

SFBB MULTIPLIER EVENT
UNIVERSITY OF ANGERS
JULY 10-12, 2023

**"WHAT (STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS SAY)
SHORT FORMS AND THEIR USES ARE"**
MONDAY, JULY 10, 11:30-12:30

THE SANTIAGO TEAM


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- **IOI: Definitions & Surveys**

- **Definitions:** if time left, comment **Booklet** ([booklet.pdf](#)): 5 approaches and their respective *pros/cons* (*relativist, generic [genre], paratextual, functionalist, and contrastive-formalist*)

- **"What (Students and Educators Say) Short Forms and Their Uses Are": second part of the IO: Surveys' results (specifically, shared with you all my presentation to a much smaller audience: Giessen TN event)**
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- HISTORY:

- Leuven Meeting 8-9 November 2021: presentation of a draft of students and educators surveys during the meeting
 - Nov. 2021-Feb 2022: 2nd rough draft revised and completed by some colleagues from the field of Sociolinguistics at the USC
 - Feb. 2022: surveys distributed through Google.docs among Faculty and Students at the Faculty of Philology (USC) and High School IES Rosalía de Castro (Santiago de Compostela) Data collected by Sergio López Sande worked as administrator and collected the data + Surveys Report drafted by Sara González Bernárdez
 - Giessen Meeting (March 28-April 1, 2022) and Santiago Multiplier Event (July 4-5 July 2022): reports on IOI by Jorge Sacido Romero and Sara González Bernárdez, respectively
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- **Relevant aspects of the report on Surveys**

Limited scope (just 1 Faculty and 1 Secondary School and low participation)

- **Population:**

- **Surveys for students:**

- Faculty of Philology (USC): 119 out of 1585 (undergraduate, graduate and Erasmus): **7,5%**
- IES Rosalía de Castro: 49 out of 390 (three last years of secondary school): **12,56%**

- **Surveys for educators:**

- Faculty of Philology (USC): 49 out of 191: **24,1%**
- IES Rosalía de Castro: 14 out of 116: **11,76%**

- **Gender:** vast majority female



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- Special attention to **similarities** and **contrasts** between/among the different sectors or interest groups (**in green type; some in red**)

- **Perception of brevity:** varies quite significantly from educators to students, and also amongst educators themselves
- **EDUCATORS**
 - written texts:

 - USC: up to 10 minutes to read: 43.5% / **less than 5 minutes to read: 34.8%**
 - IES Rosalía de Castro (high school): up to 10 minutes to read: 28.6% / **less than 5 minutes to read: 64.3%** Contrast Univ./Secondary school: a difference inherent to the educational level they teach in: a need to cover more content in a shorter amount of classroom time, or perhaps a perceived shorter attention span in their students
 - audio-visual content:
 - USC: up to 10 minutes to watch: 30,4% / **less than 5 minutes to watch: 47.8%**
 - IES Rosalía de Castro (high school): up to 10 minutes to watch: 14.3% / **less than minutes to watch: 71.4%** Contrast Univ./Secondary school: same as with *written texts*

• STUDENTS

• written texts:

- USC: up to 10 minutes to read: 34.5% / read at one sitting: 19.3% / less than 5 minutes to read: 17.6% / up to 30 minutes to read: 10.1%
 - IES Rosalía de Castro (high school): up to 10 minutes to read: 36.7% / less than 5 minutes to read: 30.6% / up to 30 minutes to read: 12.2% / read at one sitting: 8.2%
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Conclusion: distribution of percentages of reading time-spans *other than “up to 10 minutes”* in University is more evened out than in the case of secondary school students

Contrasts: (1) higher percentage of “less than 5 mins.” in secondary school students (30.6%) is in tune with their teachers' perception

(2) 12.2 % of “up to 30 mins.” in secondary school students is relevant due to the smaller number of responses (49 vs. 119 at USC) => greater difference in reading level and speed among secondary school students themselves



• STUDENTS

• audio-visual content:

- USC: between 5 and 10 minutes: 36.1% / **between 10 and 15 minutes: 18.5%**
- IES Rosalía de Castro (high school): between 5 and 10 minutes: 30.6% / **between 10 and 15 minutes: 32.7%**

Conclusions: (1) **similarity** between university and secondary school students in the option “**between 5 and 10 mins.**” (36.1% and 30.6%) is not surprising given that the consumption of audio-visual content has a fixed length, whereas reading speed can vary

