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# *Interculturalidad y lenguaje en The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County de Mark Twain*

## *Interculturality and language in The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County, by Mark Twain*

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**Resumen:** La investigación tiene como objetivo el análisis del lenguaje de los personajes literarios a partir de marcadores culturales para develar la interculturalidad en el cuento *The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County* de Mark Twain. En correspondencia con este propósito se concluye que los marcadores establecidos constituyen una herramienta que posibilita el análisis del cuento seleccionado desde una perspectiva intercultural.

**Palabras clave:** Interculturalidad; Lenguaje; Personajes literarios; Mark Twain

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**Abstract:** This research has as objective the analysis of the language of the literary characters taking into account the cultural aspects, to reveal intercultural relationships in the short story *The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County* by Mark Twain. Correspondingly, we conclude that the established markers constitute a tool to facilitate the analysis of the selected story from an intercultural perspective.

**Keywords:** Interculturality; Language; Literary characters; Mark Twain

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### Introduction

Language is the fundamental vehicle through which social life is conducted. When used in communication contexts, it is associated with culture in varied and complex ways. Likewise, the members of a community or group not only express their daily experiences through language, they also reflect their traditions and their customs, as well as the events that take place in their daily life, giving them meaning through the means they select to communicate with each other, for example, talking face to face.

Thus, the way in which people use language, oral or written, creates meanings that are understandable to the group to which they belong, that is, through the pronunciation of the speakers, their accent, the style of the conversation, the gestures and physiognomic expressions, individuals transmit spiritual and material values, feelings, ways of thinking and acting. For these reasons, through all its verbal and non-verbal aspects, the language expresses the cultural reality.

In this sense, literature, by recreating through its plots the expression and ways of acting of the characters that lead them, makes language viable as a way of transmitting their ideas, thoughts, interests and convictions. In the same way, it constitutes the expression of the singularities of the author and his style.

The language of the literary characters, although eloquent, is not always the reflection of the similarities that the reader could seek, but often represents their differences, in correspondence with the plot, time, place, customs and traditions.

At present, interculturality represents a phenomenon of increasing importance in the world. In this regard, some authors refer to intercultural contact as acceptance in a tolerant and cooperative way in relation to the form adopted or have certain socio-cultural contexts (Silva, 2002). Similarly, Garbey and O'Farril (2016), recognize the need to learn to understand the language in order to avoid misunderstandings since one cannot judge a speaker completely if you do not understand their cultural references, their world view and its linguistic forms.

For such reasons it is necessary to promote an intercultural knowledge referring to the social environment of the different linguistic communities that allows being prepared to understand people and accept their differences.

The reflection of the differences that can be noticed in the literary characters is revealing knowledge related to the social and linguistic field of these, which should be oriented towards the understanding and acceptance of their different cultures.

The previously founded leads to find in literature the search for common elements of identification with their plots, characters and their forms of expression. Thus, reading literary texts from other nations is an opportunity to enter an unknown world, recognize and understand the same feelings in other people, and get closer to the other culture, its reality, its people, customs and forms of behavior. In this sense, the analysis of the literature can be projected according to the intercultural knowledge of a community in a certain socio-historical period.

The theoretical references that support the study of interculturality in literature have been extensive in recent years. At international level, researchers like Carrasco (2005) stand out; Leibrandt (2006); Falcón (2014); Valenzuela (2015) too. These investigations undoubtedly represent an effort to carry forward studies on interculturality in literature. However, these authors do not address the way to uncover interculturality in literary texts by analyzing the language of the characters in the work of English-speaking authors. Hence, the need to deepen this aspect is noted.

The aforementioned, in addition to the studies conducted on the North American authors, and the experience of these authors, allowed detecting the following insufficiencies:

- Limited analysis of the language of literary characters as a way to contribute to the study of interculturality in the work of English-speaking authors.
- Poor projection of the study of North American literature based on the intercultural knowledge of a region in a given socio-historical period.

Therefore, this research paper is based in a scientific problem related to the insufficient study of the language of the literary characters of English-speaking authors from an intercultural perspective.

The objective of the research consists in the analysis of the language of the literary characters from cultural markers to reveal interculturality in the story *The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County* by Mark Twain.

The research tributes to the project for the management of language teaching in function of the local development "Idiovisión", of the Department of Foreign Languages of the University of Guantánamo, which is inserted in the Local Development Program in Cuba attached to the Center of Local Development of the City of Havana, hence its social need.

## **Development**

From an intercultural perspective, it is necessary to start from the definition of the concept of language in order to carry out a study about the language of the literary characters in nineteenth-century American literature and the story *The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*, by Mark Twain.

