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USING ELIOT'S SHORT STORY *EELDROP AND APPLEPLEX* TO IMPROVE EFL LEARNERS' COMMUNICATION ABILITIES AND LITERARY UNDERSTANDING

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Abstract
Literary texts have the potential to be used to enhance EFL learners' language proficiency. To manifest the use of literary texts, the researcher investigated how Eliot's short story, entitled *Eeldrop and Appleplex*, could be used to engage EFL learners in communication activities. The lesson plan to achieve this goal includes: (a) stimulating learners' interests to Eliot's work as one of the founders of the modernist movement in English poetry; (b) enhancing learners' knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar; and (c) exposing learners to both American and British English.
Key words: Literary texts, short story, communicative abilities, EFL classes

1. Introduction

To teach a new language to eager students, whether as part of an academic program (school, high school, or undergraduate), or as a vocational experience, the literary text could be viewed as a useful tool. Even so, this is not something that all experts in the field of teaching languages agree upon and some very differing views in this regards exist. The same goes for EFL courses. Literary texts have the potential to be used to enhance EFL learners' language proficiency. However, the views of EFL professionals diverge on whether and how it can be employed in EFL classes. Experts expressing doubts in the usefulness of such method list the disadvantages – from their points of view – as "literature texts being incomprehensible" to students of foreign languages, "not relevant" to the students lives, and "culturally" alien to the students.

However, experts of the opposing camp view each and every one of these "disadvantages" as an "advantage," enriching the learning experience of the students and posing as an extra bonus. In their view, these points are part of the academic challenges students face throughout their daily academic lives. To manifest the use of this tool, the researcher investigated how Eliot' s short story entitled *Eeldrop and Appleplex* could be used to engage EFL learners in communication activities.

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2. *Eeldrop and Appleplex*

This is the only short story written by T. S. Eliot. He composed it in 1917, when he was 29 years old. It is in two parts, the first part published in the May and the second in the September issue of *The Little Review* (an American quarterly journal of art and literature published between 1914 and 1929). Unlike other works by T. S. Eliot, which have been thoroughly examined by different critics, whether favorably or dismissively, it seems this short story of has not been reviewed as often or thoroughly.

2. 1. Summary of the story

This short story is a series of dialogues between two fictitious characters, Eeldrop and Appleplex. It is said that these dialogues are in fact a dialogues between T. S. Eliot himself and Ezra Pound - an American expatriate poet, who, like Eliot, was residing in England at that time and is also considered a major figure in Modernist movement in poetry - under the pseudonyms Eeldrop and Appleplex, respectively.

Eeldrop and Appleplex come from two different academic backgrounds, though it seems they have a common social background. They are staying on a rented accommodation in a part of a city – which we will find out later in the story is London – different from the area of their main residences. Through the window of the rooms in which they are staying, they can observe events happening outside in the street and study the ordinary people around them. What they observe are the subjects of their dialogues, which cover a range of different issues, such as social classes, philosophy, marriage, and, treated indirectly, religion. However, the core issue is social classes.

2.2. The lesson plan

The story as a whole is presented to the students, and a general introduction is given to them. This introduction will obviously consist of some detailed background about who T. S. Eliot is and some general description of his works; what his impact has been on English literature, in particular on the Modernist movement in English poetry, and his contribution to what we now know as the school of New Criticism. Students should be reminded that Eliot's works are not easy to comprehend at first glance. However, it should be pointed out that the complexity of his work makes studying them more challenging and surely more rewarding for EFL students. While this is a literary exercise in its own right, the actual technique applied to it is a broader form of science. Here, students are asked to dissect the story, word by word, and sentence by sentence, analyze its parts individually (from

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different literary perspectives) and then as a whole. All these points are referred to in the considerations below.

