

A Metanalysis on the Role of Audio-Visual Cartoons in Language Acquisition Among Primary School Children

Steffy Antony, Harilekshmi S, Shilpa M Chandran

ABSTRACT: *In literature, there are claims that language is a sole reason for shaping the identity of an individual. To learn a global language, without undermining the native language of a person is a difficult task. Language learners of different corners of the world, struggle to learn a foreign language. Education is based on a curriculum provided in a static, formal and systematic manner, which may not equally benefit the introvert and extrovert students in the context of language learning. Cartoons are the most delightful illustrations that can help primary school children in learning the foreign languages as well creating a firm foundation of their native language, with the visuals and audios of clarity in cartoons. When a language is studied in linguistic institutions, there is a challenging task of acquiring a native like pronunciation of the language. If a native speaker of the language is the teacher, it will be difficult for the students to acquire the exact pronunciation and it will be hard to comprehend what is taught. Often non native speakers of a language teach students the foreign languages, which can result in miscommunication of pronunciation and various aspects related to the language. Children at a very early age have the capacity of bilingualism, and cartoons can help them to acquire the exact pronunciation of the foreign languages as cartoons are available in different languages and are educative in today's world. This paper is intended to contribute to education with an easy method for producing an intelligible pronunciation of a language through cartoons for primary school children and adults can also be benefitted as cartoons can grip the attention of a language learner regardless of their age using the method of sample survey.*

Keywords: *Cartoons, Intelligible Pronunciation, Language Learning.*

"English is a global language", a phrase which has become very popular and is often seen in newspapers, magazines and educational institutions becomes assertive on the medium of instruction as English, since the advent of British empire. English is mostly thought to be the language of England but English in reality is 'lingua franca' (shared language). If a restaurant is visited, people there understand English and the menu is also provided in English. If English is the mother tongue of a person, he/she may feel proud of it being accepted as a global language, but it also induces the realization that it may not be used by the foreigners who mold English to suit themselves. If English

is not the native language. then the individual may feel motivated to learn the language as it will instill confidence and strengthen the communicative power. Despite the efforts of mastering the language, feelings of resent and anger may also be felt when the survival of native language is threatened by the prosperity of English language. These conflicting thoughts infuse fear which leads to language riots, language marches and language deaths. It has become the language of transnational and global industry. Proficiency in English language has elevated to a position where it is considered as the synonym of triumphant life. With the advent of globalization, English language, to an extent has helped in increasing employment by providing a new arena of job opportunities. English has been ruling the world as if it has no frontiers. The Afro-Asian and European countries give English an equivalent importance as they give their national languages. These aspects contribute to the eligibility of English as an International language. English has carved a niche in the global world where it breaks away the national and cultural barriers by providing the people of the world with an international linking language. India being a pluralistic society with 700- odd languages and dialects has been unified by English language. In the global village, English survives as a language of progress and anyone who can upskill the efficiency in English language can slot affluently at any corner of the globe.

Can English be learnt only by studying in an English-speaking country is a debatable question. There are several advantages of learning English from the land where it originated. But the non-English speaking countries are also productive in helping individuals in acquiring the English language. Students start learning English right from the primary schools. Their spoken English due to mother tongue influence may not reach of a high standard but their knowledge of grammar is commendable. When children learn English language in their own native land, it makes it easier and less stressful than learning it overseas as a grown up. Difficulty can arise studying English in a foreign land due to cultural shock. Though there are distinct advantages learning it in a foreign place but today non-English speaking countries are well equipped with language labs for English proficiency that can help learning the grammar, syntax, pronunciation, vocabulary and intonation.

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Education is a



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psychological, sociological and philosophical process dealt with the over all development of an individual according to the needs of the society of which he/she is an integral part, that it maximizes the joy and prosperity of both the individual and the society. As Mahatma Gandhi says,

“By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man’s body, mind and spirit”.

In general, education is availed in three senses: Knowledge, subject, process. For example, when an individual completes his/her graduation course; education of that individual is perceived as a graduate on the basis of the knowledge acquired by the person. In the second sense, when an individual opts to study a particular subject in any institution, education is said to be utilized as a subject, the most discussed and thought is the utilization of education is as a process.

