



## MONICA'S GANG IN: the English learning process

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**Resumo:** Este Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso tem por objetivo verificar como os alunos de Língua Inglesa, em seus anos iniciais de contato com o idioma, utilizam seu conhecimento de mundo em sua formação como leitores e, através dele, reconhecem os interdiscursos presentes nas histórias em quadrinhos (HQs) da *Turma da Mônica* intituladas: “Monica and Maggy in: Little flies” da revista *Little flies* (2012), e “Monica in: The ill-tempered princess, part I”, “Monica in: The ill-tempered dragon, part II”, “Monica in: Magic potion”, e “Smudge and Jimmy Five in: there is a story to be told in everywhere” da coletânea de histórias: *The ill-tempered princess*(2014) que foram selecionadas pelas autoras desta pesquisa. Para tanto, faz-se necessário um estudo acerca do gênero intitulado história em quadrinho, desde seu surgimento até a contemporaneidade, bem como do autor, Mauricio de Sousa e dos quadrinhos que compõem o *corpus* deste trabalho, das estratégias envolvidas no processo de leitura, tendo um maior aprofundamento acerca do conhecimento de mundo e a teoria dialógica de Mikhail Bakhtin (1997). Para uma melhor interpretação do tema proposto faz-se necessária a contextualização das HQs, desde seu surgimento até o momento em que se encontra o autor estudado e os respectivos quadrinhos. A fundamentação teórica deste estudo parte da leitura de textos teóricos e ensaísticos de autores como Leila e Roberto Iannone (1994), Eliana de Oliveira Diel (2012), entrevistas com criadores de HQs para falar do surgimento das histórias em quadrinhos e do autor em foco; José Luiz Fiorin (2008), Mikhail Bakhtin (1997) entre outros para discorrer sobre o dialogismo; por fim, no aprofundamento acerca do conhecimento de mundo, foram utilizados os PCNs de Língua Estrangeira (1998), autores como Robert J. Marzano (2004), Joan Baker-González e Eileen K. Blau (1995), e de um questionário respondido por alunos entre quinze e vinte e cinco anos, os quais frequentam os primeiros anos do curso de língua inglesa de uma escola de idiomas da cidade de Franca, São Paulo.

**Palavras-chave:** Histórias em quadrinhos. Mauricio de Sousa. *Monica's gang*. Dialogismo. Conhecimento de mundo.

**Abstract:** The objective of this paper is to analyze how the EFL (English as a foreign language) students, in their early years of having contact with the language, use their background knowledge in their training as readers and, through this process, identify the dialogue between the texts presented in *Monica's Gang* comics titled: “Monica and Maggy in: Little flies” from the comic *Little flies* (2012), and “Monica in: the ill-tempered princess, part I”, “Monica in: the ill-tempered dragon, part II”, “Monica in: magic potion”, and “Smudge and Jimmy Five in: there is a story to be told in everywhere” from the comic: *The ill-tempered princess* (2014). Thus, it was necessary to do some research about the comic book genre, from its first appearance to the current days as well as about Mauricio de Sousa, the comics which compose the *corpus* of this research, regarding the strategies involved in the reading process by focusing on the background knowledge, and concerning the theory of the dialogism. To a better knowledge about this paper's objective, a

contextualization of the comics, from its beginning until the moment in which this writer is and his respective strips was necessary. The theoretical basis of this paper comes from reading texts and essays by authors such as Leila and Roberto Iannone (1994), Eliana de Oliveira Diel (2012), interviews with comics creators to talk about the beginning of the comics and the beginning of *Monica's Gang*; José Luiz Fiorin (2008), Mikhail Bakhtin (1997), among others, to explain the dialogism concept; finally, the background knowledge has been studied deeply based on the Foreigner Language PCNs (1998), and writers as Robert J. Marzano (2004), Joan Baker-González and Eileen K. Blau (1995), there is also a questionnaire answered by students from fifteen to twenty-five years old that are part of a private English school in Franca, São Paulo state.

**Key-words:** Comics. Mauricio de Sousa. *Monica's gang*. Dialogism. Background Knowledge.

## 1 Introduction

Mauricio de Sousa is one of the most well-known comic books writers in Brazil. He was born in Santa Isabel, a small town in São Paulo state on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 1935. Since his childhood the author has been part of the communicative and writing world, his father, Antônio Mauricio de Sousa, used to work as a broadcaster and as a poet, and his mother Petronilha Araújo de Sousa, was a poet too.

Before Mauricio de Sousa starts the creation of his comics characters, he used to work in a newspaper, writing news about people who had problems with the police. However, when he created *Blu*<sup>1</sup>, in 1959, he decided to give up his career as a journalist and started working as a comic creator. Most of his characters are inspired in famous people and in people whom he lives or lived with.

Nowadays, this writer is successful because of his strips. Kids and adults love him, all of his characters have something to teach to the ones who are reading the comics, we can learn with them all the time we do it.

Thus, the objective of this paper is to verify how the EFL (English as a foreign language) students in their early years of having contact with the language, use their background knowledge in their training as readers and, through this process, identify the dialogue between the texts presented in *Monica's Gang* comics titled: "Monica and Maggy in: Little flies" from the comic *Little flies* (2012), and

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<sup>1</sup> *Blu* is a dog which has his own strips inside *Monica's Gang* comic, his owner, *Franjinha*, was created a few years later.

“Monica in: The ill-tempered princess, part I”, “Monica in: The ill-tempered dragon, part II”, “Monica in: Magic potion”, and “Smudge and Jimmy Five in: There is a story to be told in everywhere” from the comic: *The ill-tempered princess* (2014).

Therefore, it was necessary to do some research about the comic book genre, from its first appearance until its current days as well as about Mauricio de Sousa, the writer who belongs to the *corpus* of this research, regarding the abilities that underlie the reading process by focusing on the background knowledge, and concerning the theory of the dialogism by Bakhtin (1997).

The theoretical basis of this paper comes from reading texts and essays by authors such as Leila and Roberto Iannone (1994), Eliana de Oliveira Diel (2012), interviews with comics creators to talk about the beginning of the comics and the beginning of *Monica's Gang*; José Luiz Fiorin (2008), Mikhail Bakhtin (1997), among others, to explain the dialogism concept. Finally, the background knowledge has been studied deeply based on the Foreign Language PCNs (1998), and writers as Robert J. Marzano (2004), Joan Baker-González and Eileen K. Blau (1995), there is also a questionnaire answered by students from fifteen to twenty-five years old in a private English school in Franca, São Paulo state.

## 2 The comics in: the steps in which a new way to tell stories started

The first communicative way that the human beings found out to talk to the other ones, to tell their stories, was through drawings. At that time there was no spoken or written language, hence, people's communication was expressed by drawings. As the time passed by, the images became simplified in its visual composing. At the same time that the meaning of the words was growing, the alphabet, as we know nowadays, was created. According to Diel (2012), since the beginning of man's history, images started to represent the world and all the meanings around it by showing a real or fictitious event.

All the civilizations presented before told us their stories that had turned into History. Images and drawings were the way they found out to think about their lives, to prove that they were real and part of the humanity's history. By drawing, they

showed pieces of themselves that we could not imagine if they had not done that. We can consider that the first step for the comic book genre birth was on these images.

## 2.1 The comic book in: the comics creation

The comic books are composed by pictures and words that are presented in a sequential way to form a narrative. “Comic” is an English word to denominate something that talks about many subjects in a funny perspective. The title: “comic book” was set because of the first decades in which the stories were presented in a very funny way, some examples of this are: *Little Nemo* (Winsor McCay, 1905), *Mutt & Jeff* (Bud Fisher, 1907), *Popeye* (E.C. Segar, 1929), and *Krazy Kat* (George Herriman, 1913). According to the article, *A history of the comic book* published on a website named Random History<sup>2</sup> (2008, p.1):

[...] the comic book contains everyday language, slang, and idiom, as well as color and sophisticated interplay between text and image- all serving a therapeutic, explanatory, and commercial purpose in American culture. Traditionally occupying the fringes of pop culture, the comic book is actually a valuable historical text that comments on how young people and adults alike identify with cultural and political issues [...].

It is difficult to say what the first comic book was, considering that in the end of the nineteenth century this kind of story appeared in many places at the same time. Some bookish people consider Rodolph Topffer as the first comic book writer because of his story called *M. Vieux-Bois* (1827), in English, its name is: *The Adventures of Obadiah Oldbuck*. To other ones, the first comic book creator would be the French called Georges Christophe Colomb who wrote *La Famille Fenouillard* (1889); In Brazil, Ângelo Agostini is considered one of the pioneers on the creation of comics with his illustrated series called *As Cobranças*. In these works we can find some characteristics of the comic book genre, like the sequential pictures and few words. The man who introduced the speech balloons, which usually show the characters’ speech, for the first time to tell stories this way, was Richard Fenton Outcalt, in 1896, with the work called *The Yellow Kid*.

