

# FROM READING TO TEACHING, DULCE ET DECORUM EST IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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## **Abstract**

This paper aims to represent the usage of literature in foreign language classrooms in order to deploy the students' knowledge of English literature as an important part of learning English language. Introducing literature in the language classrooms as well as the benefits of reading it make the introduction lines of this paper. The core of the analysis is presented through the poem of Wilfred Owen, *Dulce et Decorum est*. This postwar poem with its rich vocabulary is a great tool for a didactic initiation and proposition of EFL literature classroom instruction.

**Key words:** Literature, EFL classroom, Dulce et Decorum est, Wilfred Owen, language teaching.

## **1. Introduction**

*If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart.*

–Nelson Mandela

This paper tends to make the above introducing Mandela's lines the practical ones, not only theoretical. Due to that aim, we want to represent and pinpoint the important role of literature as a useful resource in EFL classrooms. The main stress will be on the different approaches to the Owen's poem as well as analyzing the poem itself as a proposal for literature lecturer's didactic instructions. Literature allows teachers to design and redesign many activities that are going to be a part of a modern and up-to-date classrooms that have to be 'based on material capable of stimulating greater interest and involvement' (Carter and Long 1991: 3) and

to ‘provide the stimulus for interaction to take place between the learners among them, and with the teacher’ (Duff and Maley 1990: 3).

The whole work is written to encourage and induce a communicative approach in the EFL classrooms as the main goal of communicative approach is the teaching of communicative competence. Communicative competence should involve using language for different purposes and functions, using language according to the setting and participants and to understand different types of texts. Indeed, literary terms and expressions are developed structure of one’s national language with fixed or non-fixed norms in writing. Simply, it is a manifestation of one’s culture. According to that, introducing that ‘manifestation of culture’ in EFL classrooms should be the first and the last aim of any language activity.

*Dulce et Decorum est*, a postwar poem which belongs to the modernist tradition, is a prolific and productive material for being a language teaching resource. The ideas and philosophy can easily be related to the modern world wars caused by pro-cultural and religion marginalization. The poem is a pedagogical potential regarding its structure, content, context and form.

The paper consists of three sections. The first is the theoretical one and describes the links between literature and literary content and language learning as well as teaching foreign language. The second part offers a brief picture of the poem and its author explaining the reasons why *Dulce et Decorum est* is an appropriate for communicative approach. And the final, the most important part, deals with the concrete suggestions and proposals for classroom activities to be carried out. Within this final part, we have also made some critical views on the poem.

## **2. A Word or Two about Literature and Teaching Language**

Language teaching is a life-long process whose methods and techniques varied from period to period, from culture to culture, even from individual to individual. Even nowadays, the innovative solutions and perfect methods are being searched for in order to regain a productive student who is willing to involve in global and contemporary philological and cultural thought. Communicative language learning is one of the approaches that gives credit to the use of authentic language, language that is used in a real life context.

### **2.1 Why teach literature?**

As Olga Bottino (1999:211) mentions, the literature today is often seen within the framework of three main models:

1. The cultural model
2. The language model
3. The personal growth model

Through the first model which is seen as a transmitting important ideas, feelings, thoughts, views and opinions student is able to learn about ‘the Other’, about something beyond already known, other culture, tradition and customs. This is the very first stage of introducing language into the classroom generally. The second stage, often criticized as a mechanic process, is seen as a tool for teaching grammar and vocabulary structures through the literary texts where every sense of pleasure and beauty can be lost. The third model is student-centered and its aim is to motivate them to read, to personally connect themselves with the certain theme. These models make teaching literature one of the most evaluated and of high importance in learning English as a foreign language.

According to Collie and Slater (1990:3), following four reasons why literature is important in EFL classrooms are valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement. On the other hand, Maley (1989:12) lists some of the additional reasons of literature as a potential resource in the language classroom as universality, non-triviality, personal relevance, variety, interest, economy and suggestive power, ambiguity. The greatest task for language teachers is to comprise all of these factors and elements within his personal language teaching. Modern society challenges teachers to design stimulating activities that have to motivate the learners and literature stands for an excellent source for learning language.

## **2.2 Why poetry?**

Considering the personal growth of learner, it is of a high importance to begin with reading model of approaching and introducing literature in EFL classrooms. Teachers are able to practice language skills, reading and speaking which is prominent connection between language and literature. Using metaphors, poet is paving its path to the reader and unconsciously is making learning process. After reading, students gain the appreciation of the writer’s composition

structure and develop certain sensitivity for new vocabulary and discover his own capability of analytical thinking.

