Chapter 5

ELT through poetry

Kohli and Sharma (2000) point out that "in all the languages of the world the first books ever written were in verse." Continuing in the same vein Abrams remarks that "in all literatures written prose seems to have developed later than written verse". The creative effort "of Hesoid and Homer, of Pindar and the Greek tragedians" were all in the form of verse. What actually is verse then? Abrams (1999) says "Compositions written in meter are verse". According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of current English (Fourth Edition) by Hornby (1989), verse is "a form of writing arranged in lines, often with a regular rhythm or rhyme scheme". Hornby (1989) considers poetry to be a synonym of verse. Billows (1976) also follows the same line of thought in whose opinion: "to distinguish between poetry and verse is a mistake. The elements of rhythm and pattern, rhyme and artifice of rhetoric that belong to poetry distinguish all verse so immeasurably from prose in form as well as spirit, that the only useful distinction is between prose and poetry". Hence it is plausible to consider poetry as different from prose.
Keeping in view the historical facts it can be said that pioneers of literature wrote in verse probably because "Poetry is the most intimate expression of a man's spirit." Abrams (1999) has also recorded that "first prose works we possess were written by King Alfred near the end of the ninth century, more than a hundred years later than Beowulf." What than actually is poetry? This in fact is a very difficult question to answer nevertheless scholars have answered it in their own ways.

Etymologically speaking the word 'Poetry' has its roots in Middle English 'Poetrie', or Medieval Latin 'Poetria' which means 'a type of discourse which achieves its effects by rhythm, sound patterns and imagery.' It is this Latin Greek 'people' that later became 'poet' ("The writer of poems") in English. Discourse in words of Cook (1994) is a "Coherent stretch of language." So, it can be said that poetry is kind of discourse where sound patterns play a major role. Hence it is very important for enhancing the listening skill, but in contrast to Webster's definition imagery cannot be considered the exclusive property of poetry because one can often come across imagery in prose too. At times the line of demarcation between prose and poetry is quite thin. Prose, which is of extremely poetic nature and poetry of extremely prosaic nature.
is a matter of common observation. It is indeed very difficult to give any specific definition of poetry which would finally settle the issue.

Many ELT experts believe that poetry should not be used in a language classroom. Crystal (1987) quotes Gray that “The language of the age is never the language of poetry”\(^\text{12}\) and so it should not be used in the ELT class. In total opposition to Gray’s view Hopkins describes poetry as “the current language hieghtened.”\(^\text{13}\) For Dryden the words that take shape of a poem are ‘the image and ornament of thought’,\(^\text{14}\) the poet thinks deeply and uses his faculty of imagination to express himself through the channel of words. What is common in all these and other definitions is that poetry whatever it is, has necessarily to do something with the language. So, we can safely conclude that poetry is nothing but the ornamentative use of language. In Ralph Waldo Emerson’s (1940) opinion too “Language is fossil poetry”.\(^\text{15}\) In simple terms, poetry is the refined and exquisite use of language. But, basically, it still remains language.

Yet poems are often considered to be useless for language learners. There are a number of reasons which question the authenticity of poetry in a language classroom. Mostly because it is believed that poetry exclusively suits the
refined sensibilities of the elite class. Before the Romantic period, enjoyment of poetry was considered to be just the prerogative of the high class. Octavio Paz has explained why 'Poetry is a food which the bourgeoisie as a class —has proved incapable of digesting.' That poetry should or should not be used in the ELT classroom has been a controversial matter. Many people believe that the subject matter of poetry is far removed from the tastes and experiences of common readers, and poetry is of no interest to them. But many poems deal with universal themes like death, life, success and happiness. So, it can be said that poetry has a universal appeal.

Kohli (1970) says one of the strongest arguments against poetry is that "Poetry does not serve any utilitarian purpose it does not increase the students mastery over the English language... because the language of poetry is very different from everyday speech." It is not correct to exclude poetry from a language class just because poetry often has strange word order. Learners can benefit from poetry as it increases their "awareness of stylistic variation that there is more than one way of conveying a message, and that no one way is necessarily 'correct'. The unconventional word order of poetry serves as an advantage in teaching the language.
Jones and Roe (1975) draw an analogy between models and poems and say “Models, like poems, are closures on experience. Neither can match reality, only approximate it. Both are perhaps best judged more on what insight they offer than on exactness of the details with which they are furnished, though, clearly, the richer the detail that insight can carry the better. But just as most poems are unread most models are unused.” Many complex mathematical problems are solved with the help of formulae for instance Speed = Distance / Time etc by using approximation ‘x’ or ‘y’ for the missing variable thus approximation of reality too helps in unfolding the reality. Poetry often carries rich insight as the language of poetic texts directs the readers to be able to react to the nuances of meaning that poetic texts have to offer. Poetry cannot be mocked at just because most poems are unread. In the opinion of Basnett and Grundy (1993) poetry cannot be used for ELT purpose because many people claim they never read poetry and surely never actually “tried to write it.” They further add that such people “turn to poetry on special occasions. Birthday cards, anniversary cards, Valentine cards and sympathy cards all frequently contain messages written in verse.”

It is a common belief that poetic texts deal with complex themes which lead to multiple interpretations of a single poetic
text Rene Wellek (1976) says on authority of Eliot that "A poem may appear to mean very different things to different readers, and all these meanings maybe different from what the author thought he meant." In Eliot's opinion there is no objective meaning that can be drawn out of a work of art; poetry is not fit to be used for the ELT purpose as the teachers would not be able to arrive at a single convincing meaning of the text. But it should also be realised that varied interpretations from the side of the students would open up new vistas of debate and discussion which would definitely be a vantage point in a language class as it would give learners a chance to voice their opinions in the class. For Frye (1963) "poetry is an unnatural and perversely ingenious method of distorting prose statements." If such is the case how could poetry precede prose. It is a universal fact that verse is the more ancient of the two, and that is surely because of greater memorability of verse.

