

REVIEW PAPER

THE IMPACT OF DRAMA IN LEARNING AND TEACHING LANGUAGE/INTEGRATING DRAMA IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze the role of drama in context of learning a language, particularly in context of learning English through plays and dramatic movements such as Shakespeare's plays, Theatre of the Absurd and Modern and Post-modern American Drama, and the practical use of these plays in learning process according to different age and language level groups. The style of dialogue in Shakespeare's plays is analyzed and compared to the style in absurdist plays by authors such as Beckett and Ionesco. When talking about the works of Shakespeare, the process of adaptation and appropriation is mentioned as well as telling the famous tales and narratives through different media. Previous research will be taken in consideration, such as the pioneering work of drama educators who first introduced theatre as a learning tool in education or the Communicative Language Teaching approach focused on fluency and interaction in everyday situations. Specifics of drama in language learning in comparison to other literary genres such as poetry or prose will be briefly mentioned along with the history of Western drama. This paper discusses theatre and drama in the context of education with mention of similarities and differences to staged professional theatre plays. In few chapters, theatre is analyzed as a learning tool in various fields of study, but the main focus of the paper is language learning through drama with the purpose of improving students' linguistic and cultural knowledge. The discussion can be of concern to all those wishing to improve their language skills, and to drama educators and other theatre and education practitioners.

Keywords: language learning, drama, EFL/ESL, classroom drama, theatre of the absurd, modern and post-modern American drama, Shakespeare



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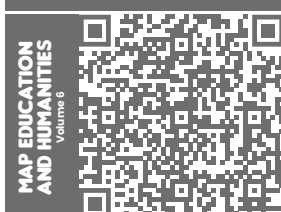
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1. Introduction

Theatre has been an integral part of the cultures and traditions around the world for centuries. Some of the known benefits of theatre include the opportunity to experience catharsis, attend social events that connect the individual to the community, increase knowledge and awareness on certain topics, and many others. Theatre consists of different art forms joined together on stage, and language and literature is one of those art elements. The focus of this chapter is to research how different types of plays can be useful when learning English and what genres and dramatic movements are most suitable and effective for different and language level groups. It is almost certain that Western plays help improve linguistic, critical and other skills of native English speakers. However, considering this paper is written from a perspective of a non-native speaker, the focus of the text will be narrowed to English learned by non-native speakers, sometimes referred to as English as a foreign or second language, which includes writing, reading, listening and speaking.

There is a certain amount of confusion when speaking about theatre, plays and drama, or drama as a dialogue form that can be found in journalism (e.g. in interviews), screenplays for film or TV, and in novels or short stories. The distinction of plays compared to other literary genres, such as poetry or prose, is that they are mostly intended to be staged or read out loud in a group setting. In terms of learning a language, these specifics can be very useful. As an example, the author Betlem Soler Pardo (2020) writes about theatre as an educational tool for developing language skills. In the research paper "Theatre as a Communicative Strategy for Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Primary Education Undergraduates: A Pedagogical Experience", Pardo examines the effectiveness of theatre as a didactic tool in the classroom and discusses the benefits and challenges of using theatre in teaching English as a foreign language. Ever since the Communicative Approach or CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) was founded, theatre has been one of the educational tools in language teaching. The Communicative Approach is a language teaching method focused on fluency and interaction in real-life situations rather than grammar rules, and communication is both the means and the goal in the learning process. It emerged gradually in the late 1960s and early 1970s and was promoted by linguists such as D.A. Wilkins and Michael Halliday.

Pardo (2020) cites authors such as Ausubel (1963), Philips (2003), Wessels (1987), and Royka (2002), who claim that the best way to learn a foreign language is through the context of real everyday situations that the student can identify with and create a fictional world in which they can use the language. Expanding students' imagination is another benefit of using the theatre in the classroom. Some of the advantages of using theatre as a pedagogical tool are improved fluency and improvisation skills, increased self-confidence and motivation, improved pronunciation, learning new grammatical structures, and enhanced social skills and teamwork, since theatre is a group activity.

