

DORA THE EXPLORER: an introduction to the English teaching-learning process

Luciana Souza MONTANHERI

Tutor: Profa. Ms. Márcia Helena Venâncio FALEIROS

Resumo: O Inglês tornou-se uma língua universal devido ao poder dos Estados Unidos ao redor do mundo. A língua inglesa é considerada a língua franca, língua que pessoas de diferentes nacionalidades usam para se comunicar por muitas razões, tais como negócios, academia e turismo. Por esse motivo, as pessoas estão buscando o aprendizado da língua inglesa. O processo de ensino-aprendizagem da língua inglesa tem passado por vários métodos e abordagens desde então. De acordo com a hipótese do período crítico, existe uma idade adequada para iniciar a aprendizagem de uma segunda língua, que é antes da adolescência. O objetivo deste trabalho é fazer uma análise de *Dora a aventureira*, um desenho animado que interage com as crianças, ensinando expressões, vocabulário e frases curtas na língua inglesa, e também verificar se o desenho é uma ferramenta eficaz no processo de ensino-aprendizagem. A análise se apoia em uma pesquisa bibliográfica baseada em autores como Harmer (1994), Lightbown & Spada (2006), Ur (1991), Lonergan (1995) e outros. Primeiro, discutimos a importância de aprender inglês neste mundo globalizado. Depois, lidamos com as diferenças entre a aprendizagem e aquisição de uma língua estrangeira. Na sequência, falamos sobre a hipótese do período crítico, a importância de aprender o vocabulário quando aprendemos uma língua estrangeira e também sobre alguns recursos que foram introduzidos no processo de ensino-aprendizagem ao longo dos anos, especialmente o vídeo. Finalmente, apresentamos o desenho animado *Dora a aventureira* e analisamos o episódio chamado *Praias* para verificar a eficácia do desenho animado como uma ferramenta no processo de aprendizagem da língua inglesa.

Palavras-chave: Inglês. Processo de ensino-aprendizagem. Vídeo. Desenhos animados. *Dora a aventureira*.

Abstract: English has become a global language due to the United States power around the world. It is considered a lingua franca, the language people from different nationalities use to communicate for many reasons, such as business, academy and tourism. That is why people are seeking the English learning. The English teaching-learning process has been through many methods and approaches since then. According to the Critical Period Hypothesis, there is a proper age to start learning a second language, which is in the early childhood. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to analyze *Dora the explorer*, a cartoon that interacts with children by teaching English expressions, vocabulary and short sentences and also verify if it is an effective tool in the teaching-learning process. The analysis was supported by some bibliographical research based on authors such as Harmer (1994), Lightbown & Spada (2006), Ur (1991), Lonergan (1995) and others. First, we discuss the importance of learning English in this globalized world. Then we deal with the differences between learning

and acquisition of a foreign language. Later on, we talk about the Critical Period Hypothesis, the importance of learning vocabulary when learning a foreign language and also about some resources that were introduced in the teaching-learning process throughout the years, especially video. Finally, we introduce the cartoon *Dora the explorer* and analyze the episode called *Beaches* to check the cartoon's effectiveness as a tool in the English learning process.

Key words: English. Teaching-learning process. Video. Cartoon. Dora the explorer.

1 Introduction

The United States power and influence around the world is the reason why English has become a lingua franca, a language adopted for speakers from different nationalities to communicate. Therefore, English is present in many places, such as product's labels, airports, international conferences, etc.

Due to these factors, people are willing to learn English as they need it for many purposes, such as academy, business, tourism, etc. As it became so important to have English as a foreign language, many methods and approaches have been introduced in the English teaching-learning process throughout the years. There is also a great discussion about the proper age to start learning a second language, which according to the Critical Period hypothesis, it is in the early childhood.

The objective of this paper is to analyze a cartoon called *Dora the explorer*, which introduces children to the target language, by teaching expressions, vocabulary and short sentences in a fun and enjoyable way through the interaction with the children and to check how useful the cartoon is to be used as a tool while children are learning English.

Based on authors such as Harmer (1994), Lightbown & Spada (2006), Ur (1991), Lonergan (1995) and others, we did a bibliographical research to give us support to analyze the cartoon and discuss some prospects that debate the foreign language learning and also aspects that assist the teaching-learning process. First of all, we deal with the importance of learning English nowadays and why it became a global language. Then we discuss the differences between learning and acquisition of a foreign language.