On the authority of Abrams, Fowler (1991) says such questions as "what is poetry? are 'bogus questions.' They fallaciously presuppose some single essence waiting to be defined". True, that it is a very difficult question to answer. Fowler maintains "Hence Wittingensteins's notion of 'family resemblances' is invoked. If we look at a corpus of poems, we
see that some resemble others in some features, others are related by different features, and so on; just as some members of a family may have pointed noses, others may have red hair, others large hands: no one need have all three characteristics for the whole set to be perceived as a family. The generalization 'family' or 'poetry' is not defined by a feature or set of features possessed by all members, but by a complex set of criss-crossing and only partly shared criteria." The partly shared criteria which goes into defining poetry differs from one set of scholars to another.

With reference to Abrams' article published in The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics (1972). Fowler says that theories of poetry have been the same from Plato to the romantics. Abrams classifies and distinguishes four types of 'theories of poetry':

1- Mimetic or imitative theories, which pay attention to the relationship between the text and the world it represents.

2- Pragmatic theories, which regard the text as 'instrumental towards achieving certain effects in the reader';

3- Expressive theories, in which 'the poet moves into the center of the scheme and himself becomes the prime
generator of the subject matter attributes, and values of a poem';

4- Objective theories, which focus attention on 'the text itself' minimizing or excluding the other three dimensions\(^2^6\).

And when the language teacher is using a literary text for ELT purpose he has to primarily focus on the last type of theories i.e. objective theories which instruct the reader to pay attention exclusively to the text.

According to Mehta (1950) poetry is difficult for language learners and teachers because good reading of poetry requires "the labeling of the metre."\(^2^7\) Highlighting another negative quality of poetry Stead (1991) maintains that it "has become an area of specialist knowledge, like physics or higher mathematics, and teachers in school seem less and less willing to treat it as a natural part of a general curriculum"\(^2^8\). Because school teachers feel the language of poetry is too elevated for the intermediate level students, so poetry should only be taught to students pursuing a course in literature. Nevertheless, poems written in simple language are in abundance. For instance, Wordsworth's poetry who wanted "to celebrate the dominance of the normal human spirit in
circumstances in which its breakdown might perhaps be expected.\textsuperscript{29} Therefore, through the subject matter of his poetry he explored human experiences which were comprehensible to normal human beings in a language which could also be easily understood by them.

It is to be noted that in the ELT world the majority considers "The aim of teaching poetry is to impart pleasure to the pupil by making him understand the thought and feelings conveyed in the poem".\textsuperscript{30} True that similies, metaphors, imagery, themes, rhyme and rhythm are all important in a poem for literary interpretation and aesthetic appreciation but by limiting one self to these aspects the ELT purpose is most likely to be marred. Which is to teach language aspects/skills in an ELT class through poetry. It therefore entails a necessary shift in teaching paradigm; that is to say the focus now has to be much more on the language items (lexical and syntactical) of a poem than on its literary aspects. By considering imagery, figures of speech, rhyming scheme etc. as a microcosm and the entire text of the poem a macrocosm for exploring the language problems teachers can teach their students language skills. The issue of exploiting a poetic text for language teaching purposes has evoked different responses in the ELT world simply because poetry has a different language, very
different from everyday language. Even when the poet uses ordinary language, the language undergoes such treatment that it becomes extraordinary. Poetry treats language in a manner that it instantly captivates the attention of the reader. But if poetry fails to engage the language teachers and learners alike the fault does not lie with the poetic texts but more with the syllabus designers (because the choice of the subjects in poetry is not in tune with the difficulty level of the language learners). Or, perhaps to a certain extent the teachers are to be blamed because they don't adopt the right approach for teaching poems in an ELT classroom. So far we have seen how the issue concerning the utility of poetry in an ELT class elicits strong arguments from critics and ELT experts both in favour of and against poetry.

Maley and Moulding (1985) say, one of the reasons that "poetry provokes a shiver of awe or revulsion may be the dusty academic way in which it has so often been taught. The learner has been enmeshed in a net of iambic pentameters, sonnet rhyme schemes and classical allusions". Poetry is often condemned and rejected for the language teaching purposes yet it will be fit for the same when it is bereft off the aura of superiority which critics often associate with it. First and foremost the subject matter of poems prescribed should be
appropriate to the difficulty level of learners. The elements like classical allusions and metres are obviously a hindrance in the language learning process and a science or commerce intermediate student is hardly going to benefit from them. On the other hand, "Recent poetry has tended to develop the conversational tone in a looser pattern rather than a set meter susceptible to the rules of scansion"\(^{32}\). Such conversational poems can help achieve the ELT objective.

Collie and Slater (1987) explain at length the advantage of having poetry in a language classroom. They make their point clear by stating that "Poems offer a rich, varied repertoire and are a source of much enjoyment for the teacher and learner alike. There is initial advantage of length - many poems are well-suited to a single classroom lesson."\(^{33}\) So, the brevity of short poems gives a sense of achievement to the readers because the entire poem can be finished in a single lesson.

Drawing attention to the high pedagogical value of poetry Billows (1976) seems to give a special value to poetry in a foreign language classroom in "opening up the fantasy and giving release to inhibited and excessively introverted types".\(^{34}\) Poetry can be a strong medium for forcing the learners out of their cocoons and so it must be used for language teaching purposes.
It is a common fallacy in India that the "main purpose of teaching poetry is not so much to improve the child's knowledge of English language as to add to his joy and increase his power and appreciation of beauty. A lesson in poetry is a failure if it has not been enjoyed. Linguistic training and increase in the command of English should be incidental; enjoyment of the poem is the primary consideration". When English is taught with the aim of bringing about proper English language learning the primary consideration is to improve learners' knowledge of English language while the enjoyment of the poem as a literary piece may take place alongside to a degree, but the latter is certainly not the singular aim of ELT.

