

Using the Historical Approach for the Analysis of Literature in the EFL Teaching Context*

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Resumen

This article presents an English as a Foreign Language lesson aimed at Venezuelan university students of International Studies. The purpose of the lesson is to guide students towards interpreting a literary text from a Historical Approach perspective. Theoretical principles are analyzed, and the central text is the poem *Not My Business* by Nigerian writer Niyi Osundare. The poem's theme is considered relevant for the target population as it addresses abandonment and indifference in the face of social and political injustice. A lesson was implemented based on the poem, which not only facilitated language development and communicative competence but also promoted reflection on the consequences of apathy towards social issues. Thanks to an eclectic, student-centered approach, the selected text served as an example of how to narratively recount past events in a meaningful way, addressing a topic of notable relevance.

Key words: Literature-based EFL teaching, Teaching English, University education, Historical approach, Critical thinking, Communicative competence, Cultural awareness, Language focus.




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Willmen Leonardo Blanco

Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador, Instituto Pedagógico de Caracas, Caracas, Venezuela.

Profesor de inglés y de música, magíster en enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera (UPEL). Investigador adscrito al Núcleo de Investigación en el área de Lengua Extranjera (NILE-IPC.UPEL), en la Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador, Instituto Pedagógico de Caracas, Venezuela. Traductor e intérprete certificado (Intérprete Público) por el Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Justicia y Paz (Venezuela).

leonardoblanco12@gmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-6326-8717>

* Artículo de investigación.

Uso del enfoque histórico para el análisis literario en el contexto de enseñanza del inglés como Lengua Extranjera

Resumen

Este artículo da cuenta de una lección de inglés como lengua extranjera dirigido a estudiantes universitarios venezolanos de Estudios Internacionales, cuyo propósito es orientarlos hacia la interpretación de un texto literario desde la perspectiva del Enfoque Histórico. Se analizan algunos principios teóricos y se toma como texto central el poema del escritor nigeriano Niyi Osundare, *Not My Business*. La temática del poema se considera relevante para la población beneficiaria, ya que aborda el abandono y la indiferencia ante la injusticia social y política. Se implementó una lección basada en el poema, que no solo facilitó el desarrollo del lenguaje y la competencia comunicativa, sino que también promovió la reflexión sobre las consecuencias de la apatía frente a las cuestiones sociales. Gracias a un enfoque ecléctico centrado en el estudiante, el texto seleccionado representó un ejemplo de cómo narrar eventos pasados de manera significativa, abordando un tema de notable relevancia.

Palabras clave: Enseñanza de inglés como lengua extranjera basada en la literatura, Enseñanza del inglés, Educación universitaria, Enfoque histórico, Pensamiento crítico, Competencia comunicativa, Conciencia cultural, Enfoque lingüístico.

O uso da abordagem histórica para a análise literária no contexto do ensino do inglês como língua estrangeira

Resumo

Este artigo relata uma aula de inglês como língua estrangeira para estudantes universitários venezuelanos de Estudos Internacionais, com o objetivo de os orientar para a interpretação de um texto literário na perspectiva da Abordagem Histórica. São analisados alguns princípios teóricos e o poema do escritor nigeriano Niyi Osundare, *Not My Business*, é tomado como texto central. O tema do poema é considerado relevante para a população beneficiária, uma vez que trata do abandono e da indiferença face à injustiça social e política. Foi implementada uma aula baseada no poema, que não só facilitou o desenvolvimento da competência linguística e comunicativa, como também promoveu a reflexão sobre as consequências da apatia em relação às questões sociais. Graças a uma abordagem eclética centrada no aluno, o texto selecionado representou um exemplo de como narrar acontecimentos passados de uma forma significativa, abordando um tópico de notável relevância.

Palavras-chave: Ensino de inglês como língua estrangeira baseado na literatura, Ensino de inglês, Educação universitário, Abordagem histórica, Pensamento crítico, Competência comunicativa, Consciência cultural, Abordagem linguística.

Introduction

The world has changed; the rapid advance in technology affects humanity's economic, social, and educational fields to a great extent. Therefore, as a future part of the workforce, students are expected to develop abilities to solve problems and reflect on situations requiring high levels of critical and lateral thinking whilst making decisions. Hence, committed teachers of English, aware of the present milieu, should empower their students with tools to solve problems, as required in the 21st century. This is why teaching English effectively has become a challenge these days; the lack of reflecting historical-based-real life classes is not suitable for training conscientious and competitive future professionals in a global economy and fast-changing world.

