



Teaching figures of speech as a productive skill and its influence on EFL learners' creative writing

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APA Citation:

Jaashan, H. M. S. (2022). Teaching figures of speech as a productive skill and its influence on EFL learners' creative writing. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 18(Special Issue 1), 423-433.

Submission Date:07/08/2021

Acceptance Date:18/10/2021

Abstract

Richards (2015) states that receptive competence is far more developed in all language users than productive competence and that in L2 learning, new lexis first shows as passive knowledge and later as active or productive competence. Moreover, productive competence is not a natural corollary to receptive competence; rather, the former requires *noticing* and *focused output*. The current study concerns itself with the *focused output* or the ability of the learners to produce comprehensible language post-intervention, which is essential for learners to acquire a new language. The study is conducted with 42 EFL learners at King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia, twenty of whom are taught Figures of Speech as a receptive skill while the remaining twenty-two are taught the Figures of Speech through three stages, designed to lead them into giving focused output or use the Figures of Speech productively in creative writing. The post-test results show that learners who are taught Figures of Speech as receptive skill could not write creatively, whereas the learners who are taught these as productive skill successfully apply the Figures of Speech to compose fine and new pieces of literature which exhibit moderate to a good grasp of creative writing. The study concludes that learners show a positive attitude and preference towards enhancing creativity by adopting such new and effective teaching methods. Accordingly, the study highly recommends adopting teaching Figures of Speech as a productive skill, in place of the commonly practiced method as a receptive skill to EFL learners.

Keywords: creative writing; figures of speech; productive skill; receptive skill; pedagogical stylistics; EFL learners

1. Introduction

Innovative methods of teaching English are at the center of interest of scholars and researchers worldwide. This continuous concern to reform English teaching methodologies has ushered in the use of strategies that make students expeditiously and thoroughly master language skills and accordingly enhance their ability to apply what they learn in practical contexts. There is little doubt that at first students will fail or get frustrated. Still, with regular exposure, they will be able to innovate and be creative in an academic classroom environment that encourages them to try something new (McIntyre,

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2018). In post-pedagogy theory of teaching and learning, Ulmr (1980) said that learners go through different stages till becoming innovative, namely, experimentation, failure, reflection, and adaptation. He acknowledges the value of experimentation in a classroom that gives students a chance for innovation and creative thinking (McIntyre, 2018). In traditional teaching methods, teachers are wont to concentrating on giving students the basic meanings of words as part of vocabulary teaching. As a result, when the students are allotted indirect vocabulary tasks, they only focus on putting them in sentences that match the basic meanings of words given in order to complete the task. This type of learning process operates in the complete absence of positive output and creative thinking opportunities, causing the learners to mentally 'switch off' to counter boredom. In the current communicative language teaching milieu, this teaching method fails to favor scholars because it depends on memorization that has single-mode-teaching. Over time, it kills students' enthusiasm and reduces their participation in-class activities.

Writing and speaking are productive skills that require recalling the input stored earlier in the brain through receptive skills (intensive listening and reading). However, Writing is the most challenging as a skill because it needs integrating different sub-skills like selecting words, constructing sentences, and presenting thoughts and ideas in the confines of a particular format. Learner involvement in the writing environment is essential to learn the skill because it provides them with opportunities to express their minds through it (Applebee, 2000; Perry & VandeKamp, 2000). Curriculum reforms and researchers regularly investigate the efficacy of school-based interventions in improving students' writing in general (Glaser & Brunstein, 2007). Khazaal (2019) opined those learners do not achieve progress in writing unless they are exposed to sufficient and massive language usage practice such as intensive reading with comprehension, knowing writing mechanisms, controlling over grammar rules, analyzing and communicating ideas effectively and concisely. Martinez Lirola (2015) concluded in his research that it is of utmost significance to expose students to different models of authentic texts so that they may observe the main features of different text types and understand how language functions in them. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), in their study, focused on the importance of training students on self-regulated learning that is likely to help them to produce texts with good quality. In addition, Graham et al., (2007) mentioned that when learners have a positive attitude towards creative writing, they will show signs of seriousness and invest greater effort while carrying out writing tasks.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Creative writing