Later on, we to talk about the proper age to learn a foreign language, the importance of teaching vocabulary and also about some resources that assist the teaching-learning process, especially the importance of video as a tool in the foreign language teaching.

Finally, we introduce *Dora the explorer* cartoon as a way to familiarize children with the target language and analyze the episode called *Beaches* to certify its efficiency as a tool in the foreign language learning process.

2 Why learning English nowadays

The globalization has established an integration between the countries around the world, connecting people from different nationalities, especially for international business and communication. It has incorporated English into an international language, one that is spoken all over the world. According to Crystal (2010), the reason why a language becomes international or global is related to the power of the people who speak it.

In the case of English, the language has spread as a result of a combination of a political/military power (The British Empire), scientific/technological power (The Industrial Revolution), economic power (pounds and later dollars), and cultural power (broadcasting, travel, films, pop songs, internet [...]) (CRYSTAL, 2010, p. 10).

Due to the United States influence around the world, English has become a lingua franca. According to Harmer (2004), lingua franca is a language that people from different nationalities use to communicate for business, science and technology, tourism, academy and others. Therefore, English is present everywhere: at airports, international conferences, restaurants and on the Internet as well. Thus the demand for English as a second language is increasing significantly every day.

As Harmer (1994) states, there are some different reasons for language study, which are school curriculum, advancement, specific purposes and culture, among others. Students who are willing to apply for a respectable college must have English as a second/foreign language. Some people seek the English learning because of their job career, as it is required in job interviews. Others do it because they are attracted by the culture of the places where English is spoken or want to travel around the world. According to Harmer (1994), each person

studies English for a reason, a waiter needs it to serve his customers, a business executive for international connections and a student may need it for academic purposes.

To follow and be part of the global revolution, people have to speak English, consequently, the acquisition and learning process of a foreign language is quite relevant. This is what will be discussed on the next topic.

2.1 Acquisition and learning

The process of learning a second language is quite complex, as it involves many factors, such as political, economic, social and others. It is possible to theorize about some general standards of language learning, but we have to keep in mind that each person has their own characteristics and learning preferences.

Learning a language is not just about the linguistic structure and vocabulary, it is also important to interact in writing and orally with the speaker, when both can understand and be understood.

Por meio da interação os alunos podem aumentar sua bagagem linguística conforme eles ouvem e leem material autêntico ou até mesmo a produção dos colegas em discussões, tarefas de solução de problemas, tarefas de lacuna de opinião. Na interação os aprendizes podem usar toda bagagem que possuem na língua alvo, tudo que aprenderam ou casualmente adquiriram. Até mesmo nos níveis iniciais, eles aprendem a explorar a elasticidade da língua (RIVER apud MORAES, 2007, p. 191).¹

Some investigations on how people become language users have been focusing on the distinction between acquisition and learning. Acquisition is defined as a subconscious process which results in the knowledge of a language, whilst learning results only in knowing about it. Learning a language is not as much effective as acquiring it. Acquisition is more successful and longer lasting, according to Harmer (1994).

Lightbown & Spada (2006) corroborates this idea by saying that learning a language is based on memorization and linguistic structures through conscious attention to form and rule for learning. On the other hand, acquisition is unconscious,

¹The quotes will be kept in the original language to maintain authenticity.

students are exposed to the second language and it is simple to understand, as when children learn their first language: unconsciously and spontaneously.

According to the monitor hypothesis, the acquired system initiates a speaker's utterances and is responsible for spontaneous language use. The learned system acts as an editor or 'monitor', making minor changes and polishing what the acquired system has produced. Such monitoring takes place only when the speaker/writer has plenty of time, is concerned about producing correct language, and has learned the relevant rules (LIGHTBOWN; SPADA, 2006, p. 37).

The second/foreign language learning has to be similar to the way children acquire their first language. "They are never consciously 'taught it', nor do they consciously set out to learn it" (HARMER, 1994, p. 33). Successful acquisition is connected to the nature of the language input students receive. The term input is the language that students read or hear. "This input should contain language that the students already 'know' as well as language that they have not previously seen" (HARMER, 1994, p. 33).