Spears (1992) points out that T.S.Eliot had said that "genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood." If poetry fails to communicate in the ELT sense fault lies with either the teaching methods or the choice of subjects in poetry. When the chosen subjects of poetry are appropriate to the difficulty level of learners the ELT teacher has primarily to isolate and focus upon the items of language in a poetic text rather than bothering about the scansion of the poem, the background of the poet and the circumstances under which he wrote the poem. For instance, if language learners of intermediate classes are taught 'Lucy Gray' poems as a part of
their general English course they would not see their English improving if they are told that William Wordsworth was born in 1770 or his 'Lucy poems', a sequence of five lyrics about love were composed during Wordsworth "sojourn in Germany". For that matter, intermediate students of science or commerce would also not gain any profit in knowing whether the Shakesperean sonnets were addressed to his patron, a young man of rank and beauty or to 'the dark lady'. It is all because these ideas might be useful for writing the critical appreciation of a poem but are irrelevant when it comes to the language teaching business. As the biographical details of a poet cannot in any way help learners imbibe language skills. It is advisable to leave them aside in a language class.

Similarly, knowledge of scansion and prosody is not essential for an ELT class in India, because language learners neither have time nor inclination to note how metres work in conventional poetry. They are there mainly to learn the language functions. And furthermore there is no logic in exposing them to the technicalities of iambic pentameter or tetrameter etc., since this kind of information would hardly if ever add on to their knowledge of English language.

The Board of Education Report (1921) on the teaching of English quotes an evidence of a headmaster who found one of
the teachers reading the following lines with all syllables accented:

God moves in a mysterious way

His wonders to perform

He plants his footsteps in the sea

And rides upon the storm

The report further points out "Naturally both the sense and the variety of verses were ruined. The accents in the first line are on God and not on moves and still less on a; in the second line there is obviously no accent on to and the third and fourth lines the main accents are not on in or upon, which both teacher violently emphasized". While keeping scansion and prosody out of the class, the teacher has to give a clear idea of intonation, and stress, necessary to communicate the right meaning to the learners. Learners should be told that content bearing words are to be stressed and this idea would be more fruitful for language teaching as it would help to make the meaning of the poem clear to the learners. The most conspicuous feature of poetry is 'form'. In this form the "unit structure for a poem is line and the strictly marked stanza, which gives a poem a definite pattern". True, these days
poetry is written in blank verse too but "Once a poem is printed, no one would confuse it with prose ... Printers are very conscious of this distinguishing characteristic of poetry, and they take great pains to space it properly and set it up on the page so that it has the look of a poem". It also goes to show that the very visual impact of a poem is different from that of prose. Psychologically speaking, it sets the reader in a particular mood of reading, understanding and interpretation. Poetry can also train the learners to read properly, and read it in a manner that a mere reading of the text helps them comprehend the meaning of the poem. Short (1996) says "when poetry is read out loud, like all other spoken forms of language, it will be divided into tone groups with appropriate assignment of nuclei in order to make the reading 'make sense'. And because we all subvocalise when we read, a similar process is enacted whenever poetry is read silently". Thus poetry should be read in such a manner that the accents should be on content bearing words. Given below is a model of how poetry should be read by an English teacher in the class.

**TEXT1**

**THE EAGLE**

He 'clasps the 'crag with 'crooked 'hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,

Ring'd with the azure world he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;

He watches from his mountain walls,

And like a thunderbolt he falls.

(by Lord Alfred Tennyson)

In this way the teacher explains to the students how nouns, verbs and adjectives should receive accents. And this is how poetry can be used to enhance the reading skill of the learners. This training would not remain confined to mere poetry recitation, but would give them much desirable practise in appropriate intonation that is applicable to all forms and patterns of meaningful speech and reading.

Linguistic deviation:– Linguistic deviation in stylistics means a shift from the accepted ‘linguistic norms’. The grammatically deviant pieces of poetry can be used for language teaching purpose. Though the language of poetry is different from the language of common usage yet poetry contains features of repetition, foregrounding, deviation and parallelism. And all
these features can be used for the benefit of language learners by their teacher.

Verbatim recall / repetition: - Leech relates 'Verbatim recall' or repetition to the mundane field of advertising. Leech (1969) in his book *English in Advertising* says "an advertisement gains nothing unless the name of the product is remembered, so at least in this respect it is desirable that a part of linguistic message should be memorized." Repetition in poetry too forces the learners to focus on repeated words, phrases or sentences, and by merely being repeated they become inscribed in the mind of the learners and the learners can easily memorize them. Given below is an extract from Dryden's poem:

**SONG FOR SAINT CECILIA'S DAY, 1687**

From Harmony, from heavenly Harmony

This universal frame began:

When Nature underneath a heap

Of jarring atoms lay

And could not heave her head,

The tuneful voice was heard from high
Arise, ye more than dead!

Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry

In order to their stations leap,

And Music's power obey.

From harmony, from heavenly harmony

This Universal frame began

From harmony to harmony.

Through all the compass of the notes it ran,

The diapason closing full in Man.

What passion cannot Music raise and quell?

When Jubal struck the chorded shell

His listening brethren stood around,

And, wondering on their faces fell

To worship that celestial sound.

Less than a god they thought there could not dwell

Within the hollows of that shell

That spoke so sweetly and so well.
What passion cannot Music raise and quell?

(by J. Dryden)

In this extract the word 'harmony' and phrase 'Harmony from heavenly Harmony' is repeated. The entire interrogative sentence 'What passion cannot Music raise and quell?' is also repeated. The tone of the poem is such that the question seems to be directly addressed to the reader and it seems obvious that the reader would also remember the question after reading the poem once or twice. As a result, it can be said the repetition in poetry helps the learners to memorize new words and grammatical structures.

Linguistic deviation: Linguistic deviation in stylistics means a shift from the accepted 'linguistic norms'. The grammatically deviant pieces of poetry can be used for language teaching purpose. Linguistic deviation exists in various forms such as morphological deviation, semantic deviation and grammatical deviation.