In the same vein, literature is undeniably interrelated to language teaching, as it represents one of the most recurrent uses of language (Rahimi). Regrettably literature-based English instruction is not necessarily welcomed by the students. This has been made empirically evident in university courses aimed at students of International Studies, who are expected to become familiar with the target languages they are learning, as well as with the cultural context where such languages operate. Such students oftentimes quit these classes or achieve low grades, as they find it difficult to grasp with the literary texts or, as they have expressed it informally, they do not seem to appreciate the usefulness of literature in their studies and their professional activities.

When dealing with the development of language skills, it is worth highlighting the importance of reading comprehension, which allows the language learner to come into contact with various discourses, and diverse representations of reality. As Hirvela points out, comprehension of written text is paramount to developing language skills and competencies. This leads us to rethink what we must unlearn regarding the use of literature to reduce students' ennui, and thus boost and enliven effective EFL classes. Hence, this article presents a pedagogical proposal based on the historical criticism approach, one of the several critical approaches to literary analysis.

Literary critics have used methods and concepts from other disciplines to unveil the meaning of literary works, such as Formalism, New Criticism, Reader-Oriented Criticism, Structuralism, Deconstruction, Psychoanalytic Criticism, Feminism, Marxism, Bibliographical Criticism, Psychological Criticism, Mythological and Archetypal Approaches, to mention just a few. In this study, the Historical Approach was implemented to analyze a literary text and as a pedagogical tool due to its connection with real-life events, which is believed to be appealing and stimulating, thus raising English language learners' curiosity about what decisions they make in certain situations.

At the School of International Studies at Universidad Central de Venezuela, literature is perceived by the teaching staff as a powerful tool to hold up a mirror to the world while revealing truths about it. Literature makes it possible for readers to bear witness to known and unknown realities, and in doing so, it allows to formulate complex responses to such realities.

This, in turn, becomes a process that builds empathy and open-mindedness, soft skills that are highly appreciated in the world of International Studies.

Through the Historical Criticism Approach, the social, cultural, and intellectual context of text production and the artist's biography can be unveiled and analyzed. Therefore, it provides the reader with plenty of reliable information to explicate and grasp possible interpretations. The aforementioned and the experience gained in teaching literature-based classes as a teacher and researcher in the field justifies presenting the pedagogical proposal herein to raise awareness of the benefits available, as a result of the elements of history as a real sample of the culture and language of a specific society and its milieu.

This work comprises five sections which consist of the metaphorical concept of the tapestry of Historical Criticism; Historical Criticism & Literature; the analysis of the lesson core literary text using the Historical Criticism Approach; the theoretical lesson plan foundation; the lesson plan description, as well as the final PBL post practice activity. The model lesson plan was applied to students of English as a foreign language (EFL), fifth level, graduation final course, at International Studies School in Caracas, Universidad Central de Venezuela.

The Tapestry of Historical Criticism

To comprehend and benefit from the Historical Approach, it is paramount to highlight that it comprises the social, cultural, and intellectual context in which any text is produced, as well as the artist's biography and milieu (Kennedy and Gioia 1798). The way these different elements are connected and resemble that of a well-woven tapestry. Historical context refers to the social, economic, political, and religious events that influenced the writing of a text, that undoubtedly helps the reader to better understand the overall meaning of the text and its details. A professional in International Studies is expected to analyze and understand international events and problems with emphasis on the political, legal, social, economic and cultural dimensions, being able to propose interpretations and actions regarding them from an interdisciplinary perspective. Thus, doing literary analysis from the perspective of the Historical Approach will equip this professional with the tools to understand and interpret events from a variety of perspectives, considering the context in which texts, oral or written, have been produced, as well as its effects on the readers throughout different time periods.

It is worth citing Selden, Widdowson & Brooker (83) regarding the importance of the historical context in literary analysis. "What we call 'culture' is not an independent reality but is inseparable from the historical conditions in which human beings create their material lives;" such lives might be directed by particular ideological systems which result from social and economic dimensions. Critics' conceptual use of the Historical Approach is important for the teacher in order to apply it appropriately, as this allows students to have the opportunity to analyze a piece of literature that represents a sample of historical record to comprehend the society and the issues of the time in which it was written, and compare it with those issues and context of their own.

