Using Short Stories in ELT/EFL Classes
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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to remind the reasons and methods of using literary resources, particularly short stories, as tools in ELT/EFL classes and to provide a model lesson with the story, ‘The Chaser’ for the teacher candidates. Using different and authentic materials in language teaching helps the students to internalize the target language while enriching the use of the language skills. It is obvious that literature grasps an important place in language teaching. Therefore, it is no doubt that literary resources help the students to learn the rules of the target language and practice it better. Short stories, which have proper length and suitable tasks, not only develop the four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) of students but also provide social, political and historical background of the society. The purpose of this article is to familiarize the instructors with the impact of using short stories in ELT/EFL classes and to present a case study of a selected short story.

Keywords: authentic materials, target language, literary resources, language skills

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1. Introduction

Regarding its positive impacts, using literary texts in the English language classroom has undeniable improvements for learners because literature enriches the learners’ competence in the target language. According to Collie and Slater (1987), literature provides valuable ‘authentic material’, develops personal involvement and enriches the cultural awareness of the students in ELT/EFL classes (3-6). The integration between language and literature results with the development of critical thinking, interpretation and communication abilities.

Motivation and communication have been the two significant drawbacks in ELT/EFL classes and both teachers and students have suffered from fragmentations between the language and content. Many students may acquire to grasp the grammatical and linguistic structures of English; however, they may fail to practice them properly. Literature provides a key to these problems because literary resources not only motivate the students but also exemplify the use of grammatical structures of the target language. According to Brumfit (1985), reading is an autonomous activity, which requires an ‘integration’ of grammar and context and can easily be enriched through literary resources (105). Although literature was ignored in ELT/EFL classes after the rise of Grammar Translation Method or other methods, with the rise of Communicative Approach, English language teachers aimed at integrating four skills with an authentic based context. During this period, literature became prior in language teaching. As Lazar (1993) states, literature “should be considered as an
invaluable resource which motivates students who can acquire language acquisition, gain a cultural awareness and interpret the texts with critical thinking’ (11).

The reasons of using a short story in ELT/EFL classes

As Poe defines short-stories as ‘a narrative that can be read at one sitting from half one-hour to two hours, and that is limited to a certain unique or single effect to which every detail is subordinate’ (Abrams, 1970), they can be accepted as exact resources in ELT/EFL classes.

There are many reasons of choosing a short story in language teaching classes. Firstly, short stories are shorter than a novel to read and are easier than a play to act out in crowded classes. Besides, they are easier than a poem to analyze linguistically and more realistic than a tale. The plot of a short story is easy to summarize and the scene is more vivid for the students.

Secondly, short stories also represent ordinary life which students can easily familiarize with. Elliott (1990) states that literature ‘is motivationally effective if students can genuinely engage with its thoughts and emotions and appreciate its aesthetic qualities’ (p. 197). As the students achieve to familiarize with the characters and the story itself, they can successfully express their thoughts while and practicing the target language in class activities. Short stories, unlike informational texts, include authentic context which are real to life, which help the students personalize and familiarize with the text while developing a competence in language.

Thirdly, short stories are good examples of vocabulary and grammatical structures. During the reading process, students deal with the language itself while having an awareness of the language use because short stories are richer than grammar books. Students in ELT/EFL realize the various structures of sentences and different ways of connecting sentences in the dialogues within the stories. Besides, the richness and variety of language provide students to improve their target language during the courses.

Short stories, also, provide cultural information about the target language. Students have the chance of developing an insight for the country and they can easily interpret social and cultural background of a certain society presented within the stories. Short stories are the proper tools for the language learners to deepen their cultural awareness and personal vision. Teachers who apply short stories also teach culture in order to develop ‘an awareness of, and sensitivity towards, the values and traditions of the people whose language is being studied’ (Tucker and Lambert, 1972, p. 26).

Moreover, literary texts deal with universal themes such as war, love and friendship that a learner cannot find in supplementary grammar or course books. Short stories, in that sense, not only help students gain an awareness of learning a foreign language, but they also enrich the students contact with the real world. Short stories in ELT/EFL classes engage the emotions of the students while enriching their cognitive skills. First, the students try to use their imagination, then, they enhance empathy and eventually they tend to be more creative. Therefore, the lessons supported with short stories are considered to be more motivating and enjoyable. As Pathan (2013) states:

In the modern, culturally barren, world of today, where cultural values are degrading every day and many evils and tribulations are infecting our young generation with unthinkable bad habits, immoral deeds, immodest behavior and horrific crimes in their early tender age, stories can be the best method of inculcating healing cultural and moral values (24).

