

Contributions of Teaching Short Stories To Language Teaching: A Sample Analysis

Kısa Hikâye Öğretiminin Dil Öğretimine Katkılarının Bir Örnek Çalışma ile İncelenmesi

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Abstract

This study aims to discuss how to teach short stories and what their contribution could be to language classes. As a sample text D. H. Lawrence's short story *Odor of Chrysanthemums* has been analyzed in the light of two theoreticians - Robert Scholes and H. L. B. Moody. It is found that not only in teaching short stories, but also in teaching other genres these reading strategies can be used and contribute to students' language skills and abilities.

Key words: Reading within, reading upon, extrinsic features, intrinsic features.

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, dil eğitimi bölümlerinde kısa hikâye öğretimi ve kısa hikâye öğretiminin dil eğitimine katkılarını ortaya çıkarmaktır. Çalışmada, D. H. Lawrence'ın "Odor of Chrysanthemums" adlı kısa hikâyesi, Robert Scholes ve H. L. B. Moody'nin teorileri doğrultusunda incelenmiş ve bu okuma stratejileri ile sadece kısa hikaye değil, aynı zamanda diğer edebi türlerin de incelenebileceği ve bu okumaların öğrencilerin dillerinin gelişimine katkıda bulunacağı sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Metnin genel anlamı bazında okuma, metni mecazi anlam bazında okuma (yorumlama), yazarın hayatı ve edebi geçmişi, yaşadığı döneme ait özellikler, dilsel ve kültürel özellikler.

Introduction

1.1 Aim of the study

All the discussions about the use of literature in language classes seem to agree on one point: literature provides insights into the culture and language of the communities while helping the personal growth. The use of literature in language classes is helpful in increasing the student's awareness of language and stimulates his/her intellectual and emotional development. In language classes literary texts enable the student to improve his/her language proficiency, to gain consciousness into the culture of the language community through authentic situations produced by the

use of natural language. Just as both teaching language, teaching literature aims to develop the skills and abilities such as the accurate and fluent use of language, or critical and analytical responses in both written and oral language, while motivating students to read in the second language. Literary texts offer the students language varieties in the style, some vocabulary items, opportunities for classroom discussions, and hence opportunities to develop some reading strategies.

Why and how to use literature in language classes have always been debated. There are various approaches and attitudes to the teaching of literature in language classes. The approaches used are generally characterized by the relationship they draw between language teaching and literature teaching. Most known of them are language based approaches and traditional approaches. In language based approaches students form their own interpretations that are based on linguistic

features of the text. The emphasis is on the detailed analyses of the linguistic context of the literary text. With this intrinsic approach students explore and comment on the artistic use of language and focus on the lexical, grammatical, structural or cultural elements. The traditional approaches, on the other hand, give importance to the content of the literary text. They mainly stress the literary, social, political or historical contexts of the text, literary genres and rhetorical devices. This extrinsic approach is more teacher-dependent and mechanical and does not leave much opportunity for the student's comments without the guidance of the teacher. The aim of this article is to suggest an approach that makes use of both the intrinsic - language based - approaches and the extrinsic - traditional approaches - and enable the students to reach multiplicity of meanings.

The short story is the most practicable genre and it is widely used in language teaching departments. Like the novel, the short story is an important form of fiction. When it is compared with the novel, although they both have the same literary elements such as plot, setting, characterization, point of view, theme, message, tone, and mood, there is a spatial limitation, and a shorter span of time in the short story. Unlike the novel, the short story focuses on only one incident and one major aspect of one character. Being an important predecessor of this modern genre, Edgar Allan Poe, "formulated basic principles for the composition of short prose narratives" (Shaw 1986: 9). He states that a short story must have unity, brevity, and singleness of effect. In order not to disturb this single effect on the reader, it should be read in one sitting because the short story is more concentrated, it has one plot, one theme, possibly one setting and one major character (Shaw 1984: 1409). Therefore, not only because of its length, but also because of the above-mentioned aesthetic differences it has, when compared with the novel, it is more practicable in language teaching classes. Moreover, since the literary elements in it are also present in the novel, drama, and poetry, studying a short story may be regarded as an introductory step for the other genres.

