literature concerning the need for scientific usage of English in our pedagogy. I only seek to remedy this imbalance here by stressing that there are other viable ways of looking at our scientific approaches. As techniques, art and science are not necessarily antagonistic. In fact, I would hope that both perceptions are capable of enriching each other. And that will benefit our pedagogy.

My main concern is that as teachers we should be thinking in an appropriate and productive context of what we are learning to do: the art of learning and teaching English. Until we can do this, I fear that there will remain a basic hypocrisy in our profession, and that this hypocrisy (“do as I say, not as I do”) creates confusion in the more perceptive students. Such conflicting responses may lead to a crisis in confidence within the classroom where teachers are alienated from the experience of their students by not sharing the feel for what should be the common endeavor in the language learning experience – the pursuit of effective English.

But before we can arrive at this point, there are many aspects of our pedagogy that need to be reconsidered in terms of their art. How artistic activity translates into the learner’s experience has yet to be developed very far in ELT. Until we have a profession that appreciates itself and is confident as a guild of artists, not as a cabal of technologists without creative impulses who at best deny their artistic possession, then the proposal of new artistic models that fully utilize literature not only as a resource, but as a way of life, will probably lack a wide receptive audience. I am aware that until we can recognize the artistic qualities inherent in our perceptions of language in everyday life and in our theoretical practices as linguists, that the barriers to such agreement will resist a more holistic view of language as, at least, not just a thing, but a beautiful thing.

As a stimulus for discussion, I would now like to offer some hints for new and creative formulations of the learner’s role in English. These hints are necessarily impressionistic or broad-brushed, as I want to avoid sounding dogmatic or overconfident. I see little justification in either of those attitudes given the current flux in ELT as I have tried to describe it. The view of the learner as an artist is important because the more the learner feels ownership of the language being learned, the more he or she will be motivated to learn and develop the language – to make the language his or her own, much as a poet makes the world. This ownership will metamorphose not just how we learn and teach English, but necessarily, as a result of that experience, the English we create as we learn.

Some ways literary experience may be used to frame and to interpret the learner’s language performance in our pedagogy are:

1. We know that good learners immerse themselves in what they do. When this is applied to language, we come up against a host of problems that relate to the confidence bump. Basically, a learner has to believe that he or she can already perform in the target language in order to be motivated enough to learn how to perform in the language. That is not a paradox. It is positive imaging practice. We are actually trying to encourage the learner to do what, according to Coleridge, every good reader of artistic works does – suspend disbelief. The *necessary* fiction is that the language being learnt and used is already real and working. It is not enough for the teacher to know or believe this is true. The students must know this for themselves. To operate in such an ambiguous environment, in what seems to be a utopian world, is not easy to conceive of, let alone to sustain. One way to prepare the student to make this leap is by developing in the student a love of reading about such fictive, utopian worlds and a willingness to undergo such suspended disbelief in the reading experience.
2. We should try to think of our students in metaphorical terms, at least sometimes. As a comic touch, which is designed to provoke a sense of parody in the learner, I try to encourage my students to think of the relationship between Dr Victor Frankenstein and the monster he creates when we read *Frankenstein*:
 - The students are creating their own version of this monster when they try to speak in English; I am the mad doctor trying to give them life in a foreign tongue; they should embrace their performance, not reject it.
 - The scripts they scrawl are acceptable with all the mistakes and the ugly blemishes of words crossed out.
 - Like Victor Frankenstein who raids morgues and graveyards for material to build his new Adam/monster, we teachers raid the graveyards of dead ideas, the textbooks of ELT, looking for any body parts that we can sling together in our monster lesson plans.