Consequently, we, teachers, have to bring the learning process as close as possible to the acquisition one (HARMER, 1994). One way of doing it is by taking into consideration the remarkable role that individual learning styles plays in the teaching-learning process.

According to Lightbown&Spada (2006), students have learning preferences and some people have their own way of learning, which is what we call learning styles. It refers to different ways in which we learn, process and retain information. Some people cannot learn a language until they see it written, that is the reason why they are called visual learners. The ones that learn best by listening are called the auditory ones and people who find it easier to learn by physical action, such as miming or role-play are referred to as kinesthetic learners.

There are many questions about the interaction of learning styles and the success in language learning, which is very complex and difficult to determine. Thus, if teachers and learners, in this case mainly adults, manage to find out what their learning style is, it is likely that the learning process will flow in a smoother and faster way and the outcome will be the expected one.

Ur (1991) points out that adults tend to be more committed and self-disciplined in the language learning-process as most of them need it for a specific

purpose such as work, travel, academy, etc. They are also more tolerant when it comes to meaningless activities.

Children are more interested in games, pictures and stories. These sources are visual and aural stimulus, which motivate children and can be very “[...] effective if they are based on an appeal to the senses or activate the children in speech or movement” (UR, 1991, p. 288). By observing, the teacher will be able to find out what the child learning style is. Young children get bored or dispersed easily, so the teacher’s role is to provide activities that activate their interest.

Teachers have to keep in mind that learning preferences count a lot in the teaching-learning process, some approaches of teaching might be good for some students, but not for all of them.

Nevertheless, when learners express a preference for seeing something written or spending more time in a language laboratory, we should not assume that their ways of working are wrong, even if they seem to be in conflict with the pedagogical approach we have adopted. Instead, we should encourage learners to use all means available to them. At a minimum, research on learning styles should make us skeptical of claims that a single teaching method or text book will suit the needs of all learners (LIGHTBOWN & SPADA, 2006, p.59).

There is a great discussion about differences between adults and children learning-process. Does the age of learning make any difference? This is what we will cover next.

3 The earlier the better

Nowadays it is very common to find children at a very young age learning English. There are some discussions about the influence of age in foreign language learning.

Adults are more self-disciplined and committed when they are learning a second language, as they may need it for a specific reason, such as job career, travelling or academic purposes. Ur (1991) affirms that adults have a good capacity for understanding and they have probably developed strategies and skills that children do not have yet, adult’s classes tend to be more cooperative, which facilitates the learning-process. They are also patient and tolerant to deal with some frustrations.

Children need to be motivated by the teacher and the approaches and techniques used in the classroom, they are more interested in visual and audio aids, which make the class more attractive and fun (UR, 1991). They usually get bored easily, thus the teacher has to come up with interesting and motivating activities.

As reported by Lightbown&Spada (2006), there are three main theories to explain language development, which are: behaviourist, innatist and interactional/development perspective.

According to the behaviourist perspective, also called Behaviourism, children imitate what they hear by those who are around them, receiving positive reinforcement to reproduce what its heard. The consistency of the reinforcement offered by the environment the children are, would shape their language behavior and they would create habits to use the correct language. "This theory gives great importance to the environment as the source of everything the child needs to learn" (LIGHTBOWN;SPADA, 2006, p. 10).

The innatist perspective that deals with the idea that all human languages are based on some innate universal principles explains that children are automatically programmed for language, as it develops like any other biological functions, such as start walking, most children learn at the same age. These ideas are connected to the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), "the hypothesis that animals, including humans, are genetically programmed to acquire certain kinds of knowledge and skill at specific times in life" (LIGHTBOWN; SPADA, 2006, p. 17).

Considering language acquisition, the CPH suggests that children who are not in contact with language in the early childhood will never acquire language if these deprivations lasts for too long.

As stated by Lightbown&Spada (2006), the idea that children are better second/foreign language learners than adults come from the Critical Period Hypothesis, which argues that there is a time in human development when the brain is predisposed for success in language learning, proposing that the earlier children is exposed to the target language, more chances of acquiring a native-like competence they will have.

However, the hypothesis that "the earlier, the better", cannot be taken as absolute, since there are many factors that may influence the second/foreign language acquisition. It is a fact that it is easier for children to learn things in general,

both for cognitive reasons, as associative memory and incremental learning elements.