1.2 Scope of the Study

While discussing the contributions of teaching short stories in language classes, the theories of Robert

Scholes and H.L.B. Moody have been helpful as theoretical guidelines. Robert Scholes's theory has proved useful in giving the writer of this study a standpoint on the issue of how to expose literature in language classes. Scholes suggests a new competence in reading - textual power. In his explanation of textual power, there are three approaches to reading a text; the first is reading i.e. reading "within" a text. It is a primary activity and requires the ability to understand the linguistic code of the text. The reader - in language classes the student - who acquires or learns the knowledge of language should comprehend the grammatical patterns and see any divergence from grammatical correctness because the general knowledge of grammatical rules helps him/her to realize the artistic use of language in a literary text. The second approach to reading a text is reading "upon" a text, which is interpretation. Reading moves from a summary of events to the discussion of meaning or theme of the text in the light of the metaphorical, symbolic and paradigmatic dimensions. The reader reconstructs the text in the light of both the writer's experience and of his own experience and creates a new organic whole, which is a broader synthesis than the work of art itself. If the first step, "reading within a text" is the "grammatization" of the text, this second step is the "thematization" of the text. The reader brings his collective subjectivity to the interpretation of the text. Scholes's last stage of reading is called "criticism" which requires a critique of both themes and the codes. The reader evaluates the text reading it "against" itself by comparison and contrast with other modes of production to which it belongs (1985: 24). However, in language classes students are not asked to read the text "against" itself and evaluate it in the literary canon.

H.L.B. Moody (in Brumfit 1983: 23-25) offers a method in studying literature. This method considers the extrinsic and intrinsic features together. The extrinsic features indicate the background knowledge about the author. Since the content and form of a text is influenced by the author's life and literary background, in understanding the text the social, historical, political or ideological processes in the period the author lived and his reaction to them acquires importance. The intrinsic features, on the other hand, include the grammatical,

lexical, structural, and cultural features. They mainly focus on the language usage and the influence of the cultural context. While studying a literary text, especially in the process of interpretation and criticism, both the extrinsic and intrinsic features have to be grasped to understand the meaning. As an example of how to teach short stories in language classes, this study aims to analyse David Herbert Lawrence's "Odour of Chrysanthemums" in the light of Scholes's theory and Moody's approach.

2. Discussion

2.1 The Extrinsic Features in Moody's Approach

Since Lawrence's works bear many autobiographical traces of his life, students are familiarized first with Lawrence's life and his literary background before the analysis of the story. Lawrence was born at Eastwood, Nottinghamshire in 1885, as the youngest son of a miner and a housewife. Lawrence's father – an uneducated and an earthly man who loved to drink, dance and sing, did not make his mother very happy who was an educated middle class woman and attach importance to religion and the spiritual side of life. The family was usually short of money. In spite of all the difficulties, the mother wanted her children to be educated, and she did her best to achieve this. The mother was very dependent on Lawrence and Lawrence was also very dependent on his mother. The 'Oedipal Complex', which was influential on him, has also been a tracemark all through his writings. Yet, Lawrence had some love affairs. At last he fell in love with the German wife of one of his professors. Together with her, he travelled through the world and died at the age of 45 in Italy because of tuberculosis.

Lawrence is one of the first modern writers in the early 20th century. He is a graduate of Nottingham University and worked as a teacher until his tuberculosis was ultimately diagnosed. His first novel, *The White Peacock* (1911) was published in a magazine just a few weeks after his mother's death. Then he wrote his autobiographical novel *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *The Rainbow* (1915), *Women in Love* (1920), and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), which was banned in England after his death. His famous short stories are "The Rocking Horse Winner", "Odour of Chrysanthemums", "Tickets Please", "The

Horse-Dealer's Daughter", "The Woman Who Rode Away", "The Last Laugh", and many more. Unlike in his novels, he is less autobiographical in his short stories. In short stories, he exercises the society and human nature. His stories have spirit of place and most of his stories are about his friends and acquaintances. However, Lawrence's literary background is not limited with his novels and short stories. He produced an amazing quantity of other work. He wrote poems, plays, essays, travel books, translations, and also letters.

2.2 The Intrinsic Features in Moody's Approach and Scholes's First Approach for Reading a Text: Reading "within" a Text

Having activated the students' interest in the extrinsic features, which will be a guide in the reading process, the intrinsic features dealt with. In this second step, students are asked to summarize the story. While doing this, their attention is on the overall meaning of the text. Concentrating on the cultural meanings of the linguistic items, they try to understand the grammatical structures and the vocabulary used in the story. Students often paraphrase, re-structure, re-shape, and delete and focus on the chain of incidents. In order to check if the students read the story "within" itself; i.e. if they get the general meaning, they are asked some questions which cover the elements of the short story. The first one is the plot of the story.

