

Staying Gold:
exploring the role of Literature in the ESL classroom through S.E. Hinton's *The
Outsiders*

Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso

Letras - Inglês

Larissa Granato da Silva

Advisor: Matias Corbett Garcez

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

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LARISSA GRANATO DA SILVA

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Dr. Matias Corbett Garcez

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DECLARAÇÃO DE AUTORIA DE

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Aluna: Larissa Granato da Silva

Matrícula: 18101599

Curso: Letras-Inglês

Orientador: Matias Corbett Garcez

Título do PROJETO DE TCC: Staying Gold: exploring the role of Literature in the ESL classroom through S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*

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11/02/2023

Assinatura da Aluna

Data

To my 16-year-old self, who got “stay gold” tattooed on her shoulder and could never explain what it meant.

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RESUMO

Esta pesquisa pretende identificar oportunidades de ensino de inglês como segunda língua para alunos B1 através de *The Outsiders* (1967) de S.E. Hinton, além de investigar como a literatura pode motivar o pensamento crítico em salas de aula de inglês como segunda língua (ESL) e dar aos alunos uma visão mais ampla da conexão entre idioma e cultura. Dada a influência política e cultural da língua inglesa, é importante que alunos de ESL sejam educados sobre o papel da língua em suas vidas e na comunidade. Aulas de inglês devem levar em conta a dimensão social da língua e promover o multiletramento, afastando-se de uma espécie de hierarquização que celebra a gramática prescrita em detrimento da sua significância para as identidades dos falantes. Minha hipótese é que o uso da literatura como uma ferramenta nas aulas de ESL pode permitir uma relação entre o conhecimento linguístico instrumental e padronizado geralmente encontrado em currículos de ESL e outros aspectos do uso da linguagem, consequentemente promovendo um ambiente de aprendizagem mais multiletrado.

Palavras-chave: literatura; inglês como segunda língua; multiletramento; *The Outsiders*.

ABSTRACT

This research intends to identify opportunities for teaching English as a second language to B1 students through *The Outsiders* (1967) by S.E. Hinton while investigating how literature can motivate critical thinking in English as a Second Language (henceforth ESL) classrooms and give ESL students a broader view of the connection between language and culture. Given the political and cultural influence of the English language, ESL students must be educated on the role of language in their lives and community. English classes should be mindful of the social dimension of language and promote multiliteracy, stepping away from a sort of hierarchization that celebrates prescribed grammar at the expense of the significance of language to speakers' identities. My hypothesis is that the use of literature as a tool in ESL classes can enable a sort of bridge between the instrumental and standardized linguistic knowledge usually found in ESL curriculums and other aspects of language use such as cultural discourse, consequently promoting a more multiliterate learning environment.

Keywords: literature; ESL; multiliteracy; *The Outsiders*.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the past four decades, there have been many studies on the intersection between literature and second language teaching. Though the topic has been discussed in texts by American (e.g. MCKAY, 1982; COLLIE & SLATER, 1987) and Middle Eastern scholars (e.g. TAYBIPOUR, 2009; FOGAL, 2010) for over 30 and 10 years respectively, Brazilian studies on that same topic are relatively hard to find and only make an appearance over the last decade (e.g. ARAÚJO, 2017; LAGO & LIMA, 2014).

This study, in an attempt to further look into the role of literature in teaching English as a Second Language (henceforth ESL), sets out to find teaching opportunities in one particular piece of literature: *The Outsiders* (1967) by S.E. Hinton. *The Outsiders* is the story of Ponyboy Curtis, a poor boy raised by his oldest brother after his parents passed away. The novel takes place in Oklahoma in the 60s, and it revolves around the tension between Greasers, who are lower-class teenagers like Ponyboy, his siblings, and friends, and Socs, the rich kids from the West Side of the town.

The Outsiders tackles many themes, but a central part of the story is how Ponyboy does not completely fit into the Greaser stereotype: he is not violent or a troublemaker and his appreciation of cinema and literature are not common in the social spaces he usually occupies along with his friends and family. One of the most iconic lines from the book (and the homonymous 1983 movie based on it), “Stay gold, Ponyboy”, is a reference to Robert Frost’s poem “Nothing Gold Can Stay” and how the main character should hold onto his “(...) not only innocence and youth but also the ability to feel, dream, hope; in other words, to watch sunrises” (WISTISEN, 2020, p. 211). Considering this, I believe that the significance culture has in *The Outsiders* can provide a parallel for my research purpose, which will be discussed in the next section.

1.1. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESIS

The idea for this research came to be because, as an ESL teacher, I felt a sort of lack of social meaning in English classes. I am convinced that literature would be a valuable resource for raising language awareness and deepening students' understanding of the English language. Still, I had little to no reference on how to go about using it. This is why I aim to identify opportunities for teaching English language use through excerpts from *The Outsiders* while investigating how literature can motivate critical thinking in ESL classrooms and give ESL students a broader view of the connection between language and culture. This objective is directly related to multiliteracy, a concept that will be explored in the literature review section. My hypothesis is that the use of literature can enable a sort of bridge between the instrumental and standardized linguistic knowledge which we usually find in ESL curriculums, and other aspects of language use such as cultural discourse. I will also further explore the different facets of this hypothesis in the literature review section coming next.

1.2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Given how few and recent Brazilian studies on the intersection between literature and language teaching are, there is still a lot of ground to be covered on the topic. Besides furthering the conversation on this interchange between the two fields, hopefully this study will exemplify how literature can be instrumentalized in ESL classes and contribute to a more dynamic and multiliterate language classroom, consequently providing a tool for ESL teachers looking to make lessons more creative and diverse.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review aims to provide a better understanding of how to go about introducing Literature as a resource in the ESL classroom and how this approach could benefit ESL students. The investigation begins with a look into how foreign language classrooms might be lacking in critical thought (OSBORN, 1966). It then moves on to why and in what way literature could be a resource in said classrooms and perhaps contribute to remedying the previously mentioned issue (MCKAY, 1972; COLLIE & SLATER, 1987; LAZAR, 1993). The review also briefly touches upon the language-based approach to using literature in lessons (LAZAR, 1993; VAN, 2009), which will be used as framework for this research, and finally discusses the concept of multiliteracy (THE NEW LONDON GROUP, 2000) and how it could be related to the use of literature as a tool in ESL classes. The texts being discussed were chosen based on their arguments in favor of promoting critical thought in foreign language education and using literature as a means to increase students' awareness of different facets of their target language, as opposed to focusing solely on the often culturally and socially sterile world represented in language textbooks.

In his 1966 book *Critical Reflection and the Foreign Language Classroom*, Terry A. Osborn presents different concepts associated with the term "culture" and their relation to foreign language teaching. The first kind of culture Osborn describes is what he calls capital "c" Culture or high culture, the one that refers to thoroughly praised works of art and so, in literature, what was once considered "the canon". He calls the reader's attention to the fact that there is an unseen cultural endeavor behind the success of these works: there are people in academia and business who have deliberately promoted these texts as representative of their language and culture (lowercase "c" culture, in this case), consequently pushing the so-called canon into language classrooms and leaving other works that could represent different facets of said language and culture excluded.

