

Bridging the Gap between Extensive Reading and Literature



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This paper is one of four presentations that made up a colloquium held at the ERF World Congress entitled Bridging the Gap between Extensive Reading and Intensive Reading. The aim of the colloquium was to try to consider how to answer the two fundamental questions: "Why Intensive Reading?" and "Why Extensive Reading?" All the presenters are currently teaching at Kinki University and sharing some experience of teaching, which makes it easier to uniformly assess the different approaches to college students, though, of course, it is not easy to get clear answers to the questions mentioned above. This paper will look at the relationship between the original text and the ER version, identifying how the two texts differ, and then give some suggestions as to how to leverage these differences to increase student interest

It is no exaggeration to say that even if a single word in a literary work is changed, the work loses a certain literary value and the meaning the writer intended to convey is at least somewhat distorted. Needless to say, when it comes to the texts for Extensive Readers (ER), we should not make a fuss about such a loss or distortion, because the purpose of ER is neither to establish literary value nor to appreciate literary taste.

This is in no way a criticism of changes made by the rewriter, much less to complain about the differences between ER texts and original ones. Rather, the suggestion is offered that readers subsequently take advantage of the opportunity to take an interest in the original story and thereby appreciate its original literary taste. For beginners to do that, they need instructors who are, to some extent, familiar with the specified literary works and who can suggest the significance of the original text, pointing out differences between the ER text and the original.

Quite a few literary works have been rewritten into ER texts. When a writer rewrites an original story into a text for ER, he/she uses various techniques so that readers can understand the story more easily; addition, simplification, abbreviation or change of the episodes in the story, or replacement of vocabulary by simpler words or phrases. Although instructors need not point out every technique used, it is not too much to ask them show to the readers why the difference between the two texts was necessary and then let them know a little about the original story. It would be an additional benefit of any ER program if the readers were aware of these differences and then were to become more interested in the original text. In doing

so, the instructor would expand the scope of the ER program and thereby increase its potential value.

Examples of techniques to convert original texts to ER texts

To begin, here are some examples of the techniques to which instructors may call to the reader's attention. For these examples, I will use Mark Twain's *The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County* (marked as OR) and the Penguin Level 3 reader version (marked as ER) to illustrate these examples.

Addition of Episodes

In a text adapted for ER, episodes or comments are sometimes added to the original story so that readers can understand a situation or see a character more clearly. Following is an example of addition of information to an ER text. The highlighted phrases are not found in the original text:

I found Simon Wheeler in Angel's Bar in Calaveras, *in the north of California*, sitting in his favorite chair close to the door. He was asleep, so I had a good look at him. He was a fat old man with no hair on his head *but a big white mustache under his nose*. He had a simple, kind look on his face. (ER) (p. 1, emphasis mine)

The information is very useful to make clear where Calaveras County is located, as well as the thoughtfulness of the observer and the appearance of Simon Wheeler. Instructors could easily point out that such information is not included in the original text.

Although the first two changes may add to the (ER) reader's understanding of the story, the phrase "a big white mustache under his nose", on the other

hand, distorts the readers' imagination of old Simon. This is most likely not the image that Mark Twain wanted to express.

Simplification of episodes

Let us compare these two passages:

He never smiled, he never frowned, he never changed his voice from the gentle-flowing key to which he tuned his initial sentence, *he never betrayed the slightest suspicion of enthusiasm; but all through the interminable narrative there ran a vein of impressive earnestness and sincerity, which showed me plainly that, so far from his imagining that there was anything ridiculous or funny about his story, he regarded it as a really important matter, and admired its two heroes as men of transcendent genius in finesse.* (OR) (p.17, emphasis mine)

Simon Wheeler smiled, stood up, and took me to a table in the corner. His chair now blocked the path to the door. I sat and listened silently. No one, I soon realized, could stop Simon Wheeler in the middle of a good story. He never changed his voice as he moved smoothly from one sentence to the next. *Did he think the story was serious or funny? He gave his listener no sign. This was his story. You can decide for yourself.* (ER) (p. 1, emphasis mine)

As one can see at a glance, the way Simon told Jim's story is greatly simplified in the ER text. Because of this simplification, the readers can easily understand Simon's determination in telling his story. On the contrary, in the original text, Simon's way of telling the story is described in detail, so that we can fully understand how earnestly and seriously old Simon told the story to the narrator. Moreover, we can also understand old Simon's character; he is impossible to hate. Certain simplification may lead to too superficial a reading.