Pardo (2020) analyzes the work of Fleming (2006) and his distinction between drama and theatre, drama referring to improvised works and theatre to dramatic works that are performed on the stage; Pardo used the term "theatre" in the research to describe both definitions. According to Fleming's explanation, there is a lot of improvisation in drama and shorter plays, and theatre is the product of literary text and needs rehearsing rather than improvisation for the best results. One of Pardo's conclusions is that theatre has always been present in education and in the classroom in the form of different activities, games, and simulations.

Pardo's focus group in the practical part of his research were undergraduate students who were planning to work as English (EFL) teachers in elementary schools. At the end of the research, student participants performed the plays that were adaptations and parodies of popular tales such as *Hansel and Gretel*, *Cinderella*, *The Princess and the Pea*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, *The Three Little Pigs*, and *Alice in Wonderland*. Some of the students made significant changes to the stories and the plays could be considered loosely based on the tales rather than adaptations. The literary texts used in the research belong to the genre of children's literature because the participants' studies were focused on teaching language to children in elementary schools. However, the students wrote adaptation and parodies rather than used the original tales and it somewhat influenced the target audience that consisted of children but older generations, as well.

According to the definition of terms in Pardo's research, drama is mostly used in the context of younger age groups and beginner or intermediary language levels along with

improvisation (games and activities) and scripts that are not too complicated in terms of learning English. In terms of education, this would include pre-school, primary and secondary education, depending on their knowledge of English and school program. Plays by authors such as Shakespeare, Samuel Beckett, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, August Wilson, Eugene O'Neill, Edward Albee, and many other dramatic works that require more in-depth analysis and a lot of rehearsing are usually used as a learning material for advanced – level students and as part of high school program (or college/university level).

Another distinction between drama and play can be found in the research paper "Teaching Drama: Challenges and Benefits". Kalicanin and Petrovic (2021) discuss the pioneering work of drama educators Heathcote, Freire and Nussbaum and their perspectives on drama. Dorothy Heathcote contributed to one of the greatest revolutions in drama pedagogy and her methods of teaching were incorporated not only in teaching drama but also in other fields of study. Heathcote (2002) and Gavin Bolton (1979) were the first scholars to emphasize the importance of theatre in the first language classroom and to introduce theatre as a learning tool (social, emotional, cognitive). Soon after, the second language educators started developing strategies to integrate theatre into their classes because it was concluded that theatre could improve the four basic skills of language learning (speaking, writing, reading, listening). Heathcote was known for conducting dramatic workshops in which her students enacted different daily situations in controlled settings. The conventional methods of teaching drama consisted of ex cathedra lectures while Heathcote's and Bolton's method involved improvisation in various social and ethical situations and drawing inspiration from personal experience. The participants of the workshops were students of all ages, starting from elementary school to university level students. The students would dramatize a real-life situation that was not prepared for them in advance, through improvisation. Kalicanin and Petrovic (2021, p. 136) write that Heathcote's students were able to make clear distinction between the play and drama: acting in a play does not allow the personalization of the circumstances or the reactions, and in drama the dramatic conflict is based on the reactions of the students and each new class or workshop is an opportunity to resolve the situation in a new way.

According to this research and the distinction of play and drama, play is a pre-written dramatic text by authors such as Shakespeare that can be analyzed or enacted in a class setting. Drama, on the other hand, is dependent on students' reactions, their experiences and improvisation, and the dramatic story or conflict is made up of these factors. The first formal definition of drama in Western literature, or more specifically, of tragedy, can be considered Aristotle's definition written in *Poetics*, which identifies the components of tragedy as a type of drama.

