

"Language and Literature as Siamese Twins: Pulling Down th Dichotomies"

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Abstract

This paper asserts that language and literary studies are a twosome and calls on experts in the 'twin' disciplines to tap from each other for mutually beneficial ends. Language is the means by which literature is created and literature becomes the exemplification of linguistic novelty, the platform where we experience language as it is in its everyday, aesthetic, rhetoric, profane, esoteric and sublime uses. The paper reveals that both in their conceptualisation and practice, language and literature rely on each other. The literary artist and critic must be conversant with linguistic methods to function profitably and the language analyst must make recourse to literature for data for linguistic studies. Among others, aspects that establish their relationship include language and literary pedagogy, literary creativity itself with language as its tool, stylistics, linguistic analysis of literary texts, creative figurative uses of language. Therefore, it is needless to create boundaries and dichotomies between subjects that rely on each other. Rather, it is recommended that the perceived dichotomies be pulled down to allow a harvest of knowledge from both sides.

Key words: Language, Literature, Siamese Twins, Dichotomies

Introduction

There have been and there still are vigorous academic debates, sometimes polemical, on the dichotomy between language and literature and on the relationship between them. Scholars in language and literary studies have been at daggers drawn over the independence or the interdependence of the disciplines. Dwelling on the polemics on this discourse, Toolan (1990, p. 1) observes that: "Too many of the contributors have preferred, for whatever reason, to adopt a combative stance in the face of their alleged antagonists, and have indulged in a destructively extreme dialecticalism of debate". The arguments and counter-arguments by practitioners aim either to draw distinctions and boundaries between the two sister-disciplines on one hand or to establish the bond

between them on the other hand. The arguments in favour of dividing lines between the two appear to be more stringent, vehement and overwhelming as evidenced by practice. In many Departments of English in universities in Nigeria and perhaps across the globe, courses are designated as language-based or as literature-based and teachers are said to specialize in either of the sets of courses of which they only can or should teach respectively. That is, we have specialist-teachers of language courses and those of literature courses; they religiously maintain their boundaries. The students are also made to specialize in language or in literature as sub-disciplines in the Department. Students get the impression that it is convenient to choose one

over the other as led by their teachers or according to the one they find easy to deal with or even because they believe that these are 'separate' disciplines independent of each other. It does seem the controversy is being handed down by teachers to students and it is being carried on by both teachers and students.

Kolawole (1997) reports that there exists a controversy between the literary critics and the language experts over the nature of their disciplines. Among other points, they emphasise the distinctiveness of each branch of knowledge as being a different entity. While literary criticism focuses on value, purpose and aesthetics, linguistics borders on phonemes, stress, syntax and lexico-semantics. In extending the conflict, the literary writer/critic considers the application of linguistic tools on literature as extraneous and burdensome while the language scholar insists that linguistics should not depart from its sentence analysis. The controversy is aimed at making each to stay within its domain. Kolawole (1997, p 1) states further that "This schism has lasted for a very long time." Indeed, the schism dates several decades back and it is not limited to Nigerian universities as revealed in Fowler's (1976, p 1) statement:

When I read English at the University of London in the late fifties, I had to make a choice between the 'literature syllabus' and the 'language syllabus'... This choice of alternative emphases reflected a traditional division in the field of English studies.

However, there are also strong espousals of the synthesis of language and literature aimed at pulling down the boundaries and dichotomies or at least, at dousing the unnecessary antagonism. Jakobson's (1989: p.

xiii) assertion of over fifty years ago is relevant to the thesis of this paper: "A linguist deaf to the poetic function of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistic problems and unacquainted with linguistic methods, are equally flagrant anachronisms". Earlier positions than Jakobson's have equally drawn attention to the marriage of language and literature including I. A. Richards's *Practical Criticism* (1929), Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's *Understanding Poetry* (1938), Winifred Nowotny's *The Language Poets Use* (1962), David Lodge's *Language of Fiction* (1966), Roger Fowler's *Essays on Style and Language* (1966), *The languages of literature* (1976) and so on. There are also a number of fairly recent books that establish the inherent interface between language and literature, among others, Geoffrey N. Leech and Michael H. Short's *Style in Fiction: A linguistic introduction to English Fictional Prose* (1985), Emmanuel Ngara's *Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel* (1982), Michael Toolan's *Stylistics of Fiction* (1990), Valerie Shepherd's *Literature about Language* (1993), Paul Simpson's *Language through Literature: An Introduction* (1996).

