

## **“Impact of Watching TV English Cartoons on EFL Language Acquisition: A Case Study of an Arabic Young Child”**

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### Abstract:

The aim of the study was to describe a longitudinal case study of a child's language acquisition via watching TV cartoons in an EFL setting, namely Saudi Arabia, Buraidah city. The study examined the impact of watching TV cartoons on language acquisition of a child who started to watch purposely selected TV cartoon programs since he was three years old for at least 3 hours a day until he was 10 years old. The study employed qualitative research methods for this longitudinal case study. The main two research qualitative tools were observation and analysis of extensive video and audio recordings. Interval and spontaneous conversations were held between the child and his father for the purpose of the research. The results showed that the child watching TV cartoon in an environment that rarely uses English acquired a great deal of language. The child went through several interlanguage developmental phases in a similar way a native child goes through. Significantly, he developed a native-like accent although he rarely used English. Pedagogical and parental recommendations were suggested to consider this case study for their children.

### Introduction

Nowadays, English has acquired the status of an international language. It has become an integral part of modern culture, economics, politics, sports, education, art, tourism, and science all over the world, conveying values and views of its speakers and affecting the formation of their thinking. Thus, the study of English contributes to a deeper acquaintance with other cultures, an understanding of intercultural differences, the acceptance of differences

in the perception of the world, the development of tolerance necessary for the formation of a harmonious holistic personality in a modern multicultural society.

However, there are several obstacles on the way to learning any foreign language. One of the difficulties is the very limited ability to communicate with native speakers and use speaking skills outside of school, family, etc. in non-English-speaking countries. For this purpose, authentic materials are of great importance. The use of authentic materials, including cartoons, contributes to the implementation of the most important requirements of the communicative technique – to present the process of mastering the language as an apprehension of a living foreign language culture; individualization of learning and motivation of learners' speech activity. The audiovisual form of cartoons is an effective form of learning which not only activates learners' attention but also contributes to the improvement of their listening and speaking skills since the visual support of foreign phonemes, lexemes, phrases, and sentences sounding from the screen help to more fully understand its meaning. That is, the audiovisual form contributes to the acquisition of the language, not its mechanical learning. American linguist Stephen Krashen emphasized this fact (1982). The main idea of all his works is that in order to learn any language more efficiently, it should be taught in a natural way. The linguist has put forward very interesting hypotheses about the acquisition of foreign languages. According to Stephen Krashen (1982), there are two ways in which we can study a foreign language: acquisition and learning. The way of acquisition is that a person does not have to memorize something consciously. Information is digested at an unconscious level. This is how young children learn the native language: they perceive knowledge at the subconscious level, and not intentionally. For example, learning happens when we do something interesting: listen

to music, watch a movie, cartoon, and communicate with an interesting person. Krashen believes that acquisition is more effective than learning. He advises devoting more time to natural perception, rather than mechanical learning (Krashen, 1982; Krashen, 2003). That is why audiovisual authentic materials need to be used in teaching pupils and students as a means of promoting interactive learning methods: in order to study the language in a natural way, it is recommended to use interesting materials. No acquisition will occur if the child learns from boring textbooks. Children are easily interested in the plot of cartoons, so they watch them with pleasure. According to Krashen (2003), it can be a good mean for natural language acquisition. While watching, the perception of natural English speech by ear is trained, the correct pronunciation is formed. The child quickly memorizes new words and phrases if they are associated with a scene from a cartoon. Besides, a large selection of cartoons in English allows you to choose a story on any subject. It is also easy to choose materials for different ages. They can be used at any time during the teaching or training as long as they are relevant to the point or have been designed with a specific purpose.

In the view of the above, the present research aims at discovering the effectiveness of exposure to cartoons on language acquisition by children at an early age and finding out *to what extent it is possible to acquire a foreign language (in our case – English) using cartoons-viewing as the crucial educational tool for the EFL children* (Krashen, 2003; Enayati,&Farhad, 2016).

Some linguists (Krashen, 2003; Kuhl, 2004) believe that a foreign language cannot be taught, it can only be studied by a learner himself/herself. A teacher or a parent should be close to the learner in order to direct his/her activity, to activate those inner qualities of

himself/herself, on the level of which success in studies depends on. Therefore, it is necessary to know the inner world of the learner, to look for ways and opportunities for the formation of his/her motivational sphere, a conscious, interested attitude to acquire a foreign language, the need for it, etc. That is why the researcher decided to design this investigation around a particular case (a young child acquiring English through cartoons-viewing) in order to thoroughly study a learner and to reveal a new understanding concerning the research problem.

