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IMAGERY AND COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: ACCENTUATING WORD PICTURES IN ESSAY WRITING PEDAGOGY IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This work analyses *the importance of achieving competence in essay writing by emphasising the learning and mastery of the use of figurative language to develop essay writing skills in the English language class. Writing, especially essay writing; is often the means of testing knowledge in various subjects in post-primary institutions of learning. There is therefore no gainsaying the importance of mastering essay writing skill in the English language class. Research reveals that using word pictures (figurative expression) help to create vivid images that enhance the clarity and freshness of expression. Word pictures used in essays, help learners to produce emotive language that makes their essays exciting to read. If well managed, accentuating word pictures in essay writing will help in enhancing essay writing communicative competence.*

Keywords: Imagery; Communicative Competence; Accentuating; Word Pictures; Pedagogy; English Language Classroom.

Introduction

In everyday communication among humans, whether graphic or oral, words are used to create pictures for people to vicariously see, feel, hear, taste, smell and move. Images are usually created in speech and writing through the use of figurative language. The images created through word pictures may be visual, auditory, gustatory, tactile, thermal, olfactory, organic imagery, and kinaesthetic/proprioceptive. Teaching figures of speech and imagery is one of the ways to improves literacy and communication skills and help learners to produce rich creative writing (Hong Thu, 2019). Figures of speech and imagery in a language reflect the culture of the native speakers of the language. A mastery of word pictures in the English language created through figures of speech, idioms and imagery therefore, brings learners to the nuances of the language through better accessibility which makes for a better grasp and understanding of the language. Moreover, the goal of language teaching is to get learners to attain a near-native-speaker mastery of the language. This is why it is important for learners in the English language class not only to be

able to identify figures of speech and imagery but they should be able to attain a high-level competence in their usage to enable them to skilfully integrate word pictures (imagery) in their essays.

Communicative competence describes learners' capacity to comprehend messages, to express themselves easily as well as understand non-verbal, socio-cultural nuances of a given language. Phinit-Akson (2002) and Baby (2018), emphasise that communicative competence is to produce effective communication patterns, usable in different contexts as a result of knowledge and mastery of subtle details of the language. Students with communicative competence therefore, are able to make utterances that are appropriate for different communicative needs including appropriate expressions for academic and socio-cultural acceptability. The use of imagery would help communicative competence as this avails the students the opportunity for the extended use of already familiar vocabulary in novel ways. According to Guerrero, Hoffmann and Munroe-Chandler (2016), the use of imagery in communication sharpens communicative competence and improves social skills and self-confidence in learners.

Of the four major communication skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), writing could arguably be said to be a skill that could be used to measure a person's competence in a language. West, Malcolm, Keywood, & Hill (2019) posit that writing skill as an aspect of communicative competence, falls under the discourse communicative competence that enables users of the language to produce coherent utterances that aptly express what they intend to portray. He defines an essay as a composition of not more than 3000 words on a subject that makes sense to the writer. It is a necessary fundamental skill that learners should acquire as it is an instrument both for self expression and a means that teachers use in measuring students' knowledge in various subjects. Essay writing is used to obtain learners responses to questions and to gauge their level of comprehension of topics.

Fitzgerald (2007) and Regmi (2014) emphasise that essay writing helps learners to sort out and clarify thoughts and ideas. Through essay writing, learners exercise critical judgement by expressing this in lucid, coherent language that provides feedback on learners' progress. Researchers (Defiazo, Jones, Tennant & Hook, 2010) posit that essay writing involves a whole gamut of cognitive exercise which displays level of learning, understanding, application of comprehended facts and synthesis of new knowledge. It is an exercise that portrays learners' dexterity especially in creative writing and this brings us to the core theme of this work, which is, emphasis on the importance of teaching learners to learn figures of speech and apply them in writing good essays. The variety in the types of figures of speech makes it possible to choose different types to create the different images and effects that are desired.

Hassan, Kazi, and Asmara (2020) considers writing as the language user's ultimate skill because it determines the future of the

candidates in examinations and developing writing skill positively impacts students' language competence and attitude towards language use. Also, Abioye (2010) states that writing tests important skills that other forms of evaluation cannot adequately sample. Omitting writing is not feasible, as writing tasks are important features of the learners' real life needs; hence it is an important feature of most testing programmes. The student also needs to be able to write good paragraphs that contain well explained thoughts which logically flow from one to the other. He/She needs the right and appropriate kind of vocabulary with which to express his/her thoughts. Hence, West, Malcolm, Keywood, & Hill (2019) see the fundamentals of writing skills as accuracy, awareness and correction, good spelling ability, punctuation, grammar, vocabulary, style and appropriateness.

