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Tania Muñoz Sánchez

"The use of graphic novels in the English as a foreign language EFL context: *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*, identity and intertextuality"

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Abstract: The present research arises from the idea of the pedagogic potential of graphic novels in the classroom and offers fresh insights on how to promote intertextual connections in reading classrooms using this new pedagogical tool in the foreign language environments.

With regards to methodology, firstly there is a broad overview on graphic novels, if will first attempt to define the genre and clarify the assumption that comics and graphic novels are the same thing. Secondly, there is a briefly trace of the historical evolution of the genre, and focus on some aesthetic aspects, relevant to the process of reading comprehension. Finally, the research ends with the analysis of a case study, an example that takes the form of sequential art, known as "Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic" by Alison Bechdel where students are able to bring their own experiences to the text, interact with it and learn about Anglo-American literary history as well as the gender dynamics.

Keywords: graphic novels, reading comprehension, language skills, cognitive elements, intertextuality

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Tania MUÑOZ SÁNCHEZ

"The use of graphic novels in the English as a foreign language EFL context: *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*, identity and intertextuality"

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1. Introduction

Looking at recent publications on the book market, it seems that 'sequential art', a term used to describe comic strips and graphic novels, has finally been accepted as serious literature.

This paper presents graphic novels as a useful tool for the teaching English as a Foreign Language. The proposed exercises are designed for intermediate learners of English (levels : KS4 (GCSE) and KS5 (A-Level) which, in Spain, correspond to the following age groups: from 14 to 16 years 3º y 4º E.S.O., and from 16 to 18 years in the two years of Bachillerato.

The present research can be considered as an intertextuality-based study that encourages learners to re-conceptualize reading as a dialogical process, a conversation—one in which they are active participants.

Graphic novels make use of information in various visual formats, image and text. Since images offer a visual aid to students, graphic novels might be useful in the development of reading comprehensions skills and in encouraging reluctant readers to gain a new and fresh perspective on the reading activity. Considering the new perspectives and the opportunities they offer in the teaching of literature, graphic novels are transforming methodologies in educational contexts, challenging traditional teaching methodologies. Based on the fact that the use of graphic novels in the classroom is highly recommended due to its positive effects on reading

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comprehension skills, it seems that in the future this new trend will continue, and that these teaching tools will be used not only in the teaching of literature, but also applied to other disciplines.

Reading and learning are generally viewed as passive processes. Indeed, reading is often seen as something akin to hearing (as distinguished from listening), as though the text author is *telling* and we, as readers, are supposed to sit back and just receive the information.

One of the first comic writers in Europe was Rodolphe Töpffer (1799 –1846) a Swiss teacher, painter, cartoonist, and caricaturist. His illustrated books are considered the earliest European comics (see Kunzle 2007). In Europe, the first graphic album *Tintin in the Land of Soviets* by the Belgian cartoonist Georges Remi, writing under the pen name of Hergé, achieved a remarkable success in the 1930s. By 2007 it had been published in over 70 languages and sold more than 200 million copies. Another successful and well-known graphic novel series created by the Belgian artists René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo was the Asterix comic strip series (for a detailed account see Laurence Grove 2010).

The genre was popularized by US cartoonist Will Eisner in *A Contract with God*, a series that revolved around poor Jewish characters in a tenement in New York City, and which began to be published in 1978. In his 1985, *Comics and Sequential Art,* Eisner described comics as a form of 'sequential art'. However, there have been many problems in further defining the genre, with some theorists emphasizing the combination of text and images, like Eisner himself (see also Carrier 2002, Grove 2010), and others stressing the primacy of sequences of images (McCloud 1993, Groensteen 2012). Thus, Gregg Hayman and Henry John Pratt have defined it as "a sequence of discrete, juxtaposed pictures that comprise a narrative, either in their own right or when combined with text." (Hayman & Pratt, 2005, p. 423) At the end of the 20th century, the digital revolution has contributed to popularize the genre even more thanks to cheaper means of image reproduction. Its expansion has also meant the discovery of different comic traditions and the rise of new forms, such as the graphic novel, all of which have complicated its generic definition.

Usually the terms comics and graphic novels, are used as interchangeably. However, comics can be regarded as an umbrella term covering comic strip, comic book and graphic novel. Comic strips contain a very short narrative and they are composed of blocks of three to five panels. The comic book is lengthy and tells either a whole story or appears in serial form with a continuity plot. In turn, graphic novels have a extended size and deal with a wide range of aspects, and not just fiction (Yıldırım 119). Many successful graphic novels, such Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize – winning novel, *Maus* are a mixture of fiction and non-fiction. Popular graphic novels include horror, adventure, fantasy, science fiction, history and mystery. Recently, graphic novels are being use with therapeutic means[1].

[1] For example:< http://www.graphicmedicine.org/>. In this website there is an interesting collection of articles, links and comic reviews that explore the interaction between the discourse of healthcare and the medium of comics. Additionally, you can find podcasts and suggestions of anyone involved in comics and medicine.

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Once regarded as only a means of amusement and lacking literary quality, comics and graphic novels have increased in popularity and evolved into a respected literary genre. Not only young readers but also adults are being attracted by these novels, and distinguished newspapers such as the *New York Times* or the British journal *The Guardian* are publishing reviews and discussions on the topic.

The *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel has been the selected for this study because it contains many interesting themes to discuss in an English class. The rich intertextuality of the novel is probably one of the reasons for its success, and also one of reasons of its interest in the context of secondary school education. Besides bringing forth the topic of gender relations, the novel functions as an introduction to Anglo-American literature for young readers. They may also prove interesting for enhancing meta-cognitive awareness in the classroom in the last level of Secondary Education. I am aware that this novel might not be suitable for younger readers, but it might contribute to provoke a great deal of debate in the 17-18 age brackets.

2. Overview of the evolution of comics and graphic novels

Graphics have been an important medium of communication since antiquity. Paintings and hieroglyphics have been used for years to communicate thoughts and ideas. The development of printing press guaranteed the cheaper distribution of books as well as a daily and weekly supply of periodicals, many of them accompanied by images. Images were used sparingly due to the high cost of their reproduction. Originally they were woodcut reproductions. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the main processes used for reproduction of illustrations were engraving and etching. At the end of the 18th century, lithography allowed even better illustrations to be reproduced. Hand drawings and paintings, typically with ink or watercolor, were also used. In Victorian England, caricatures became very popular, and the apparition of serial publications was determinant for the gradual spread of reading to the poorer classes[2].

The 'golden age of illustration' started at the turn of the 20th-century, when newspapers and magazines became the dominant media of communication, and improvements in printing technology appeared. After the 1930s, the first forms of comic art appeared daily in newspapers, journals and magazines, many of them associated to marketing and promoting sales. Initially, these strips included three of or four vignettes using text and dialogue. Gradually they became longer stories. In the 1950s, comics and graphic novels began to meet severe social criticism that hampered the growth of comics. The popularity of television, and moving pictures (cinema) shaded the initial spread of comics. Restrictions were imposed as accusations of inappropriate content (sex, violence and so on) began to spread. Characters such as Wonder Woman were viewed as a bad example for girls, judged of promoting an unnatural sense of reality and denying the traditional values of femininity. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the market for comics spread in shopping malls and other ways of distribution, and more recently television adaptations like of *Smallville*, *The Walking Dead* and *The Human Target*, and

[2] for a study of dialogue between text and image in Dickens' *The Pickwick Paper* and its role in the spread of literacy, see López-Varela and Khaski Gaglia 2013

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movies like *Spiderman* and *X-Men* have regenerated the genre (for a detailed account of the history of the genre, see Eisner 1985).

In recent years, the visual image plays a dominant role in communication. Digitalization has reduced the cost of images enormously, and this in turn has encouraged a new generation of graphic novels, such as *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi (2000-2003), an autobiographical account that depicts Satrapi's childhood up to her early adult years in Iran during and after the Islamic revolution. Novels such as *Persepolis* can be used in the classroom to teach students about history, intercultural issues and women rights.

3. The Graphic Novel in the Classroom

The use of graphic novels in the classroom has a short history. For this reason, it is difficult to find supporting evidence that assesses their impact in language classes and as a pedagogical tool. It is clear, however that they might be helpful particularly for visual learners, as Aşkın H. Yıldırım has indicated in his 2013 Turkish case study. He adds that graphic novels can stimulate learners with reading difficulties and those who are reluctant to read Yıldırım (2012).The introduction of visual media devices in the classrooms is making learning easier. Language classrooms in particular can benefit from teaching tools that place a greater emphasis on visual aspects. Traditional texts are more difficult to follow because words are abstract and arbitrary symbols that share no resemblances with reality, whereas images are icons (maps and diagrams are also icons), that is, signs that share some kind of similarity relations with the real Peirce's (1894). This is the main reason for the rising popularity of graphical novels in language classrooms, particularly for young learners.