The history of Western and English-speaking drama starts with tragedies and comedies in Ancient Greece (6th century BC) and a century later in ancient Rome. The plays were based on the rules of Aristotle's *Poetics* and written by authors such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides (tragedies), and Aristophanes, or Plautus in Rome (comedies). The 5th to 15th century was the time of medieval plays such as morality plays, miracles and mystery plays that dramatized Biblical events, moral lessons or lives of the saints. These medieval church plays had a flipside in the form of farces and carnival comedies performed during celebrations. This time can be considered the beginning of English-language theatre. Next was the Elizabethan drama most famous for a great number of Shakespeare's plays and tragic heroes and anti-heroes such as King Lear, Richard III, Hamlet, Macbeth, followed by 18th century drama, rise of melodrama in the 19th century, plays of naturalism and realism with psychological depth and playwrights such as Strindberg, Ibsen, Chekhov and Shaw, and finally, 20th and 21st century drama including Theatre of the Absurd, Modern American Drama, Feminist Theatre, Post-modern Drama.

The next few chapters will focus on plays and dramatic movements of the English-speaking world: Shakespeare's plays written in early modern English, and absurdist plays along with few examples of modern and post-modern American plays. The paper will analyze how these plays can be used in education, and particularly in learning English (EFL/ESL).

2. Learning English through Shakespeare's plays

William Shakespeare is widely regarded as one of the greatest playwrights in theatre history, and his plays have had a lasting impact on English literature and language (and on the literature and

languages in the rest of the world). He wrote 39 plays in his life, tragedies such as *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*; comedies that include *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and plays that dramatize the lives of kings such as Henry IV, V, VI, Richard II, III, King John and others. Aside from writing the plays, Shakespeare is known for popularizing and inventing numerous English words. His plays introduce learners to diverse vocabulary, idioms and other expressions in the English language and that is why they are a great resource in language learning. His plays are typically written in a five-act structure that became a framework for dramatic writing: in Act I the setting and the main characters are established, Act II sets the story for dramatic conflict, in Act III and IV the conflict reaches its highest point followed by the effects of the event, and finally in Act V there is a resolution to the story. It can be claimed that the dialogue in Shakespeare's plays, with its complexity and diversity of the language is the most resourceful aspect for study in terms of language learning rather than focusing on character development, plot, structure and other aspects of play analysis. However, the more the students understand the parts of play and play as a whole the more they will be able to grasp the language, its function and its dimensions. There is a distinction in how the dialogue is written for different characters, e.g. heroes in Shakespeare's plays often speak in verse, and prose and ordinary speech is often used in scenes of comic relief. The type of verse used in the play is iambic pentameter without rhyme, and rhymed verse is sometimes placed at the end of a scene.

In paper *Shakespeare for ESL*, Todd Heyden (2003) writes that Shakespeare has left a stronger linguistic imprint on the English in terms of themes, characters and specifics of speeches and phrases than any other writer, and that ESL students should be given a strategy for accessing the cultures of the English-speaking world.

For Heyden, there should be a sense of play and fun for students in reading literature, particularly the plays of Shakespeare. Another important aspect is confidence because non-native speakers can find it challenging to read Shakespeare's plays that are not written in modern English. Heyden describes the methodology in his lectures, the first thing his students do in small groups is rewrite the famous soliloquys such as

"To be or not to be". As they are writing this task, students stumble upon many words they already know, and realize it is not a solitary activity but something they can write together with their group partner. Other activities in Heyden classes include inventing dialogues, writing letters to characters and creating simplified scripts based on a scene in a Shakespeare play. Another English playwright, Tom Stoppard has done this and expanded the text into a full-length absurdist play focusing on the Shakespearean characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Heyden explains that rewriting helps students to read with attention and notice how the original speech is constructed, details such as the number of syllables, the rhythm of the speech, the sound of words. Heyden observes that rewriting the soliloquys could seem like a sacrilege at first but it is the first step in understanding the meaning of the speech and appreciating its beauty (Heyden, 2003).

