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**Facultad de Lenguas**



**The Benefits of Using Short Stories to Teach Culture in the EFL  
Classroom**

**A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Languages for the degree of  
Licenciatura en Enseñanza del Inglés**

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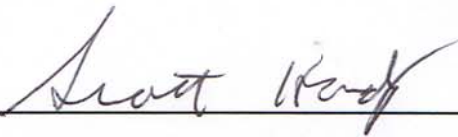
**“THE BENEFITS OF USING SHORT STORIES TO TEACH CULTURE IN THE  
EFL CLASSROOM”**

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## DEDICATIONS

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# CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction to the problem

Language is the principal means whereby people conduct their social lives. It is a system of signs that constitute social identity because by using words people express facts, ideas or experiences. All these aspects are related to personal opinions, points of view, attitudes and beliefs of the speaker, for that reason... "language expresses cultural reality" (Kramsch 1998, p.3). In a more complex way, culture refers to identity that in Moran's words (2001, p.102) springs from the intricate mix of others and self culture. This author remarks that the more complex identity takes place when persons enter a new culture and learn other languages. In this view, people who learn a foreign language may also learn the foreign culture to increase their own and in this way be more comfortable while learning. Hence, Halliday (1994 in Palomino 2011) argues that the students' sociocultural background has to be taken into consideration because ignoring their norms and expectations; they could bring in the classroom an attitude of refusal. This is recommended previous of learning a new language to help students gain confidence. From this point, learners may integrate aspects of the foreign language culture to their own to complete their knowledge.

On the other hand, "the role of language differs widely from one country to another, as do the reasons of particular groups of learners for studying them" (Richards 1985, p. 4). At this point, it is important to set the context of this research. The language to analyze here is English taken as a Foreign Language

(EFL), the term that Richards (1985) defines as the "nonofficial language of a country." and in this paper it is studied at the Faculty of Languages BUAP with the purpose of teaching.

Thereby, and according to the authors' opinion cited above, learning another language implies necessarily to learn the culture of the language that is being studied. Moran (2001) states that it is better when language learners get involved in language action pulled by real people in real situation. He remarks this as "the ultimate goal of teaching culture, when learners move from the classroom culture learning model out the door into the other way of life" (p.136). However, when language is being learned as a Foreign Language and with the purpose of teaching, it is a big deal that could become difficult to manage. Making reference to this study that takes place at Faculty of languages BUAP, it seems difficult to be in the real language context (English), so here is the importance of teaching culture in the EFL classroom. This paper sets out the problem that students at the Faculty of Languages BUAP face in learning the culture of the English language. Even when literature is included in the curriculum and some teachers worry about the culture topic while teaching the Target Language, sometimes it is not easy for the students to achieve the knowledge and either for the teachers because as it is mentioned in Chapter II they are not always good culture guides. As it follows, and being aware of the lack of opportunities that students have to engage the foreign culture, this study proposes the short story as a meaningful tool to teach the foreign culture of the English language since they are resources of variety and reflect aspects of the society and language's context (Valdes1986, p.130). There are two culture options:

British and American, but as the University is located in Mexico, the nearer culture and most accessible to learn is the American. So the study was carried out with the short story *Roselily* by Alice Walker about an African American woman.

The important role of short stories in the process of learning and teaching EFL is not as simple as it is thought. According to Cassany (2003 in Palomino 2011) the concept of cultural dynamization does not only include cultural information in the classroom but also turns the classroom into a context of cultural activity and implies the active projection outwards of procedures and attitudes. In addition, Lazar (2002, in Ruiz 2007) justifies the use of literary texts with the following ideas: a) it is motivational, b) it is authentic, c) it has educational value, d) it appears in many syllabuses, e) it functions as stimulus to acquire another language, f) it allows students to be aware of linguistics, but the most important for this study, g) it allows students to comprehend another culture. As Lazar (2002, in Ruiz 2007) explains, the literary texts are a complete tool where teachers can use to go beyond the simple text. So, with all this benefits that the literary texts offer, the teacher can take advantage in the Target Language class to work more than one area with the students learning a foreign language. In this study, the focus is on the didactic point of view because the context is in teaching EFL. From this idea, Ruiz (2007) argues that the advantages of short stories in didactics are the authentic language examples that they offer, the variety of genres, but the main aspect that he underlies is the length of the text because it allows better concentration of the reader, it could be read in a short time consequently, it avoids boredom.

Stories can provide a highly motivating, engaging and realistic source of genuine language interaction in the classroom. They are "living language" in which the teacher becomes the source of language (Morgan & Rinvoluceri, 1983). These authors remark on the importance of stories as a source for variety of activities for students in different levels but the main purpose above all is for "exposure to real spoken language." Therefore, the kind of language that is used in stories reflects on the culture of those periods of time. That is why stories as a source of teaching EFL is a complete tool.

This paper is focused basically on the term culture, the use of short stories as a tool to teach and for better comprehension of the culture when learning a foreign language. It has been planned that this tool also helps to improve the academic achievement in other areas, for example linguistics, communicative and reading abilities.

## **1.2 Purpose of the study**

The main goal underlying this thesis is to present short stories as a strategy to teach the foreign culture when a language is being learned, in this case English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at the Faculty of languages BUAP with the purpose of teaching, at the same time that the reading, linguistics, and communicative abilities are developed.

### **1.3 Specific Objectives**

- 1) To demonstrate that students need another resource to reinforce their English cultural knowledge.
- 2) To prove how a short story can help to teach different domains of culture.
- 3) To analyze the benefits of using short stories to learn new vocabulary.
- 4) To use short stories as a strategy to develop communicative abilities.
- 5) To find out how short stories improve the reading comprehension.

### **1.4 Research questions**

This paper sets out to answer the following questions:

1. What kind of selected short stories can be applied to teach English culture at the Faculty of Languages BUAP?
2. How do short stories work in other areas of English teaching?