Indeed, this study holds that language and literature are Siamese twins, irrespective of their seemingly different internal and external characteristics, approaches and functions. As Azuiké (2012, p. 65) puts it, "The language and literature of a society are interwoven and provide the vehicle for the encapsulation and expression of its ethos and mores." It is our contention in this paper that the letter and spirit of language and literature of a nation are the same. There are many reasons and much evidence to bolster this position: the meanings of the subjects, their operations and applicability, their sub-disciplines, example,

stylistics, linguistic and literary criticism and so on.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to conceptualise language and literature as innately related sub-disciplines that draw insights from each other. The objectives include to establish that symbiotic relationship, to dismantle the perceived boundaries between the disciplines and to encourage synergy among language teachers/students and literature teachers/students and their critics alike.

Conceptualising language and literature as Siamese twins

Language has been defined in a multitude of ways because of its sundry social functions. Literature has also been variously conceptualised and it is still being viewed in many senses. Language is seen as every means of every sort or level of communication. By this, language is speech, writing, dressing, positioning (posture), culture, religion, identity because by means of these, we communicate. No wonder Pratt (1987) quoted in Toolan (1990) sees language "as a nexus of social identity" (p.4). However, we are concerned here with language as speech and/or its written representation. Literature is generally every form of writing and specifically the various forms of creative writing including the novel, play, poem, short story etc. Abrams and Harpham (2012, p. 199) having recognised the common use of literature to "designate fictional and imaginative writings – poetry, prose fiction, and drama" aver that the term has an expanded use, to designate "any other writings ... that are especially distinguished in form, expression and emotional power". Thus, the domain of literature is wide even though here, we want to apply it in its restricted sense

which Agyekum (2007, p. 1 – 2) defines as "the artistic, imaginative and creative expression of individual and group experiences, nature and values of a group of people over a certain period of time by the medium of language whether written or oral". On the medium of language for creation of literature, Ngara (1982, p. 10) asserts that:

Although a work of art consists of various elements – such as plot, theme, character and ideas – without language, these elements would not be what they are; in other words, they are realised and given form through the medium of language. In our analysis of literature, therefore, we need to have a sound understanding of the phenomenon called language, of its nature and functions.

From the above, it is deducible that there is a relationship between language and literature. Agyekum's definition (2007) locates that symbiotic relationship between language and literature. Literature is, overall, language in use. Omole (2008, p. 32) cites Fowler as saying that literature is language, because the former "provides a world where a reader can experience the infinite possibilities of language." Chapman (1973) reveals that literature is unique because of its manipulation of language. According to him:

Literature, then, seems to offer language which is different from what may be loosely termed the 'normal' or 'everyday' usage of a speech-community, yet which is intelligible to the members of that community if they are willing to apply a special standard of acceptability. (p. 3 - 4)

Literature becomes a vehicle for the revelation of the possibilities of language use available to a linguistic community. In this way, as the

linguist studies the language of a people, their linguistic behaviours and their literary works, he takes into consideration the limitless capacity inherent in the language of literature as it is in real life. Fowler (1976: p. 11) explicitly establishes the convergence of these fields, noting the need for the knowledge of language in the literary enterprise:

Literary criticism is an account of the use of language in some particular types of text. It would be surprising if knowledge of language in general did not enhance understanding of specific instances of language use. There is thus a powerful *a priori* argument for critics and students knowing about language.