Lowercase “c” culture, on the other hand, covers topics such as habitual cultural practices (How many hours a week do they work? At what age can you drink or drive?) and etiquette (How does one behave in formal settings versus informal? Is it polite to greet someone or eat something in a certain way?) of a given people. This dimension of culture is usually an unspoken agreement in the place where it is from, but a very significant and explicit portion of foreign language lessons. Osborn indicates that teachers often introduce students to this cultural information as if it is absolute fact, with little regard to social nuance and consequently perpetuating one-dimensional ideas of what a native of a given foreign language is supposed to be or act like. The author exemplifies that with a Spanish textbook exercise that asks students to classify pictures of greetings as “American” or “Hispanic”, creating a sense of otherness around interactions with foreigners as well as portraying a handful of actions as representative of a hugely diverse people.

The other concept of Osborn that concerns this research is that of “classroom culture”. He points to the similarities in how foreign language teachers are perceived by themselves, their students, and other teachers (the overarching view is that they are more sensitive and optimistic than teachers of other subjects) despite the difficulty in defining a single classroom culture for a subject of which lessons can be so wildly different from each other in content and context. The highlight of the classroom culture section, though, is when Osborn discusses course content tendencies in foreign language classes, more specifically those that follow the communicative approach. He claims that the communication scenarios brought up by an overwhelming majority of foreign language textbooks are just as intangible to students as “outdated” approaches such as Audiolingualism¹ and Grammar Translation² once were. Just like generalizations on lowercase “c” culture, standardized foreign language course content

¹ The Audio-lingual Method is based on behaviorist theory and portrays language as a habit to be developed. It prioritizes repetition exercises and the enhancement of oral skills (JALIL, PROCAILO, 2009).

² The Grammar-Translation Method is centered around the translation of literary texts. It prioritizes the study of normative grammar and the enhancement of reading comprehension. This method was mostly used to teach classical languages such as Greek and Latin (JALIL, PROCAILO, 2009).

tends to oversimplify social aspects of the target language. Furthermore, it prevents students from finding personal meaning in what is being learned since “[d]espite the best intentions of language teachers, most of our students will never buy vegetables in a Munich street market, ask for directions to the Eiffel Tower in Paris, or have a school schedule in Mexico City.” (p.30).

One of the earlier texts to show literature as a way of promoting a more wholesome view of language inside foreign language classrooms is the 1982 article “Literature in the ESL Classroom” by Sandra McKay. It argues that literature allows us to look into different cultural and social perspectives, and so students would be motivated to work on their empathy and actively broaden their understanding of culture and language. McKay also introduces us to Widdowson’s (1978) two different concepts of linguistic knowledge: “usage” and “use”. Usage refers to the grammatical and solely linguistic aspects of language, while use is about applying linguistic knowledge in contextualized communication. The author points out that literature can contribute to the use of language by exposing students to extensive examples of vocabulary and syntax through “discourse in which the parameters of the setting and role relationship are defined.” (p.530). That means learners can not only learn about grammar but also observe closely how linguistic rules are and should be applied in different contexts.

Years later, in their 1987 book *Literature in the Language Classroom: A resource book of ideas and activities*, Collie and Slater elaborate further on the benefits and ways to go about introducing literary works into English courses. The chapter “Teaching literature: what, why and how” explains that though literary knowledge is not required by any ESL proficiency exam, it can add to English language lessons by providing valuable authentic material, texts that were not created specifically for language learning and so the language in them is not “manipulated”, so to speak, but for the sake of communication and/or artistic pursuits. The chapter defends the use of literature once students are past the survival stage of foreign

language learning, which we can interpret as the initial levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and highlights the fact that exposure to literary texts may introduce them to conventions of language such as narrative and its different genres. Collie and Slater also argue that there is potential for cultural and linguistic enrichment since literature can represent language use in countless different social contexts within the target culture and, though literary language is not a perfect replica of casual everyday dialogue, it “produces unexpected density of meaning” (p.6), which is to say it broadens students’ perceptions of the foreign language and their own experiences when communicated through it. If the text is appropriately chosen, literature can also foster students’ involvement with the course material as it portrays multidimensional characters within a structured and compelling plot. All of the reasons cited above contribute to Collie & Slater’s goal of “complement[ing] more conventional approaches and so diversify[ing] the repertoire of classroom procedures.” (p.9).

Having discussed the potential benefits of using literature in a language class, we should also consider the way to go about introducing it into lessons. In *Literature and Language Teaching: a Guide for Teachers and Trainers (1993)* by Gillian Lazar, we are faced with different approaches a foreign language teacher could work with while incorporating literature into their lessons. Content-based and stylistic approaches are elaborated on, but I will focus on the language-based approach (LAZAR, 1993) for the purpose of this research. Teaching language-based lessons would involve, but not be limited to, choosing what to broach within the literary text based on its use of the target language to increase learners’ awareness of English through literature. The approach also calls for activities that allow students to practice the target language by reflecting and working on meaning-making through the literary text (e.g. writing summaries, making predictions, rewriting snippets,

debating); as Van (2009) puts it, “this approach facilitates students’ responses and experience with literature.” (p.7).

The points made by McKay (1982), Collie & Slater (1987), and Lazar (1993) on the possibility and potential benefits of bringing literature into the foreign language classroom can be related to the concept of multiliteracy, coined by The New London Group in their 2000 manifesto in favor of “broadening the understanding of literacy and literacy teaching” (p. 61), and which Brazil’s common curriculum promotes. The national curriculum sheds some light on the concept when it states that English classes should promote multiliteracy by being mindful of the social dimension of language, and stepping away from a sort of hierarchization that celebrates prescribed grammar at the expense of popular language usage and its significance to speakers’ identities (BRASIL, 2018).

. In “Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures”, a group of language scholars called The New London Group stands for questioning the social impact of language learning. They agreed on the term multiliteracies to represent the need for careful consideration of the diversity of cultural and subcultural elements that have an impact on language use in society and consequently, on how language education should happen. Students should, as per the ideas of Cope and Kalantzis (1995), “have the chance to expand their cultural and linguistic repertoires so that they can access a broader range of cultural and institutional resources” (apud THE NEW LONDON GROUP, 2000).