Morphological deviation: Instances of morphological deviation too can help the teacher to teach grammar to the learners. The teacher can take up an example of morphological deviation for instance.
The Sod scarce heaved;

(from 'A Dream of the Unknown' by Shelley)

Then the teacher can explain to the learners that morpheme is the smallest meaningful unit into which a word can be divided. The word 'read' has a single morpheme while 'cook-s' has two morphemes and the word 'un-like-ly' has three morphemes. With the help of the phrasal extract from Shelley's poem 'the sod scarce heaved' the teacher can explain that with the noun 'sod' verb 'heaved' is used. But the poet has deviated morphologically from the standard usage as instead of adjective 'scarce' adverb 'scarce-ly' should be more appropriate in this particular context judged by the standards of common usage. So, poetry can help the teacher impart the knowledge of morphemes to the learners and the role they play in word / sentence formation and proper communication.

Semantic deviation:- Another form of deviation which is a common feature of poetry is semantic deviation. Semantically deviated (thus foregrounded) pieces of poetry force the learners to focus on the language of poetry. In this kind of deviation the word order is correct but the meaning is unconventional. And the poet uses these instances of semantic deviation to heighten the poetic effect. This form of deviation seems to be
appropriate in the literary or poetic context but it is definitely uncalled for in common usage where the learners cannot surpass the limits set by the conventions of standard language usage. Still examples of semantic deviation could also be put to a successful ELT use. We may consider the following examples to make the point clear:

(a). I can taste grief

(from 'Deceptions' by Philip Larkin)

(b). At the mid hour of night when the stars are weeping

(from 'At the Mid Hour of Night' by T. Moore)

In these examples the semantically foreground words are underlined. The teacher can take up the two extracts one by one and ask the learners to supply verbs befitting common usage. The possible answers could be:

(a). I can feel grief

(b). At the mid hour of night, when the stars are twinkling.

Hence it can be said that instances of semantic deviation can help the learners identify and scrutinize the inappropriate words from the poetic context and use appropriate words in
their place which are fit for the common usage. It can be a
good exercise for testing the language ability of all learners.

Syntactic deviation: Syntactic or grammatical deviation is also
a common form of deviation found in poetry. Syntactic
deviation takes place when the word order becomes unusual in
a sentence. The teacher can utilize the instances of
grammatical deviation by asking the learners to put the
deviated structures in the correct order. The teacher explains
to the learners that according to the conventions of grammar it
is customary for the verbs to follow the subject but in poetry at
times the word order gets disturbed. The teacher supplies the
learners with the following examples:-

(a). Most wounds can Time repair;

(from 'At Ease' Walter de la More)

(b). But help it I cannot,

(from 'Spectator' by Arthur Hugh Clough)

Then the teacher asks the learners to rewrite these
structures in accordance with the rules of grammar. They might
come up with following responses:-

(a). Time can repair the most wounds;
(b). But I cannot help it.

Next the teacher supplies the learners with a similar poem having instances of syntactic deviation consider for a while a poem by Emily Dickinson:-

I never saw a Moor –

I never saw the sea –

Yet know I how the Heather looks

And what a Billow be

I never spoke with God

Nor visited in Heaven –

Yet certain am I of the spot

As if the checks were given...

I never saw a Moor-

The teacher writes the entire poem on the black board and asks the learners to give it a silent reading. Then the teacher himself/herself gives it a loud reading. After the teacher has finished reading the poem, he/she asks the learners to point out if there are any instances of unusual word order. They might come up with the following:
(i) Yet know I how the Heather looks

(ii) Yet certain am I of the spot.

It is customary for conjunction 'yet' to be followed by subject 'I' and the subject 'I' precedes the verbs so these two sentences will be written as:-

(i). Yet I know how the heather looks

(ii). Yet I am certain of the spot

So, syntactic deviation helps the teacher in testing his/her learners' knowledge of the syntax.

Lexical deviation:- Another form of deviation which is a common feature of poetry is lexical deviation. In this kind of deviation the words undergo change in a manner that they become unacceptable according to the standard usage of the language. An example of lexical deviation is given below:-

Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate:

(from a Shakespearean sonnet ‘Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer’s Day’)

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It is a known fact that the comparative degree for adjective 'lovely' is not 'more lovely' but lovelier the teacher can take this foregrounded example of lexical deviation as an opportunity to teach the intermediate learners the positive, comparative and superlative degrees of commonly used adjectives.

The teacher explains to the learners that when the positive degree of an adjective ends in 'y', and is preceded by a consonant, then 'y' is changed into 'i' before adding 'er' and 'est', to make his/her point more clear the teacher asks the learners to write the positive, comparative and superlative degree of the following adjectives:-

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive degree</th>
<th>Comparative degree</th>
<th>Superlative degree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Happy</td>
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<td>b. Easy</td>
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<td>c. Sunny</td>
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<td>d. Wealthy</td>
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<td>e. Funny</td>
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Hence, lexical deviation can be used to enhance the lexical knowledge of learners.
Neologism: Deviation takes place in many forms, the most common of it is ‘neologism’. Due to ‘neologism’ (invention of new words) foregrounded literary pieces become especially prominent. In instances of neologism “a poet may exceed the normal resources of language”

Foregrounding:- We have seen so far how deviated parts can be used to teach grammar. But it is true that if a part of a poem or any other literary text is deviant “it becomes especially noticeable, or perceptually prominent.” Short (1996) on the authority of Van Peer calls it psychological effect foregrounding, and foregrounded pieces of poetry can be successfully used for the ELT purpose.

Graphalogical deviation: - The most striking form of deviation is graphological deviation where the shaped poems are printed differently from the standard printing pattern of poetry. This form of poetry is also known as ‘cubist’ or ‘concrete’ poetry, the pattern poetry forces the reader to focus on the shape of the poem and draw inferences from its shape, to conclude what the poem is all about. Some of the prominent poets of shaped poetry are John Fairfax, Abram Bunn Ross, Leonard Clark and Wes Magee.
Even without reading the title of such a poem the learners can easily guess from its shape what the poem is all about take for instance a poem by Wes Magee.