Like language, literature is a social practice and a cultural artefact with all the underpinnings of its heritage. It emanates from that heritage and becomes a reflection of every aspect and essence of the society's being. The language and the literature of the society exemplify each other to the extent that we find the language of the people in their literature and savour their literary creativity in their linguistic habits and repository. Amuta (1989: p. 106) declares that what "we have come to popularize as 'literature' consists in the creative exploitation of the social properties of human language for the mediation of social experience in a manner that approximates an apparent resolution of the contradictions of daily life...". So, language and literature are both tools for interrogating and negotiating the complications of man's social life.

According to Azikiwe (1998, p. 206)

It is not in doubt that language is not separable from literature, which means that, they are two sides of a coin. None has and/or should have an edge over the other

because they are complementary. Indeed, they are parts of a whole.

In the same vein, having acknowledged that the relationship of language and literature is tricky and paradoxical, Lawal (2020) views language as the raw material of literature like stone is that of sculpture and sound that of music. He conversely situates literature "within the limitless and ever-expanding province of language" concluding that the two are "like Siamese twins".

Language scholars and literary critics alike are involved in commenting on, evaluating, analysing, criticizing and appraising works of literature with the mutual subtle objective of improving practices in the interdependent fields. The literary writer, nay critic, needs to use language in some acceptable and creative way for his/her product to be qualified as literature, whether novel or poem or play or criticism. Otherwise, a work is discountenanced as non-literary. As Fowler (1986, p. 2) reports in his reading of Lodge's work, *Language of Fiction*, the basic assumption is that "The novelist's medium is language; whatever he does, *qua* novelist, he does in and through language". Fowler goes further to assert that "...language is the essence of literature" (1986: p. 3).

In practical terms, the interdependency of the twin disciplines reflects in the areas highlighted below.

Language and literature pedagogy

In the pedagogy of language, literature plays a key role for no language teaching class is complete without the use of literature texts. They are used in the teaching of language at all levels of education. The literature texts are meant to help the language learner come in

contact with language in use. The teacher draws examples of language use from the texts to consolidate the learner's internalisation of linguistic data and even facilitate the unconscious adoption and adaptation of the rhythms of speech as found in the texts. Allen (1965: p. 296) refers to the role of literature in the teaching of language as a 'reinforcement device'. Similarly, Williams (1999: p. 255) notes that:

Since literature organises language in the most exemplary fashion, the (second) language learner must be aware of the importance of applying the language of literature as a model for his [their] own use. The teaching of literature has the practical value of enabling the student to learn about the (second) language as well as use it.

Using literature texts in teaching language is thus particularly relevant to second language pedagogy which is the case in Nigeria and other English as second language communities around the world. The classroom is the most veritable environment in which the language is learnt and the literature text is a key instrument.

What is true about the role of literature in language teaching/learning is true about language in literature teaching – that in the pedagogy of literature, language plays a key role because no literature teaching class is complete without language inputs. Language inputs such as sentence structures and patterns, word creation rules, tense forms, the semantics of words in contexts, etc. will help in literary creativity as well as in the understanding of the text. Since language is the writer's tool, the learner of the literature text must know the rubrics and the niceties of the language to

make a headway. The literature teacher thus relies on their knowledge of language to impart literary skills.

Figures of speech

The concern of the literary artist with figures of speech is a concern with the nuances of language as it operates in the speech community. Therefore, one of the fascinating, indeed the basic, areas of connection between language and literature is the preponderance of figurative expressions in the language of literature. The language of literature is variously referred to as literary language and figurative language. Agyekum (2007: p.140 – 141) explains figurative language as:

Figures of speech and word combinations that go beyond literal (denotative) meaning; it is an intentional departure from the normal order, construction, usage and meaning of words so as to create a pictorial effect on the audience and readers. Examples include metaphor, simile, personification, apostrophe, irony, hyperbole, metonym, synecdoche, etc.

The points above show that literature is language used in a special way to achieve a rhetoric effect. Therefore, literature is language; it is language in different infinite shapes, performing different actions, functions, and having different meanings (Omole 2008; Abochol, 2011).