The Historical Criticism Approach connects literature with other areas of intellectual activity in a consistent and meaningful way. Additionally, this approach can also be used in the teaching-learning process of a language, since it uses patterns that are repeated in societies (Byram and Fleming, 2001). This is a key element that fosters communication and discussion among students because these patterns are familiar to them.

It is worth reviewing how the analysis of pieces of literature works will shade light on how the milieu and ideological content of each text as result of historical events and the writers lives and experiences. For instance, the *Chimney Sweeper* poem, by English poet William Blake, is not only a sample of historical record, but a portrayal of a specific society during the Industrial Revolution, in which the main character, a little child sold by his own father was exploited; a common practice of that time that does not exist either in England or even in our society at present. From the lenses of the approach in question herein, students are requested to examine the possible interpretations and impact of the text of English readers from 18th century.

Furthermore, the use of language is connected to religious and fantastical topics. Words and phrases such as locked up in coffins of black, angel, bright key, wash in a river, white, and free are symbols of freedom from oppression. This use of figurative language to represent reality in an aesthetic and creative way also provides the reader with elements of the milieu of the characters that are connected with real historical events. For instance, there is evidence of a child, whose mother died, being sold by his father to work as a chimney sweeper, sleeping in soot, and as well as other children sharing the same destiny, having their heads shaved.

This makes a clear reference to the Industrial Revolution's inhumane practices of exploitation under capitalism and the Darwinian ideas. Child slavery activities are portrayed in the poem; waking and getting up in the dark, carrying their bags & brushes to work in a cold morning, and having the hope of not getting hurt if fulfilling their duty. Hence, the ideas presented in said poem comprise a strong criticism against the injustice, and cruel practices that children exploited as chimney sweepers were victims in that society at that time. This is basically the ideas or ideology promoted by the writer who was influenced by those ideas of the French Revolution.

Based on the aforementioned, we can stress the fact that the interaction and relationship among society, language, literature and ideology help us comprehend to a greater extent what this text represented and the possible impact it had on the readers of said society at that time. Literature, once again, has proved it is a reliable historical record of reality.

In regards to what has been stated so far, Williams and Williams (2) assert that there are several benefits associated with the study of literature. Based on the ideas put forward by Paul Hirst, a British sociologist, political theorist and a scholar at Birkbeck College in London, the authors identify five major strands that explain the individual and social advantages of including literature in education, which are summarized below.

The first strand, the most relevant for the present study, refers to “the contextual knowledge, cultural background, or information necessary to the enjoyment and full understanding of many works of literature” (Williams and Williams 2). The second deals with literature as a pleasurable activity. The third highlights the role of literature as a source of multiple forms of understanding and insight. The fourth puts forward the importance of closely studying literary texts in education. The fifth and last deals with the ability to argue in interpreting texts to develop reasoning skills.

As the literary text selected for the lesson presented as a byproduct of this study consists of a poem within the so-called Postcolonial literature, assumed to be rooted in political events, the need for scaffolding knowledge is particularly acute. We will discuss this issue in more detail in the poem-analysis section using the Historical approach.

The Historical Criticism Approach connects literature with other areas of intellectual activity consistently and meaningfully. This approach can also be used in the teaching-learning process of a language since it uses patterns that are repeated in societies. This teachability is an essential element that fosters communication and discussion among students because these patterns are familiar. Language teaching nowadays tends to be oriented towards intercultural education, which sets out to promote and assess several attitudes such as (a) willingness to take up opportunities to engage and recognize otherness in terms of equality; (b) interest in discovering other perspectives on how to interpret familiar and unfamiliar phenomena in one’s and others’ cultures; (c) readiness to experience a variety of stages of adaptation to and interaction with other cultures; and (d) readiness to engage with the conventions and rites of verbal and nonverbal communication and interaction (Byram, 50).

A Literary Text Analysis Using the Historical Criticism Approach

Teaching literature to EFL learners is based on three basic approaches duly described by Carter & Long (2): the language model, the personal growth model, and the cultural model. These are outlined below.

1. *The language model*: it focuses on enhancing EFL learners’ knowledge of the target language by studying familiar grammar, lexical and discourse categories, thus facilitating text comprehension toward the formulation of meaningful interpretations. From this perspective, the Historical Approach is enhanced by the use of the target language by focusing on familiar grammar, lexical and discourse categories, and thus paving the way for better text comprehension and more meaningful interpretations, which in turn will facilitate a sensible and esthetic appreciation of the text. For instance, archaic uses of lexical items in a text can offer insights about people’s worldviews, interests, behavior, values and imaginaries. Activities such as cloze exercises, making predictions, unscrambling sentences, summary writing, roleplay, among others, can be incorporated as part of the process of deconstructing literary texts and thus serve both linguistic goals and historical awareness.