There is a list ² that contains a few reasons why kids should be introduced to a foreign language as earlier as possible:

- a) the accent: young children tend not to have a “foreign” accent when speaking a different language.
- b) enjoyment is very important in the learning process, once children enjoy learning, they are not concerned about their cognitive ability or motor skills, and they just want to have a good time by doing the activities.
- c) children are also undaunted, since they do not worry about their mistakes. They want to show the others students what they have learned without fearing mistakes, while adults suffer pressure, as most of the time they have to use a second language in formal situations.
- d) support network is a great thing for kids, once they have that support at school and at home. The parents can reinforce what they have learned at school through bilingual books, videos, games, etc.

Introducing children to a new language when they are young, makes it easier to accept the fact that learning a foreign language is something ordinary, as we live in a globalized world.

According to Lang (2016), learning a second language is something good for children’s mind.

Learning a second language does not cause language confusion, language delay or cognitive deficit, which have been concerns in the past [...] children who learn a second language can maintain attention despite outside stimuli better than children who know only one language (LANG, 2016, online).

As studies have shown, the younger we are, the easier it is to learn a new language. It does not mean that adults cannot learn a new language as well, but when people are introduced to a foreign language as a child, the advantages are quite significant.

²According to the Blog Language Lizard (2016).

Being an adult or a child to learn a foreign language we should master vocabulary as this is the starting point to manage to communicate. The next topic explores this idea in more details.

4 The role of vocabulary in the teaching-learning process

Although it is said that people should start learning a second language as earlier as possible, it is vital the way how it is taught and also the approaches and techniques teachers use in this process, no matter the age the students are.

When we are learning a second language it is essential to deal with the four language skills, which are: listening, reading, speaking and writing, but it is also crucial to deal with vocabulary, as we need words to formulate sentences to communicate.

If language structures make up the skeleton of language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and the flesh. An ability to manipulate grammatical structure does not have any potential for expressing meaning unless words are used (HARMER, 1994, p. 153).

We know that grammar structures have to be taught since they enable students to construct sentences, but learners also need a storage of words to do so. That is one of the reasons why teachers should focus on vocabulary teaching, so that students are able to develop a conversation whenever they need. The lack of vocabulary would make it harder to express what students are trying to say, making the conversation meaningless and nonsense.

Ur (1991) defines vocabulary as the words we teach in the foreign language. As students meet the word for the first time, teachers should explain to them what it means, how it is spelled and how it is pronounced, making sure that they have learned it accurately. Students also have to be presented to the many ways a word can be used, such as the time tenses, plural form, prepositions that goes with a verb, etc. There are many ways to present students the meaning of new vocabulary, such as: detailed description, concise definition, synonyms, among others.

As stated by Ridell (2001), when teaching new vocabulary, the teacher has to use approaches that clarify the meaning of the words in a way that do not confuse students' mind. There are some words that work in a different way

depending on the context and also have more than one meaning, which is very common, such as *slim/thin/skinny*, depending on the context in which we use it. That is why languages are very tricky, we never learn it all.

Regarding meaning, Harmer (1994) points out that the word *book* works as a noun (e.g. the thing we read from), and also as a verb (e.g. to make a reservation in a hotel). If it is added a preposition, it becomes a phrasal verb (e.g. *book out*, which means to leave a place in a hurry).

Besides, word meaning is also guided by collocations, “that is which words go with each other” (HARMER, 1994, p. 157). Some words just sound natural when combined to others, but sometimes it does not make sense, sounding wrong. We could say that we had a *quick meal*, but if we say we had a *fast meal*, it just does not sound natural or right.

The form also counts a lot. According to Ridell (2001), there are some words that are written in a very different way of their sound, e.g. *cough*, *laugh* or are spelled in a different way but have the same meaning e.g. *color/colour*, *favorite/favourite*.

In addition, the pronunciation is very relevant, which includes sounds, phonology, intonation, stress and rhythm. When learning a new language, students must learn the right way the words are pronounced. The sound of the word might be different from the spelling and the stressed syllables are very difficult to know, as the letters have different sounds depending on the word.

Indeed, the way words are stressed (and the way that stress can change when their grammatical function is different – as with nouns and verbs, for example) is vital if students are to be able to understand and use words in speech. Part of learning a word is learning it written and spoken form (HARMER, 1994, p.157).