When a language is learnt, it is always difficult to incorporate the reading and writing skills, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation altogether. The task can be more challenging when pronunciation is focused on, but it is often pushed to the bottom list. Phonology is a technical aspect that language learners must master to acquire the correct pronunciation of the words. Pronunciation is important to learn, in order to speak a language understandably. Children can be trained easily to pronounce like native speakers as it will not be an exhaustive task for them as they will be exposed to the native like pronunciation at a very early age. Adults find it difficult and often in their pressure of learning the native pronunciation, come up with pronunciations that confuse the listeners. It is always better to acquire an intelligible pronunciation, if there is a hinderance of mother tongue influence.

The critical period for language acquisition in a child’s life is between the age 7-14. Children can easily absorb the sounds and words; they hear around them and gradually imitate the pronunciation by uttering the words accurately. A teacher can never force children to learn the pronunciation of a language, as a child should feel motivated.

“You can lead a horse to water, but can’t make it drink.”

Primary school children feel more motivated to learn a language and improve pronunciation, by the moving and talking pictures, illustrated in the cartoons. In classrooms, teachers often teach students to pronounce by making them repeat the words, but the quality of pronunciation may be low as the teachers may not be able to produce the accurate model of pronunciation. Native language interference or language transfer is the influence of the first language on learning a foreign language. It is helpful, when the sounds in the foreign language is similar to the sound in the native language, the challenge becomes easier to learn the language. For instance, the pronunciation of /k/ in a foreign language may be similar with the sound of /k/ in the first language.

Some of the pronunciation errors that occur while learning a new language are merging, and substitution. Merging is the error, where language learners, find difficulty in pronouncing the native like pronunciation, when they hear an unfamiliar sound and try to fit it with a sound in the system of native sounds, similar to the foreign sound. For example, there are no separate vowel sounds for the words *rich* and *reach*, therefore the learner may tend to pronounce both the words as same. Substitution is the error, where the language learner tries to substitute a sound to the foreign sound which may sound abstruse. To cite an example, the words, *think* and *three*, the first sound of these words is not found in all the languages. Therefore, the learners often substitute similar sounds provided in their vernacular language such as /s/, /f/, and /t/, that ‘think’ may sound like *sink*, *fink*, or *tink*. There are several words that are borrowed from English language to acclimatize the pronunciation, to pertain with the sounds of the borrowed language. For example, the Japanese word /garasu/ is borrowed from the English *glass*, where there is a change in the main sound vowel due to an extra final vowel.

While pronunciation is taught by teachers, fossilization is one of the most obstinate problem. Fossilization is the process where a student may progress in a language to a certain level, but may find learning the language as an arduous task to progress further. For example, a student who may have learnt the English language, but may not be able to distinguish between the sounds /v/ and /b/ of the words, *very* and *berry*. It is always better to avoid fossilized pronunciation and to expose the beginners to the native like pronunciation from the beginning of learning a foreign language. Hypercorrection is another pronunciation problem, which literally means, ‘too much correction’. This happens when a student learns the rules for pronunciation and applies it in many cases which may be inappropriate to use. For instance, the Korean language does not possess the sound /f/ in the sound system, therefore if they pronounce the English word *fan*, they pronounce it as *pan*. Similarly, Koreans will pronounce the word *funny* as *punny*. Hypercorrection is not a long-term serious problem but happens due to the slip of tongue.

To improve the pronunciation skills, what is important is to develop the ability to hear properly. How can listening skills be enhanced to pronounce the words accurately? Adults don’t hear all the speech sounds as their brains are developed to hear only the sounds that exist in their local language. As a child is exposed to a language environment which allows the brain to develop a ‘phonological filter’, that is the ability to hear and identify only the sounds that exist in their language. A student gets firmly anchored in their language that the brain rejects to hear the unfamiliar and unnecessary sounds. To flourish the listening skills.



One should first, think the word on hearing an unfamiliar word, that is to think how to move the lips to pronounce the sounds as well as to position the tongue to pronounce similar sounds.