For the purpose of clarity, Abochol (2011: p. 161) classifies figures of speech into five (5) categories, all of which "relate to words and their extended meanings." They include: (1) figures of resemblance or relationship (e.g. simile, metaphor, conceit, parallelism, personification, metonymy, synecdoche and euphemism); (2) figures of emphasis or

understatement (e.g. hyperbole, litotes, rhetorical questions, antithesis, climax, bathos, paradox, oxymoron, irony); (3) figures of sound (e.g. alliteration, repetition, anaphora and onomatopoeia); (4) verbal games and gymnastics (e.g. pun and anagram) and; (5) figures of error (e.g. malapropism, periphrasis and spoonerism). The aforementioned are instances of figurative language usage; they are evidence of language use that departs from the convention. This does not mean that language in literature is always a departure from the conventional. It is rather a reflection of the ways language is used in different contexts since literature re-enacts life in all its ramifications. Depending, therefore on the social context being re-enacted, the suitable nuances of language use reflect.

Stylistics

Stylistics straddles language and literature and exemplifies the interdependence of the two subjects. Some see it (stylistics) as a linguistic venture, others see it as a literary one. That is why we can be talking about linguistic stylistics or literary stylistics. Literary stylistics is the study of the various uses to which writers put words in prose, poetry and drama. Chapman (1973, p. 15) posits that, "One task of literary stylistics is... to determine how far and in what respects a poet's language in fact shows deviant features. Another is to note how a writer uses generally accepted features to special effect." Whether it is about the style of an author, or that of an age, or that of a genre, literary stylistics shows the relationship between language and literature, since it is in the latter that the possibilities of language use are more pronounced and demonstrated. Eyo (2005, p. 28) provides more details by saying that the purview of literary stylistics includes:

The language habit of a particular writer (a writer's idiolect), the language identity of a group of writers in a particular period (writers' literary dialect), figurative and unconventional language use, striking and significant linguistic features, foregrounding, artistic deployment of extra-linguistic phenomena like symbols, myths, folklore, stress and intonation, among others....

Language use in literature is, therefore, the concern of literary stylistics, which explains the nexus between language and literature. Ngara (1982, p. 34) notes that stylistic criticism gives emphasis to the aesthetic aspects of literary works of art with parameters of a linguistic nature in mind.

While aiming to establish its domain, Widdowson (1975) draws attention to the fact that stylistics "involves both literary criticism and linguistics" (p.3) and it is "an area of mediation between [the] two disciplines" (p.4). The fact that stylistics straddles linguistics (language) and literary criticism (literature) buttresses the involvement of the one with the other. This is why Leech and Short (1985: 6) describe stylistics as "an adventure of discovery for both the critic and the linguist".

Literary theory and criticism

Some traditional/foundational literary theories are based on the use of language to formulate the principles and critical theories of literature, a further proof of the symbiotic relationship between language and literature. Agyekum's (2007: p. 123) informed position is that, "Literary Criticism has its fundamental basis from language.... The discussions in Literary Criticism concentrate on the language

used by the writer." Some of the literary theories that apply language principles to the criticism of literature are: formalism, structuralism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, among others.

Formalistic criticism analyses a literary work by examining the language and literary devices which gives it a form. It regards literature as a special use of language. It investigates the *literariness* of literary works, not its content. The focus of formalism is the technique of literary works which has to do with a special use of language. Therefore, in formalism, the practice is to do a close reading of the language and the diverse and dynamic literary devices (figures of speech) that draw attention to themselves, and estrange and 'defamiliarize' experience and ordinary language or discourse (Rice and Waugh 1989; Raji 1999; Bertens 2008; Agyekum 2007).

Another literary theory that utilizes language in its criticism of literature is structuralism. The proponents and practitioners of this theory hold that the same way that language has a grammar, rules, system governing its organisation, combination and a network of relationships and inter-relationships (such as subject, verb, object, complement and adverbial) (Raji, 1999, p. 222), so does literature have a system of internal organisation (an underlying structure) which contains the fictive space that has a beginning, middle and end. The explicit model of linguistic analysis is the bedrock of the structuralist criticism of literature. As phonemes form words, and words form sentences, and sentences form paragraphs, the same way does a literary work develop from an internal organic structure. Structuralism therefore believes that there is a poetics or grammar of literature (Raji, 1999, p. 222), which is based on the 'science' and signs that make up the system of a literary work

(Rice and Waugh, 1989, p. 23) – a literary system that thrives on self-sufficiency and literary completeness (Raji, 1999, p. 223). Structuralism has given rise to semiology/semiotics and narratology (Bertens, 2008, p. 51-55).