### **1.5 Significance of the study**

This thesis will provide new ways of applying techniques and material that could be added to the present curriculum of the Faculty of Languages BUAP, mainly from LEI students, to get better results in learning English as a Foreign Language. The importance to implement short stories in the classroom in this study is to encourage the culture of the foreign language that the student is learning. For that reason, the present study is engaged in a particular short story named "Roselily" by Alice Walker with the purpose to teach some aspects about the African-American culture.

## 1.6 Key terms

**Context of culture:** The historical knowledge, the beliefs, attitudes, values shared by members of a discourse community, and that contribute to the meaning of their verbal exchanges. (Kramersch 1998, p.26)

**Culture** is "far more than a mere catalogue of rituals and beliefs"... cultural models derive from the world in which people live and the reality that they construct (Rosaldo, 1984 cited in Hinkel 1999, p.1).

**EFL:** The non official language in a country (Richards, 1985).

**Language:** is a system of signs that is seen as having itself a cultural value... speakers... view their language as a symbol of their social identity (Kramersch 1998, p.3).

**Short story:** The short story is an instrument to improve static skills, intercultural, linguistic, communicative and interactive for learners of a foreign language (Ruiz, 2007).

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this chapter, concepts like language and culture and other issues regarding to English as a Foreign Language will be defined. The relationship between them, its impact in English teaching, the use of literature in the classroom (emphasizing in short stories) are mentioned as well for the purpose of this research.

### **2.1 Language and culture**

#### **2.1.1 The nature of language**

Bonvillain (2011) defines language as "an integral part of human behavior; the primary means of interaction between people. Speakers use language to convey their thoughts, feelings, intentions, and desires to others." In contrast, from the linguistics applied perspective, language is considered to be a set of abstract systems whose meaning reside in the forms themselves rather than in the use to which they are put (Hall, 2002). Taking a more narrow definition and now from the view of language as social action, Halliday (1973, cited in Hall 2002) points out that "language is considered to be first and foremost a socio-cultural resource constituted by a range of possibilities, and open-ended set of options in behavior that are available to the individual in his existence as social man." The definition of Bonvillain (2011) remarks the importance of the language in use, in other words the importance of communicative interaction to exchange experiences whereas Hall (2002) making reference to the applied linguistics perspective shows language

worried about form, just language as a system, without the effect caused by its use.

### **2.1.2 The importance of culture when learning a foreign language**

In order to understand best the role of culture in the acquisition of a foreign language, it is important to provide the definition of what culture is. Brook (1975, cited in Hadley 1993) defines culture as everything and the best in human life. But culture does not have the same meaning for all areas; so, from the Marxist point of view, culture is the product of man destined to men and only acquires the sense that it is able to give the preparation of the senses and of the mind of men that participate on the process of communication and is made up of certain social conditions (Kloskowska 1975). This conception of culture has been considered as a measure of vitality to the contemporary sociology of culture. Cavalli (2007) provides a definition of culture from the anthropological point of view as "the global accumulation of knowledge and innovation derived from the sum of individual contributions transmitted from generation to generation and spread in our social group that influences and constantly changing our lives." Cavalli stresses that the development of culture has been possible thanks to communication between human beings. In addition, culture as "accumulation of knowledge" is related to the past, and it allows knowing about the present and the future. It can then be concluded that culture is everything that human beings acquire through life helped by language and perceived differently according to social conditions and the preparation of the mind, which allows it to make sense.



### **2.1.3 The relationship between language and culture**

The importance to study the relationship between language and culture is mentioned by Brown (1980, cited in Valdes 1986) who says: "Second Language learning is often second culture learning." There is a field in anthropology called "linguistic anthropology" which studies this relationship. From this point of view, language is regarded as a system of symbols or words established to convey meanings; for that reason the study of language and its meaning is vital to comprehend the values, the beliefs, the ideology and other aspects of the culture (O'Higgins & Rossi 1981). In this view, language is seen as a complex issue, it cannot be taken in isolation because it is a social tool. In a similar way, Kramsch (1998) argues that "language is a system of signs that is seen as having itself a cultural value; speakers identify themselves and others through their use of language." Moreover, Valdes states that no one can feel, or therefore think deeply, in an artificial language; a clear example of this is Esperanto. Taken into account the definition of language given above by Bonvillain (2011), language is useful to convey feelings, intentions and also to express experiences in life, so it is difficult to use an artificial language just to communicate when the speaker does not know about the receiver or vice versa. It makes no sense.

On the other hand, Herder and Humboldt (cited in Kramsch 1998) suggest that "different people speak differently because they think differently, and that they think differently because their language offers them different ways of expressing the world around them (linguistic relativity)." This idea was later taken by Benjamin Whorf and Edward Sapir in what is called the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Lee, 1996

cited in Hall 2002). From this hypothesis Sapir states that "human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society." Thus, language and culture are one part of the other that involves changes in the ways of thinking, behaving and speaking and all this brings up people see the world in different ways; different culture expressions.

## **2.2 Culture in the EFL classroom**

After analyzing definitions of culture and language and its relationship, it is necessary to clarify what teaching a foreign language means.

### **2.2.1 Teaching a foreign language**

Harrison (1990) expresses that "teaching a language is not a value-free or transparent activity, what we do in the language classroom is affected by who we are, the views we hold, and the societies we are part of." In addition to this, Barrow (cited in Harrison 1990) argues that in the classroom the teacher presents not just the language but also the values and beliefs, in this case English, which may be different in comparison to other languages. Nowadays, English is the sole official language of 25 countries and functions along with others as official languages in some 36 more (Bonvillain 2011), the purpose are many but in this research the most important is English for education. Moreover, as it is explained above, English involves different values and beliefs, so it is common that English learners acquire a second identity that can be successful if learners have strong self esteem in their

own culture (Valdes 1986). To this point of view, Brown & Eisterhold (2004) state that in the case of people learning another language, issues of identity are intertwined with motivations of learning the language. I agree with Harrison definition because to teach a new language, it does not matter if it is taken as foreign or second language, it is vital to start from what students already are and what they know to balance all these aspects and from here start teaching the new values and beliefs of the target language. It also helps with motivation in the process of learning another language. To conclude this section and taking into account the information given by the authors cited above, when teaching a foreign language, English or whatever, teachers may promote different ways of thinking in students because a foreign language always differs from the mother tongue in values and beliefs, in other words in culture.