Abbreviation of episodes

Next, let us look at two examples of abbreviation. The original story, has episodes about the horse and the dog that Jim had are abbreviated in the ER text. The episodes in the original text tell us how strange and funny the animals were. The episode about how they beat their opponents and win much money for Jim is told with much humor. (See OR. pp. 19-20, ER. p. 2) Jim's dog had a special skill for fighting as follows.

...and the bets being doubled and doubled on the other side all the time, till the money was all up; and then all of a sudden he would grab that other

dog jest [*sic*] by the j'int [*sic*] of his hind leg and freeze to it—not chaw, you understand, but only just grip and hang on till they throwed [*sic*] up the sponge, if it was a year. (OR) (p. 19)

The dog had never been beaten until he fought with a dog which had no hind legs. In the ER text, the episode is significantly abbreviated, even though the very episode embodies the essence of a typical American tall-tale. The ER readers who are interested in the animals should subsequently read the episodes in the original text. The kind of abbreviation used in the ER text significantly reduces the humor found in the original.

A second example of abbreviation follows. Compare the following two quotations.

... he was the curiousest [*sic*] man about always betting on anything that turned up you ever see, if he could get anybody to bet on the other side; and if he couldn't he'd change sides. . . . If there was a horse-race, you'd find him flush or you'd find him busted at the end of it; if there was a dog-fight, he'd bet on it; if there was a cat-fight, he'd bet on it; if there was a chicken-fight, he'd bet on it; why, if there was two birds setting on a fence, he would bet you which one would fly first; (OR) (p. 18)

He was a hard worker and a good talker, but there was something special about him, too. Jim Smiley liked to bet. He was always looking for someone to bet against. He liked to bet on everything: on the weather, on business, and on all kinds of fights and races. (ER) (pp. 1-2)

In the ER text, some episodes about what Jim bet on and how he bet are abbreviated. Although the abbreviations help the readers catch a rough portrait of Jim, they prevent them from gaining a full understanding of Jim's character. The original text shows how crazy he was about gambling and how he was such a hopeless and incurable gambler.

Change of episodes

Following is an example of a change of an episode, a change which makes a difference to the readers' interpretations of a character. Each of the following quotations is the opening passage of the story. In both of the passages, the narrator explains the reason he called on Jim Smiley.

In compliance with the request of a friend of mine, who wrote me from the East, I called on good-natured, garrulous old Simon Wheeler, and

inquired after my friend's friend, Leonidas W. Smiley, as requested to do, and I hereunto append the result. *I have a lurking suspicion that Leonidas W. Smiley is a myth; that my friend never knew such a personage; and that he only conjectured that if I asked old Wheeler about him, it would remind him of his infamous Jim Smiley, and he would go to work and bore me to death with some exasperating reminiscence of him as long and as tedious as it should be useless to me. If that was the design, it succeeded.* (OR) (p. 17, emphasis mine)

While I was visiting the west coast of this great country, an old friend wrote a letter to me. He made an interesting suggestion: "You should visit old Simon Wheeler. Ask him about Leonidas W. Smiley. Wheeler won't know Leonidas—he *doesn't exist. But when you say the name, he'll remember Jim Smiley. Wheeler's got some funny stories about Jim.*" (ER) (p. 1, emphasis mine)

In the ER text, before the narrator visited old Simon Wheeler, his friend had told him that Leonidas Smiley no longer existed. This indicates that the narrator visited old Simon not to ask for the information of Leonidas, but to listen to "some funny stories about Jim" told by Simon.