The first comic book, named *The Funnies* (1929), was written in the U.S.A. by Deil Publishing. It was a journal, in which there were all of the comics that

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<sup>2</sup> Random History is a website that provides selections of History facts. Find it in the bibliography of this paper.

used to be published daily on the newspapers, this journal became a best-seller and, in 1936, Deil Publishing published a second edition that lasted until 1942.

From 1940 to 1945, about four hundred superheroes were created. However, a lot of them disappeared. One of the survivors we know nowadays because of many movies that were produced about him, is *Batman* (1939), written by Bob Kane. It tells a story of a boy who has his parents murdered and, when he becomes a man, he turns himself into a superhero and decides to protect his city from bad people.

During the World War II, comic books became a social way to improve soldiers and people's moral. The most known superhero of this time was *Captain America* (1941), by Jack Kirby and Joe Simon, which tells the story of a soldier who fought in the First World War. He faced villains of the real world; his first magazine is an example of it: on its cover he was punching Hitler's face. Through Captain America's acts, it is possible to see a fearless man, who was not afraid to protect his country from the evil. This magazine came out to be a way to recruit new combatants to fight on a war.

In the fifties, the comics were subject from a study in which the writer Frederic Wertham, a psychiatrist, criticized them saying they were a bad Literature, a bad influence to people. His book is called *Seduction of the innocent* (1950). At this time, the American parents were terrified and the Congress started trying to censure this kind of magazine. After that, the publishers created the *Comics Code Authority*, a way to control the comics themes according to each age.

At the same time a new comic emerged by improving this way to tell stories. With an intellectual vision to analyze the World, this comic book tells a story of a young boy, Charlie Brown, who is a loser and symbolizes naivety, insecurity, the vision of a six-year-old kid without any kind of evil inside of his heart. It was written by Charles M Schulz, by carrying the name of *Peanuts* (1950).

In 1960 many heroes who had disappeared for a period showed themselves again, for example, *Superman* (1938), *Batman* (1939), *Aquaman* (1941) and many others. Then, in 1961, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby created the most known group of fighters that fought against the crime together, and they are up to the moment called *The Fantastic Four*. In their first magazine, these heroes were

presented as common people without any uniform or masks. They were four people who had had an accident in the space that changed their lives.

At the time of its comic book creation, the U.S.A. was in a war against the Soviet Union, which was the first country to send a person to the moon. The soviet man was Yuri Gagarin. The American president, John Kennedy, by seeing this situation, promised to the people of his country that they would send someone to the moon too.

*The Fantastic Four* (1961) was then, the fiction answer by the U.S.A. to the soviets about this moon journey, the creators sent the characters, four scientists of the comic to the space and, when they came back, all of them were affected in some way, by getting superpowers. The four scientists tried everything they could to achieve their wishes and they would put their lives in risk to win the fight against the “Red Scare”, name that was given to the soviets by the U.S.A.

## 2.2 The comic book genre in: the ages

As we see in Literature, the History of the comic book is divided into ages. According to Random History (2008, p.1), the first one is called “Golden Age” and it lasted from 1930 to 1950. Around this moment we saw the beginning of the comics when style and technique were inspired by movies, the storytelling unfolded itself in many pages, divided into many scenes by using a montage of sound (expressed by onomatopoeias) and light, dynamic framing and cheerful colors. During the World War II the comics became an ideological gun, it pushed two dominant ideological visions of the time: the World War II patriotism and the New Deal-style social reform in which, according to a website called *Sua pesquisa*, some social and economic decisions by Roosevelt government between 1933 and 1937 were made with the intention of recovering the U.S.A economy after the 1929 crisis. The end of this era was pointed by the cancellation of *Captain Marvel* and *Plastic Man* publications.

The “Silver Age”, from 1956 to 1971, marked the comic book chase. People, the parents of children who used to read this genre, and the government started a chasing against the short daily strips after the publication of the book called

*The Seduction of the Innocent* (1950). This age ended with the *Captain America's* identity abandonment as a reaction to the "*Secret Empire*".

From 1971 to 1980 we have the "Bronze Age", the most important point is that the writers left the social issues behind and started to emphasize form and stylistic details. According to Random History (2008, p.3), at this time "comic books no longer looked through for the ideals, values and conflicts of society but began to look at the form itself". In this period, the Academy of Comic-Book Arts (ACBA) was created by the industry of comics as a way they found out to put some rules on the strips production.

The comic books sales started declining when *DC* and *Marvel* created cartoons on television of superheroes like *Wonder Woman* (1941), *The Incredible Hulk* (1962) and *Superman* (1938).

The period from 1980 to 1987 is known as the "Iron Age", in which the form and the beauty were considered the most important aspects to be analyzed on the comics. The tales about heroes started to have saviors who questioned their heroism acts and seemed to lose their sanity. One hero of this time is *Daredevil* (1964), by *Marvel*. Stan Lee, who is this hero's creator, says in an interview for a documentary:

[...] so, I thought: "Well, I got to find a guy with another flaw that seems to be what turns people on [...]"

I was afraid that they (the public) might be a negative reaction to a blind superhero, primarily among blind people. I felt they would feel, you know, "what is this guy trying to do? We cannot do things like that. Is this some sort about a parody?"

I was nervous about it, and then I was amazed [...] they said that the people that we are involved with were so grateful that there is a blind superhero, they loved that idea, oh man, what a relief that was for me[...] (OSTRICK, M; MEFFORD, J.,2003)<sup>3</sup>

The stories about heroes became less and less sought while the comic publishers earned more and more great profits by increasing the cost of these magazines, delivering them to outlets specialized in this kind of books instead of the newsstands. The writers from Random History (2008, p.3) say that "the increased influence of this specialized market on the production and distribution of comic books

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<sup>3</sup> This speech can be found online at YouTube. Find its directory in the bibliography of this paper.

indicated the extent to which comic books had become, in large part, the niche of a slightly estranged subculture”.

The last age is called “Modern Age”. It goes from 1987 until nowadays. During the nineties the comics became a collection thing, many people used to buy it to keep all the editions of a specific story, similar to what happens to coins, for example.

In 1991, *Marvel* was considered the first comic book publisher to be listed on the *New York Stock Exchange*. Technology has always been a big help to the creators of comics, with more realistic characters and pages full of colors, these strips were still getting more audience in that period.

Nowadays it is almost impossible to count the amount of comics created. With the increase number of people who enjoy this kind of genre, many other tales were born into the same way the comic book was. There are, for example, cartoons, strips, graphic novels, web comics, storyboards, etc.

### 2.3 The Brazilian comic books in: the tradition

As found on the article: *História em quadrinhos no Brasil*, the tradition of the comic book in Brazil started with Angelo Agostini in 1869, the creator of *Zé Caipora* (1905) and who was the first person to publish it in newspapers. The first comic book magazine was created by Manuel Bonfim and Renato de Castro in 1905, it was called *O Tico Tico*. Inspired by Agostini, a culture to create small strips by questioning the values of the society, socially and politically speaking started.

This magazine is composed by many comics, even publishing the Brazilian ones, used to show tales from others countries, for example, *As Aventuras do Ratinho Curioso*, known as *Mickey Mouse* (1928).

In the sixties, Ziraldo appeared by bringing a comic book called *O Pererê* (1960), with a character who has only one leg. He is a funny and adventurous person and his adventures have an ecological and educational background.

At this same decade, a cartoonist called Henfil started the tradition of the strip format, which is showed up in all comics created by Mauricio de Sousa, who will be discussed afterwards.



During the Military Dictatorship, the strips became a gun against the moralism of the governors, charges from a newspaper called *O Pasquim* (1979), even with the censure they were used to criticize the period in which our country was living.

The most famous author of comics in Brazil is Mauricio de Sousa, the father of *Turma da Mônica*, which years later turned to be known all around the World as *Monica's Gang*, in English, or even *Mônica y su pandilla*, in Spanish.

### **3 Mauricio de Sousa and Monica's gang in: the history behind the scenes**

Mauricio de Sousa is the creator of many characters that are capable of teaching, entertaining and inspiring us.

The author was born in Santa Isabel, a small town in São Paulo state on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 1935. His father, Antônio Mauricio de Sousa, was a poet and a barber, and Mauricio's mother, Petronilha Araújo de Sousa, used to work as a poet, too. The creator of *Turma da Mônica* (1960), *Monica's gang*, in English, has ten children.

The writer moved to Mogi das Cruzes- SP when he was a few months of birth. He lived there for a long time during his childhood. Then, he went to São Paulo, where his father worked in a radio station. As we can see by his parents' occupations, Mauricio de Sousa has always been part of the communicative and writing world.

To help with the household expenses, Mauricio de Sousa created posters for traders of the cities around where he lived.

In 1959, he created his first comic book character while he was working as a police news writer on a newspaper. This character was Bidu (translated into English as Blu), which was followed by his faithful friend called Franjinha. After that, the author gave up his journalist career and started working as a comic creator.