- Our students' voices are things of wonder, not ugly monstrosities that should be corrected and deformed in the name of some foreign, metropolitan, idea of what is acceptable.
 - Another metaphor could be the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde split personality. We are always someone else when we work in a foreign language – we have our masks and our magic potions or scientific experiments. This model is especially useful in helping the shy student suspend disbelief by acting as though he is confident. Soon enough, the appearance becomes the reality.
3. The voice is an aesthetic presence, whether that voice is written or spoken. We know that our students are painfully self-conscious about this when they are reluctant to sound ugly/stupid by speaking English in a way that to their ears is unpleasant. Singing in English is a way to get past these insecurities and to develop an aesthetic feel for English in our students. Why do we not give emphasis to students reading their work aloud in class? Is it that we don't want to hear their tortured voices as we think we can't do anything about them? If so, then we are abandoning our students at the very point they most need our help. We should be encouraging them to listen to how people read. This will help them to develop their inner voices in English, which will in turn encourage them to develop their personal voices in writing and speaking. We may be losing the oral arts of reciting and lecturing.
 4. It seems to be characteristic of artists that they do not take themselves too seriously. They are willing to laugh at themselves and to play the fool:
 - The simplicity of communicating gets lost when we burden ourselves with massive textbooks overfilled with advice that no one really can take in except in the most mechanical short-term ways.
 - By laughing at ourselves, we may find new ways of thinking about what we do.
 - We may also be more willing to change, to be less conservative. Being funny and clever are not mutually exclusive states.
 - The disruptive power of humor can help us to at least look at other possible ways of thinking about what we do as teachers. Laughter and folly can be cathartic and liberating forces that may help us to clear away much of the theory-driven bits and pieces – body-parts – that litter the floor of ELT at present.

I hope in these discussions of some ways to help our students perceive their own roles in the learning process that I have provided enough examples to demonstrate how we can and should be focusing on how to foster the students' development of a creative, critical spirit in which good English is valued and appreciated as an empowering skill that enables the students to sense their vital relationships with the roots of the language they are studying and its essential critical spirit. It is this spirit that I have tried to draw attention to in my dramatization of the dialogue that should be occurring between the literature and the language people.

But...

As a result of the forced divisions between literature and language, I am worried that certain practices have developed which, if left unchecked, will threaten our effectiveness as teachers. By turning a blind eye to the merits of good language and artistic practices, we may have unwittingly encouraged a passive acceptance of mediocre language usage in our profession. The danger is that once we accept our language and its usage as necessarily unimaginative and unattractive, we start to teach that belief to our students. The implication is, speaking personally, that whenever I had a teacher who did not *love* the subject being taught, I had a bad teacher for that subject. By seeing the teacher and the student as artists in the language we may avoid such cold, and therefore harmful, responses to language.

What follows is a series of questions which are intended to highlight some of the areas in ELT where an avoidance of, or a lack of appreciation for, the artistic faces of language may have negatively influenced our own English language use:

1. How many of us can, and/or do, read a full-length novel in English and discuss it meaningfully with students and colleagues?
2. How many of us can actually write an essay?
3. Why are there so few essays written in our field of ELT? (We have many “articles” and “reports”, whatever they are.)
4. How many of us keep a journal of any sort?
5. How many of us attend dramatic performances or poetry readings?
6. How many of us are in reading circles?
7. How many of us see any films apart from the most recent blockbusters?
8. Are we sensitive to the danger of demotivating our students by shoving literature down their throats in jumble exercises and tests? (Is there really much difference to the bad old ways of shoving Shakespeare down students’ throats?)
9. How many of us write letters to the editors of newspapers?
10. How many of us are confident to read aloud to others?
11. How many of us actually love this language that we study and teach?
12. Are there many Master’s level programs that offer courses on “The Art of Teaching”, “The Art of Reading”, “The Art of Writing”, etc.?
13. Can we evaluate textbooks as works of art?

It seems that these acts are basically literary. If we don’t practice them then are we not weakening ourselves as language users? And are we not failing to do the very things our pedagogical theories encourage us to facilitate in our students? If we don’t practice what we teach, does that make us hypocrites, at least in the eyes of some of our students? If we can’t do these things, how can we hope to teach our students to do them? I believe that these are important questions. Hopefully we can answer yes to a number of the items in the aforementioned list which is not meant to be complete or definitive.