A central part of the text is how a more diverse and critical language education brings about social change. The first relevant concept on this matter is the “design of meaning” and its three elements, “available design”, “designing” and “the redesigned”, which are based on discourse theory. The element of available design consists of meaning resources; that is, pre-existing texts that are available for consumption and interpretation; in the context of this study, that would be the language used in *The Outsiders*. Designing, the second element, is

more abstract but it is also where the potential for social change lies. Designing constitutes a process of recontextualization of available design, it is an undertaking that may transform the meaning of pre-existing texts in varying degrees depending on the situation (cultural, social or temporal) in which it occurs. In this study, designing would happen during the ESL class. For example, students could compare the context of language use in a specific scene from the novel to a similar situation they have found themselves in. The last element of the design of meaning is the redesigned, discourse that is the product of the transformation of available design; in this case, the redesigned would be the language use performed by ESL students after their interaction with the literary text during a foreign language lesson.

An idea that is also introduced by The New London Group and might contribute to more complex meaning-making during designing is that of a “transformed practice”. In a section of the paper in which the authors discuss how to go about promoting a more multiliterate education, transformed practice is an option presented to the reader as a way to go even further on meaning-making. It consists in reimagining the redesigned in other contexts or if performed by conflicting identities; what would the pre-existing text mean to you if you were not a part of this culture or subcultural group, for example?

Ultimately, the authors state that this particular article is only a “tentative starting point” so that multiliterate practices can be applied and discussed in future scientific works. They also point out that the premise of a multiliterate approach to literacy teaching is not to extinguish current pedagogy or curriculums but to add to and assist in the development of teachers’ repertoires. This premise brings us back to McKay (1982) and Collie & Slater (1987), who offer a reminder that the use of literature in the ESL classroom should not be understood as an exclusion of other types of support material.

Therefore, we can think of literature as a potentially valuable complementary tool for deepening language awareness in students. If utilized through a thoughtfully chosen text, this

resource could pave the way for more culturally nuanced English lessons and motivate students to investigate both societal and personal biases when it comes to language use and foreign language learning.

3. PROCEDURES

Given that I intend to explore literature as an additional tool for language teaching, the structure of the study will be based on a pre-existing scope of grammar and vocabulary for B1 students, which is available in Cambridge's *B1 Preliminary for Schools: Handbook for teachers for exams from 2020* (CAMBRIDGE, 2020). I decided to narrow down the investigation to only one proficiency level of the CEFR so that the study could be more thorough and objective, and B1 was selected for being considered the first stage in which students are already independent language users.

Though the lack of similar studies leaves me with no predetermined methodological procedures, Lazar's (1993) language-based approach aligns with my priorities of combining language and literature syllabuses to help students make meaningful interpretations out of language use. I will work under its methodological assumptions that the literary material in an ESL class should be chosen based on the way it exemplifies a certain feature of the English language as well as what it offers in terms of literary analysis, with the intention of helping students increase their language awareness and practice critical thinking.

The sections under "Analysis: Teaching Opportunities in *The Outsiders*" will each revolve around a topic from the inventory of functions, notions and communicative tasks presented by the B1 Handbook. Every section will explore how the selected notion or task is illustrated in excerpts from *The Outsiders* and how the novel could play a part in the development of students' understanding or performance of said notion or task, as well as

indicating how a close examination of language use in the book can contribute to their interpretation of the story.

4. ANALYSIS: TEACHING OPPORTUNITIES IN *THE OUTSIDERS*

4.1. SIMPLE NARRATIVES

The first step to exploring the teaching opportunities in *The Outsiders* is to make sure students are acquainted with the plot of the novel, which can be an opportunity in and of itself since B1 learners should be able to understand and produce simple narratives in English. A narrative is a sequence of events related not only by a causality which moves the plot forward and is inherent to the story being told, be it fiction or nonfiction, but also by a desire to represent some aspect of the world we live in (COBLEY, 2014). That is to say that teaching ESL classes on narrative through *The Outsiders* should involve a look into how the English language contributes both to the assembling of a plot through the connection of singular events and to the representation of some kind of real-life dynamic. That could be accomplished as students learn to employ connectives such as “and”, “but”, “so”, “because” and “while”, all of which are listed in the B1 Cambridge inventory of grammatical areas.

A good way to start introducing students to the sequence of events in the book is presenting them with the scene in which the Socs attack Ponyboy and Johnny, which leads Johnny to kill Bob in self-defense³. It is a key moment which displays central character dynamics in the novel and sets off every main plot point, so it can be related to most relationships and events within the story, be it by consequence, contrast or causation.

³ I find it important to mention that though it is a scene centered around a violent act, neither the book nor its movie adaptation, which I mention shortly after in the paragraph, approach it in a graphic or gory manner. Given the theoretical nature of this study and the novel’s PG-13 rating, I will not further dwell on how some of the book’s themes might be sensitive to students, though that should be considered in applied research.

An interesting option is to play them the scene as depicted in the 1983 film adaptation since it speaks to my multiliteracy goal by entailing an “integration of significant modes of meaning-making, where the textual is also related to the visual, the audio, the spacial” (THE NEW LONDON GROUP, 2000, p. 64); this integration of signifiers is especially beneficial since they can provide context clues as learners are still working towards becoming independent users of the language and familiarizing themselves with the premise of the story. Once the class is acquainted with the scene, the teacher should be able to start a discussion so that students can speculate on what are the causes and consequences of that event: Why did the Socs decide to attack Ponyboy and Johnny? What do they think happens to them after Bob is killed? As the discussion progresses and the novel’s actual happenings are either confirmed or brought up by the teacher, students can begin to make sense of the order of events in the plot.

The students’ understanding of simple narratives should be further developed as they learn to connect and establish relationships between individual plot points and pieces of information by using connectives. To achieve that, the teacher can go about presenting said connectives to the class through an inductive approach, which means grammar will be introduced in context, with a priority of meaning over form; since they are now aware of how the story plays out, students have the necessary frame of reference to make meaning out of snippets from the novel that contain the conjunctions and dive further into specific scenes or characters. The table below provides examples of quotes that could be used as input and how they might contribute to the comprehension of both the target language and some of the novel’s elements.

Table 1 - *The Outsiders* quotes and their possible contributions to an ESL lesson about simple narratives

Quote	Contribution
“He’s always happy-go-lucky and grinning, while	It introduces the students to two of the novel’s

Darry's hard and firm and rarely grins at all." (p.3)	central characters, Ponyboy's brothers Darry and Sodapop, as well as their main character traits, which shape their relationship to Ponyboy. The quote also exemplifies the use of the connective "while" as it contrasts the boys' personalities.
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Quote	Contribution
"It drives my brother Darry nuts when I do stuff like that, 'cause I'm supposed to be smart; I make good grades and have a high IQ and everything, but I don't use my head." (p.4)	It provides context for Darry's frustration and his attitude towards Ponyboy, while also allowing the students to learn more about Pony and recognize him as academically intelligent but not as someone with the necessary <i>street smarts</i> to thrive in his environment. It also models the use of connectives "because" and "but" as they justify Darry's irritation and contrast Ponyboy's brightness with his lack of common sense.
"I had grown up with them, and they accepted me, even though I was younger, because I was Darry and Soda's kid brother and I kept my mouth shut good." (p.8)	Not only does this quote ease students into Ponyboy's dynamic with the rest of the Greasers, it also does so by basing that dynamic on his relationship with his brothers, which learners are already aware of by this point. Once again, there's an example of "because" as a way to present the reasoning behind the characters' behaviors. Students can also be introduced to the connective "even though" as it shows the breaking of expectations related to Ponyboy being considered a child but already belonging to the gang.
"Me and Johnny'll come, (...) Okay, Darry?" "Yeah, since it ain't a school night." (p.11)	Besides furthering the students' understanding of the relationship dynamics between Ponyboy and Darry, this quote shows Ponyboy and Johnny as a unit, laying the groundwork for some of the novel's main events which revolve around the two characters and their friendship. Furthermore, it exemplifies "since" as a connective for linking reason and result.