(2) **contrast** in the option “**between 10 and 15 mins.**” (18.5% and 32.7%) may be due to younger students being more accustomed to consuming more audio-visual content, or to attention spans with focus becoming shorter as they grow older



- **Use or perception of use of short forms:** Both educators and students *were asked to tick every option they had seen employed, or employed themselves, in a teaching context, out of a limited list of items* that was made as inclusive as possible
- forms seen employed or employed themselves:
 - most respondents (educators and students) ticked every or almost every option (e.g., USC students: 77.3% and IES Rosalía de Castro: 65.3%)
 - in “Other”, the following were suggested: “surveys and games” (USC prof.), “digital versions of MSs or parchments” (USC prof.), “animations, simulations and self-correcting exercises” (IES R. de C. teacher), “Kahoot” (IES R. de C. student: time limit & questions to be answered quickly)



- perceived frequency of use:

- **Educators:** USC and IES Rosalía de Castro: similar

- “very often”: 43.5% (USC) and 42.9% (IES R. de C.)

- “sometimes”: 30.4% (USC) and 28.6 % (IES R. de C.)

- **Students:** USC and IES Rosalía de Castro’s : **less perceived frequency than educators**

- “sometimes”: 45.5% (USC) and 51% (IES R. de C.)

- “often”: 29.4% (USC vs. 43.5% educators) and 24.5% (IES R. de C. vs. 51% teachers)

- “rarely”: 15.1% (USC vs. 0% educators) and 20.4% (IES R. de Castro vs. 0% teachers)

- online learning, forced by the pandemic, has increased frequency of use:
 - **Educators:** as much now as before the pandemic (USC: 78.3%; IES R. de C.: 50% [more now: 50%])
 - **Students:** more now than before the pandemic
- **Conclusion:** the idea educators (esp. at University) have of their use of short materials may be inaccurate, or at least considered so by their students, *though both collectives ticked similar options in the section “forms seen employed or employed themselves”*



• EDUCATORS' PERCEPTION

- perception of usefulness and applicability of short forms: 69.5% of USC and 71.4% of IES R. de C. “strongly agree” that short forms are effective teaching tools
- perception of usefulness and applicability compared to longer forms: more divided:
 - USC: 43.5% “neither agree nor disagree”; 30.4% “strongly agree”
 - IES Rosalía de Castro: 42.9% “strongly agree”; other options more evenly distributed => perhaps due to the lower age of their students and their attention spans being perceived as shorter in general (consistent with the “perception of brevity” above)

• if short forms had been considered (more) effective/productive, tick the reason(s) why out of a limited set of options and/or add “Other”:

- most respondents ticked almost every option: students would be more engaged and feel less intimidated by shorter forms
- USC (73.9%) and IES R. de C. (71.4%): students are more familiar with these short forms in their usual communicative contexts, which is helpful for them in the classroom
- “Other” options:
 - short forms are useful because it is possible to cover their analysis in one class session
 - that students pay more/better attention if the form is brief
 - short forms are not necessarily more effective, but rather complementary to longer forms and other materials



- which short forms in a list they consider most productive for teaching:
most respondents ticked (almost) every option
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- Conclusion: educators' responses match those of the students, **but**, while willing to attribute some advantages to short forms,
 - generally hesitant to place them above or as more useful than longer forms (=> a reluctance to leave longer forms behind)
 - belief that relying overmuch on short forms can in fact be detrimental to students' learning

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION

perception of usefulness and applicability of short forms: overwhelmingly positive: “useful” or “very useful”, and “strongly agree” that the use of these forms makes their learning experience more engaging

- if short forms had been considered (more) effective/productive, tick the reason(s) why out of a limited set of options and/or add “Other”: startlingly similar between both educational levels (Univ. & Sec. School)

USC (57.1%) and IES R. de C. (53.5%): feel generally more attracted to these forms, which engages them in learning;

USC (30.5%) and IES R. de C. (34.9%): their length will allow them to consume these forms in their entirety

EDUCATORS' perception (“students are more familiar with these short forms”) is not really a priority among STUDENTS themselves (meagre 5.7% USC and 7% R. de C.)