### **Literature Review**

#### **A. Language Acquisition in Early Childhood**

A large number of researches (Larsen-Freeman Long, 1991; Kuhl, 2004) increasingly show that the formation of speech is most active, quick, and effortless in early (preschool) childhood. All over the world, children learn their native language freely and simply, in a natural way. Children learn to speak, regardless of whether adults teach them specifically or not. The preschool age (from 0 to 6 years) is the sensitive period for the development of speech. Therefore, if a child in a bilingual family hears simultaneously and constantly speaking in two languages, then, he will naturally master two languages. Learning a foreign language in a period when a child has not fully mastered his native language passes through the same mechanism as mastering native language, and the level of mastering a second language will not be inferior to the level of the first. On the contrary, bilingualism develops cognitive skills, supports cross-cultural awareness, etc. (Bialystok, 2001).

Early age is the time of the greatest sensitivity and susceptibility of a child to a particular type of activity. Therefore, it is one of the most suitable periods for foreign languages

acquisition. During this period, the child's mastery of the language occurs most quickly and fully, with ease and joy. The child recognizes the new lexemes unconsciously at an early age. He/she accepts a foreign language as his/her own – a child hears and then speaks (Krashen, 1982). Especially productive language acquisition is when it happens unconsciously, through interesting materials that cause positive emotions. After all, according to Krashen (1982), the ability to master a language decreases if we experience negative emotions, such as fear, boredom, or embarrassment. At this point, negative “emotional filters” are included. Therefore, even if we understand the language, acquisition does not occur (Krashen, 1982).

By the age of six, each child speaks fluently, despite the fact that he/she does not understand yet what tense he uses, what the sentence consists of, what is the correct word order, etc. Children are not afraid to make mistakes. They have no language barrier: they say what they want, do not pay attention to their pronunciation and errors in speech. If the parent or the teacher corrects these mistakes, the child will get used to building sentences and correctly speaking. Children have a good memory. It is no secret that children quickly memorize words and phrases. Besides, children quickly learn to pronounce all the sounds of their native language as adults say. Similarly, the child learns to pronounce the sounds of a foreign speech quickly and correctly (Larsen-Freeman, 1991; Endang, 2005).

As follows, earlier learning of a foreign language has a positive effect on the development of attention, memory, thinking, general speech development of a child, and mastery of the language. At 2.5 years old, the child easily learns oral speech; this is a sensitive period of speech hearing and articulation. At 4.5-6 years, you can begin to teach the child to

read. 8-9 years is considered to be the second period of the great development of the language abilities of the child (Larsen-Freeman, 1991).

### **B. Cartoon Advantages in Language Acquisition**

In applied linguistics, more and more researchers from different countries of the world notice the influence of English-language content on the quality of learning English as a foreign language. Until recently, English-language resources were not as accessible as they are today. Nowadays, Internet technologies allow children to surround themselves with English for the perfect study of it. They can watch movies, TV shows, cartoons, listen to talk shows, speeches from conferences, download and use a wide variety of programs, including games, that allow them to replenish vocabulary, learn grammar, develop listening and writing skills and the like.

D'Ydewalle and Van de Poel (1999) show that there is undoubtedly significant incidental language acquisition simply by watching a short subtitled TV program.

A large number of scholars (Karakas & Sariçoban, 2012; Poštič, 2015; Enayati & Farhad, 2016) have noted the importance and effectiveness of cartoons for the practice of teaching and learning a foreign language by a young child. Cartoon is a natural and valuable facilitating setting for language learning development (Poštič, 2015). It is a source of authentic audiovisual language input which has proved to be effective in increasing language learners' motivation (Poštič, 2015). First, the characters on the screen use live spoken language, so the child hears how the language is used, i. e. how its main communicative function is realized. In addition, the child hears intonation, observes gestures and facial expressions that enhance the verbal aspect of conversations. A child not only hears the speech, he/she sees its use as well,

learns to feel the naturalness and ease of using certain phrases. Secondly, because of the cartoons, the child becomes acquainted with the culture of native speakers. In the cartoon, he/she can see the peculiarities of national cuisine or British (American) clothes, learn easy tips how to order food and drink like a local in a foreign country, how to address adults, how to be polite, etc. Thirdly, thanks to cartoons, a child gets motivated to learn a language because he/she wants to understand what is happening on the screen. Very often, a child associates himself/herself with the characters on the screen (with princesses, travelers, pirates, superheroes, etc.), wants to be like them, and, therefore, wants to communicate in the same language as they do (Harmer, 2004).