To enhance the learners' interest in this short story written by Eliot, the author should be presented as one of the founders of the Modernist movement in English poetry. His first poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is regarded as a masterpiece of the Modernist movement. The Modernist movement in English poetry should be explained and some history provided regarding how it emerged during the early years of the 20th century. It is said to be the reaction to the Victorian poetry, where too much emphasis was on traditional formalism and diction. While modernist poetry is characterized by usage of free verse and its attempt is to bring the poetry to the layperson. It is in some ways similar to what we know as "New Poetry" in Persian literature. This similarity can reduce feelings of alienation regarding English literature for some students, and directly or indirectly raise the interest in English literature as a whole and English poetry in particular.

As this short story is one of Eliot's least challenging works, it can be read and discussed by learners that have reached the intermediate level. It is possible to use any literary text as a teaching tool in EFL classes. It could be a piece of work from an obscure publication or an unknown writer, as long as it is written properly and according to grammatical rules. However, this is the bare minimum for such a practice, and any upgrade on this minimum would be a bonus. It is quite exciting to work with literature written by one of the greatest contemporary English literary figures. Eliot's works are mostly poems and, in fact, the only prose work is *Eeldrop and Appleplex*. Eliot's poems are very difficult to understand. While both his poems and this short story are awash with allusions, in comparison to his poems *Eeldrop and Appleplex* is certainly less difficult to understand. At the same time, it can give the students some idea about Eliot's style of writing. It would be a useful text to enhance learners' knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar. The story has been written in contemporary English. In most of the text, the sentences are short and concise. Even where we identify allusions, the prose is simple and straightforward English. Grammatical rules are observed and reading the text can enhance students' knowledge of new English vocabulary.

Eeldrop and Appleplex can be considered as an appropriate point of entry into Eliot's world of literature. Students of EFL learn the new language and as part of their learning experience to master this new language, they read literature. During this process of learning, the students come to know different literary figures and read their works and appreciate the uniqueness of such works. Undoubtedly, T. S. Eliot is one of the prominent figures in English literary world. Eventually, any student of the English language who

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wishes to pursue his learning experience comes across Eliot's work and wants to find out how Eliot's work has influenced the English literature.

While reading this story, learners are exposed to both American and British English since Eliot's English, despite his having been born in the US, illustrates both American and British English. Eliot has said of his nationality and its role in his work, "my poetry has obviously more in common with my distinguished contemporaries in America than with anything written in my generation in England. It wouldn't be what it is, and I imagine it wouldn't be so good ... if I'd been born in England, and it wouldn't be what it is if I'd stayed in America. It's a combination of things. But in its sources, in its emotional springs, it comes from America." Here, Eliot himself has acknowledged the influence of both America and England on his writings, and, in a way, studying his works would expose the readers to both American and British English.

Through this short story, learners can be provided with the opportunity to increase their communicative abilities in English and to gain literary understanding. Communicative methodology of teaching advocates collaborative learning and creative use of language. Communication is termed a holistic process, and second language learning is better facilitated when learners are engaged in meaningful and relevant interaction. Negotiation of meaning through content that engages the learner and involvement in activities like problem solving, personal experience sharing, and role play provide opportunities to enhance learners' communicative abilities. In fact, Personalizing learning and providing critical thinking by applying what is learnt to the learners' own life makes learning more effective. On the other hand, applying the literary lens to the story and talking about the stream of consciousness technique in which the writer presents the inner life and thought processes of a character, helps the learners to gain literary understanding.

3. Dissection of the story

3.1. Characters

There are two main characters in this short story: Eeldrop and Appleplex. The whole story is constructed around them and their dialogues, which are based on their points of view. They are friends, but we do not know much about the length and depth of their friendship. From the first few paragraphs, we get the idea that they do not know much about each other aside from some general points. A clue to this is when Eliot writes that they "departed in the morning for destinations unknown to each other." Hence, we know they are not aware of each other's profession.

Characteristically, Eeldrop and Appleplex represent two different approaches towards various issues in life. Eliot has tried to construct each of

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these characters in contrast to the other. This serves him well during the course of the story when the conversation between the two characters takes place and issues are discussed. While Eeldrop is passive in nature, Appleplex is active, Eeldrop is a skeptic, and Appleplex has some leaning towards skepticism. Eeldrop has a taste for mysticism, but Appleplex is a materialist. To complete the picture and present two opposing sides of the arguments, Eeldrop is "learned in theology" and Appleplex is "learned in physical and biological" sciences. In this way, Eliot sets the complete plot for a dialogue between "religion-theology" and "science", a recurrence of a never-ending discourse.