Creative writing has become an important part of language education and literature in the field of ELT. This has led to several universities giving courses on creative writing. Yet, in many other universities, across the globe, the dominant view is that offering creative writing courses for EFL learners is still not worth the effort given the belief that creative writing is difficult to teach to L2 learners. As an EFL teacher, the researcher partially agrees with them that it is difficult, but his classroom experiments have shown that a large part of the learning objectives may be obtained by presenting the idea for students gradually within writing courses and applying it in its stages in literature courses aiming at triggering the ideas in the students' minds. Collins (1994) defined creative writing as the ability to create imaginative and productive ideas characterized by expressiveness and originality. The writers prioritize expressing their sentiment and emotions rather than presenting the fact. Therefore, it enables them to use inner feelings to create real, interesting and attractive stories for the targeted readers. Creative writing for students requires being aware of the basic techniques of literary expression, including aestheticism, stylistic devices, and narrative strategies. Ramey (2001) suggested three main things should be given to students in order to make them creative writers; first,

the opportunity to read and write a lot. Second, they must be taught by professional writers. Third, students need to learn about literary history and literary criticism in order to learn how to analyze a work of literature and learn the tools and concepts of critical production and reception.

Knowing language regularities is also something that the EFL learner has to be fully aware of. Out of these regularities, and in an advanced stage of language learning, the learner subverts/deviates from them for the purpose of creativity in expression and in writing. Because innovation and breaking linguistic norms through using Figures of Speech are inevitable and constant in language use and are a potential source for creativity (Carter, 2015; Pope, 1995), encouraging creativity, without neglecting language use restrictions, gives learners a spacious room to bring out the inner thoughts in pleasing and aesthetic scripts (Adsit, 2017; Hanauer, 2014).

The main aim of Reader Response Theory is the reader's centrality in textual interaction (Iser, 1987). It totally rejects the traditional teaching methods in which students are only expected to read text and get information out of it. It instead aims at experience-based learning like making a connection, inference, and prediction then responding to writing about the ideas stylistically. So, literature is an incomparable and an important rich source for good writing (Spack, 1985; Oster, 1989; Tomlinson, 1998; Stern, 2001; Al-Ahdal, 2020). The main gate for creative writing is reading, so different literary authors introduce learners to different writing styles. This encourages them to develop their own writing styles (Hale et al., 1995). Therefore, reading literature presents an authentic language input and stimulates EFL learners to share, discuss, and write their ideas (Belcher & Hirvela, 2001; Parras, 2005). This relationship between input (reading) and output (writing), in utilizing literature, familiarizes students with stylistic devices and rhetorical writing conventions (Weber-Fève, 2009).

3. Research Objective

The popular and traditional methods of teaching Figures of Speech to EFL learners at King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia, have not yet risen to the position of enhancing creative writing. It is a method that forces the learners to be passive. They just listen and receive definitions for each figure and then are given examples from literary texts. There is no way out for them to show creativity and innovation. This paper opens a new dimension regarding teaching Figures of Speech as a trail for creative writing. It aims to know the extent the learners can write creatively through practical application of Figures of Speech they learned as a productive skill. It also aims at exploring the learner's perception about teaching Figures of Speech as a productive skill.

4. Research questions

This current study is woven around two main questions:

- 1- Does teaching Figures of Speech as a productive skill enhance students' creative writing?
- 2- What is the attitude of EFL learners at KKU towards teaching Figures of Speech as a productive skill and its impact on their creative writing?

5. Methodology

The study is an experimental one. 42 EFL learners in the course "Introduction to Literary Forms" are the subjects of the study. They were divided into two groups. Twenty learners (1st group) were taught Figures of Speech through the classical method (as a receptive skill). The teacher only highlighted these Figures of Speech with examples from different texts. Then they were asked to use these to write their own poems/ short stories. The second group (22 learners) was taught Figures of

Speech through three stages. First, they were introduced to the main idea of the study and the main terminologies that are important in the study, such as (creative writing, student-centered approach, teacher-centered approach, stylistics, pedagogical stylistics, etc.), and how Figures of Speech function in literary texts. Second, they were allowed to read different literary texts and discover the Figures of Speech by themselves. Third, they were assigned to write their own short stories/poems using as many Figures of Speech as they could.

To gain an understanding of the attitude/perception of the students towards the teaching of Figures of Speech as a productive skill, a questionnaire with 14 items was administered to the group.

6. The Study

6.1. Teaching Figures of Speech

Pedagogical stylistics equips English teachers with practical tools to teach literary texts. Therefore, as Stockwell (2007) suggests, stylisticians are really the most suitable people who should teach literature because they know well how to bridge the gap between learners and literary texts. They also have a repertoire of skills and techniques developed through years of practice to enhance creativity. (Berliner, 2001; Turner-Bisset, 1999; Hassan et al., 2020). In this regard, Clark and Zyngier (2003: 342) say, "Pedagogical stylistics will be concerned first and foremost with sensitizing learners to linguistic and poetic problems specific to a text (very often literary, though non-literary texts can be applicable), then encouraging them to suggest solutions in the most appropriate way, and investigating how the interaction between students, teachers, and texts occurs".

