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Muhammad Hatta, Ph.D :

"...Tendang lagi bolanya ke saya...."



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Shape Poem:

An Appealing Merger of Word and Form

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Too difficult and irrelevant to the need of English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners would mostly be the answers of EFL teachers, when they are asked whether or not they use poem as authentic material in EFL classroom. Most of them, apparently, looks literature particularly poem or poetry as the untouchable object. Surprisingly, the regretful opinion on literature (particularly poem) not only comes from EFL teachers but also arise from the writer's colleagues—*widyaiswara bahasa Inggris* (English Teacher Trainer) The myth toward literature (poem) clouds the true color of the poem as authentic material which should benefit the EFL learning process in Indonesia.

As the literature dilettante, the writer possesses great determination to uncover the myth. It is undeniably an arduous task to be carried out. However, it is also challenging. One action that already has been done is

by presenting this issue to the reader *EKSPRESI* of PPPG Bahasa (Language Teacher Training Development Center). The aim of this article is to introduce SHAPE POEM as one of the types of poem.

Shape poem began its journey in 1950's when some poet in Switzerland, Sweden and Brazil independently develop 'concrete poetry'. This kind of poem offers the different arrangement of words and phrases which lead to the interpretation of poem's meaning. Some famous poets who have made such great work on collaborating the form or appearance with the words and phrases are Ezra Pound, Stephane Mallarme, Lewis Carol and George Herbert. Later, concrete poetry or visual poetry is also known as shape poem.

Kenneth Koch in the *www.baymoon.com* provides some characteristics of shape poem:

1. If you remove the form of the poem, you will weaken the poem (not only the meaning but also the total beauty of the poem). In some shape poems (though not all), the form has significant meaning to the poem that removing the form means destroying the poem.
2. Shape poem has the arrangement of letters, words and phrases that create an image leading to the meaning visually.
3. The white space of the page can contribute significant part of the poem.
4. Shape poem can include a combination of lexical and pictorial element
5. The physical arrangement in shape poem or concrete poem can provide a cohesion that the actual words lack. This allows a poem to ignore standard syntax and logical sequencing.

In Shape poem the visual represents and symbolizes the

meaning and perhaps the subject of the poem. The form further contributes the content construction of the poem. The following is an example of shape poems entitled **A Simple Tree** by Marie Summers (2003):

And life began
From a simple tree
Starting from roots
They spread beneath
The earth nourishing soil
Growing bigger
Its trunk widens
Strengthening
It begins to
Stand
On
Its
Own

And the roots keeping reaching far beyond the ground...

The visualization of tree leads to the meanings as the reader read. It helps the reader to reaveal the content of the poem and also strengthens effect of words used by the poet such as root, trunk and soil. Another two simple examples of shape poem are **Broken Car** by **Jonathan Sluder** (2001):

What can I do with
a car that doesn't go
can I find some way to fix it
How long will it be before I can go again
Can the car even be fixed or is it hopeless
I can't take a bus to work they aren't around
Stranded No Money
Damned Things

and **Coffee** by Sally Ann Roberts (2001)—which is Shape poem as well as Acrostic Poem (poem where the first letter of each line spells a word, usually using the same words as in the title).

Coffee, mild, but dark as toast.
O..Oh healthy cup, of robust roast,
F.....Fresh the smell, of perking pot,
F.....Flavors senses, while it's hot.
E.....Everlasting, in every way,
E...Every morning, every day.

Both poems talk about common objects (car and coffee) that people often take for granted. The poets express their feelings (by describing object and daily experiences) about car and coffee and try constructing meaning through visual (the image of car and a cup).

To bring shape Poem into EFL classroom will be a good way introducing literature to secondary students. It does not mean EFL teachers should discuss rhyme, verse or any complicated technical terms in their classroom with the students, but simply use the poem as authentic material. For lower and upper secondary students, shape poem will not be too difficult as long as the choice of theme is contextual. The best theme can be talking about the surrounding object the students meet. The EFL teachers can provide the examples or explain how to compose a shape poem first. Kenneth Koch in *www.baymoon.com* suggests ways:

1. It might be easiest to outline the shape first and then erase it, leaving a faint hint of the shape to guide you.

2. The shape can be anything you want, as long as it has something to do with what your poem is about.

From the above suggestion, EFL teachers can ask their students to

choose- for example- **a very special object** the student possess. Teachers give questions for students to answer, such as:

1. What does it look like ? Describe it as best as you can-for example smooth, white, small, can be placed in child's hand.

2. How did you get it ? given as birthday present by parents. When? A four year ago. Where? In suburb of Jakarta.

3. What does it mean to you ? It became my friend ever.

Based on the answers, students can start to compose their own poem. The next activity, students can show their shape poem to the class and read the poem aloud. In small group, students can also discuss each other poems and try to guess the story 'behind' the poems.

To conclude, shape poem is the alternative authentic material for EFL teachers to use in EFL classroom. Not only significant to explore the receptive skill (listening and reading) and productive skill (speaking and writing) but also appealing to accommodate students/learners need to express their feeling. [E]

References

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