Besides providing input, snippets of the book could also be used in activities for practice and assessment. Collie and Slater (1987) suggest gapped summaries as a way to both facilitate reading and introduce key words and expressions. I find that an adapted version of this activity, in which the gapped text is actually a carefully selected excerpt of the book, would be a productive way to help students practice what they have learned on connectives, while also consolidating their understanding of the novel's premise and character dynamics.

With that in mind, I chose to propose an activity based on an excerpt from the early pages of the novel, in which a few of the connectives predicted in the B1 Cambridge Handbook are used. Like a gapped summary, it should call learners' attention to pivotal words and their role within the text. The highlighted words in the excerpt below would be replaced by gaps and randomly presented to students so they could choose the connective that best completes each sentence. I chose to omit certain parts of the excerpt that were not vital for the exercise since the complexity of the paragraph might be beyond B1 learners' reading level. When applying the activity, the tutor could also segment the snippet into shorter sentences as long as that does not interfere with students' ability to understand the relation being established by each connective.

I was thinking about Johnny's father being a drunk **and** his mother a selfish slob, (...) **and** Dally--- wild, cunning Dally--- turning into a hoodlum **because** he'd die if he didn't, (...) **and** Darry, getting old before his time trying to run a family and hold on to two jobs **and** never having any fun--- **while** the Socs had so much spare time and money that they jumped us and each other for kicks, had beer blasts and river-bottom parties **because** they didn't know what else to do. (HINTON, p. 33, **emphasis** mine)

Besides reinforcing the linguistic purpose of connectives within this excerpt of the text, the activity will show learners how the target language helps signal some of the main relationships in the novel and the reasoning behind them. “And”, a coordinating conjunction that joins two or more similar elements (e.g. nouns and nouns, verbs and verbs, clauses and clauses, and so on), is used to link the members of Ponyboy's gang and their struggles, showing the reader that, despite how different their characterization and journeys throughout the rest of the novel might be, there is, from the very start, something inherently similar about these characters in opposition to other people in the story.

Such opposition is also exemplified within this same snippet by the connective “while”. As a conjunction, “while” can mean “compared with the fact that; but” (WHILE, 2022) and, in this particular text, it is used to contrast the greasers' struggles with the Socs'

privilege. By looking closely at the use of this connective in the quote as they work on the suggested activity, learners are implicitly learning about one of the most prominent topics in the books: social and economical inequality and their effects on young people from different backgrounds. Furthermore, “so”, a subordinating conjunction that introduces clauses expressing result, and “because”, a conjunction which indicates the reason for something, also allow readers a glimpse of some of the characters’ motivations, which play into the aforementioned opposition between greasers and Socs.

By seeing the linguistic function of these words not only modeled in authentic language use but also paralleled to the narrative around which the lesson revolves, learners get a more holistic view of what it takes to understand and produce a narrative. They should now be aware of some of the real-life dynamics represented in Hinton’s *The Outsiders*, how said dynamics play out in some key passages and events from the beginning of the novel, and how the use of connectives contributes to the organization of the text and meaning of the story.

4.2. HABITS AND STATES IN THE PAST

Another topic contemplated by the B1 Cambridge Handbook that can be worked on as students continue to familiarize themselves with the novel’s themes is the language used to talk about states in the past and habits. As previously touched upon, many of the plot points and character dynamics within the book are shaped by socioeconomic disparities and their impact on children coming of age. I find that signs of said impact can be observed through descriptions of changes that characters have had to undergo and of what circumstances some of them have grown accustomed to, namely descriptions which involve B1 terms “used to” and “be used to”.

The marginal modal verb “used to” and the expression “be used to” (as well as its more informal version “get used to”) are often presented alongside one another in teaching

materials so that readers can tell them apart despite their similarity in form. If pointed to key instances in which these structures are employed throughout *The Outsiders*, learners should be able to use their understanding of the novel and its characters as a means to contextualize and differentiate these linguistic structures as well as allow newly acquired knowledge about the expressions to inform their reading henceforth.

Though set in urban Oklahoma and written in the late sixties, the book seldom references social and political issues that pervaded the United States of America at the time. Both the Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam War go unmentioned, and our main clue about the time period during which the events of the book take place is that Ponyboy references pop culture icons from the sixties such as Paul Newman, Elvis Presley, and The Beatles. Nevertheless, *The Outsiders* is heavily reliant on class conflict, and descriptions of what has become habitual to the characters as well as comparisons between past states and their current lives can give us a glimpse into how said class issues affect them.

The vagueness of historical context also contributes to the timelessness of *The Outsiders*. The story is narrated in the first person, but it is not about what it is like to be a poor Oklahoman teenager in the 1960s. Rather, it is about being young and beginning to understand that circumstances out of your control will inevitably shape your experiences and relationships, which is arguably a more comprehensive theme. This all-encompassing but still personal approach to the struggles of marginalized teenagers should hopefully help learners see the novel's themes as relevant and motivate them to engage with the narrative moving forward.

Asking Concept Checking Questions (henceforth CCQs) about key quotes from the novel might be a good course of action to get students to reflect both on the lesson's target language and the impact of the socioeconomic context on the characters' coming of age. The purpose of CCQs is to "highlight the essence of the meaning of the target language taught

during a lesson and verbally check students' understanding" (FLORKOWSKA, 2018, p.9), which fits the end goal of using the text as a resource for eliciting new layers of meaning from the target language. The tutor can begin carrying this out with a snippet about Darry, Ponyboy's oldest brother and caretaker.

Referring to Darry and a Soc, Ponyboy thinks "They **used to** be buddies, I thought, they **used to** be friends, and now they hate each other because one has to work for a living and the other comes from the West Side." (HINTON, p. 106, **emphasis** mine). After presenting the quote, the teacher could ask questions such as: How do Darry and this Soc feel about each other? Has their relationship always been like this? What changed? What element of that sentence indicates that they are not friends anymore? They will likely elicit the realizations that (1) the socioeconomic reality of these characters actively impacts their relationships and (2) the words "used to" can help describe ways in which things have changed.