According to Rohim (2018), in teaching essay writing in the English language class, the facilitator should be able to guide learners to picture the content that they need to express in their minds' eye; and this can be achieved through the use of imagery. These are words and expressions that conjure up pictures in the mind. The pictures presented are called images and the purpose is to make description vivid and clear and have lasting impression on the reader. Different images appeal to the different aspects of our senses. "Word pictures" which will be used synonymously with "figures of speech" in this work, help to a great extent to creative vivid pictures that makes creative essay writing a success.

In most literary works, writers use figures of speech that help readers visualise images as the read what is written. These are called imagery or figures of speech because the writer tries to create an image or figure in the reader's 'mind's eye' with the words he uses. Miftah (2015) avers that the language of the author is built in such a way that the reader is made to feel and understand things and situations described as if they had come in contact with them. There are different figures of speech in literature, some of which are closely linked. Figures of speech are of different types; figures of comparison, figures of contrast, figures of association, figures of emphasis, verbal games and figures of sound.

Jaashan (2022) in his research discovered that learners who are taught use figures of speech as a productive skill are able to produce better creative writing than those who are merely taught figures of speech as a receptive skill. This shows the importance of not just stopping at definition and identification of figures of speech and images but teaching students to weave them into their writings to embellish, create a dramatic effect of superabundance, repetition or expansion, to clarify or emphasise points or concepts. This is because figures of speech put so much life into expressions that they leave the reader with a sense of wonder that leads to better enjoyment of the piece than if such writings

were left within the limits of the literal. The use of pun for example, is called verbal game also referred to as word gymnastics.

The Place of Word Pictures in Essay Writing

Essay writing no matter the type, whether descriptive, narrative, expository or creative, entails creating pictures with words. Such images are made possible with figures of speech which are good quality additives in writing. In the first place, word pictures created mostly by figures of speech make one's writing interesting (Antonieттti & Colombo 2011). Even in everyday communication figurative expressions conjure images that make spoken and written messages catchy, and remove the blandness of literal expression. Word pictures in essays also make them not just attention grabbing, but keeps them memorable. Many figurative expressions, especially in literature have attained a kind of permanence that would have been unattainable were they not figurative or generated the images that they produced, and still produce whenever they are used. This is because figurative devices deepen the meaning in essays, making them more thought provoking and engaging (Hollowway 2022).

Word pictures also make for clarity to better understand and for the reader to empathise with the writer. Figures of comparison, juxtapositions, associations, transportation, permutation, switching, analogies and so on, help writers to get out their ideas clearly. Figures of speech that conjure images are important tools for emphasis in writing. Hyperboles for example, are good structures that help writer emphasise situations, ideas and the objects and actions of people that they want to communicate to their readers. Word pictures help writers to personalise expressions, to say things in special ways as they spontaneously occur to them, such that the expressions have a kind of freshness that is often appreciated because the encoder has been able to express himself/herself in a way that it is not commonly expressed (Qisha (2017). This gives such writings an air of creativity and fossilises such expressions in the memories of the readers.

The use of figurative language adds colour to writing; every well used figure is like a new hue and a concise way of getting ideas across for the enhancement of prose. This does not mean that essays should be inundated with imagery or that writers should use word pictures that are made to sit oddly where they are not fitted. Figurative expressions give specialised meaning that adds flavour, personalisation of expression in a way that gives peculiarity to writing, thus making it possible to tag such expressions to the personalities that created them (Bouchrika, 2022). The use of imagery helps the writer to avoid the 'shackles' of the boringness of outright literality. Imagery, also referred to as visual words, have emotional appeal even as they are vicariously felt in the senses. Figurative language jolts the audience or reader to attention, eliciting the desired positive response that the writer desires. In fact it changes what could have been simple narrations to vivid creative works of art; thus making the insignificant or seemingly insignificant significant.