Considering the essay is published in *The Journal of the Imagination in Language Learning and Teaching*, with focus on imaginative writing and writing tasks in the classroom setting, it is clear that the purpose of rewriting the soliloquys is not to change the original text but to increase the students' knowledge and understanding of Shakespeare. However, if the rewriting was done in a professional theatre setting, with the intention of staging the play with the changed version of Shakespeare's text, there would probably be few critics or theorists who would argue against the changes of Shakespeare's dramatic works, such as few former directors at the Globe theatre. This is what Julie Sanders says about adaptation and appropriation of tales, folklore and other source materials:

These forms and genres have cross-cultural, often cross-historical, readerships; they are stories and tales which appear across the boundaries of cultural difference and which are handed on, albeit in transmuted and translated forms, through the generations (Sanders, 2006, p. 45).

Sometimes Shakespeare's plays are adapted for different media, such as film or radio, or set in another context or timeline, in such a case the term adaptation would be used to describe the retelling of the original story with some changes. Shakespeare himself used sources such as classical texts, medieval legends and historical chronicles as inspiration for his plays. In case of plays like *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead*, that reference Shakespeare's *Hamlet* but diverge greatly

from the original story (in terms of the plot, the main characters, themes, perspective), they could be described as loosely based on Shakespeare (in a way homage), or as plays referencing or commenting on the original play. Pardo's research was conducted in a similar way with adaptations and loose adaptations of children's tales. Sanders (2006) writes that dramatic adaptations of Shakespeare's plays have been done since Restoration in England in 1660s and Shakespeare's cultural value lies in his availability to coming ages to adapt his work as they wish, because, as Jean Marsden (as cited in Sanders, 2006) says every new generation tries to redefine Shakespeare from a contemporary point of view.

Shakespeare is more often taught (as part of drama or language classes) in higher grades in high school and at university level, but can be an inspiration for all generations, not only in the form of plays but through numerous literary, film and TV adaptations and references in pop culture. Shakespeare's unforgettable plays are proven resources for learning English through its masterful word constructs, phrases, idioms and expressions that increase students' linguistic and cultural knowledge.

3. Theatre of the Absurd in the context of language learning

Unlike Shakespeare's style, which can be described as poetic, expressive and filled with metaphors and imagery, the linguistic style of Theatre of the Absurd is repetitive and simpler in expression, it reflects the breakdown of communication and is fragmented and stripped to its core layers of meaning. When speaking about Theatre of the Absurd, the context of the World War II and its aftermath is often discussed, and so are the personal experiences of the authors who changed countries and wrote in more than one language.

Aside from Theatre of the Absurd, representatives of Modern and Post-modern American Drama are included in this chapter, who were influenced by Theatre of the Absurd such as Edward Albee, or Sam Shepard who had similar thematic focus in some of his plays. Similar to the case of Shakespeare's dramatic works, the absurdist plays are more suitable for advanced-level students and older age groups in terms of thematic complexity and context of the plays. However, parts of the dialogue could potentially be adapted for younger age groups but this paper will focus on the original unedited plays.

True West is a play that was published in 1981 (and produced the year before) by an American playwright, screenwriter, actor, and director, and it is one of the 58 plays Shepard wrote in his lifetime. The story centers on two brothers, Austin and Lee, who, after many years of estrangement, meet at their mother's house located 20 miles outside of Los Angeles. Some of the topics the play explores are family relations, the American dream, and the search for meaning in life.

According to some theorists, Albee's plays are an American version of the Theatre of the Absurd, which describes plays about existential issues, human existence, the lack of meaning, and the lack of communication. Martin Esslin (2004) writes that Theatre of the Absurd did not have as much influence on American writers at the time because, in the US, there has not been the loss of meaning and the concept of American dream was still strong. Albee was, however, considered one of the absurdist authors due to the irony and lack of optimism in his work. Some of his renowned plays include works such as *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, *The Zoo Story*, *Homelife*, *The Sandbox*, *The American Dream* and others.