The same process can be applied to a quote with "be used to". While Ponyboy reminisces on finding Johnny after his friend had been beaten by a group of Socs, his inner monologue tells us that "[They] **were used to** seeing Johnny banged up--- his father clobbered him around a lot (...)" (HINTON, p.25, **emphasis** mine). First, it's imperative for learners to be walked through vocabulary which might be unfamiliar, mainly the adjective "banged up" and the verb "clobbered". Besides their role in introducing students to the lesson's main theme and along with the context of the snippet, CCQs can be a tool in elucidating the meaning of these words so there are no impediments to learners' comprehension when the focus shifts to the target language. Questions like "Is being banged up a good or a bad thing?" and "Is Johnny's father kind or is he a violent man?" should lead them in the right direction.

Once the vocabulary has been dealt with, we are free to focus on the target language. If Ponyboy and his friends are used to seeing Johnny banged up, does that mean he is often or rarely hurt? Is Johnny being a victim of violence surprising or is it expected? These questions will lead students to notice that “be used to” is a structure we use to discuss recurring actions or feelings, situations which are habitual and so we learn to take them for a given, as well as encouraging them to speculate about what sort of actions, feelings or situations the main characters in the novel have learned to expect from their environment.

Once the difference in meaning between the two target languages is clear, the next step is to focus on form. The teacher could use an inductive approach to grammar to present other snippets from the novel so that learners can infer rules about appropriate language use.

Here follow other quotes that display the target language and could be presented during the lesson: “I’ll bet you watch sunsets, too. I **used to** watch them, too, before I got so busy...” (p.31, **emphasis mine**); “He **didn’t use to** be like that... we **used to** get along okay... before Mom and Dad died.” (p.39, **emphasis mine**); “Well, we got to **get used to** it, (...) We’re in big trouble and it’s our looks or us.” (p.54, **emphasis mine**); “We’re **gettin’ used to** the idea. We’re gonna be okay now.” (p.56, **emphasis mine**).

Having become acquainted with the target language and observed how the two different structures are employed in the novel, learners can start to make the association between descriptions of habits and past states and how social conflict potentially affects young people in a broader sense. The lesson could then move on to designing: recontextualizing the language used in *The Outsiders* and applying it to a different social and cultural context than the one in the novel.

To encourage students to question the relation between the lesson and their lived realities, the teacher can propose pairwork in which learners interview their partners and later report back to the class with answers to questions such as “What is something that you used to

do but cannot do anymore? What caused this change? Have you noticed this change in other people in your life? Is there something in your life you don't like but had to get used to? Do you think learning to accept this situation was a positive or negative thing?"

Once everyone gets to share what they have discussed, the teacher should prompt learners to reflect on what their habits and past states, plus the reasoning behind them, have in common with those of their classmates or the ones in *The Outsiders*. Concluding the lesson this way promotes both output of the target language and the introduction of what The New London Group called transformed practice into the classroom, since students are incentivised to reimagine language use in the novel in relation to their own identities.

4.3. (IN)ABILITY AND (IM)POSSIBILITY

Throughout the novel, modal verbs “can” and “could” are used to express (in)ability and (im)possibility. Besides modeling B1 communicative functions, the use of these verbs gives readers an insight into character dynamics and into Ponyboy's biases. What he believes himself and the people around him are able or unable to do, as well as what he considers to be possible or impossible, can show us how he perceives his environment and how that perception compares to the lived reality of other characters or to our impressions as spectators.

In this section, I will discuss the use of modals to portray (in)ability and (im)possibility in *The Outsiders*, elaborating on how an ESL teacher could raise language awareness and bring forward social issues using snippets about greasers in general, Dallas Winston, Ponyboy's oldest brother Darry or Ponyboy, the narrator, himself. These four “angles” of discussion can be brought up individually, but they are all related to one theme. The suggestion of multiple approaches is fitting due to the frequency of use of the target language within the text as well as the assumption that learners are already familiar with the

main aspects of the novel. A tutor wishing to experiment with this teaching opportunity, for example, could select whichever perspective seems more likely to resonate with the needs and taste of their students and explore different aspects of the target language (which I will scatter throughout the different approaches) within that singular standpoint or mix and match approaches to give learners a more holistic view of the novel.

Though we are initially presented to a polarized community of greasers versus Socs in *The Outsiders*, the narrative leads us to view characters as complex people that are coming of age with identities that go beyond those labels. That is quite explicit in Ponyboy's relationship with Cherry Valance, a Soc girl to whom he can talk about his interests despite him being a greaser. Another event that makes this clear is when, talking about Randy, who is both Bob's best friend and one of the Socs who attacked him and Johnny the night Bob was killed, Ponyboy realizes "He ain't a Soc, (...) he's just a guy." (p.88). On top of these examples, I find that greaser and Soc roles are also explored and questioned through talk of (in)ability and (im)possibility.

Talking about himself, Johnny and Two-Bit as they confront Socs, Ponyboy says "We **can look** meaner than anything when we want to — looking tough comes in handy." (p.34, **emphasis mine**). He believes greasers are able to put on a mean appearance as a defense mechanism, but he does not see them as actually being mean. There is a conscious effort to appear to be uncaring, even dangerous, and drawing students' attention to the use of the verbs "can look" might help them understand that about the characters as well as shed light on the meaning and function of the modal verb "can".

One way this could be done is through an exercise in which the highlighted language chunk is replaced by other verbs. Asking students to compare different versions of that same quote in which "can look" is replaced by "can", "look", "can be" and "are" is a way of motivating them to reflect on the role of modal verbs without necessarily bringing

metalanguage to the table. The tutor can begin by modeling the comparison using two out of the four samples and pointing out a difference in meaning between them.

I would also suggest that learners work only with the first clause of the snippet. That way, it is less likely that their attention will be drawn to other verbs that are not part of the aim of the exercise or that more complex vocabulary (e.g. the idiom “to come in handy”) will demand lengthy explanations that digress from the lesson or frustrate students who are unfamiliar with it. The table below presents some observations that should come up during the activity, be it in the tutor’s example, the students’ answers to the exercise or the discussion and feedback following it.

Table 2 - Modified *The Outsiders* quotes for modal verb practice and responses they might elicit from the class

Quote	Possible observations
“We can look meaner than anything.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Can” means that they are able to; ● They do not necessarily look mean.
“We can meaner than anything.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The sentence does not make sense without another verb following “can”.
“We look meaner than anything.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● They necessarily look mean; ● The absence of “can” does not make the sentence unintelligible.
“We can be meaner than anything.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● They are able to act mean, not just appear to be so; ● They are not necessarily mean; ● “Be” remains in its infinitive form when following “can”.
“We are meaner than anything.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● They necessarily act mean; ● The absence of “can” does not make the sentence unintelligible.