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Using word pictures provides many ways of expression and provides alternative sense of reality that enhances the author's creation. It gives animation to writing, particularly when using figures like irony, sarcasm and hyperbole that had humour to what is being said or written. Bouchrika, (2022) emphasises the vibrancy that comes with the proper use of metaphors. Argumentative writing especially, word picture make the writing credible and persuasive, evoking not just concurrence but eliciting action from readers. Figurative use of language shows a level of language mastery and showcases the language competence of writer.

The pervasiveness of figures of speech in formal and informal settings makes it not a push-off in catering to the writing needs of learners in the English language classroom. The cultural flavour of figurative language would help learners to get acquainted with the culturally specific nuances of the English language. The good application of figurative expression reveals the writer's intent, thus clarifying meaning. Scholars (Regmi, 2014 and Jaashan, 2018) agree that the use of figurative language helps to build seasoned writers of the English language. Saouma, Bahous & Nabhani (2018) also reveal that teachers view figures of speech as tools that help them to transmit abstract physic concepts to students in a simpler and concretive way. They emphasise that the mastery of the use of figurative language improves literacy skills and communication skills especially in writing because it makes language more accessible as learning figurative language also brings learners close to understanding native speaker culture which embedded in the language.

Accentuating Word Pictures in Essay Writing Pedagogy in the English Language Classroom

In essay writing pedagogy, it is needful to get students to understand figurative language, figures of speech and imagery before instructing them to write essays using word pictures. Making students write in the English language class is getting them engaged in a hands-on activity. The writing exercise could even be made interactive if it is a group assignment. It provides an opportunity for optimal participation in the learning process, making it student-centred learning. Facilitators of learning in the English language classroom should employ the strategy of explicit instruction as the first step in teaching learners how to use figurative language and imagery in their essay writing. Explicit instruction begins with a clear definition of each figure of speech and teaching learners to comprehend the effect(s) of each of them. This will help the teachers ensure that their students are well grounded in identifying various figures of speech (simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, irony, sarcasm, onomatopoeia, imagery etc) and recognising how figurative expressions help to paint pictures referred to as imagery. According to Feathers & Arya (2015) learners should be taught to ensure that there is no ambiguity between literal and figurative meaning, and that they know the distinctions between the images – visual,

tactile, thermal, olfactory, auditory, gustatory, organic, kinaesthetic/proprioceptive etc. In the explicit instruction strategy, the teacher could write out sentences with different figures of speech and engage the learners in a sorting game, where they arrange the figures of speech according to their types and categories.

As part of the effort in getting students fossilised in the knowledge and use of figurative expressions, the teacher could also organise a figurative language escape room. Scholars (Taraldsen, Haara, Lysne, Jensen, & Jensen, E. S; 2022) have identified the use of escape room as a teaching method that could help students master what is being taught in a scenario different from the traditional teaching methods. It involves students working in small groups to complete puzzles, working to get crack codes that would give a lead to the next activity. Applying this to literature and figurative language teaching, students could be shared into small groups to engage in games and activities all related to figurative language. It would involve students moving around the designated room, visiting various stations, and as each of the exercises is properly completed, and students move closer and closer to escaping, they master the terms through fun learning.

Students may be taught using various modelling techniques in order to ensure that they have mastery of the functions and effects of various figures of speech and the images that they paint in writing, before they are made to weave their own examples into their essays. One of such techniques could be using teaching tools like figurative language posters. Guerrero, Hoffmann, & Munroe-Chandler (2016) pointed out that the posters could state figures of speech that are closely related, but pointing out their differences with examples. The figures of speech could also be sorted out and grouped according to types like figures of sound (alliteration, consonance onomatopoeia, pun, assonance etc); figures of association, (metonymy, synecdoche and euphemism, transferred epithet); figures of comparison, relationship or resemblance (simile, metaphor and personification); figures of contrast (antithesis, oxymoron); figures of gradation (climax, anticlimax, bathos); figures of emphasis or understatement (hyperbole, litotes, meiosis); miscellaneous (paradox, repetition, anaphora, epigram, irony, apostrophe) and so on. The different groups of figures of speech (with examples) could be placed at various stations in a gallery, for learners to go round and examine and use as models for their own constructions.

Learners could also model figurative language used in context, like in poems, prose passages and drama texts. The examples that they get from literary texts may then be used as scaffolds for writing similar expressions in exercises on paragraph development. Other in-context activities could be identifying figurative language in movies and songs and using them as guide to express themselves in similar ways in writing. Learners could also be guided to use certain figures of speech to create specific effects. For example learners could be asked to use irony, sarcasm and hyperbole to create humorous paragraphs on given topics.