These two, nevertheless, have a common motive in renting rooms in this part of the town: "to separate themselves […] from the field of their daily employments and their ordinary social activities." According to Eliot, what they have is "too well pigeonholed, too taken–for–granted, too highly systematized areas" for their liking, and they were endeavor to escape from it. The common goal of Eeldrop and Appleplex is their quest in the language of those whom they sought to avoid -- "to apprehend the human soul in its concrete individuality." Other characters in this story are of less importance and they are referred to by their names or simply in general terms; almost all of them are subjects of the dialogues between Eeldrop and Appleplex.

3.2. Plot

The whole story is a series of dialogues about different issues of interest to Eliot; however, the main focus is on social classes, and the notion of "classification". Eliot has an academic background in philosophy, and therefore philosophy has a great part in story. The setting is in a suburb of South London, something we find out at the beginning of the second part of the story: "The suburban evening was grey and yellow on Sunday; the gardens of small houses to left and right were rank with ivy and tall grass and lilac bushes; the tropical South London verdure was dusty above and mouldy below." We already know this is not a reputable part of the town: "Eeldrop and Appleplex rented two small rooms in a disreputable part of town."

This is the best place for Eliot to continue with his social study, and through his fictitious characters first observe the people and then examine their behaviors. He mounts his arguments and counter-arguments through the dialogue between Eeldrop and Appleplex. He emphasizes this part of town has been chosen "with great care" by his characters for this social study. He pictures the neighborhood "as being … evil," and goes further in describing the evilness of the place by referring to hidden things behind the "heavily curtained" windows where "the cloud of respectably… concealed… something." Their rooms have been chosen in a way that they have a clear

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view of the entrance to the police station, which would be the main point of potential commotions: "Eeldrop and Appleplex commanded from their windows the entrance of a police station across the way."

Eliot wrote this short story prior to 1917 – the time of its first publication in *The Little Review* was the same year of the publication of this poetry collection *Prufrock and Other Observations*. [*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, the main part of this collection was first published in 1915 in *Poetry Magazine*, with not a favorable reception in literary circles.] At the time of the writing of *Eeldrop and Appleplex*, Eliot had not been in London very long. During his first few years in London, he worked as a schoolteacher, most notably at Highgate School, a private school in London, and later at the Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe, a state school in Buckinghamshire. He had also done some lecturing jobs at Birkbeck College, University of London. When writing this short story, Eliot had not converted to Anglicanism yet and had a rather short experience with life in England. In the story, Eliot's characters discuss only a few points: classification (social classes), individualism, and marriage. There is no doubt that these are issues Eliot had been contemplating prior to his residence in London.

3.3. Class

This is probably the most prominent issue discussed by Eeldrop and Appleplex throughout the story. Through the question of class, they make some references to the race, too. "Why," says Eeldrop, "was that fat Spaniard, who sat at the table with us this evening, listening to our conversation?" The reference to "fat Spaniard" and the way Eeldrop describes him is where the questions of race and class are implicitly raised. The dress of this "fat Spaniard" is described: "He wore a waistcoat *café au lait*, and black boots with brown tops." His behavior is described as "oppressively gross and vulgar." Then he is classed: "he belonged to a type, he could easily be classified in any town of provisional Spain." The feeling any reader gets from this description is that the character is looking down at the subject of his description, and seeing him as not worthy of his attention at all. This is what is mentioned in the next sentences of the story. According to Eeldrop, such a character is not worth noticing at all, apparently due to "his class." However, he is noticed, and when "he suddenly leaned forward and exclaimed: 'I was married once myself' we were able to detach him from his classification and regard him for a moment as a unique being, a soul, however insignificant, with a history of its own, one for all."