This term means: 1 / Use of the word to express oneself. 2 / Any means to express themselves. Alvero (1986). For other authors, language refers to words, their pronunciation, their syntactic composition, in order to be understood by a community. Language -they add- denotes a given system for the communication of ideas or feelings through the use of signs, gestures or marks (Wolfreys, Robbins, and Womack, 2006).

The words that people -or the characters in the case of literature- exchange, relate daily practices, enunciate facts, opinions or events that are affordable because they refer to a group of knowledge about the universe that other subjects share. The words also reflect the attitudes and beliefs of their authors, as well as their points of view, so in both cases, the language expresses its cultural and therefore intercultural reality.

To carry out the integrative analysis of the language of literary characters from the intercultural point of view, it is necessary to deepen the relationship of language with other sciences such as Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology, Ethnology and Stylistics. The authors of this research assume this approach because the dialectical relationships that are revealed between these sciences and their essentialities are determining guidelines for the continuity of the study being carried out, whose particularity is given in the analysis of the language of the characters in the story that it is proposed as a sample to unveil interculturality.

Consequently, to complement the study of the language of the literary characters in the story *The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*, by Mark Twain, from an intercultural perspective, it is necessary to analyze the concept of culture.

According to Alvero (1986, p.215), culture is the set of spiritual and material values created by humanity in the course of history. According to other consulted sources, it is the set of knowledge, ideas, traditions and customs that characterize a town, a social class, a time, etc. (Dictionary on the use of Spanish for America and Spain, 2015).

From the above it is necessary to deepen interculturality and its conceptual approaches. The concept of interculturality is based on the models of mass communication in the United States in the decade of the 50's of the last century, in addition to the theories of intercultural communication, developed by researchers such as Miquel Rodrigo Alsina, at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, in Spain (Dictionary of key terms of ELE, 2016).

On the other hand, some researchers refer that interculturality is a type of relationship that is established between cultures, and that advocates dialogue and the encounter between them based on the mutual recognition of their respective values and ways of life (Dictionary of key terms of Spanish as a Second Language, 2015). According to these authors, the concept also includes the relationships established between people of different social groups within the borders of the same community.

Other authors propose that interculturality refers to the communicative interaction that occurs between two or more human groups of different cultures. If one or more of the groups in mutual interaction are going to be called ethnic groups, societies, cultures or communities, it is rather a matter of preferences of social science schools, and in no case are they epistemological differences (Dictionary of key terms of Spanish as a Second Language, 2016).

However, according to Carrasco (2005), the term and the concepts of interculturality that have been introduced in books, congresses and research allow us to define certain types of existence and sociocultural behavior, as well as a certain type of discourse that has reached

in the literary expression its greater development, complexity and aesthetic level; Within these discourses, it is the literary one that has achieved greater development. In this sense, the author defines literary interculturality as the relationship between ethnic groups, cultures, languages and dialects produced in texts recognized as literary.

According to Falcón (2014), the intercultural adjective also refers to the dialogue produced between the different linguistic manifestations reflected in the literary work, which makes possible to know the culture of origin, as well as the language of the society in which the authors live. The author sustains that intercultural works often expose representative characters of the history of a country, a language or a generation, which have undergone a profound cultural and linguistic change.

On the other hand, Valenzuela (2015) refers that the theory of intercultural literature is considered a dynamic and historical concept of culture, which allows us to assume interculturality as a concrete fact that is revealed through literary texts. In the same way, this author maintains that the text presents an intercultural character since the textual subject is related to the other on an integral level. This research assumes the criteria provided by the author considered the most relevant for the study made, because in this regard, the subject under investigation provides ample opportunities to share the elements pointed, carriers of cultural and spiritual enrichment for the enjoyment of the reader, taking into account the literature and language of his characters.

The epistemic analysis developed allowed the authors of this article to establish markers that could lead with a greater precision the analysis of the language of the literary characters from the intercultural perspective, since this analysis is complex because it is related to socio-historical and cultural events, as well as with the different forms of expression of these characters.

In attention to the elements that contribute the time, the region and the forms of expression of the literary characters, the following are established and defined as cultural markers:

**Socio-historical-intercultural:** signs that identify historical events or social phenomena, traditions and customs recreated in the literary work through the forms of expression and performance of the characters, in correspondence with cultural differences between the inhabitants of a given region.

The analysis is proposed with the use of these markers from the socio-historical-intercultural point of view, whose integration helps the observation, understanding, explanation and interpretation of the events, traditions and customs that are related in the story, understood as:

**Event:** casual event marked by a time or representative date for the region and its inhabitants.

**Tradition:** social practice that is transmitted from generation to generation.

**Custom:** social and individual act.

**Linguistic:** signs that identify the intention and purpose of language through the forms of expression of the characters, their dialectal variants, transmission of thoughts, feelings, desires, needs and interests, inclinations and character traits.