Consequently, Harrison (1990) states that all this changes are required; it is inevitable that the target language shapes all what students are, hence it is not something about which teacher or students should feel guilty.

### **2.2.2 Social context**

According to Halliday (1978, 1993 cited in Buzzelli & Johnston 2002), learning is a semiotic process - a process of making meaning- in which language plays a central role. In other words, it refers that how language is used by people, what they can do with it (Halliday 1978). Halliday underlies four claims of language as a social semiotic and one of them is that "the social and cultural context in which the language activity occurs influences the meaning that are created and

exchanged by participants in the activity" (Eggins 1994, in Buzzelli & Johnston 2002). As it is seen, language can change or determine its meaning according to the context in which it is used. It is not always the same. "Learning is above all, a social process... knowledge is transmitted in social contexts... and the words that are exchanged in these contexts get their meaning from activities in which they are embedded" (Halliday and Hasan 1989 p.5 in Buzzelli & Johnston 2002). E. T. Hall (1977 cited in Moran 2001) introduced the concept of Low context and High context as two ends of a continuum. In the first one the context or situation plays a minimal role in the communication, it is context the messages are explicit, direct, and conveyed primarily through spoken language. On the contrary, the second one, High contexts messages are implicit, indirect, conveyed primarily through the context or the social situation. These two extremes of context are also seen in degrees of explicitness or visibility in the message, meaning or understanding, from explicit to tacit, direct to indirect. Hall (1997) gives the example of folk dancing as a high context where the meaning of the message is more tacit than explicit. Halliday (1978) adds that the context in which language is used differs from one language to another in three ways: a) according to what is happening in the context (what the participants are doing); b) according to who is taking part, who the participants are, and their relationship to one another; and c) in the role language plays in the activity. To conclude this paragraph, it is important to mention that the context will always influence the sense of language, obviously differing between participants, the situation, and other aspects, but it is meaningful to take language more complex and without isolation.

### **2.2.3 The role of the teacher**

The teacher is a vital element when focusing in the classroom as a means by which the learner acquires culture and language knowledge. As it was reviewed before, learning a second or foreign language involves the acquisition of another culture, hence it is supposed that teachers must teach culture in the classroom. However, it is not always the case. Brooks (1964 cited in Valdes 1986) asks how teachers will impart information about culture if he has not taken a previous course of cultural anthropology. Thus, Damen (1987 cited in Tran-Hoang-Thu 2010) points out some reasons for the limitation of teachers' efficiency as cultural guides: 1) teachers do not know what "culture" to teach; 2) until recently only a few textbooks of methodologies have been available to assist teachers in the direction of culture learning. Consequently, Brown (2007, cited in Tran-Hoang-Thu 2010) states four guidelines on accounting for cultural issues for classroom teachers:

1. A student's cultural identity is usually a deeply seated bundle of emotions, so teachers should practice empathy as they relate to their students in cultural matters: behavior patterns, and expectations; expected relationship to authority, family, and peers; ambiguity, tolerance, and openness to new ideas and ways of thinking; students' attitudes toward their own and the second language culture; their view of individualism versus collectivism; linguistic conventions of politeness, formality, and other sociopragmatic factors.

2. Teachers should recognize the cultural connotations and nuances of English and the first language of their students. Teachers should capitalize those in their teaching.

3. Teachers should use the classroom as an opportunity to educate their students about other cultures and help them to see that no one culture is better than another. Teachers should also practice in words and deed their respect for their students' deeply ingrained emotions that stem from the students' cultural schemata.

4. When cultural differences emerge, teachers should help their students to appreciate and celebrate diversity. Especially in English as a second language context where students in the same class may represent many different cultures, teachers should try to make their classroom a model of openness, tolerance, and respect.

(Brown 2007 cited in Tran-Hoang-Thu 2010 pp. 28-29)

Therefore, as it is seen by Brooks and Damen, it is wrong to expect that the teachers will be always good culture guides when learning a foreign language because as language and culture are not easy terms they are not able to know everything about the culture of the target language, but they must do it. Thus, this paper intends to provide the short story "Roselily" as an example of how this kind of stories could support the teachers facing the situations mentioned before either in Target language or literature class.

#### **2.2.4 Authentic material to incorporate culture into the foreign language classroom**

As it is read in many articles and cited in many studies, the use of authentic material in the classroom has numerous benefits in the process of students' learning. Dantas-Whitney and Rilling (2010 cited in Huang, Nisbet and Tindall

2011) point out authenticity as something that "should be framed in broader terms to include learners' cognition, engagement, collaboration, problem solving, critical analysis, and the development of language for specific and often localized communication purposes." In other words, they state that authenticity goes beyond that simple real language in use; it must be linked to more complex functions of the language. It involves a combination of tasks. In addition, Felix (2005, p. 88 in Huang, Nisbet and Tindall 2011) gives a more detailed idea about authenticity in the classroom. He states that teachers must "address the needs and interests of students, engaging them in authentic, real life tasks, allowing them ownership of the curriculum." So, taking into account the previous ideas it is seen that authenticity reflects on the use given to the material and the selection of this is focused on the needs analysis of the group of students and the context.