Deconstruction is also a literary/critical approach that uses language as its tool of criticism. As an aspect of post-structuralism, deconstruction, as championed by Jacques Derrida, presupposes that language is uncontrollable; therefore, a literary text is capable of eliciting underlying and multiple meanings, such that there can never be a *closure* (Bertens, 2008, p. 103). The implication of that in the reading of a text is that as language is unstable, so is there plurality of meaning in a text. And, the reading process must involve the dismantling of all centred/hegemonic/privileged meanings in order to make room for "an infinite flow of meaning" (Bertens, 2008, p. 107). Ugwu (2013, p. 87) argues that deconstruction "...proposes that a literary text has varying levels of interpretation other than its seemingly definite or stable meaning.... Deconstructive reading further aims at producing varying meanings of a text through the careful tracing and dismantling of possible binary oppositions, contradictions and ambiguities inherent in the literary work." It is evident that language plays an important role in the deconstructive reading of a text.

Psychoanalytic literary criticism also privileges the application of language. The theory borrows from the cognitive science to analyse the minds, personalities, emotions of writers and their characters as reflected in literary works. It relates from the workings of the mind on language which is a psycholinguistic concern. Agyekum (2007, p. 128) opines that this approach to literary

criticism draws from the objects, language and other elements of the text to show the symbolic meanings that reflect states of mind. The psychoanalyst dwells on the workings of the mind on language and the workings of language on the mind in the creation of characters and the narration of events. This explains Ortsega's (2015: 216) point that, "...writers have been using what certain characters say about other characters to inform us about their feelings since time immemorial." Okolo (2014, p. 110) adds that "Psychoanalysis therefore is a 'deconstruction' of self, an inquiry into the recesses of a person's being to discover an identity or identities 'hidden' or not immediately accessible to that person." This 'deconstruction' of the repressed and the sublime materials of the conscious and the unconscious mind is done using the resources of language and based on the workings of language and the mind. Furthermore, nearly every approach to the analysis of written works of art contribute to the understanding of linguistic creativity and the revelation of the depth of the functions of language including the cultural, the historical, the sublime and the symbolic.

Conclusion

There are dogmatists on both sides of the divide, language teachers who say they cannot put up with the triviality of storytelling and literature teachers who say they cannot condone the tedium and stringency of language. But the language teachers find the niceties of language in literature and the literature teachers find the tools of literature in language. As such, the controversy or the dichotomy is needless. Even with disciplines that are clearly distinct, there is interconnection because of the apparent overlap of knowledge: history, language and literature drawing

insights from each other (historicism); literary criticism and psychology (psychoanalysis); language, literature and sociology (sociological criticism); arts and science etc.

Teachers and students of language and literature have much in common and much to gain from each other. Language is the lifeblood of literary creativity and analysis while literature is the evidence of language application. Literature uses language for its products – novel, poem, drama – which provide data for linguistic investigation. Literary scholars must know both the rigidity and the malleability of their tool to be artistic with it on one hand and to be critical of its use on the other. The language scholar must then relate a piece of literature with their experience of language because a literary work exemplifies the systems of the language. This dependency makes their symbiosis obvious and inevitable.

Therefore, the dichotomies should be pulled down and be replaced by a warm embrace of synergy. The understanding of the role of language in literary works and the role of literary works in the investigation of language can be enriching to both language studies and literary studies. Teachers and students of language and literature should see each other as pursuing the same goal. We should no longer create the boundaries by exempting the language teacher and student from the literary enterprise or exempting the literature teacher and student from linguistic exploration, after all, that, is indeed what the literary artist does, explore the resourcefulness of language. Teachers of language courses and those of literature courses should no longer see each other as doing different things but as doing complementary things in complementary disciplines.

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