There are many difficulties for the introduction of graphic novels in the classroom. Some of them have to do with the myth of 'poor quality' in comics, and others with accusations of sexual and violence explicit material. A 2011 study conducted by Robin A. Moeller on gender and graphic novels, showed that graphic novels seem to be more attractive for boys than for girls, and that while girls focus on character relationships, boys are more interested in action and adventure. This would indicate difficulties in attracting female and male learners. Moeller's research also indicated that students valued graphic novels less than they valued traditional novels, and this fact impacted in their motivation towards using them in the classroom.

There are also positive responses to the use of graphic novels in the classroom. James Bucky *Carter, from University of Virginia, has published extensively on the benefits of graphic novels as pedagogic tools. In his introduction* "Carving a Niche: Graphic Novels in the English Language Arts Classroom" to the volume *Building Literacy Connections with Graphic Novels* (2007) edited by Carter in collaboration with the US National Council of Teachers of English, he explores recent publications in the field and provides substantial evidence for the growing enthusiasm of graphic novels and their effects on TESL/TEFL populations. Carter argues that visual literacy has been tied to the fields of graphic design, art, and art history, but that over the last few decades, visual literacy, cultural literacy, and

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critical literacy have become more and more intertwined. He provides the following definition:

> A group of vision competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences. The development of these competencies is fundamental to normal human learning. When developed, they enable a visually literate person to discriminate and interpret the visual actions, objects, and/or symbols, natural or man-made, that are [encountered] in [the] environment. Through the creative use of these competencies, [we are] able to communicate with others. Through the appreciative use of these competencies, [we are] able to comprehend and enjoy the masterworks of visual communications (Building literacy connections with graphic novels: Page by page, panel by panel 11-12)

He goes on to add that language studies should include translations from one sign system to another as an essential part of the curriculum, "acting out" scenes from stories, poems, dramas, novels to films so that students receive information in various media. He concludes that the use of graphic novels can be a good alternative for weaker students to compensate their lack of language skills. Finally, in the same article he describes his attempts to use *Maus* in the classroom and the problems he encountered.

As Carter's study shows, the introduction of graphic novels in language classrooms is still today rather limited, and not exits of difficulties, some of them arising from the fact that the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach has been almost the only one used in language classes since the 1970s. Applied linguists began to doubt the efficacy of situational language teaching, the dominant method in that country at the time. This was partly in response to Noam Chomsky's insights into the nature of language. The linguist and anthropologist Dell Hymes developed the concept of communicative competence, explaining that proficient language users did not only master the structural aspects of language and its rules, but also the pragmatic and appropriate use of language in different social situations. Work by D. A. Wilkins in Britain, Jürgen Habermas in Germany, contributed to CLT in creating new language syllabuses as directed by the Council of Europe in the years that followed the growth of the European Union and the establishment of common educational frameworks for its members. Language is viewed as meaning potential, and the context of situation, following Halliday (1978) systemic-functional approach. Language functions are based on an assessment of the communicative needs of learners specified the end result, or goal, of an instructional program. The term 'communicative' attached itself to programs that used a notional-functional syllabus based on needs assessment, and the language for specific purposes (LSP) movement was launched. Collections of role-playing exercises, games, and other communicative classroom activities were developed. Exercises were designed to exploit the variety of social meanings contained within particular grammatical structures. These methodologies simulated real-life situations in language classrooms. Language was actually spoken and the teaching

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of English was basically centered on the use of lexis and grammar. Consequently, it was even more difficult to find foreign-language classes where literature or literary texts were used by teachers.

Against this background, Cristopher Brumfit and Ronald Carter edited a series of articles in the 1980s that argued in favor of teaching literature in a foreign/second language teaching context. They outline approaches applied to the study of literature. According to the authors, in an EFL context, students should be taught how to actually analyze language before they can respond to a text -language based approach- and only later pay attention to the linguistic stylistic analysis. The argued that an important notion that broadens the stylistic point of view on literature is that of "translinguistic discourse" (Brumfit & Carter, 1986 p.5) which does not view discourse only as a mere language system but also includes it in political, historical and social environments (Brumfit & Carter 2-5), thus influencing the interpretative skills of the reader positively.

Additionally, Sandra McKay indicates that literature can also be considered as an interaction between writer and reader through a text. This perception can influence positively the reader's motivation, encouraging his cooperation (following Paul Grice's maxims) and willingness to interact with a particular text (1986: 192). Moreover, literature can also be seen as a great value to the development of inter-cultural understanding and even stimulate students own creative writing (McKay 192-193). This author goes one step further, claiming that the selection of texts needs special attention, especially in terms of linguistic and cultural dimensions. If texts are not adequate for the learner, they will not contribute to learning at all.

Another interesting point to take into account is the influence of reader-centered theories and modern linguistics, mainly pragmatics and discourse analysis. One of the central arguments linking literature and linguistics is the fact that literature is not a variety of language such as e.g. legal language, the language of newspaper headlines, etc. Rather, it is a special use of language which emphasizes aesthetic and emotional aspects. This reason alone would provide us with a central justification to use literary texts in the classroom. Bumfit & Carter argue that literary texts can be used in foreign language teaching, particularly in procedural activities, making students interacts with them in order to recreate their reality (Bumfit & Carter 15), leading to meta-cognitive and social domains in which the learner becomes aware of what, how and why, and not just learning to reproduce structural linguistic patterns.

In "Comics and Graphic Novels in the Classroom," (2006) Dirk Vanderbeke also outlines the ways in which sequential art can contribute to foreign-language teaching, signaling them a scaffolding-tool for students with reading difficulties who need additional visual aids (369). The author explains that they can be of enormous help for students who struggle with purely verbal communication (visual learners). He points out that another advantage of comics in the EFL/ESL classroom has to do with the way they work as a medium, promoting communication through several dimensions, making text reception easier.

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4. Cognitive Implications of Visual Literacy in relation to Graphic Novels

One of the best known works regarding the particularities of the comic genre is Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art.* In this book, McCloud attempts to draw the characterization of the genre, claiming that "a single unified language deserves a single, unified vocabulary. Without it, comics will continue to limp along as the 'bastard child' of words and pictures" (1993: 47). One of the most difficult aspects that the author identifies has to do with the sense of time, because the form demands both sequence and simultaneity. In the dominant form of sequential graphic art (cinema) discrete images occupy the field of vision one frame at a time, and are processed by the brain into an illusion of continuous motion of development, an effect called persistence of vision. However, perception in comics operates a little differently. In the Western world, the reading process takes place from top left o bottom right. The reading of textual units happens one unit at a time in a linear sequence, whether in a printed page or on the screen. There are, however, four types of reading skills that allow to process information differently. Skimming is used to understand the main idea, scanning to find a particular piece of information, extensive reading is used for pleasure and general understanding, and intensive reading for detailed understanding. In skimming and scanning, the eyes run over the text taking notice only of relevant information. These two are similar to what happens when reading a comic strip, where the eyes remain free to scan the page along multiple lines of sight. Since the reader must understand each component panel itself as a simultaneous visual field, he or she is encouraged, in a sense, to look along more than a single track.

The medium of comics is inherently complex due to the mixed time patterns of simultaneity against succession and sequence. They operate on a model in which successive images are presented in two-dimensional arrays, rather than in a singular stream. Within the interplay between pictures and words there is an under-language that is neither iconic nor symbolic representation (again using Charles S. Peirce's categories of sign), but a unique effect caused by a combination of the two. McCloud explains that the genre brings a particular mental faculty into play, which he terms "visual closure" (69), in which readers complete reading information by means of their world experience (63), in search of filling any communication gap.

McCloud's theory is very close to Peter Brooks' in *Reading for the Plot*: *Design and Intention in Narrative.* Human beings can only make sense of the world, Brooks asserts, by making up stories about it, organizing the chaos of experience into orderly narratives with beginnings, middles, and ends. However, Brooks turns away from formalist narratology in a psychoanalytic attempt to relate the dynamics of time to human desire. More importantly, neuro-scientific evidence on isomorphic filling-in theory would indicate that perception is based on mental Gestalt representation, held in a two dimensional array of neurons typically arranged retinotopically, in which color signals spread in all directions except across borders formed by contour activity. At first sight, surface form and color would not be coded, but would be derived only at a symbolic level of representation, as attributes of objects or proto-objects <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/brain-adapts-in-a-blink/> According to these findings, that would, in a way, support McCloud's theses, (McCloud (2002) the dynamics of text/image present in comic

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strips and graphic novels will theoretically provide additional ways of 'filling-in' and 'closure'. Regarding to this fact, it is helpful to review research on the benefits of using pictures and images to support reading comprehension. Thus, I shall review some of the basic aspects in Schema Theory within the ESL context.