Finally, students may also improve four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) in language learning with the contribution of short stories in the learning process. If selected and exploited appropriately, short stories enrich the courses and learners can enhance an advance level of the target language. A literary text provides a vivid idea about syntactic structure which clarifies the written form of grammatical structures (Collie and Slater, 1987, p. 5).

How to use Short Stories in ELT/EFL Classes

Short stories should be chosen carefully by the teachers/instructors considering the problems of overcrowded classes, limited time and interests of students, teachers are supposed to play the most important role in the selection process in order to avoid ‘frustrating reading’ (Schulz, 1981, p. 44). Firstly, a short story selected for an ELT/EFL lessons, should be at a suitable length for course hours. If it has a single plot, a
simple setting and a few characters, it will be easier for the students to read and grasp the main idea. The readability of the texts should be the main concern of teachers. Secondly, the short story should reflect interests, age and tastes of students of different levels. Real life stories or stories including current issues will both provide cultural information and attract the learners’ attention easily. With the proper selection, students can have the chance of developing an insight for the country and they can easily interpret social and cultural background of a certain society presented within the stories. According to Howie (1993), language teachers are responsible for developing students’ cognitive skills because every student needs to ‘make judgments, be decisive, come to conclusions, synthesize information, organize, evaluate, predict, and apply knowledge’ (p.24). Although the teachers have to cope with many drawbacks when they use literary texts and short stories, they may easily overcome the challenges and create an effective teaching process (Duff and Maley, 2007). The proper choice of a short story in ELT/EFL classes will provide a gate for productivity if the teacher applies an authentic text which is at suitable length, which corresponds to the needs and interests of students and which creates productivity for the learners. Having applied the short story ‘The Chaser’ (in Appendix) in ‘Short Story Analysis’ lesson for the teacher candidates in Faculty of Education, I have observed the contributing impacts of short stories in ELT/EFL classes. The students of the course not only gained the methods of teaching grammatical structures and vocabulary with the story, but they also experienced the application of a story stylistically. Moreover, the feedbacks of the students proved that using a short story for an ELT/EFL class contributed both to the linguistic and the literary structure of the learning process. The main focus of this course, which is integrated in terms of grammar and literature, was to train the teacher candidates about the impacts of using short stories in their classes. In the following parts of this study, a Case Study for ‘The Chaser’ (in Appendix) will be presented so that language teachers have concrete ideas about applying short stories in their language courses.

2. Method

‘The Chaser’ was applied in the course of ‘Short Story Analysis’ in the Faculty of Education Department and the study group consisted of the teacher candidates. The main focus was on the application of the story as a reading course which is to be integrated with the other skills. Moreover, the structural and literary analyses were acquired during the course which provided the students for a deeper insight.

Linguistic Analysis

In order to enrich the form and discourse competence (Hall, 2005, p. 47-57), in the pre-reading process, warm-up activities based on speaking may help the teacher candidates familiarize with the characters and the title. Below questions, used in the course of ‘Short Story Analysis’, may provide a warm-up activity:

- What do you think does the title imply?
- Who can be the chaser: Alan or the shop owner?
- What do you think does the old man sell in his shop?

After the close reading, above questions were reinserted and comprehension and inference questions provided students/teacher candidates develop a deeper critical thinking and analyzing. Meanwhile, certain adjectives or adverbs (obscurely, acquaintance, imperceptible, substitute, overwhelmed, costly, intensely or confidential) were studied. Moreover, dialogues and conversations helped language learners discover and practice certain grammatical structures (Direct-Indirect Speech, If Clauses or even Past Tense). Below activities were exemplified during the course so that the teacher candidates had a better vision of using a short story for a grammatical practice:

- Change the ‘Direct Statements’ into ‘Indirect Sentences’.
- Find the past participles and underline them.
- Rewrite three/four sentences using ‘If’

In order to practice the listening skills of learners, the listening CDs were used and the teacher candidates role-played and dramatized the speaking parts in class. They had the opportunity to participate in speaking activities or in group discussions. The story was retold, comments were discussed and the story was
interpreted in class discussion. Below activities provided a guide for the teacher candidates and they may serve the teachers in their classes:

- Do you think Alan will reach his aim with the love potion?
- If you were Alan, would you do the same for your love?
- What do you think happened after Alan left the shop?
- Why do you think the old man says ‘Au revoir’ in the end?