Metaphors, according to Bouchrika, (2022), could also be used to describe situations and settings and oxymoron to emphasis contrast. Learners could be instructed to use animal imagery to symbolise various aspects of human nature and to give meaning to objects.

It is important to point out to students that they should move from the literal to the figurative by not just stating but showing through figurative language what characters feel, think and how it affects their actions such that the organic imagery and other images are portrayed in their writings. Students could be introduced to famous (people's) figurative language such that they serve as models for their own writings. Students could also work as teams reading passages or literary lyrics to identify figurative language or word pictures used in such passages (Idialu, 2020).

After all, students could then practice writing using figurative language by integrating the devices into their own writing. The students could be given task cards with specified figures of speech embedded to write essays (Antoniettti & Colombo 2011). For example, students may be given task cards with the following instructions (a) Using at least two sentences with personification and one simile and a metaphor, write from your shoes' perspective to describe your shoes' personality, appearance and so on as if they were alive. (b) Write a paragraph describing a grinder, using alliteration as your main device. (c) Using at least three metaphors, write a paragraph about someone addicted to watching football.

Researchers (Candra, 2013; Hosana, & Supriadi, 2022; and Ramadhan, 2022) agree that the use of brand slogans, jingles and expressions in advertisements used by corporations often incorporate figurative language. Students could therefore be given a list of brand jingles, slogans and expressions from written or audio advertisements to identify use of figurative language and images that they conjure, and reflect on how the use of figurative and persuasive language could be modelled in their descriptive and argumentative essays. Students can also be asked to go for jingles and slogan hunt and share what they see as figurative language and imagery with small groups or the whole class. Students could also look at what they get and create their own writings featuring school-related examples on organic, auditory, visual olfactory tactile imagery and so on.

Facilitators of learning in the English language class may use anchor charts with important points and illustrations that would serve as guide in students' writing. This could be followed by writing prompts that could help students to brainstorm at the prewriting stage. For instance, students could be asked to think of the first time they did something exciting or scary. It could be the first day they rode a bicycle or at their swimming lesson or their first day in a new school. They could be guided to use specific figures of speech to paint word pictures with certain adjectives like thrilling, nervous, gritting, scared, nervous, excited, slippery, and so on, for them to be expanded to create paragraphs or full essays. Gallery images, and plot diagrams are also effective

guides for narrative and descriptive writing as they help students to compartmentalise stories in sections. Jaashan (2022) emphasises the importance of showing what needs to be expressed, using images that appeal to different senses to present thoughts rather than plain-telling information.

Conclusion

It has been established in this work that using figurative language or imagery is intentionally deviating from the literal way of speaking or writing in order to attain special effects. Figurative expressions that appeal to the senses transport readers to new but credible worlds. This work analyses the importance of achieving competence in essay writing by emphasising the learning and mastery of the use of figurative language to develop learners' essay writing skills in the English language class. Writing, especially essay writing; is often the means of testing knowledge in various subjects in post-primary institutions of learning. There is therefore, no gainsaying the importance of mastering essay writing skill in the English language class. Research reveals that using word pictures (figurative expression) help to create vivid images that enhance the clarity and freshness of expression. Word pictures used in essays, help learners to produce emotive language that makes their essays exciting to read.

English language teachers would need to get students grounded in the knowledge of figures of speech and imagery through various forms of direct teaching, until the students are able to understand and identify word pictures before including them in their personal or group-writing exercises. Students may be directed to use in-context examples as scaffold first in sentences, then paragraphs, before writing full-length essays. If well managed, accentuating word pictures in essay writing will help in enhancing essay writing communicative competence of students in the English language classroom.

Final Word to Teachers

In selecting writing tasks for students, teachers should note the following points:

1. The task should suit the students' level in term of content and topic.
2. Consider the function of the material in relation to the discourse, whether narrative, descriptive, instruction or argument.
3. Have a focus on the type of writing skills you want to develop, such as paragraphing, selecting relevant content and using effective cohesion devices.
4. Consider context – that is, real or projected readers of the writing.
5. Prepare lesson notes that will guide step by step administration of the exercises bearing in mind adequate classroom management.

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