The main goal would be for the class to realize that (1) modal verbs are auxiliary and do not stand on their own, which means they somehow contribute to the meaning of a main verb; (2) “can” can be related to the concept of ability; (3) modal verbs can affect the

conjugation of main verbs; and (4) Ponyboy believes that, though greasers in general are capable of looking mean in order to feel safe, they do not always come across or act that way.

Expressions of (in)ability and (im)possibility also contribute to the depiction of individual characters. Dallas Winston, Dally, is often portrayed as almighty and uncaring; throughout most of the novel, Ponyboy's internal dialogue tells us that "Dallas Winston **could** do anything," (p.43, **emphasis mine**) or "Dallas is always okay. He **could** take anything." (p.76, **emphasis mine**). However, Dally's behavior at times contradicts this point of view. Referring to Johnny, Pony narrates that "Dally just **couldn't** hit him. He was Dally's pet, too." (p.19, **emphasis mine**). Dally's inability or unwillingness to hurt Johnny, as well as his concern towards the boys becoming fugitives after Bob's death and his reaction to Johnny's passing later on in the novel, goes against what we learn about his cruel, detached character. Dally and Johnny's relationship will be further explored in the next chapter, but the last quotes mentioned in this paragraph already hint at Dally's capability for fondness. Encouraging learners to compare these quotes to one another, in a similar but not identical fashion to the last suggested activity, should lead them to both question Ponyboy's judgment of Dally and recognize "could" as a modal verb used to express (in)ability.

The teacher can go about this exercise in two separate steps. First, they can present the first two quotes ["Dallas Winston could do anything." (p.43); "Dallas is always okay. He could take anything." (p.76)] to the students, asking them to point out similarities, be it in structure or meaning, between the two. They will likely notice that "Dallas", "could" and "anything" are a common denominator, and that Dally could be described as strong, powerful or tough. With that in mind, they should be asked to also consider the lines "Dally just couldn't hit [Johnny]. He was Dally's pet, too." (p.19). Are there any elements in this snippet that are familiar but not exactly alike the previous quotes? How does the Dally described here

compare to the one they knew moments ago? In their opinion, is this new quote aligned with Ponyboy's other descriptions of him or is it contradictory?

Raising these questions is a good opportunity to highlight the negative form of the modal "could". Learners can have divergent points of view: some of them might find the third quote to be fitting with Ponyboy's earlier descriptions, since it makes sense that someone so mighty would act as a protector to Johnny, while others could believe that him being incapable of mistreating his friend actually goes against Ponyboy's statement that he could do *anything*. Regardless of where they stand on that, comparing the language used in the snippets will call attention to the use of "could" in the first two versus the use of "couldn't" in the last one. Considering the proficiency level of the class, students would likely recognize "n't" as a contraction for "not" and acknowledge that "couldn't" negates "could". Over the course of the activity, they should come to the conclusion that (1) "could" indicates ability (2) "couldn't" stands for "could not" and indicates inability; (3) "could" affects the conjugation of verbs that follow it; and lastly, in terms of character analysis, (4) there might be a vulnerable side to Dallas, which means Ponyboy's character judgment is not always reliable. If both this activity and the discussion on greasers' tough appearance are developed in a single lesson plan, students should also get an opportunity to notice that not only does Dallas fit Ponyboy's idea of greasers putting up a mean act as a defense mechanism, he also does so to such a degree that other greasers are intimidated by him.

For another opportunity to highlight affirmative versus negative forms, we can focus on Ponyboy's oldest brother, Darry. According to Pony, "In spite of not having much money, the only reason Darry **couldn't** be a Soc was us." (p.94, **emphasis mine**). The way he sees it, Darry's responsibilities as a member of their gang and as a parental figure to him and Sodapop are the reason he cannot fit in with the Socs and access their privilege; being a greaser means being held back. Because of Darry's strictness and their constant arguing,

Ponyboy also believes “(...) [Darry] wishes he **could** stick [him] in a home somewhere” (p.32, **emphasis mine**). The tutor can engage learners by starting a discussion on what these two quotes mean for Darry in terms of being a greaser versus being a Soc: what stops Darry from being a Soc? What qualities could Darry have to make Ponyboy think he is “qualified” to be a Soc? What reasons might Darry have for putting Ponyboy in a boys home, an orphanage? If that is really what he wants, as Pony says, what is stopping him? Considering both quotes, how do they think Darry’s life would change if he did stop being responsible for Ponyboy?

Once the class has shared some initial thoughts on the meaning behind the quotes and Darry’s relation to greaser and Soc roles, the teacher can call their attention to the modal “could” and to the fact that it can be found in both quotes, though in one of them “could” is in its negative form. The previous discussion should prompt students to notice that (1) “could” can be related to the idea of possibility, ability or permission, (2) “couldn’t” indicates impossibility or inability, and, concerning the roles of greasers and Socs, that (3) in these two snippets, being a greaser means having limitations and being confronted with impossibility, while the expression of possibility, though hypothetical, is associated with a chance of leaving responsibility, and consequently the role of greaser, behind.

In the book *How to Teach English Grammar*, Jeremy Harmer lists three elements as necessary to successful language learning: engage, study and activate; *ESA* for short. The “activate” element consists in promoting free practice moments where learners are not plainly directed to use a certain target language, but encouraged to use whatever language background they might have to communicate on a certain subject (HARMER, 2007, p.26). To get learners to activate what they have learned about conveying (im)possibility, the teacher can ask the class to list what they believe are possibilities and impossibilities when you are a greaser versus when you are a Soc. Besides giving them the opportunity to practice language,

the exercise should highlight the contrast between what possibilities are made available for marginalized and privileged people coming of age, as well as the fact that those who are marginalized need to make drastic compromises for even a slight chance at rising socially.

Finally, we can see modals being used to express (in)ability and (im)possibility in Ponyboy's descriptions of himself, mostly ones which somehow set him apart from other greasers. After being handed a broken bottle as a weapon by Two-Bit so they could confront the Socs and noticing that Cherry was scared by the imminence of a fight, Ponyboy narrates "I **couldn't** use this," I said, dropping the pop bottle. "I **couldn't** ever cut anyone...." (p.35, **emphasis mine**). Later, as he and Johnny watch the sunrise together during their time as fugitives, Pony thinks "I **couldn't** tell Two-Bit or Steve or even Darry about the sunrise and clouds and stuff. I **couldn't** even remember that poem around them." (p.59, **emphasis mine**). The poem he is referring to is "Nothing Gold Can Stay" by Robert Frost, which inspired the novel's arguably most famous quote (and consequently the title of this paper): "Stay gold, Ponyboy. Stay gold..." (p.110). Like the Frost poem and Johnny's iconic last words, much of *The Outsiders* is about holding on to earnestness and naivety, even when characters are faced with violence and injustice. Ponyboy personifies that theme by subverting many of the expectations that have been set for greasers: he repudiates violence, he is appreciative of nature, some of his main interests are cinema and literature, and he mostly does well in school. The quote about how he would never be capable of attacking someone with a broken bottle as well as the one about not seeing himself discussing sunrises and poetry with most of his gang are evidence of that.