A Lithuanian researcher Svetozar Poštič (2015) notes that children who have watched cartoons in English, namely in American English, since their childhood have excellent pronunciation and communicate much more fluently in English than those who have not immersed into this language since early childhood (Poštič, 2015). At the same time, no one forced children to learn a foreign language. They did it spontaneously, plunging into the interesting world of animation, favorite characters, and interesting stories. This all absolutely captured their attention and caused a relaxed perception of a foreign language. The desire to understand what is happening on the screen became the best motivation for learning a new language. In addition, the author notes that those children who watched American cartoons have a distinctly American accent. It is a significant finding since pronunciation is the basic characteristic of speech, the basis for the development and improvement of all other types of speech activity. Mastering pronunciation is an important step in the practical acquisition of the pronunciation mechanism and the pronunciation standard, as well as in the development of



speech skills. Improving pronunciation at an older age is very difficult. Therefore, it is important to immerse the child into English in his/her early childhood by means of cartoon-watching, first of all, in order to successfully form a correct pronunciation (Poštič, 2015).

Viewing cartoons in a foreign language has a positive effect not only on improving the orthoepy but also on other language levels mastering. In particular, the child learns new words (the advantage of cartoons is visualization, thanks to which the child simply guesses what is there on the screen without having a direct translation), learns to build sentences, ask questions, and use them in the appropriate context. For example, Dr. Bayez Enayati and Farhad Kakarash (2016) investigated the influence of English cartoons-viewing on grammatical accuracy of elementary students. The researchers noted the positive impact of cartoons on language acquisition, in particular, its grammatical structure. However, as the results of their research showed, watching cartoons does not allow to improve writing skills. These skills are the most difficult to master, and cartoons or any other video materials do not actualize them (Enayati & Kakarash, 2016).

Taher Bahrani (2014) paid attention to the role of audiovisual materials in the process of language learning development as well. He notes that cartoons are an important authentic material (Gilmore, 2007) for learning a foreign language because they are not designed specifically for learning the language instead of reflecting the real speech of real speakers. Cartoons visualize objects, ideas (“a strong picture-word interconnection”) and in a relaxed manner (often, through repetition) contribute to memorizing their names in a foreign language. In addition, it occurs in an interesting and sometimes humorous form (Bahrani, 2014).

A study by Ali Karakas and Arif Sariçoban (2012) investigated the influence of subtitled cartoons on incidental vocabulary development. Their findings did not affirm the assumption that the group which viewed subtitle cartoons would outperform the no-subtitle group. However, the authors observed significant improvement in target words memorization in both of the groups. They explain this progress by contextualization of target lexemes in cartoons. The participants understood the meaning of the words, so it was less difficult to memorize them (Karakas & Sariçoban, 2012).

However, Jaana Jylhä Laide (1994) who works as a teacher of English and Swedish in a Finnish comprehensive school researches peculiarities of using television and video in the practice of second (foreign) language acquisition. She notes that learning through video is critical because of the lack of interaction and input. Therefore, the researcher argued on the issue concerning the real potential of television and video in language acquisition, stating that it is helpful only in the case when some learning skills are already required. Without other resources, the beginner would only learn some lexemes or isolated phrases (Jylhä Laide, 1994).

In contrast to this study of the late twentieth century, we believe that today there are a sufficient number of cartoons and other video materials that involve active interaction with the viewer and motivate him/her to learn, even if his level of knowledge of a foreign language is zero.

Most of the related studies were either conducted over a short period of time or focusing on the influence of subtitles with ESL learners. No longitudinal study to date has examined child' acquisition of English via watching TV cartoons in an EFL setting. This study is likely to contribute to the area of child foreign language acquisition which rarely occurs due to the low

status of a foreign language in a given environment. Additionally this study adds to the foreign language acquisition literature as it deals with an Arabic-speaking child (Anmar) who started watching English cartoons at age 3.

### Significance of the Study

The result of this study is expected to have both theoretical and practical *significance*. An example of the English language acquisition by a specific child in a non-English-speaking family through cartoons-viewing can support previous theoretical studies on the effectiveness of using comprehensible input (Krashen, 2003) in the process of language acquisition at an early age, including for children for whom English is a foreign language. Practically, this study is expected to become an important basis for developing foreign language teaching methods for young children.