Absurdist plays were written between the 1940s and 1960s, in the period after WW2 that was characterized by disillusionment with previous values and traditions. In his essay "Theatre of the Absurd", Esslin writes about the absurd in the plays of Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and Arthur Adamov, and the absurd in Beckett's plays is described as melancholic and characterized by a feeling of futility and chronic hopelessness. The world is portrayed as an incomprehensible place observed from an external point of view, and that is why the events unfolding on stage appear to lack meaning (Esslin, 1961).

Our own time, at least in the Western world, wholly lacks such a generally accepted and completely integrated world picture. The decline of religious faith, the destruction of the belief in automatic social and biological progress, the discovery of vast areas of irrational and unconscious forces within the human psyche, the loss of a sense of control over rational human development in an age of totalitarianism and weapons of mass destruction, have all contributed to the erosion of the basis for a dramatic convention in which the action proceeds within a fixed and self-evident framework

of generally accepted values. Faced with the vacuum left by the destruction of a universally accepted and unified set of beliefs, most serious playwrights have felt the need to fit their work into the frame of values and objectives expressed in one of the contemporary ideologies (Esslin, 1961, p.6).

The play *True West* cannot directly be described as absurdist, and it was written a few decades after most of the plays of the theatre of the absurd, but it does deal with the same topics, such as isolation, search for identity, and lack of communication and understanding.

It is particularly the aspect of the communication that makes the absurdist plays appealing for analysis in the context of teaching English as a foreign language. The breakdown of communication, however, leads to a lack of meaning not only in an existentialist sense but in terms of words and phrases within the play. Dialogue in Theatre of the Absurd sometimes differs from or is in contradiction with the action happening on the stage, and it is important not to further confuse the students as they are trying to improve their linguistic skills, and to find the appropriate parts of the dialogue for different age groups and levels of education. Activities such as the analysis of the play and the discussion about the context and the characteristics of the Theatre of the Absurd can be conducted, and just like in the case of Pardo and Heyden, the students can try to write their own absurdist plays or adapt the stories they find to be absurdist in some way. The characters in the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd are essentially trying to find or create meaning in what they perceive to be a world devoid of meaning, and in that way, they can be relatable to students wishing to improve their English skills. Unlike Beckett's or Ionesco's plays, which are some of the main examples of absurdist plays and are very philosophical, vague, and repetitive in terms of the dialogue, play structure, and location, Albee's and Shepard's plays are not as vague, and follow some of the traditional rules of playwriting.

Dialogue in absurdist plays usually consists of clichés and repetitive stereotypical phrases, and Esslin (1961) questions how many of such phrases are used in daily life. Theatre of the Absurd is most revolutionary in terms of its approach to language; it tries to renew the dramatic language and to deconstruct the conventional stage dialogue. In

1948, before writing his first play, Romanian-French playwright (and at the time proofreader) Ionesco was trying to learn conversational English, and soon he bought a French-English phrase book, *L'Anglais sans Peine* (English without Pain), and started studying at Berlitz school. His method was to write down and copy sentences from the book and try to memorize them. After reading the sentences a few times, Ionesco realized that it is not so much his knowledge of English that is improving but his awareness of facts such as that there are seven days in a week, or that the ceiling is up and the floor is down, which he knew about before but never seriously considered. He was affected by the tragic quality of these phrases, and the ordinariness that creates the absurdity. The sentences in the book were not only simple statements in French translation but universal truths and observations. As Ionesco continued learning from the phrase book, in later lessons he encountered personal observations that were written in the form of dialogue, and all of these findings led him to write his first play and improve his knowledge of the English language (Ionesco, 1960).

Ionesco was born not far from Bucharest in Romania, but moved to France with his family due to his father's work. At the age of 13, he and his sister had to return to Romania, and Ionesco was not happy about the move and felt a sense of isolation from the Romanian society and language. It is precisely the alienation from his first language that, later, when Ionesco moved again to France and started his playwriting career, helped him evoke in his texts a feeling of confusion and frustration at the inability of language to find and describe the meaning of reality (Lahr, 1994).