2. *The personal growth model*: it is considered a bridge between the language model and the cultural model. The personal growth model relates to the Historical Approach as teaching practices from this perspective focus on the particular uses of language in a text while simultaneously placing it in a specific cultural context. In other words, the readers' personal, intellectual, and emotional experiences get involved into the process of considering the historical context where the text comes from. Moreover, analyzing historical facts against one's reactions towards the text allows for the expression of feelings and opinions about a variety of themes and topics. From this perspective, learning a language takes place while the readers become more capable of interpreting texts and constructing meanings on the basis of their own experiences and the insights provided by historical information.
3. *The cultural model*: it is based on the relation between the literary piece and the target culture, the literary history, or the genre. Thus, learners must explore and interpret the *context* of a specific text: social, political, literary, and historical. The learners are granted the opportunity to explore their cultural background, which helps them achieve a genuine understanding of literary works and of different cultures.

Regarding these models, it is worth noting that the pedagogical proposal presented in this article considers them all, as EFL learners need to improve their knowledge of both the target language and its culture while growing personally. Undeniably, cultural awareness is a paramount goal in teaching literature to EFL students, which needs to be highlighted. We believe that by reading and analyzing literary texts that may well represent the society of a particular period, EFL learners will be sensitized toward cultural issues. Thus, the literary text chosen for the pedagogical proposal paves the way to improving communicative competence in the target language and cultural knowledge. Both cultural and pedagogical implications are interwoven to build up an approach to an EFL class. The literary text is used to help the learners develop their linguistic competence and sense of cultural awareness, which will influence learners' performance in their professional contexts.

Another point should be made regarding the three models described by Carter & Long. We pledge allegiance to Savvidou (§ 11), who comments that the cultural model tends to be teacher-centered, hence the need to plan for an integrated approach to teaching that involves the students as protagonists of their learning process so that literature becomes accessible to them and aids their development.

Following is the analysis of the poem, *Not My Business* by Nigerian poet and freedom speech supporter Niyi Osundare, who lived under the dictatorship of General Sani Abacha, who ruled Nigeria from 1993 to 1998 (as explained in the Nigerian Poetry website, 2011). The text is a sample of a historical record and represents a suitable choice to stimulate students critical thinking about concepts such as a democracy, dictatorship, totalitarianism, freedom, solidarity, being supportive, indifference, human rights, or law. Furthermore, cultural elements such as "yam" may appeal to the audience's own feeding choice since yam is eaten in Venezuela as well; they will be able to see similar situations they are going through in their own country in the text. Therefore, the aesthetic value can be used not only to learn the target

language item (the past simple tense) but also to communicate and interact about a topic and themes of authentic communication.

The text explores how being indifferent to your neighbors' suffering will affect your own life and this represents a great dilemma in other texts such as Hamlet, *To Be or not to Be* or in *No Man is an Island*; this means that everything we do or do not do will have consequences in our lives and affect everyone around us. Therefore, this is perfect to apply critical thinking which is, "...the ability to think for one's self and reliably and responsibly make those decisions that affect one's life. Critical thinking is also critical inquiry, so such critical thinkers investigate problems, ask questions, pose new answers that challenge the status quo, discover new information that can be used for good or ill, question authorities and traditional beliefs, challenge received dogmas and doctrines, and often end up possessing power in society greater than their numbers" (Schafersman 3).

Upon reading the poem, part of the collection *Village Voices: Poems* (2004), it is evident that there is a detailed depiction of ethnic conflict, i.e., a type of intra-national conflict.

In lines 1-7 (first stanza), the poet describes a man called Akanniup, a Yoruba man, being beaten up and thrown into a jeep. The narrative voice does not care because this event does not affect him. From lines 8-14 (second stanza), Danladiout, a Hausa man, is dragged out of his house in the middle of the night and taken away to an unknown destination for an unspecified length of time. Again, the narrative voice shows no concern, as it does not affect him directly.

From lines 15-21 (third stanza), Chin, an Igbo person, is suddenly sacked from her job for not doing anything wrong and without due process "no query, no warning, no probe" but for only performing well in her duties 'just one neat sack for a stainless record'. The narrative voice remains nonchalant towards this innocent citizen of the Federal Republic.