The numerous benefits of using poetry in EFL classrooms have been highlighted by many EFL practitioners and scholars as the following:

1. Saraç (2003:17-20) explains the educational benefits of poetry as to provide readers with a different viewpoint towards language use by going beyond the known usages and rules of grammar, syntax and vocabulary, to trigger unmotivated readers owing to being so open to explorations and different interpretations, to evoke feelings and thoughts in heart and in mind, to make students familiar with figures of speech (i.e. simile, metaphor, irony, personification, imagery, etc.) due to their being a part of daily language use.
2. It can be used as an introducing and practicing language by exposing student to "authentic models-real language in context" (Brumfit & Carter, 1987). According to Tomlinson (1989:42) using poetry in the language process contributes more to the development of all language skills in real contexts than "a total concentration on the presentation and the practice of language items".
3. According to Collie and Slater (1987:72) "using poetry in the language classroom can lead naturally on to freer and creative written expression".
4. Poetry based activities are motivating as they generate strong emotional reactions. As Hess (2003:20) notes, "Entering a literary text, under the guidance of appropriate teaching, brings about the kind of participation almost no other text can produce. When we read, understand, and interpret a poem we learn language through the expansion of our experience with a larger human reality".

Moreover, poetry employs powerful language to evoke and exalt special qualities and conditions of life, and suffices readers with feelings. Poetry is one of the most effective and powerful transmitters and representatives of culture. Poems comprise the most various cultural elements - allusions, metaphors, vocabulary, idioms, tone, dialect and accents that are not easy to translate into the mother tongue of a learner.

### **2.3 A poem to choose**

Following the curricula of the course on Anglo-American, modern, postmodern and postwar literature, *Dulce et Decorum est* seemed to stand as unique as its author was. It offers a

picturesque description of a real life conditions then as well as a pedagogical and cultural opportunities to explore its magnificent language and reveal it underlying philosophy.

## **2.4 Content, form and historical background**

With its historical background, the content of the poem represents the rich and picturesque sequences of events that make the classroom an audio and visual workshop for students. The poem is one of the most powerful literary works and it is a reflection of Owen's ironical realism of his own thoughts and personal experiences related to the World War I. It culturally and literally marked one era of silence and issued the problem of patriotism as a life bitterness at the time. It begins with an ironic title taken from the Horace meaning 'it is sweet and honorable' which is followed by *pro patria mori* which means 'to die for one's country.' Owen uses the irony as he believes this is the opposite of the truth, detailing the real but gruesome reality of the war.

The most poetic technique used is imagery and visual imagery, to be more specific. Its reading demands a high involvement from the reader and allows students many different conclusions and further discussions. Owen brilliantly uses extensive imagery in this poem which is very productive for students' imagination. He uses an effective language to convey painful but sincere message of war destructiveness using almost all of the figures of speech. Onomatopoeia and personification as well as metaphor, word connotation, alliteration, hyperbole, exclamations, epithets, simile are highly employed in describing the moments in the poem.

### **Table of proposed tasks and expected responses**

#### **I Introducing activities**

<b>Teacher's task</b>	<b>Material or tool used</b>	<b>Student's response or activity</b>
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<p>These three famous quotes are shown on the projector:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Mankind must put an end to war before war puts an end to mankind.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>John F. Kennedy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>War does not determine who is right - only who is left.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Bertrand Russell</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Only the dead have seen the end of the war.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>George Santayana</b></p> <p>Students are asked to comment on these quotes, to resonate and connect them with contemporary life and happenings, especially in the war zone today.</p>	<p>Video projector</p>	<p>This introducing activity can be very productive in a way that modern society has its own wars. Students are expected to comment on one of the mentioned quotes, choosing their favorite.</p> <p>Discussion about modern life can lead to an excellent introduction into the main topic of Owen's poem <i>Dulce et Decorum</i>.</p>
<p>Now students are asked to think of a situation where they felt sad, tearful, grievous or even distressed.</p>	<p>Images</p>	<p>This question may give rise to a myriad of responses, for example when left by the beloved person,</p> <p>When someone in the family died, or when failing in an exam.</p>
<p>On the next step, teacher should offer the first hint related to the poem they should examine.</p> <p>Students are asked to deduce from the title <i>Dulce et Decorum est Pro Patria Mori</i>, what does it mean and to give possible themes of the poem.</p>		<p>Students are expected to think about the title and give some of the possible answers as war, destruction, soldiers, glorification of war, bravery, strength, getaway, refugees.</p>
<p>Before the students are given the whole text of the poem, the teacher is playing</p>	<p>Poem Video</p>	<p>Students are now fully dedicated to the audio and visual happening in their</p>