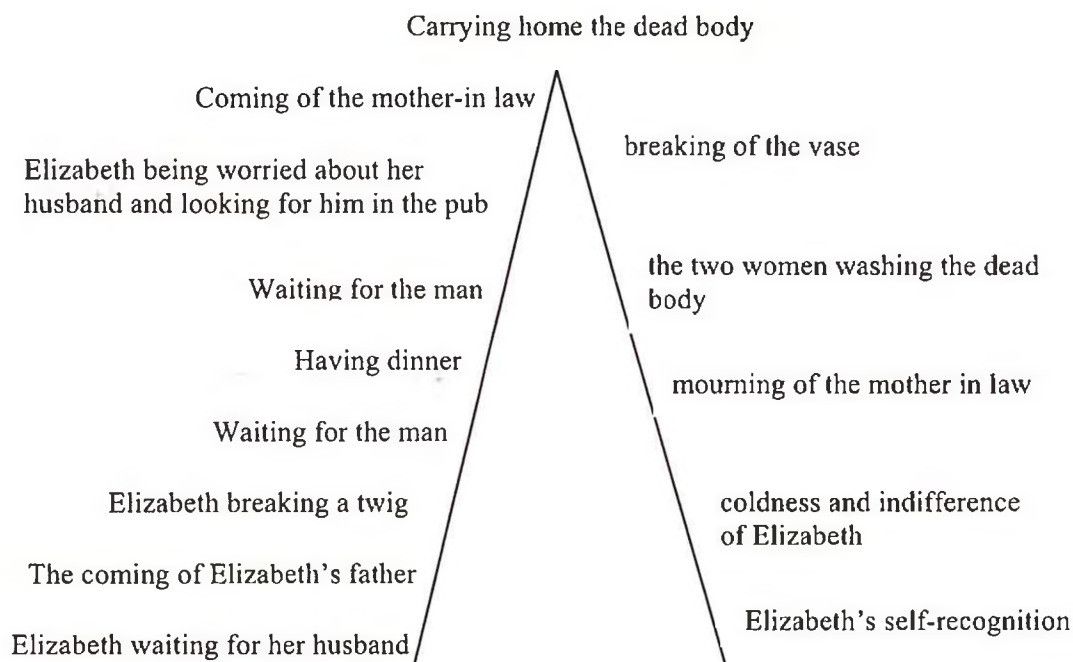
The story begins in *medias res* (the middle) which is the house where the family lives. Elizabeth is waiting for her husband who is late for dinner - she is outside the house in the garden with her children – her daughter Annie and her son. While waiting, Elizabeth's father comes and they talk about his wish to marry. She decides not to wait for her husband and has dinner with the children. When entering her house, her son tears out the petals of the pink chrysanthemums and throws them on the path. Elizabeth is angry and she breaks off a twig and pushes it in her apron-brand. While having dinner, the family talks about the father, Elizabeth is angry because she thinks that he has gone to a public house and is drinking. Suddenly Annie notices that her mother has chrysanthemums in her apron and tells her mother that they look nice and smell nice. However, Elizabeth does not agree with this and says that she does not like

chrysanthemums because she had chrysanthemums when she married, when she gave birth to her child and the first time her husband was brought home drunk, he had chrysanthemums in his button-hole. Then she puts the flowers in a vase in the parlour. Time passes and the man does not come home. Elizabeth looks for him in the public house but he is not there, she asks his friends but they do not know where he is. Later her mother-in-law comes. She has a worried face and tells that her son had an accident in the pit and that his friends will bring him home. After some time, the friends come and Elizabeth sees the dead body of her husband. The mother starts to weep. The dead body is in the parlour but her husband's friends are not careful enough and they break the vase with the chrysanthemums. Elizabeth picks it up. Then the dead body is laid on the table, he is half naked. After the friends leave, the two women start to strip and wash the dead body. The mother feels sorry and tells words to emphasize the innocence of her son whereas Elizabeth feels as if she is touching a stranger not her husband. She feels cold and guilty. She cannot even cry for the man with whom she had been one flesh.

Lawrence has organized his story after the major steps found in the traditional Freytag's triangle. In the exposition, we have Elizabeth waiting for her husband.