In the original story, on the contrary, the narrator's friend never said that Leonidas was a fictitious person. That is to say, when the narrator called on old Simon, he believed that Leonidas was a real person and asked Simon about Leonidas as he was requested to do. But, after the narrator left old Simon and thought back on the story later, he knew that his friend had played a joke on him. In other words, the narrator called on Simon not out of mere curiosity, but out of friendship and kindness. Nevertheless, he doesn't speak badly about his friend's trick, but actually admires the fact that he witnessed it. The change makes a great difference in the interpretation of the narrator's character

Instructors should also point out that the direct speech as seen in the ER text is not used in the original text, and have the students consider why direct speech is used in the ER text. In this case, it can be said that the direct speech is useful to simplify the story, but it may diminish a wider interpretation of the story or of the characters.

Moreover, we must focus on two important and controversial changes of episodes seen in the ER text.

Look at the quotation.

Parson Walker's wife laid very sick once, for a good while, and it seemed as if they warn't [*sic*] going to save her; but one morning he come in, and Smiley up and asked him how she was, and he said she was considerable better—thank the Lord for his inf'nite [*sic*] mercy—and coming on so smart that with the blessing of Prov'dence [*sic*] she'd get well yet; and Smiley, before he thought, says, 'Well, I'll resk [*sic*] two-and-a-half she don't [*sic*] anyway.' (OR) (p. 18, emphasis mine)

His boss's wife had a terrible illness. She was sick for a long time. Then, one morning, the boss came to work with good news.

"How's your wife today?" *one man* asked.

"She's much better today, thank you," answered the boss. "I hope she'll be well by the end of this week."

Without thinking, Smiley said, "I'll bet five dollars she's dead by Saturday." That's how he was. (ER) (p. 2, emphasis mine)

In the original story, the woman who was seriously sick in bed is not the wife of Jim's boss, but of a preacher. The original episode shows that Jim was so impious that he even bets on the preacher's sick wife. Furthermore, in the original text, it is Jim himself who asks the condition of the patient. This indicates that Jim is not anxious about Parson Walker's wife at all. He just is concerned about the thing he is betting on. He is truly a hopeless and gambler. This important image of Jim does not come across as clearly in the ER text, and thereby diminishes the literary value of the work.

Let us look at one more example of a change of episode. As the title of the original suggests and the ER version directly states, Jim had a frog which is very good at jumping, and is proud of it. One day at a bar, Jim met a stranger who said he would bet Jim if he had a frotwhereupon Jim went all the way to the river to catch another frog for the stranger, keeping him waiting in the bar. While Jim was away, the stranger poured something into the mouth of Jim's frog. In the ER text, the material is sand while in the original text, the material is not sand, but quail-shot. Made of lead, quail-shot is much heavier than sand. If readers know it is lead shot, they can easily imagine how heavy Jim's frog is. Above all, most readers will wonder why the stranger was carrying around sand, and how could he

have obtained the sand while he sat in the bar waiting for Jim? Again, we see a diminishment of the original story as presented in the ER text.

Conclusion

As has been mentioned, an instructor who is familiar with a literary work could pick up key words as well as key episodes in the ER text, stimulate students to consult the original text to locate the equivalent, and then help them to compare one with the other. Such an activity will lead them to gain a better understanding of the story, and to better enjoy the original. The elements of fiction are character, plot, settings, point of view, and meaning. If a student is interested in any of the elements when he/she reads a story retold for ER, instructors should introduce the original text to the student, and accurately and properly point out the difference between the ER text and the original text. If this is done, one can expect a student to be spurred on by reading a retold story, and eventually will also be interested in the original text. This certainly would be another benefit of the use of Extensive Readers.

References

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