Schema Theory focuses on cognitive processes of understanding. Real world concepts are stored in the working memory (short term memory) in the form of "schemata" or basic cognitive patterns that allow the mind to connect separate concepts within a unifying framework so that information can be easily recalled. In other words, 'schemas' are mental structures that organize categories of information and the relationships among them. Early developments of this idea and the term itself were introduced by Jean Piaget in the early 1930s and continued by Frederic *Bartlett* (1931) (see DiMaggio, 1997). Schematic instructions are aimed to teach learners problem solving and reasoning skills that would help them, for example, to comprehend complex textual patterns by breaking down information and decreasing cognitive load, related to the control of working memory. Instructions that support critical thinking uses higher cognitive questioning techniques that require students to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information to solve problem and make decisions (think) rather than merely to repeat information (memorize). There seems to be empirical support for the importance of the following strategies in reading: comprehension monitoring, cooperative learning, graphic organizers, story structure, questioning (answering and generation), and summarization. These strategies are particularly useful when studying a foreign language, where the cognitive load and the processing effort higher than when using one's native language (Lamanno, 2007).

Various techniques such as symbolic story representations, concept diagrams, and other graphic organizers are all strategies currently used in efforts to increase comprehension of text. Since working memory has the ability to process the visual and auditory information independently, information presented in various sense modalities, as in the case of graphic novels, can help minimize cognitive load. In order for this integration to be successful, the visual information has to be held in visual working memory at the same time as the verbal information is held in verbal working memory, a condition known as contiguity effect (Ginns, 2006). Graphic novels use multiple literacies that take information and channel it through different modes (Schwarz, 2004). They have been found to help students to acquire metacognitive strategies in reading and writing, but they can also be used as valuable resources to improve such critical language skills as listening and speaking, as well as help students develop critical thinking (Frey & Fisher, 2008). On the other hand, failure to form mental pictures discourages the learners and causes frustration (Lamanno, 2007).

Overall, visual learners would benefit the most from the use of graphic novels in the classroom. Their spatial intelligence is motivated with the rich visual content present in graphic novels. Learners with linguistic intelligence that refers to analytical and verbal skills can also be inspired by graphic novels, as the multimodal elements will encourage them to make more complex inferences. Finally, learners who use interpersonal intelligence, sensitive to other people's thoughts, feeling and emotions, and who like interaction with others, may find the

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communication potential in graphic novels interesting for group work activities (Biebrich, 2006).

5. Some Important Aspects in the Analysis of Sequential Art

Scott McCloud has done a great job when discussing of different forms of cartooning and associated forms of meaning. As he states, any sense of ordinary sequence imposed in comics always implies an awareness of other, unconventional relationships, or at least a background impression of the page as a whole. If films trick the eye with the time persistence of vision, comics instead challenge the eye through a spatial extension of vision.

McCloud goes on to explain how the use of text in comics follows narration and mood creation by means of the use of words and characters' thoughts, introduced in single frames placed in sequence. Usually panels have rectangular borders, but they can have any shape, or even no border at all. Normally they contain text, images, drawings, paintings, photographs, speech, thought balloons and text boxes and generally are read in the same sequence as text (e.g, in Western countries left to right, then top to bottom). Likewise, the distance or space that separates one panel to another is called gutter. Structurally speaking, the larger the gutter the weaker is the contiguity effect (Ginns, 2006) and the more decoding effort is required in order to infer the meaning and produce closure. (Figure 1).

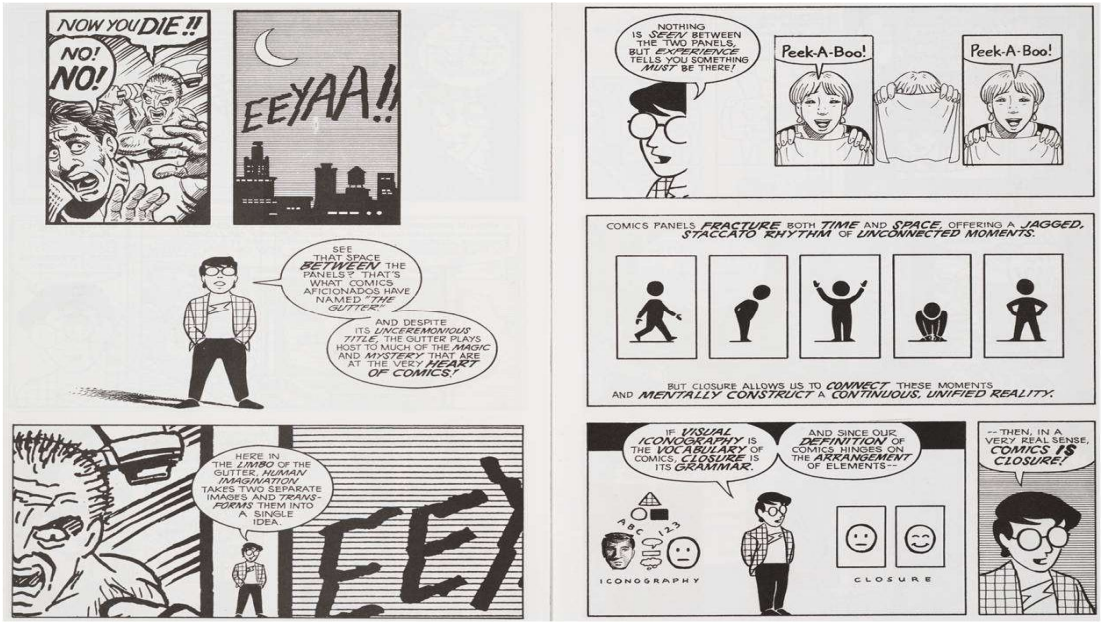

Figure 1: Visual closure <http://cdn.comixology.com>

Transitions from panel to panel can differ depending on the amounts of closure, and can be categorized in six models according to McCloud: moment-to-moment, action-to-action, subject-to-subject, scene-to-scene, aspect-to-aspect and non-sequitur. (Figure 2).

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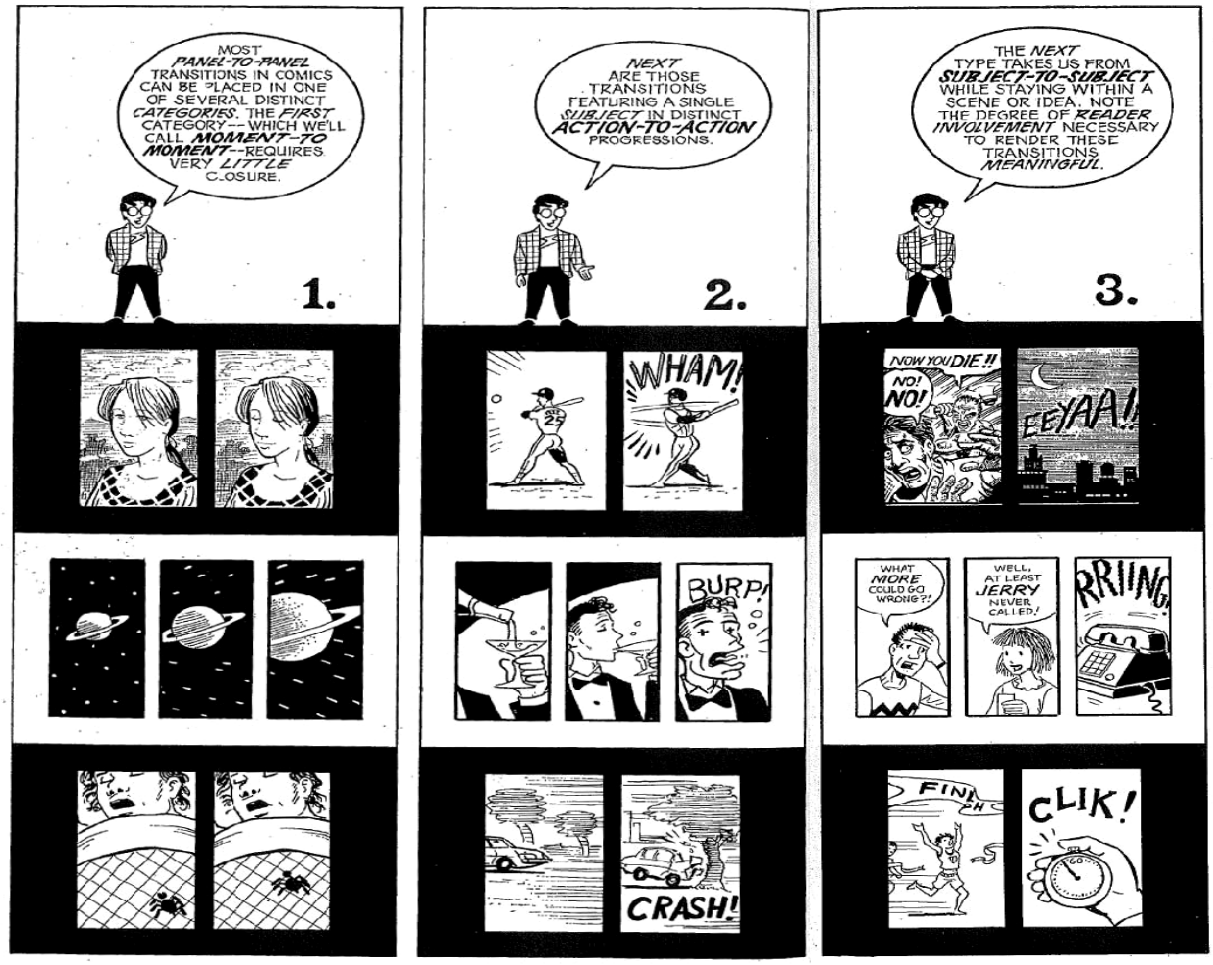

Figure 2: Transitions: <http://thesequentialpress.files.wordpress.com/>

The first one, the moment-to-moment model may illustrate changes in a short period of time, even a few seconds. Dealing with the sense of time, comics-style selects very well the structure or form of the panels because basing oneself on their shapes they might infer a particular meaning. The smaller is the panel, the less the sense of suspense is evoked. The second category, may represent a single subject engaged in a specific action. Additionally, the subject-to-subject categorization may require a higher amount of closure because in this case, the illustration might be a single scene or idea but with two or more separate subjects. Dealing with scene-to-scene type, the transitions are more complex for representing two different images so the mental process to engage the meaning of the reader requires more deductive reasoning to infer the meaning.