The rising action starts with her father coming and continues with the breaking of the twig, waiting for the man for dinner, having dinner, again waiting for the man, Elizabeth being worried about her husband and looking for him, and at last the coming of the mother-in-law. The climax is the friends carrying the dead body of the man. In the falling action, we see the breaking of the vase, the two women washing the dead body, the mourning of the mother, and the coldness of Elizabeth. In the resolution, we see the change in Elizabeth, her thoughts about her marriage and death and her realization of how wrong she has been in identifying herself with her husband.

After the plot, students are asked about the setting of the story. The setting is both external and mostly internal. The story takes place in a mining village, where people earn their money mostly by working in the pits in the early nineteenth century. The internal setting is the house and especially in the last paragraph it is Elizabeth's mind. The whole story takes place in a day. It starts late in the afternoon and ends late in the night. There are a lot of local colours as well, like; Selston, Underwood, black wagon, spinney, Brinsley Colliery, pink chrysanthemums, apple trees, wintry primroses, the names like; John, Elizabeth, Annie, Jack, the tea, twenty-three shillings, Prince of Wales, New Brinsley.



The point of view in the story is the other question that is put to the students as another element of the short story. It is the third person selective omniscient; i.e. the narrator is able to enter the minds of the characters and comment on the situations. For instance, the narrator knows how Elizabeth thinks or feels: "She *knew* she submitted to life, which was her immediate master. But from death, her ultimate master, she winced with fear and shame" (Lawrence 1979: 2162).

The characterization is another question that is put to the students in the process of reading "within" the text. In "Odour of Chrysantemums", it is multi-dimensional; i.e. the physical aspects are given in detail as well as the characters' internal conflicts. The characters in the story are Elizabeth Bates, Walter Bates, the two children – the son and the daughter, Elizabeth's father, Walter's mother, the neighbours and the colliers. Elizabeth is the protagonist and the focus of the story. She is the only character who changed at the end of the story. She is a round character. However, since we are not given their internal conflicts, Annie and the son are flat characters. On the other hand, the mother-in-law and the neighbours are used as foils to emphasize Elizabeth who is more sophisticated than the others. The antagonist of the story might be Elizabeth's husband and the Industrial Revolution, which caused people to be materialistic.

2.3 *The Intrinsic Features in Moody's Approach and Scholes's Second Approach to Reading a Text: Reading "upon" a Text*

In Scholes's *Textual Power* (1985), the second approach to reading a text is reading "upon" a text, which is interpretation. The teacher directs his/her students from a summary of events to the discussion of metaphorical meaning or theme of the text focusing on the deviant use of the language. Students are asked to pay attention to the words in the first two paragraphs like - "locomotive engine", "waggons", "the colt", "the woman", "natural habitation", "animals" and the lexical items referring to their action or state. For instance, locomotive engines "appeared round the corner with loud threats of speed", "the trucks thumped heavily past, one by one, with slow inevitable movement". The colt is "startled" by the locomotive engine. The woman, on the other hand, "drew back into the hedge", "watched the

engine advancing", "stood insignificantly trapped between the jolting black waggons and the hedge", "The fields were dreary and forsaken", "the fowls had already abandoned their run among the alders" (Lawrence 1979: 2145). As the selected words indicate, the scene explained in these paragraphs is a picture of an industrial society. The locomotive engines, the railway, the pit, colliers' houses, the sterile and the abandoned nature stand for the ugly side of mechanical civilization, whereas the trees, the animals, and here the colt stand for the nature. Lawrence, in the very beginning gives the dichotomy between civilization and nature. The 20th century is an age of speed but this speed is "threatening". If the "startled" colt and Elizabeth - the woman in the first paragraph - who drew back to protect herself from the train - are considered, we see that civilization "trapped" man. Lawrence does not want a civilization at the cost of mankind. However, there is an "inevitable movement" i.e. the speed of the civilization is inevitable for the 20th century man.

The dichotomy between civilization and nature goes on in human relationships too. Lawrence uses some explicit and implicit explanations in portraying the characters, especially Elizabeth - in her relationship with her father, her children, her neighbours, her mother in law, and especially her husband. She is "a tall woman of imperious mien, handsome, with definite black eyebrows. Her smooth hair [is] parted exactly... Her face [is] calm and set, her mouth [is] closed with disillusionment" (Lawrence 1979: 2146). All these descriptions point out the fact that Elizabeth is a sort of person who very much values control, self-possession and self-reliance. She is a rigid, domineering character. In her relationship with her father, Elizabeth is pure reason, and suppresses her feelings all the time. Her father is an engine driver and wants to get married. He doesn't want to "sit at [his] own hearth like a stranger" (Lawrence 1979: 2147). In this relationship, while Elizabeth stands for civilization, the father stands for nature. She is portrayed as a product of the industrialized puritan society and is more on the side of the social rules. Yet, the father acts more individualistically. If Elizabeth is the superego, her father is the id. What Lawrence wants indeed is a balance between the society and the individual, a balance between the superego and the id.