Climb The Mountain

Climb, climb the mountain, high. Touch the clouds and see the sky. Feel the wind against your face. Look out past the bend. Wes Magee
Step I:- The teacher has this shape poem printed on a big sheet. The teacher displays the sheet in front of the whole class.

Step II:- Once the students finish looking at the sheet in a glance. The teacher asks them what the poem is all about?

The students might come up with following answers; a triangle, conical hat, hill or a mountain.

Step III:- When the students guess the correct title of the poem the teacher reads the shape poem in the class. And the students listen to him/her.

Step IV:- Finally the teacher asks the learners to write shaped poems. Possible subjects for writing shape poems could be moon, clouds, boat, cube etc.

Such shaped poems have a novel shape and their shape entices the learners to concentrate not only on the visual impact of the poem but also to read out and find out what the poem is all about. Even the idea of writing pattern poetry is very exciting for the learners. So, it can be said that pattern poetry also helps to motivate the learners read poetic texts. As a result it can be concluded that various forms of deviation can contribute to the benefit of the language learners.
Poetic texts can also be used to teach the learners grammatical processes such as compounding and affixation. Look at the following examples of affixation where prefix ‘un’ has been put to a novel use:

(1). Just as it is, unmisted by love

(from ‘Mirror’ by Sylvia Path)

(2). ‘Untwist’ slack they may be

(from ‘Carrion Comfort’ by Hopkins)

It is customary to come across words like undue, unnecessary etc but words ‘unmisted’ and ‘untwist’ are seldom heard. The teacher can explain to the learners the prefix ‘un’ is used with the force of a negative. Here are a few examples of prefix ‘un’: unaware, uncommon and unexpected. From all these examples the teacher can explain to the learners that prefix ‘un’ is mostly added before adjectives. So, poetry can be used to teach the learners the process of affixation.

Poetry also offers opportunities to the teacher to explain to the learners the concept of compounding (where two or more items are joined to make a single compound) to the learners. Given below are a few examples of foregrounded compounds:
(a). 'Spiralwise'

(from 'Time' by Ralph Hodgson)

(b). 'Carecoiled' and 'care-killed'

(from 'The Golden Echo' by G.M. Hopkins)

Though these compounds are not found in everyday usage of the English language yet the teacher can explain through these compounds the nature of compounds, processes of compounding and linguistic purpose of compounds.

A single poetic text can be used to impart the knowledge many language items.

Read the following poem:-

This is Going to Hurt Just a little Bit

One thing I like less than most things is sitting in a dentist's chair with

my mouth wide open

And that I will never have to do it again is a hope that I am against

hope hopen

Because some tortures are physical and some are mental,

But the one that is both is dental
It is hard to be self-possessed
With your jaw digging into your chest
So hard to retain your calm
When your fingernails are making serious alterations in your
life line
or love line or some other important line in your palm;
So hard to give your effect of cheery benignity
When you know your position is one of the two or three in life
most lacking in dignity.
And your mouth is like a section of road that is being worked
on.
And it is all cluttered up with stone crushers and concrete
mixers and
drills and steam rollers and there isn't a nerve in your
head that
you aren't being irked on.
Oh, some people are unfortunate enough to be strung up by
the thumbs.
And others have things done to their gums.
And your teeth are supposed to be polished.
But you have a reason to believe they are being demolished.
And the circumstance that add most to your terror
Is that it's all done with a mirror.
Because the dentist may be a bear, or as the Roman's used to say, only

they were referring to a feminine bear when they said it, an ursa,
But all the same how can you be sure when he takes his crowbar in one
hand and mirror in the other he won't get mixed up, the way you
do when you try to tie a bow tie with the aid of a mirror, and forget
that left is right and vice-versa?
And then at last he says That will be all, but it isn't because he then
coats your mouth from cellar to roof
With something that I suspect is generally used to put a shine on a
horse's hoof.
And you totter to your feet and think. Well it's all over now and after
all it was only this once.
And he says come back in three monce.
And this. O fate is I think a most vicious circle thou ever sentest,
That man has to go continually to the dentist to keep his teeth in good condition when the chief reason he wants his teeth in good condition is so that he won't have to go to the dentist.

(by Ogden Nash)

Once the students finish reading the entire poem the teacher can explain to the learners that 'nonce formations' or newly invented words are created by the poet to maintain the rhyming scheme of the poem. Good examples of 'neologism' or 'noun formations' can be traced in the poem 'This is Going to Hurt Just A Little Bit'.

Through the compounds found in the poem such as fingernails, self-possessed and crowbar the teacher can explain to the learners the process of compounding and how compounds are formed. He/she can explain to the learners a compound is a noun, adjective etc composed of two or more words or parts of words from the vast collection of words originally found in language of common usage and formation of compounds has added generously to the English vocabulary. The teacher can provide the learners with a few examples of formation of compounds, for instance:-
Given below are few examples of formation of compounds:

(i) noun + noun – Such as card-board
    Speedboat
    Ballet – dancer.

(ii) adjective + noun- Such as
    Super-market
    Arterial roads
    Political prisoner

(iii) Verb + noun - Such as
    Assault craft
    Pick pocket
    Travel agent

(iv) Gerund + noun - Such as
    Rocking – chair
    Writing-desk
    Playing – cards
(v) Preposition + noun - Such as

Over coat

Over sight

After thought

Similarly compounded adjectives are formed by joining:

(i) Noun + adjective (or participle) - Such as

Status conscious

Praise Worthy

Grief stricken

(ii) Adjective + adjective - Such as

deep red

pure white

dark blue

(iii) Adverb + participle - Such as

long-standing

well bred

well balanced
The teacher can also explain to the learners that prefixes such as un-, re-, dis etc can be used to create new words by adding them before the root of the words and also that suffixes like -er, -ate etc can be added after the root of the words to create new words. So, poetry can be used to teach the learners the phenomena of affixation. Thus, innumerable language items can be taught to the learners through a single poem. In order to execute his ideas through a single poem properly, the teacher must make a lesson plan. For instance:-

Lesson Plan No.1: ‘This is Just Going to Hurt a Little Bit’ by Ogden Nash

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills and language areas covered</th>
<th>Reading skill</th>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
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<td>Use of idiomatic expressions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pre – reading Phase:-

Activity I - Learners are asked to answer the following:-
1. Have you ever been to the dentist to get your teeth examined?