Following the order of technical aspects being ranked above, the next one is the aspect-to aspect model, which encourages the reader to make transitions in the scene not necessary through time.

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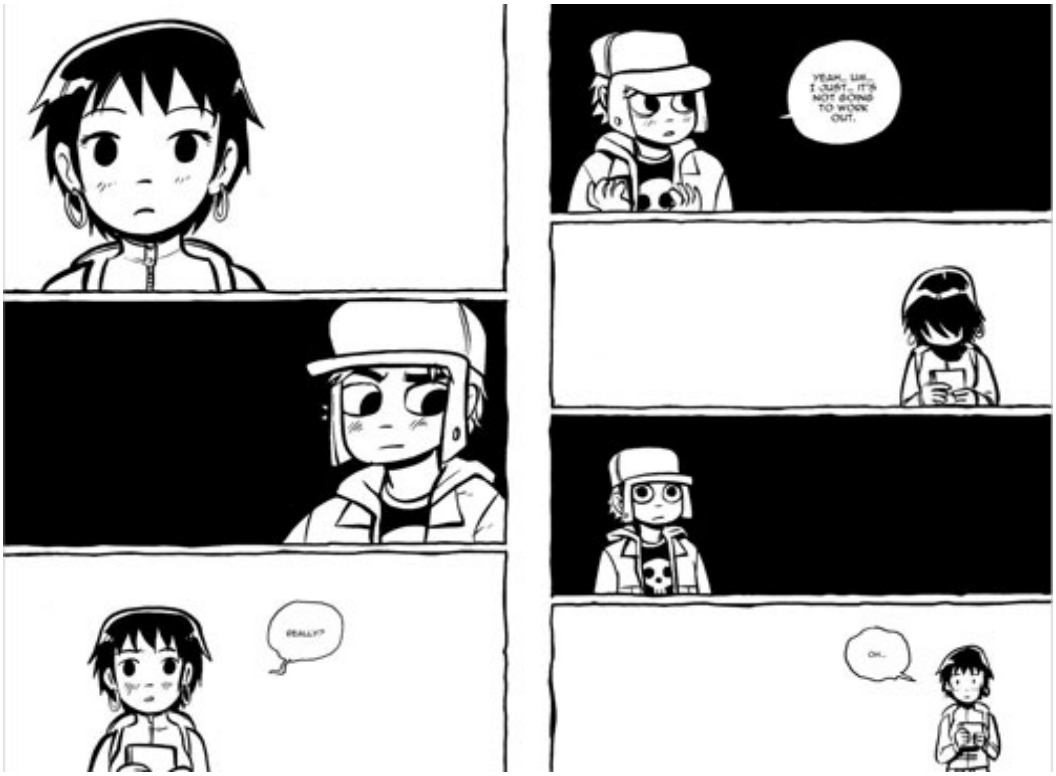

Figure 3: World panel composition/ Time progression-distance
<http://druidcitycomic.tumblr.com>

To finish, the non-sequitur requires a transition with two different images with no apparent relation among them at the beginning (i.e. an image of a dog and then an image of the sun), although one can deduce meaning at the end: in this case, it can be an abstract idea referring to the weekend Sunday or a holiday.

Other elements to consider are, for instance, the images within the panels. Comics are composed of many of them and can be divided in iconic, textual and figurative. The iconic type, makes reference as its own term reveals, to the icon, that is, based on similarity relations with the real (see work by Charles S. Peirce mentioned before). Iconic images are represented through narration boxes, thought bubbles and speech bubbles. Additionally, the variations in shape can help infer mood variations. For instance, a spiky word bubble may refer to nervousness and desperation. The figurative type of images refers to people, their figure gestures, facial expressions and actions. These illustrations can evoke what the characters are feeling or how they are behaving or acting in the story. Finally, coming to the narration, textual images are captured in text boxes that maintain different signs (words are symbols in Peirce's classification). (Figure 3).

Reading is often seen as passive process, something akin to hearing (as distinguished from listening), as though the text author is *telling* and we, as readers, are supposed to sit back and just receive the information. An intertextuality-based course that exploits the use of the visual aspects present in

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graphic novels challenges this analogy as students are asked to re-conceptualize reading as a dialogical process, a conversation—one in which they are active participants.

The idea behind this study is to offer fresh insights on how to promote intertextual connections in reading classrooms using graphic novels. In the Unit presented at the end of this paper, students learn about the topic of identity, in relation to characterization in the novel *Fun Home: A family tragicomic.*

Intertextuality is a potentially rich classroom resource in promoting reading comprehension and textual interpretation. By highlighting the intertextual links students make during text discussions, they become more engaged learners and heighten their awareness of their own learning process. However, the role of the lecturer is also important in ensuring that all students participate actively in the discussions as well as provide a supportive and collaborative classroom environment for the students.

Some implications of this study involve both areas of research and teaching. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, a more comprehensive research involving a larger number of participants and different levels of language proficiency is needed for an in-depth investigation of how intertextual links can promote greater comprehension and textual interpretation in text and imaged based classroom discussions. With intertextual links, there exists multiple interpretive possibilities and both students as well as the teacher will have a broader perspective that goes far beyond the text itself.

6. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic (2006)*

Alison Bechdel is the author of *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006), a graphic novel that has enjoyed popular and critical success. The memoir was published in hardcover by Houghton Mifflin and in paperback by Mariner Books the following year. After publication, *Fun Home* spent two weeks on the New York Times Best Seller list and in the New York Times Sunday Book Review[3] Bechdel is now considered a serious cartoonist and her memoir was nominated for several awards, including the National Book Critics Circle Award and three Eisner Awards (one of which she won). She has edited *Best American Comics* (2011) and published her second memoir, *Are you My Mother?* in 2012.

Fun Home is narrated by Bechdel as sole narrator and main character. It presents the author's childhood and youth in Pennsylvania, and focuses on her complex relationship with her father. The novel avoids the self-centered nature of the conventional autobiography and diary forms, and focuses on themes such as sexual orientation, gender roles, suicide and dysfunctional family life. Since the 1970s, although mainly in the United States, there has been a steady progression of autobiographical memoirs within the comics industry. Today the reader can find easily sub-genres and historical movements within autobiographical comics.

I have selected *Fun Home* for the study because it contains many interesting themes to discuss in an English class. The rich intertextuality of the novel is probably one of the reasons for its success, and also one of reasons of its interest

[3] <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/18/books/review/18wilsey.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0>

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in the context of secondary school education. Besides bringing forth the topic of gender relations, the novel functions as an introduction to Anglo-American literature for young readers. They may also prove interesting for enhancing meta-cognitive awareness in the classroom in the last level of Secondary Education. I am aware that this novel might not be suitable for younger readers, but it might contribute to provoke a great deal of debate in the 17-18 age brackets.

The novel takes the form of a diary, but instead of following the traditional daily structure, it composed of overlapping and intersecting narrative storylines which include double lives, broken plots, stories within stories and texts within texts. Initially, the reader finds it difficult to perceive the design as a whole, and until the final chapter can only guess at interlinks and relationships. As a cartoonist, Bechdel promotes this uncertainty in a visual way, by inter-cutting panels and sequences from different narrative lines and often from distant points in time, future as well as past, so that readers must work hard to construct continuity.

As mentioned, the narrative is non-linear and incidents are told and then re-told as new information on them comes up. In an interview that took place at Rutgers University in 2008, the author has described the novel as a sort of concentric labyrinth where she starts to narrate from the outside and spirals towards the center of the story (Rutgers University Writers House 2008). The memoir does not follow the typical memoir structure, using hybrid forms such the combination of text and image, and many allusions to Greek myths and various works of literature which provide additional clues, sometimes dead ends, to the mystery underlying the narrative of family relations.

Centered in the relation between Bechdel and her father, Bruce, he is introduced as a funeral director and high school English teacher at Beech Creek in Pennsylvania, where the author grew up. The family nicknamed the funeral home 'Fun Home', and this serves as title to the novel.