For Oster (1989), literature helps students to write more creatively in a second language (p.85). For the writing practice, the teacher candidates discussed about the elements of organizational and outlining skills with writing tasks. Paraphrasing, reviewing and rewriting activities were emphasized since they all develop the writing competence of language learners. If teacher candidates bring such questions to the class, they may provide better writing tasks:

- Paraphrase the ending of the story.
- Summarize the story in ten sentences (include the main character, plot, climax, resolution)

**Literary Analysis**

Short stories are also useful resources for high-intermediate or advanced students. They may have the opportunity to gain an insight and imaginative way of practicing the target language. The analyses of point of view, characterization, theme or setting lead to critical thinking. Not only the linguistic forms but also the literary context assisted the teacher candidates in the learning and practicing process. Using ‘The Chaser’ (in Appendix), teacher candidates may enrich the design of a reading course. For a more advanced learners, a stylistically designed course was also presented for the candidates. According to Oster (1989), ‘focusing on point of view in literature enlarges students’ vision and fosters critical thinking by dramatizing the various ways a situation can be seen’ (85). Students may interact, comment on and interpret the text with a closer reading, which will improve their speaking ability. In the model lesson, below questions helped the teacher candidates to focus on point of view, setting and theme and they may help the teachers in teaching process:

- Does the story take place indoors?
- Describe the shop of the old man.
- Is it morning/evening or night?
- What month/day or the year does the story take place? Are there any clues?
- Who tells the story?
- Does Alan arrive at any eventual realization or recognition?
- What can be the message of the writer?
- Does the story involve a traditional formula?
- Does the story involve an exposition, a crisis, a climax and a resolution?
- Summarize the story, ‘The Chaser’.
- Rewrite the story ‘The Chaser’ in your own words.
- What do you think would happen if Alan didn’t buy the potion?

Applying the story, ‘The Chaser’ (in Appendix), during the character analysis, teacher candidates focused on the following questions and they had a deeper analysis of characterization:

- Who is the main character (protagonist)? Describe the main character using adjectives.
- Describe the round, flat or stereotype characters in appearance or character.
- Rewrite the acts of the characters by using adverbs.

**3. Findings**

When selected properly according to the levels, interests and objectives, short stories are the rich and vast resources in-class activities. They include different activities which all contribute to the four skills in language learning and also they enrich the cultural awareness of the students. This proved the fact that short
stories are perfect examples for listening and pronunciation exercises. Almost the whole class may participate in speaking activities in group discussions. The students may retell the story, comment on the events or interpret the story, which will enrich their speaking ability. Short stories, like other literary resources, provide a good model for writing because it is memorable and challenging (Parkinson and Reid Thomas, 2000, p. 9-11). Short stories become the tools for a better interpretation and comments. Since the students have a sample (the original text) in mind, they will find it easier and more motivating to create their own writings. They may be more creative in the learning process and reach advanced levels in grammar and vocabulary.

4. Conclusion

The main aim of this study is to emphasize the causes of using a literary text in ELT/EFL classes and to provide a lesson which focuses on the students’ communication abilities in the target language with the application of a short story. This study presents a model lesson that emphasizes linguistic and literary analysis of ‘The Chaser’ (in Appendix) for the teacher candidates of Faculty of Education. It should be noted that literature provides valuable ‘authentic material’, develops personal involvement and enriches the cultural awareness of the students in ELT/EFL classes. The discussion in this paper shows that short stories provide activities for the language skills (reading, listening, speaking and writing). Moreover, for the advanced learners, the analysis of the story linguistically and literally results with the development of critical thinking, interpretation and communication abilities. Although the teacher candidates/teachers have to cope with many problems such as crowded classes, limited time and varied interests of learners, they observe that they may easily overcome the challenges and create an effective teaching process. Having applied the story ‘The Chaser’ (in Appendix) in ‘Short Story Analysis’ lesson, it is observed that short stories contribute to the course both in terms of practicing grammatical structures and analysis of literary resources for a deeper critical insight.

References

Appendix

The Chaser, by John Collier

Alan Austen, as nervous as a kitten, went up certain dark and creaky stairs in the neighborhood of Pell Street, and peered about for a long time on the dime landing before he found the name he wanted written obscurely on one of the doors.

He pushed open this door, as he had been told to do, and found himself in a tiny room, which contained no furniture but a plain kitchen table, a rocking-chair, and an ordinary chair. On one of the dirty buff-colored walls were a couple of shelves, containing in all perhaps a dozen bottles and jars.