However, the situation takes a turn for the worse in the last stanza (lines 22-26), as the poet (narrator) sits down one evening to eat, and there is a knock on the door; there comes the realization that a jeep is waiting to take him away, as so many other people before him.

Nigeria, like so many of the countries deemed as "developing" or "Third World", has struggled with ethnic and other types of conflict, and the victims in the poem suffered abuses because they could not come together as one to fight a common cause. Everyone is living for themselves, on their own, and unperturbed about the fate of fellow citizens, probably due to a poor perception of their own national identities.

The poem, thus, being as contemporary as 2004, raises issues that can be interpreted in terms of its impact on English readers in 2023. The language is simple, yet there are subtle layers of meanings, which can be inferred from what is both stated and unstated.

Based on the aforementioned, we can stress the fact that the interaction and relationship among society, language, literature, and ideology help us comprehend to a greater extent what this text represented and its possible impact on the readers of said society at that time. Literature, once again, has proved to be an important, yet not always accurate, depiction of reality.

Theoretical Lesson Plan Foundation

First, using a single teaching English language method does not satisfy students' learning needs for different reasons. Because methods are well-organized arrays of selected approaches comprising techniques or activities to conduct teaching classroom activities, they tend to be prescriptive and anticipate what kind of situations the teacher will encounter in the classroom every day.

Given that every teaching situation is unique with people with different learning styles and cultures that provide different teaching scenarios, a single method for such diverse teaching situations should not be the only choice. Therefore, effective teaching consists of personalizing learning, understanding that students develop at different rates and that there will be a range of student abilities and aptitudes in every classroom. The pulse of a classroom should be felt, and teaching methods need to be implemented accordingly to maintain a high level of interest, no matter what the subject is (Moreno Rubio 39)

Teachers should decide which approach works best according to their classroom environment, and students' needs based on their culture by considering all the aspects that take place in the classroom. Additionally, due to cultural diversity around the world, teaching a specific culture, for instance, those from the inner circle would not satisfy student's needs worldwide. Thus, the cultural context ultimately defines what teachers have to teach (McKay 106, 108). Therefore, we follow Robertson & Acklamm (8) who claim that "there is no single correct way to teach English. There are different theories on how students learn, so there are different ideas as to what can and should be done in the classroom..."

It is worth recalling that, as mentioned before, this lesson is also oriented towards the development of critical thinking, with the goals of presenting coherent and persuasive arguments, reading and writing complex texts, and synthesizing information from several sources to formulate and communicate decisions (Halpern 19). The incorporation of literary texts in the teaching area, in addition to any established by the programs or syllabi, must also be articulated with this objective.

Hence, based on the aforementioned, the methodological planning of this EFL class does not follow a language teaching method exclusively but incorporates elements of different approaches. This combination of all methods is multidimensional and seems to be the most appropriate response to different learning styles and preferences. Regarding its target language, the grammar item, that is, the Past Simple Tense, is embedded.

The students will not focus on grammar; instead, they will focus on the topic of indifference, practice and study grammar inductively; this is known, to a certain extent, as teaching grammar communicatively (Popovic 3). Any teacher can integrate the language skills in lieu of applying the segregated-skill approach. By reflecting carefully and planning, the teacher can also strengthen the language teaching and learning process like a well-interwoven tapestry (Scarcella & Oxford 8).

The new vocabulary elements of the English language will be introduced to students, *inter alia*, through a lead-in using pictures that represent the topic, and words such as “yam” and “clay,” taken from the text. According to Robertson & Acklamm, “A lead-in is a way to introduce the topic of a lesson. The teacher may use a story, anecdote, or pictures to lead the students into the subject of the day... They engage the students and get them using English from the start” (34). Thus, the use of a lead-in through pictures is justified to get students engaged, generate interest in the topic, and set the context.

The clarification of meaning, form, and pronunciation is the way the new grammatical, vocabulary, and pronunciation items will be presented to the audience. In order to achieve such purpose, the teacher will ask understanding checking questions, write the form of the board, and model and drill marker sentences. This will help reinforce the language items and make sure students understand meaning (Robertson & Acklamm 36, 37).