The following years were marked by the creation of many characters such as: Cebolinha, Penadinho, Chico Bento, and many others, all of them were presented weekly on the newspaper, including Mauricio de Sousa's first creation.

SILVA, D. R.; SOUZA, J. S.; BERNABÉ, F.H.L.

It was only in 1970 when he published his first comic book, called *Mônica*, three years later followed by another one named *Cebolinha* (1973). After that, there were other comic books, such as *Cascão* (1982), *Chico Bento* (1963), *Magali* (1989) and others by *Abril Publisher*. Mauricio de Sousa's work started to be known around the world with the comic book titled *Turma da Mônica* (*Monica's Gang* in English). Nowadays, *Monica's Gang* and its related works have been published in around forty countries and about fourteen different languages.

Besides the famous characters like *Mônica*, *Cebolinha*, *Cascão*, *Magali* and others, Mauricio de Sousa shows us, by using the comic characters, people with some kind of disability inspired by real people. Two examples of it are *Dorinha*, a blind young girl, and *Luca*, a boy who cannot walk. Through them, we are able to think about the human condition that is experienced by many people, to know a little about the reality of these human beings. About this subject, Mauricio de Sousa says<sup>4</sup>:

A Turma da Mônica é um grupo de personagens que vivem e agem como crianças normais, como nossos filhos ou conhecidos. Todos nós temos amigos com algum tipo de deficiência e convivemos harmônica e dinamicamente. Aprendemos as regras da inclusão aí. (VIDA MAIS LIVRE, 2012, p.1)<sup>5</sup>.

When mangas became notorious, Mauricio de Sousa did not have any cartoons playing on the television, so he lost popularity. To take back all the market he had acquired with all the time he had worked, the writer decided that it was time to open a new window, thus he started a new business: an animation studio, called *Black&White* in which there were more than sixty people working on eight feature movies.

At the time Brazil was suffering from an economic and political issue, the inflation prevented the long-term projects as the animations, the lack of access to technologies, these problems and many others forced Mauricio de Sousa to give up his plans.

Finding no other option, the creator of comics stopped the production of the animations and came back to his comics.

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<sup>4</sup> These quotes were said by Mauricio de Sousa in an interview for the website named "*Vida mais livre*". The article is named *O desenhista Mauricio de Sousa fala sobre a criação de personagens com deficiências*.

<sup>5</sup> The quotes will be kept in the original language.

When the crises had gone away, the author of *Monica's Gang* opened a theme park by using the characters of his comic books as a way to call the kids' attention.

Nowadays, this author is successful because of his strips. Kids and adults like them, all of his characters have something to teach the ones who are reading the pages and people feel as they are learning all the time they do it. The fame of this creator and his characters around the world brings us questions to be answered: how are these characters presented on the English Language version, for example? Does Cebolinha have the same problem he has in Portuguese with the letter "R"? Are the characters' characteristics the same? What are the changes?

These are some of the questions, we are supposed to analyze carefully and answer in the next pages of this study.

### 3.1 Mauricio de Sousa in: the characteristics as a writer

As we saw before, each creator of a comic book has his own way to write, and characteristics that only he gets. Each detail is designed by the writer while he is giving life to something new and, every moment he writes a new tale it seems just like the first time he does it. Of course that there are some aspects of his work that last for all of the comics he produces and these are the ones we are going to present about Mauricio de Sousa: his particularities, the aspects that help us to recognize his work.

Even a person with little knowledge in the English language, as an English learner on his/her first years, is able to understand Sousa's strips. This is related to the fact that the images and the dictionary at the end of its comics help them but it does not make his work less valued. As the *student A* said when he answered the questionnaire: " *aumentou o meu vocabulário por conter algumas palavras que eu não conhecia, como: ill-tempered, tickling, bitter, etc. E os desenhos facilitam [...] o aprendizado, pois mesmo sem entender algumas palavras é possível compreender o contexto por causa das imagens*"<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See student A's answer on page 54.

According to the website Pulp Feek (2013)<sup>7</sup>, many of Mauricio de Sousa's characters are inspired on people who are superstars or live with him every day. They are caricatures of these real people. For instance, the inspiration he had on his children to create Mônica, the chubby and toothy girl, and Magali, the big spread, or famous soccer players, as Pelézinho and Ronaldinho Gaúcho. The reality is used by the author as background:

Eu desenhava e escrevia o que vivia e nunca fui mulher [...] sabia que precisava de um personagem feminino. Foi quando me atinei que na minha casa tinha três mulheres e que conhecia muito bem minhas filhas. Elas eram bem pequeninas, mas a gente conhece a personalidade da criança assim que ela abre os olhos. Peguei a Mônica, coloquei na história, e ela roubou a cena de cara [...] ela veio com uma carga de humanidade muito forte e a Magali também [...] E aí comecei a pegar mais gente da família, mais personagens (BRANT, 2014, p.1).

Another aspect we can find in Mauricio de Sousa's strips is the simple setting. The characters and their acts are the most important characteristics of the stories, the stage around them is set there only to complement the information the writer wants to express. For example, when Mônica comes back to the castle of her family, after becoming a princess again, the storyteller tells us that everyone was happy there and, the only element which shows us this statement is the sun smiling.

**Picture 1-** The simple setting of Monica's gang

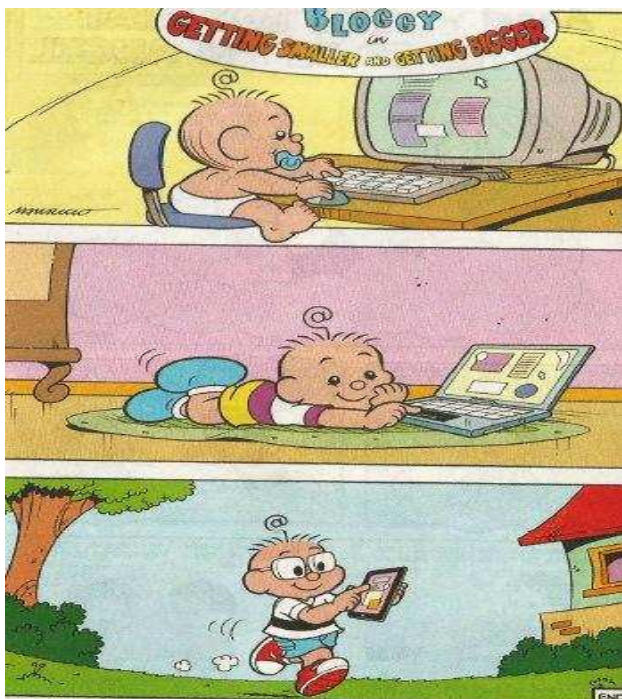


**Source:** SOUSA, 2014, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> A website consisting of many people, hence we could not find the author of these words. You can find the reference on the bibliography of this paper.

Another fact that makes the fame of the strips is its capacity to be up-to-date. Mauricio de Sousa uses current issues to develop his comics and he talks about many aspects of the society through a funny perspective. For example, the evolution of the technology that can be seen in the representation of these strips below:

**Picture 3-** The current themes on *Monica's gang*<sup>8</sup>



**Source:** SOUSA, 2014, p.45.

### 3.2 *Turma da Mônica* and *Monica's gang* in: the full story

The first *Turma da Mônica* comic was published in 1970, and it was titled: *Mônica e Sua Turma*. Mauricio de Sousa's daughter inspired Mônica in him. She was created in 1963 as a supporting character in Cebolinha's strips that were published in the newspaper, but soon, the little girl became the main character. In an interview for the blog *Mania de Gibi*, the author said:

<sup>8</sup> This image was taken from the same comic magazine that is part of our study only to exemplify what we are saying but it is not part of our *corpus*. The reference of this story can be found at the end of our research.

Eu tinha dúvidas sobre como uma mulher pensava, reagia. Mas como toda criança é transparente nas emoções e reações, estavam ali minhas inspirações. A Mônica fez grande sucesso de imediato. E sucesso não se planeja, acontece. O público leitor 'elege' (LEITE, Osmar, 2013, p.1).

Since the creation of his first character, Sousa has created and designed more than two hundred of new characters, and, in 2008 he created *Turma da Mônica Jovem* (*Teen Monica's Gang*, in English), comics in which the famous group grew up and got new stories focused on their youth. In its four first publications, the comic book sold more than 1.5 million copies and it has broken the records of the most sold out strips, even in countries like the U.S.A.

In 2005, Mauricio de Sousa and UNICEF, which is “the leading humanitarian and development agency working globally for the rights of every child”<sup>9</sup>, joined to create a comic book that shows all the children and adolescents their rights in a funny way. In November 2007, Mônica was chosen by UNICEF through the influence she exerts on children, teachers and families, by helping over more than 44 years, transmitting values such as friendship, the importance of education, family and community. The same day, Mauricio de Sousa received from UNICEF the title of *UNICEF Writer for Children*.