2. If 'yes' then what was the experience like?

Activity II- The teacher asks the learners to read the poem silently.

Reading phase:-

Activity I:- The teacher recites the whole poem and the students listen carefully in order to understand the pronunciation of different words. They also listen to the teacher recite the poem for stress pattern and intonation.

Activity II:- The teacher again reads the poem and points out the words such as alterations, cheery, self possessed, fingernails etc. He/she explains the learners how words can be formed from roots and stems by adding prefixes and suffixes. He/she also tells them that compounds are formed by adding two or more independent words. The teacher provides the learners with some more examples of such words.

Foolish

Humanitarian

Misanthrope
Activity III:- The teacher explains some of the idiomatic expressions used in the poem, such as:

(1). To be strung up by the thumbs

(2). Vicious circle.

Activity IV:- The teacher explains to the learners the concept of 'neologism' with examples from the poem such as hopen, benignity, monce etc.

Post reading phase:-

Activity I;- Learners are asked to make two words from each the following affixes:-

Re-, un-, -er, -ate, -tion.
Activity II:- The teacher asks the learners to make two compounds from each of the following combinations:-

i. Noun + noun

ii. Noun + adjective

iii. Adjective + noun

iv. Adjective + adjective

v. Verb + preposition.

Activity III;- Learners are asked to make two sentences from each of the following structures:-

i. Sub + verb + object + adjunct

ii. Sub + verb + complement

iii. Sub + object + complement

Activity IV:- The teacher tells the students that the correct verb of 'hope' is 'hoping' and not 'hopen'. The teacher asks the learners to supply correct words in place of other newly invented words in the poem such as 'benignity' and 'monce'. This could be a good exercise in lexis.

Parallelism: Foregrounding and deviation have been dealt with earlier another feature worth mentioning is
parallelism. Parallelism can also be used for the benefit of language learners. ‘Verbatim recall’ is a phenomenon in poetry where some words or phrases or sometimes entire lines are repeated without even a slightest change to give emphasis to certain words, phrases or lines. But because in these instances of repetition similar structures get repeated it is restricted in linguistic choices as compared to the instances of parallelism. In comparison to Verbatim recall a much more exciting method of foregrounding is 'obstrusive irregularity'. To quote Short (1996) parallelism or 'obstrusive irregularity' is a method of foregrounding "where some features are held constant (usually structural features) while others (usually lexical items, e.g. words, idioms) are varied."46

See the lines given below:

Youth like summer morn,

Age like winter weather,

Youth like summer brave,

Age like winter bare:

Youth is full of sport,

Age's breath is short,
Youth is nimble, Age is lame:
Youth is hot and bold,
Age is weak and cold,
Youth is wild and Age is tame:-

Age, I do abhor thee;
Youth I do adore thee:

(from a Madrigal ‘Crabbed Age and Youth’ by William Shakespeare)

Parallelism forces the reader to pay attention to the parallel parts of the poem and look for parallel or contrastive meaning. For instance Shakespeare’s Madrigal is loaded with parallel phrases some of which have suitable antonyms like ‘hot and cold’ ‘summer and winter’ while other phrases and words ‘morn and weather’, ‘breath is short’ / ‘full of sport’ etc are paralleled yet they are not standardized antonyms of the phrases or words juxtaposed. Still the aesthetic use of language in poetic context has made them appropriate in bringing out the contrast between ‘youth’ and ‘old age’. So, parallelism can help the teacher to enable the pupils to look for meaning links between the parallel or contrasted parts in the
poem. In this poem there are instances of verbal parallelism too. Repetition of consonant and vowel sounds produces such sound associations that these sound links not only contribute to the aesthetic effect but also force the listener to see how these sound links between words and phrases help in determining the meaning of the poem. For instance Shakespeare's Madrigal 'Crabbed Age and Youth' has many instances of verbal parallelism such as repetition of initial consonants (alliteration, as in winter/weather), repetition of final syllables as in (lame/tame) rhyme (as in bold/cold) etc. Thus, these associations or links between various vowel and consonant sounds of the poem certainly heighten the musical effect of the poem and sometimes force the listener/reader to concentrate on the sound links in the poem in such a manner that the possible meaning of the poem can be determined. Moreover, a clear and loud reading of the poem by the teacher attunes the learners' eardrums to different consonant and vowel sounds which enhance his listening skill and provide him with exemplary reading of the poem. So that when the learners read that text they too read the poem correctly. A poem having instances of parallelism can be used to impart the knowledge of antonyms, and sentences having parallel structures. Besides instances of verbal parallelism can be used to train the
learners in producing correct vowel and consonant sounds. The teacher can also teach the learners the phenomena of sentence stress through a poem. The teacher can explain to the learners that in normal speech nouns, full verbs, adjectives and adverbs are said in a way that they stand out this is how the following sentence will be read:-

The 'Washerwomen 'brought the 'clothes in the 'evening.

Based on these observations a lesson plan has been prepared on Shakespeare's Madrigal 'Cрабbed age and youth'.

**Lesson Plan 2: Crabbed Age and Youth by Shakespeare**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills and language areas covered</th>
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<th>Sentence making</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Reading skill</td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Speaking skill</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Pronunciation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sentence stress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pre reading phase:-**

Activity I: Answer the following :-

Q.1 What do you think are the advantages of young age?