A strange phenomenon took place. I don't know how—the text began imperceptibly to change before my eyes. The very simple, luminously clear statements I had copied so diligently into my notebook, left to themselves, fermented after a while, lost their original identity, expanded, and overflowed. The clichés and truisms of the conversation primer, which had once made sense (...), gave way to pseudo-clichés and pseudo-truisms (...). For me, what had happened was a kind of collapse of reality. The words had turned into sounding shells devoid of meaning, the characters too, of course, had been emptied of psychology, and the world appeared to me in an unearthly, perhaps its true light, beyond understanding and

governed by arbitrary laws (Ionesco, 1964, p. 178-179).

In the research paper “The Impact of Literature in Teaching a Foreign Language: A Case Study on the Use of Drama and its Practical Implications”, Anxhela Starja analyzes the various proven means of language acquisition with the purpose of developing skills and competencies. The first part of the research focuses on the role of literary texts in the teaching process, and in the second part, Starja writes about the practical approach within the classroom setting. The research aims to emphasize the effect of drama, particularly Shepard’s play *True West*, on the students’ learning process and their levels of creativity, motivation, individual work, and work in a group setting. According to Starja, literary texts can be put to use in developing linguistic and literary skills. One of the preconditions for using literature as a source material in learning a foreign language is to have the students familiarized with the necessary information that will enable them to understand its key principles and extract meaning from various uses of language. In order to interpret and understand dramatic texts and other literary works, the students need to use their communicative skills and have literary competence. Based on the works and argumentation of numerous eminent scholars, Starja mentions the following reasons for integrating literature in the foreign language classroom: literature represents the best aspects of language and that is why it is adequate for language learning, it helps students develop the linguistic awareness, discussion of literary themes, character relations and so on develops communicative competences, it provides students with the knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, cultural values and fosters creativity with language activities such as role playing, rewriting or changing the point of view within the story (Starja, 2015).

Albee’s plays, with similar themes, length and duo-character relations, can be analyzed and taught in the classroom setting according to Starja’s case study. Plays like *Marriage Play*, *The Zoo Story*, *Homelife*, *The American Dream*, *The Box*, consist of one act and, based on the book edition and the number of pages, can be read or listened to in one or a few classes, workshops, or other group work setting. *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia* has two acts (in a published version) and *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* consists of three acts. Excerpts can be chosen for reading and analyzing, or the play as a whole, depending on the thematic focus. Some of the suggested themes are the clash of

values (points of view, lifestyles, philosophies) that the main characters represent, the symbolism of the setting and its commentary of contemporary society and the American Dream, absurdity and existentialism in Albee’s work, the unconventional dramatic structure and the other contrasting topics such as alienation, isolation and search for the connection and meaning.

In Starja’s case study, practical activities were carried out in order to analyze the role of the literary genre of drama, and the participants were fourteen upper-intermediate level students of English at the Faculty of Foreign Languages. Divided into small groups, students were supposed to read, listen to, and rehearse extracts from Shepard’s play and present to the class the main ideas of the play and their impact on American society. The objectives of the case study were to get the students acquainted with the works of Sam Shepard and rehearse the play, to improve listening skills by watching the play on YouTube, speaking skills through presentation of main ideas to the class, and reading skills by reading the dialogue excerpts. Some of the other objectives were to get acquainted with new vocabulary terms, enhance students’ creative and critical thinking, and develop connections between literature (drama) and other subjects such as sociology or geography through the research of contemporary American society, consumerism, and setting (Starja, 2015).

The participants in both Starja’s and Pardo’s case studies were university students of English, but Pardo’s approach was more focused on language and pedagogy. Starja’s methodology was interdisciplinary as well in terms of wanting to link different fields of study but was focusing more on the socio-political and psychological aspect of the play.