The first *Monica's Gang* written in English was published in 1973 by *Abril*, the publisher that used to publish Mauricio de Sousa's comics at that time, in order to present the group of friends in the Congress of Lucca in Italy, 1972. About it, the writer says:

Essa edição em inglês foi produzida para eu levar para o Congresso de Lucca, Itália, se não me engano em 72. Foi um dos primeiros esforços da empresa para nossos personagens se fazerem entender no exterior e com isso atingirmos o mercado internacional. O gibi até que saiu bonitinho, mas o inglês utilizado deixava a desejar. Não foi brinde de revista e não foi distribuído no Brasil (RODRIGUES, E; RIBEIRO, J.R., 2010, p.1).

This edition has thirty-six pages, and its format is 13, 5 x 21cm. The cover of it is made of coated paper and the crumb is composed by offset.

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<sup>9</sup> This information is found at UNICEF's website, provided in the bibliography of this paper.

### 3.3 *Monica's gang in: little flies (2012) and the ill-tempered princess (2014)*

For the purpose of this paper, we decided to select some tales from two Monica's Gang comics, named: *Little flies* (2012) and *The ill-tempered princess* (2014). From these magazines five strips were taken, they are "Monica and Maggy in: Little flies" from *Little flies* (2012), and "Monica in: The ill-tempered princess, part I", "Monica in: The ill-tempered dragon, part II", "Monica in: Magic potion", and "Smudge and Jimmy Five in: There is a story to be told in everywhere" from *The ill-tempered princess* (2014).

These are stories in which, by reading previously, we found examples of dialogism, which can be understood as the discourses inside a text, and it will be explained further in this paper. The readers could possibly detect a great number of characteristics to compare the comics in English with the ones they have read in Portuguese when they were young. We did these procedures in order to verify how these similar characteristics would be part of the student's background knowledge.

Both of the two comics magazines selected have the same format, which is 13, 4 x 19 cm and, each comic has a number of almost seventy pages.

The comic book titled *Little flies* was written by Mauricio de Sousa in 2012 and published by an Italian publisher named Panini.

It is made up by ten stories named: "Monica and Maggy in: Little flies", "Pitheco in: an archeology lesson", "Monica's gang in: the basic things", "Vanilla in: the bilingual one", "Monica and Jimmy five in: wood and cardboard cutouts", "Bug-a-booo in: life on the other side", "Monica's gang in: Lost and found", "Bubbly (the astronaut) in: those who try, do (or get really tired)", "Jimmy Five in: Wearing a wig", and "Maggy"; some games; three pages called "fun facts" in which the writer talks about people who speak more than one language, how the writers create their stories and characters by using the reality; and, an explanation about what the place called "lost and found" that appears in one of the strips of this comic is; and, a dictionary at the end of this magazine that shows the meaning of some words which appears in the tales. About this dictionary, *Student A* says: "*umentou o meu vocabulário por conter algumas palavras que eu não conhecia, como: ill-tempered, tickling, bitter, etc.*":

**Picture 5:** The dictionary at the end of the comics

GLOSSARY/ GLOSSÁRIO/ GLOSARIO					
<b>THE ILL-TEMPERED PRINCESS</b>			<b>THE BOY THAT WANTED TO BE AN ANGEL</b>		
Bitter	Amargo	Amargo	Lift	Carona	Autoestop
Bunch	Cacho	Racimo	Shade	Sombra	Sombra
Bush	Arbusto	Arbusto	To float	Flutuar	Flotar
Guest	Visita	Visita	To trip	Tropear	Tropezar
Ill-tempered	Mai-humorado	Malhumorado			
Reward	Recompensa	Recompensa			
<b>AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA</b>			<b>CRUMBS OR DUST?</b>		
High tide	Maré alta	Marea alta	Crumbs	Migalhas	Migajas
Seaweed	Algas	Alga marina			
<b>WHO DO THESE PRINTS BELONG TO?</b>			<b>THERE'S A STORY TO BE TOLD EVERYWHERE</b>		
Paw	Pata	Pata	Aim	Mira	Punteria
Prints	Impressões	Huellas	Archery	Tiro com arco	Tiro con arco
Trail	Rastro	Rastro	Challenge	Desafio	Desafio
			Naïve	Ingênuo	Ingenuo
			Poisoned	Envenenado	Envenenado

**Source:** SOUSA, 2014.

The story selected from this magazine is designated: “Monica and Maggy in: Little flies”. In its strips we have not only the two girls, but also many others characters that appear throughout the story. Monica and Maggy wish they were flies to get into the boys’ club to listen to their conversation.

The ladies’ wishes are carried out when two flies, who had been cursed by a witch that told them they could be princesses again with only one clause: someone needed to take their places, appear and make the young girls’ dreams come true, then, Monica and Maggy turn into flies in the princesses’ places.

They get surprised when they find out what the two princesses have done, but then, thinking better, Monica and Maggy think that what happened can be their chance to spy on the boys and discover if Frank and Hank, the ones who they are in love with, like them too. They find out the guys do not like them, therefore, to revenge themselves, when they meet Frank and Hank again, and the two girls tell the boys that they are actually annoying and suffocating.

Monica and Maggy decide to find someone new to fall in love with and that is when Smudge appears and the girls start circling around him. This is the part in which we usually laugh while reading the strips because of the funny way that the situations are portrayed.

The other comic book we had chosen to make up the *corpus* of this research is called *The ill-tempered princess*, written by Mauricio de Sousa and published in 2014 by Panini, too.

This magazine is made up by twelve stories. Some of them are named: “Monica in: The ill-tempered princess, part I”, “Monica in: the ill-tempered dragon,



part II", "Pitheco in: At the bottom of the sea", "Vic vampire in: bitten", "Monica in: Magic potion", "Blu in: who do these prints belong to?", "Angel in: the boy that wanted to be an angel", "Buc-a-booo in: Crumbs or dust", "Smudge and Jimmy Five in: there is a story to be told in everywhere", and "Monica's gang"; there are some advertisements; and a dictionary, in which the meaning of some words that appear in the tales of the comic are presented.

As it was said before, four comics were taken from *The ill-tempered princess* (2014), the first one was "Monica in: the ill-tempered princess, part I". In this story, the birth of a young girl in a castle where there is happiness all the time is told. In order to celebrate her birth, the king and the queen decide to throw a party in which a bitter witch is not invited.

She appears there very angry for not being invited and decides to give a present to the baby who is acted by Monica. This gift is a curse, something that many people had already seen in fairytales before, like in *Sleepy Beauty* (1812), written by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, which tells a story of a princess that was cursed when she was a baby, too. This curse was that Monica would always be as bitter as the witch is, and, if her family did not make her laugh until her seventh birthday, she would be an ill-tempered dragon forever.

Her parents try everything to make her smile, failing in all of these attempts. The kingdom becomes sad because of Monica. Three months before she becomes a dragon, Monica listens to her parents' conversation in which they were talking about her curse, then to run away from home.

The first part ends, by starting the second one called: "The ill-tempered dragon, part II". In its pages we see two of the most famous characters: Monica and Jimmy Five living in a medieval world as we have seen in the part I of this tale. The setting is medieval and there are castles, witches and dragons.

This part starts with Jimmy Five, a traveler that looks for fame and fortune, walking around the forest when he sees a paper in which there is a reward for those who find the lost princess. She is Monica. While he is looking at this handout, a dragon, that is the princess, sets fire on him. They argue with each other until the time that the witch, who had cursed Monica, appears bringing with herself a birthday cake and asking Monica whose voice she had heard was. Monica had

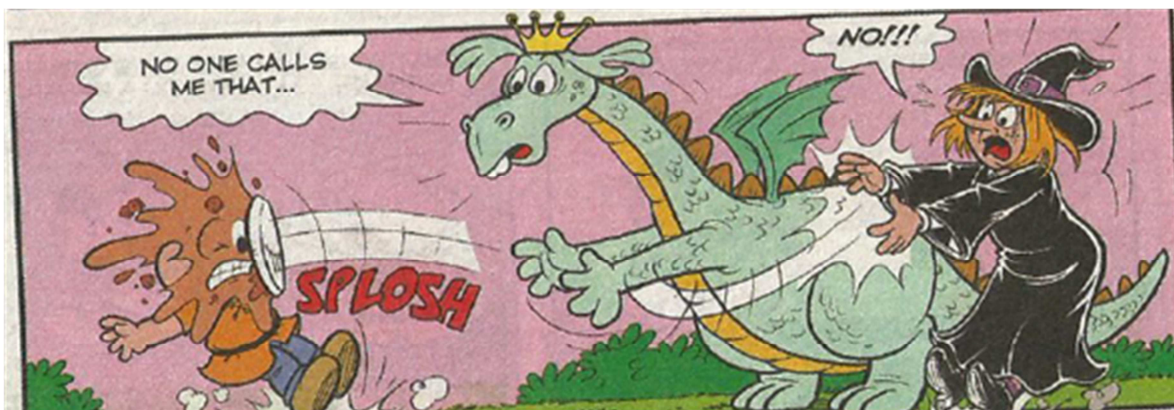
thrown Jimmy Five away before the evil woman arrives where they are, hence, the witch does not see him.