<p>video with the effective reading of the poem. In this case, teacher has chosen Christopher Eccleston video (<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qB4cdRgIcB8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qB4cdRgIcB8</a> )</p> <p>After the first listening, student are now given the poem in printed version. Teacher reads through the poem slowly and asks student to highlight the unknown words.</p>		<p>classroom. Literature is not only about the reading but also about hearing the art of poetry. Since this is their first time to meet Owen and his poetry, it is very important to hear the poem from the native speaker.</p>
<p>It is very important to introduce the poem gradually to the students. This is supported by the step when teacher adds some history facts to the material. As the students became familiar with the material, teacher should allow them to become familiar with the writer. Teacher should take care only to mention relevant facts about the writer, usually one that are interesting and easy to remember thus differing Owen from other authors.</p> <p>Teacher should mention, for example, that Owen was inspired by Keats, Byron, Shelly and other romanticist.</p> <p>Also, he was teaching in France when the war began and his first experience of the war was in hospital treating the wounded soldiers.</p> <p>He was close friend with Siegfried Sassoon.</p>	<p><b>Images</b> <b>Projector</b></p>	<p>Students shouldn't be bored because now they are 'meeting' someone new and are still in the listening phase. The teacher hadn't still given them the assignment. The key moment related to this activity, and any other activities where the authors are mentioned, is the moment when they hear something familiar, in this case the names of famous romanticists Keats, Byron, Shelly and others. They immediately associate familiar authors with the one who is unknown.</p>

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Introducing activities are very important in further reading exercises and represent a teacher's hook for student's attention. It is a starting point in whether student will be interested in learning new things or not. It is of a high importance for learners to have the opportunity to predict what will next happen and have some idea what they are going to learn and read about. According to Maingay (1983) this is a very important strategy, not only in language, but also in communication.

Also, usage of contextual learning can be useful in a way that students would be able to construct meaning and opinion based on their own experience. In that way, when they are asked to think of a sad situation, the teacher brings their personal situation closer to the general and social situation they are going to learn about. One of the main goal of these introducing activities is to develop and replicate a real world experiences within the personal world of a student. It can help and bring relevance and meaning to the reading, helping students to relate to their inner world, world they live in.

Teacher should also take care of his vocational priorities in the classroom and pedagogical benefits of each activity involved. The aim of contemporary teachers is to be an interesting, never boring guide in class not an angry and serious supervisor. His basic role is to create a pleasant atmosphere where student will feel free to express his opinions, thoughts and be able to comment and communicate on various topics.

## II Analyzing activities

<b>Teacher's task</b>	<b>Material or tool used</b>	<b>Student's response or activity</b>
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<p>The teacher shows some pictures, concentrating on the suffering of the soldiers, during WWI, battlefield pictures where soldiers are extremely tired, exhausted, returning from the battle. Owen describes the harrowing events and asks the following questions:</p> <p>Is this sweet and right to die for? Why? Is this a patriotic poem? Why? Why not?</p>	<p>Pictures</p>	<p>Having looked at the pictures before him, student creates his own inner impressions and feelings which will be transmuted into critiques and opinions. Student is expected to react according to the emotional state of his intellect, to explain why or why not is sweet and right to die for its own land and about patriotism and its meaning and definition. Student becomes able to define some expression relying on his previous interpretation.</p>
<p>Students are asked to work in a group and identify all the adjectives in the poem and define the feelings that those adjectives provoke in them.</p>	<p>Images</p>	<p>Having written down all the adjectives from the poem, now they are asked to explain the provoked feelings while researching for adjectives. In this way they identify themselves with the author and his emotions.</p>
<p>Even though the poem functions as the whole unit, the teacher separates poem into three parts in order to ease its interpretation for students.</p> <p>The first part is from 1-8 verses. Students are asked to work in pairs and find the simile, alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhyming couplets, repetitions, metaphors. Students are obliged to explain all these figures of speech and their cause of usage.</p>	<p>Images, computer access</p>	<p>Students have got the first concrete task which is to identify and analyze the poem critically. Some of the expected answers would be that simile is used to give a negative image of frail, decrepit and confined soldiers in 'like old beggars under sacks'. Alliteration and also onomatopoeia is used in '<i>knock-kneed</i>'. Students should also mention alternate rhyming couplets that run throughout the poem, e.g. 'sacks'- 'backs'/ 'sludge'- 'trudge', and explain</p>