- perception of usefulness and applicability compared to longer forms:
contrast with EDUCATORS, whose replies were more divided, STUDENTS considered short forms are more effective (50/119 USC students and 20/49 IES R. de C. students “agreed” or “strongly agreed”)
 - Possible reasons:
 - liable to be more interested in them
 - can be consumed in less time (working time in each subject is a pressing issue for them in their learning experience)

Conclusions:

1) Perception of brevity:

- variable among interest groups
 - shorter length in secondary school interest groups
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2) Use or perception of use:

- every suggested format was chosen, other formats added
- students perceived that short forms were less frequently used, but more so than before the pandemic

3) Perception of usefulness and applicability:

- very positive in all interest groups, yet overwhelmingly positive in students
- compared to longer forms: more divided (educators more hesitant)
- students are not really conscious of educators' conviction that they are more familiar with short forms



- **Structure and Contents of Booklet (deliverable):** [booklet.pdf](#)

- Title: *What Are Short Forms? Definitions & Examples*

- “Introduction”: the following cannot be obviated:

- 1) short forms are **too complex and disparate cultural products** to lend themselves to onefold definitions as the notion of “shortness” is unstable and context-bound

- 2) the 21st-century reinforced imperatives of **immediacy and rapid consumption and dissemination** have worked in favour of the utility of short forms as cultural objects

- 3) As a consequence, the defining quality of short forms (*shortness*) can be approached from **different perspectives**. We propose 5 of these approaches dividing their presentation into 3 parts: definition of the approach, examples, and notes concerning their potential and limitations

- I) **Relativism**: reader(s)-/audience-dependant: *short* would be that form an individual or community considers as such within a given context => **pros**: descriptive specificity based on cultural perception; **cons**: determined by subjective judgement which impedes transhistorical extrapolation(s)

- 2) **Genre Studies**: taxonomic: *short* would be that form classified as such because it exhibits the features of established generic categories => **pros**: it works in many cases (e.g., “the short story”); **cons**: genre is often unaware of its own historical specificity so that it may fail to accommodate new manifestations (esp. digital)



- 3) **Paratextual Study**: contextual and individualising: *short* is a given form considered as such by a community at the moment in which it appears because of the way it treats spatiotemporal brevity within a specific context (e.g., “short poem”, “short tweet”, “short film”, etc.) => **pros**: accounts for the specificity of each individual unit in its response to an environment; **cons**: *shortness* impossible to define (too many contextual variables and individual idiosyncrasies) and definitional features of a short unit are not immanent to the instance itself



4) **Functionalism**: pragmatic: *short* forms would be those which deploy brevity for a specific aim or to have a particular effect. They are short insofar as they make brevity function => **pros**: it highlights what short form *do*; **cons**: shortness as a feature cannot be isolated or transferred as it is tied to its function(s)



- 5) **Contrastive Formalism**: based on extension: *short* forms as those different from long(er) => **pros**: forcefully evident; **cons**: reductive and exclusionary of forms not inscribed in a tradition of length



- **Contributions on Definitions by other teams:**
- **Giessen on “micro-fiction” and “short forms” in general:**
 - Extreme, palpable action (vs. “subtle adjustments in attitude or alterations in perception by characters”)
 - Flat, anonymous characters (vs. fully delineated, three-dimensional characters)
 - Generic spaces and indistinct settings (vs. detailed settings and metaphoric and impressionistic space)
 - Short, compressed duration of events and discourse and lack of background (vs. more complex and expansive temporality)
 - Tendency towards intertextual references (vs. well..., what exactly?)
 - Narrative closure (vs. openness)



- **Quantitative approaches:**

- Word count:

- 2500 words (*Short Shorts*, 1982)

- ~~1500 words (*Sudden Fiction*, 1986)~~

- 750 words (*Flash Fiction*, 1992)

- 300 words (*Micro Fiction*, 1996)

- 280/140 characters (Twitter fiction)

- Reading time:

- “four-minute fiction”



Socio-cultural approaches:

-short(-short) fiction in a **changing cultural and media ecology**: “access to **contemporary feeling** states more effectively than the conventional story does“ (D. Shields)

-Microfiction in **digital media** (e.g., Twitter)

- **The cognitive and cultural work of (short) forms:**

- Microfiction as an **epistemological form** that reflects on the status and generic construction of knowledge (Basseler 2018)
- **Short(est) forms** of fiction do not simply ‘contain’ or ‘embody’ a certain form or mode of knowing, **they construe and prefigure it in the first place** (e.g., through formal properties and conventions). → **the “affordances” of short forms** ([Basseler](#)):
Def.: “*Short forms include all aesthetic and social forms that deliberately and observably exploit the rules of economy, thereby creating affordances and constraints regarding the arrangement and structure of our sociocultural reality*”