The witch promises to the little girl that she would make her human being again, but she only brings the birthday cake to Monica because it is the way to make her a human being a dragon for the rest of her life. The girl, who is very smart, does not accept eating the cake alone, thus, she asks the witch to eat it with her, what does not happen.

Jimmy Five, who was hidden, appears again when the evil woman goes away. He and Monica start talking about her curse and the reason why she lives with the bitter witch. The girl tells him that it is because the evil woman promised to change her into a princess again, however, she needs to wait until her seventh birthday to see it happening.

Monica tells him she cannot smile, hence, he spends all the day trying to make her laugh, not succeeding until the moment he calls her bucktoothed and bitter. Monica gets angry with him, takes the cake, which were made by the witch, and throw it in Jimmy Five, what makes her and the witch laugh:

**Picture 6-** Strip from Monica in *The ill-tempered princess* (2014)



Source: SOUSA, 2014, p. 15

By realizing she is laughing, Monica becomes a girl again. The princess and the traveler run away from the forest and come back to the castle before the witch stops laughing. The story ends with Jimmy Five receiving the reward and the

witch, who was always sad and bitter, locked in the tower of the castle, laughing at the two main characters that are chasing each other.

The third story, named: “Monica in: Magic Potion” has only two pages, however, we find it funny because of the fact that Monica is now a witch and Maggy, who is her assistant, eats a potion, which turns herself into a monster. The people that are used to read about these characters already know that Maggy is a girl who always seems to be starving, hence, she eats everything she sees, and, in this case, she has eaten the ingredients of Monica’s potion that could turn Jimmy Five and Smudge into ogres.

In the same comic, we have now the strips telling a story in which Jimmy Five and Smudge establish a long dialogue about “plenty of things going on” around the place where they are at that moment. It is named “There’s a story to be told everywhere” and, in their dialogues, we can see Smudge teaching Jimmy Five how to appreciate the little things happening around them. As it was told previously, everything is showed to the reader in a very amusing way:

**Picture 7-** Smudge and Jimmy Five in “There’s a story to be told everywhere” (2014)



Source: SOUSA, 2014, p. 57

These are only some of the stories we have chosen to be described in this paper analysis, however, some of the students, who answered the questionnaire and read the whole comic, and all of them could easily understand all the references the writers have made among the strips. The oldest students, between twenty and twenty five years old, who answered the questionnaire, reported to it that they were very surprised with the fact that the comics they used to read in their teenage years are now translated to English, keeping almost all the characteristics they know and

this is something that, besides helping with the reading comprehension, makes them pay much more attention to the reading passage and read with much more affection.

#### **4 Previewing, background knowledge, scanning, skimming, forming hypotheses and paraphrasing in: the strategies of the reading process**

Reading is a language skill we are in contact with all the time. We read for many reasons. For example, we read a newspaper article to know what is happening around us, to keep us knowledgeable, a comic book to have some fun or to improve learning another language.

The questions we have never asked ourselves are the following: How do we read? What are the abilities involved in the reading process?

In accordance with Baker-González and Blau (1995), the reading process can be divided into three parts: before, during and after reading. In each part we find many abilities that we are going to discuss in the following pages.

Before reading, the first thing to be done is to preview the text to have a general idea of what the subject is. Previewing is considered when the reader pays attention to the “title and section headings” (BAKER-GONZÁLES; BLAU, 1995, p. 13), he/she reads the first two paragraphs, after that, he reads the first sentence of each following paragraph and then the last two paragraphs.

Then, the reader needs to think about his background knowledge. It is the information considered essential to understand a situation or a problem. This information is kept in people’s memories, they can be knowledge about many things from the least important to the most important ones. In the words of Marzano (2004, p.1), who is a speaker, trainer and educational researcher, there are two factors that take us to acquire the background knowledge:

[...](1) our ability to process and store information, and (2) the number and frequency of our academically oriented experiences. The ability to process and store information is a component of what cognitive psychologists refer to as *fluid intelligence* [...].

Our ability to process and store information dictates whether our experiences parlay into background knowledge.

According to the Foreign Language PCNs (1998), background knowledge is the kind of knowledge, responsible for a person understanding many

references of their daily routine that they could not if they did not have this information, and, the more the speaker expands their background knowledge, the more they will be able to understand speeches and situations in its entirety.

While reading, much information is acquired by the reader, but how a person understands the content of this process depends on what he/she knows before reading. It is an interaction of what the reader already knows and what he/she acquires from the text.

The third aspect to be considered before reading is the purpose we want to achieve. By having it determined, we start our reading according to the objectives we want to achieve. According to Baker-González and Blau (1995, p. 13): “[...] They (readers) know they do not have to read everything at the same speed or with the same degree of care”, that is why the reader needs to have a determined purpose. If we are trying to find a specific detail inside of the article or chapter, we *scan* the words looking for that detail, “wasting no time on anything else” (BAKER-GONZÁLES; BLAU, 1995, p. 13). However, whether our objective is to understand “the main idea of something” (p.13), we read faster, taking the key words from the text and sentences that show us the whole idea, we *skim* it. Nevertheless, sometimes we also have to read the text carefully, paying attention to each part of it, rereading when it is necessary and asking for help, it is called: “reading slowly and carefully”, by the authors.

During the reading process, the reader sometimes forms some hypotheses about what the text is saying, ideas that are revised over the whole process. According to Baker- González and Blau (1995, p. 13):

Reading is an active process; the reader's mind is always working. Since readers cannot ask the writer questions, they use all possible clues in the text to figure out what the writer is trying to communicate. [...] Efficient readers form **hypotheses**, or tentative ideas, about what the text says and continuously check those ideas. If something they read contradicts their understanding of the text, they modify their ideas. This whole process is called **monitoring comprehension** [...] They (readers) recognize when they don't understand something, and they use the words on the page, their background knowledge of the topic, and their general knowledge of the world to build the meaning.

After reading the text, the reader's acts depends on what his purpose is, for example, if the reading is for pleasure, readers tend to think about what their reactions are, for example, if the text is funny, if it is not, whether they want or do not want to share this story with friends and many other things.

As we said before, the way we check out our understanding is influenced by what we want to do with this text. There are, according to the authors, three ways to do that: by asking questions about the text, as: "why did the writer write this material? What are the main or the most important ideas that the writer wanted to communicate? What are the major details related to these main ideas?" (1995, p.14); by paraphrasing, it is when the reader takes the most important ideas from the text and puts them into his own words; and, the last way is to explain to someone else what you understood from the text.

## 5 Bakhtin (1997) in: the dialogism concept

According to Bakhtin (1997) each human being action is associated with the language in use. This use is accomplished by statements that are complete and unique in their contexts. To the author, "[...] *Qualquer enunciado considerado isoladamente é, claro, individual, mas cada esfera de utilização da língua elabora seus tipos relativamente estáveis de enunciados, sendo isso que denominamos gêneros do discurso*" (BAKHTIN, 1997, p. 280) <sup>10</sup>.

The discourse is heterogeneous. It means that there are many ways to say the same thing. It happens in accordance with the moment in which the speaker is and the message he wants to convey.

One of the most important aspects found in Monica's Gang comic books, is how its stories can be directly connected to other stories around many other contexts. Examples of these connections will be shown later in this paper, and right now, we are going to explain what the concept of dialogism is, conceived by Mikhail Bakhtin (1997). Fiorin (2008), by following Bakhtin's thoughts, says that all statements are dialogic because they all show ideas presented in many others discourses, which are joined to make up the speaker's ideal:

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<sup>10</sup> These quotes will be kept in the original language.

Todos os enunciados envolvidos no processo de comunicação, independentemente de sua dimensão, são dialógicos. Neles, existe uma dialogização interna da palavra, que é prespassada sempre pela palavra do outro, é sempre e inevitavelmente também a palavra do outro. Isso quer dizer que o enunciador, para constituir um discurso, leva em conta o discurso de outrem, que está presente no seu. Por isso, todo discurso é inevitavelmente ocupado, atravessado, pelo discurso alheio. O dialogismo são as relações de sentido que se estabelecem entre dois enunciados (FIORIN,2008, p.19)

According to Bakhtin (1997), dialogism is the language essence itself. In this conception, the language cannot be understood as if it were an abstract system of norms. One discourse cannot be conceived without another one, and in a form of attraction or rejection, this allows that the dialogue appears in two or more voices. In Zani's words (2003, p. 5):

Em Mikhail Bakhtin, a relação dos diálogos é estabelecida por um cruzamento de vozes e/ou discursos diversificados e, embora o teórico russo tenha se baseado na literatura, o dialogismo proporciona também um cruzamento de meios de comunicação e discursos enunciativos distintos. Tal cruzamento serve também para ressaltar que o termo dialogismo pode ser denominado como polifonia - um outro termo para designar um significado assemelhado e/ou próximo e/ou o mesmo -, caracterizando-o como um diálogo em que muitas vozes adquirem visibilidade no dialogismo. Esta intertextualidade explicitada existe e confere uma identidade específica ao discurso.