Similarly, the first stage in creative writing (input stage) is to let students analyze literary works and be familiar with the textual and contextual elements of literature. Textual elements contain stylistic devices such as the atmosphere, theme, setting, plot, and style of a text. Contextual elements contain the different literary theories criticism, which is an intellectual exercise and natural students' response to literary works. In the second stage (output), they produce literary works to support and equip writers with different stylistic tools to make fine and new literature. Using critical theories to analyze literary works gives writers general background framework that enhances creative writing (Fenza, 2000). Clark (2007) applied teaching stylistic devices to students who are taught two different novels. She firstly introduced students to different stylistic devices through weekly lectures. Secondly, students are put into groups and asked to read the novels and pick up the Figures of Speech in them. She found that this activity raises students' comprehension of literary texts. Furthermore, it intensifies their literary awareness regarding styles and mode of writing. Gavins and Hodson (2007) designed another way of teaching Figures of Speech (pedagogical stylistics). They follow transferring stylistic skill scheme through letting active and efficient students took the role of teacher. The brilliant senior students teach stylistic skills to the other college students. The long and continuous experience makes students very knowledgeable and confident to teach junior students the stylistic skills in different genres and texts. In US universities, creative writing is a major course. A pre-requisite of studying elaborately many courses on literature such as poetry, drama novel short stories. In addition to that, the teachers need to teach learners what literary theory, creative writing, and the interconnection of literary theory and creative writing are and what all they need to know about how creative writing gets produced.

EFL learners at Saudi universities lack courses that contain a sense of creative writing. This paper goes a step further, and it assigns a scheme that enables EFL learners to be creative writers. Out of the Figures of Speech that the group learned and encountered in literary texts, they are asked to write a self-piece of literature. This technique goes through three main junctures. First, the students are taught the different Figures of Speech with examples extracted from various literary texts. Second, they are asked to read novels/ poems and pick up as many Figures of Speech as possible. Third, they were

asked to brainstorm and write a short story/poem (creative writing) through applying the Figures of Speech they learned. The post-test results were amazing. They show that some students have the potential to be creative writers in the future. They create fine and new pieces of literature. This method enables them to apply practically what they learned instead of just receiving knowledge. On the other hand, the performance of the learners in the other group who were taught the Figures of Speech using the traditional method (as a receptive skill) lacks perfection and accuracy.

The researcher, too, gained the impression that this method of teaching has benefits for students at the levels of input and output. It teaches students the content of the material and helps them to master it through the application. In the beginning, students, in general, did not favor the ideas of creative writing but later on, such perspective vanished, and they become optimistic about the idea when the researcher simplified it to them. Some students became curious and ambitious to try this technique. The following are samples of those who were taught Figures of Speech as a productive skill. Those who were taught them as a receptive skill failed to produce any creative piece. The majority left the pages blank, and some others copied and pasted the poems that are part of their prescribed books.

6.1.1. My Damn New car (short story)

My Damn New Car

He dreamed of riding it with his friends, drifting and traveling to many cities. Dad promised to buy me one if I pass the exams with good grades.

Ali, "you are still young, no driving license you have" mom said.

"Mom don't interfere, Dad promised to buy me one, and all my friends in my age have cars" Ali told her.

My little brother Ahmed (3 years old) was happy because he saw me happy. "I will take you with me in the car wherever I go". I told him. He was the source of joy and happiness for the family. We all love him. He keep waiting for me to give him some sweets I bought form my school café. The moment I put my bag on the ground, he ran, opened it, threw the books out and got his sweets.

"Keep the sweet out and give him immediately when you arrive, don't wait till creating mess" Mom said.

"I love see him in this way" I told her while hugging him.

Ali told his friends about his coming car. They were happy because Ali will join them drifting. They used to tell him their expertise with cars drifting. Ali was listening and eager to have this experience.

How is your study and when the exam starts? "Dad asked Ali.

Next week we will start the exam?" Ali answered.

How is your preparations? Dad asked.

Good. I will score good marks to have a new car as you promised.

HHHHHH, yes I remember.

Dad called the school, the principal assured him that his son got high marks and scored 1st position.

"Where is Ali?" Asked his wife

"He is sleeping now".

"I am proud of him. He scored 1st position in school. I bought him a car. This is the key".