Q.2 What according to you are the disadvantages of old age?
Q.3 Have you read any poem; article or essay on the advantages/disadvantages of old age. If 'yes'. Then which one is it?

Q.4 Why do you think the poet has added term 'Crabbed' with age?

**Reading phase:**

**Activity I:** The teacher asks the learners to read the poem silently and look for phrases/sentences having parallel or contrastive meanings. They might up with responses such as 'Youth is nimble; age is lame' 'Youth is hot and bold', 'Age is weak and cold', etc.

**Activity II:** The teacher asks the learners to note down the rhyming words in their rough note books. They might come up with following responses, e.g. lame and tame, cold and bold etc.

**Activity III:** The teacher asks the learners to make a list of all the adjectives in the Madrigal. Probably their answers would be brave, bare, short, nimble, tame, weak, bold, abhor etc.
Post reading phase:-

**Activity I:** The teacher asks the learners to write the antonyms of all the adjectives they had written in their note books.

**Activity II:** The teacher asks the learners to mark the sentence stress in the following structures written down as sentences:-

i. Youth is hot and bold.

ii. Age is weak and cold.

iii. Youth is wild and age is tame

iv. Youth is full of sport

v. Age’s breath is short

**Activity III:** A list of the words taken from the poem is given below. In these words different vowel sounds have been underlined. The learners are asked to consult a good dictionary and find out what symbols are used to indicate these vowel sounds. The word list is as follows:-

age, youth, brave, bare, full, breath, sport, short, lame, hot, cold, weak, wild, abhor, do.
Activity IV: Learners are asked to say these words paying special attention to the underlined parts:-

- bold, bolt, think, thee, brave, crave, full, pull, dare, chair, share, question, session.

Activity V: Learners are asked to write in 'column B' the correct antonyms against the words in the column 'A' from the list given below:-

Word list: Mournful, repel, disjointed, opacity, ambiguity, injured, belittle, bestial, disorganized, literate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column A</th>
<th>Column B</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Connected</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Clarity</td>
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<td>3. Entice</td>
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<td>4. Unscathed</td>
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<td>5. Joyous</td>
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<td>6. Transparence</td>
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<td>7. Civilized</td>
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<td>8. Illiterate</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Magnify</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Organized</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Activity VI:- Learners are asked to complete the following sentences having parallel structures:-

i. Life is ______________; death is ______________.

ii. To err is __________; to forgive is ______________.

iii. Youth is ______________; old age is ______________.

iv. Men are ______________ while women are ______________.

v. Love is __________ while marriage is an eye opener.

Once the students finish doing all these exercises the teacher takes their note books and checks them. All the mistakes of the learners are corrected by the teacher. The teacher also writes his/her comments in the note books for further motivating the learners to improve their language skills.

Colloquial poems:- Many poems are written in conversational style. Such poems can serve as suitable language learning materials because they have colloquial expressions. Billows too suggests that based on the study of colloquial poems the teacher may ask simple questions which will help students to overcome their reticences. Such colloquial poems can help the learners improve their conversational
skills. The teacher can ask the students to read the following lines carefully:-

'I was thinking, Mother, of that poor old horse

They killed the other day;

Nannie says it was only a bag of bones,

But I hated it taken away'.

'Of course, sweet; but now the baker's man

Will soon have a nice new motor van.'

'Yet Mother, But when on our walk a squirrel

Crept up to my thumb to be fed,

She 'shood' it away with her gloves – like this!

They ought to be shot, she said.'

'She may have been reading, darling, that

Squirrels are only a kind of rat.'

'Goldfinches, Mother, owls and mice,

Tom tits and bunnies and jays –

Everything in my picture – books
Will soon be gone, she says.'

'You see, my precious, so many creatures,

Though exquisitely made,

Steal, or are dirty and dangerous,

Or else they are bad for Trade.

(from 'Reserved' by Walter De La Mare)

After the students finish reading these lines silently once or twice the teacher can ask the learners "what impression do they gather from these lines?" The possible answer might be that it is a conversation going on between a mother and curious little child. Then the teacher can ask the learners if "they have ever had the experience of answering the questions of an innocent little child; if 'yes' what were the questions about; and if the child was satisfied by the answers of the learners?" etc. Thus, the teacher can coax the students to respond to the questions asked by him/her. This kind of an exercise will motivate the students to focus on the information provided by the text of the poem and students will not have much difficulty in responding to the lines as the poem is very simple.
Pronunciation:- Poetry can also be used for teaching correct pronunciation and meaning of the difficult words to the learners. Take for instance a poem by Alan Seegar. 'I have a Rendezvous with Death'. The teacher can explain through such texts of poetry the pronunciation and meaning of difficult words like ‘rendezvous’/ rondivuː/. And the meaning of ‘rendezvous’ is (place chosen for a) meeting at an agreed time.

The teacher can ask the learners to determine which part of speech does the word ‘rendezvous’ belong to? Then the teacher can use it in a sentence of her/his own, e.g. ‘The college canteen is a rendezvous for meeting friends.’ Finally learners can also be asked to write some more sentences in their rough sheets by using the same word ‘rendezvous’. After the learners finish writing the sentences the teacher can individually collect their sheets and correct the grammatical errors in the sentences that need to be corrected.

A similar kind of an exercise in lexis and pronunciation can be prepared on the stanza taken from Louis Mac Niece’s poem. Read the following lines:

I am not yet born O fill me

With strength against those who would freeze my
Humanity, would dragoon me into a lethal automaton,

Would make me a cog in a machine, a thing with

One face, a thing, and against all those

Who would dissipate my entirety, would

Blow me like thistledown hither and

Thither or hither and thither

Like water held in the

Hands would spill me.

Let then not make me a stone and let them not spill me.

Otherwise kill me.