		why.
In the second part, 8-14 students also get an assignment to identify all above mentioned figures of speech used in this part of the poem. It is important to mention that students are researchers here and they do all the work related to the analyzing the poem with no help of the teacher. Thus, the students become capable to critically analyze any kind of literature. Access to computers should be allowed.	Images, computer access	These verses differ from others by their punctuation. Students are expected to notice where the capitalized letters are used and why, as well as using dash as caesural pause and give reasons for its usage. Important figure of speech that overwhelms these verses is metaphor in 'misty panes', 'green sea', 'drowning'. Owen uses 'guttering' as horrible sound which mimics the soldier coughing helplessly.
In the final part of the poem, 14-28 verses, the teacher is still a guide who monitor his students' work and researching the poem. One of the question for student would be about the simile and its use, about the effect of sibilance, about 'a friend' who is addressed as 'my friend'.	Images	Students anticipate that Owen's usage of simile is to compare 'cud' with the cancer and it is called an animalistic imagery. The interesting part of students' research is discovering the mysterious 'my friend' whom Owen is addressing to. One of the answers was the one who explains that 'my friend' is every poet, writer, journalist who writes motivational poems like Jessie Pope.
Finally, when the poem is literally and critically analyzed, students are asked to mold and define the themes of the poem considering their interpretation of Owen's viewing of war.		This questions gas given a myriad of answers like warfare, suffering, patriotism, horrors of war, irony of life.

With these analyzing activities, we fragmented the poem in order to develop lexical capability and competence of the students. Their research for vocabulary and literal explanations will make the learner to interact in the classroom being a part of the group. The aim of the assignments they got is to direct students towards a further and deeper understanding of the poetry.

### III Writing activities

Teacher's task	Material or tool used	Student's response or activity
<p>The final part, but not least important though, would enclose the interpretation of Owen's poem. Now students are politely asked to close their eyes while the teacher is playing an audio-effective youtube video (<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gd3bhg3O_qE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gd3bhg3O_qE</a>).</p>	<p>Video</p>	<p>This pre-final activity is related to their cognitive function. Students do not use their eyesight anymore and every new impression and cognition is based on the sense of hearing which, by medical researches, is now multiplied.</p>
<p>After the first listening, students are asked to imagine themselves in the battlefield. They are fearful and hopeless. The sadness and destruction is all around them. They are asked to write a poem of their own impression influenced by Owen's poem. While the students are writing poems, the music of war is heard in the background.</p>	<p>Audio</p>	<p>Finishing the final step in analyzing the poem, students' creativity and talent should be expressed and shown which was the initial aim of this course.</p>

Listening activities involved in this part of writing can be very useful and represents an immensely memorable interpretation of poetry using the most powerful tool of intellect – imagination. Variety of activities in the classroom will surely guarantee a success. That success is students' involvement, resonating, understanding and adopting new knowledge.

These activities are intended to be an outline and suggestion for using *Dulce et Decorum* as a resource of culture in English as a Foreign Language classroom. The basic approaches used in activities are communicative and contextual approach which develop social competence showing how to communicate and behave in foreign culture in foreign language. The teacher is the only one responsible for creating the learner's autonomy and developing the way of learning and adopting knowledge.

### **3. Conclusion**

This paper is one solution of the many suggestions how to implement the poem *Dulce et Decorum* by Wilfred Owen in EFL classroom. It is our view of a cultural model application in learning foreign language which is designed to transmit important ideas, feelings, thoughts, views and opinions about 'the Other', about something beyond already known, other culture, tradition and customs. Thus, literature represents the increasingly popular method in mastering foreign language. Our selection of *Dulce et Decorum* by Owen is both thematically and formally justified since it is a brave and inspirational poem that is a representation of a cruel, but real war scenes that exist even today.

These proposed introducing, analyzing and writing tasks proposed are a proof that the teacher can develop, not only literary, but also lexical, social and communicative competence through poetry. *Dulce et Decorum* is surely a useful tool for implementation of those competences in EFL classrooms.

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