An old man sat in the rocking-chair, reading a newspaper. Alan, without a word, handed him the card he had been given. "Sit down, Mr. Austen," said the old man very politely. "I am glad to make your acquaintance."

"Is it true," asked Alan, "that you have a certain mixture that has-er-quite extraordinary effects?"

"My dear sir," replied the old man, "my stock in trade is not very large-I don't deal in laxatives and teething mixtures-but such as it is, it is varied. I think nothing I sell has effects which could be precisely described as ordinary."

"Well, the fact is..." began Alan.

"Here, for example," interrupted the old man, reaching for a bottle from the shelf. "Here is a liquid as colorless as water, almost tasteless, quite imperceptible in coffee, wine, or any other beverage. It is also quite imperceptible to any known method of autopsy."

"Do you mean it is a poison?" cried Alan, very much horrified.

"Call it a glove-cleaner if you like," said the old man in differently. "Maybe it will clean gloves. I have never tried. One might call it a life-cleaner. Lives need cleaning sometimes."

"I want nothing of that sort," said Alan.

"Probably it is just as well," said the old man. "Do you know the price of this? For one teaspoonful, which is sufficient, I ask five thousand dollars. Never less. Not a penny less."

"I hope all your mixtures are not as expensive," said Alan apprehensively.

"Oh dear, no," said the old man. "It would be no good charging that sort of price for a love potion, for example. Young people who need a love potion very seldom have five thousand dollars. Otherwise they would not need a love potion."

"I am glad to hear that," said Alan.

"I look at it like this," said the old man. "Please a customer with one article, and he will come back when he needs another. Even if it is more costly. He will save up for it, if necessary."

"So," said Alan, "you really do sell love potions?"

"If I did not sell love potions," said the old man, reaching for another bottle, "I should not have mentioned the other matter to you. It is only when one is in a position to oblige that one can afford to be so confidential."

"And these potions," said Alan. "They are not just-just-er-"

"Oh, no," said the old man. "Their effects are permanent, and extend far beyond the mere casual impulse. But they include it. Oh, yes they include it. Bountifully, insistently. Everlastingly."

"Dear me!" said Alan, attempting a look of scientific detachment. "How very interesting!"

"But consider the spiritual side," said the old man.

"I do," indeed, said Alan.

"For indifference," said the old man, they substitute devotion. For scorn, adoration. Give one tiny measure of this to the young lady-its flavour is imperceptible in orange juice, soup, or cocktails-and however gay and giddy she is, she will change altogether. She will want nothing but solitude and you."

"I can hardly believe it," said Alan. "She is so fond of parties."

"She will not like them any more," said the old man. "She will be afraid of the pretty girls you may meet."

"She will actually be jealous?" cried Alan in a rapture. "Of me?"
"Yes, she will want to be everything to you."
"She is, already. Only she doesn't care about it."
"She will, when she has taken this. She will care intensely. You will be her sole interest in life."
"Wonderful!" cried Alan.
"She will want to know all you do," said the old man. "All that has happened to you during the day. Every word of it. She will want to know what you are thinking about, why you smile suddenly, why your are looking sad."
"That is love!" cried Alan.
"Yes," said the old man. "How carefully she will look after you! She will never allow you to be tired, to sit in a draught, to neglect your food. If you are an hour late, she will be terrified. She will think you are killed, or that some siren has caught you."
"I can hardly imagine Diana like that!" cried Alan, overwhelmed with joy.
"You will not have to use your imagination," said the old man. "And, by the way, since there are always sirens, if by any chance you should, later on, slip a little, you need not worry. She will forgive you, in the end. She will be terribly hurt, of course, but she will forgive you in the end."
"That will not happen," said Alan fervently.
"Of course not," said the old man. "But, if it did, you need not worry. She would never divorce you. Oh, no! And, of course, she will never give you the least, the very least, grounds for uneasiness."
"And how much," said Alan, "is this wonderful mixture?"
"It is not as dear," said the old man, "as the glove-cleaner, or life-cleaner, as I sometimes call it. No. That is five thousand dollars, never a penny less. One has to be older than you are, to indulge in that sort of thing. One has to save up for it."
"But the love potion?" said Alan.
"Oh, that," said the old man, opening the drawer in the kitchen table, and taking out a tiny, rather dirty-looking phial. "That is just a dollar."
"I can't tell you how grateful I am," said Alan, watching him fill it.
"I like to oblige," said the old man. "Then customers come back, later in life, when they are better off, and want more expensive things. Here you are. You will find it very effective."
"Thank you again," said Alan. "Good-bye."
"Au revoir," said the man.