### Problem of the study:

The researcher whose major is English developed a clear understanding that although English represents an urgent need for Saudi people, especially students who are witnessing the new advances and progress by the Saudi government, this language has become a real challenge for most of them. English is obligatory course that is taught for two years in elementary school, three years in intermediate school, and three years in high school, and as optional course as well in colleges. However, the general out comes are obviously inconsistent with amount of time, efforts and topics being. According to Sawahel (2015), “while the English skills of people in most countries are improving, that is not the case in the Arab world, where several countries rank among the 20 worst in English proficiency”. Moreover, from personal experience, parents

show constant worries about their children English level. The researcher is fully aware about these circumstances that called him to start early with his child to be acquainted with English and avoid unpleasant examples that most Saudi students experience with English. Therefore, the researcher, the father of the child, brought home English cartoon channels and assigned times for the child to watch them in a daily basis.

### **Anmar's Story**

Anmar, the subject of this study, is born and lives in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Buraidah, Anmar is the third son among three boys. His exposure to English via watching TV cartoons started when he was three years old, especially in the morning when his brothers were at school. He was always home with his Arabic speaking family. At the beginning he spent three hours a day watching English cartoons. However, the duration increased within time when he had nothing to do or play with. The data collection started after one year and a half from when he started watching cartoons. By that time, he started to produce some English words and expressions, which were basically related to the cartoon episodes he was watching. Arabic is Anmar's mother tongue. English is a foreign language for him. The language means of conversation at home was mainly Arabic. He has been learning English officially in school since Primary Grade fourth, specifically when he was 10 years old. This is after 6 years of exposure to English via TV cartoons. His father is the only one in the family who can speak English fluently. However, his communication with the child in English was too limited. It turned out that *cartoons were the only source for Anmar's English language development*. Now, Anmar is 12 years old. He is a very good pupil and a communicative personality.

It is important to mention that the data collection finished before Anmar started his official English courses in Primary school. However, the English courses never added anything to him because they were very basic for him.

### Method

The present study is a longitudinal investigation on a linguistic behavior of an Arabic boy Anmar during viewing cartoons in English. The study attempts to focus on the child's language development through cartoons-viewing and the extent he uses English later at the lessons, in his everyday communication, etc.

The research data (spoken and written) were collected by observations of Anmar's language skills development between 2009 and 2018 (since the boy was 3 years old until he was 10) through cartoons-viewing. The materials of the early and later stages of Anmar's language acquisition are based on the recollections of the boy's father. It includes some written records of Anmar's utterances and video materials as well. In this regard, the study adopts the case study method, that is, an empirical research project in which a single case of a social entity (a contemporary phenomenon) within its real-life context is selected as a subject of research. The case method is one of the current and widely used in modern linguistics and other areas of science, but depending on the scope of this method, it may include radically different techniques, algorithms for conducting research and technology for presenting the results. Linguists use this method in ontolinguistics, methods of teaching a foreign language, communication, cognitive and discursive linguistics, linguistic synergy. The case study method aimed at studying a specific case is promising when studying the formation of an individual

language thesaurus – a knowledge system formed in the course of communication in a particular language.

Some of Anmar's audios and videos were randomly shared with three native speakers of English so that the researcher remained unbiased. The three speakers gave their judgement about Anmar's pronunciation. Also the raters listened to Anmar reading a short reading passage at the age of 10 years old.

#### *Types of cartoons Anmar has viewed*

When Anmar started watching TV cartoons, he didn't know anything about English. He was raised typically like any child in a traditional Saudi home where Arabic is the main and only language used at home. He started first by watching only three TV cartoons programs at a time so that they could match his situation. Then, at the age of 6, Anmar, and after he had gained some language confidence, he started watching other cartoons and programs that he selected by his own. These programs included episodic events, adventures of real characters, talk shows, stand-up comedies, language games etc. The three programs that were selected for him were *Dora the Explorer*, as *Lazy Town*, and *Sponge Bob*.

*Dora the Explorer* is a program for children viewed by millions every day in a large number of countries. This cartoon character teaches many things by interacting with young viewers. On every program, Dora and her friends have to go somewhere to solve a certain problem. A map is a cartoon character assisting Dora and her viewers. It tells them where to go next.

This cartoon was selected first because it contains simple vocabulary. The cartoon characters speak the understandable and uncomplicated language, without using special terminology and too twisted sentences. Their speech is intelligible: the cartoon characters speak clearly, pronouncing almost every letter in each word. The acquisition of such a simple and intelligible speech occurs easily and naturally, with a clear expression of the thought that the hero wants to convey. In addition, Dora constantly repeats some word or phrase, sometimes even from series to series. This will only help a child to acquire the presented material faster. This program was selected first because, according to Snow (1977), children need to listen to a simplified language known as *motherese*. This program fulfills this type of language as it allows repetition, attention getters, associative language, slow rate of speech, and fluency (Jylhä Laide, 1994).

