TEACHING VOCABULARY THROUGH POETIC FORMS

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It has been proven by many years of experience and research that children at primary and teenagers at secondary school can much faster and more efficiently learn vocabulary items and grammar phenomena through learning to write various short poetic forms. Such poetic genres as acrostic poems, colour, shape, lists and ABC poems, nursery rhymes, couplets, triplets or quatrains are easy and fun to practice. Rhymed prose can also present a very interesting genre to help memorize and enjoy learning a foreign language. Animal and food metaphors, as well as colour and shape similes can serve an excellent foundation for building images and strengthening language patterns.

Key-words: acrostic poems, colour and shape poems, lists and ABC poems, nursery rhymes, rhymed prose

This article is dedicated to practicing short poietic forms which allow pupils at primary and secondary school level learn and actively use vocabulary items and grammar structures envisaged by school curriculum.

More than ten year experience in teaching Prose and Poetry Hermeneutics to university graduate sudents proved that projects hey make aimed at analyzing and developing teaching tasks in learning English as a foreign language give students and effecient tool in teaching when they have teaching practice at local schools during their last year of studies.

Rhyming has proved throughout centuries a very helpful technique in learning vocabulary items and grammar structures. As a result such genres of literature as poetry and rhymed prose have been developed.

Children love to play with words and creating rhyme patterns is one of their favourite language games. Initially they start to rhyme short prosaic text at an early age and then move to experimenting with short poetic forms with a length from two to six or eight-nine lines, that is from a couplet to an nonnet.

Harmonious and rhymed prose is defined as a literary kind of speech characterized by producing music and intonation in order to convey meaning of the context as well as influence the addressee more. It is a piece of prose where sentences are divided into elements or cola (phrases) by speech pauses, but with the cola terminations rhyming. [1; p.9] In Romanian literature Marin Sorescu is famous for his tales in rhymed prose (proza rimata). In such texts noun phrases and endings of clauses rhyme, which produces a strong stylistic effect.

It is possible to suggest students at primary school rhyme vocabulary items or grammar structures that they study learning a foreign language. It facilitates memorizing them and using actively later. For example, if we take Module One, Lesson Five in Magic English for the third form, it is possible to ask students to write short messages to friends or family using vocabulary from the topic jobs and occupations: mother-father, farmer-barber, actress-waitress, postman-policeman, etc. [2; p.10] A descriptive rhymed text they wrote looks like this.

Pupils' Example:

My father is a barber, my mother is a farmer, my sister is an actress, my niece is a waitress. No one wants to be a zoo keeper in Cypress feeding the angry tigress.

Another possibility to acquire rhyming skills appeared when pupils studied the topic – fall, working with Module Two, Lesson One, vocabulary topic – autumn weather: [2; p.17]. They produced a couplet when rhyming words with diphthongs on the given topic. It was short and easy to do. Children had a lot of fun doing it.

Pupils' Couplet Example:

In the gardens leaves we rake,
Pumpkin pies our mothers bake.

Later on third form pupils tried their hand at rhyming vocabulary items from the topic-houses and producing quatrains when working with Module Three, Lesson One: [2; p.31].

Pupils' Example of a descriptive poem:

In a house lives a mouse,
In a flat stays a rat,
Cats dwell in the same city
And find it very pretty.

Among other highly attractive poetic genres is an ABC poem that has five lines to create a feeling, mood or imagery. Each line is made up of phrases. The first word of line one begins with an A. The second line begins with a B. The third line begins with a C. The fourth line begins with a D. The fifth line begins with an E. However, there are variations of this poem. The pupil can begin with any letter in the alphabet and use the next five letters in the alphabet to start each line of their poem. The alphabet poem uses all 26 letters in the alphabet. Pupils need to write all of the letters of the alphabet on the left side of their paper. Then for each letter, they need to write a phrase that focus on a single topic. Or, they can write a narrative poem using the Alphabet Poem format. This Abecedarian poem is a simple format for middle school or elementary school students to write. [3] The third form pupils wrote an example of an abecedarian poem when learning past form of the English irregular verbs that are part of grammar core in Module Six, Lessons Four to Six: [2; pp.78-83]

Pupils' Example of an ABC poem:

Cooking Lessons

Andy *bought* a cookery book,
Betty *taught* him cook.
Caren thought the pie was as hard as a rock,
Daren brought it home to feed his dog.