The stages of the case study were divided into 5 to 6 classes. In the first two classes, the students are introduced to Sam Shepard, who is a winner of numerous screenwriting and playwriting awards, such as the Palme d’Or and Pulitzer Prize (Drama). The research of his plays is divided into three parts, into the early plays portraying the life in America in the ‘60s, the second part focused on the family plays set in the next few decades until the ‘90s, and the third part centering on the plays with themes such as the portrayal of the contemporary individual, the national identity and the male identity (Starja, 2015).

Similar to the works of Shepard, Albee's plays can be explored in the classroom/workshop setting in three phases. His Early Plays, written between the late '50s and early '60s, are strongly influenced by the Theatre of the Absurd and characterized by confrontations and societal critique. The language is often stylized and obscure, and the setting is minimalist and symbolic. Albee's Middle Plays phase lasted from the beginning of the '70s to the end of the '80s, and, during this time, he moved his focus from Broadway to regional US theaters and various European cities. In the early part of the '90s, Albee wrote the Later Plays, which represent a more mature, introspective and stylistically diverse stage of his work (Roudane, 2017).

In the next stage, the focus of the class is switched from the playwright to the play, and students are introduced to *True West*. The students are told that the play is a character study examining the relationship between two brothers, Austin and Lee. The play's basic information written on the playwright's official website is discussed, such as the setting and the main plot of the story. The play synopsis is briefly mentioned, along with the main points. The discussion of a play is approached with a "character study" point of view, and focuses on the analysis and discussion of two main characters and how they influence the plot. Finally, the participants were asked to read the play at home and watch the footage of one of the stage productions on YouTube (Starja, 2015).

This part of Starja's research focuses on the character study in the same way Kalicanin and Petrovic used English Renaissance anti-heroes and characters in Shakespeare's plays as practical examples of Heathcote's methods of teaching. Characters in Theatre of the Absurd can be challenging to analyze due to them not being written in a traditional but rather fragmented way, and through embodiment of deep philosophical and symbolic ideas. Characters in *True West* and in Albee's plays (e.g., Martha and George in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*) are written with more psychological depth and are more adept for character study.

According to Starja's description, in classes 3 and 4, students were divided into groups of four to five students, with each group doing the analysis of one of the acts. One of the tasks was to identify and discuss the themes emerging in the play, such as the comparison between the Old and the New West, the American Dream and its failure, and different

understandings (definitions) of art that each of the brothers represents, along with different parts of American society. The student later explored the idiolect of the main characters and through it, their social and other background; symbols and the concept of Austin and Lee changing the roles within the play, and coming up with a list of characteristics for the protagonists and writing it on the board in the classroom. The topic of dialogue and monologue was discussed, and every group focused on one of the major events in the play, such as the conflict between the brothers or their talking about Austin's screenplay. Afterwards, a small contest was organized between the groups to motivate them to continue to work hard. Each group was given a list of dialogue lines, and their task was to guess which character said the statement. One of the aims was to connect the dialogue lines and the characters' discourse to their background. The dialogue statements consisted of peculiarities in speech, such as the use of slang words, cursing, or more sophisticated terms (Starja, 2015).

In terms of linguistic exploration of Albee's work, Roudane (2017) writes that Albee animates his theatre through language, which is the dominant feature of his plays and his contribution to the history of American drama. One of Albee's strong technical points is the ability to capture the essence of personal beliefs, values, and views of his characters through language. His approach to language is precise and effective, often referencing leitmotifs such as food and drink, animals, and language itself. The stage directions in Albee's plays are occasionally read as mini-prose poems emphasizing the emotional intensity in scenes, and his use of italics in the dialogue lines creates a subtler interpretation of the dialogue and the subtext.