Moreover, Guariento and Morley (2001) provide the definition of Little *et al.* (1988) who says that "an authentic text is one created to fulfill some social purpose in the language community in which it was produced." It is, material that contains real language for specific purposes for example, the journals, the broadcast, the movies, the tales, the magazines and others which are mainly designed to inform or entertain but not primarily created for pedagogical purposes. However, it is possible to adapt all these material in the classroom to change the traditional process of teaching. In this way, the use of authentic material, written or spoken word, help students to bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and the capacity to participate in real world events (Wilkins 1976 in Guariento and Morley 2001).

## **2.3 Literature to teach English to Second or Foreign Language students**

### **2.3.1 Literature in the past**

Ruiz (2007) argues that before the communicative method to teach a foreign language literature had less importance in the classroom than nowadays. It was because based on theories literature was a difficult source to acquire a language, because of the use of metaphors and complex language, so it discouraged the students. The idea sounds strange if there is no knowledge about that period of time and the role of literature looks completely different in these days where it is taken as the richest source to teach even a foreign or second language or the mother tongue. Who knew it will be a great tool in education but mainly in foreign language teaching. The change started with the introduction of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which proposed a set of goals to teach communicative competences that includes knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions, knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants ( formal and informal speech or language appropriately for written), knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts and knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge (Richards, 2006). Furthermore, Widdowson (cited in Ruiz 2007) introduced a new dimension for the literary text with the book *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature* in 1975 that best supported the didactic use of literature in the classroom even if the purpose of the book was different. Since then, new theories emerged and the literary texts were used to foreign language teaching in different levels.



### **2.3.2 Literature in the intercultural classroom**

It is well known that literature is a good resource to teach the culture of a foreign or second language, even in the acquisition of culture of the mother tongue. Valdes (1986 cited in the study of Tran-Hoang-Thu 2010) noted that literature may be used to teach culture to upper-intermediate and advanced second language students so that they can have greater insight into the culture, and they may also have a greater understanding and appreciation of literature in their first language as well as that of the second language. Even if literature is supposed to work with advanced learners, it depends mostly in the kind of text used and the objectives planned to achieve. Literary texts are selected because they illustrate aspects of the target language (Corbett 2003). The practical educational utility of literary texts is that they can vividly illustrate aspects of an entire society... and show for example, the lived relationships between classes (Pulverness 1996:11, in Corbett 2003). Moreover literature is a rich resource because through this teachers can design many activities for the learners. For example, role plays to practice pronunciation or develop speaking skills or to make debates in the classroom which enrich the critical thinking, and others. But the fundamental goal, for teaching culture, is learning about its values and beliefs and the conflicts presented in the text can make the learners encounter the new culture.

### **2.3.3 Problems about using literature as authentic material**

Literature is taken as authentic material because it does not have specific purpose in teaching languages. It is created for native speakers. Gilmore (2007:11 in Sánchez-Reyes and Torregrosa 2011) points out that "authentic material is likely

to expose learners to a wider variety of grammatical and lexical features but with less frequency than contrived input specifically designed to highlight particular target language.” According to this idea, authentic material is regarded as a negative source for teaching that could make students to feel frustrated, confused and what is worst, feel demotivated. Therefore, authentic material is basically recommended to work with post-intermediated or advanced levels. Despite, Widdowson (1978 cited in Guariento and Morley 2001) states that in cases like these when working with lower levels, simplification can take place while maintaining authenticity in the sense of learners’ response and matching to the learners' interest. It is not a negative characteristic of the authentic material, the point here is to adapt the material and vary the tasks according to the language levels.

## **2.4 Why to use short stories?**

### **2.4.1 Short stories**

“Stories may bridge the gap between language study and language use and also to link classroom learning with the world outside (Ellis and Brewster 2002: 17 in Urbancová 2006).” Stories are clear examples of authentic material in literature field and as in the previous definition they have great significance in language teaching because of its richness in real language that is totally different from the language taught in the classroom; especially when it is a foreign language. One of the pioneers from the 19th century is Edgar Allan Poe who defines short story as “a narrative that can be read at one sitting of from one-half hour to two hours (Abrams 1970 in Ahmad 2012).” In addition, Ruiz (2007) argues that the length of a short

story and the words it contains are not exactly determined. They can be extremely short (50 words) or long (3000 words) but the time in which a short story is read should not exceed from three to four hours.

According to Abrams (1970 in Ahmad 2012), short stories are classified into two kinds: story of incident and story of character. The story of incident "generally focus on the course and the final outcome of the events" (p.74) while stories of character "dilate upon the motivations and thinking patterns of character, or reveal his moral strength (p.74)." The recommendation suggested by Abrams for students of English as a Foreign Language are the stories of incident because as this kind of texts are focused mainly in the story it can be an advantage to get students' attention and it also can motivate them to continue reading the short story. Nevertheless, stories of characters could have the same importance, in this case using short stories to teach culture, because the behavior of the characters in the story and their moral qualities could result very useful manifestations of differences between the culture of the foreign language and the culture of the mother tongue. Though the selection of the type of short story to work with in the classroom depends on the characteristics and needs of the students.

#### **2.4.2 Benefits of using short stories in the classroom**

Short stories, defined in previous section, are authentic material with richness of real language in use. From the didactic point of view, according to Ruiz (2007), some advantages of using short stories are:

- a)** It is to be read in a short time that could be in one sitting.
- b)** It has variety of genres and it helps in the adaptation of students' interests.
- c)** It offers authentic examples of language in use.
- d)** Its length makes easier the cognitive process.
- e)** The reader can change the text if it is not attractive without complaining about waste of time.