As discussed above, vocabulary teaching can be very arduous, however, teachers have many aids that support that task. Sometimes, we, teachers need some other techniques to present new vocabulary.

Not all vocabulary can be learnt through interaction and discovery techniques. Even if such techniques are possible, however, they are not always the most cost effective. There are many occasions when some form of presentation and/or explanation is the best way to bring new words into the classroom (HARMER, 1994, p. 161).

There are some different effective ways³ of presenting our students new vocabulary, such as realia, pictures, mime, gesture and also by contrasting words:

- a) realia would be when a teacher shows the object, if she says pencil, then she shows a pencil.
- b) pictures are a great source when the teacher cannot bring the object to the classroom. The teacher can also draw on the board.
- c) mime and gesture can be used to present actions, such as smoking or running, which sometimes it is easier to explain by doing it.
- d) contrasts are also a good way to teach meaning. Teacher can present the meaning of tall by contrasting it with short, and so on.

There are many useful sources that assist the English teaching. If teachers do not make use of some extra aids, the class becomes boring and students might not have an effective learning.

As the technology has increased, some new aids were introduced in the language teaching, such as videos, songs, data show, etc. The use of these resources is a very motivating technique in the classroom, not only for teaching vocabulary, but also for teaching the language as a whole. This is what will be discussed on the next topic.

4.1 Resources for English teaching

The English teaching has been through many methods and approaches throughout the years and it is clear that it requires the use of some aids to assist this process, as the class has to be interesting and attract student's attention, so they keep motivated and the learning is more effective.

The board, which is still used in classrooms although not as much as in the past, is "[...] the most versatile piece of teaching equipment [...]" (HARMER, 2005, p. 137). Teachers use it to present new language or structures, to clarify students' doubts, to show the right spelling of some words, to write down the answers of an activity and others.

³As Harmer (1994) endorsed.

Besides the board, there are some resources that support the teaching-learning process such as: pictures, the overhead projector, language laboratory, etc.

Pictures are a good source to be used in the classroom, we can use it in many circumstances, especially as realia to deal with big objects we would not bring into the classroom. This fact is endorsed by Harmer (2005): pictures can be used in many ways as an aid in the teaching- learning process, such as the use of drills, game-like activities and also prediction.

The overhead projector, nowadays called data show “[...] are extremely useful pieces of equipment, since they allow us to prepare visual or demonstration material” (HARMER, 2005 p. 136). At first the use of the overhead projector was for demonstrating pictures or texts through transparencies, but as the technology has developed, nowadays, it allows us to show pictures, slides and also videos through this multimedia equipment.

Another resource for language teaching is the language laboratory, which is a room that contains some cabins with headphones, microphones and computers.

The technology is organized in such a way that students can work on their own, can be paired or grouped with other students, or can interact (through their headphones and microphones) on a one-to-one basis with the teacher [...] Students can interact with each other, and written texts can be sent to each computer screen (HARMER, 2005, p.141).

The language laboratory has many advantages, such as privacy, learner training and also individual attention. Students are not disturbed by their colleagues, they can train their listening and speaking by making use of the headphones and microphones and the teacher is able to talk to each student by the microphone without interrupting the whole class (HARMER, 2005).

Technology has evolved significantly over the years and it has become an indispensable aid in the English teaching. The use of computers has become an ordinary resource in language classes, it can be used for many reasons, such as: searching the internet, watching videos, playing educational games, etc. The most advantageous device students access when using the computer is the internet. The internet is a vital instrument for communication, work, educational purposes, among others.

The internet has provided many benefits to the teaching-learning process, once students are able to do some research, to access many books and online dictionaries and it also contains websites that are especially created for language learning.

We know that technology, nowadays, especially computers should be part of the English classes. However, there is a resource that we cannot forget mentioning and is also worth using: video.

The use of videos as an aid is extremely important in the learning process, as they enable students through a VCR, TV or multimedia equipment to see the language in real use, such as: in a restaurant, in a night club or on the beach.

Videos play a vital role in the teaching-learning process. Children are the ones that usually benefit more of them as video are appealing to these learners. This is what the next chapter covers.