The novel starts with the presentation of Bruce Bechdel's obsession with restoring their house following traditional Victorian architecture. This obsessive activity is intimately related to the distance he maintains from his family, and connected at the same time with the fact of being a closeted homosexual. He expresses his frustrations in his coldness and occasional outburst of rage. Bechdel's presents her father as a distant and isolated man, occupied in gardening or historical restoration. He rarely showed physical or emotional signs towards his family. In the novel, Bechdel challenges the traditional father role.

Both Bechdel and her father struggle with gender roles. Some of Bechdel's struggles are public, like her refusal to grow her hair long, or her reluctance to wear dresses, skirts, or jewelry, in contrast to her father's preference for creams and colognes. Others struggles are hidden, like her father's affairs with other men. Bechdel cames out to her parents, and her mother makes her aware of her father's homosexual affairs. The reader finds out that while in the military, he has had relationships with youngsters and also some of his high school students. One day Bruce steps in the path of a truck and gets killed. This happens two weeks after his wife requests divorce, when he was only 44. Although evidence is equivocal, Bechdel concludes that her father committed suicide, and she feels guilty that it may have been brought on by her coming out as a lesbian.

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The story also tells of Bechdel own struggle to find her sexual identity, with the novel documenting her diary notes, anecdotes and secret sexual lesbian experiences. Father and daughter share similar obsessive-compulsive behavior patterns, and their opposing artistic inclinations are a source of tension in their relationship. Allison describes herself as "Spartan" while she labels her father as "Athenian" (*Fun Home* 15). She adds that she is "utilitarian" while he is an "aesthete". Such allusions appear repetitively in the novel, reproducing the obsessions described in the form of the novel (*Fun Home*, pp. 76, 80–81, 140–143, 148–149, 153, 157–159, 162, 168–174, 180–181, 183–186, 207, 214–215, 224) "Not only were we inverts, we were inversions of each other. While I was trying to compensate for something unmanly in him, he was attempting to express something feminine through me. It was a war of cross-purposes, and so doomed to perpetual escalation." (*Fun Home* 98).

The memoir functions as a sort of confession of inner guilt. Several times in the book, Allison reflects on whether her decision to tell the world she is a lesbian may have triggered her father's suicide (*Fun Home*, pp. 57–59, 86, 117, 230–232). Thus, in addition to sexual orientation, the memoir touches on the theme of gender identity.

The final underlying theme is death. Unlike most young people, the Bechdel children have a tangible relationship with death because of the family mortuary business.

The literary references used in *Fun Home* are not merely structural or stylistic. They are used to create a certain reading climate by bringing in the emotional content of various other works of fiction. The rich intertextuality of the novel is probably one of the reasons for its success, and also one of reasons of its interest in the context of secondary school education. Besides bringing forth the topic of gender relations, the novel functions as an introduction to Anglo-American literature for young readers.

The choice of the graphic medium for her memoir allows Bechdel to explore primal scenes quite literally: by drawing separate scenes from her childhood, adolescence and young adulthood. Bechdel uses patterns that slow down focal events by exploding them into linked panels. The reader is then forced to close the gaps between those panels by connecting and, in a sense, animating, these sequenced panels (see my description of 'closure' before). "The reader, perhaps initially below the threshold of conscious meaning-making, recognizes patterns, resonances, repetitions which bind distant panels together." (Mitchell n/p)

6.1. Intertextuality in *Fun Home: A family tragicomic*

Intertextuality can become a scaffold, schema-building-blocks in teaching. A learner's comprehension of a particular text is rarely completely supported by existing schema and prior knowledge. For that reason, supplementary texts can be brought into the discussion in order to anticipate students' gaps in prior knowledge. These supplementary texts provide additional knowledge needed to fill in some of the gaps in a learner's foundation of comprehension as it becomes stronger and sturdier with each additional block of schema (see my previous discussion on Schema Theory).

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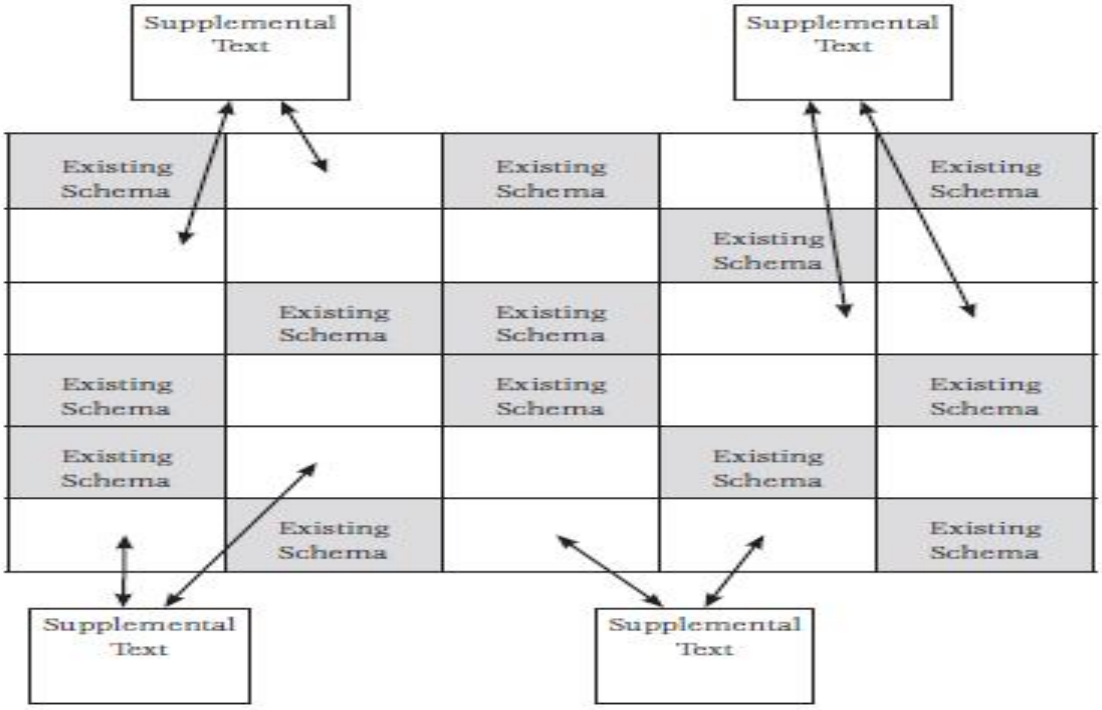

Using intertextuality as an instructional approach in a reading class allows students to practice the process of making connections or relationships between what is being read and what has previously been read on a topic. Intertextuality involves the analogical linking of one's prior knowledge on a topic to the new knowledge or experience. This process of analogical linking can function by means of associations (past texts are linked to the present text), integration (background knowledge applied to present text), and evaluation (personal judgments, values, conclusions, and generalizations in comparing past and present texts are used by the reader).

Intertextuality is particularly present in literary texts, and for this reason they are claimed to widen learners' knowledge on culture, besides providing opportunities for learning the lexical and grammatical structure of language. In making intertextual links, learners would use mental images to decode the words and experiences. Learners also make comparative references between past texts and the current text, integrating the knowledge obtained from all of them texts and using it to predict the outcome and to draw personal conclusions and generalizations based on prior comparison and integration of knowledge.

Intertextual links can be: 1. Literature based: including facts, quotes, or questions about literary work; perceptions of authorial perspective or intent; opinions about the literary work; and links to other literary works. 2. Personal, that is, related to family, friends, self-experience, and identity. 3. Related to the classroom community: including utterances where the members of the class built on each other's comments inviting or creating solidarity among them. 4. Language and culture: these are connections made to native, target, and other languages and

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cultures. 5. Universal: these are connections related to universal qualities and general concepts accepted by everyone.

Like Alison's and Bruce's bodies in *Fun Home,* discourses (in any form, oral written or in hybrid multimodal forms - text + image) are bodies of knowledge, consisting both of content and context. Their content can be seen as all the statements, ideas, theories and concepts. The context can be thought of as how statements are directed and related to other discoursing subjects. The context includes those strategies employed to control the borders of the discourse by deciding what should be included within (or excluded from) it. Intertextual borders are thus a part of context. And so is power.

In *The Order of Things* (1970), Michael Foucault's theorized that power is also about discourse. For Foucault there can be no power relationship without a simultaneously developing knowledge field, a discourse. Similarity there can be no knowledge production which at the same time does not (re)produce certain power relationships. Discourses are not just constituted by subject-actors but by the practical field in which their actions are deployed. In this way, Foucault shifts the focus away from individual actors within the discourse to the structures which the discourse operates within, and to its conditions of existence. This, in turn, includes, the storyline, which represents the main aspects of the actor(s) arguments, and its relation to the larger discourse, the positioning strategies used by the narrator(s) as an actor in relation to the other actors and their theoretical perspectives, and intertextual allusion.

