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Teaching English through Simple Poems in the ESL Context

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This article reports the experience of a teaching session conducted using poetry in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. Poetry is perhaps the literature genre least open to the attention of ESL learners and teachers, due to its highly allusive and metaphorical language and the cultural alienation. Yet teachers can use different categories of poetry which introduce various methods of language application, based on the learner requirements. The purpose of the teaching session was to identify the effectiveness of using simple English poems in the ESL classroom as a solution to the difficulties encountered in using highly advanced poems. The teaching session involved 20 ESL learners in the University of Kelaniya. All these participants were native speakers of Sinhala. The participants' English language competency level was varied from low level to the higher level. The practical strategy approach was used as the teaching approach to teach poetry in the ESL classroom. Acrostic poems, haikus, narrative poems, picture poems and poems making use of different grammatical patterns were used as the resources in conducting the teaching session. Poetry based activities were designed according to the pre, while and post reading activities. All the students were given the freedom to write their own poems under post reading activities. At the end of the teaching session student feedback was collected through a questionnaire. Results of the questionnaire demonstrate that the majority of the students enjoy poetry based ESL activities. Therefore simple English poems can be used as a resourceful tool in the ESL context.

Key words: Poetry, metaphorical, ESL classroom, narrative, haikus