5 Video as a tool in the teaching-learning process

Videos give students an idea of how foreign people act in different situations. They also show different accents, as depending on the place people live, the accent tends to be different. English classes with videos can be very motivating, once students “[...] show an increased level of interest when they have a chance to see language in use as well as hear it, and when this is coupled with interesting tasks” (HARMER, 2005, p. 282).

One of the main advantages of video is that students do not just hear language, they see it too. This greatly aids comprehension, since for example, general meaning and moods are often conveyed through expression, gesture, and other visual clues. Thus we can observe how intonation can match facial expression (HARMER, 2005, p.282).

The video ability to show communicative situations in an authentic way is valuable in the teaching-learning process, “The combination of sound and vision is dynamic, immediate and accessible” (LONERGAN, 1995 p. 4). Students are able to see the foreign language in use, how people behave or act in formal or informal situations and also get to know the culture of the target language: how people dress, what kind of food they use to eat, what kind of dance or music they enjoy.

At their best, video presentations will be intrinsically interesting to language learners. The learner will want to watch, even if comprehension is limited. The material should be motivating; the learner should want to see more, to ask questions, to follow up ideas and suggestions (LONERGAN, 1995, p. 5).

There are many different kinds of videos that can be used in the classroom: television broadcasts, language-teaching broadcasts and films, self-made videos produced by the teacher and students.

Television broadcasts can be used as realia in the classroom such as the use of newspaper articles or magazine pictures, “[...] they are real and meaningful; and they have a relevance to the learner which transcends the immediate needs of language learning” (LONERGAN, 1995, p. 5).

The language-teaching broadcasts and films are especially planned and produced for language teaching, the vocabulary and structures taught have to be controlled according to the students’ level as stated by Lonergan (1995).

Students can also tape themselves and their friends speaking the target language, so they can analyze and improve their pronunciation and have fun as well by developing their own video.

Videos manage to be used to encourage oral fluency as they can be paused anytime, so the teacher is able to stop the video and ask the students to repeat what they have heard.

Language learners can be invited to join in with part of the video presentation, and to speak in response to the cues they receive. In this way they learn to communicate in the target language: presented with a situation, the learners must make any utterance which is valid in that situation (LONERGAN, 1995, p. 32).

The intonation and gesture count a lot in a conversation, as the person might say something in an ironic way that we could realize only if we are attentive to the person’s gesture or face expression. That is the reason why it is essential to see the language in real use.

When teaching children, videos are greatly effective, as they get very interested in the images in the cartoons. Images are useful when teaching children, they feel absolutely motivated and attracted by visual aids.

Visual association in an integrated context helps students to understand the concepts more easily, and to internalize the communicative objectives, the vocabulary, and the grammar points more readily [...] The importance of our visual sense in acquiring languages is imperative [...] Pictures help to

enhance body language, which is very important in communication, and is often neglected in the classroom (SANTOS, 2016, online).

Children can learn a lot through videos/cartoons. There are many educational cartoons, especially created for children, through which they can learn vocabulary, word spelling, functions, expressions and also a foreign language. Children can be introduced to a foreign language by watching cartoons, as some of them presents some initial vocabulary and common expressions in the target language.

There is a cartoon called *Dora the explorer* that is very appealing to children, besides it, it also deals with the English language in a way that can be explored in the English teaching-learning process as we can see below.

5.1 Dora the explorer

English has become a global language because of the influence of the United States around the world. It is the language people from different nationalities use to communicate as endorsed by Harmer (2004). Consequently, people have to speak English to be part and follow the global revolution.

As we have already discussed, people study English for different reasons, such as academic purposes, career, culture, among others. Independently of the reason, the sooner the better as it is supported by the Critical Period Hypothesis.

Children feel motivated by visual and audio aids. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to certify if videos/cartoons are a real beneficial tool in the English teaching-learning process. To do so we chose an episode of *Dora the explorer*.

Dora the explorer is an educational television cartoon that interacts with children by teaching them how to say numbers, the name of the colors, functions and other language characteristics in their native language, but she also teaches some English vocabulary, expressions and short sentences. However, in the original version, Dora speaks English and teaches its viewers to speak some Spanish.

According to Tricae (online), Dora is a 7-year-old girl who is always involved in some adventure with her monkey friend called Botas. In every episode they face a different situation, they have to find the right path to go to different places

or to help a friend who is in trouble. To do so, they need to speak English with other characters to complete their missions throughout their path.