This dialogism is often found in *Monica's Gang* comics, especially in stories that we can see the references from other famous ones. As it is shown in the strip below, we have inside the pages of *Monica's Gang: The ill-tempered princess* (2014) an intertextuality between the story going on and the story of "genie in the lamp".

**Picture 8- Intertextuality between the stories**



Source: SOUSA, 2014, p. 63

Many strips of this comic refer to fairy tales, wizards and witches, subjects that really attract many people. Even in the best stories, it is possible to find wide connections between the story which is being told and other famous stories that the reader with his/her background knowledge will certainly understand while he/she is reading.

In the explanation given by Campos (UNESP/UNIVESP, 2011)<sup>11</sup>, humans' language built itself into interaction relationships and when people speak, they recover conversations, facts and at the same time, they think about questions that will happen and this situation also happens with the reading passages. The idea of dialogism is based on its recovery of something that had happened and something that can be projected for the future. "A text is never isolated and never thought by itself" (UNESP/UNIVESP, 2011).

The dialogism can also be understood as an art, the act of producing dialogues or reproduce speeches in which the author will answer the reader's questions by showing it inside the characters' feelings. The idea of dialogism is often seen as a need to produce a dialogue, but there is also a second idea which is also accepted and it refers to the internal dialogism of language. As explained by Cotê (2000, p. 34):

[...] it's an internal dialogism of language, of words, of forms of language, of speech genres, since they are seen to present the 'objective' aspect of the realization of language events. The third idea of explicitly linking dialogism to

<sup>11</sup> This speech was taken from a video called: Pedagogia Unesp/Univesp- linguagem e dialogismo, it is available on the bibliography of this paper.



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its ontological foundation in dialectic is, however, much less common; but it is this last idea, I shall argue, that we find in Bakhtin's ontological claim. This also partially masks the nature of the 'Being' implied by his philosophy.

In our analysis, we will identify these connections between the famous stories, and we will show how this part inside of Mauricio de Sousa's comic books is directly related to the background knowledge of an individual. We will also analyze readers that use their background knowledge while reading the comics, and, how this background knowledge is important for them to understand the stories with the same characters, but in English.

### **6 *Monica's gang in: the English learning process***

To achieve our objective, it was necessary to apply a questionnaire to people from fifteen to twenty-five years old on their first years as English language learners. The questionnaire was applied in a private English school in the city of Franca, São Paulo. In this questionnaire (see Appendix A), The four learners talk about how their background knowledge acquired from reading *Monica's gang* strips in Portuguese helped them to understand the ones we gave them in English. These questions and answers were written in Portuguese with the intention to keep it easy for the students to understand.

Our first step was to ask these students to read all the tales presented in the comics: *Little flies* (2012) and *The ill-tempered princess* (2014), to choose, after their answers, what were the best ones to be analyzed. Then, students answered some questions (that will be shown throughout this paper). Hence, we have taken five strips from these two comics to analyze deeply, by having the background knowledge and the dialogism concept as theoretical sources and the questionnaire answered by the students to show what we will talk about on the following pages.

The strips are: "Monica and Maggy in: little flies" from the comic *Little flies* (2012), and "Monica in: The ill-tempered princess, part I", "Monica in: The ill-tempered dragon, part II", "Monica in: Magic potion", and "Smudge and Jimmy Five in: There is a story to be told in everywhere" from: *The ill-tempered* (2014).

As explained previously in this paper, Mauricio de Sousa has based many of his creations on real people who are part of his life, not only people from his family, but also famous soccer players, singers, people who have some kind of influence, among others.

Mauricio de Sousa has the great ability to see the remarkable features on people around him, and express it into his characters while he is creating them.

Fortunately, throughout the analysis, it is possible to verify that these remarkable characteristics have not been lost when the comics were translated from Portuguese to English.

As presented before, the background knowledge is all the knowledge acquired by a person while he/she is living. According to the Foreign Language PCNs (BRASIL, 1998, p. 29), “the background knowledge refers to the conventional wisdom that people have about the things of the world, it means, their pre-wisdom of the world”.

Since the creation of the four characters, which we will analyze deeply in this study, it was possible to notice some aspects that determine them, such as, the color of their clothes that changes only when the setting changes, for example, if the story happens in a medieval time, if their clothes match it, but, if they are in their daily routine, their clothes are usually the same:

**Picture 9-** The characters' clothes changed



**Source:** SOUSA, 2014, p. 18.

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Their hair is another aspect that makes a distinction between them. While Monica's hair is drawn in the way that remind us a bunch of bananas, Jimmy Five's hair is only five strands in his head, Smudge has dirty hair and Maggy has some loose strands of hair on the back of her neck:

**Picture 10-** Monica's and Maggy's hair



**Source:** SOUSA, 2012, p.4.

The first of these four characters created by Mauricio de Sousa was Jimmy Five. His first appearance on the strips was in 1960. According to Leite (2013), a friend who lived in Mogi das Cruzes inspired Jimmy Five in Mauricio de Sousa. This boy had a diction problem that made him change the letter “R” to the “L” in Portuguese, a characteristic that is part of this character too, and all the students who answered the questionnaire mentioned it. In Portuguese, he keeps using the “R” instead of the “L”, but, when it is translated to English, he uses the “W” instead of the “R” in words like *princess*, *very*, *treat* and *try*, they become *pwincess*, *vewy*, *tweat*, *twy*, etc.

**Picture 11-** Jimmy Five's diction problem in Portuguese<sup>12</sup>



**Source:** SOUSA, 2002, p.12.

**Picture 12-** Jimmy Five's diction problem in English



**Source:** SOUSA, 2014, p.10.

Another very remarkable aspect is Jimmy Five's hair. Only *Student A* mentioned it. When he was created he used to have more than the five strands he has nowadays, and, it is the reason why Mauricio de Sousa gave him the name: Jimmy Five, in English. About it Mauricio de Sousa (1998, p.1) says in a chronicle<sup>13</sup>:

O Cebolinha na Itália não ficou tão difícil. Cipollino lembra o original em português. Em espanhol também não foi tão diferente: Cebollita. Mas e em inglês? Little Onion (pequena cebola?). Não tem nada a ver. Foi quando a Maura, minha irmã e responsável pelo nosso escritório em New York, sugeriu uma solução: como o Cebolinha tem cinco fios de cabelo, poderia ser "rebatizado" como Jimmy Five. Mas por que esse nome?

<sup>12</sup> The strip written in Portuguese is not part of this paper *corpus*. It was used only to show what we explained before it. Its reference can be found on the bibliography of this study by the name: *Turma da Mônica em: a volta da bruxa Viviane* (2008).

<sup>13</sup> This chronicle was posted in a website called *Uol*, which has a section only by Mauricio de Sousa and his comics. The reference is at the end of this paper.

### **MONICA'S GANG IN: the English learning process**

Para que cada vez que um “kid” (garoto) cumprimentasse outro com aquela célebre batida de mãos abertas, falando “give me five”, lembrasse nosso personagem.

Monica, who is always chasing Jimmy Five because of his plans to take her down, was created in 1970. As we said before, Mauricio de Sousa's own daughter inspired this character in him. Most of the time we see her portrayed in her daily routine she is wearing a red dress and no shoes. The characteristics that call the readers' more attention are the facts that her two front teeth are bigger than the other ones; she is chubby and small. As *Student A*, said: “A Mônica é baixa, meio gorda, dentuça e se irrita facilmente, especialmente quando pegam seu coelho Sansão”:

**Picture 13-** Monica's main characteristics



**Source:** LEITE, 2013, p.1

Maggy is Monica's best friend. Her first strip was created in 1963 and, according to Leite (2013), another daughter of Mauricio inspired Maggy in him. This character, as the other ones mentioned before, has her characteristics. She is apparently always starving and wears a yellow dress nowadays. However, according to Leite (2013), the first time she appeared she was wearing a t-shirt, a skirt and no shoes. In addition, as we said previously, her hair has some loose strands on the back of her neck:

**Picture 14-** Maggy's evolution



**Source:** LEITE, 2013, p. 1.

Smudge was created in 1961, a little boy, who used to live in Mogi das Cruzes inspired Smudge in the author. This young person main characteristic was that he did not like taking a shower, an aspect that Mauricio kept in his character. His name in Portuguese is Cascão but, according to Mauricio de Sousa (1998), when he decided to translate the character's name to English, the creator wanted to choose a name that showed his main characteristic. The closest one was Smudge. Jimmy Five, his best friend, and he are always planning something against Monica. About this friendship, *Student D* who answered the questionnaire says: *"Lembro que o Cebolinha falava errado e vivia criando planos contra a Mônica, e ela vivia batendo nele e no Cascão por causa disso"*.