What Ruiz (2007) remarks more than once is the length of short stories as characteristic of advantage because the reader can easily go back to the text to look for information but these also includes motivational, literary, cultural and higher-order thinking benefits (Erkaya 2005). Thus, according to Wright (2003 in Ahmad 2012) when short stories are used, it is something much bigger that goes beyond language teaching. In addition, Lao and Krashen (2000 in Erkaya 2005) shows in their study between a group of students that read literary texts and another that read non-literary texts at a university in Hong Kong that stories can improve students' vocabulary and reading. In short, the implementation of short stories in the curriculum of language teaching have advantages in whatever situation or aspect that teacher wants develop from his class but as a tool to teach culture in the EFL classroom they are useful because as the text use real language it transmits culture of the place where the story is developed. In Erkaya (2005), it is seen that short stories refer to the present and past, customs and traditions of the characters and it suggests students to make brief comparisons between their mother culture and the foreign culture. In conclusion, short stories have a variety of

activities, when it is used in the classroom, and as a tool to teach a foreign language it provides EFL students with a variety of opportunities to express their thoughts, in this case in English (Shang and Tsai, 2011). The recommendation in this case, is to know a little bit about the author and be aware of cultural differences to avoid misinterpretation.

### **2.4.3 Criteria for choosing short stories**

Hill (1994, in Ahmad 2012), points out that the basic criteria to choose short stories to work on are: "the needs and abilities of the students, the linguistic and stylistic level of the text and the amount of background information required for a true appreciation of the material (p.74)." It would be fine if before selecting the material teachers make a needs analysis to the corresponding group to work with to know better what they expect. Also, to determine the objective that the short story may achieve and thereby, select the text with the appropriate vocabulary, the use of specific grammar tenses and the meaning that the story have itself. Short stories should get the students attention and interest. For that reason, relevant short stories are the most suitable. But what is relevant? What criteria may teachers follow to determine a short story as relevant material? It is just defined by the needs of the students. Moreover, another aspect to take into account when choosing the short stories for the classroom is the age of the students and based on this information, the story must match life experiences, emotions or dreams of the learner (Küçüköğlü and Sarıçoban 2011). Teachers may be careful when choosing short stories considering content and the language used in the story.

## **CHAPTER III: THE METHODOLOGY**

This section is determined to describe the subjects, the instruments, the procedure and the data analysis for the present study. As the main purpose of this thesis was to implement short stories to teach culture in the EFL classroom, a survey research was carried out. Vogt (1999 in Criollo 2003) explains that this type of research methodology "involves collecting information by means of questionnaires or interviews." In this thesis, different activities from a "ficha pedagógica"(see Appendix A) , mainly questionnaires, were applied to work with linguistics contents (vocabulary), reading comprehension, literary contents but basically focused on the interpretation and comprehension of cultural content that the short story "Roselily" by Alice Walker (see Appendix B) offers. The idea to use a "ficha pedagógica" for this study was mainly because it is a complete tool which allows working different points from the same content. As mentioned before, this thesis is focused on cultural contents of the short story used, so the last questionnaire was recorded in order to obtain different points of view and students' opinions about the culture that is showed in the text.

### **3.1 Subjects**

The study was carried out at the Faculty of Languages from the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP), a public university located in Puebla City, Mexico with a group of students from the Licenciatura en la Enseñanza del Inglés (LEI). They were students that had already finished their Target Languages

and each one is at the end of the major (eighth of a four-month period). The subjects were 9 participants, 6 women and 3 men, from different groups of research seminars and they are between 21-23 years old. Their proficiency level is B1, according to the Common European Framework (CEF, 2002) and based on the Test Of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) that they have presented at the Departamento de Planeación y Evaluación Académica (DEPEA) in which the score range is between 450-546. They were selected according to their scores in TOEFL to be sure that they could better analyze the short story and be critical at the same time.

### **3.2 Instrument**

As mentioned before, the instrument applied in this research was a "ficha pedagógica" divided in four parts that were I) reading comprehension, II) linguistic content, III) literary elements and IV) cultural contents (see Appendix 1). The activities were three questionnaires and a worksheet with a table as vocabulary activity. The short story to work on is called "Roselily" by Alice Walker and each activity was linked to this.

First of all, the student started with the linguistic contents part from the "ficha pedagógica" which had an activity related to the vocabulary of the text. It has a table where students wrote the new words and their possible meaning. The students left the last column because this was to do after reading. The objective of this part was to increase the students' vocabulary (see part I on Appendix A). The part II is about reading comprehension and from this part students had to read the

short story then do the activities. This part has a set of five multiple choice questions; its objective was to evaluate how much students understood from the text (see part II). Once the students have read the whole story, they can complete now the last column of the table in the part I and look for a better meaning of the new words selected. The activities of these two first parts have duration of 10 minutes each one.

The objective of the third part was to identify literary elements from the short story. It consists of 5 open questions and students had 15 minutes to answer individually (see part III on Appendix A). The last part is the principal one that is why it was carried out at the end when students had a clear idea about the short story. It is composed of ten open questions that students have to discuss in group, related to cultural elements found in the text. The discussion is recorded to obtain evidences of the comments and opinions. It took no more than 40 minutes (see part IV on Appendix A).

### **3.3 Procedures**

This research was carried out following the next steps. First of all, the short story was searched and selected taking into account that it had the required elements to work on with fields like reading, vocabulary, literary but especially focused in cultural manifestations. It also was chosen based on the students' proficiency level stated by the CEF (2012) in the main domain to be focused that is the educational domain. Thus, according to the TOEFL training test that students have done at DEPEA, their scores point out that the subjects in this research are



between B1 - B1+. That is, in the reading skill the CEF states that students can understand the description of events, feelings and texts in a language of high frequency everyday language. In the speaking skill, according to the same level, students are able to enter unprepared into conversations and give reasons and explain opinions. Moreover, according to the CEF in the spoken language use, students have enough language to get by, with sufficient vocabulary to express themselves on topics such as current events and interests. The activities planned in the "ficha pedagógica" were adapted to the same characteristics.