According to Judith Butler, gender is produced through repeated 'performances': bodily acts, gestures, desires, discourses. These 'performances' are at the same time intentional on the personal level and restricted by historically specific regulatory frameworks of what is considered appropriate gendered behavior and experience at the cultural level. "Because there is neither an 'essence' that gender express or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all." (Butler 1990b: 140). For these reasons, the background of the graphic novel, the characters and their motives are among the 'performances' that invite critical inquire and interpretation.

In *Fun Home,* intertextuality functions as a way to show that identities are gendered not through procreation and sexual attributes but through a process of social relations. One of the first examples appears in relation to the Daedalus/Icarus myth, a non-religious version of the Biblical Fall from Grace. The first scene (3) presents Alison's father balancing his ten year old daughter on his foot playing "Icarian games" with Alison tumbling over. However, she adds that "In our particular reenactment of this mythic relationship, it was not me but my father who was to plummet from the sky" (4). A few pages later, she goes on to create further ambiguity in her father's identity by saying that "if my father was Icarus, he was also Daedalus – that skillful artificer, that mad scientist who built the wings for his son and designed the famous labyrinth...and who answered not to the laws of society, but to those of his craft" (7).

Intertextuality also works to complicate the relations between past and present. Bechdel returns to the same myths and the same texts only to look at

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human relations from different vantage points, and to illuminate how myths, and thus identities, change in their perceptions when contemplated in historical evolution. On page 12, for instance, she returns to the "Icarus games" by placing six contiguous panels that refer to the making of Daedalus myth, focusing on the story of King Minos in the Labyrinth and the half-man monster Minotaur, associated to Allison's father. As Adrielle Mitchell indicates,

> Bechdel is able to scaffold a complex interrogation of power and agency onto this myth by allowing the characters of her father and herself to occupy different, and changing positionalities. The nature of graphic narrative abets this process, serving to offer opposed positions in a single panel or panel sequences (enriching the network of Icarian references significantly). (Michell n/p)

These kind of intertextual games not only serve to frame the various themes in the novel within a historical perspective, showing how (sexual) identity is a cultural construct. The novel also establishes multiple connections between Alisson's father and herself and fictional literary figures, bridging the real life events of the memoir with myths and fictional occurrences, in a faction (fact+fiction) narrative that complicates the conception of 'real' identity too.

The graphic novel also offers readers several opportunities to practice inferential skills. One of the most obvious places where students have to infer in a graphic novel is in the gutter, the blank space between panels. Using clues from previous and subsequent panels, readers make inferences about what may have occurred in the blank space. In a way, it is equivalent to reading between the lines in traditional text.

Readers of graphic novels also have to infer meaning from pictures when panels have no text. This means careful analysis of illustrations requiring close reading even though there are no words present. Techniques such as foreshadowing, point of view, irony, flashback can all be learnt in the novel. The teacher can encourage students to analyze the role of pictures in telling a particular story and then examine the way the author uses lines, color, and symbols to express ideas.

Discussion can also center on the advantage(s) of visual imagery compared to traditional text in conveying certain concepts.

to promote 1) language use, 2) reading and writing proficiency, 3) the learning of the literary techniques mentioned above, 4), 5) *Fun Home* as a source of introduction to Anglo-American literature, as well as bringing forth discussion social issues, particularly the question of gender relations, 6) discussion and oral expression in the classroom, 7) teach students how to create a strong sequential narrative. All of these aspects bridge sociological gaps left by other subjects, and contribute to content-based learning and language integrated learning / CLIL.

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6.2. Classroom-based Intervention Proposal

In this paper, *Fun Home* is presented as a class tool in a EFL-context. It has been designed for advanced learners of English as a Foreign Language in a 17-18 age group within the Secondary School context in Spain.

In organizing the inclusion of this graphic novel, the following considerations have been taken into account.

- Why/how is this book appropriate for students?
- How is the book pertinent to the objectives of my school curriculum?
- Teaching objectives/goals (what do I want kids to know and be able to do during/after reading)

It is crucial for teachers to do some research before including comics and graphic novels in their teaching plans. This first stage deals with student's experiences with comics and graphic novels and with the study of the genre in general. The fact of introducing this information in the teaching class encourages teachers to respect students' enjoyment of comics so that students can see graphic novels as "in-an-out teaching materials" available for being experienced out of school rather than "instructional teaching tools". The skeleton frame that has been used in this section includes the following headings as part of characterization and interpretation.

In the first place, concerning linguistics, the study of *Fun Home* should promote a) the reading and writing proficiency, b) the learning of the literary techniques and c) the role of intertextuality in the English classroom and myth in bringing additional historical contexts to compare to the present day. This final objective focuses on the relationship between texts. *Fun Home* gives a lot of opportunities to discuss and develop linguistic skills in the classroom. Furthermore, this graphic novel can be used as a source of introduction to Anglo-American literature which brings forth discussions about social issues, particularly the question of gender relations. All these aspects bridge sociological gaps left by other subjects and contribute to content-based learning and language integrated learning/ CLIL.

Fun Home may encourage debates and discussions in the classroom and in order to carry out a cooperative learning, students should be organized into groups based on how well they can work together and be productive. Before starting any subject, and after considering the importance of the classroom management and organization, the teacher should help students access prior knowledge. The main objective is to activate the student's own background knowledge about the historical period. In this case, the novel depicts the seventies in America, the period and culture of that time. They should be familiarized with the main visual allusions to television programs and other pop cultures into this artwork, often displayed as images on a television in the background of a panel. Also, students should find many cultural allusions contained in the novel. For instance, Bert and Ernie of Sesame Street, Yogi Beer, Batman, the resignation of Richard Nixon and the Smiley Face, among others. Once students are taught the general overview, students chooses one of the following topics for discussion.

In order to teach this graphic novel to the students, the following aspects should be taken into consideration:

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- Find out information about the author's life
- Why is the author appealing?
- Which are the recurrent themes found in her books?
- What messages of importance are conveyed in her books?
- Does the author tend to stick to a particular genre?
- In what way is the title "Fun Home. A Family Tragicomic" related to the content?

Furthermore, the first part of the title is quite ironic because as Alison confesses, every member of the family carried out a life in isolation and individualism. Each one tried to do their very best in succeeding artistically. As she states: "It was a vicious cycle, though. The more gratification we found in our own geniuses, the more isolated we grew." Page: 134. On the other hand, the subtitle's "Tragicomic" also refers to the relationship between father and daughter -similarities and differences- that is built piece by piece through the book and does not is constructed as a full picture until the very last panel. Another aspect to consider is that Alison compares herself and her relatives with The Addams Family whose TV show and film is tragicomic.

6.2.1. Characterization

In order to bring this novel to the classroom, first of all the students should learn about the importance of character construction and characterization. In every study of literary work it is essential to discuss the plot, the construction of characters and the actions with their consequences. Some of the following questions can be taught by discussion into the classroom:

- Are the characters depicted realistic?
- Is there gender bias?
- Is there stereotyping?
- Who influenced the writing of this author?
- What is the inspiration for the novels' plots?
- Discuss Alison's relationship with her family.
- Even though Alison's mother is not a central character, discuss the effects of her actions on the family.
- Define the plot of the story. Is it about death or identity?
- Put yourself in Alison's place and discuss how you would have felt
- Throughout the book Alison's father seems to be unsympathetic and uncaring. Briefly explain the reason for this type of attitude.
- If you wrote a sequel to Fun Home, how would you portray Alison five years later?

After considering the above mentioned questions, students can play a more active role in their learning. In order to do so, they can be assigned a character in the story and after they have created their character poster, they may choose a famous person that is best represented by the character. Afterwards, they can attach a photograph of the famous personality to their character design. Students might be required to have a written piece explaining the reasons why they have picked the person they did and using specific examples to support their choice (at least 5 characteristics outside of physical traits).

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6.2.2. Interpreting

When teaching literature it is always important to consider the multiple interpretations of the book. In order to know the material it is relevant that the students interpret what they have read and for that they have to know how to apply their knowledge. Students are able to learn if they know how to question material and how to support their assertions.

Students, organized into groups, might be provided a number of topics for discussion in each group. Furthermore, they might be given some pictures from the graphic novel to discuss and using worksheets and visual aids they can discuss their similarities and differences about their interpretations. The teacher might ask what pictures were important to the outcome of the story and should show them that each student's point of view were different, but relevant because everyone uses details from the picture to describe what is going on. Therefore, each interpretation is correct if it uses evidence from the picture to support each student's assertion.

By developing questions about the graphic novel, students play a more active role in the reading process. Asking students to compose three types of questions (literal {i.e., what happens}, analytical {i.e., author technique} or global {i.e., connections to self, other books} helps them reflect on the novel more critically because they are asked to create connections Text-to-Self, Text-to-Text and Text-to World.