The ways in which Ponyboy stands out from the group are also related to his abilities. On page 50 of the novel, he says "I **can** lie so easily that it spooks me sometimes--- Soda says it comes from reading so much." (**emphasis mine**), and later on, in the last chapter of the book: "I know I don't talk good English (...), but I **can** write it good when I try" (p.124,

emphasis mine). Pony is often criticized by his older brother Darry for being absent minded, focusing too much on movies and books while lacking common sense and practicality, but these snippets show us that Ponyboy's interests, though unlike his peers', help him hone skills that impact his role as a greaser. The fact that he is a good liar keeps him and Johnny safe as they run from the consequences of Bob's death, and writing well allows him to tell Johnny and Dally's story so that "people would understand then and wouldn't be so quick to judge a boy by the amount of hair oil he wore." (p.131).

To introduce learners to these aspects of the novel and raise awareness on the use of modals in expressions of (in)ability and (im)possibility, the tutor could carry out a reading comprehension exercise in which the class, based on the four quotes that contain "couldn't" and "can" mentioned within the past two paragraphs, lists what Ponyboy considers to be his abilities (e.g. writing, lying) and inabilities (e.g. speaking "proper" English) as well as actions he deems impossible (e.g. cutting someone, talking to some of his friends and family about poetry). Once they have done so, the teacher can ask students to point out structural similarities among the quotes in the reading exercise so that, through an inductive approach to grammar, they will be able to recognize "can" and "couldn't" as the common denominators and make the connection between the target language and the communicative goal of the lesson.

To promote a moment of free practice and get students to reflect on how Ponyboy compares to other greaser characters and greasers as a group, the teacher could split the class in groups and assign each of them one of the quotes brought up earlier. A single quote could be discussed by multiple groups depending on the amount of students in the class, and the lesson could be wrapped up with the different groups reporting individual discussions to the whole class. During the activity, learners should reflect on questions such as: Do you believe other greasers would have the same skill/difficulty as Ponyboy? What about the Socs? Can

you think of a character that would relate to him and another who would have a different experience?

Students' answers may vary depending on personal opinion and the extent of their knowledge of the novel's plot and characters, but if the previous teaching opportunities brought up in this paper have been taken, they should be able to raise points such as (1) other greasers and Socs would not hesitate to act violently, perhaps with the exception of Johnny, who could only hurt someone under immense pressure; (2) other greasers might also feel discouraged to share their interests with the gang if that makes them seem vulnerable; (3) other greasers might be able to relate to being a good liar (Dally, for example, was able to keep Johnny and Ponyboy's secret after Johnny kills Bob), but probably not on the account of reading too much; and (4) other greasers probably do not relate to Ponyboy's ease with writing, but some Socs might. Still, most of those Socs probably do not relate to Ponyboy not "talking good English".

Overall, scrutinizing different characters' experiences regarding (in)ability and (im)possibility not only serves the study of language or of narrative elements, but it is also an exercise in interrogating how relationships and societal systems influence what we ourselves see as feasible or believe people are capable of. By adopting one of these approaches or merging elements from each of them, hopefully ESL teachers can raise language awareness while motivating learners to think critically about individuals' identities in relation to the communities they are inserted in as opposed to having language modeled by oversimplified characters in polished environments found in standard textbook dialogues.

4.4. PERSONAL FEELINGS, EXPERIENCES AND OPINIONS

Finally, we can find teaching opportunities related to the communicative function listed in the B1 Cambridge Handbook as "talking about physical and emotional feelings" and

to the topic “personal feelings, experiences and opinions”, which is mentioned in the “Language specifications” section of the Handbook as a subject that learners should be able to tackle at a B1 level. As opposed to previous chapters, this section will not revolve around a target language prescribed by Cambridge’s inventory of grammatical areas; it will instead explore how the negative contraction “ain’t”, most commonly found in informal contexts and particular English vernaculars, is used within *The Outsiders* as characters share their feelings and past experiences.

A person’s environment impacts their feelings and experiences, as it does their language use. Though considered not standard (AIN’T, 2023), the contraction “ain’t” is extensively used in media and is a common feature of dialects such as African American Vernacular English⁴ or Cockney English⁵. It also often marks the speech of lower classes (FREEBORN, 1993); in every single one of the 58 times it appears in the *The Outsiders*, “ain’t” is used either in Ponyboy’s narration or in a line of dialogue delivered by a greaser character. Besides serving a B1 communicative goal, broaching this contraction adds a sociocultural aspect to the lesson, raises awareness on linguistic variation and, in doing so, contributes to a multiliterate classroom. It defies the boundaries of standard syllabuses not by dismissing the relevance of what is already taught, but by drawing attention to language that is often overlooked in formal language learning environments.

Over the course of previous chapters, different target languages have helped paint a picture of the contrast between greasers and Socs, the limitations that come with being defined by your socioeconomic class, the resentment of being faced with others’ privilege and realizing all that is not available to you, as well as the struggle of avoiding displays of

⁴African American Vernacular English, or AAVE, is a dialect of English spoken mostly by black Americans. Most of AAVE grammar and vocabulary is shared with Standard English, but it also has unique grammatical, lexical and pronunciation features. Though it is often disregarded as incorrect English, the dialect abides by its own set of rules. (PULLUM, 1999).

⁵ Cockney is a word traditionally used to refer to East End Londoners, but it has also come to mean the accent of London’s working class. Like with AAVE, there is some stigma around this language variant. (HUGHES; TRUDGILL, 2013).

vulnerability even as a child. This last chapter will be a look into instances where that suppressed vulnerability shines through and we are able to see that, despite being thrust in an environment fundamentally tied to violence and injustice, these characters are still just children.

I would suggest the tutor go about this lesson in steps, presenting one “ain’t” quote from *The Outsiders* at a time and building up to the “study” portion of the lesson, in which language and form are priorities (HARMER, 2007, p.25). After learning that Johnny wants to turn himself in for killing Bob and responding negatively to that, Dally pleads with his friend by saying "Johnny, I **ain't** mad at you. I just don't want you to get hurt." (p.67, **emphasis mine**). The teacher could start by presenting this quote along with the narrative circumstances around it and ease the class into the lesson with a discussion. They could ask questions such as “Why would Dally be mad? Do you think Johnny is making the right decision? Does this line match the idea you have of Dally from previous lessons?” to make sure learners grasp the meaning and context of the quote before highlighting language use and asking what they think "ain't" stands for. Being acquainted with the verb to be, students will likely answer that it seems to be a contraction for "am not", at which point the tutor can bring up a second snippet.