By approaching our tasks as teachers from an artistic perspective we may remedy many of the problems that seem to mark our work at times as unimaginative, boring, rigid, dogmatic, or at least demotivating to ourselves and to our students. Our language should improve from a new emphasis on its aesthetic effect as beautiful, powerful, effective, clear and usable.

I would now like to turn to an appreciation of some of the positive qualities offered by an artistic pedagogy. In making this gesture, I am offering an open-endedness to the debate. I am aware that in the literature of our field such open-endedness is frowned upon as loose-structured. But, I for one find such endings aesthetically appealing. We already have too many articles that seek to box the reader in to a false sense of certainty, conclusiveness and authoritarian control. Such “well-made” structures can often be boring and too limiting by denying the reader a possibility for involvement in the future development of the text being read. Such closed texts are more appropriate in the critical realism of textbooks, and not so useful in modern approaches to the use of language. We should be trying to open our learners’ minds and our classrooms, not close them.

Coda

If, in trying to voice creatively or to dramatize the silent or invisible dialogues I hear around me throughout the ELT world, I have managed to generate a vision of possibilities of how things need not be the way we currently see them, and if I have managed to share my enthusiasm for the hopes held out by meaningful discourse in our profession, a discourse that is well-rounded, and not distorted by divisive segregation, then perhaps a reasonable conclusion would be that we can be more creative and imaginative in how we talk to each other and to our students. Then, and only then, will we be sensing a

breakthrough in how we conceive of ourselves as teachers of English, as artists worthy of the respect and admiration of others.

My trust in the artistic and playful characteristics of teachers makes me confident that the task of being creative is not too much. However, to feel relaxed enough to respond in this way, the present divides between the art and the science of language teaching and the study of English need to be bridged.

So too must we reach back to hear what has been written in the past that has shaped our practices now. To stress this activity, I have deliberately limited myself to trying to re-voice some of the ideas of Sapir and Halliday – ideas that I feel may have been pushed aside when we overlook some of their less easily subsumed thoughts for the sake of conformity or simplification in our textbooks. The writers of these foundation texts are still in touch with the voices of art. Such contact enriches these writers' work. We should remember our origins in their work, in their language. By bringing these voices back to life we are performing a literary act. We are also conceiving of our use of language as a concrete practice – as a dialogue or dramatization of arguments and dreams from other times and places. In such literary activities we may make consistent our views of language, pedagogy and how we know ourselves. Such a unity may heal the divide between us.

By putting back together the voices of literature and language, by putting them together in a dramatic dialogue, we will have built something worthwhile, interesting and imaginative – and we will have done it in a creative way.

What exactly will happen in that artistic future world is anyone's guess. Perhaps someone will write a utopian novel about the issues raised in this essay. Such a novel would be an interesting alternative to the boring and unimaginative textbooks we too often warp our sensibilities with at present. I hope that if we can carry on dialogue in an open-ended, pluralistic way, we will create an atmosphere where we will feel confident to take that leap into the creative aspects of language and ELT. But, if we as teachers all sound the same – out of a misplaced confidence in a unified single voice of a drab, Gradgrindish scientific certainty – we may develop a pedantic drone in our classroom and conference voices. Such a drone will be counter-productive in our teaching and communication, where it really matters.

When we have our own voices, and can celebrate them – when we have our own ways of expressing our ideas and dreams – there is hope for our profession. Then we are artists in our field. Without this creative outburst, I hear only the silence that sadly characterizes too many situations in the ELT world. With confidence in our art we may start writing free-flowing essays again, and keeping journals of our adventures in the classroom. This is a world I want to realize – utopian though it may seem.

References

- M.A.K. Halliday, (1978) *Language as Social Semiotic*, London: Edward Arnold.
Edward Sapir, (1921) *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech*. NY: Harcourt, Brace