Wife said "Ali is still young. His age is 15 and he is not mature enough to drive car. He might make accidents".

"He is like others. I already bought the car. It is outside in the garage. Let me surprise him with it".

Ali was so happy with car. But he does not know how to drive. He drove it recklessly. Within a month he did more than 5 minor accidents.

One day, he took his little brother Ahmed with him in the car. In the road, he met one of his friends.

"Let's go with friends somewhere?" A friend suggested.

"Where to? I can't, my little brother is with me." Ali answered.

"It is a matter of 1 hour, then you will back." A friend said.

"Ok" Ali

All friends were waiting in the streets with their cars. They crazily drove the cars.

Ali started doing like them.

He enjoyed it. He exceeded the speed limits. Crossed the red lights.

At 7:00 PM

"Are you the father of Ali?" This is Aseer hospital.

"Yes, it is me". What happened?

"Your son made an accident. The little boy died and the older one is in ICU with severe injuries."

After 3 months Ali arrived home with wheel chairs as a permanent companion.

Respondent number 11 from the 2nd group produced this piece of creative writing as a short story with a social message using some Figures of Speeches he learned during the intervention. This step itself is a good trial because it opens students' minds to how to be creative writers. The story is about the consequences of not abiding by the rules of driving cars in the country when an underage,

untrained boy goes for a spin. The Father buys a car for his immature son, who is all 15 years old. The result of such a reckless decision was the death of a young child and the lifelong disability of the 15-year-old.

6.1.1.1. *Figures of Speech*

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 1- <i>Metaphor:</i> | <i>My Damn New Car</i> |
| 2- <i>Simile:</i> | <i>with wheelchairs as a permanent companion</i> |
| 3- <i>Inversion:</i> | <i>no driving license you have</i> |
| 4- <i>Metonymy:</i> | <i>Dad called the school</i> |

6.1.2. *Farwell day*

- | | |
|--|-----|
| <i>What shall I say in a farewell day?</i> | (b) |
| <i>My half left to eternity</i> | (b) |
| <i>In a journey without delay</i> | (a) |
| <i>Still many things we could not do together</i> | (c) |
| <i>Death ends lives one after another</i> | (c) |
| <i>Soul will meet to complete duties in the last day</i> | (a) |
| <i>What shall I say in a farewell day</i> | (a) |

Another student brainstormed and created a touching poem titled *Farewell Day*. It talks about the suddenness of death that ended the life of a man's companion, his wife. The grieved husband said that there were many things they did not do together in life because death set them apart. But he assures the readers that hereafter the souls will meet each other again and complete what they left unfinished in life. The student applies what he has learned and creates a fine poem with many Figures of Speech.

6.1.2.1. *Figures of Speech*

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1- <i>Rhyme scheme:</i> | <i>a b a c c a a</i> |
| 2- <i>Metaphor:</i> | <i>My half left to eternity</i> |
| 3- <i>Personification:</i> | <i>death end life one after another</i> |

6.1.3. *To my old love*

- | | |
|--|-----|
| <i>To the one whom I love one day</i> | (a) |
| <i>What can I say</i> | (a) |
| <i>You are the only love in my days</i> | (b) |
| <i>And you will still the one for the others days</i> | (b) |
| <i>Sitting remembering you, I enjoy</i> | (c) |
| <i>Seeing you in my dreams is a big joy</i> | (c) |
| <i>Talking, smiling, looking, at me for a long sit</i> | (d) |
| <i>These are the hope for this poor heart</i> | (d) |
| <i>Now, for the future plans</i> | (b) |
| <i>Hoping come and stays</i> | (b) |

See how weak I become (d)

See how weak I become (d)

This poem talks about the old, present, and future love. Love is the source of enjoyment for the writer. His ultimate goal is always to see his love. The student with his broken language triumphed over the linguistic challenges to create this piece of literature and experimented in the realm of creativity.

6.1.3.1. Figures of Speech

Inversion: sitting remembering you I enjoy

I enjoy sitting remembering you

Personification: this is the hope for the poor heart

Rhyme scheme: aa bb cc dd bb dd.

6.1.4. Do one thing today no two things tomorrow

Wake up! Give up procrastination. (a)

Wake up! Plan your day (b)

Still long is your destination (a)

Hurdles are more in your way (b)

Do one thing today (b)

Tomorrow is full of depression (a)

Don't delay, don't delay (b)

The idea of this poem is not delaying responsibilities, overcoming the temptation to procrastinate. Using many Figures of Speech, it exhorts the readers to achieve one thing today, which is better than intending to achieve two things tomorrow.