Towards the end of Starja's two classes, the students were asked to come up with a different ending to the play. The ending in *True West* is ambiguous; there is no resolution in a traditional sense, with the events ending tragically or on a more positive, optimistic note. Austin and Lee get into a physical fight, almost choking each other to death. However, Lee suddenly wakes up from unconsciousness and stops Austin from leaving. The brothers are left standing and facing each other, ready to continue the conflict. (Starja, 2015). This type of ending resembles the endings in the Theatre of the Absurd plays, suggesting emotional or physical intensity due to failure of words and communication, endless repetition and lack of

resolution. In some cases, the play ends the same way it started, and it can be claimed that there is no real character or relationship change in *True West*. In the last two lectures, class 5 and 6, every group had the final rehearsal and interpreted the new ending of the play, students had the presentation on the topic of their choice and with a focus on sociological aspect, and finally, the student participants were given the questionnaires to describe their impressions and evaluate their experience in the project.

In case of Albee's plays, again, Starja's approach can be implemented, and the learners can be divided into teams with the task of writing their own ending for the plays, rehearsing it, and presenting it to the class or workshop. In *Homelife*, the play ends with Peter leaving the apartment after an intense conversation with his wife, and the same character of Peter is later shown in a different kind of conflict. In *Marriage Play*, that is about a married couple dissecting their past few decades together, Jack and Gillian do not come to resolution but remain in the same point of conversation they were in the beginning (almost referencing the ending of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*), and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* ends in disillusionment.

The ending of the play can be rewritten based on the themes the participants would like to highlight and their view of the conflict between the main characters. As Matthew Roudane writes in *Overview: The Theatre of Edward Albee* (2017), Albee's theatre is a theatre of rebellion, and a variation of Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre, that is the interactive theatre technique exploring societal issues, can be implemented in the sense that there is a group discussion about the play's main themes and the teacher serving as the spect-actor and guiding the performance. In Forum Theatre, sometimes known as Theatre of the Oppressed, the audience usually has an active role in discussions of social issues and suggestions for conflict resolution within the scenes and the play. In the case of a workshop or classroom setting, the participants would be both the actors and the audience.

According to the questionnaire and students' feedback in Starja's research, the drama technique used in the case study was successfully implemented. Including the drama in the English teaching curriculum positively affected the students' critical thinking, imagination, confidence, motivation, individual work, and teamwork, and the students enjoyed being an active part of the

groups and helping with the organization and management of the process. They were a part of not only cognitive but also social processes, and proved the importance of the social dimension and community in the learning process. Additionally, the students liked writing their own endings for the play and discussing different issues and aspects of American society in the presentation part. The participants were able to express their opinions, and there were numerous opportunities for interaction and language usage through the dialogue. Both verbal and non-verbal language skills were integrated through the use of drama. There were a few setbacks mentioned during the process, such as the difficulty of listening/reading the play within the given time frame of one class and occasional difficulties in understanding the spoken version of the play on YouTube (Starja, 2015).

Theatre of the Absurd can in many ways be inspiration for learning English, starting from its playwrights who were actively learning new languages (particularly Ionesco whose attempt to learn English resulted in writing a full-length play that was a turning point in modern drama), to its world-building and characters who are unsuccessfully trying to grasp meaning and establish communication. Not only are the absurdist plays effective in the process of learning a language, but so are the plays that were influenced by them, as it is shown through Starja's case study and Esslin's observations.

4. Conclusion

This paper discusses the role of drama in the context of learning English, with a focus on English as a second or foreign language (EFL/ESL). Few case studies were analyzed along with the methodology of drama and language educators who were aiming to improve the students' linguistic and literary skills (and other skills such as imagination, critical thinking, confidence). The distinction of terms, such as drama and play, was clarified according to more recent definitions. The main part of the paper focuses on the Renaissance and the 20th century, and the dramatic works of Shakespeare and absurdist playwrights in terms of teaching English to different student level groups. These particular plays were analyzed for their linguistic diversity that can help improve the students' English, and their literary and cultural knowledge.

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