*Lazy Town*: in a town full of lazy people, one hero, Sportacus, tries to make a difference by teaching people how to live healthy lives. It is about promoting a healthy lifestyle for children in a positive, entertaining, and catchy way. This developing cartoon is good for new words acquisition and memorization.

*Sponge Bob* is a cartoon about a sponge living in the ocean. It is entertaining. It presents everyday language; therefore, it helps children a lot. It is designed for 6- to 11-year-olds.

The above-mentioned types of authentic material have contributed most to his communicative skills and language confidence.

Anmar's language acquisition was observed in terms of language comprehension based on his reaction during the above-mentioned cartoons viewing.

## Findings and Discussion

The overall behavior of Anmar is worth described. At the beginning when he was arranged to watch TV cartoons he didn't accept the English channels. Yet was not very opposing as there was no other choice for him. He refused at the beginning because he didn't understand anything. But within time he started to adapt himself with the atmosphere. The selected cartoon programs helped much in this regard because they contained interesting visual representations and picture-word interconnections. These features played a major role in Anmar's progressive behavior towards his willingness and readiness to watch for longer hours and later search for more cartoon program types that contain fewer picture-word interconnections due to language acquisition. This typically applied when Anmar moved from watching "Dora the Explorer" to "Lazy Town" and then to "Sponge Bob." Amazingly, he was later found playing "vocabulary" games on his iPad device. This naturally reflected Anmar's positive attitudes towards English.

The proposed case study confirmed the statements of Krashen's works (2003) concerning the efficiency of language acquisition, and not the mechanic learning of its individual units (words, phrases, sentences). The Arabic-speaking child, who was immersed in the conditions of involuntary and incidental acquisition of a foreign language through cartoons (and only when he was five years old conscious learning at school was attracted), showed unique results in the development of the English language skills.



Therefore, the case study confirmed Krashen's hypothesis, which says that acquisition of a foreign language occurs when the learner perceives material by ear or eye: he listens to podcasts, watches TV shows, cartoons, etc. (Krashen, 2003). In this case, the maximum benefit could bring the material level of which is higher than the current level of the learner. That is, at the Intermediate level, it is most productive to study texts, listen to podcasts and watch videos for the Upper-Intermediate level (Krashen, 2003). Anmar's English level was zero when he started watching cartoons in this language, that is, he began to learn the material a step harder than his own level.

The reason for this, in our opinion, was the expedient combination, coincidence in time and space of such important factors as enthusiasm or high motivation (the emotional sphere of the child wanted to perceive cartoons, it was enjoyable and effortless), tender age (from 3 to 11 years old), willingness for acculturation bridge, positive attitude.

### *Sounds system*

Usually, when an adult learns a language, a big problem for him is the correct pronunciation of sounds that do not exist in his/her native language. When a child learns a language, this problem does not exist for him/her at all. After all, he/she learns the sounds of a foreign language with the same ease as his/her own. Young children are sensitive to subtle differences between all speech sounds, whereas older children and adults lose their sensitivity to distinctions that do not occur in their native language (Kuhl, 1993; Kuhl, 2004).

There are a number of sounds in English that do not occur in Arabic. For example, the two sounds of /p/ and /b/ in English have one equivalent in Arabic which is close more to the

letter /b/. Most Arab EFL adult learners do not distinguish between these two sounds in English. They pronounce the letter /b/ for /p/ (“babber” instead of “paper”). For Anmar, his acquisition of minimal pairs was noticeably good. He easily differentiates between “map”, “bridge”, and “bag”. Besides, it was spontaneously and unconsciously distinguishing between these sounds that do not occur in Arabic.

When the child was 8 years old, he told some stories of language deviation committed by his EFL teachers. For example, he noticed that they pronounced “favourite” as “faforite” because /v/ sound does not occur in Arabic and adults find it difficult to articulate this sound, replacing it by the closest sound from their native language phonemes set (Best & McRoberts, 2003).

Now, Anmar has a native-like pronunciation. All the three raters stated that his accent, a well, sounds nativelylike. For example, noticeably, he pronounces the words *better*, *bottle*, and *little* with /d/ sound instead of /t/ sound. the raters also notice that Anmar was applying intonation based on the meaning and attitudes of the text. He paused when it is expected to pause. Sometimes when he paused inappropriately, he would go back and reread so that he might pause correctly according to the meaning.