As a response to Johnny assuming he has a good relationship with his brothers, Ponyboy loses his patience and says "Johnny Cade, (...) we all know you **ain't** wanted at home, either." (p.32, **emphasis mine**). To engage the class in a discussion of this quote, the tutor could point out that Ponyboy uses the adverb “either”, also in the B1 inventory of grammatical areas, to express that he feels he himself is not wanted at home. The teacher could ask students how they think the two boys’ family situations compare and, based on previous lessons and their overall knowledge of the novel, whether or not they agree with Ponyboy’s opinion that Johnny and him are not wanted at home.

Having talked the text through, the class can focus on language. Once again taking an inductive approach to grammar teaching, the tutor can ask what similarities there are between the two quotes presented up to this point of the lesson. Once students point to the fact that “ain’t” is used in both, the teacher should ask them if it is also a contraction for “am not” in “you ain’t wanted at home”. Given that it follows the singular second person pronoun “you”, they should be able to notice that, in this case, “ain’t” stands for “are not”.

To move forward with the lesson and further explore Johnny’s feelings on his relationship (or lack thereof) with his parents, we can focus on the quote "It **ain't** the same as having your own folks care about you," Johnny said simply. "It just **ain't** the same." (p.39, **emphasis mine**). It comes from a conversation where Johnny tells Ponyboy that he has nobody and that he would rather have his father hit him than not acknowledge him, which is what happens most of the time. Trying to comfort his friend, Ponyboy says Johnny has the gang, their friends, and to that Johnny replies "It ain't the same as having your own folks care about you."⁶. The discussion surrounding this snippet can be about whether it affects the opinions students formed on Pony and Johnny’s familial relationships based on that previous quote, as well as their thoughts on the impact family and friends have on teenagers as a whole: Do they agree with Johnny? In Johnny’s place, would they feel comforted by Ponyboy’s remark? Do they think strong friendships can compensate for the absence of a parental figure and vice-versa? What do children need from their friends and what do they need from their parents?

When the discussion is over and the class is familiar with the quote, the teacher can highlight the role of “ain’t” in it. For a third time, the teacher should ask learners what the contraction stands for and, as opposed to what they might expect based on earlier lines, they will notice it does not replace “am not” or “are not”, but rather “is not”. Once the class

⁶ Before moving on to the discussion, it is important that the tutor helps learners infer that “folks” is a synonym for “parents” in this context.

reaches the conclusion that "ain't" can replace negative contractions of present forms of the verb to be, they can be shown this last quote, spoken by Johnny not long before he dies: "Sixteen years **ain't** long enough. I wouldn't mind it so much if there wasn't so much stuff I **ain't** done yet--- and so many things I **ain't** seen." (p.90, **emphasis mine**).

The first sentence, "Sixteen years ain't long enough.", should fit the idea learners have of "ain't" thus far; it is a negative contraction of the verb to be being used to express Johnny's feelings. The rest of the excerpt, though, allows for the introduction of one more possible use of "ain't". The teacher can switch the order in which they have been working with previous quotes, meaning then grammar, and encourage the class to reflect on form: Does "ain't" stand for the verb to be in the last two times it appears in the quote? What type of verb comes after it both times? In what verb tense do we use the past participle?⁷ What is the structure of that verb tense? What communicative purpose does that verb tense serve? With the tutor's assistance, students can infer that "ain't" can also mean "have not", the negative form of "have". They should also note that "have" is the auxiliary verb of the Present Perfect verb tense, which serves the purpose of describing past actions and experiences completed in an unspecified time or that continue to take place at the moment of speaking.

Johnny's words serve as a parallel for this particular use of "ain't"; both the quote and the negative contraction are about the absence of past experiences. Besides helping students recognize that he is mourning all he has not gotten to do before dying so young, this association is something they can use as reference as they continue to study "ain't". Their knowledge of the novel can help them remember the function of the language, and knowing the language can help them understand certain aspects of the novel. Other *The Outsiders* quotes could also be used to reinforce form and broach different themes; as previously

⁷ Given that these students are past the A2 level of the CEFR, they should be familiar with the Present Perfect verb tense (CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT ENGLISH, 2020, p.49). The Present Perfect tense is also the only one listed in the A2 inventory of grammatical areas that has present participle verbs in its structure, which means the questions proposed are unlikely to mislead learners.

mentioned, “ain’t” is used 58 times throughout the book. The tutor can select a number of those and ask students to replace the contraction with its standard grammar equivalent (am not, is not, are not or have not) depending on the linguistic context of the snippet.

To take the lesson further, the teacher should address the concept of register. Learners need to be reminded that “ain’t” is most used in informal environments and certain communities and that that should be considered when they are communicating in English. This reminder also serves the purpose of contradicting the common preconceived notion that the English we learn in formal ESL classes is somehow universal; introducing students to linguistic variation is a way of enabling them to adjust their expectations as they hopefully encounter a wide range of contexts for language use and providing them with an assortment of tools to meet their communicative goals. At last, the tutor can encourage learners to pay close attention to the contexts in which they find the contraction “ain’t” from then on, even asking for examples in later lessons. As well as motivating language awareness, that instruction fits the multiliterate concept of transformed practice as it inspires a reimagining of the lesson’s target language into diverse contexts and can help students broaden their perception of what “ain’t” stands for, both grammatically and socially.

5. FINAL REMARKS

This paper was quite challenging. As mentioned in its introduction, there are very few related studies, none of them coming from Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. I did not find a study that set out to explore a single novel and what role it might have in a foreign language classroom of a specific CEFR level in any of my readings. While it was exciting to work with a relatively unexplored subject, there was no set procedure for me to follow. One of my biggest concerns was sounding too idealistic, which is why I strived to thoroughly justify

every excerpt chosen and activity suggested. Hopefully that has made the paper more intelligible to its readers.

Over the course of the last chapter, I pointed out how *The Outsiders* exemplified a number of B1 English notions or communicative tasks, and suggested classroom procedures involving snippets from the book. My intention was to talk the reader through my thought process as I saw potential for ESL teaching in one of my favorite novels. I wanted to argue the case that literature can enrich ESL classes while highlighting parallels between themes and language use within the novel, so that myself and other teachers might have some sort of framework or starting point, an example of what to search for in a literary text once we have decided to bring it into the classroom. Aspiring to honor the national curriculum's perspective in favor of multiliteracy, I also selected excerpts of the novel which, besides modeling language use, could elicit discussions on the characters' social context and its effect on their relationships.

All in all, there is still a lot of ground to cover. Further research could be carried out with a different selection of B1 communicative tasks, a focus on another CEFR level, a different novel or other sort of literary text, and, of course, with an applied study that implements these teaching opportunities in fully fleshed out lesson plans. Though I chose to prioritize broader themes and activities that could encompass different learner profiles, there would be a lot to gain from similar studies that cater to specific demographics such as young learners or the LGBTQIA+ community. Hopefully this paper can set a precedent and be followed by more comprehensive investigations regarding literature as a resource for language teaching.

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