The adventures revolve around a problem, which most of the time is caused by the villain Raposo, which is always trying to disturb Dora and Botas through their way. He is called Swipper in the American version because he steals things from the characters. Raposo can only be stopped if the viewers say "Raposo não pegue".

The help of viewers is part of the interaction because when the characters ask questions, such as if they see something or if they know what something is, they give viewers some time as if they were waiting for the child to respond. Dora has a backpack in which she carries all the stuff she needs, including a map. The map and the backpack sing a short song explaining what they are used for every time Dora needs them.

All episodes follow the same order of events for the child to understand the pattern of situations where little Dora ends up getting involved. There is always a problem for them to deal with, but they always find a way to handle the problems created by him.

We know the importance of the Critical Period Hypothesis for a better second/foreign language learning according to what Lightbown & Spada (2006) said. This hypothesis argues that there is a time in human development when the brain is predisposed for success in language learning, proposing that the earlier children are exposed to the target language, more chances of acquiring a native-like competence they will have. We can use the cartoon as a tool to expose students to the English language.

As stated by Lima (online), the bilingualism of the cartoon is the main attraction for the parents and also for children. It appeals to the aural and visual stimulus, which according to Ur (1991) is very effective for the children learning process, as they feel motivated by those senses, besides movements.

Their learning preferences and their own way of learning also counts a lot. Lightbown & Spada (2006) say that there are different ways through which we learn. People that are called visual learners cannot learn something until they see it. The auditory ones learn best by listening and the kinesthetic learners find it easier to learn by physical action, such as miming or role-play. Dora's cartoon presents all

those learning styles, as children can watch, listen and also move according to what the episode presents.

Based on these ideas, we are going to analyze one episode of *Dora the explorer* to certify if the cartoon is a valuable educational tool.

5.1.1 Beaches by Dora the explorer

The episode that will be analyzed is called *Beaches*. In this episode Dora is pretending to swim, then her friend Botas shows up and she invites him to go to the beach. He does not know how to swim very well, so Dora asks children to help open her backpack by saying backpack (in Portuguese) to get a present for Botas. It shows some objects pointed by an arrow and children are supposed to choose the right one that has a red bow, which is the gift for Botas.

When the right object is found the backpack says “very good” in English. Then the backpack puts the other things inside it, pretending to eat them saying “delicious” in English.

When Dora waits for the children to repeat what she says and answer her questions, she is interacting with the viewers, in this case the children. River apudMoraes (2007) emphasized that through the interaction students/children are able to increase their linguistic knowledge as they hear authentic material.

Besides, Lonergan (1995) says that the combination of sound and vision is dynamic, immediate and accessible. Thus, children can assimilate what the words they heard in English mean in Portuguese as they are visualizing it. Santos (online) corroborates this idea by saying it is easier for students to understand the concepts if they have a visual association in an integrated context.

Later on, Dora gives Botas a float, so he does not drown when he goes swimming. Then they start their walk towards the beach. They do not know the path, so they ask the map for help, but the map only shows up when children call for it. It sings a song explaining what the map is used for: “If there is a place you got to go, I am the one you need to know, I'm the Map...”. The map shows the right way they have to follow.

First they have to go through the sand dunes, then pass the pier, finally the beach. The map asks children to tell Dora the path as they have been interacting.

Dora and Botas continue their journey singing a song. Children love songs, as Ur (1991) stated, they are interested in audio aids, which make the learning process more attractive and fun. Children feel motivated when they are enjoying the learning, as they are not concerned about their cognitive ability or motor skills, they just want to have a good time, says Blog Language Lizard (2016).

Then, in the episode, kids are asked to tell Dora if they see the villain Raposo. He shows up and Dora interacts with the kids as they are telling her that Raposo is around, but she cannot see him. Then Raposo manages to steal Tico's ice cream. Tico is Dora's friend, he is a squirrel that speaks English, so Dora asks children to tell him to "watch out" in English, that is an expression used to tell people to be careful. As Dora passes through some situations, she teaches the viewers some vocabulary and expressions in the foreign language.

Later on, Dora and Botas tell Raposo not to take his ice cream. Tico says "Swiper, no swiping" in his native language that is English, so children can compare to Portuguese and learn some English expressions. Tico thanks Dora by saying "thank you" and she says "you are welcome". Harmer (2005) mentions that a good advantage of watching a video is that people can see the language in real use, people's expressions and gestures and also how intonation matches the facial expression.