Guiding questions would be the following:

- For what classes is this book especially appropriate? Why?
- Why teach this novel to the whole class rather than let the students study it in small groups?
- To what particular objectives, literary or psychological or pedagogical, does this book lend itself?
- In what ways will the book be used to meet those objectives?
- What problems of style, tone, or theme or possible grounds for censorship exist in the book?
- (Consider common reasons why books are challenged or banned).
- How do you plan to address those problems?
- Assuming that the objectives are met, how would students be different because of their reading of this book?
- Examples of memory and identity. Is this related with the fact that the novel is written in a form of diary?
    - Why in this graphic novel the most colour used through the novel is the blue? What's the meaning of blue?
    - How does memorial punctuation shape the text? Is it a way to catch the attention of the reader to make him read until the end?
    - Explore with your partner the differences between dialogue in prose and dialogue in graphic novels and tell what you learned in the process
    - Draw two original panels in which you illustrate Scott McCloud's definition of the gutter and closure
    - Take a current news on the topic of gender relations and create a short graphic novel

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In this respect, the students can be asked to create their own scenario and or a similar scene plot explaining how their story would be incorrect if they did not use proper evidence (details that were not found in the picture) and assisting students that are struggling with it. Questions like "how did you come with that" or "what details from the picture support your story" or even "can you see how that by not using details from the previous picture creates a story that is irrelevant to the actual picture" may help the student to be more concise and when dealing with their own creative design.

6.2.3. Intertextuality in the EFL Classroom

This stage aims to help students understand what they read and to activate their "personal and aesthetic interaction" (McKay, p. 198) with the text. They should learn how they can reflect upon a text by expressing their own reactions to the text, especially creative ones.

Type 1: Revision

This type of intertextuality features a close relationship between anterior and posterior texts, wherein the latter takes identity from the former, even as it departs from it. The process occurs under the guiding and explicitly comparative eye of the revising author. The revision may be prompted by external circumstance - censorship, or theatrical, legal, or material exigencies. Alternatively, the revision may simply reflect an author's subsequent wishes. The reviser who is not the author presents another scenario and an entirely different set of problems and considerations. In all cases, however, the transaction is linear, conscious, and specific, marked by evidence of the reviser's preference and intentionality

Type 2: Translation

Translation transfers, 'carries across', a text into a different language. The later text explicitly claims the identity of the original, its chief project an etiological journey to itself, or to a version of itself. Translations are generally grouped according to source language, and judged by standards of 'fidelity', i. e., the closeness of the rendering to the original and the success of the translator in representing the original's literary quality and effects.

But the usual distinctions among translation verbatim, paraphrase, and meta-phrase, deflect attention from the real difficulty inherent in this type of intertextuality - namely the unbridgeable cultural and linguistic spaces between languages and cultures. Translations from Greek or Latin best illustrate this difficulty.

Type 3: Quotation

Quotation literally reproduces the anterior text (whole or part) in a later text.

(For general purposes of description, we may view textual allusions as a types of quotation, in effect, quotation without verbal iteration, quotation as reference not re-enactment.) Quotations may be variously marked for reader recognition, by typographical signals, by a switch in language, for example, or by the actual identification of the original author or text

Type 4: Sources

Source texts provide plot, character, idea, language, or style to later texts. The author's reading and remembering directs the transaction, which may include

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complicated strategies of *imitatio.* The source text in various ways shapes the later text, its content, or its rhetorical style and form. There are at least three subdivisions possible here.

The source coincident. Here the earlier text exists as a whole in dynamic tension with the later one, a part of its identity. The later one may simply respond to an earlier one:

The source proximate. This is the most familiar and frequently studied kind of intertextuality, that of sources and texts. The source functions as the book on- the-desk; the author honors, reshapes, steals, ransacks, and plunders. The dynamics include copying, paraphrase, compression, conflation, expansion, omission, innovation, transference, and contradiction.

The source remote. This last term includes all sources and influences that are not clearly marked, or that do not coincide with the book-on-the-desk model.

The field of possibilities here widens to include all that an author previously knew or read: grammar-school texts, classical stories and authors, the Bible, evident in allusions, turns of phrase, or re-appropriated motifs. The dynamic still consists of reading and remembering, even if the process of recollection and re-articulation occurs in the subconscious mind of the author.

Category II

Category II contains traditions. An original text radiates its presence through numberless intermediaries and indirect routes - through commentaries, adaptations, translations, and reifications in other works. It exists in combination with other original texts, largely as a set of inherited expectations, reflexes, and strategies. The source remote does not lie far off from the traditions of Category II.

Poets constantly appropriated and adapted numerous conventions from classical, medieval, and continental literatures, formal and rhetorical. Senecan conventions in tragedy, the chorus, messenger, dominatrix dialogue, stichomythia, and soliloquy, for example, have all attracted due attention.11 So have Plautine and Terentian conventions in comedy: eavesdropping, disguise, lockouts, stock characters like the witty slave, bragging soldier and so on.

Type 6: Genres

Category II intertextuality also includes the wide range of links implicit and explicit in generic choices. These may appear in individual signifiers (e.g., the play-within-the-play of revenge tragedy, the singing shepherds in pastoral), which function much like conventions, or range to broader and less discrete forms. On the far end of the spectrum often a sophistication and smoothness of adaptation makes difficult positive identification of origins:

Category III

In the age of intertextual *écriture,* this last category consists of what any audience brings to a text rather than what the author put in. The focus moves from texts and traditions to the circulation of cultural discourses. Cesare Segre has called this kind of intertextuality, 'interdiscursivity', which he defines as 'I rapporti che ogni testo, orale e scritto, intrattiene con tutti gli enunciati (o discorsi) registrati nella corrispondente cultura e ordinati ideologicamente, oltre che per registri e livelli',16 'the relationships that each text, oral and written, holds with all other utterances (or discourses) recorded in a corresponding culture and organized

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ideologically, according to registers and levels'. This means in practice whatever the literary critic perceives as revelatory of cultural poetics; he or she, not the author, brings the text to the table.

Type 7: Paralogues

Paralogues are texts that illuminate the intellectual, social, theological, or political meanings in other texts. Unlike texts or even traditions, paralogues move horizontally and analogically in discourses rather than in vertical lineation through the author's mind or intention. Today, critics can adduce any contemporary text in conjunction with another, without bothering at all about verbal echo, or even imprecise lines of filiation. In some ways the discussion of paralogues departs from past critical practices, bringing new freedom; but, of course, new perils threaten: rampant and irresponsible association, facile cultural generalization, and anecdotal, impressionistic historicizing.

The new millennium will doubtless disclose new types of intertextuality to add to this preliminary listing. Some already clamor for attention. *Onomastic intertextuality,* for example, may include the range of allusion, reference, and significance evoked simply by a name, *Printing intertextuality* can signify the accidental inclusion of one text in another during the printing process. Randall

McCloud, for example, notes an advertisement for Peacham's soap transferred accidentally to a George Herbert text (private correspondence). *Reception intertextuality* may reverse the chronological axes entirely so that later texts can influence the reading and printing of earlier ones. Woodcuts to Italian editions of Virgil, especially Book 6, for example, show the enormous influence of Dante's *Commedia* on conception and understanding of the ancient poet. And, finally, we may consider *forgery,* as a kind of ghostly intertextuality, wherein an anterior text pretends to be an original. Forgery occupies a large role in the literary and cultural history of this period. John Wolfe faked Italian imprints to boost the sale of his books; for the same reason, William Jaggard published in *The Passionate Pilgrim* under the name of William Shakespeare, though the collection included some twenty poems by other poets. Lorenzo Valla momentously exposed as a fake the *Donation of Constantine,* which gave temporal power to the Church. Antony Grafton, moreover, reminds us of extensive forgeries in Gratian's *Decretum,* in the *Corpus* of Latin inscriptions, and even in Erasmus's work. In forgery there is a complete assumption of identity that denies ontological difference. The text makes an etiological journey to itself, perhaps, in the case of the forgery of a known text at least, the *terminus ab quo,* of Category I, though many other distinctions are possible.

Intertextuality can be taught in class creating a product from their understanding (Apply/ Interpret). In this way students will learn how to question material and how to support their assertions (Analyze).

6.2.4. Intertextuality in the Graphic Novel

The students should be guided to come up with further relations in the story. It will lead them to further interact with the text and serve as a basis for further reading of the Anglo-American pieces mentioned in *Fun Home.* Note the following examples:

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Can you tell me what illustrations display the obsessive-compulsive disorder in father and daughter? What do you think can be the hidden causes for this illness? Do you know anyone like this?

The excerpts for this stage that could be used in class are for example a scene where the father wants the necklines of her dress to look "more feminine" whereas she prefers the mismatching colors as an attempt to reject the idea of femininity. She tries to control that her daughter looks like "a lady".

Page 8: There is another illustration depicting her fear to thresholds (doorways) and this is related to her identity. There is a parallelism between the protagonist of the story and the author. Alison Bechdel, suffered from OCD as Alison. I believe that this threshold is an attempt to make the line between "queerness" and "straight" "reality" and "fiction", the fact of being homosexual and do not express his nature in society.

Page 12: Along with the already-mentioned, there is another scene that displays the white space or gap between images. I see this gasps as overlaps, lapses, mesh of possibilities. In this case, the elements that constitute Alison's sexuality are not made or cannot be made.