The stages of this class include the lead-in mentioned above to engage students and boost interest; a reading for gist to make predictions regarding the title and ordering jumbled paragraphs to build confidence; a guided practice to engage students in questions related to their field, but at the same time that are deeply intertwined with the topic of the class by means of an activity or playful game called the Tic-Tac-Toe; a reading for more detailed information which is a controlled practice to allow students become accustomed to the concepts of the topic; a post-reading activity to allow students work in groups and predict in writing the possible outcome of the unknown ending of the text at that stage (Free practice); a PACS (Post activity correction stage), a Project based-learning activity to allow students to put into practice what they have just learned and continue learning by doing; a wrap up to praise, and reinforce consolidation and correction (Robertson & Acklamm 17, 37).

The previous reading strategies clearly present in the aforementioned description are according to the fact that teachers have to remind the students that before reading the text, they can skim through it, looking at the title, subheadings and graphics so as to give themselves a general idea of what the text will be about.

Likewise, as they read, they should connect the information presented in the text to their previous knowledge to activate their schemata. Moreover, they have to ask themselves questions about the text from time to time, looking back or ahead to link one part of the text to another. Additionally, when they are confused by the content, they have to search for clues in the context, try to paraphrase, or consider what they know about structure (Richards & Renandya 287).

Regarding the aforementioned group work, let us compare the role of a teacher and a facilitator in a constructivist classroom environment to make said interaction go smoothly. On the one hand, in a teacher-centered environment, instructions are given through lessons by lectures in which students have little or no participation. Most teachers limit their participation to providing information with examples and instructions. In contrast, a facilitator goes beyond giving information by creating the necessary conditions in which students can discover things independently and interact, constructing their knowledge.

A facilitator makes it easier for the students to use their previous knowledge, recognize what they want to learn, and appreciate and evaluate the newly acquired information. Moreover, a facilitator's foremost concern is the student, not himself.

In regards to the benefits of cooperative learning for the students, Willis states the following:

The nature of cooperative group interdependence increases emotional sensitivity and communication skills. The planning of cooperative learning transfers the responsibility of decision-making and conflict resolution to the students. It's reassuring in times of change and unpredictability to have the supportive and growth experiences of well-planned cooperative learning (16).

The students' role is to support each other and work jointly to achieve their common goals.

Vocabulary is the other target language aspect included in this class, and it plays a vital element when teaching or learning a new language. Teachers apply different techniques to teach new words, but sometimes they are not the most appropriate ways to help students achieve their learning vocabulary goals. Teaching vocabulary should depend on the student's English level and needs. The short piece of literature to be used in this class comprises inductive learning and intensive reading to help students succeed in learning vocabulary.

Furthermore, emphasizing explicit instruction can help students succeed in learning vocabulary at basic levels (Pawlicki 11). On the other hand, the inductive approach is recommended for higher levels to promote analytical and critical thinking, and enhance cognitive skills to achieve constructive reasoning techniques finally.

This lesson-integrated skills class is meant to be applied with an advanced audience of 20 undergraduate students of the last English level course (English 5) at the International Studies School of Universidad Central de Venezuela for 90 minutes. Therefore, the inductive approach or Inductive Learning is used to teach grammar and vocabulary.

It is paramount to highlight the target audience profile, background, and training; this allows us to make the most appropriate choice of the text and activities to be used in this pedagogical praxis. Said students' training includes, inter alia, law, human rights, international

agencies, economics, history, geography, negotiation, international relationships, and English classes taught in English. This broad and complex audience requires an efficient and effective learning and teaching approach.

Learning the linguistic elements of a language is neither satisfactory for precise and suitable language use, nor for building communicative competence. It is well known now that language requires context to facilitate communication between speakers and listeners (Garten, Kennedy, Sagae & Dehghani 1). Hence, appropriate language use is learned through context.

From the perspective of Structuralism, semantic functions affect grammatical functions and so forth. Chomsky states in his *Syntactic Structures* (1957) that one can utter or make syntactically and grammatically well-structured sentences, which can also be syntactically anomalous. For instance, this is true in Chomsky's classic example found in the above-mentioned book "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously." On the other hand, this changes if we use it in a context, like the one in a poem.

Thus, contextualizing language organized around content through specific and varied activities can help teachers establish a more enjoyable and motivating atmosphere in the EFL classroom. Literature comprises all the competences and competencies required to learn a language.

Using content is a useful manner to activate students' previous knowledge about a given topic; literature provides students with meaningful contexts that are rich in historical allusions, with a high degree of ideological content and intentionality, representing cultural codes and an extensive range of vocabulary, interesting characters and situations that apply and appeal to humanity.