- **Useful aspects for teaching and/or cultural mediation:**
 - Ubiquity + formal brevity => easily grasped (though may complex or deep), consumed, and disseminated (examples of short forms' *affordances*)
 - Short forms travel easily and quickly across medial, national, and cultural borders (e.g., “Bella Ciao” in Covid-19: call to solidarity and resilience, yet danger of suggestiveness, manipulation and simplification)
- **Forerunners of contemporary short forms** (von Hagen):
 - **short telephone monologues** in the theatre (=“text message”)
 - **postcard** (1869), **petite poste** (1761), **small Viennese post** (1784)
 - **feuilleton novel** (=“serial formats”)
 - **novella** (a historical example of the variability in measuring brevity: e.g. 25 pp. in 16th-c. France, 200 pp in 17th c. ...)



- **Leuven on “short forms”**:
 - **Structural/formalist approach**: on the notion of brevity as something that is shared by short forms in different genres (gnomic, lyrical, narrative, dramatic texts) (P. Zumthor’s *brevitas*)
 - **Generic approach**: on short genres and their development in literary **history**; ... yet **flexible structures** (traditional forms can be recovered, redeployed and adapted to suit new writers and new contexts) + quite common degree of **generic hybridity** (e.g., microfiction crossing over into essay or short stories drawing on characteristics of poetry)
 - **Contextual approach**: publication context: together with other texts, “polytextual” publication context (Bruno Monfort) => affects their reception, production, and development



- **Functionalist approaches:** how they function, what they can do, what their affordances are (Caroline Levine, *Forms*, 2015; Michael Basseler, *An Organon of Life Knowledge*, 2019)
- **Def.:** “Short forms are narratives structurally shaped by brevity: they use techniques of condensation, selection, synthesis, or ellipsis to create unity and to resort maximum effect (affective, rhetorical, epistemological, ...) with a minimum of means.”
- **Short forms in teaching practice in Belgium:**
 - *Secondary education:* not frequently used; preference for extracts from novels or plays (except for lyrical texts)
 - *University:* preference for extracts from canonical novels, yet short poems and short stories are used to teach the methods and techniques of literary analysis, or in specialized MA-level courses

- **Athens** on “pedagogical use of short forms in language classes”:
 - mostly used **at the beginning** of learning (poems, songs, post-cards, nursery rhymes, riddles, advertising slogans etc.), yet **gradually abandoned** in favor of extracts of longer texts, as the learning progresses
 - **risks**: because short, belief that language is simpler and more understandable =>
 - missing cultural nuances (humor, puns, linguistic ambiguity...)
 - if too simple or childish, the students’ interest may decrease
 - feeling of intellectual inferiority if not adapted to learners’ level and interests
 - **not considered by teachers as a separate type of expression** that could contribute to the development of specific skills
 - if their specificities were taken into account, **objectives**, such as the intercultural education and the plurilingualism, **could be achieved**



- **Angers on “short forms”**: “There is nothing simple about the definition of short form as a concept, especially if it is considered in a transdisciplinary way”:

Many questions are raised:

- ~~**Brevity** intersects with other notions, sometimes verging on the paradoxical:~~
simplicity, conciseness, intensity, density
- The question **perfection** (e.g., a sonnet) or **imperfection** (e.g., fragmentation [connected to impressionism in painting], which is paradoxically related to the epiphanic, the revelation → the fragment may evoke the whole [=holy relics])
- **Synecdoche** (the part for the whole) is **fundamental in defining short fiction** (Pierre Tibi): particular **relationship to the long forms** in which they are often inscribed, + in **the field of communication**, messages - tweets, SMS, posts - are rarely isolated and rather function according to principles of seriality



- **Lack in breadth** often **compensated by depth** in 3 ways:
 - intrinsic
 - relating it to a set to which it belongs (collection, series, sequence, chronicle...)
 - via effects of intertextuality or inter-iconicity with other forms of expression
- characterized by "**polygeneity**": capacity *to go from one to multiple* and "by *assimilating different genres: the fable, the tale or the anecdote, etc.*" => functions like a crucible, **like a laboratory** where authors experiment with new techniques of representation.