Page 2: Another panel explains the father' s obsessive-compulsive activity to reform the house, taking care of the garden, tending to the family's home

Page 135: wiping away "invisible substance that hung in doorways".

Some of which include counting, replicating specific behavior.

Among other interesting themes, the opposition of father and daughter is one of the most important. This confrontation is the source of tension in their relationship. Can you tell me what images support their dissatisfaction with their given gender roles?

Page 40: "Not only were we inverts, we were inversions of each other. While I was trying to compensate for something unmanly in him, he was attempting to express something feminine through me. It was a war of cross-purposes, and so doomed to perpetual escalation".

Page 39: "I was Spartan to my father's Athenian. Modern to his Victorian. Butch to his nelly. Utilitarian to his aesthete".

- Does fiction become a medium to understand reality? To what extent?

Alison parallels her father's life with F. Scott Fitzgerald's to the point of how long they lived -Fitzgerald lived three days longer than her father-p.85) and she uses this parallelism as if there were some answer or explanation to his death. She feels in some way guilty and responsible for her father's death. (See scenes on the pages 23, 28, 42).

Furthermore, Alison herself explains why she uses the allusions to James and Fitzgerald. 'I employ these allusions to James and Fitzgerald not only as descriptive devices, but because my parents are most real to me in fictional terms' (67).

Narrator Alison herself tells us (6) that Modernist fiction responded to the initial loss of belief in such a world. In this graphic novel, another interesting theme is the loss of belief in objective reality since it becomes fiction, that her way to find veracity and truth in all things.

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The allusive literary references in this graphic novel are not merely stylistic. As Alison herself notes in page 50 "I employ these allusions ... not only as descriptive devices, but because my parents are most real to me in fictional terms. And perhaps my cool aesthetic distance itself does more to convey the Arctic climate of our family than any particular literary comparison".

The title of chapter 5, "Old father, old artificer", is of Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. "Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead". The protagonist twins Joyce and her father. She seeks a voice as an artist, and self-consciously evokes Joyce as an artistic ancestor. She retells in the first page of chapter two, her father's death as "his consummate artifice". (27)

"A Happy Death" is Camus's first novel and Alison parallels her father with the protagonist of the novel, Patrice Mersault. Obviously the tittle is quite ironic, because both her father's death and Patrice's death were anything but happy. On page 28, Alison highlights her own understanding or evolution of thought about her father using the same Camus's words: "we always deceive ourselves twice about the people we love-first to their advantage, then to their disadvantage".

"That old catastrophe" comes from the Wallace Stevens poem "Sunday Morning" and makes reference to Bechdel's life and family. It is Alison's mother favorite poem, who despite of being merely inexistent in the novel, she has lived a dead married for decades and found emptiness in her life.

Of course, "The Ideal Husband" comes from a play by Oscar Wilde "An Idea Husband" from 1895 and obviously this is meant again ironically, because Bruce Bechdel does not behave like an ideal husband. What makes someone gay/queer? Is it what he does or the labels he assigns himself?

As Derik Badman states in his essay, there is a generalized tendency in comics to saturate the design with redundant blocks of text and over-narrate. Here, the author integrates text and images very intelligently avoiding redundancy. On one way, she complements context and image and sometimes adds a thread parallel but working as a supplement to the images, which drives the reader to a more complete understanding of the reading. In relation to the words used, mostly are concise and in some scenes become poetic -literary allusions-. Concerning to the panels of the novel, the author displays many details in the description of the scenes and uses photographic references to give the reading a more realistic sense -maps, journals- and regarding the layouts of panels, are simple and effective, containing over four or five panels on each page.

Another interesting discussion would be the one about the sexual relationships Alison's father had with younger men -most of them teenage boys- and Alison's lack of anger when as an adult she discovers an erotic photograph that someone (her father?) had taken of one of these guys, probably of college age. Those debates can relate to other -not less interesting-like the discussion about the ethics of age differences between gay male sexual partners. If they believe that sexual experiences with older men are treated openly in our days or does exist hypocrisy in society.

In a post-reading stage, students could be asked to respond creatively to the text. The aim of this stage is to drive their interaction with the text further through an own creative output -another aesthetic interaction-and make sure that they

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have understood the text and the topic. These final recommendations are designed to suggest a useful method to shape the students' critical awareness towards -literary- texts and once again, to relate the text to their own world -another form of interaction among students and the text-; McKay, p. 198-. In that way, students also have the opportunity to practice writing skills in English.

These are several examples of how to continue teaching this graphic novel after the reading of the novel. Some of them could look like:

Did Alison's father commit suicide or was an accident? In case of suicide, do you think he had reasons -enough- for doing that? Is he a victim of his society? These can either be elaborated orally in class or as a written activity; however I believe a group discussion of the topics in class as absolutely necessary. The teacher can ask the students to write a descriptive essay about any theme of your daily lives using some of the literary references mentioned in the novel.

After having read this graphic novel, what do you think that the author chose to tell the story in the form of a comic? Do you believe that the study of this graphic novel without images would be the same? Why not?

Here the class could create a debate wondering what the main role of images is in this graphic novel. From my point of view, Alison Bechdel throughout an autobiographical diary tries to look her life from a psychoanalytic perspective. Those experiences are remembered like flashbacks without order in her mind and take form of dreams. That is why images are so important in Fun Home, because images are as imagery as they are language.

A Role- play can be used as well, since it is a very useful way the students practice their oral and rhetorical skills; this can be practised by providing them with a model and preparatory exercises (e.g. vocabulary to give opinions, to form good arguments, etc.). There are several lawyers per class; the rest of the class is the jury and has to decide with lawyer was the most convincing one. Students are asked to reflect upon the knowledge they have learned, employ the ideas and even develop them further.

To finish, they can write a letter to an imagined editor of a literary journal about Fun Home. Students can tell him/her why you liked/not like Fun Home, what the main topics in the book are and how they are described and why you would recommend it to the readers (or if you did not like it: would you not recommend it?)

7. Conclusion

The objective of the present paper was to show how a fictional text in the form of sequential art- Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A tragicomic Family* can be employed in order to teach literature to EFL. The suggestions were designed along the lines of Sandra McKay's teaching recommendations based upon the notion of aesthetic reading. It aims to get the reader to interact with a text; and students should bring their own experience to the text and might feel inspired and motivated to seek their own aesthetic expressions.

Graphic novels often (not always) span a variety of genres by borrowing comics-style format and sequential art, as many others forms of text and discourse, contains its own specific features. Among the ones already described in the text, in

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my opinion the following are the most obvious and noticeable: their motivational factor and their inspirational role for the student's creativity. On my view, they suggest alternative learning types and are therefore a kind of text that must be approached by taking into account the additional aesthetic dimension of graphical images. Nowadays, pictures and illustrations support reading comprehension and this visual aspect is of great importance for our learners since it might be more inspiring for them than e.g. a narrative text.

Taking into consideration the evident restrictions of the paper, I focused on specific aspects of *Fun Home.* The variety in the suggestions reflected under a pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stage. These are hypothetical ideas of how the text can be dealt with by using some extracts from the book for teaching the graphic novel. Theoretically, the text should be dealt with as a whole, as students could then better grasp the full dimension of the text; however, real teaching contexts in secondary education do not help to put these ideas into practice.

As a conclusion, many researchers support that there are many ways for teachers of English as a foreign-language to include in their ESL classrooms graphic novels and comics in an inspiring and motivational way. However, I agree with Sandra McKay that the goal should not be to promote a frenetic reading of literature but that our students should be encourage to experience literature through an aesthetic understanding. This is the only way to promote their critical awareness towards texts and enjoy literature.

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Bioprofile of the author:

Tania Muñoz Sánchez, studied a BA in English Studies from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid UCM (2012) and a MA in the English Teaching as a Foreign Language URJC (2014). Furthermore, Tania has been awarded two Scholarships. She has spent one year in Brussels as a Erasmus student (2011) and she is currently working as a Spanish Assistant in the Hayfield Secondary School, England (2015). Additionally, Tania has participated as a speaker in a national conference such as the International Conference on Electronic Literature and Visual Art at the Institute Franklin (2012). Her interests focus on literature and its adaptations to digital formats.

Contact: <munoztania946@gmail.com> / <thanya-2787@hotmail.com>

Tania Muñoz Sánchez estudió la licenciatura de Filologia Inglesa en la Universidad de Madrid en 2012 y el Máster de Profesorado de Lengua Inglesa en 2014. Además, a Tania se le han concedido dos becas. Fue estudiante Erasmus en la Universidad de Bruselas en 2011 y está actualmente trabajando como Auxiliar de español en el colegio de secundaria Hayfield School de Inglaterra (2015). Además Tania ha participado en una conferencia en el Congreso de Literatura Electronica y Arte Visual en el Instituto Franklin en 2012. Sus intereses se centran en la literatura y sus adaptaciones a formatos digitales.

Contacto: <munoztania946@gmail.com/> <thanya-2787@hotmail.com>