**Picture 15:** Smudge



**Source:** Leite, 2013, p.1

As we said previously, there are some situations that involve more than one character, and these events are presented in many *Monica's gang* comics, for

example, Jimmy Five is always making plans to take Monica down and she, on the other hand, is always trying to retaliate by punching him as in the situations that were taken from our *corpus*:

**Picture 16-** Monica and Jimmy Five I



**Source:** SOUSA, 2014, p. 18

When we read the *Monica's gang* comics written in English, it's easy to remember this characteristic because we are used to seeing it in the ones written in Portuguese. This happens because of our background knowledge. It means our first contact with Monica and Jimmy Five fighting all the time happened when we were young and started reading their comics, as readers, this knowledge about them were kept inside our memories. By reading the strips again, even in the English ones we bring these memories to make up our understanding of the story and the characters. All the students who answered the questionnaire said that while they were reading the comics in English, they could remember the main characteristics of the characters because of the previous knowledge they had of them.

We use our background knowledge in many times we read the comics. For example, even without reading the stories that are part of our *corpus*, by looking at the cover of the comic *The ill-tempered princess* (2014), the readers can activate their memories of characters who have the characteristics they see in it. Like a chubby little girl with two teeth that are bigger than the other ones and a boy with five hair strands in his head, inferring then, they can be Monica and Jimmy Five from *Monica's gang*. These details we mentioned are kept in our memories after we read these comics and, when we see the comics again, but at this time in English,

notwithstanding an English learner in his first years, he knows they are *Monica's gang* characters, maybe he cannot remember their names, but their acts and major characteristics will be remembered.

When we mentioned to the students who answered the questionnaire about the comics in English, they got interested in them. They did not know there are *Monica's gang* comics translated in many languages. In the questionnaire, *Student A* says: “Eu não sabia da existência desse tipo de quadrinho, mas quando fiquei sabendo tive muita vontade de ler, principalmente para ver se as características dos personagens estariam de acordo com a versão original em Português. [...] É possível compreender o contexto por causa das imagens”.

Another aspect that was observed is the comic books background color. In both magazines the predominant colors are blue, pink, yellow, white and green. When we analyzed other magazines that were written in Portuguese, we found the same feature:

**Picture 17-** The color of Monica's gang strips in English



Source: SOUSA, 2012, p.31.

Only one of the students who answered the questionnaire, talked about this characteristic. He says: “[...] *Tem também a cor dos quadrinhos, para mim pareciam sempre as mesmas. Um rosa clarinho, um verde, amarelo, isso chamava minha atenção. Nos quadrinhos em Inglês apareceram essas mesmas características [...]*” (STUDENT D).



By having the *Student D* as an example, we can see that the memories he kept from the comic books he read when he was younger were beyond what we were expecting. He remembered how the background color of these strips looked like and it called his attention while he was reading. Moreover, when he read it in English to answer the questionnaire it was one of the memories he brought and that in some way helped him to build his previous knowledge about what he was reading.

As we have said before, every human action is associated with the use of the language and every statement is unique and complete in its context of use. According to Bakhtin (1997), the dialogism between discourses happens when one of them takes ideas from the other one and gives a new meaning to them. To find out characteristics of a discourse that happened previously inside of the one we are reading/seeing/hearing/etc. we need to use our background knowledge and through it, think about the times we have seen it before in a text, a speech, an image, among others.

Mauricio de Sousa shows us the princesses in “Monica and Maggy in: Little flies” from the comic called *Little flies* (2012), we, with our background knowledge suppose they are innocent and kind, however, the author deconstructs this ideology previously built when he shows us that the princesses only wanted to be free from their curse, without caring about how Monica and Maggy would turn into people again, even the princesses faces show us that.

**Picture 18-** The deconstruction of the princesses' ideal



**Source:** SOUSA, 2012, p. 6.

If we go back to the point that Mauricio de Sousa's intention is to make his comics to remain current, there is another point to be discussed. Nowadays,

many people talk about the breaking of paradigms. It is not cool anymore that all the princesses are thin and submitted to beauty and to live a life looking for the perfect prince and it is not nice either, when the villain always loses in the end. Superheroes are humanized. They have feelings and weaknesses too. They can fail as everyone can.

Transposing this fact to Mauricio de Sousa's comics, we can show again, his capacity to create stories involving all kinds of aspects, and as people's minds have changed, we can see this changing inside his comics, too.

As explained before in this paper, an interesting point to be analyzed in *Monica's Gang* comics is its connection with many other stories, such as fairy tales and superheroes or even famous television programs.

What we intend to show, is that this connection can be directly associated to the concept of dialogism, presented by Bakhtin (1997). There is a wide range of stories in these comics, in which we can see not only the images in the strips making us think and remember other remarkable stories, but also dialogues between the characters that automatically make us think about other famous characters and situations.

The easiest and most common theme that can be seen in *Monica's Gang* is the interrelation with fairy tales. In many editions, this is a current genre and the author deals with it in two different ways: the main characters are taken into the medieval or monarchist world in which princesses, princes, kings, queens and witches appear in it.

Regarding the questionnaire answered for this paper, another interesting point to mention is that most of the English students who answered the questions and are over twenty years old can understand the comics' aspect clearer considering their background knowledge. They are Brazilian readers but they can understand with no difficulties, the references made in English inside the comics and we can attribute this fact to the connection that most of the stories present.

According to Verdolini (2007, p.4), this kind of resource also shows how Mauricio de Sousa's comics have the ability to deal with current topics:

Desde o início das revistas, nos anos 70, o quadrinhista teve uma preocupação em misturar a fantasia e o imaginário com acontecimentos reais, algo que de fato pudesse acontecer no universo infantil, para uma

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maior aproximação com as crianças; além de preencher as histórias com eventos atualizados de cada época. No entanto, no anseio de atingir o cômico e preservar o público conquistado na tenra idade, os recursos intertextuais foram se tornando mais específicos, sofisticados, e o que se vê hoje são histórias plenas de alusões, citações, paródias e paráfrases das mais variadas fontes do mundo real: filmes, contos de fadas, clássicos da literatura universal, músicas e programas de televisão. Sejam elas discretas ou audaciosas, estão cada vez mais presentes nas historinhas, sempre buscando atingir o riso com o que há de mais recente na mídia.

In one of the comics chosen to be analyzed in this paper, there is a strong influence of this kind of tales, as we have shown previously. "The ill-tempered princess, part I" is the story of a princess who was cursed by a bitter witch when she was still a baby because the witch did not like the idea of not being invited to a party in the kingdom.

**Picture 20-** The princess Monica being cursed by the bitter witch



**Source:** SOUSA, 2014, p. 6.

This story in special, leads us to remember a fairytale known all around the world as: the *Sleeping Beauty*, written by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in 1812. In this story, the birth of a young girl is told. In order to celebrate her birth, the king and the queen decide to throw a dinner party in which they invite almost all the witches that live in the kingdom except for the one that could not be invited because there are only twelve plates, so she has to stay at home.

After the dinner the twelve witches that are celebrating with the king and the queen offer gifts to the little princess, among them there were virtue, beauty and fortune. When the eleventh witch comes to give her gift, the one who was not invited

appears by cursing the little girl. This evil woman declares that the princess would prick her finger on the spindle of a spinning wheel on her fifteenth birthday and die.

The last witch, who has not given her present yet, stands up and says that the young girl would not die; she would only stay in a deep sleep for a hundred years.

When the little girl reaches her fifteenth birthday, she pricks her finger on the spindle of a spinning wheel by having the curse realized then. What we do not expect is that the entire kingdom sleeps with her.

Years later, a prince, who was walking around the kingdom, finds the young princess and, when he kisses her, she wakes up from her sleeping.

The connection between these two stories is about not only the curse, but also the bitter witch and the “happy ending”. Both are presented in the stories. Aurora, the “sleeping beauty”, does not die and in the end, she marries the handsome prince who had saved her. In “The ill-tempered princess, part II” we have Jimmy Five’s character, saving Monica from her curse but differently from Aurora, to end up her enchantment, Monica has to laugh, instead of finding the true love.

Mauricio de Sousa adapts his stories to his own public, and as it was claimed before, he always writes in a funny way. These adaptations leads the reader to understand the meaning of the strips, *Monica’s Gang* characters do not lose their singularity. In the words of Verdolini (2007, p.4), “*Os expedientes são utilizados para causar humor, para resgatar clássicos (como obras da literatura e contos de fadas), não para denegrir*”. This procedure that Mauricio de Sousa uses, repeating the features does not represent a critic or antagonism, but its content is used to give his strips a new sense so its first functions can be changed.

In the comic named *The ill-tempered princess (2014)*, but in a different tale, called “Smudge and Jimmy Five in: there is a story to be told in everywhere”. It is possible to find another funny case of interdiscursivity, where Snow White and the Evil Queen show up in the middle of the story, and Maggy, who is trying to catch an apple, ruins the Evil Queen’s plans to poison the princess.

Picture 21- Snow White and Evil Queen in the comic



Source: SOUSA, 2014, p. 62.