6.1.4.1. Figures of Speech

Parallelism: Wake up! give up procrastination

Wake up! Plan your day.

Inversion: still long is your destination

your destination is still long

Rhyme scheme: ab ab aba

The data thus collected from the second group brings the researcher to the conclusion that Figures of Speech are important because they help learners to analyze and understand literary texts. They are also good tools that enable learners to be creative writers if these tools are taught as triggers for creativity. This aligns with Clark (2007), who found that teaching Figures of Speech as a productive skill raises students' comprehension of literary texts and intensifies their literary awareness regarding styles and writing modes. It also stands with (Fenza, 2000) who said creative writing goes through two main stages (input and output). The input stage is when we let students analyze literary works and be familiar with the textual and contextual elements of literature. The output stage is the one in which the learners produce literary works. The purpose of this is to support and equip writers with different stylistic tools to make fine and new literature. Using critical theories to analyze literary works gives writers a strong, general background framework that enhances creative writing by acting as scaffolding. In addition to that, this study goes with the idea of Gavins and Hodson (2007) who

confirm that it is best that the teachers teach learners what literary theory, creative writing, and the interconnection of literary theory and creative writing and what all they need to know about the production of creative writing is. Therefore, we may conclude by saying that teaching Figures of Speech as a productive skill enhances students' creative writing and is a good practice for inclusion in the curriculum.

Regarding students' attitude about teaching Figures of Speech as a productive skill, a web-based survey with 13 items was administered to the students who were taught Figures of Speech as a productive skill. A total of 16 students completed the online survey. Their responses to the survey are as follows in Table 1.

Table 1. Questionnaire Responses

S.no	Items	Mean	SD
1	Understanding Figures of Speech is mandatory to analyze literary texts	4.29	0.80
2	Teaching Figures of Speech as a receptive skill gives me space for creative writing	2.35	1.20
3	Teaching Figures of Speech as a productive skill helps me to be a creative writer.	4.39	0.81
4	The course (Literary Forms) should be taught by those who have expertise in stylistics.	3.80	0.98
5	I understand Figures of Speech when I apply them in my own writing.	4.45	0.83
6	Students should be given a chance to use Figures of Speech to criticize literary texts they study.	4.29	0.80
7	Figures of Speech should be focused on/considered in all literary courses.	4.43	0.83
8	Teacher-centered-approach in teaching Figures of Speech is effective.	2.41	1.19
9	Student-centered-approach in teaching Figures of Speech is effective.	4.30	0.85
10	Students creative writing should be included in course's method of assessment.	3.50	0.99
11	Creative writing is not complicated as we expected.	4.33	0.76
12	Teaching Figures of Speech as a productive skill let me know how to write creatively even if I am not interested in creative writing.	3.88	0.96
13	There should be a space for creative writing in writing-skill courses.	4.40	0.84

As is evident from the data, the students generally show positive perception, and they agree on the importance of teaching figures as a productive skill because it enables them to write creatively. They also prefer learning them from teachers who know literature and linguistics. They are with the idea of incorporating creative writing in all literary courses and its use as a tool of course assessment. In addition to that, they show that this method of teaching triggers them to be autonomous and creative writers. This attitude aligns with Graham et al (2007) who mentioned that when learners have a positive attitude towards creative writing, they will show signs of seriousness and invest much effort while carrying out writing tasks.

7. Conclusion

Creative writing as Collins (1994) defines it is the ability to create imaginative and productive ideas characterized by expressiveness and originality. To reach the desirable level of creative writing, students are required to master the important and basic techniques of literary expression such as aestheticism, stylistic devices, and narrative strategies. Innovation and breaking linguistic norms

through using Figures of Speech are inevitable in language use and are the main source of creativity. This comes through three main phases: (i) intensive reading and writing; (ii) students must be taught by professional writers and; (iii) they need to know about literary history and literary criticism (Ramey, 2001). After this, they will be able to analyze any work of literature and learn the tools and concepts of critical production and reception. Regarding the first goal of the study, the samples cited above are clear indications of that. The students create fine pieces of literature containing different Figures of Speech, a sign of the building up of their creativity. It is proven that this method of teaching is effective, and it has a positive influence on students' creative writing performances.

The results of the survey indicate that the students are comfortable with the method of teaching Figures of Speech as a productive skill. It enhances their needs for autonomous and creative writing. This positive attitude will surely make them serious and encourage them to do their best while undertaking writing tasks.

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