(from 'Prayer before Birth' by Louis Mac Niece)

First the teacher can ask the learners to pick up /underline copy the words which they find difficult and write them in their rough notebooks. Then he/she can ask the learners to guess the meaning difficult words from the context. All the correct responses by the learners can be noted by the teacher on the black board. Then the teacher can explain the correct pronunciation and the meaning of these difficult words and also what part of speech they belong to. For instance:
1 - Dragoon- /drəˈɡuːn/ (noun) -- heavily armed cavalry man

2 - Automaton- /ˈætomətən / (noun) -- robot or a person who seems to act mechanically without thinking.

3 - Dissipate - /dɪsɪˈpeɪt/ (verb -- cause something to scatter or vanish.

4 - Entirety - /ɪnˈtælərəti / (noun) -- state of being entire or complete.

5 - Thistledown- /ˈθɪsldaun / (noun) -- light fluff that contains thistle seeds and is blown from thistle plants by wind.

To quote Carter (1982) “our response to the poem is never straight-forward; it is clearly, not simply a matter of responding to the language of the poem taken as a whole... the words carry associations from the social and interpersonal contexts from the ‘families’ in which they are habitually used”47. For instance read the following lines:

Tonight I can write the saddest line
Write, for example, ‘The night is shattered
and the blue stars shiver in distance.’
... To hear the immense night, still more immense without her.

(from ‘Tonight I can Write’ by Pablo Neruda)
Based on Carter’s observation that words carry associations the teacher can ask the students to recall and tell what words come to their mind when they think of the word ‘night’. Responses could be like this darkness, moon, stars, mystery, death, rest etc. Then the teacher can similarly give them some more words like ‘day’ and ‘sky’ etc. The associations of these words could be ‘day’- brightness, sun, heat, work, play etc., ‘sky’- azure, blue, clouds, vastness etc. This kind of an exercise will help the learners use together the words in form of sentences which are usually associated with each other.

Next, the teacher can ask the pupils to write a short poem or a paragraph on any word association group. Selected poems or paragraphs can be read out in the class, or the teacher can ask students to use word associations and make sentences for oral production. Such an exercise will improve their writing and speaking skills simultaneously.

Poetry can also serve as a useful medium for teaching creative composition to the students by providing them with a model poem or stanza such as:

Every village has its jack, but no village ever had quite so fine a jack as ours:-
So picturesque,

Versatile,

Irresponsible,

Powerful,

Hedonistic,

And lovable a Jack as ours.

(from 'Jack' by E.V. Lucas)

Learners may come up with certain compositions of their own. We can't exactly predict what though. Nevertheless, just to understand the point, they may come up with something as follows on the pattern of the above stanza:

Every class has a class bully, but no class ever had an ominous bully like ours:

So bossy,

Wild,

Reckless,

Huge,

Venomous,
And disgusting as ours.

Another playful method of enhancing the creative writing skills of the learners through poetry has been advocated by Mehta (1950). He suggested the method of composing poetry with the help of rhyming words fruitful for cultivating the interest of the language learners in the English language. The same method was tried by me on a group of students of class XIth (A.M.U). The students enjoyed themselves throughout the entire exercise. The topic of the poem 'Cricket' was chosen after considerable debating. And then the rhyming words were chosen. After a lot of deliberation the class started to compose a poem. The final result after a few corrections is as follows:

**Cricket**

What a beautiful bat!

Had the Meerut university Capitan who is fat

After hitting every six he used to give his pot belly a pat,

The bowler threw the ball,

The captain had a fall,

After that another player was given a call,

On the score of 250 runs went all.
Then came the Aligarh Muslim university team,

See them score them the supporters gave a loud scream,

They made their opponents eat cream,

Their performance was a real dream.

The opening batsmen made a great pair,

And Aligarh Muslim University's coach said his team's victory was quite clear.

Collie and Slater (1987) feel writing a metaphor poem can be a good way of enhancing the writing skills of the learners. Read the following poem carefully:

**The Hangman at Home**

What does the hangman think about

When he goes home at night from work?

When he sits down with his wife and

Children for a cup of coffee and a plate

Of ham and eggs, do they ask

Him if it was a good days work
And everything went well or do they

Stay off some topic and talk about

The weather, baseball, politics

And the comic strips in the papers

And the movies? Do they look at his

Hands when he reaches for the coffee

Or ham or eggs? If the little one says Daddy, play horse, here's

A rope – does he answer like a joke:

I seen enough rope for today?

Or does his face light up like a

Bonfire of joy and does he say:

It's a good and dandy world we live

In. and if a white face moon looks

In through a window where a baby girl

Sleeps and the moon-gleams mix with

Baby ears and baby hair—the hangman
How does he act then? It must be easy

For him. Anything is easy for a hangman

I guess.

(by Carl Sandburg)

After this poem ‘The Hangman’ has been read by the teacher with immense feeling and deep eye contact. The poem can be read again by one of the learners. Then the teacher can explain to the learners that in a metaphor one kind of thing, quality or action is called to be another; though this thing, quality or action is actually different from its literal usage, e.g. ‘He is a brave tiger’. Though the boy is brave yet in actuality he cannot be called a tiger because the physical properties of a tiger are very different from that of a boy. Thus, a metaphor is used for producing rhetorical effect in the English language. Once the meaning of the poem ‘The Hangman’ becomes clear to the learners the teacher ask them to write a short metaphor poem on ‘the hangman’. As Collie and Slater (1987) suggest the teacher can supply the learners with metaphorical clues such as:

He’s (an animal)

He’s (a Flower)
He's (a drink)
He's (weather)
He's (a colour)

The end result could be something close to the following metaphor poem:

The Hangman

He's a helpless beast forced to kill,
He's a flower without scent,
He's a cold drink that sends shivers down the spine,
He's a foggy day,
He's the jet-black face of death.

Thus, it can be said that poetry offers rich opportunities to the English language teacher for improving the language skills of the learners. In the next chapter 'ELT through Drama' it will be examined how this genre can be exploited to the fullest for achieving the ELT objective with special reference to the intermediate language learners.
References:


13. Ibid.


21. Ibid.


25. Ibid.


39. Ibid.


41. Ibid.


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