By analyzing these situations, we can say students are acquiring the language as stated by Harmer (1994) when he defines it as an unconscious process which result in the knowledge of the language. In the episode there was no translation into Portuguese, children learned the expressions unconsciously. The second language learning has to be similar to the way children acquire their first language, spontaneously and unconsciously taught, affirm Lightbown&Spada (2006).

As they keep their way to the beach, they always say "let's go" in English and Portuguese, so children learn it. They face other situations that are solved with the kids help, by choosing the right path that the map has showed and also by counting the boards that are missing in the pier, always teaching something, in this case directions and the numbers.

Raposo shows up again and takes Botas float, so children have to help him to find it among other similar objects. By looking for the float, they learn the round shape and some colors. When they arrive on the beach they meet the octopus

that waves to Dora saying “Hi Dora”, therefore, children learn how to greet people in English. As they realize they have handled all the obstacles they sing a song, which says “We did it”, mixing Portuguese and English. Successful acquisition is connected to the nature of the language input students receive, which is what they hear or read. This input should include language that students have not previously seen as well as language they already know, Harmer (1994) states.

Throughout the episode it is emphasized vocabulary – isolated words, expressions, functions, etc. This valuable part of language is essential when learning it. Harmer (1994) defines languages structures as the skeleton of a language and vocabulary as the flesh and the vital organs, since it is crucial for sentences construction. Children learn many English expressions through Dora’s episodes, which is good when they start formulating sentences in the foreign language, they will already have a storage of words, making it easier to communicate.

Moreover, children also learn how to pronounce the words properly, as Dora pronounces them accurately. If children are introduced to a foreign language as earlier as possible, they tend not to have a strong accent when speaking a different language affirms Blog Language Lizard (2016).

Dora the explorer is a great source for children who are learning a foreign language, it may work as reinforcement for children who are already in contact with English, and/or for the ones who have never seen the target language before, it could be a great introduction to the learning process. The Language Lizard Blog (2016) endorses this statement by saying that support network through videos or games are able to reinforce what students/children have learned at school.

As we can see, Dora’s cartoon is a good tool for children to be introduced to a foreign language, as they learn it in a fun and spontaneous way: children are unconsciously taught the target language. It is also worth mentioning that according to Lang (online) it is good for children’s mind the learning of a second language, as it does not cause any language confusion, cognitive deficit or language delay. On the contrary, the ones that learn a foreign language can maintain attention better than the ones who know only one language.

6 Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to verify the effectiveness of *Dora the explorer* cartoon as an aid in the teaching-learning process, as according to the Critical Period Hypothesis, the proper age to start learning a foreign language is in the early childhood.

The analysis has shown that the cartoon can be an efficient tool in the teaching- learning process. As discussed previously, children feel really motivated by visual and audio aids. *Dora the explorer* indeed appeals to those senses, which is very effective, as it attracts children's attention.

Dora's cartoon also presents the different learning styles, as children can watch, listen and also move according to Dora's directions through their interaction.

While watching *Dora the explorer*, children can see the language in real use, the character's gestures and expressions, which enables them to compare and assimilate what the words and expressions mean in both languages, English and Portuguese, as they are visualizing it. It is easier for children to understand if they have a visual association.

Throughout the episode children are taught isolated words - vocabulary, expressions and functions, which are crucial in the learning process, consequently, they will be able to construct sentences as they have a storage of words to do so.

The interaction of Dora with the children is also a good way of introducing the target language. Through the interaction children/students increase their linguistic knowledge and they learn it properly. Children who start learning a foreign language in the early childhood tend not to have a strong accent. Dora and her friends speak the language accurately, therefore students acquire good pronunciation.

The cartoon gives children the opportunity to acquire the target language unconsciously, which is similar to the way they have acquired their first language.

Besides, it is also an aid for the ones who are already in touch with English, it may be used as a support network, reinforcing what they have learned at school.

Through the analysis, we concluded that the cartoon is a good tool in the teaching-learning process, as children can learn some English in a spontaneous and enjoyable way.

They also enjoy the learning process, as watching the cartoon they are not concerned about their cognitive and motor skills, they just want to have a good time.

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