The first activity was about linguistic contents and took around 10 minutes (see part I, Appendix A). In this part students got new vocabulary from the short story and they got the meaning of those words by reading and getting context clues. Then, the reading comprehension's questionnaire was applied. The students answered the questions by themselves and at the end they share their answers to try to get the idea of the story (see part II, Appendix A). The third part, was an open question questionnaire with the purpose of identifying literary elements from the short story Roselily (see part III, Appendix A). It was designed to take 15 minutes but it took more because students were confused with some literary elements asked like metaphors, similes found and the structure of the text. Finally, the questionnaire about cultural contents, which has 10 open questions and was supposed to take 40 minutes took more time because in this part the students analyzed "Roselily" story and commented about the cultural differences they could get from their own culture and the culture that was showed in the story (see part IV,

Appendix A).The last part was recorded to obtain data in a more natural way. In total, the instrument took 1 hour and a half.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

The analysis of the results obtained from the instrument applied for this research is qualitative and quantitative. That is that the information collected is analyzed in terms of meaning and naturalistic features but certain parts are analyzed with numbers (quantities). For the analysis of the first part, related to new vocabulary, the answers given in the activity from the Appendix A were taken into account to see which was the most common word that students pointed out as unknown (see part I). Moreover, the meaning that they wrote is analyzed as qualitative. The comprehension part is reviewed in a similar way. The results are summarized in terms of frequency (see Table 2). Then, the part of literary elements, is analyzed making conclusions with the responses that students wrote, as these were open questions. Finally, the cultural elements part is summarized based on the recording obtained stressing the main points and the students' opinions from the discussion where they talked about cultural differences.

## CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

In this chapter, the results of the activities in the "ficha pedagógica" (questionnaires, guessing the meaning, recording) are presented to show how the short story worked and what the students learned about it.

### 4.1 Linguistic content

Table 1. Linguistic content - vocabulary.

<b>New words</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Whizzing	2
Yelp	2
Vouched	3
Cinders	4
Coattail	2
Glare	2
Dragging	3
Quicksand	3
Preacher	2
Giggle	2

In Table 1 the information about the new vocabulary that students got from the short story is shown with the frequency that they wrote the words (see Appendix A part I).

## 4.2 Reading comprehension

Table 2. Reading Comprehension

QUESTIONS	CORRECT ANSWERS
Question 1: <b>Where does the wedding party stand?</b>	3 out of 9
Question 2: <b>How many children does Roselily have in total?</b>	8 out of 9
Question 3: <b>Where is the man to whom Roselily is being married from?</b>	6 out of 9
Question 4: <b>What is the main reason why she gets married?</b>	5 out of 9
Question 5: <b>How do her children react to the wedding?</b>	4 out of 9

As it is observed in the Table 2, only half of the subjects had a clear idea about the reading and just in one question most of them coincided (see Appendix A part II).

### 4.3 Literary elements

From the part of Literary elements (see Appendix A part III) the students arrived at the next conclusions:

- **Question 1\* About the author's style to write:** Each paragraph has subtitles/ each paragraph is about a part of woman's life/ the lines over the paragraphs are part of a prayer.
- **Question 2 \* Main topic:** Religion, freedom, wedding rite, cultural shock, problematic with Afro-Americans in society.
- **Question 3 \*Underlined metaphor:** Free in robe and veil.  
Simile found: like cotton to be weight.
- **Question 4\* About the main character:** Free woman/ a woman that looks for a way to escape/ a mother doing the best for her children.
- **Question 5 \*Personal opinion about the wedding:** It does not matter the religion if love is true/ according to some known experiences sometimes it is difficult to deal with different beliefs in a couple life.

As it is shown in the comments above, students had different interpretations of the story but it is not bad at all because they created first their own idea to share opinions and give comments with the last activity.

#### **4.4 Cultural content**

From the last questionnaire that was about cultural contents (see Appendix A part IV), there is a tape recording. It is important to mention that all the questions were answered in group in such a way that each subject had the opportunity to participate. The general idea of the recording is the next one:

- a)** There is no problem in marrying people from different religions and cultures if they love each other.
- b)** The story reflects the slavery suffered by Afro-Americans in those times.
- c)** The wedding rite is completely different from culture to culture because in each one people follow completely different beliefs. For example, in Mexico the wedding rite in a town of Puebla is different in comparison with a wedding in a community of Oaxaca.
- d)** A woman who leaves her son with her husband is not well seen here in Mexico.
- e)** The role of women and men changes constantly through the time and from culture to culture.

In conclusion, with the instrument applied at the end, students shared the ideas they conceived from the short story and their ideas were clearer when the text was analyzed in group. They learned about a woman's life in the United States of America in the 20th century linked to the Afro-American culture by contrasting it with their own culture (see Appendix A part IV).

## **CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS**

In this chapter, a summary of the results obtained from the present research and its main highlights are presented. In addition, the implications of the study, the main limitations and some directions for further research are also provided.

### **5.1 Conclusions**

The main purpose underlying this thesis was to present short stories as a strategy to teach the culture of the English language that students are learning as a foreign language with the purpose of teaching it at the Faculty of Languages BUAP. For this goal, a session that took one hour and a half working with the short story "Roselily" by Alice Walker was carried out. During this session, the activities from a ficha pedagógica were applied in order to know how the short stories help students to know about the culture of the language that is being learned as a foreign language. Also, some of these activities were designed to prove that short stories are also useful to improve reading, gain new vocabulary and to learn about literature. That was another aim of this paper.

The aims of this research explained above and in chapter I, were partially achieved. From the short story used, the students could talk about several culture themes like religion, wedding beliefs, the family, between others. They took the example of the situations that the characters in the story are living to compare what happened around them. What if they were in that situation? How could their families react? The students share different points of view. This answer to the first

research question: What kind of selected short stories can be applied to teach English culture at Faculty of Languages BUAP? As it is showed, the Afro-American culture offers a variety of topics that can be analyzed in the classroom with the students (see Appendix A part IV).