According to the phonologist Peter Ladefoged,

“It seems as if listeners sometimes perceive an utterance by reference to their own motor activities. When we listen to speech, we may be considering, in some way, what we would have to do in order to make similar sounds.”

Often students do not emphasize on pronouncing the words, as they focus more on learning the language as a subject, therefore acquisition of the language is not developed. For example, the English language is taught in schools as a subject, which students learn to score good marks rather than to develop their linguistic abilities. Voice is believed to define the identity of an individual. It is the pronunciation that marks an individual as the member of a group that follows a particular language dialect. It can be a bit threatening to pronounce the sounds similar to the foreign sounds as it can turn into a cause of losing the original identity. For example, when in school, teachers often scold students who make fun of children who pronounce differently from what the students hear or pronounce, by imitating their speech. The exact aim to improve the pronunciation is to use the technique of imitation, which can be terrific while pronouncing, as their will be mother tongue influence.

There is the need for the involvement of both the mind and the body of an individual to pronounce sounds. There is so much of difficulty in developing the pronunciation habits after growing up, as the mind must be trained to learn to move the muscles of the mouth to pronounce accurately the words. Learning pronunciation is not as easy as learning a physical activity such as, dancing or performing a sport immediately. While learning dance, it doesn't happen all at once, but it should be taken slow, a lot of practice is required, to develop the speed and skill. Similarly, 'muscle memory' should be build up, for learning a language, by practicing several times, so that the mind can remember the pronunciation of the words.

Cartoons are the most effective medium of communication for children, as the audio and visual processing helps to understand the meaning more efficiently than reading a book or listening to a lecture in the class. Every living being learns the world through their senses. Similarly cartoons with their colors and powerful animations serves the purpose of educating young children, by keeping the curiosity high in them. They remain spellbound on seeing their favorite cartoon characters narrate a story, which captures the attention of the children, by which they imbibe the style of talking of these cartoon characters which helps in enhancing the pronunciation skills of the children. To learn the correct pronunciation of words, classrooms can be a very boring place, because the monotonous teaching of teachers to repeat the words, doesn't work persuasively, because

students may slumber in between the class or indulge in other fun filled activities under the desks. Cartoons help a child with right and wrong pronunciation.

For example, a student may learn the pronunciation of the words, *ship* and *sheep* as same, because, classrooms do not provide with a good sound clarity. There are also problems on how the teachers pronounce the words. If the teacher is not a native speaker, there are chances for miscommunication of the exact pronunciation of the words. If a non - native is teaching the children to pronounce *sheep* in the classroom, he may pronounce it under his mother tongue influence as *ship* to adapt with the similar sounds to pronounce *sheep*. For instance, “A pup in sheep's clothing” is the second segment of the 11th episode in Season 3 of *PAW PATROL* broadcasted in the channel Nick Jr (India). The episode depicts the story of the sheep running away from farmer Al's pasture and the duty of Paw Patrol to detect who has been creating holes in the fence. It's an adventurous animation that keeps the children tuned to the cartoon till the end. In this episode the character Marshall, who is a pup, dresses up as a sheep and has conversation with the character Garbie, a female goat, who is responsible for busting the fence:

When Garbie bites off a piece of
wool from Marshall's sheep
dressed body, Marshall tells
Garbie, “Marshall: So, I am not
a real sheep. I am on an official
duty. Now please, Stand back.”

There are several scenes from the same episode, where the pronunciation of the word *sheep* is stressed. It provides the children with the right pronunciation of the word sheep as [ʃi:p].

Children who learn Hindi as their second language in schools, who are not native speakers of Hindi language, may find the task of learning Hindi, taught by teachers who are not native speakers, very stressful and exhaustive. They will not be able to catch up with the accurate pronunciation of the words, or to speak the sentences with correct rhythm of the words. Even if the children are taught by teachers who speak Hindi well, they won't be successful in enabling the children to articulate the words properly with the appropriate pronunciation as they will aim at finishing the portions as quick as possible, rather than focussing on developing the language skills of the children. In such situations, cartoons are the best source to learn language which will help the children in the future also.