In her relationship with Annie, her daughter, Elizabeth's nature is once more revealed. Annie too is on the side of nature. She is an emotional girl. She shows her feelings unlike her mother who regards it as a shame: "I do think it's beautiful to look in the fire. It's so red, and full of little caves – and it feels so nice, and you can fair smell it" (Lawrence 1979: 2149). The mother's reply to her is worth to notice: "It'll want mending directly" (Lawrence 1979: 2149). Elizabeth never gives way to her emotions. She is a very duty - conscious woman.

Lawrence does not present Elizabeth like the other women in the neighbourhood. Just like her sophisticated name, she is different from the other miners' wives. She speaks differently and her neighbours show her respect. She represents puritan consciousness with her rigidity and cleanliness. In contrast to Mrs. Riggley, who is dirty and untidy, Elizabeth is very clean, tidy, indeed a hair-splitter. However, Riggley's dirt does not make her husband escape from her. If how many times the strike of the clock is mentioned throughout the story is considered, the degree of Elizabeth's time-consciousness can be understood better.

There are some direct explanations about Walter's character traits, too. He "got another bout on". He is "bragging", "drinking", "make[s] a beast of himself" (Lawrence 1979: 2147), "goes past home to drink" (Lawrence 1979: 2148). It seems that Walter cannot cope with Elizabeth's authority in the house and looks for another flow of life in public houses. At this point, the two opposite natures of the husband and wife come to the foreground. While Elizabeth stands for the cold intellectual and the spiritual values, Walter represents the physical vigour and sensuality. As in the society, these two values clash in the Elizabeth - Walter relationship. Walter wants to live in accordance with his nature and for this reason he escapes from home to satisfy his nature away from home, but he fails.

Elizabeth is different from Walter's mother too. The old lady also stands for nature. Especially, if her language, that is repetitious, illogical, and inconsistent is considered, how emotional and different from Elizabeth she is can be seen. When she arrives, "the fountain of her tears" is stopped by "Elizabeth's directness" (Lawrence 1979: 2155). Elizabeth asks her directly if he is dead or not and for the first time, flushes at her own

rigidity. While the old lady is crying, Elizabeth's main concern is to stay in control emotionally and mentally. Her only worry is how she could manage with a little financial support if something bad happened to Walter. She learns at the end that the gas in the mine suffocated Walter. His friends bring his dead body to his house. Even while waiting for the dead body, Elizabeth never gives up her authority. She devotes herself to the necessary preparations for receiving his body; she quiets and consoles his mother, and protects the children from the scene.

When she looks at Walter's dead body, Elizabeth's self-recognition or her growing up starts. She feels "countermanded". His body lies there "utterly inviolable". She tries to lay claim to her husband's body. Yet she has lost her control over him. She embraces the dead body to get some connection, but she fails. She feels "driven away", because he is "impregnable" (Lawrence 1979: 2159). As she puts her face against his neck, she trembles and shudders. A great dread and weariness hold her because she feels "unavailing", isolated. For the first time Elizabeth recognizes that their marriage has already failed because they had never impinged on one another in any meaningful way.

As it is obviously seen in Elizabeth's and Walter's mother's attitudes and feelings while washing Walter's dead body - the mother remarks how pure, how beautiful, how peaceful his body is whereas Elizabeth notices how strange, how impregnable the dead body is – Elizabeth, differently from the mother who understood Walter better than herself as his wife, has so much suppressed such feelings all her life that she is far from expressing any natural human feelings. While questioning herself, Elizabeth's thoughts and feelings under emotional stress come to such a point that she feels absolute isolation and claims that this dead man has nothing to do with her:

There had been nothing between them... she knew she had never seen him, he had never seen her, they had met in the dark and had fought in the dark not knowing whom they met nor whom they fought. And now she saw, and turned silent in seeing. For she had been wrong. She had said he was something he was not; she had felt familiar with him. Whereas he was apart all the while living as she never lived, feeling as she never felt (Lawrence 1979: 2161).