The teacher presents new information in the literature context of known information, applying both linguistic and world knowledge. This will stimulate a natural reusing of language and information used in practical lessons, as previous material is reviewed and put into practice when presenting new material. In addition, teachers can set a language context using the information provided by the literature content chosen and combine it with authentic materials to increase students' motivation. These authentic materials have to be common and reachable to the specific context, the teachers and their students. Moreover, authentic material implies using authentic activities, which require real communication (Celce-Murcia 359-366).

Lesson Plan Description in Detail

The lesson plan is based on the abovementioned poem *Not My Business* by Niyi Osundare, addressed to 20 Venezuelan university students, in their 5th semester. At the end of the lesson, students will be able to use target vocabulary and grammar regarding past experiences as a

means to explain how indifference and lack of empathy towards our neighbors' struggles, weaken our own rights and freedom.

The class is developed through the following stages:

Warmer/Lead-in: The teacher will elicit vocabulary related to the poem to be read later, such as indifference, empathy, solidarity, yam, clay, bewildered, and lawn. This will be done by means of showing pictures and ask students: "What can you see in the first picture? Can you define the situation portrayed in it with one word?" Although abstract concepts like "empathy" could be difficult to illustrate in one image, the word is a Spanish cognate and should be easy to guess.

If needed, students are shown all the pictures; the words are pre-taught with the MFP (Meaning, Form, and Pronunciation) focus. Volunteers take turns at using the words in meaning examples drawn from their experiences; later, in pairs, they explain to each other why some people behave like that, while the teacher monitors their work and writes down any language mistakes they make. These are discussed with the whole class, whereby students volunteer to offer corrections and suggest different ways of expressing the same ideas.

Presentation: The teacher will give the students the first three (3) stanzas and the title of a poem scrambled, the students have to work in groups of four and organize them. The teacher and the students check them together. It is worth noting that at this point there is no single correct answer, as long as the groups can justify their choices and make sense of them.

The title of the poem is written on the board, and students provide answers to the following questions, aimed at raising awareness and activating schemata: "What do you think the story is about? Do you think it is about empathy, solidarity, and providing support or aid to others?" The teacher elicits what they know. Students are grouped according to diverse language performance, so more advanced learners and less proficient students can work together and exchange ideas. Later, a handout is provided so the students can start reading the whole poem, which will then discuss by using the Think-Pair-Share technique.

The students read the Poem for the first time and answer a few questions to show comprehension. After the whole class has checked the answers, they will read the following sentences, "We went to work. I sat down to eat my yam." (Part of the poem) while the teacher writes the following questions on the board: "Did you sit down to eat this morning? Did you go to the university today?" Ask students: "Did you wake up this morning, have breakfast, and go to your English class?". The procedure is then repeated with other verbs and ideas.

The teacher then focuses on grammatical accuracy (verb tenses) by means of the following questions: Did you go to the university yesterday? – Am I asking about the future? No. Am I asking about the past? Yes. Am I asking about the specific time? Yes.

The teacher elicits from students the meaning and use of the Past Simple Tense in these examples, and provides explanations. The text is then revised once more in order to underline the examples of past simple use. At this stage of the lesson, the focus is on language acquisition, while attempting to highlight the importance of recalling and narrating past events.

Guided Practice: The teacher takes the three stanzas back and give a handout with blanks to be completed by the students. This is checked in groups while the teacher monitors. Students will compare their word choices with those of the text and explain why. For less proficient students, the handout could also include a box with the word forms they need to choose from to fill in the blanks. The teacher monitors the activity, but maximizing students' talking time.

Next, a Tic-Tac-Toe game is implemented. A grid is drawn on the board. The class is divided into two teams. One team is Noughts (O), and one team is Crosses (X). Team O chooses a square first. The question corresponds to the number in each square. If they answer correctly, O is written in the square. If they answer incorrectly, Team X can answer and win the square. The first team to get a line of three in any direction wins the game. Students will use phrases to express opinions.

The following are the questions for each number to be used by the teacher:

1. What is a dictatorship?
2. What is the opposite of a dictatorship?
3. What is a democracy?
4. Which country did each of the following dictators rule: Slobodan Milosevic, Adolf Hitler, Saddam Hussein, and Augusto Pinochet? These historical figures can be changed for other contemporary ones, or alternatively, pictures with these peoples' names and the country can be used, to avoid frustration by not knowing historical facts.
5. Why is the mass media so important for governments?
6. How do the abilities to read and write make people a threat to powerful governments?
7. What is the difference between a democratic political system, a monarchy, and a dictatorship?
8. What is free press?
9. Which country did Dictator General Sani Abacha rule from 1993–98? It is very unlikely that most students know the answer, but, as enrolled in the International Studies undergraduate program, some might have a slight idea.