Anmar, furthermore, easily differentiate between British English and American English. There were many cases when he listened to British speakers that he could recognize that the accent is either British or American. Anmar's accent is American due to the that fact that most the programs he saw were Americans. However, when he was 8 years old, he watched different kinds of programs including "*British Got Talent*" and others.

This means that a child who started acquiring English at an early age by means of authentic audiovisual materials has no problem with the pronunciation, speaking a different language. The given case study confirms also that when we get older, it is more difficult for us to master authentic pronunciation because of the influence of our native phonetic system. English cartoons-viewing for young children is a great opportunity to give your child an accent and pronunciation of a native speaker.

### *Vocabulary*

There was a gradual language acquisition on the level of vocabulary and sentence making in Anmar's case. Since the language exposure was limited to TV cartoons, and particularly to episodes of *Dora the Explorer*, his first words were those frequent in these cartoon episodes. These were the words belonging to nature items and nature areas, such as *mountain, river, cave, bridge, castle*, and action verbs such as *jump, walk, cross, run, sing*, etc. Best of all, he acquired the words denoting specific objects that can be seen or touched, personal names, and verbs denoting movement and actions that can be demonstrated. However, from the age of 5 years, it was easy to notice a continual increase in vocabulary acquisition: modifiers (*this, the, an*), adverbs (*outside, inside, early, sadly*, etc.), abstract nouns (*trouble, love, joy*, etc) developed his lexicon. At the age of 5, Anmar already knew about 1000 words. At the age of 8, his vocabulary expanded to 4000 words, which is enough for normal communication in an English-speaking environment. At the age of 5 and 6 years, the child was offered a picture in which people and various objects were depicted. He was asked to tell within 5 minutes as much as possible about what is depicted and what is happening in this picture. The Anmar's speech was recorded in a special protocol for evaluating active vocabulary.

<i>Recorded lexical item</i>	<i>Frequency of lexical items used by the child</i>
Nouns	10 (river, grass, sky, sun, wood, lion, fox, duck, boy, girl, tree, flower, castle, bridge, clouds, map )
Verbs	11 (shine, walk, swim, jump, cross, sing, carry, guide, attack, escape, smell)
Pronouns	6 (she, he, it, they, her, his)
Adjectives	13 (fast, slow, smart, clever, hot, innocent, high, strong, nice, lost, deep, green, beautiful)
Prepositions	7 (in, out, of, outside, beside, back, to)
Particles	2 (used to, have to)
Conjunctions	8 (and, but, or, after, because, that, where, both)

This protocol notes the frequency with which a child uses various parts of speech indicating the level of his vocabulary development.

#### *Evaluation of results*

The child receives 10 points if there are at least 10 of the signs listed in the protocol in his speech (story based on the picture).

At 8–9 points, his speech is evaluated when at least 8–9 different protocol signs are found in it.

A child earns 6-7 points for his speech if there are 6-7 different signs.

A score of 4-5 points is given to him for the presence in the speech of 4-5 different signs.

A child earns 2-3 points when there are 2-3 signs in the speech, 0-1 point – when there is no story or there are 1-2 words in it, which represent one single part of speech.

Conclusions on the level of vocabulary development:

10 points – very high level.

8-9 points – high level.

4-7 points – average level.

2-3 points – low level.

0-1 point – very low level.

Anmar received 6 points when he was 5 years old and 10 points when he was 8 years old, that is, his vocabulary was almost doubled thanks to watching cartoons only.

After one year and a half of passive watching, he started to interact with the episodes as the program of *Dora* gives some time for watchers to think and say the word before Dora. At this stage, he started interacting and uttering the words for the first time. Since children of 4-6 years of age have a leading play activity, acquisition of any aspect of the language, in particular, vocabulary should be based on a large variety of games. This allows to introduce and, more importantly, to work out new lexical units in a fascinating form for a certain amount of time.

The cartoon about *Dora* clearly contributed to both verbal recognition (listening), and oral reproduction (speaking).

Musical cartoons also helped Anmar to consolidate language material, expand and consolidate lexical units and speech patterns. When words are connected by rhythm and music, they are more emotional and individually meaningful and are better memorized. The given case study showed that after learning a poem, rhyming, their lexical content was included in the active vocabulary of the child.