The dead body seems alien to her. However, she realizes that he has always been a stranger to her in his life. They have come together only to share their nakedness. They have met in the darkness. There was no real communication and no emotional give and take in their marriage. She realizes that she had denied him. Yet, ironically it is death that teaches the reality of life to Elizabeth. For the first time she understands how her husband has suffered, how frustrated he has felt.

In her emotional stress Elizabeth tries to rationalize everything in a sense of denial or self-delusion. She claims that as in her case her husband had nothing to do with the children either (Lawrence 1979: 2161). However, this claim is contradicted with the earlier passages of the story: "As the mother watched her son's sullen little struggle with the wood, she saw herself in his silence and pertinacity, she saw the father in her child's indifference to all but himself"(Lawrence 1979: 2148). In her strong reaction, Elizabeth denies this reality, saying: "There were the children – but the children belonged to life. This dead man had nothing to do with them. He and she were only channels through which life had flowed to issue in the children" (Lawrence 1979: 2161). Lawrence presents Elizabeth pregnant. However, Elizabeth is forced to deny this child in her present mood. She regards it as "a weight apart from her" (Lawrence 1979: 2160), and "like ice in her womb" (Lawrence 1979: 2161). Moreover, "she saw this episode of her life closed" (Lawrence 1979: 2161). In her present state, she finds this idea consoling. Yet, she seems to be right in the sense that their relationship has only meant procreating offsprings. Otherwise, they have never lived true love and sexuality.

While reading "upon" the story in Scholes's textual power, having covered the story, students are asked the themes. Themes in "Odour of Chrysanthemums" can be taken as being yourself, isolation, alienation, sterility, incongruity between couples and the environment, effects of Industrial Revolution. With respect to these themes some major messages that might be drawn from this story can be stated as follows: the indifference to one's partner causes unhappiness in a marriage; Industrialism caused workers to drink too much and destroyed some marriages; If someone identifies himself/herself with someone else, it leads to

unhappiness; Couples who have been married for a long time still may be strangers to each other; One's death can be a new life for another.

Students are also asked to pay attention to the title, which Lawrence chooses to be functional in providing a foreshadowing. In the beginning "beside the path hung dishevelled pink chrysanthemums, like clothes hung on bushes"(Lawrence 1979: 2145). They signify the clash between nature and industry. While the mother and son are walking home, the child tears at the wisp of chrysanthemums and scatters their petals. She scolds her son. She breaks a twig bearing a few flowers and puts them in her apron. If the whole story is considered, chrysanthemums stand for the natural feelings, love, potation, desires. In Elizabeth's life, chrysanthemums have always been important. She cannot help keeping the flowers in her apron because she received chrysanthemums when she married, when she gave birth to her children, when her husband was brought home drunk. And finally when the miners brought the dead body of Walter, they break the vase with the chrysanthemums, which may stand for the death of Walter and natural feelings. Not only the flowers in the title but also "darkness" is used symbolically foreshadowing the end: "Darkness was settling over the spaces of the railways and trucks" (Lawrence 1979: 2147); "Indoors the fire was sinking and the room was dark red"; "the dark winter days" (Lawrence 1979: 2148); "All was deserted" (Lawrence 1979: 2148); "darkness of the lines" (Lawrence 1979: 2148); "the room was almost in total darkness" (Lawrence 1979: 2149). All the examples not only set the gloomy atmosphere in the house but also foreshadow the coming grief - death. The dark atmosphere is related to both the coal mining villages and the misery felt in the hearts.

At the end of the story, Elizabeth becomes mature and reaches the wisdom Lawrence has: "She was a mother – but how awful she knew it now to have been a wife" (Lawrence 1979: 2161). As the "pink" chrysanthemums indicate, her love is a fantasy. In love, getting out of one's self and trying to understand the other is important. Sexual love is only an end of this beginning. Love does not mean engulfment but rather independence. It is feeling the otherness of the other self.

Conclusion

In this study the practicability of the use of short stories and how to teach them in language teaching departments have been argued. While discussing how to teach short stories and their contributions in language teaching classes, Robert Scholes's and H. L. B. Moody's approaches have been used as models. Having analysed D. H. Lawrence's "Odour of Chrysanthemums" as an example text under the light of these two theoreticians, it is found out that not only in teaching short stories, but also in teaching other genres, these reading strategies i.e. the recent theories of deconstructive and semiotic readings can be used, since the literary texts offer the student language varieties in the style, some vocabulary items, opportunities for classroom discussions, and hence opportunities to develop some reading strategies, this can enable the student to develop his/her language skills and abilities.

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