On the other hand, the activities in the Appendix A (from part I to III) prove that the same short story can be used to work with reading comprehension, vocabulary and literature elements. In this part of the instrument it was seen that even when the students take courses related to the areas before mentioned, they need more, sometimes they failed with the lack of knowledge that they have. This answered the second research question: How do short stories work in other areas of English teaching?

## **5.2 Limitations of the study**

The main limitations of my research are probably the time given to apply the instrument and the lack of activities to work better with the culture elements that the story offers. One hour and a half is enough time to work with a group per day, but maybe this kind of session could have been repeated during a week with more activities. The aims of this study were related to different areas but the principal one was culture so, most of the activities should have been about it.



### **5.3 Further research**

After the results obtained from this research and already listed the limitations of the same, it is recommended for further research in this topic to look for more activities related to culture when using a short story. Maybe maps showing the places the story talk about, some extra information referring to the topics before reading the story or ask the students to investigate certain topics the day before the session to have a clear idea and participate. In a better way, the time was not enough for the purpose settled down at the beginning. Two hours per day during a week could be fine according to the length of the story.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: Ficha pedagógica

#### Part I: Linguistic contents

**General Objective:** To identify 4-5 vocabulary words from *Roselily* that students will need to understand in order to comprehend the text. In order to activate prior knowledge, students will brainstorm what they already know about the vocabulary term. During the reading, use the think aloud strategy to model how context clues provide context and give meaning to the vocabulary words.

AGE: \_\_\_\_\_ SEX: \_\_\_\_\_ TOEFL SCORE: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**DIRECTIONS:** Write the vocabulary terms in the 'new words' column. Next, brainstorm what you already know about the word in the 'before reading' column. Finally, after you have read the text, complete the 'after reading' column with new information you obtained from the reading.

**TIME:** 10 min.

NEW WORDS	BEFORE READING	AFTER READING

Making meaning (Retrieved from: <http://learningtasks.weebly.com/vocabulary-strategies.html>).

**Part II: Reading comprehension**

**General Objective:** To identify elements that best describes the sequence of events and their results.

**DIRECTIONS:** Read the text and choose the correct answer (just one possible answer).

**TIME:** 10 min

**1. Where does the wedding party stand?**

- a) In a church in Mississippi.
- b) On the street.
- c) On the porch of Roselily's house.
- d) In Chicago, Illinois.

**2. How many children does Roselily have in total?**

- a) One.
- b) Three.
- c) Four.
- d) Five.

**3) Where is the man to whom Roselily is being married from?**

- a) He is from Chicago, Illinois
- b) He is from Panther Burn.
- c) He is from Mississippi.
- d) He is from New England.

**4. What is the main reason why she gets married?**

- a) Because she wants to change her religion and worship the correct God.
- b) Because she does not have to work in a sewing plant anymore.
- c) Because she is in love with him.
- d) Because she wants to be respectable, reclaimed, renewed and free.

**5. How do her children react to the wedding?**

- a) They are happy.
- b) They are hopeful.
- c) They are nervous.
- d) They are angry.

**Part III.** Literary elements.

**General Objective:** To identify elements of the text *Roselily* to know different points of view.

**DIRECTIONS:** Answer the following questions expressing your point of view about the text *Roselily*. Argue for or against. Justify your position about it.

**TIME:** 15 min

**Questions:**

1. Why do you think the author uses the words in italics above each paragraph?
2. For you, which is the main topic about the Roselily's story?
3. Can you identify some metaphor used in the text? Underline some examples from the text.
4. What do you think of the main character?
5. Do you think that Roselily had to cancel the wedding? Why?

**Part IV. Cultural contents**

**General Objective:** To analyze the story beyond the simple text.

**DIRECTIONS:** Share opinions in group about cultural elements of the short story (for or against). You can guide yourself with the following set of questions.

**TIME:** 40 min

**Questions:**

1. What do you know about Afro-American culture?
2. What do you know about Muslims? (customs, values, beliefs).
3. How is the wedding between people from different religions seen here in Mexico?
4. How is a wedding's celebration in your country?
5. What do you know about the life in Mississippi, Chicago and New England?
6. Why does Roselily describe God as a "small black boy"?
7. Which is the importance of "cotton", "sing" and "pray" for black people culture?
8. What does the author mean with the expression "Free. In robe and veil"?
9. What would you do if you were in Roselily's place (about wedding)?
10. Would you react as Roselily did with her fourth child? How would it be viewed by others (in Mexico)?



APPENDIX B: Short story

◆ ROSELILY ◆

Alice Walker \_\_\_\_\_ Short Story

ca. 1967

*Dearly Beloved,*

She dreams; dragging herself across the world. A small girl in her mother's white robe and veil, knee raised waist high through a bowl of quicksand soup. The man who stands beside her is against this standing on the front porch of her house, being married to the sound of cars whizzing by on highway 61.

*we are gathered here*

Like cotton to be weighed. Her fingers at the last minute busily removing dry leaves and twigs. Aware it is a superficial sweep. She knows he blames Mississippi for the respectful way the men turn their heads up in the yard, the women stand waiting and knowledgeable, their children held from mischief by teachings from the wrong God. He glares beyond them to the occupants of the cars, white faces glued to promises beyond a country wedding, noses thrust forward like dogs on a track. For him they usurp the wedding.

*in the sight of God*

Yes, open house. That is what country black folks like. She dreams she does not already have three children. A squeeze around the flowers in her hands chokes off three and four and five years of breath. Instantly she is ashamed and frightened in her superstition. She looks for the first time at the preacher, forces humility into her eyes, as if she believes he is, in fact, a man of God. She can imagine God, a small black boy, timidly pulling the preacher's coat tail.