Interestingly, when Anmar was 4 and a half years old, his father asked him if he understood what was said in the cartoon. Anmar answered that he understood almost everything. From this fact, we can conclude that there are differences between the vocabulary the child understands and the one the child produces. From about 5 years old, Anmar understood a large number of tokens, however, did not reproduce them. These linguistic units belonged to the child's passive vocabulary. When Anmar was 5 years old, he began to activate them in his utterances. This supports the idea that child starts comprehending language before he/she produces it. In addition, the recordings of Anamar's utterances make it possible to note that the child may not know the conceptual content of some words used in his speech, and may also correctly formulate language statements without knowing the full meaning of all the words in the statements he utters. This happens when the child memorizes and reproduces all the phrases or combinations of words he has heard. For example, the recordings of Anmar's utterances indicate that the child often told his father, "I have an idea". However, he could not give an answer to the question, "What idea do you have?" He did not realize the meaning of the word "idea" and used the entire phrase as a kind of ready-made communicative template. Copying

and reproducing foreign language sequences of words “in finished form” or memorizing and using stable combinations of words in own speech most often used cartoons is one of the leading mechanisms for the formation of the second language system in early childhood and its further development.

### *Grammar and productive language*

Before the age of 8, Anmar used ready-made phrases and sentences in his speech. These were simple grammatical patterns, telegraphic utterances, and memorized nursery rhymes.

At the age of 8, Anmar started making his own simple phrases and sentences, expressing his own thoughts. It means that he gained control over the lexical and grammatical structure of English. He began experimenting with it, especially during having conversations in English with his father. Communication with an adult was an essential factor in mastering English grammatical system. Of course, he made mistakes in different grammatical areas of the English language (the usage of passive voice, perfect tenses, gerund in the meaning of a noun was difficult for him). It is evident: grammar is not a priority in mastering the language at an early age since even native speakers aged 4-5 years speak with grammatical errors (Guasti, 2002). Anmar mastered and implemented grammatical rules based on speech patterns, which were used functionally to express the speaker's communicative intent. Thus, his main focus was on language as a means of communication, and not on a set of grammatical rules. A detailed complementary research study investigating Anmar's grammar acquisition development will be conducted soon as data already are collected.

### *Code-Switching*

In conversations with his family, Anmar often denoted items not in Arabic but in English. This started after three-four years of passive watching TV cartoons, specifically when the child almost quitted watching *Dora* and started watching *Sponge Bob* which is more fluent in English than *Dora*. Until this age, he has already developed his native language.

It was not language mixing but code-switching that is a normal aspect accompanying foreign language acquisition. He switched between these two languages, although he was capable to separate them. In addition, it was not noticed any lack neither in Arabic nor in English Anmar's vocabulary.

### *Listening skills*

Anmar made a great progress in his listening and comprehension. As his vocabulary developed his listening was simultaneously developing. Anmar could develop gradual progress in understanding conversations and speeches. His listening comprehension amazingly developed to an extent that he might catch some topics on TV even if he is not paying attention to it. When sometime he was asked to listen to the news he would catch the general meaning although he didn't understand some technical words. One time when he was watching a video clip of standup comedy performance on his mobile, he laughed furiously. He was later asked about the meanings of some advanced vocabulary that were used in the speech and could either explain their meanings or bring the Arabic equivalent. These words include "clown, horrible, complain, steal, crisis, ambitious, pathetic, mocking). Additionally, his understanding of many words led him to understand the context and that what helped him gradually to develop his language acquisition.



### *Writing skills*

Some written data were also collected after the child was 5 years old. It is worth saying that writing is the most difficult skill to be mastered in the English language because of a great gap between its pronunciation and spelling. However, Anmar is good at the spelling of a large number of English words and perform well in his school writing assignments due to his language exposure. Some TV shows and cartoons with subtitles are supposed to be useful for Anmar's writing skills development. Later, at the age of 8 Anmar started by his own choice to play different vocabulary games in which picture is shown and he figures it out and write it, or plays buzzle games. These games helped him to develop spelling. More significantly, his attitudes towards language games that help improve spelling was very noticeable. However, there are words which Anmar misspelled due to his lack of writing practice.

### **Recommendations**

In the process of learning English by young children, it is important to remember that at an early age, children are especially sensitive to receiving new information and knowledge. Parents and teachers can instill a desire for the English language acquisition to your child, or vice versa – they can achieve the exact opposite result. To avoid this, it is necessary to take into account the crucial principles in the process of teaching a young child:

1. The principle of naturalness. Do not force your baby to sit at the desk and memorize new words. Let him/her gain knowledge by performing those actions and processes to which he/she is used, for example, let him just watch cartoons in a foreign language.

2. The principle of clarity. The child acquire the language, but does not learn it. He/she compares new words and concepts with actions and visual processes. Acquisition through cartoons implements this principle.

3. The principle of the integrated development of language skills. In the process of a language acquisition, do not focus only on speaking. Let your baby learn to perceive information by ear through conversational speech. Let him/her watch cartoons with subtitles aiming at developing writing skills.