In this paragraph, the two key words are "detached" and "insignificant". The worthiness of the "fat Spaniard" is noticed when he has been separated from his "class;" however, he is still "insignificant." Eeldrop

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believes that "a man is only important as he is classed.", and he looks at his attitude with regret, and a sense of loss for the "decline of orthodox theology", where each and every event has "unique importance." To him (and to Eliot, too), this labeling of people has led to the vanishing of "individualism" and "hence there is no tragedy." In other word, he is saying that "tragedy" and "appreciation of tragedy" have something to do with individuals. To his acquaintance, Appleplex declares that "when a man is classified something is lost." Some critics have accused Eliot of being "racist" on a few occasions. Further, he has been labeled as "anti-Semitic," too. In the passage above, the description of the "fat Spaniard" could be seen as racist, too. The controversy over the "anti-Semitic" nature of Eliot's work has never gone away. For example, the 2003 publication of some previously unknown cache of letters written by Eliot fueled the dispute over the charges of anti-Semitism once more. According to Professor Lawrence Rainey of the York University in UK, "the debate [over Eliot's anti-Semitism charges] would never come to close, because whether or not Eliot himself was anti-Semitic, anti- Semitism was central to his greatest and most difficult poems."[13]

3.4. Marriage

The subject of "marriage" is another recurring theme in this story. When the question of "class" is discussed by the two main characters, "that fat Spaniard" becomes the subject of interest when "… he suddenly leaned forward and exclaimed: 'I was married once myself'." While this is a general reference to marriage, the reader can easily see that it has probably not been a "happy marriage" since it is referred to in the past tense. Later in the story, we come across another character referred to as Bistwick. The main subject of interest in this subplot is this gentleman's marrying outside his class, more precisely, "his mother's housemaid". Besides the question of "class" here, which was mentioned before, the "marriage" is not a "happy" one, and "Bistwick is called among the unhappily married."

Eeldrop believes that, to "the generous minded and thoughtful outsider," the case of Bistwick is "evidence for the necessity of divorce law reform." We later come again to the subject of marriage when Wolstrip - presumably someone from a famous and important family in Philadelphia, gets married: "When Wolstrip married, I am sure he said to himself: 'Now I am consummating the union of two of the best families in Philadelphia.'" We won't know if this is a happy marriage or not, but this is not causing any "family disgrace" as it did in case of Bistwick.

When the discussion between Eeldrop and Appleplex is around Scheherazade, or, as Appleplex has catalogued her in his "Survey of Contemporary Society," Edith, alias Scheherazade, marriage is once more

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referenced. After graduating from "the University of California with Honors in Social Ethics," Edith married "a celebrated billiard professional in San Francisco, after an acquaintance of twelve hours, lived with him for two days ... and was divorced in Nevada." Any reader can see the criticizing tone when it observes that the marriage took place after an acquaintance of only “twelve hours."

On another occasion, we learn that Eeldrop is married himself, a subject which is referred to at the end of the first part of the story. There is no direct reference to the state of his marriage. However, when he is talking about "Edith, alias Scheherazade," he is reminiscing about her, and giving the idea of their previous encounters. This short story was published in 1917, two years after Eliot's first marriage. This was not a happy marriage and ended in divorce some 18 years later. Therefore, it is possible to assume that, when writing this story, Eliot had some idea of the state of his marriage and the unhappy nature of it. It seems the references to "unhappy marriages" we see in the story are in a way a reflection of Eliot’s real life experiences. All cases of marriage mentioned between the main characters in the story are either "unhappy" ones ending in divorce, or, in the case of Wolstrip, lacking any elaboration at all. One would suspect that Eliot is implying through these examples that "marriages" are doomed to fail and lead to an unhappy state, especially if the union is a mismatched one between two different social classes.

They perhaps stand a better chance if they are a "union of two best families." We know that Eliot was himself from a distinguished family of New England origin, while his first wife Vivienne Haigh-Wood was a governess and a ballet dancer. We do not know if he saw a mismatched marriage from a class point of view. However, it seems Eliot believed that marriage between people from different classes do not stand a good chance of success; at least that is what he says through Eeldrop and Appleplex in his short story.