To demonstrate how pupils can list words beginning with all 26 English letters we brought to class Example 2 of the ABC poem that looks more like rhymed prose:

A better cat doesn't exist, four gentle hearts insist. Juggling kittens, leaping, mewing, now overturning pillows--quietly rush, sustain terror--understand: Vitality will explode yawning zzz's!

by LaVerna B. Johnson [4]

Still anoher interesting poetic genre is acrostic poems which are also very popular with elementary pupils. It is a poem, usually in verse, in which the first or the last letters of the lines, or certain other letters, taken in order, form a name, word, phrase, or motto.

Below there is an example Acrostic poem based on Module Two, Lesson One, vocabulary topic – autumn weather: [2; p.16]. It was done by pupils of the third grade when they practiced rhyming words with short and long vowels.

Fall weather is fun,
All day there's sun.
Late at night it's cool,
Leaves fall in the pool.

In their didactic projects graduate students like to offer writing colour poems that express feelings about a colour. Children are invited to write down their associations with the chosen colour using analogies, similes and nouns which remind them of it. They imagine what it tastes, feels, sounds and looks like, to help describe the colour and make the poem descriptive. They learn to apply such techniques as similes, metaphors and imagery. [5]

Example of a Colour poem:

Blue is the color of the swaying oceans.
The blue jays chirping in their nest.
Blue is the color of my sapphire ring.
Blue is also the color of my nail polish. [6]

List poem or catalog poem provide a possibility to learn vocabulary items related to a category or phenomena, producing a list or inventory of things, ideas or images. For example, it is a good idea to practice it when learning body parts. It can rhyme, but doesn't have to. There's a famous example of such a poem.

Cat Bath by Cristopher Smart

She licks her neck
She licks her nose
She licks her legs
She licks her toes
She licks her tummy,
She licks her back.
Then she rubs my leg
to ask for a snack.[7]

Nursery rhymes help bring music and movement to class. Nursery rhymes represent short poems or songs for small children that often tell a story. Most of them date from the 16-th century. They usually accompany children's games , such as "Handy, dandy, prickly, pandy, which hand will you have?" (recorded 1598) and for the riddle-rhyme "Humpty-Dumpty", etc. [8]

Shape poems provide a possibility to enliven language learning by experimenting with visual forms. They can be written in the shape or form of an object. Shape poems do not have to take the form of the object they describe. This form is different than a concrete poem, in that a concrete poem takes the shape of the object it describes. [4]

CHAMPAGNE by Dawn Drickman

CHAMPAGNE, CORKED BOTTLES OF EFFERVESCENT FUN
SWEET AND FRUITY TO THE TASTE, OR MAYBE EXTRA DRY
A TINY GLASS OF BUBBLING, POPPING, SPLASHING FUN
MAKE A CHOICE, BRUT, SPARKLING, OR SIMPLE ROSE
WHEN ON A FRUGAL BUDGET, ANDRE'S PINK
DOM PERIGNON FOR THE WEALTHY
KORBEL FOR UNDER TWENTY
PRICED JUST RIGHT

FOR YOU
"C"
"O"
"L"
"D"
"C"
"H"
"A"
"M"
"P"
"A"
"G"
"N"
"E"
IS SO
DELICIOUS
"HAVE A GLASS TONIGHT" [4]

And finally, secondary level pupils can try their hand at writing nonets. A Nonet has nine lines. The first line has nine syllables, the second line eight syllables, the third line seven syllables, and so on, until line nine that finishes with one syllable. It can be on any subject and rhyming is optional. line 1 - 9 syllables line 2 - 8 syllables line 3 - 7 syllables line 4 - 6 syllables line 5 - 5 syllables line 6 - 4 syllables line 7 - 3 syllables line 8 - 2 syllables line 9 - 1 syllable
Example Nonnet poem:

School
I wish we didn't have to stay here.
The only good part is lunchtime,
eating and playing handball
instead of doing maths.
I don't like history
or geography.
I can't wait
for the
bell. [4]

In this article an attempt was made to demonstrate that poetry writing is not the craft of the born poets, this activity can be used to facilitate learning a foreign language and making it an enjoyable activity fit for anybody.

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