4. The principle of creative activity. Enter cartoons into the process of the language acquisition, where there is an interaction with the viewer, so the child will experience positive emotions and for a long time will remember those or other words, utterances of speech, etc.

5. The principle of systematicity. Viewing cartoons in a foreign language should be systematic. Children remember songs and rhymes well, if they are systematically repeated. It stimulates kids, helps to create an atmosphere of success and confidence.

## Conclusion

Thanks to early English acquisition, Arabic-speaking boy perceives the fact of bilingualism and multilingualism as the norm. Speaking in more than one language is not perceived by him as something extraordinary. It is simply an element of belonging to the global community. Besides, learning a foreign language at an early age is very effective. Children quickly learn new things and easily learn useful skills. Cartoons are just the material that

involuntarily motivates a child to learn a language because it is served in a playful and interesting form. In addition, early exposure to foreign language helps in acquiring sound patterns and achieving native-like pronunciation and accent. Speaking and pronunciation skills are better than grammar and writing. However, it is easier to master these abstract areas at the older age.

The personal experience of Anmar affirmed that it is quite possible to effectively acquire a foreign language (especially its phonetic features and vocabulary system) at an early age by watching cartoons as the comprehensible input. His acquisition was not accompanied and stimulated by conversations with English-speaking people. Anmar has the only one audiovisual channel for English acquisition – cartoons. He did not have enough interaction. Therefore, this case study does not support the Krashen hypothesis (2003) which states that foreign language acquisition requires meaningful interaction. *It is possible to acquire foreign language through cartoons-viewing only and to gain the level of natives.* It is worth saying that three native English speakers listened to some recordings of Anmar's speech. Two of them affirmed that his English sounds native, and one English speaker stated that it is native-like.

This case study supported also the fact that when EFL children are exposed to languages and cultures at a young age through videos books, songs and games (or any other input), they feel comfortable growing up in a world where languages and cultures are intertwined all the time. Their perception of the world is wider and many-sided. Besides, this investigation carries significant dimensions in EFL acquisition via watching cartoons. Further studies can be conducted to investigate specifically and through description several issues related to this particular case such as, EFL acquisition rate or order via watching TV cartoons, vocabulary

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acquisition and vocabulary development, acquisition of grammatical categories, pragmatic acquisition, socio-linguistic competence, cultural identity, and reverse transfer effect of ELA via cartoons on the child's native language and native culture.

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## تأثير مشاهدة الرسوم المتحركة التلفزيونية باللغة الإنجليزية على اكتساب اللغة الإنجليزية

كلغة أجنبية: دراسة طولية لطفل عربي

### ملخص الدراسة

تقدم هذه الدراسة الطولية وصفا لحالة اكتساب اللغة الانجليزية لطفل عربي من خلال مشاهدة الرسوم المتحركة التلفزيونية في بيئة غير ناطقة باللغة الانجليزية، وهي المملكة العربية السعودية وتحديدا في مدينة بريدة. ركزت الدراسة على تأثير مشاهدة الرسوم المتحركة التلفزيونية على اكتساب اللغة الانجليزية للطفل الذي بدأ يشاهد برامج الرسوم المتحركة التلفزيونية المختارة بعناية منذ أن كان عمره ثلاث سنوات ولمدة ثلاث ساعات على الأقل في اليوم حتى كان عمره عشر سنوات. استخدمت الدراسة أساليب البحث النوعي لدراسة الحالة الطولية هذه. كانت أهم الأدوات البحثية النوعية هي الملاحظة وتحليل التسجيلات الصوتية والمرئية الشاملة. بعد فترة من المشاهدة أصبح هناك محادثات متقطعة وعفوية بين الطفل وأبيه لغرض البحث. أظهرت النتائج أن الطفل الذي يشاهد رسوم متحركة تلفزيونية في بيئة نادراً ما لا تتحدث اللغة الإنجليزية قد حصل على قدر كبير من اكتساب اللغة. مر الطفل بالعديد من مراحل التطور اللغوي بطريقة مماثلة لما يمر بها الطفل الذي يكتسب لغته الأم. وبشكل ملحوظ طور لهجة مشابهة للغة الأصلية على الرغم من أنه نادراً ما يستخدم اللغة الإنجليزية. واقترح البحث عددا من التوصيات التربوية للوالدين في الدول العربية عامة وفي المملكة العربية السعودية بشكل خاص للاستفادة من هذه الحالة في اكتساب اللغة الانجليزية لأطفالهم.