On the question of divorce, a need to reform the "divorce law" is mentioned by Eeldrop. We are again unsure whether Eliot faced difficulties when divorcing Vivienne, so the reference to such difficulties might not originate from similar personal experience on Eliot's part. Eliot's second marriage was a happy affair by all accounts. According to one of his private letters, written when he was in his 60s, his first marriage brought no happiness to his wife, and he sees his poem "The Waste Land" the result of his state of mind due to his marriage to his first marriage. One thing which has been shadowing Eliot's first marriage is unconfirmed by the three principals involved in the case are rumors of an affair between Bertrand Russell and Vivienne. During that time, and later, when Eliot had moved to London for a permanent stay, he and his wife stayed in Russell's residence.

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There have been many speculations over these rumors and about the extent to which some people, like Robert Sencourt who, in *T. S. Eliot. A memoir*, stresses the significance of the triangle - Eliot, Vivienne, and Russell, - and the fact that it was the background of everything that Eliot wrote in verse or prose from 1915 onward. This presumably includes *Eeldrop and Appleplex*.

3.5. Style of writing

Without any doubt, Eliot is one of the initiators of the Modernist movement. He introduced a new style of writing utilizing both common speech as well as very obscure allusions. This is a complicated style of allusions mixed with some common elements. Due to this complication, it is difficult for an average reader to follow Eliot's writings, something that kept his popularity rather low at the beginning of his writing career. This style of writing makes people think hard to understand his complicated work, and through using allusions (which usually refer to the works of others), he captures feeling. Therefore, his works are concise and straightforward, yet complicated and deep.

When one analyses Eliot's works, one can see how intricate they are, and the only way to fully understand his work is to analyze them thoroughly. His style in poetry has been examined and studied in detail. However, the same stylistic pattern can be observed in his prose work, namely in the short story *Eeldrop and Appleplex*. A quick glance through through the story reveals just what we see on the surface and nothing more. It comes across as a simple story, but one that one cannot really understand. However, a more through analysis reveals much more about the story and about the author himself, as well.

Eliot has kept his poetic writing style here in this prose work. While the story begins with short, concise sentences in introducing the main characters, we frequently come across many allusions, too. In describing the neighborhood where Eeldrop and Appleplex have rented their rooms, Eliot talks about the "heavily curtained" windows, "and over it hung the cloud of a respectability which has something to conceal." In these sentences we see a simple description of the place, which, in deeper layers, tries to give the real sense of the place. Just before this, Eliot talks about "the evil neighborhoods" , and Eeldrop and Appleplex veiw it "as being more evil." At the beginning of the second part of the story, Eliot tries to picture an early Sunday evening in that suburb of London. The sentences are sort and concise, again, but a deeper look helps the reader to capture the true feeling of the time and the place.

Eliot keeps a satirical tone throughout the story, despite the very serious nature of the content. Throughout the story, the two main characters

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are able to escape the social pressures that normally operate on them and achieve associated sensibilities. They are able to gain a special perception of reality, though unable to put it into words. As any other work by Eliot, this short story is not easy to understand at first glance and it needs a thorough examination. Furthermore, as Eliot himself argues, a literary critic cannot consider a piece of art in a vacuum, but in the context of previous pieces of works by the same artist.

4. Conclusion

Languages are dynamic, and, therefore, teaching them is a dynamic process, too. Since a language evolves, the ways it is taught, like any other science, requires innovations and new approaches all the time. Employing literary text as a teaching tool, while not a wholly new idea could be seen as a rather unconventional method, and selecting a difficult short story from a well known writer such as T.S. Eliot as a teaching tool for EFL students is a challenging approach. Even so, it would provide some ideas about Eliot's style of writing and the societies he was living in during the different parts of his life. By dissecting this story and studying different parts of it, students learn how to take a scientific approach towards literature, and increase their communicative abilities in English.

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