Controlled Practice (Reading for More Detail): The teacher gives the three previous stanzas back to the students and asks them to work in groups of 4 to answer the following questions:

1. What is the speaker like?
2. What does he possibly look like?
3. What is his favorite food?
4. What is his attitude towards what is going on around his neighborhood?
5. Taking into account the names: Akanniup, Danladiout, and Chin, what kind of country is this one, and where might it be located?
6. What does the expression “Beat him soft like clay” imply? This is figurative language, and should be highlighted to the students.
7. Which cultural elements are used by the speaker in the text that helps us comprehend the people, the social conditions, and events that provide the environment in which the characters act or live?

They check the questions in groups. The teacher monitors the discussion. Students will compare their answers to those of other groups and explain why. This stage of the lesson focuses on the historical and cultural context of the poem, as well as on higher order thinking skills and critical thinking.

Post-reading Practice (Free Practice): The teacher asks the students to work in groups of four (4) and write a short paragraph predicting the end of the poem before being given the real one. The students exchange their drafts with a partner and ask each other questions to help clarify meaning and improve the text wording and content.

Students compare their answers to those of other groups to appreciate different ideas. The teacher will give the students a handout with the final stanza and ask them to compare their version of the ending of the text with that one of the original to see how close they were to their predictions.

The teacher asks students, “What would do differently if you were the speaker?” while the students reflect on it and express their opinions and ideas, using the Think-Pair-Share technique.

PACS (Post activity correction stage) Project-based learning activity: The teacher asks students to write a one-page newspaper article about the message of the poem *Not my Business* by Niyi Osundare and its connection with Human Rights. Students may work in groups of four to write the article; choose the title, check the main idea, and include pictures if pos-

sible. They will also comment on the relationship of the text with a text previously studied in class, *No Man is an Island*. Students are given time to revise and proof-read their texts. Then they are to select correct sentences with the past simple tense and talk about them.

The newspaper article is assessed using a rubric that includes the following aspects: grammar, spelling, vocabulary, mechanics, and creativity. The rubric describes the levels of achievement in detail (not achieved, beginner, intermediate, advanced) within a 4-point scale, for a total of 20 points (4 points maximum for each aspect). The articles are then displayed on the classroom walls so that everybody can have a look at them.

Wrap-up: The teacher congratulates students for their work and effort and elicits their ideas in regards to the poem studied the previous week, *No Man is an Island* and its connection to the message of *Not my Business*. Volunteers offer their insights orally in front of the class. Finally, in small groups, the students summarized what has been learned in this session.

Conclusion

The pedagogical proposal thus presented arose from the need for EFL learners at university level enrolled in International Studies undergraduate program to incorporate the literary text as a means to further develop language skills, enhance cultural competencies, as well as expanding their knowledge of historical facts, while growing at a personal level by focusing on relevant universal topics. Additionally, the lesson hereby presented served to illustrate how the Historical Approach to literary interpretation can fit within an interwoven combination of teaching techniques and activities resulting from an interest in developing critical thinking and raise language and culture awareness, while positioning the literary text as a useful source of information and language input, in meaningful and interesting ways.

We can use the Historical Approach to teach English through an eclectic teaching language approach and promote critical thinking. Additionally, the Historical Approach can serve to make students aware of the role of literature as a means to get to know the past and thus avoid repeating the same mistakes.

Under the lenses of the Historical Approach, the literary text becomes an effective means of promoting cultural awareness and stimulating critical thinking. Therefore, the benefits for EFL learners are manifold: (a) they can learn how to deal with particular social conflicts by identifying and trying to solve them; (b) they can be made aware of the fact that the cultural and social context of any literary text may serve as a tool to develop their abstract thinking, as well as their linguistic and cultural competencies.

Literature is the most suitable and appropriate sample of language for such purpose because it is a constructed, yet not always accurate, historical record of history and reality while encompassing all the competencies that learning a language requires. We believe that the secret lies in planning every class carefully. Considering what is presented in this modest

lesson plan, we can always enhance language learning to make it significant and move students toward personal growth and cultural awareness.

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