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According to the survey done in St. Mary's Residential Central school, Kollam; NSS Lower Primary school, Changanacherry; and NSS Boys Higher Secondary school, Changanacherry, the results indicates that the Hindi cartoon *MOTU PATLU* broadcasted in the channel Nickelodeon (India) is one of the most popular kids' sitcom television series among the school children. This cartoon makes its easier for the children to learn the Hindi language and develop the pronunciation precisely. From Season 1, the episode 111, "Swimming" of *MOTU PATLU* illustrates the fear of Motu to swim in the cold water and efforts of Patlu and his friends to put Motu in the water.

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In this segment, the pronunciation of the words associated with swimming, such as cold water (□□ □□ □□□□), pool (□□□), swimming (□□□□□), dive (□□□□□) and so on are uttered with the native like pronunciation which helps the children to acquire the language appropriately according to the situations which can be related in daily life, making the challenge of learning Hindi more interesting and congruous, where children are fascinated to imitate the words as imitated by these cartoon characters. Learning a foreign language through cartoons is easier and simpler for young children. Even adults can benefit in learning a language through cartoons than spending money on language learning classes.

Cartoons also provide exposure to languages that the children are not familiar with or have not heard or taught in schools, such as Spanish. The cartoon *DORA, THE EXPLORER*, broadcasted in Nickelodeon (India) teaches children to learn the names of objects, colours and counting numbers in languages such as Spanish. The episode 6 of Season 5 of *DORA, THE EXPLORER* is "First day at school" that illustrates the scene of Dora, Boots and Tico going to school on their first day. Tico is a character who is a four-year-old, purple squirrel with a round body and smaller triangular stumps for arms and legs who is known for operating vehicles and is a good friend of Dora, He is fluent in Spanish and seldom speaks English. Boots is the monkey, energetic and athletic, and also the best friend of Dora. Dora is the main character of the cartoon, who is a heroic Latina girl, who embarks on new adventures to find something or to help somebody. Swiper is another character, who is a sneaky orange fox, who is the main antagonist in the cartoon, who attempts to steal away the tools or key items that help Dora in the journey. In the episode of "First Day at School", Dora, Boots and Tico are excited for their first day at school, where they will learn English and Spanish. They have no knowledge of the way to school and seek the help of the 'Map' and on their way, Swiper steals away their lunch. Tico speaks in Spanish which helps the cartoon watching children to learn Spanish also. For example, the conversation between Dora, Tico and Boots in a segment

of the episode, where they have to cross the river by hopping on the backs of the turtles:

Dora: Boots can cross first. I see three turtles. One, two, three. But boots need six. How many more turtles do we need? Three and three makes six altogether.

(Boots Hops on the turtles by counting: one, two, three, four, five, six.) You did it.

Dora: Now, let's help Tico cross. I see six turtles. One, two, three, four, five, six, but Tico needs seven. How many more turtles do we need? Six and one makes seven altogether.

Tico hops on the turtles by counting the

turtles in Spanish: Uno, Dos, Tres, Cuatro,

Cinco, Seis, Siete. Children learn the

Spanish language through this cartoon with

the right pronunciation.

Cartoons make use of the easiest language, rather than the authentic language, therefore there are absolutely no chance of a language to overwhelm a child or an adult. It can help children to have exceptionally fun way to learn a language which lines up the vocabulary tracks along with humour for the purpose of entertainment. Learning has become a very serious and stressful activity because of the formal instructions that are rendered. Cartoons help in creating a very light and playful mood for children as well as adults. Language learning and language teaching takes place unconsciously through cartoons. It is the best medium for communication as it contains humour which helps in delineating something unpleasant. Learner is given more emphasis in language teaching through cartoons where the child in actively participating in using a realistic target language. It is this unconscious involvement of the child that helps the student to acquire the language. Cartoons also help in creating a stress-free environment and keeps the student motivated to learn a language.

Cartoons are exciting and adventurous which contains a lot of information and also quiz in the end for children as a way of self-evaluation. Cartoons help in motivating the children to self-study, thereby making them independent children. Cartoons enable students to learn vocabulary, letter and sound recognition through music which pins the attention of the students. It can be concluded that cartoons are effective in language acquisition among primary school children.

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