The established cultural markers are pertinent insofar as they possess integrative value by being in correspondence with interrelated elements, which facilitate the understanding and interpretation of the language of the literary characters in a given period of time. These markers are applicable to favor an analysis of the language of the literary characters of the selected story from an intercultural perspective.

For this, the following parliaments mark events, customs and traditions that identify the characters through the plot of the story, which carry philosophical and intercultural content as follows:

Socio-historical-intercultural markers

Events

- "... in the winter of '49 -or maybe it was the spring of '50 -"

- I remember the big flume was not finished when I first came to the camp;

These parliaments of the character Wheeler locate the reader in time and space, which allows him to recognize the socio-historical period in which the events of the story are framed.

#### Traditions

- ... Leonidas W. Smiley is a myth;
- ... young minister of the Gospel, who was a resident of Angel's Camp.
- ... or if there was a camp meeting, I would be there reg'lar ...
- -thank the Lord for his inf'nit mercy-
- I found Simon Wheeler dozing comfortably ...
- ... and had an expression of winning gentleness and simplicity ...

These parliaments give an account of the myths existing in that society, as well as the typical traditions of the people of Angel's Camp in the nineteenth century, as they show the existence of situations such as constant bets, the presence and influence of the church, religious beliefs, as well as good manners and formal education, even in people of lower cultural level, as in the case of the Wheeler character.

#### Custom

- I found Simon Wheeler dozing comfortably ...
- ... and had an expression of winning gentleness and simplicity ...
- Simon Wheeler backed me into a corner ...
- ... and blockaded me there with his chair,

The previously mentioned parliaments are representative of interculturality in the language of the characters in this story. They are a reflection of the history, society and culture of the period in which the work is written. The meeting of the reader, through this analysis, allows



accepting the identity of the writer in his relationship with the expectations of the reader, who can assimilate with respect the spatial-temporal realities of the recreated time.

The analysis also allows empathy towards the plot, its arguments and intercultural diversity, aspects that enrich the knowledge about Mark Twain and his work, and the philosophical and cultural values that are found in it, by having man in the center of his attention with all its virtues and defects.

#### Linguistic markers

- Thish-yer Smiley had a mare ...
- ... it might be a canary, maybe, but it an't -it's only just a frog ...
- Finally I've ketched a frog ...
- "H'm-so 'tis. Well, what's he good for? "
- "Well, I do not see any p'int about that frog that's any better'n any other frog."
- "Maybe you understand frogs, and maybe you do not understand 'em;
- Anyways, I've got my opinion and I'll risk forty dollars that I can outjump any frog in Calaveras county. "

These elements make people know that he is an uneducated person. This expression also reflects that it is fun, because the absurdity of such a bet leaves the reader laughing out loud, despite being a morbid joke.

By taking into consideration the special colloquial record in which he speaks, it is easy to guess that he is an informal but hospitable native of the Mississippi River Valley. Their expressions allow the respectful perception of their spatial-temporal realities and their cultural origin.

These speeches said by the character Wheeler are examples of the individual style of the author who realize that the character is not a well-educated person, but is humble at the same time, which allows accepting his identity and understanding the linguistic and

intercultural diversity. For example, the use of *is not* denotes a linguistic incorrectness to express denial.

In Smiley's parliaments, aspects of errors in writing and in grammar are observed, which account for the actual form used by the speakers of the place during that time. Mark Twain to have experiences of these linguistic manifestations as pate of the inhabitants of the place could reflect such truths. They, by being the reflection of history, society and culture of the time, allow the horizontal dialogue between writer-reader, and recognize the linguistic manifestations of the time with empathy and respect.

As a result, the reader, by expanding his culture, achieves enjoyment by observing and interpreting literary expressions, the formal language of the narrator Mark Twain, and the colloquial language of the main characters.

These linguistic manifestations enrich the philosophical and cultural content of the work by contributing to the understanding of the forms of expression and action of the inhabitants of the Mississippi River Valley in the nineteenth century.

Similarly, the language used by the author for the foreign character allows unveiling intercultural elements, as they show the presence of foreigners in the town where the plot takes place, which accounts for the arrival of foreigners in the territory.

As a result, the analysis of the language of the literary characters, with the use of markers, carries a spiritual enrichment through the knowledge of the culture of origin and the language of the society in which Mark Twain lived.

## **Conclusions**

The foundation of theoretical referents and the interpretative analysis of the language of the literary characters of nineteenth-century literature from an intercultural perspective reveal limitations in the use of markers that allow a better analysis of the language of literary characters.

The established cultural markers are tools that enable the analysis of the language of the literary characters in the story *The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*, by Mark Twain, from an intercultural perspective.

An intercultural and integrative analysis is achieved as an expression of the dialectical relationship between these markers, which elements locate the reader and familiarize him with the plot, the time, events, traditions, customs and linguistic manifestations of the period represented.

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