In another Verdolini's (2007) comment, we can find the explanation of why the author uses such types of interferences in his stories:

A Turma continua atemporal com suas brincadeiras de criança, seus eternos aniversários de sete anos e suas roupas que não mudam (apesar de aparecerem com modelinhos diferentes vez ou outra); contudo, vivenciam ou representam grandes sagas do cinema, da televisão, da literatura. Às vezes, aparecem mexendo no computador, mencionando algo da Internet ou brincando com um brinquedo eletrônico – possível apelo aos novos leitores da era tecnológica –, mas Mauricio preza as brincadeiras tradicionais e que envolvem a imaginação e a companhia dos amigos. Essa seria a ponte para que os adultos estimulassem suas gerações descendentes a ler o gibi. (VERDOLINI, 2007, p. 5)

As we said previously, the comics have been since its creation, a genre to transpose the real life into drawings, and each author and draftsman has their own ways to make their imagination flow, with the intention of attracting the public. Mauricio de Sousa has been doing it very well and transparently. He found a great way to connect everything, to make people use their background knowledge through his comics filled with the dialogue concept. The amazing ability of his comics, to remain so remarkable and timeless, can be explained, too. They are kids. Kids enjoying the best part of their childhood, they argue, they play, they fight, they get together to do everything that Mauricio de Sousa has in his mind.

Inside of *Monica's Gang* comics, there have never been only the quiet and polite children, bad witches or the best parents ever. There has never been a superhero that always saves or even the dog who is supposed to be only a pet, or a princess who is always kind, or the most dangerous vampire. In the words of Verdolini (2007, p.7): "*Em uma época em que se vive rodeado de mediocridade, principalmente na mídia, é tranquilizador poder contar com publicações como a Turma da Mônica, que apesar da pseudo-simplicidade, denota férteis recursos textuais e formação humanística*". *Monica's Gang* is a mix of everything, a deeper look on both sides of every human being that was transformed into a character. It is about not only good and evil, but also how the characters deal with both, in the funniest way they find.

## 7 Conclusion

By coming to the end of this research with the objective of this paper to verify how the EFL (English as a foreign language) students in their early years of having contact with the language could use the background knowledge they have in the training as readers and through this process, it was possible to identify the dialogue between the texts presented in *Monica's Gang* comics titled: "Monica and Maggy in: Little flies" from the comic *Little flies* (2012), and "Monica in: The ill-tempered princess, part I", "Monica in: The ill-tempered dragon, part II", "Monica in: Magic potion", and "Smudge and Jimmy Five in: There is a story to be told in everywhere" from the comic: *The ill-tempered* (2014).

Mauricio de Sousa's comics in English are full of dialogism. What we expected to do was showing some of them and to bring a reflection on how the human beings acquire knowledge by having these comics helping them in their first steps as English language beginners.

As we said before, the background knowledge and the dialogism concept are closely related. To understand the discourses that are presented in a comic, for example, the reader needs to have a previous knowledge about the theme, as we saw through the answers of the questionnaire, the students remembered stories they have read before and, by using them, they understood the

comics. They were able to remember the main characteristics of the characters and use them in their reading comprehension.

This analysis was done in order to show how our background knowledge can help us in learning a new language. The most important point was to introduce the learning process of a new language through the comic books that many of these students have discovered in their first years of contact with their mother tongue. By the use of these comics we could see that they had the opportunity to improve their knowledge of English as a foreign language through a pleasant and entertaining reading, not focused only on grammatical knowledge.

According to Bakhtin (1997) and explained in this paper, the language is meaningful if it is inside a context, in other words, it is through the language that the man takes his position in the world, by giving his opinion and showing the way he sees life. Many of our memories can be built because of the language in its use, by gestures, facial expressions, words and images.

Our memories become the background knowledge, and, this cognition helps us in every reflection on many situations. These memories are what we are, what make us being ourselves, what helps us to defend our position in the world.

Mauricio de Sousa's comics in English have these characteristics. They help students to learn by using their background knowledge about not only the comics the author has written in English, but also the dialogues between these comics and fairytales, TV programs, superhero comics, and many others.

The first steps about this subject have been presented here, and many others aspects can also be analyzed about the English learning process. We chose *Monica's gang* as our *corpus* because it was part of our lives when we were younger. At that time we learned a lot with them, not only in the language aspects, but we also learned how to be better people, how to respect the differences and how to live as a kid while we were kids, something that is missing in our society nowadays, because we see many children who do not know how to have a good time with friends or how to enjoy their childhood and even, with the advance of technology, we hardly ever find children who read comics or tales but fortunately, we will always count on *Monica's Gang* as a support when children's comics are needed.

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**APPENDIX A - Comic books questionnaire**

- 1 – Você já sabia da existência dos quadrinhos da Turma da Mônica em inglês? Quando soube, teve curiosidade de lê-los?
- 2 – Você se lembra das características mais marcantes das personagens (Mônica, Cascão, Cebolinha, Magali, etc.) dos gibis em português? Quais são estas características? Nos quadrinhos em inglês, essas características são as mesmas?
- 3 – Você encontrou nos quadrinhos que leu, alguma referência de histórias como: conto de fadas, heróis, programas de TV ou artistas?
- 4 – Você acredita que tais quadrinhos aumentaram de alguma maneira seus conhecimentos na Língua Inglesa? Cite um exemplo.

## APPENDIX B - Answered comic books questionnaires

### STUDENT A

- 1) Não sabia da existência desse tipo de quadrinho, mas quando fiquei sabendo tive muita vontade de ler, principalmente para ver se as características dos personagens estariam de acordo com a versão original em português.
- 2) A Mônica é baixa, meio gorda, dentuça e se irrita facilmente, especialmente quando pegam seu coelho Sansão; Cascão: nunca toma banho; Cebolinha: tem o cabelo com cinco fios, troca o “r” pelo “s” ao falar, gosta de “aprontar” com o coelhinho da Mônica; Magali: come a todo instante, nunca está acima do peso. Nos quadrinhos em inglês as características foram as mesmas.
- 3) Sim, tinha referência da história da Bela Adormecida.
- 4) Sim, aumentou o meu vocabulário por conter algumas palavras que eu não conhecia, como: ill-tempered, tickling, bitter, etc. E os desenhos facilitam a abertura da mente, melhorando o aprendizado, pois mesmo sem entender algumas palavras é possível compreender o contexto por causa da imagens.

### STUDENT B

- 1) Não, sim.
- 2) Cebolinha sempre fala errado, Cascão sempre desconfiado, Magali sempre comilona, Mônica amorosa, mas quando confrontada ela bate.
- 3) Conto de fadas, teatro.
- 4) Sim, com palavras que eu ainda não conhecia.

### STUDENT C

- 1) Não, sim.

- 2) Yes, Magali continua comendo muito, Cebolinha continua falando errado e brigando com a Mônica.
- 3) Sim.
- 4) Sim, como são histórias cotidianas na vida de crianças, são histórias de fácil entendimento e que facilitam o aprendizado de diálogos em inglês.

### STUDENT D

- 1) Não. Sim. Eu queria ver se elas continuavam engraçadas para mim.
- 2) Sim. Lembro que o Cebolinha falava errado e vivia criando planos contra a Mônica, e ela vivia batendo nele e no Cascão por causa disso. A Mônica era dentuça, usava um vestidinho vermelho e era gordinha. A Magali era como uma sombra da Mônica. Elas estavam sempre juntas, a Magali era muito comilona. Tem também a cor dos quadrinhos, para mim pareciam sempre as mesmas: um rosa clarinho, um verde, amarelo, isso chamava minha atenção. Nos quadrinhos em inglês apareceram as mesmas características só alguns nomes que mudaram.
- 3) Sim, uma história parecia a bela adormecida, em outras vi o gênio da lâmpada, tinha também um programa de televisão, acho que era o “American Idol”, parecido com os que temos aqui no Brasil, o “The Voice Brasil” e uns outros. Tinha também da Branca de Neve, do super-homem, mas o engraçado é que nessa parte do super-homem é depois de achar uma kriptonita que o Cebolinha se transforma nele, o que não acontece nos quadrinhos e nem nos filmes do super-homem, porque se ele chegar perto da kriptonita, enfraquece. Em uma das historinhas tem também o clube dos meninos, me lembro de ver vários filmes que aparecem clubes assim, mas o que mais me marcou foi o “Dênis, o pimentinha”, em que o Dênis e os amigos dele ficam tramando contra a Polly. Tem também bruxas nas histórias, a Mônica vira uma delas em um dos quadrinhos.
- 4) Sim, porque já conhecendo as personagens. Eu pude prestar mais atenção nas palavras que elas falavam e as compreender melhor pelas imagens. Tinham algumas palavras que eu não conhecia, mas o dicionário no final das duas revistinhas me ajudou bastante. Pelo Cebolinha falar errado, nas partes dele eu tive que prestar mais atenção e tentar entender qual era a palavra que ele falava.