*to join this man and this woman*

She thinks of ropes, chains, handcuffs, his religion. His place of worship. Where she will be required to sit apart with covered head. In Chicago, a word she hears when thinking of smoke, from his description of what a cinder was, which they never had in Panther Burn. She sees hovering over the heads of the clean neighbors in her front yard black specks falling, clinging, from the sky. But in Chicago. Respect, a chance to build. Her children at last from underneath the detrimental wheel. A chance to be on top. What a relief, she thinks. What a vision, a view, from up so high.

*in holy matrimony.*

Her fourth child she gave away to the child's father who had some money. Certainly a good job. Had gone to Harvard. Was a good man but weak because good language meant so much to him he could not live with Roselily. Could not abide TV in the living room, five beds in three rooms, no Bach except from four to six on Sunday afternoons. No chess at all. She does not forget to worry about her

son among his father's people. She wonders if the New England climate will agree with him. If he will ever come down to Mississippi, as his father did, to try to right the country's wrongs. She wonders if he will be stronger than his father. His father cried off and on throughout her pregnancy. Went to skin and bones. Suffered nightmares, retching and falling out of bed. Tried to kill himself. Later told his wife he found the right baby through friends. Vouched for, the sterling qualities that would make up his character.

It is not her nature to blame. Still, she is not entirely thankful. She supposes New England, the North, to be quite different from what she knows. It seems right somehow to her that people who move there to live return home completely changed. She thinks of the air, the smoke, the cinders. Imagines cinders big as hailstones; heavy, weighing on the people. Wonders how this pressure finds its way into the veins, roping the springs of laughter.

*If there's anybody here that knows a reason why*

But of course they know no reason why beyond what they daily have come to know. She thinks of the man who will be her husband, feels shut away from him because of the stiff severity of his plain black suit. His religion. A lifetime of black and white. Of veils. Covered head. It is as if her children are already gone from her. Not dead, but exalted on a pedestal, a stalk that has no roots. She wonders how to make new roots. It is beyond her. She wonders what one does with memories in a brand-new life. This had seemed easy, until she thought of it. "The reasons why . . . the people who" . . . she thinks, and does not wonder where the thought is from.

*these two should not be joined*

She thinks of her mother, who is dead. Dead, but still her mother. Joined. This is confusing. Of her father. A gray old man who sold wild mink, rabbit, fox skins to Sears, Roebuck. He stands in the yard, like a man waiting for a train. Her young sisters stand behind her in smooth green dresses, with flowers in their hands and hair. They giggle, she feels, at the absurdity of the wedding. They are ready for something new. She thinks the man beside her should marry one of them. She feels old. Yoked. An arm seems to reach out from behind her and snatch her backward. She thinks of cemeteries and the long sleep of grandparents mingling in the dirt. She believes that she believes in ghosts. In the soil giving back what it takes.

*together,*

In the city. He sees her in a new way. This she knows, and is grateful. But is it new enough? She cannot always be a bride and virgin, wearing robes and veil. Even now her body itches to be free of satin and voile, organdy and lily of the valley. Memories crash against her. Memories of being bare to the sun. She wonders what it will be like. Not to have to go to a job. Not to work in a sewing plant. Not to worry about learning to sew straight seams in workmen's overalls, jeans, and dress pants. Her place will be in the home, he has said, repeatedly, promising her rest she had prayed for. But now she wonders. When she is rested, what will she do? They will make babies – she thinks practically about her fine brown body, his strong black one. They will be inevitable. Her hands will be full. Full of what? Babies. She is not comforted.

*let him speak*

She wishes she had asked him to explain more of what he meant. But she was impatient. Impatient to be done with sewing. With doing everything for three children, alone. Impatient to leave the girls she had known since childhood, their children growing up, their husbands hanging around her, already old, seedy. Nothing about them that she wanted, or needed. The fathers of her children driving by, waving, not waving; reminders of times she would just as soon forget. Impatient to see the South Side, where they would live and build and be respectable and respected and free. Her husband would free her. A romantic hush. Proposal. Promises. A new life! Respectable, reclaimed, renewed. Free! In robe and veil.

*or forever hold*

She does not even know if she loves him. She loves his sobriety. His refusal to sing just because he knows the tune. She loves his pride. His blackness and his gray car. She loves his understanding of her *condition*. She thinks she loves the effort he will make to redo her into what he truly wants. His love of her makes her completely conscious of how unloved she was before. This is something; though it makes her unbearably sad. Melancholy. She blinks her eyes. Remembers she is finally being married, like other girls. Like other girls, women? Something strains upward behind her eyes. She thinks of the something as a rat trapped, cornered, scurrying to and fro in her head, peering through the windows of her eyes. She wants to live for once. But doesn't know quite what that means. Wonders if she has ever done it. If she ever will. The preacher is odious to her. She wants to strike him out of the way, out of her light, with the back of her hand. It seems to her he has always been standing in front of her, barring her way.

*his peace*

The rest she does not hear. She feels a kiss, passionate, rousing, within the general pandemonium. Cars drive up blowing their horns. Firecrackers go off. Dogs come from under the house and begin to yelp and bark. Her husband's hand is like the clasp of an iron gate. People congratulate. Her children press against her. They look with awe and distaste mixed with hope at their new father. He stands curiously apart, in spite of the people crowding about to grasp his free hand. He smiles at them all but his eyes are as if turned inward. He knows they cannot understand that he is not a Christian. He will not explain himself. He feels different, he looks it. The old women thought he was like one of their sons except that he had somehow got away from them. Still a son, not a son. Changed.

She thinks how it will be later in the night in the silvery gray car. How they will spin through the darkness of Mississippi and in the morning be in Chicago, Illinois. She thinks of Lincoln, the president. That is all she knows about the place. She feels ignorant, *wrong*, backward. She presses her worried fingers into his palm. He is standing in front of her. In the crush of well-wishing people, he does not look back.

\* National Humanities Center, 2007: [nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/](http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/). In Alice Walker, *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women* (1967); reprint (paper) Harvest Books (Harcourt), 2003, pp. 3-9. Permission pending from Harcourt Inc.